

TEACHING TOOL:
ASKING QUESTIONS AND CLASS DISCUSSION

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There are a variety of learner types in a classroom setting: creative (imaginative), reflective (realistic solutions), team (helpers), self-managers (learn in multiple contexts), effective (actively engage), and independent (process information and evaluate effectively). Using these learner types consistently or randomly, students engage the class in different ways. As an active learning technique, instructors can use the “reflective, creative, and team learners” as a resource for provoking class discussion. This technique works best as the instructor learns more about their students.

1. **Engaging Students:** Ask questions in three ways: (1) Creative: Can you explain how this might impact yourself, someone you know, or others? (2) Reflective: Can you offer an example of something that reminds you of this topic? (3) Team: Can you elaborate on your classmate’s comment and apply it to something you’ve learned in the lesson?
2. **Managing Discussion:** When the question and answer takes place, move to sections, tables, or rows and open the question only to that area of the class. This opens opportunities for all students to engage and stops 1 or 2 students from monopolizing class discussion.
3. **Spawning Healthy and Diverse Discussion:** Each student has a 2 minute window to comment. To encourage conversation in the classroom, instructors can open discussion by using the more talkative students as a resource while also having more control over the flow of conversation.

Helpful tips:

1. Use learner types as an advantage to enhance class discussion.
2. Offer several ways to answer the question using learning types as a source for questions.
3. Direct questions in specific areas of the class to broaden opportunities for students to speak (giving other students time to think about the question).
4. Offer a 2-minute (timed) window for comments to encourage students to think before they speak and to respect time allotted for the activity or delivery of class material.

Journal Writing

Again, going back to my involvement with the *National Writing Project* and WAC at Marshall University, the one technique that I incorporated into my bag of tricks 20 years ago was **journal writing**. Of course it lends itself to the fact that I am a writing instructor, but more than that it gets **every** single student writing almost every class period. It has been a life-saver because it takes the focus off of me and puts it on the students. I make it clear on day one that their journals are not diaries; I do not want to know what they did last night or over the week-end. Therefore, they must be prepared to share with the class everything that they write in their journals/learning logs.

So, at least once a week, I put a prompt on the board (related to the topic at hand), students are given five minutes to write, then they verbally share what they wrote. Of course, I do not always know where this will go which is perfectly ok with me. Often the most interesting and rich class discussions come from the sharing part of journal writing.

This also is an opportunity to give credit for attending class. I do not grade the journal entries for sentence structure, spelling, and mechanics, etc.; this is a soft grade. Therefore, it counts for a work ethic grade which is part of attendance.

Often students comment in the end-of-year course evaluations that the journal writing was most beneficial because they were given quiet time in class to reflect, write, and communicate.

2015 West Virginia Great Teachers Seminar

Submitted by Julie Terry, Assistant Professor, Graphic Design and Business
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Trick of the Trade: My teaching area is graphic design. I've found the free social media site pinterest.com to be a great source for collecting ideas, projects, samples and tutorials. I encourage my students to open accounts and collect and create their own boards. We share things we've found in class.

In past times, artists and writers would tear out samples from magazines, swatchbooks and other printed materials to create an "idea file." Today we can do this digitally, and not worry about spilling coffee on our notebooks!

Inspiration: Instructional videos and tutorials on Lynda.com, tutsplus.com and YouTube are invaluable. I've found a wealth of interesting projects and lectures that keep my skills sharp and give me ideas for classes. I've also shown videos in class to demonstrate techniques and software tools.