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Questioning is Your Friend!

Questioning is one of the most natural ways to stimulate inquiry, inquisitiveness, and critical thinking about a problem or situation. Unfortunately, through the formal schooling process, students lose much of that natural inquisitiveness with which they were born and develop the repetitive habit of rote recitation of facts, figures, and monosyllabic responses. By refining our questioning techniques and strategies, we will stimulate learners to inquire more deeply, think creatively of alternative solutions, and guide learners into a higher mode of critical thinking and problem solving. Purposeful classroom questioning on the part of both the instructor and students leads students to more reflective oral and written classroom responses.

Because college students are enculturated in a system that rewards correct responses to very low level questions, they often become unwilling to risk an expanded response to a question. That reluctance is reflected in their writing. Both instructors and students need to play a role in elevating thought in the classroom. While low-level questions get a conversation started, higher-level questions provide opportunities for an extended response. A “who” or “what” question begs a one-word response, while a “what might”, “what could”, or “what if” question demands that students explore multiple possibilities. It is from the exploration of multiple possibilities that meaningful writing emerges. For an instructor to guide this process, it is necessary to develop purposeful questioning techniques, such as planning questions.

Students also need to engage in the process of questioning. Through questioning, they are able to “distance” themselves from the present, draw from past experience and knowledge, and think of new ways to respond to or plan for future occurrences. Converting information from fact to questions requires different thought processes. It creates a learning experience that enables them to write more critically about what they learned.

To facilitate the questioning process, a questioning matrix was illustrated. (see attached) One notices that as the questioner selects questions further down and to the right of the matrix, the challenge of critical thought increases. This matrix can be used in two ways. First the instructor can use it as a guide to select and assess the level of challenge that discussion questions present to students. Second, it may be used to share with students in which the students are asked to address selected levels of questions in their discussions and writings.

By increasing the challenge of questioning to students, the benefits are many. By practicing this higher order of questioning, students will improve their:

- speaking and listening skills
- knowing how to learn
- critical thinking
- thinking framework

- understanding
- teamwork
- sensitivity/politeness
- honesty/integrity
- ability to accept criticism
- responsibility and initiative
- desire for learning
- scholarly writing

The Questioning Matrix

	Event	Situation	Choice	Person	Reason	Means
Present	What is _____?	Where/ When is ?	Which is _____?	Who is ___?	Why is ___?	How is ___?
Past	What did ___?	Where/When did ___?	Which did ___?	Who did ___?	Why did ___?	How did ___?
Possibility	What can ___?	Where/When can ___?	Which can ___?	Who can ___?	Why can ___?	How can ___?
Probability	What Would ___?	Where/When Would ___?	Which Would ___?	Who Would ___?	Why Would ___?	How Would ___?
Prediction	What Will ___?	Where/When Will ___?	Which Will ___?	Who Will ___?	Why Will ___?	How Will ___?
Imagination	What Might ___?	Where/When Might ___?	Which Might ___?	Who Might ___?	Why Might ___?	How Might ___?