EFFECTIVE QUESTIONING TECHNIQUES

Objectives

Terminal Objective (TO): Given a case study involving a classroom question and answer segment, recognize instances where the instructor used/did not use effective questioning techniques based on the types of questions covered in the lesson and the minimum criteria specified in the NTC Instructor Delivery Evaluation Checklist and Guidelines.

Enabling Objectives (EO): In order to reach the TO each student should, by the end of the lesson, be able to…

1. Explain how effective questioning techniques promote learning.
2. Differentiate between knowledge and comprehension type questions.
3. Explain why comprehension type questions are critical to assessment.
4. Recognize the different types of directed classroom questions.
5. Give examples of directed questions being used in the classroom.
6. Describe the different types of ineffective questions instructors should avoid.
7. Predict the impact of poor questioning techniques on participant learning.

What <u>Questions</u> Target Different Levels of Thinking?
(From Bloom's Taxonomy)

Ask questions that make people think at more than one level of thinking. Try these or similar action words in your questions. You can influence how people think! Many action words can cause thinking at more than one level. Notice also that not all questions need to be written in question form.

Level 6: **Evaluation** Example: Why was the <u>introduction</u> ineffective?
<u>What</u> are you recommendations for improvement?
<u>What</u> is your justification?

Appraise	Conclude	Decide	Justify
Argue	Criticize	Defend	Rate
Assess	Critique	Dispute	Recommend
Choose	Debate	Judge	Weigh

Level 5: **Synthesis** Example: <u>How</u> could you have done it differently?

Combine	Devise	Imagine	Organize
Compose	Develop	Invent	Plan
Create	Expand	Make up	
Design	Hypothesize	Modify	

Level 4: **Analysis** Example: <u>Was</u> that an effective introduction? Why or why not?

Analyze	Contrast	Investigate	Separate
Break down	Diagram	Map	Simplify
Categorize	Dissect	Scrutinize	Take apart
Compare	Examine		

Level 3: **Application** Example: <u>What</u> would be an effective introduction for a lesson on stress?

Apply	Compute	Dramatize	Solve
Assemble	Construct	Draw	Test
Develop	Demonstrate	Illustrate	Work Out

Level 2: **Comprehension** Examples: <u>Why</u> is it necessary to have a route in the intro?
<u>What</u> might be an example route for a lesson on stress?
<u>What</u> is the likely result of not having a route?

Classify	Generalize	Paraphrase	Reproduce
Describe	Give an example	Recap	Sort
Discuss	Outline	Rephrase	Translate
Explain			Predict

Level 1: **Knowledge** Example: <u>What</u> are the required elements in an NTC introduction?
<u>Which</u> element in an introduction serves to motivate?

Find	List	Name	State
Identify	Locate	Select	Tell
Label	Match		

Remember: With the exception of the Knowledge-Level, each level in Bloom's Taxonomy is dependent on the previous level. For example, you cannot perform a task (application) unless you first "know" what needs to be done and "comprehend" how to do. Read each sample question and think about how it relates to that level.

Higher Levels of Thinking

10.1

Asking Questions

I. Effective Questions

a. <u>Lead-off questions</u>. A lead off question is designed to stimulate thinking and generate discussion, and is phrased so *students <u>are aware of the main point.</u>* These types of questions are particularly useful during the guided discussion method where you *want* student input and discussion of the main point. For example, during a lesson on "leadership enhances morale," you may have a main point such as, Leader's integrity enhances morale. You might lead off with the question: "How does a leader's integrity enhance morale?" This focuses students on the topic and gets them thinking. This is how lead-off questions promote learning.

b. <u>Follow-up questions</u>. Once you've gotten the discussion rolling with your lead-off question, you want to *guide* the discussion. You do this with *follow-up* questions. You should plan follow-up questions that will guide the lesson progression by supplying sub-ideas that will promote student reasoning. For example, after our lead-off question of "How does a leader's integrity enhance morale," you might follow-up with a sub-idea of leadership integrity -- and how it relates to morale, such as "How does your boss' integrity enhance morale?" Well-planned follow-up questions promote learning by guiding the lesson's progression and promoting student reasoning.

c. <u>Spontaneous questions</u>.
(1) As your lesson progresses, you may notice students are getting off track. Instead of focusing on leadership and morale, they may be discussing followership and morale, or leadership and mission accomplishment. In either case, you need to get them back to the point under discussion. You do this by using a *spontaneous question.* By the very nature of the term, you've probably already guessed you *can't plan* these! You have no way of knowing ahead of time someone is going to get off of the subject. What you need to do when it happens, though, is to ask a question that will bring the discussion back to the lesson, such as: "That's a very interesting point about the follower's integrity and morale, but let's focus on the leader's role for the moment. How does your boss' integrity enhance morale?" You've given the student positive feedback ("interesting point") to ensure you don't shut him or her off, and then repeated the follow-up question to get him or her back on the subject.
(2) Another time you may need to use a spontaneous question is if the students aren't discussing the whole relationship of the lesson objective -- for example, leadership and morale. If they focus on only one aspect of the lesson, such as leadership, then you need to ask a spontaneous question to focus them on the rest of the point: "How does that [whatever leadership example he or she has given] enhance morale?" You've focused the student on the whole relationship and gotten him or her to think through how one affects the other.
(3) Another example of when you would use a spontaneous question is if you need to seek clarification of a student's response. Let's say during the discussion, a student gives an answer that isn't really clear to you. Chances are, if it's not clear to you, it's probably

not clear to the other students. At that point, you could say to the student, "Would you restate that in another way?" or "Could you explain your answer in more detail?" This allows the student the chance to make himself (or herself) clear.

Q: How would asking spontaneous questions promote learning?

AR: - Keeps the discussion on track.

- Ensures the inputs relate to the entire lesson.

- Ensures clarity of responses.

(4) Sure! Spontaneous questions promote learning by keeping students on the subject, ensuring their responses focus on the whole relationship of the lesson objective and ensuring student responses are clarified for everyone's benefit.

d. <u>Rhetorical questions.</u>

(1) When an instructor asks a question for which no response is required, it is a *rhetorical* question. Either the question goes unanswered or the instructor answers it himself (herself). In this sense, rhetorical questions are *self-directed* since they are not directed to the students.

(2) (Rhetorical question) Why would an instructor ask questions for which no answer is expected? Rhetorical questions are useful throughout the lesson, from the attention step that asks "Have you ever wondered why . . ?" to the hook that asks "How can you use this information?" to the summary that asks "What have we covered today?" Rhetorical questions promote learning by focusing students on a new angle or by getting them ready for a new direction in the lesson.

e. <u>Direct questions.</u> *Direct* questions are the ones most of us as students dreaded! These are the ones the teacher asked us -- *by name!* -to answer. But now that you're on the other side of the classroom, direct questions can help you in many ways. Direct questions promote learning by getting a quiet student involved in the discussion, by seeking an opinion or by drawing support from a student. For example, if a student in your class has expertise in the area under discussion, you might ask, "Mr. Johnson, you've taught for a while. How have you seen evaluation handled in the past?" Notice this questioning technique *begins with the student's name.* You do this to ensure the student is paying attention to the question you're about to ask. If you tack the student's name onto the *end* of the question, the student may respond with, "Would you repeat the question?" That's embarrassing for both of you and wastes time.

f. <u>Reverse questions.</u> Sometimes a student asks a question that you feel he/she could answer himself/herself if he/she thought about it. In that case, instead of answering the question yourself, you might want to turn it around and ask a *reverse* question. You ask the student the same question he/she asked you. For example, Mrs. Smith asks, "I don't see the point in doing the examples and non-examples in our lessons. Why do we have to do them?" You reverse it and ask, "Let's look at the objective of your lesson, Mrs. Smith. Why do you think you would want to have examples and non-examples in your lesson?" Chances are, she'll think about it and come to the conclusion that examples and non-examples help the instructor evaluate whether the students actually comprehends a particular concept. In this case, reverse questions promote learning by getting the

students to think about the issues they've raised and see if they can come up with the answers themselves.

g. <u>Relay questions</u>. Another way to keep the students involved is by using a *relay* question. If a student asks you a question you may not want to answer, you can redirect the question to another student. Mr. Jones may ask, "But how do you incorporate the route into the introduction?" Your reply might be, "That's a good question. Mr. Anderson, how do you incorporate the route into the introduction?" Relay questions promote learning by keeping the discussion among the students and helping you, as the instructor, evaluate where there are weaknesses in student understanding of the material so you can clarify these areas.

II. Ineffective Questions

a. <u>Closed-ended questions</u>. These are questions that require no more than a yes or no answer, or maybe just a one word or short phrase response. If you asked students, "Is General Schwarzkopf an example of an effective leader?"-- what would they discuss? The answer is either yes or no. You could follow-up with 'Why?" to have the student expand on the answer, but a more effective question would be, "Why is General Schwarzkopf an example or non-example of an effective leader?" This requires student thought and discussion. The first question did *not* promote thought or discussion. It's not *always* possible to avoid dead-end questions, but don't *plan* these types of questions in your lesson plans. And, if you accidentally ask one, always follow-up with "why" or "how." Also remember that the answer to a question that begins with "Can anybody tell me . . . " or "Can anybody give me an example . . . " is YES or NO -- so watch your phrasing! Most students will respond to the question in a comprehension level manner, but you might have a smart aleck in class who will give you a yes/no response and put you on the spot a little.

b. <u>Foggy questions</u>. These are questions that are unclear; students aren't really sure what it is you're asking for. For example, "What happened in the United States in November 1994?" Lots of things! And depending on where your students were living, they might answer with a plane crash in their home state or floods or an earthquake -- the list is endless! The context of the classroom lesson might give them a clue, but why not just ask, "What significance is there to the congressional elections that took place in November 1994?" Give the students as much *specific* information as you can so they're providing thought-out responses versus trying to "guess" what you meant. An indefinite question like, "How do Ohio and Florida differ?" is also a foggy question and could get you answers covering geography, climate, economics, population, etc. Give the students focus in the questions you ask.

c. <u>Multiple questions</u>. Think about the presidential news conferences where a reporter -- let's say Helen Thomas of the Associated Press -- wants to ask as many questions as she can since she knows she'll only have one shot. So she asks, "Mr. President, how are you going to handle the deficit, and how are you going to deal with Bosnia, and how is the Department of Defense going to downsize?" Whew!! Which one of those is the president

supposed to answer first? Multiple questions are confusing! So help your students by not asking multiple questions.

d. <u>Catch questions</u>.
(a) A *catch* question is one where you imply the answer in the question itself. For example, "The NTC is part of BLM, isn't it?" There isn't really a response required to this question, so the students will probably just nod their heads. You certainly won't generate any discussion with that question!
(b) A *loaded* question is a type of catch question. An example is: "Have you stopped bouncing checks at the mall?" No matter what the answers, it's bad! "Yes" means they *used* to bounce checks; "no" means they're *still* bouncing checks. Avoid these questions because they reflect bias!