

Do you know...

why questioning is an important skill?

The fundamental purpose of asking questions, regardless of context, is to contribute to the shared pool of information and mutual understanding. Questioning can take place in a one-one situation or in groups of two or more.

Why use questioning?

Questioning is helpful for learning and teachers should be aware of why they are asking questions.

Your reasons for questioning your students may include:

- Engaging the learner
- Testing the student
- Establishing understanding
- Clarifying ideas
- Exploring challenges
- Encouraging deeper thought



Open questions

Open questions tend to draw out longer responses and may be used to explore thoughts or feelings.

In what ways can I help you to learn best during the placement?

What are your needs during this placement?

Closed questions

Closed questions can be used to elicit information or confirm understanding.

How many weeks have you been in this placement?

What specifically would you like to focus on during the placement?

Leading questions

Leading questions have the effect of pointing the student in a particular direction. A leading question can shape the rest of the conversation.

I think that one of the most difficult skills for students to acquire is xxx. What do you think?

The danger of using leading questions is that they require a respondent to make a conscious and deliberate effort to disagree.

Recall questions

Recall questions check knowledge.

What are the three most commonly prescribed antibiotics in General Practice?

Process questions

Process questions focus on thoughts and analysis or sharing of opinion.

*For this patient what are you thinking of prescribing and why?
How do you decide on the priority tasks in this situation?*

Some key questioning strategies

Non-verbal cues

The way you phrase a question, the tone you use and the body stance you adopt all influence how a student interprets a question. Allow students space to get a question wrong, without ridicule or eye rolling.

Formulating the question

It is easy to ask a closed, low-level recall question. Try to formulate more meaning through open, high-level process questions. When starting your questions, think about the why, what, how.

Adaptive questioning

Don't let questioning become a downward spiral of negative feelings. If a student doesn't know something it is not a bad thing and the student shouldn't be made to feel small because of it. Instead, maybe it's time to adapt your questioning.

Funnelling

The funnelling technique moves from a general open question to more specific questioning. It is a useful technique to adapt your questioning.

For example:

“Tell me about gall stone disease?” (open)

“Name the ways that gall stones can cause disease in patients?” (closed/recall)

“How do gall stones cause pancreatitis?” (process)

Give the person time to think, at least 7 -10 seconds for higher order questions.

The sound of silence / wait time

Give students time to consider the question and what it means, and to construct a meaningful response. Most questions prompt an answer within 7-10 seconds. It can be hard to wait, but students may not answer a question for fear of looking stupid, not because they don't know the answer.

Responding to answers

How you respond to the answers is as important as how you ask the questions. The answer may indicate whether the question was understood as you intended or needs to be reformulated. Immediate feedback is useful and is a stepping stone to the next question. Where possible, show an appreciation for answers and build on the student's response.

Modelling

If you model effective questioning it is likely that the student will adopt a similar questioning style. The student should be prompted to ask questions and encouraged to ask “why” questions. If they ask “why” questions, it's still useful to probe their existing understanding.

Practical Tips

Consider the questions you are going to ask

Questions may occur spontaneously based on what is happening, but some questions can be pre-designed.

Share the load

Some students may struggle to answer a question. If in groups, allow a struggling student to ask two colleagues, select the best answer, and explain why.

Increase wait time

Don't underestimate the importance of thinking time.

Think, pair, share

If in groups, ask students to discuss their answers with a partner and then share with the larger group.

Staged funnelling

Use adaptive questioning to increase the level of the questioning and challenge to match the students.

No hands up

Choose the student to answer. This helps keep all students on their toes. They should all be willing and able to answer questions.

Ask your student to think of questions for you! Get them practising questioning techniques and give them feedback on their questions

Advice - Don't use all of the strategies at the same time. Choose one and experiment.

Readings

Edmunds, S & Brown, G. (2010). Effective small group learning: AMEE Guide No. 48. Medical Teacher, 32(9)715-726.

Cho et al (2012). Analysis of questioning technique during classes in medical education. BMC Medical Education 12 (39) 1-7. DOI: 10.1186/1472-6920-12-39

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