STAFF ROOM POSTER

Four Habits of Strong Questioning

Question quality matters less than question habits. These four turn answers into thinking, lesson after lesson.

Wait, twice

Three-plus seconds after asking, and again after the answer. Both silences lengthen and deepen responses.

In class: Count five in your head. The discomfort is the thinking happening.

No opt-out

Cold call from a list, warmly. Hands-up questioning samples the same six learners forever.

In class: I am coming to four people for this one. Half-answers are fine starts.

Follow the answer

The first answer is the doorway, not the destination. Probe, bounce, or press for evidence.

In class: Pause... Pounce: Jas, your answer? Bounce: Ren, build on that or challenge it.

Plan the few that matter

Script your two or three pivotal questions and their follow-ups; improvise the rest.

In class: Tonight's planning: the hinge question for minute 25, plus what each wrong answer tells me.

Question Stems by Purpose

Stems organised by what you need to know, not just by level. Keep on the desk; one follow-up per first answer.

Check the base

Fast, everyone, low stakes: is the foundation there?

Say: "What is...? What happened first...? Show me on your board..."

Probe the reasoning

The answer is right or wrong; the WHY is the data.

Say: "What makes you say that? Walk me through your steps. What is your evidence?"

Stretch the thinking

Push past the first defensible answer.

Say: "What would change if...? Who can argue the opposite? Which matters more, and by what test?"

Connect the room

Send thinking learner-to-learner; the strongest evidenced move.

Say: "Do you agree with Maya, and why? Combine your answer with Leo's. Who can improve that answer?"

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Pause, Pounce, Bounce

One sequence that fixes three problems at once: rushed answers, the same hands, and answers that end the thinking.

Pause

Ask, then hold the silence for everyone. No hands. Thinking time belongs to all thirty.

In class: Question up. Ten seconds. Some of you should be jotting.

Pounce

Name someone, warmly, from your list, not the volunteers.

In class: Sam, start us off: what is your first thought?

Bounce

Move the answer to another learner before you evaluate it. The class does the cognitive work.

In class: Priya, is Sam right? Improve the answer or challenge it.

Then you

Only after the bounce do you confirm, correct or extend. Your voice arrives last, not first.

In class: Both of you circled the real issue: now here is the term for it.

TEACHER CHECKLIST

A Questioning Audit

Record one lesson (or ask a colleague to tally). Honest data beats impressions: most of us ask more and wait less than we think.

Distribution

- [ ] Questions reached at least half the class by name, not just hands.
- [ ] The quietest five learners answered at least once each.
- [ ] No learner answered more than three times while others answered none.

Depth

- [ ] At least a third of questions asked for reasoning, comparison or judgement.
- [ ] First answers got a follow-up more often than an immediate evaluation.
- [ ] Wrong answers were explored for their logic before being corrected.

Time

- [ ] Wait time after asking averaged three-plus seconds.
- [ ] Wait time after answers existed at all.
- [ ] The pivotal question of the lesson was planned, with follow-ups.

CPD BRIEFING: STAFF ROOM COPY

Questioning: A 5-Minute Evidence Briefing

What the research supports about classroom questioning, sized honestly.

The dialogic moves carry the evidence

Inviting learners to share ideas and taking up their answers are the strongest correlates of achievement in the talk literature; monologic question-and-confirm patterns show no such relationship.

Higher-order questions help, modestly

The quantitative syntheses found small positive effects for higher cognitive questioning, not transformative ones. The gains live in the follow-through: wait time, probing and bouncing.

Trained repertoires move results

The dialogic teaching trial, with questioning at its core and sustained coaching around it, advanced classes two months in twenty weeks. The unit of change is teacher habit, not question lists.

The honest caveat

Most questioning evidence is correlational or bundled inside larger programmes, and effects depend on classroom climate. Expect better thinking and fuller participation quickly; expect attainment movement over terms of consistent habit, not days.

Evidence base

Tao, Y., Wang, M. and Zhu, S. (2024). The relationship between teacher talk and students' academic achievement: a meta-analysis. Educational Research Review.
Samson, G.K. et al. (1987). The effects of teacher questioning levels on student achievement: a quantitative synthesis. Journal of Educational Research.
Alexander, R. (2018). Developing dialogic teaching: genesis, process, trial. Research Papers in Education.
Rowe, M.B. (1974). Wait-time and rewards as instructional variables. Journal of Research in Science Teaching.