

Developing students' questioning skills arouses curiosity, sustains motivation and develops key learning skills; and the questions students ask indicate their progress. With your help, I will demonstrate three ways of generating and managing student questions: Visitor Technique, Press Conference and Simultaneous Surveys. Discussion will assist application to your subject area.

Visitor Technique (1)

Let's use the Visitor Technique itself to find out more about the technique. This will be challenging and it might be confusing, but I think it will work. It all depends on the quality of your questions. To get things going I will just say that I know a bit about a teaching method called the 'Visitor Technique' and that the first stage involves you working in small groups for five minutes to generate a sequence of questions that will help you to find out what you want to know about it. I think I should also warn you that when you ask your questions I am unlikely to provide long answers. I think I should also warn you that I am very deliberately not providing you with a detailed handout about this technique. What you happen to learn about the technique will depend very much on the nature of the questions you ask me. After preparing questions and asking them, each group will be asked to assess the quality and usefulness of their questions and the visitor will comment on their experience as a visitor.

Visitor Technique (2)

Now that you have learned something about the Visitor Technique I would like you to try it out within your small groups. We need one person in each group to volunteer to be a visiting expert and I will meet with the visitors while each group prepares their questions.

Once the visits are completed, each group review will focus on the experience of the visitor and the experience of the group.

Visitor Technique: whole group review

Share reactions from each group. Compare the technique (pros and cons) with lecturing and with other techniques that help students learn from the expertise of others. Consider the range of visitors who could be invited in your subject area. Consider variations that extend the students' responsibilities beyond the asking of questions to choosing, inviting, hosting and thanking a visitor. Consider using conferencing and internet technologies.

Press Conference

Press Conference is similar to Visitor Technique, but there are important differences. These include:

- the person facing questions has a story to tell rather than expertise to share
- the questioning teams each have different interests depending on the publication or programme they represent (in role)
- the end product from each group is a front page story or verbal report in the style of their particular publication or programme
- the person being interviewed can be telling a true story about themselves or what they have witnessed, or can be briefed to represent a real person (in the news or from history - an explorer, an inventor, or an ordinary person from a different place or time). Or the person can be a character from a work of fiction being studied.
- As in real press conferences there can be more than one witness or spokesperson. Like a court drama, each response may provide a different perspective or a contradictory account.

Organising a Press Conference

1. The teacher can be the person facing questions or can take the role of chairperson managing the flow of questions and the flow of answers.
2. A useful support role (as in real press conferences) is to have an assistant with a roving microphone (real or dummy) under the instruction of the chairperson.

3. Students' questioning skills are important in all variations, and so are the skills of note-taking, turning notes into a report and working with others to do so.
4. Whether asking or answering questions students need to use their imagination and step inside the shoes of another. For some this might *discourage* participation, but in my experience, the role play element adds interest and *encourages* participation.
5. Even if your main purpose is simply imparting knowledge, Press Conference has many advantages over traditional methods, and if well briefed and organised it is more time efficient.
6. Press Conference can be adjusted in many ways to focus on different learning outcomes.

How Press Conference helps learning

Several features of Press Conference enhance the learning process, including these:

- students prepare questions in advance for an investigation for which they are responsible
- students acquire the information in the form of a story
- students reorganise and craft the information into a new version of the story (in the form of a newspaper, journal, or web page) and create a visual record.
- the drama inspires motivation, participation, imagination, interaction and enjoyment.

Action Replay: Video Clips

To introduce even more life into a Press Conference you can introduce 'Video Clips'. These are reruns of key moments that help to illustrate the story being told. In some cases, this might involve real video, but I nearly always prefer live re-enactments (action replays) which can be rehearsed or spontaneous. To start the process, questioners may ask "Was this captured on video?" The replay often stimulates further questions. Questioners can make requests during the playback such as 'pause/freeze frame',

'rewind/replay', 'fast forward'. Video Clips will not suit all Press Conferences, but the visual staging of a story focuses attention and brings the story to life, especially for more visual learners.

Simultaneous Surveys

Some active learning techniques take time, but this one saves time. It is most useful as a starting point for informed discussion on a subject in which everyone has an opinion, experience or knowledge. Some survey questions can be used again at a later stage to see if there have been any changes.

Setting up Simultaneous Surveys

1. Break down the main topic into a list of 7 sub-topics (with student help if desired)
2. Create 7 small groups. Each small group adopts a single sub-topic.
3. Each small group creates 2 survey questions. Ideally one question helps to create a statistic and another question brings out a story or example. Everyone should now have two questions written down and a pen and paper for recording answers.
4. The survey begins and has a suitable time limit (about 7 minutes). Each group should aim to get at least a 70% response rate between them. My preference is for these 7 minutes to be a free-for-all with students meeting one-to-one and interviewing each other.
5. After the survey, each group has 7 minutes to prepare a 70 second verbal report of their results.
6. The results are shared in the whole group. I prefer the information to be presented anonymously: "60% agreed, 3 people blushed, 1 person had a great example ..."

Acknowledgements and further reading

Visitor Technique is described in *Active Tutorial Work* by Jill Baldwin and Andy Smith. The other techniques are mostly my own developments. Also see 'Using learners' questions in reviewing' and 'Action Replay' in the resource list at <http://reviewing.co.uk/kbs>