Types of Classroom Questions (wiggins and mctighe)

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| **Questions That Hook** |
| * • Asked to interest learners around a new topic, may spark curiosity, questions, or debate, often framed in engaging "kid language", asked once or twice, but not revisited |
| **Questions That Lead** |
| * • Asked to be answered, have a "correct" answer, support recall and information finding, asked once (or until *the* answer is given), require no (or minimal) support |
| **Questions That Guide** |
| * • Asked to encourage and guide exploration of a topic, point toward desired knowledge and skill (but not necessarily to a single answer), may be asked over time (e.g., throughout a unit), generally require some explanation and support |
| **Essential Questions[[1]](#footnote-1)** |
| * • Asked to stimulate ongoing thinking and inquiry, raise more questions, spark discussion and debate, asked and reasked throughout the unit (and maybe the year), demand justification and support, "Answers" may change as understanding deepens |

*An essential question is a question that leads to sustained inquiry*

Steps to creating Essential Questions

**Step 1: Write Learning Outcome**

*Define Flood Return Period*

This is a very typical content focused, low Blooms level Learning Outcome. Next step is to raise the Bloom’s level (in this case using Bloom’s Cognitive Domain Taxonomy). Lets try that!

**Step 2: Increase Blooms level of Learning Outcome**

*Explain Flood Return Period*

The change has moved the learning outcome from the lowest Bloom’s level – Remembering - to the slightly higher - Understanding – level. In the next step, we try to change this learning outcome to make it about concrete action rather than just abstract understanding. Lets try that!

**Step 3: Make it about concrete action**

*Demonstrate understanding of Flood Return Period*

This is often the first attempt at making the learning outcome more about concrete action. Unfortunately, it doesn’t provide any information on how the students might “demonstrate understanding”. In the next step, we try again to make it about concrete action but this time making student understanding visible. Lets try again!

**Step 4: Require judgment or discrimination**

*Students will predict the outcome of a situation WRT flood return period*

This is getting better. Students are using their knowledge of Flood Return Period andapplying abstractly to a concrete situation. This is key. You can start to get glimmers of what an activity might look like where students show you that they know (knowledge in the service of action). But what is missing here is discrimination and judgment. Lets add those!

**Step 5: Constrain possible choices to intensify inquiry and reporting discussion**

*Students will predict the most likely outcome of a specific situation*

We now have discrimination and judgment but still a little too open ended to have students make decisions that are easily comparable and drive an intense reporting discussion that examines only the salient issues that need to be considered to make a “good” judgment and decision “in this case”. Constraining the possible outcomes to be considered can help you structure the analysis and discussion so very specific issues are discussed and very specific analysis is done. Lets constrain the possible choices!

**Final transformation to Essential Question**

**Which of these outcomes is most likely given this situation (using your knowledge of flood return period)**

* **Possible Outcome 1**
* **Possible Outcome 2**
* **Possible Outcome 3**
* **Possible Outcome 4**

We have transformed a lower level learning outcome, that at best could be assessed in an examination, into a powerful classroom activity that is structured to lead to a rich, deep reporting discussion.

Example Essential Question prompts[[2]](#footnote-2)

* A patient comes into emergency with the following symptoms...
  + What is the **first** thing you would do? And why?
  + What is the **first** test you would order? And why?
  + What would be the **worst** thing to do? And why?
* Given 3 possible programs to end homelessness in your city, select the program that is the **best** and will likely be most strongly supported by local agencies and Civic leaders? (Michaelsen and Sweet)
* What is the **most** relevant theory that explains the behaviour in the video? (Kubitz and Lightner)
* Which of the following **best** describes the opportunity cost of coming to class today? (Espey)  
  Which of the following should the University do to **best** increase the quality of Undergraduate education? (Mahler)
* Which sampling scenario would **best** address this research project? (Mahler)
* Given three valid historical interpretations of the progressive Movement, discern which **best** describes the Progressives revealed in our manifesto? (Restad)
* In Clarence Page’s op-ed piece “The Problem With Trashing Liberty”’ where does the responsibility for a safe a civil society lie? Which of the following three philosophers (X, Y, and Z) does Clarence Page **most** agree with on these fronts? (Roberson and Reimers)
* What of the following passage in the Bhagavad Gita **best** illustrates reflection about the nature of Krishna’s divinity? (Dubois)
* Rank how useful each source is for understanding the fears of the Cold War era. (Restad)
* Which teacher should be nominated for a teaching award? (Croyle and Alfaro)
* Which indicator (from a list of 5 plausible alternatives) is **most** critical to making a correct diagnosis in this case? (Michaelsen and Sweet)
* If a moving vehicle overloaded this bridge structure, which component would likely fail **first**?
* You are making a home assessment, which of the following safety hazards would be of **greatest** concern? (Clark)
* After assessing Mrs. Randall’s dining room what would be your **first** recommendation to protect her from falls? (Clark)
* What line on this tax form would pose the **greatest** finical risk due to an IRS audit? (Michaelsen and Sweet)
* Given a set of real data, which of the following advertising claims is **least** (or **most**) supportable? (Michaelsen and Sweet)
* You are consulting for a new business owner who wants to open a dry-cleaning store in Norman, Oklahoma. Where would you recommend locating a new dry-cleaning business?(Michaelsen)

Bill Roberson’s TBL Activity Recipe

**First**, you may need to make your original Learning Outcomes more CONCRETE.

**Next,** you need to create problem scenarios/situations where students’ factual knowledge is useful, but maybe insufficient to solve the problem definitively.

**Next,** when creating these scenarios you want to clarify exactly what do you want students to be doing.

* Evaluate/judge something (object, product, creation, situation)?
* Analyze or diagnose a situation?
* Interpret something (text, artifact, data set)?
* Solve a particular type of messy problem?

**Next**, identify the concrete information/data sets the students will work with:

* Texts (such as cases, descriptions, excerpts from a textbook, writing samples, etc.)
* Images (visualizations, diagrams, videos, etc.)
* Data (spreadsheets, graphs, charts, etc.)
* Objects (products, specimens, etc.)

**Next,** you need to pick the format of students’ action:

* + Will they compare?
  + Will they sort?
  + Will they rank?
  + Will they score?
  + Will they choose the best course of action?
  + Will they distill and represent in a written format?

**Next**, determine how to make student thinking/decisions visible so it can be represented in a simultaneous report. Can their answer be represented with?

* 1. Colour Voting Cards
  2. Single Number
  3. Single Letter
  4. Single word or phrase

Sometimes this means converting a complex response into a simple response. For example, after a ranking task, ask students to report their #1 choice, rather than their entire ranking scheme. If you’ve asked students to compile a list, ask them to choose the MOST critical item on their list and report it. Every task needs to lead to a moment of sharp differentiation: “I choose this over that.” Getting the students to this moment sets up “WHY?” as the teacher’s entry point for interactions leading to student analysis, reflection, and critical thinking. The simultaneous report naturally lets teams compare their decisions and decision-making process to other teams.

**Finally**, it is good to develop a facilitation plan for debriefing the 4S Application task, to ensure students learn the most they can from the task. Debriefs always begins by asking ALL teams to simultaneously report their answers/decisions. A good plan provides you with a way to organize the discussion that follows, and direct students into a dialogue with each other.

*Instructor: “OK, I see three groups said “B” and two groups said “C.” Let’s start with those of you who said “C.” Please explain to the other students why you chose this answer?*

*Later: OK, teams who said B, how would you respond to them?*

*Later still: Nobody chose A. Why did you discount that possibility?*

1. From Essential Questions: Opening Doors to Student Understanding (2013) Jay McTighe and Grant Wiggins p14 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Note the use of superlatives or implied superlatives to force a specific choice [↑](#footnote-ref-2)