

## Suggestions on Conducting Q&A Sessions

A Q&A session consists of three major components: Listening, Questioning, and Reacting to Student Communication (p.121, McBeath, 1998).

### Listening

#### Types of situation:

- **Recognize the validity of each question:** Students are motivated when they feel instructors concur and support their needs for help.
  - **Tips:** Having eye contact and supportive body gesture; rephrasing the question with tone of approval; calling them by their names (when possible); etc.
- **Listen between the lines:** Listen attentively and look for signs in their body language or use of words that might indicate lack of confidence, shyness, frustration, etc. before you answer.
  - **Tips:** Use statements like, “You have asked a question that concerns many students.”; “This is an important area that you have highlighted.”; “Great, a question from the homework.” etc.
- **Clarify before answering:** Some students are confused on a topic thus unable to articulate the question. It is a vicious cycle that feeds reticence.
  - **Tips:** Repeat or rephrase the question before answering helps, not to mention the whole class will hear the question as well. For example, “The question is...”, “What you are asking is actually a tri-fold question, they are...”, “Correct me if I am wrong, your question is about...” etc.

### Questioning

Ask yourself what you want to achieve with your questions before you formulate the questions. The questioning technique will justify the purpose. Mix the question types to achieve your communication purpose. Be flexible with different individuals.

#### Types of questions

- **Open ended questions**
  - Best for: Soliciting longer and freer response in forms of opinion, feelings, thoughts, etc.
  - Examples: “What do you think about ...”; “How would you describe...”; “Can you identify an application for this ...?” etc.
- **Probing questions**
  - Best for: Guiding students to think critically; investigating the background or learning progress; etc.
  - Examples: “Why do you think method A is more effective even though ...?”; “When will step 2 replaces step 1?”; “Could you give me an example?” etc.
- **Divergent questions**

- Best for: promoting thinking-out-of-a-box, inquiry, independent thinking, etc.
- Examples: “Imagine if I took method A instead of method B, then what would happen?”; “What if...?”; “What would you do next if both methods are proven invalid?” etc.
- **Closed ended questions**
  - Best for: Confirming understanding before asking another type of question; bring to closure; etc.
  - Examples: “Do you agree with method A?”; “Can we now move on to the next section now that we have reviewed the highlights?” etc.
- **Rhetorical questions**
  - Best for: Making statements to reinforce consensus on certain messages.
  - Examples: “Wasn’t the prep for the exam a worthwhile experience?”; “Don’t you think the exercises helped you to remember the important points from your reading?” etc.

In my opinion, there are really no bad or good questions per say, just targeted questions (Baquet & Goeller, 2006). Misuse or misalign any questioning technique with a purpose can inhibit two-way communication, discourage critical thinking, weaken confidence, intimidate follow-up questions, etc.

## Reacting to Student Communication in General

At all times, instructors should continue to

- Encourage students to expand and clarify their ideas.
- Keep your promise when you said you will get back to them.
- Develop a positive and supportive rapport even when students appear to be discouraged.
- Identify feelings and emotions but not to judge them in your response.
- Even if there is a “stupid question”, try to rephrase it to benefit the class. Many times students are confused but not ignorant.
- Introduce other channels for follow-up questions, i.e. email, discussion threads in LMS, question cards, etc., in case some students have different learning styles or communication preferences.

## References

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