

The Teacher as “Professional Question Maker”?

How to sharpen our questioning skills

Rachel Appleby, Budapest



Oxford Teacher Training
and Conference 2019

INSPIRE, INVOLVE, INNOVATE – Keys to Motivation

Every day Qs: In class, on the phone

Which questions get the 'best' responses?

Are you enjoying the
conference?

Have you had a good day
so far?



Which session(s), have you
enjoyed most at the
conference, and why?

How was your day?

Are you having a lovely
birthday?

Did you get some nice
presents?



How are you spending your
birthday?

What's the best present you
got?

“**Asking a question is the simplest way of focusing thinking.**

EDWARD DE BONO

[Maltese philosopher & author]

The teacher as “Professional Question maker”

Questions about questions ...

- What sorts of Qs do we ask in class? ... And HOW?
- What Qs are used in course books?
- What Qs are Students asked in exams?
 - Are we focusing clearly on language?
 - • Do we give Ss ‘space’ to express themselves?
 - Are we involving *all* our Ss appropriately?

Are we providing our Ss with the
best possible learning experience?



Recipes ...

If we know exactly
what we do, then we
have a much better
chance of being able to
improve it.



Giving choice

Using questions tactfully



Giving choice in the classroom

Handing over control: empowering students

- “We have these 3 tasks to do. Which shall we do first?”
- “Shall I play it again?” *[the recording]*
- “About the test: shall we do it on Friday or Monday?”
- “Look at the 5 questions. Choose 2, and answer them.”
-

Question types – Linguistic Form

Closed / Y/N / Polar Qs

Open / *Wh-* / Divergent Qs



Did you have a good weekend?



What did you do last weekend?

Question types – Linguistic Form

Involving and motivating Ss

Open / *Wh*-
Divergent Qs



Question types – Linguistic Form

Closed / Y/N
Polar Qs

GRAMMAR SPOT

1 Look at the future forms in these sentences from the conversation:

It's on my list. I'm going to buy some.

Good idea! I'll get a loaf.



In each sentence when did Ben make his decision?
Before speaking, or at the moment of speaking?

Headway, Intermediate U5

Question types – Linguistic Form

Open / *Wh-* / Divergent Qs? or Closed / Y/N / Polar Qs?

- A**
- Give you **facts**
 - Are **easy** and **quick** to answer
 - **Check** students' **knowledge**
 - **Keep the control** with the questioner

Closed / Y/N
Polar Qs

- B**
- Give you **opinions** and **feelings**
 - Elicit **longer** answers
 - Ask the respondent to **think** and **reflect**
 - **Hand over control** to the respondent

Open / *Wh-*
Divergent Qs

Question types – Functional

Which Q(s) does the teacher know the answer to?



JONATHAN – Gifts; quantifiers (*containers; packaging etc.*)

1. What did you get for your birthday?

2. What other things do people get for their birthdays?

3. Look at this word [*necklace*]. How many syllables does it have? Where's the stress?

Display Questions

Referential Questions

Question types – Functional

Display Questions



“How many syllables does it have [necklace] ?”

- designed to **check students’ knowledge** / comprehension
- the teacher **already knows** the answer

Referential Questions



“What did you get for your birthday?”

- require learners to provide **info**, or give an **opinion**
- focus on content (not language)
- the T **doesn’t** necessarily **know** the answer

A “lesson of questions”

Lead-in / warm-up activity

Brainstorm a topic / Ask Ss their opinions

Elicit a wide range of contributions

Referential Qs

Open / *Wh*-
Divergent Qs

Text comprehension Qs

‘Noticing’ language in a text

Matching words / phrases

Gap-fill activities

Language clarification

Concept check Qs

Closed / Y/N
Polar Qs

Display Qs

Personalisation (of language)

Ss relate to / reflect on the topic

Ss use new language to ask/answer Qs

Freer speaking; Ss take control / ‘own’ language

Open / *Wh*-
Divergent Qs

Referential Qs

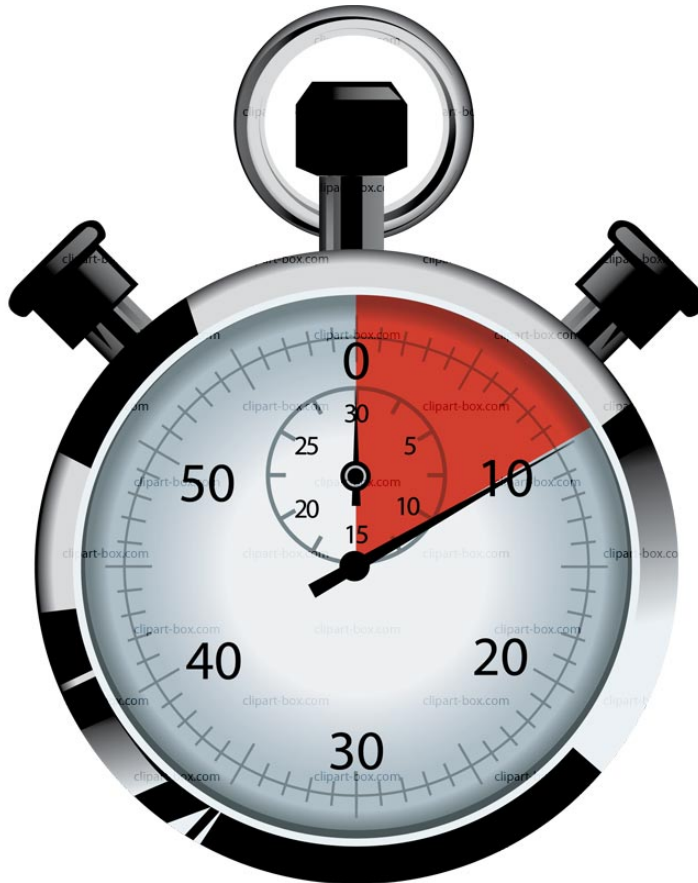
How do YOU ask Questions?

How do we involve our students appropriately?



Wait time

How long do you wait after asking a Question?





Facts about Questions

Survey in USA; all subjects: **True or False?**

1. On average, a Teacher allows less than 1 second wait time.
2. Trained Teachers allow 3-5 seconds' wait time.
3. Teachers give stronger students longer to answer Qs.

Rowe, M.B. (1974)



Facts about questions

If you wait **l o n g e r** , ...

- **more students** are able to answer
- more answers are **accurate**
- the **length** of student responses **increases**
- **weaker students** are more likely to respond.



Give students more time!



Rowe, M.B. (1974)



Questionnaire: how do YOU ask Qs?

< - - - Never – Sometimes – Usually – Always - - - >

1. I ask a mix of individual / open-class Qs. *U [usually]*
2. *(in this order)* I nominate* a S, and then ask the Q. (*name)
3. If a S doesn't understand, I immediately rephrase the Q.
4. I immediately acknowledge if an answer is correct or not.
5. I let Ss write down their ideas before they say anything.
6. I ask Ss to discuss ideas in pairs before they answer.

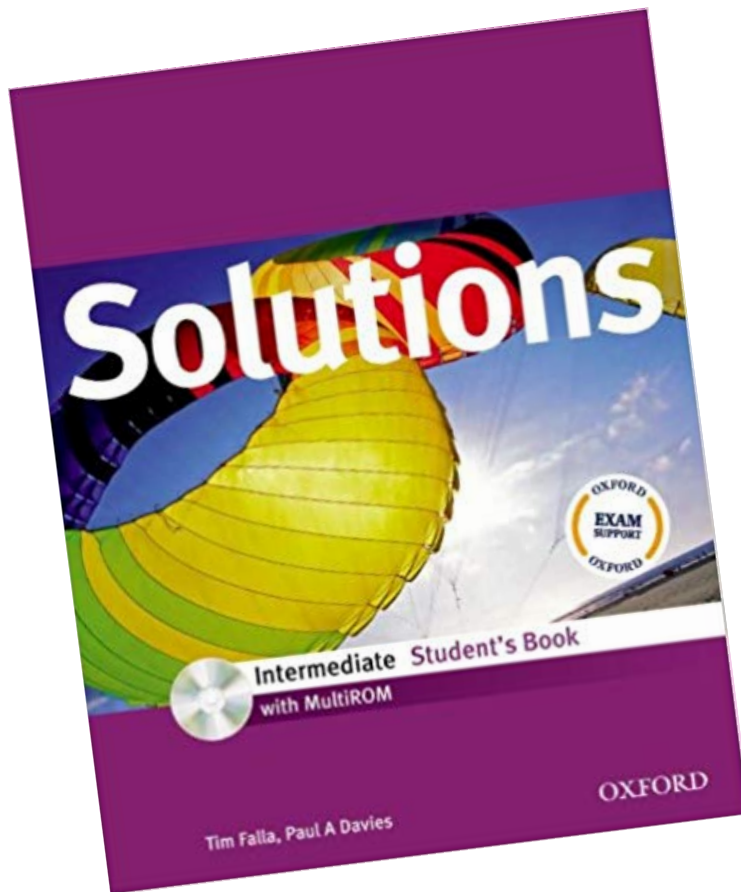
Questionnaire: how do YOU ask Qs?

Choose one that interests you: discuss it in pairs.

1. I ask a mix of individual / open-class Qs.
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Getting students to think more deeply

Inspiring & involving out students; personalisation



Solutions, Intermediate
“Visions of the future”
U5E



Solutions, Intermediate, U5E

READING Visions of the future

Look at the pictures which show visions of the future fifty years from now. Describe them.

Which one do you think is the most likely to come true?

I can understand and react to experts' predictions for the future.



Fifty Years On

1 Sir David King, scientific adviser to the British Government

If we don't reduce carbon emissions, the earth will become warmer, polar ice will melt and the oceans will rise. Cities like London and New York will disappear under the water. By 2100, Antarctica could be the only continent that is suitable for human life – the rest of the world will be too hot.

2 Francis Collins, geneticist

Fifty years from now, millions of people will live past the age of 100 and remain healthy. This will happen because we'll be able to study each person's genetic code and find the best way to treat and prevent illnesses in that individual. In about fifty years' time, the most important question for our society might not be 'How long can humans live?' but 'How long do we want to live?'

3 J Richard Gott, physicist

During the next fifty years, our earth might suffer a catastrophe. Humans could disappear, just like the dinosaurs and hundreds of other species. The best way to make humans safe from extinction is to start a colony on Mars. This is not a prediction but a hope. Will we be smart enough to do it?

4 Ellen Heber-Katz, biologist

I believe that soon we will be able to repair the human body in the same way that we can replace damaged parts of a car or a washing machine. Five years from now, we will be able to grow new fingers, and, a few years after that, new arms and legs. Within fifty years, replacing your whole body will be normal.



5 Peter Norvig, director of research at Google

Today, people all over the world have access to billions of pages of text on the Internet. At the moment, they use search engines to find information, but fifty years from now, people will simply discuss their needs with their computer, and the computer will make suggestions and provide usable information, not just a list of links.

6 Eric Horvitz, principal researcher at Microsoft Research

In fifty years' time, computers will be much more intelligent than today, and this will change people's lives. Computers will help people work, learn, plan and decide. They will help people from different countries to understand each other by automatically translating from one language to another. Intelligent computers will work as scientists, and will start to make important discoveries on their own.

Reading tip

When you're looking for specific information in the text, read the first sentence of each paragraph. The first sentence usually shows you what the whole paragraph will be about.

3 Read the reading tip. Then read the texts and match the opinions with experts 1–6. There is one opinion that you do not need.

- a ___ hopes that people will go and live on another planet, in case there's a terrible disaster on Earth.
- b ___ thinks that computers will find things out without the help of humans.
- c ___ predicts that the human race will become extinct.
- d ___ predicts that in about 2060 people may be able to determine their own lifespan.
- e ___ thinks that the coldest place on Earth might one day have the best climate for humans.
- f ___ predicts that medical advances will allow us to grow new limbs.
- g ___ thinks that we'll be able to communicate directly with search engines and they'll tell us what we need to know.

4 Match the verbs and nouns to make phrases from the texts.

- | | |
|-----------|-------------------------|
| 1 reduce | a catastrophe |
| 2 treat | b information |
| 3 suffer | c damaged parts |
| 4 start | d important discoveries |
| 5 replace | e carbon emissions |
| 6 provide | f a colony |
| 7 make | g illnesses |

5 Complete the sentences with phrases from exercise 4.

- 1 You _____ of a machine when it breaks down.
- 2 They've developed new drugs to _____.
- 3 The tourist office can _____ about hotels.
- 4 Computers have helped scientists to _____ about space.
- 5 We need to use our cars less in order to _____ and stop global warming.
- 6 Nobody is certain what caused the dinosaurs to _____ and become extinct.
- 7 In the seventeenth century, a group of pilgrims left England to _____ in North America.

Vocabulary Builder 5.3: Verb + noun collocations: p. 13

6 SPEAKING In your opinion, which expert's prediction is:

- 1 the most optimistic? Give reasons.
- 2 the most pessimistic? Give reasons.
- 3 the most interesting? Give reasons.
- 4 the most likely to come true? Give reasons.

7 Work in pairs. Make three predictions about the world in fifty years' time. Use the ideas in the box to help you.

buildings climate computers education
entertainment health space transport work

8 SPEAKING Tell the class your predictions. Do they agree or disagree?

1. Look at the pictures which show visions of the future 50 years from now. Describe them.

2. Which one do you think is most likely to come true?

3. Match opinions

4. Match verbs + nouns

5. Complete sentences

READING
Visions of the future

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Determine their own opinions

- e _____ thinks that the coldest place on Earth might one day have the best climate for humans.
- f _____ predicts that medical advances will allow us to grow new limbs.
- g _____ thinks that we'll be able to communicate directly with search engines and they'll tell us what we need to know.

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6. In your opinion, which expert's prediction is the most optimistic / pessimistic? Why?

7. Make 3 predictions about the world in 50 years' time.

Solutions, Int. U5E

What sorts of Qs are they? *Open / Closed; Display / Referential?*

1. Describe the pictures.

2. Which one do you think is most likely to come true?

3, 4, 5: text Qs; match verbs + nouns; complete sentences

6. In your opinion, which expert's prediction is the most optimistic / pessimistic? Why?

7. Make 3 predictions about the world in 50 years' time.

Which Qs require deeper thinking / engagement?

Solutions, Int. U5E

What are Ss really being asked to do?

1. Describe the pictures.

2. Which one do you think is most likely to come true?

3, 4, 5: text Qs; match verbs + nouns; complete sentences

6. In your opinion, which expert's prediction is the most optimistic / pessimistic? Why?

7. Make 3 predictions about the world in 50 years' time.

predict

label / recall

understand

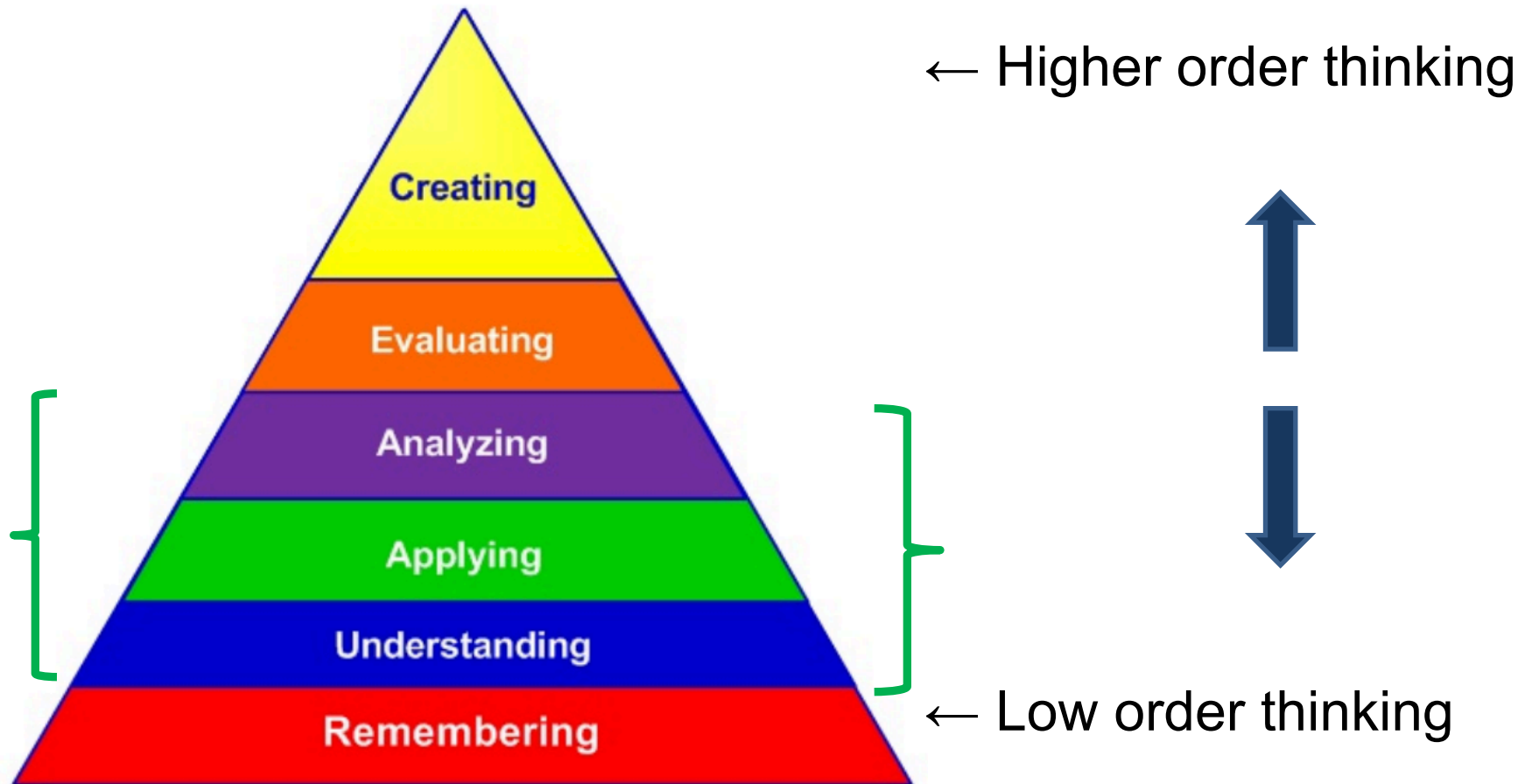
interpret

draw conclusions

describe

Bloom's Taxonomy & critical thinking

Encouraging deeper, more meaningful responses



“ Asking questions is “one of the basic ways by which the **teacher stimulates student thinking and learning**”.

ASCHNER, M. J.

Critical Thinking / Student exams

Understanding exam Qs; preparing our Ss better!



Critical Thinking / Student exams

Cambridge, FCE Speaking, Part 2 – photos



*Different places to **shop** for clothes*

- **Compare the photographs**
- **Say why you think people would choose to shop in these different places.**

Critical Thinking / Student exams


Euroexam, B2 Reading, Task 3 – multiple choice

Task Three: Multiple-Choice Reading (15 minutes) – Questions 14-20

You will read an article about cricket.

- Read the following article.
- Answer the multiple-choice questions and choose the correct answer: A, B, C or D.
- Place a [X] in the appropriate box on your Answer Sheet.

Cricket



London correspondent Salvo Tomaselli writes about the history of cricket.

As 'typically English' as tea at five, a lifetime to understand, never mind a last anything up to five days, with not for hours on end and then when it does be looking the other way or be fast a

rules are so complex that you probably need a PhD to comprehend them full decide it's not really worth the bother.

The precise origins of cricket are highly debatable and there are many theories. It might have been invented by shepherds or played in churchyards as far back as the 14th century, although some accounts suggest that it might pre-date this by as much as 100 years. The first source which British historians consider completely reliable describes something which resembled cricket in 1300, although even this account is far from certain. The rules of the modern game were not completely defined until the 18th century. The first organised international took place in 1861, with England against Australia. What soon developed into a fierce, ongoing competitive rivalry. As the game was being formally established, other countries joined the growing international play community.

To attempt to explain the rules of cricket comprehensively in an article of this length would be impossible. It could be argued that the basic principles of the game are similar to those of baseball, although the game play and rules are very different. Cricket is an outdoor, fair-weather sport played mainly in countries belonging to the British Commonwealth, such as England, Australia, the West Indies, India, Pakistan and South Africa. The balance of power in international cricket tends to swing between these competing nations. At present Australia predominate having been virtually unbeaten for the last decade or so and teams always face a tough match against them.

Although it might appear to be a sedate, sleepy pastime, cricket has always demanded concentration and immense courage. Since becoming fully professional in the 1970's star players and training facilities have improved immensely across the game. Cricket is now as competitive and technical as any global sport, and who knows, perhaps its popularity might yet spread to previously unexplored territories.

euroexam
International

15. Concerning the start of cricket...

- A** there is little dispute.
- B** it was first played by shepherds in churchyards.
- C** it is a very difficult game to play.
- D** it is a very old game.

20. Whom is the text aimed at?

- A** Amateur cricketers.
- B** Cricket fans.
- C** Newcomers to cricket.
- D** People who don't like cricket.

The teacher as “Professional Question maker”

Answers to questions ...

- **Classroom Qs:** what can we improve?
 - **Course book / exam Qs:** understand their purpose!
 - Ask the right Q. at the right time, & in the right way
- ➡
- Focus clearly on language
 - Enable Ss to express themselves with new language
 - Involve and challenge our Ss appropriately

Provide our Ss with the
best possible learning experience!



“a professional question maker”

What next?

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TEACHER'S QUESTIONS OUP Conference, August 2019

(4 pages) Included:

- A blank format for recording questions: Types, wait time, purpose
- A bit of extra back-up theory

Why do we ask questions, and what sorts of questions do we ask? Use this form to collect questions

CLASS: (Level, age, no. of students etc.)

OVERALL Aims of lesson:

Teacher's questions	Q type *	Wait time	Purpose of Q
OK. Shall we check the homework?	CM	30 secs	move to next stage
So, Ana, what sort of films do <u>you</u> like?	Ref.	4 secs	to motivate, personalise

INSPIRE
VOLVE
NOVATE

Oxford Teacher Training
and Conference 2019

TEACHER'S QUESTIONS

Rachel Appleby

Pick an area that interests you; then choose 2-3 ideas to try.

PLANNING

- ☐ Know the aims of your lessons; then plan Qs accordingly.
- ☐ Write down 5 key Qs: put them on post-its on your plan!
- ☐ Plan important questions [Qs] in advance, word-for-word.

TYPES

- ☐ Ask a balance of referential & display questions.
- ☐ Plan Y/N Qs ahead to check concepts and understanding clearly.
- ☐ Use open (Wh-) Qs to encourage opinions, elaboration + discussion.
- ☐ Ask Qs about important rather than trivial content.
- ☐ Personalise Qs, or use personalized follow-up Qs where possible.
- ☐ Do you understand? Is that clear are unlikely to get helpful responses.
- ☐ Avoid Qs which cause embarrassment / offend ('Are you awake?').
- ☐ Add 1-2 Qs at start/end of module to promote higher level thinking.



“a professional question maker”

What next? An action plan!

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HOW / WHO

- ☐ Spread Qs randomly around the class.
- ☐ Balance Qs to the whole class, with individual S nomination.
- ☐ Move around the room to ‘catch’ more Ss more easily, randomly.
- ☐ Give Ss time to write down / discuss their answer(s); then it’s ‘safe’ to nominate.
- ☐ Let Ss ‘phone a friend’ i.e. ask another S for help.

WAIT TIME

- ☐ Give Ss **time** to answer: count 1,000, 2,000, etc. before responding.
- ☐ Know which Ss will need most thinking time.
- ☐ Know which Qs will require more thinking time.

“a professional question maker”

Record your questions!

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Teacher's Qs	Wait time	Student response	Q type	Purpose of Q
<i>OK. Shall we check the homework?</i>	<i>30 secs</i>	<i>Ss open their books</i>	<i>CM</i>	<i>Move to next stage</i>
<i>So, Ana, what sort of films do <u>you</u> like?</i>	<i>4 secs</i>	<i>“Em, I like .. comedies, thriller”</i>	<i>Ref.</i>	<i>To motivate, personalise</i>

“ Good questions inform,
great questions transform.

KEN COLEMAN
[American Sportscaster]

References

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Handout (etc.)

padlet.com/rachelappleby/91y41p6lcr9g



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CONFERENCES / WORKSHOPS / TRAINING

Posted on April 16, 2016

(Please note that the date you can see above is when I started this blog; I update it regularly!)

For more information and details on short workshops, please check out this page: [SHORT WORKSHOPS](#)

Budapest, 24 August 2019: Oxford Teacher Training Conference 2019

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

"The Teacher as 'Professional Question Maker':

How to sharpen our questioning skills"

As teachers, we ask 200-300 questions a day, but are we really aware of what each question does, of how we're asking them, and what happens afterwards?



Questions are key in motivation – from engaging our students in the lesson's topic to enabling them to personalise and "own" new language. We also use questions to organise students and activities, clarify language, and check understanding. Successful lessons will additionally provide the appropriate level of challenge, involve each student and elicit valuable contributions, and promote autonomy.

What if we could do all this even more effectively in every lesson simply by sharpening our questioning technique?

This session will look at the kinds of questions we ask, and raise awareness of the power questions can have in making learning more effective.

Session handout: [Rachel Appleby Questions OUP 2019 Handout](#)

Follow-up materials:

[Rachel Questions Action plan](#)

[Observations Tasks Questions Rachel Appleby 4pp](#)

[Observation Task Questions Somogyi_Toth 3pp](#)



The Teacher as “Professional Question Maker”

Sharpening our questioning skills

Thank you!

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INSPIRE, INVOLVE, INNOVATE - Keys to Motivation