

Questioning – Structuring Tools

Structuring tools can be used to create questions. They help ensure continuity and progression. They also make it easier to develop questions. This is because they remove some of the work which has to be done. The teacher does not have to think about the general form, or the relationship between one question and the next. Instead, they simply apply the structuring tool to the present topic.

Here are five structuring tools:

1) Bloom's Taxonomy

This has six levels:

- Knowledge
- Comprehension
- Application
- Analysis
- Synthesis
- Evaluation

They get progressively more challenging. Here are some key words for each level:

Knowledge:	Arrange, Define, Describe, List, Match, Memorise, Name, Order, Quote, Recognise, Recall, Repeat, Reproduce, Restate, Retain.
Comprehension:	Characterise, Classify, Complete, Describe, Discuss, Establish Explain, Express, Identify, Illustrate, Recognise, Report, Relate Sort, Translate.
Application:	Apply, Calculate, Choose, Demonstrate, Dramatize, Employ, Implement, Interpret, Operate, Perform, Practise, Role-Play Sketch, Solve, Suggest.
Analysis:	Analyse, Appraise, Categorize, Compare, Contrast, Differentiate, Discriminate, Distinguish, Examine, Experiment, Explore, Investigate, Question, Research, Test.
Synthesis:	Combine, Compose, Construct, Create, Devise, Design, Formulate, Hypothesise, Integrate, Merge, Organise, Plan, Propose, Synthesise, Unite.
Evaluation:	Appraise, Argue, Assess, Critique, Defend, Evaluate, Examine, Grade, Inspect, Judge, Justify, Rank, Rate, Review, Value.

2) Concrete to Abstract

This method involves a gradual transition from one type of thinking to another, as opposed to a specific delineation of skills. That shift is from concrete thinking to abstract thinking. Here is an example:

Concrete

- 1) How many ducks are in the pond?
- 2) What colour are the ducks?
- 3) How are the ducks behaving?
- 4) What are the relationships between the ducks?
- 5) What might be influencing the behaviour and relationships of the ducks?
- 6) Why might the ducks have come to be as they are?
- 7) Is all human life mirrored in the vagaries of ducks?
- 8) If ducks could speak, would we understand them?

Abstract

3) Show Me, Tell Me, Convince Me

Show me: Use the phrase 'show me' as the command part of your question. You might ask a student to show you what they have done, to show you how they have learnt something, or to show you what something means. The use of the word 'show' indicates that this activity will involve a basic level of thinking.

Tell me: Using the phrase 'tell me' as the command part of your question means you are making greater demands on your students. You might ask pupils to tell you what they think about something, to tell you about the structure of something, or to tell you about the origins of something they have been studying. The use of the word 'tell' indicates that this activity will require a deeper level of thinking than was the case with the word 'show'.

Convince me: Using the phrase 'convince me' as the command part of your question will result in even greater demands being made of your students. You might ask pupils to convince you that they are right, to convince you that something is the case, or to convince you that a certain course of action should be taken. The use of the word 'convince' indicates that this activity will require complex thinking – thinking which is beyond the level of showing and telling.

When using this method, you can ask a number of questions based on each category. You need not be limited to one per section. You might extend this method by using different command words (explain, describe, persuade and so on).

4) Digging Deeper

This is where your main aim is to get to the very bottom of what students think. As such, your questions will involve asking for explanations and justifications of what has been said. You will need to be persistent, continually pushing students to explain themselves. Listen carefully to what they say and latch on to anything which is not sufficiently clear, plausible, supported by evidence, reasoned or explained. Here are some examples of 'Digging Deeper' questions:

- What do you mean by that?
- How does that relate to the question?
- Why do you think that?
- What evidence/reasons/support do you have for that?
- How can you justify what you have said?
- Why should we accept your answer?
- On what is your thinking based?
- How might someone challenge that?
- How might someone attempt to disprove what you have said?
- On what does your answer rest/rely?
- Why?

5) General to Specific

This is where your questions begin with a general concern about some given topic or idea before gradually progressing to a specific element of that. Here is an example:

What are your thoughts on climate change?

What do we know about climate change?

What effects might climate change have on the world?

How might human behaviour connect to these possible effects?

How might it be possible to mitigate these effects?

What might a plan to alter the behaviour of people in the UK look like?

What are the strengths and limitations of such a plan?

To what extent do you agree that climate change can be reversed by attempting to alter the behaviour of individuals?

Important Note

These structuring tools are not set in stone. You can change and adapt them if you feel your subject demands it. For example, practical subjects may change the order of 'show me, tell me, convince me'.