Asking better questions.

When AI can complete almost any task in seconds, the questions you ask in class matter more than ever. A good question is the quickest assessment a teacher has. It shows how a student is thinking while there is still time to do something about it. Here are seven types of question, each with five you can use tomorrow.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Retrieval practice

Activate prior knowledge, strengthen memory

- What do you remember about...?
- Can you recall three key points from...?
- What did we learn last time about...?
- How does this connect to earlier learning?
- What comes to mind first when I say...?

Elaboration

Deepen understanding through explanation

- Why do you think that happens?
- Can you put that in your own words?
- What does that mean, exactly?
- How would you explain this to someone younger?
- What's the reasoning behind that?

Application and transfer

Apply learning in new contexts

- Where else could this be useful?
- Can you think of a real example?
- How would this work in a different subject?
- What would happen if we changed X?
- How could you use this in your own work?

Comparative reasoning

Build connections, spot patterns

- How is this similar to...?
- What's the main difference between these ideas?
- Which is more effective, and why?
- Can you compare these examples?
- What patterns do you notice?

Hypothetical thinking

Encourage prediction and speculation

- What might happen if...?
- What would you expect to happen next, and why?
- If you were in charge, what would you do?
- What would change if X were removed?
- Imagine this idea in the future. What might it become?

Critical judgement

Support evaluation and justification

- Do you agree with this view? Why?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses here?
- Is there a better way to do this?
- What would you do differently?
- Which option would you choose, and why?

Metacognition and self-regulation

Build awareness of thinking and habits

- What helped you work that out?
- What was the hardest part?
- How did you decide what to do first?
- When you got stuck, what did you try?
- How might you approach this differently next time?

Reframing the everyday question.

A small change in wording can change who does the thinking, and bring in the students who never put a hand up. Here are ten common questions, reworked. Two things make them work: a few seconds of wait time, and a classroom where a wrong answer costs nothing. Without those, calling on a student by name is more likely to cause anxiety than thought.

Instead of	Try	Why it works
"Does anyone know the answer?"	**"What do you think, Sam, and why?"**	Everyone has to think, because anyone might be asked.
"Who can tell me what I just said?"	**"How would you explain that in your own words?"**	Students rephrase the idea, which shows whether they understood it.
"Is that clear?"	**"What questions do you have?"**	It assumes there will be questions, so asking one feels normal.
"Do you understand?"	**"What's your next step?"**	Students say what they will do next, which shows whether they can.
"What's the answer?"	**"How did you work that out?"**	You hear the method as well as the answer.
"Can you guess?"	**"What do you already know that might help?"**	It points students to what they already know.
"Who's got it?"	**"What did you notice as you worked through it?"**	Students reflect on how they worked.
"Why didn't you get it right?"	**"What was tricky about this for you?"**	It treats difficulty as normal, so mistakes feel safe.
"What's wrong with that?"	**"What might be another way of looking at it?"**	It invites another view without telling the student they were wrong.
"Anyone else?"	**"Let's hear a different perspective."**	It shows that a different view is welcome.

Sources: Rowe, M. B. (1986) Wait time: slowing down may be a way of speeding up! Journal of Teacher Education, 37(1), 43–50. Wiliam, D. (2018) Embedded formative assessment. 2nd edn. Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree.