

Teaching

A series of practical and innovative teaching tips for college faculty No. 11

The Top 10...

Getting More (and Better) Student Questions

We want students to ask questions, but does our teaching behavior send a different message? Being intentional about getting good questions pays big dividends – you can do things to significantly improve both the quantity and quality of student questions.

- ✓ Remember, if you talk they cannot ask questions. If you want questions you must tell students that, often. You must also **act as if you expect questions**. How? Ask, and then wait. Use open hand gestures, give students time to think. Ask them to come to class with at least two questions.
- ✓ If you find you are not getting questions from many students, try **Question Roulette**. Everyone writes down a question. Upon your signal they all pass their questions to another student, continuing to do so until you say “STOP.” Randomly ask students to ask the question in their hand. This assists students who are reluctant to speak to a full class. An added benefit is that you can provide constructive criticism about how to improve a question because no one knows who asked it.
- ✓ Teach students how to ask good questions. It is not true that “there are no bad questions” and students know this. Especially in lower level courses, provide model “knowledge” questions, such as “what did Lincoln say about freeing the slaves before the Civil War?” Also model “understanding” questions, such as “how does the economy impact an organization’s specific environment?”
- ✓ At the end of a lesson, have students identify one question that they have on the material they studied, and tell them that you will answer at least five.

- ✓ Encourage “applications” questions by modeling them. From “identify 3 ways that learning Spanish can help you in your career” to “identify exactly how knowledge of attribution theory can help you when talking with your friends,” get students thinking and understanding that what they study directly impacts their lives – if they let it!
- ✓ Give constructive criticism when students ask questions, to help them strengthen their questions. This is tricky because some students will be intimidated by even the most positive critique. Counter that intimidation by having students work with 2 or 3 others to develop questions and say up front that you will be helping them improve these questions.
- ✓ Encourage students to send you questions via email, or use Blackboard’s discussion application, and answer them. Some students do better with electronic communication because they are less intimidated.
- ✓ Model questioning. Before introducing major topics, identify the question(s) the lesson will explore and seek to answer. This gives you another chance to clarify what a “knowledge question” is, or an “application question” for example.
- ✓ Make certain students know that asking questions ***will not prolong*** class time. In fact, consider rewarding students taking an on-ground class when many good questions are asked ***by letting them out 5 minutes early***. For an online class, consider dropping some activity if there are many “good questions” on a lesson.
- ✓ Reward excellent questions. Make the reward fit your personality and their interests. Perhaps for each “really good” question, a student gets a boost in class participation grade, or candy, or locally grown apples in the fall. Use your imagination.