



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.



 Retrieval practice Activate prior knowledge, strengthen memory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What do you remember about...? - Can you recall three key points from...? - What did we learn last time about...? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How does this connect to earlier learning? - What comes to mind first when I say...?
 Elaboration Deepen understanding through explanation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Why do you think that happens? - Can you put that in your own words? - What does that mean, exactly? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How would you explain this to someone younger? - What's the reasoning behind that?
 Application and transfer Apply learning in new contexts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Where else could this be useful? - Can you think of a real example? - How would this work in a different subject? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What would happen if we changed X? - How could you use this in your own work?
 Comparative reasoning Build connections, spot patterns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How is this similar to...? - What's the main difference between these ideas? - Which is more effective, and why? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Can you compare these examples? - What patterns do you notice?
 Hypothetical thinking Encourage prediction and speculation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What might happen if...? - What would you expect to happen next, and why? - If you were in charge, what would you do? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What would change if X were removed? - Imagine this idea in the future. What might it become?
 Critical judgement Support evaluation and justification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Do you agree with this view? Why? - What are the strengths and weaknesses here? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What helped you work that out? - What was the hardest part? - How did you decide what to do first? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 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.