

# Improving your Oral Questioning Techniques

**ProtocolNational**  
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**Enough emphasis cannot be placed on the importance of questioning in any teaching situation. Often the difference between a dull, boring lesson and a lively discussion is only a matter of some well-planned, well-directed oral questions.**

### **Suggested approaches to improving written questioning techniques**

- Stimulate learner thought. Ask questions that call for the application of facts, rather than just facts alone. Facts can easily be committed to memory and require little or no thought on the part of the learner.
- Establish a level of teaching and learning. Ask questions that require learners to comment on previous experience in the subject matter you are going to teach. By asking a series of oral questions, you can determine the learners' level of knowledge in a particular subject matter. That information will enable you to determine the level at which you should begin instruction.
- Arouse interest. Asking a general question, such as "How many of you have fired a .50-caliber machine gun?" or "How many persons died on the highways last year?" will serve to clear learners' minds of any extraneous thoughts. Such questions aid in motivating learners, as they mentally search for an answer. This type of questioning usually is used to generate interest in a large block of subject matter, usually a lesson as a whole.
- Focus the learners' attention. By asking a question about a particular part of a model, mock-up, chart, demonstration piece, or whiteboard drawing, you can direct the learners' attention to that specific area.
- Review the subject matter. Devise questions requiring learners to solve problems that will provide them with an opportunity to apply knowledge. Again, ask questions that emphasise the ability to reason and not the ability to recall mere facts.

- Drill on the subject matter. Use pre-planned oral questions to reinforce a subject matter in the learners' minds to help trainees remember certain facts, figures, shapes, formulas and so forth. This technique eventually will lead to the learners' mastery of the subject on which they are being drilled.
- Check for comprehension. Ask questions covering the main points of the lesson to detect and correct errors in thinking and to locate areas that need to be re-taught.
- Increase learner participation. Encourage learners to take an active part in the lesson by allowing them to both answer and ask questions.
- Increase learner learning. Encourage learners to ask questions to help them learn. Learners remember information longer if the material is given as answers to their own questions.
- Develop communication skills. Allow learners to ask and answer questions to improve their speaking skills. Active involvement in the class discussion increases their listening skills. Asking and answering questions helps trainees organise their thoughts.
- Seek feedback from the learners regarding the questioning techniques.
- Check to see if learners have expressed a sense of feeling pressured to answer fast. If this is the case, increase the time you give them to formulate an answer.
- Avoid concentrating on learners who are capable of giving the answer. Structure a few questions in a manner to elicit the right answer from learners with lower ability. Address these questions to those specific learners and give them enough time to answer. Do this on a regular basis to help these learners get more involved with learning.

- Change the timing of questions. With quiet/shy learners or those with lower ability, restrict questions to material that they have studied. With higher ability or more mature learners, it is possible to ask questions even before they learn the material, as this will help them improve their thinking and inquiry skills.

### Types of Questions

#### Open questions:

- are useful in getting learners to speak.
- can provide the tutor with a good deal of information.
- often begin with the words: What, Why, When, Who
- can be statements: "tell me about", "give me examples of".

#### Closed questions

These are questions that require a yes or no answer and are useful for checking facts. They should be used with care - too many closed questions can cause frustration and shut down conversation.

#### Specific questions

These are used to determine facts. For example "How much did you spend on that".

#### Probing questions

These check for more detail or clarification. Probing questions allow the tutor to explore specific areas. However care should be taken because they can easily make people feel they are being interrogated.

## Hypothetical questions

These pose a theoretical situation in the future. For example, "What would you do if...?" These can be used to get learners to think of new situations. They are also be used in interviews to find out how people might cope with new situations.

## Reflective questions

These can be used to reflect back to what you think a learner has said, to check understanding. These can also reflect the learner's feelings, which is useful in dealing with angry or difficult learners and for defusing emotional situations.

## Leading questions

These are used to gain acceptance of the tutor's view - they are not useful in providing honest views and opinions. If it is said to someone 'you will be able to cope, won't you?' they may not like to disagree.

**A series of different types of questions can be used to "funnel" information.** This is a way of structuring information in sequence to explore a topic and to get to the heart of the issues.

**e.g.** the use of an open question, followed by a probing question, then a specific question and a reflective question.