

Teaching Tip 11: Using Questions for Teaching and Learning

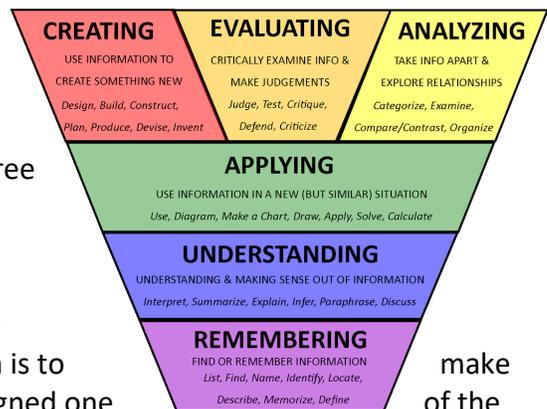
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This tip focuses on questions. Questions are an integral part of teaching and learning, and good questions require creativity and thoughtfulness. Teachers often ask, “Are there any questions?”, and nearly always the class response is silence. If there are questions, they almost always come from the students sitting in the first row, who are often not representative of the majority of students in the class. Framing, asking and answering good questions are powerful teaching and learning approaches. One approach to getting students to engage and think is to regularly ask three questions; What did we talk about?, How is it related to the class material?, and Why is it important?. These three questions align with the various levels of Bloom’s cognitive taxonomy, “what” asked about facts and content (remembering), “how” asks about relationships (understanding and analyzing), and “why” asks about higher cognitive level skills (evaluating and evaluating).



[Bloom’s Taxonomy link](#)

In previous tips we have looked at the one-minute paper and exit strategies. One suggestion is to on a regular basis ask students to answer the “what”, “how” and “why” questions. One can do this by using the last few minutes of the class to have them answer these three questions. This can be done using paper and pencil or using the Learning Management System (LMS). Alternatively, questions can be a take home assignment to be completed before the next class. The answers don’t have to be individual and one suggestion is to this an in-class group exercise where each group is assigned one questions and has five minutes to come up with an answer which is then shared with the class. All of these are useful ways to collect student feedback on engagement and understanding.



As important as being able to answer questions is getting students to be able to ask good questions. This is difficult, students are often shy and are not used to asking questions that go beyond surface knowledge. When students are asked to generate questions initially the questions are at best, trivial and sometimes dreadful, the majority of questions are often simply fact questions whose answers could be easily found using a web search. However, with practice, guidance, and examples, and practices by the end of the semester students will be able to

create good questions such as “What is the relationship between disease and hygiene in a modern hospital”, “How to vaccines work?” “Why are microbes required for life on earth?”. Questions that fostered discussion and learning. Note: these are actual student generated questions for a non-major general education science course.

If you’re interested in getting your students to be critical thinkers and engage in higher order cognitive skills, consider integrating the use of student generated questions into your course. You should not be surprised or disappointed if initially the student generated questions are not very good. Developing and writing good questions takes time and effort, but it is a hallmark of scholarship, in both teaching and research. How more information see “How to Use Question to Promote Student Learning” <https://www.scholarlyteacher.com/blog/using-questions-for-student-learning>



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