



Teaching and learning activities

Learners asking questions

Building in opportunities for our learners to practise asking questions can encourage intellectual curiosity and independent thinking. If your learners are not used to asking questions, a simple scaffold may be useful such as the 5 Ws and an H approach: What, Why, Who, When, Where and How? These questions could be asked in relation to an image and could act as a useful starting point for independent work. Once your learners become more familiar with asking questions, a next step might be to consider what makes a good historical, mathematical, sociological etc question.

Card sorts

These help learners to organise information in a way that is meaningful for them as they make connections between the information on the cards and with their own knowledge. Depending on what is being learnt, students might match cards up in pairs, put cards into a hierarchy such as a diamond 9, or group cards into their own categories. Our working memory (sometimes referred to as our short-term memory) is much smaller than our long-term memory; card sorts may help to reduce the amount of information a learner needs to retain, therefore freeing them up to think about the relationships between the information on the cards. Cards could include words, images, quotations, diagrams etc.

Thinking routines

When thinking happens, it happens in our heads, which makes it a challenge for teachers to know if learners are thinking or not. Thinking routines are sequences of questions or prompts that students can use to guide their thinking with the help of their teacher. The purpose of different thinking routines can vary. For example, “I used to think... Now I think...” guides learners in reflecting on how their thinking has changed over the period of a lesson or unit of work, whereas ‘Connect, Extend, Challenge’ is a thinking routine which can be used when a learner is presented with new information. It helps learners make connections between this new information and prior knowledge or learning. For more examples of Thinking Routines, Harvard Project Zero has a Thinking Routines Toolbox.

Think-Pair-Share

Think-Pair-Share is a thinking routine (see above) that builds in thinking time for learners before they begin sharing their thoughts more widely. By working in pairs, learners can shape their thinking by talking through their ideas. Having worked with a peer, learners may feel more confident to share with the whole class. Think-Pair-Share works best when learners are responding to a good question.

Think-Pair-Share works by:

- provoking thinking with a question, prompt or observation. Ensure you provide enough time for learners to think individually before they are asked to pair up.
- allowing learners to pair up to compare notes. The opportunity for pairs to talk here is crucial.
- Encouraging pairs to share their thinking with the rest of the class.

Graphic organisers

These are ways of organising knowledge or ideas to help learners see relationships between information. Certain graphic organisers are good for certain things, for example a Venn Diagram is useful for seeing where ideas do and do not overlap, whereas the Frayer model is used for helping students understand key vocabulary. An event chain is a graphic organiser that helps us see the individual steps in a sequence of events, for example to show how individual events contributed to a significant moment in history. There are many examples of graphic organisers, which can be adapted to suit your students and their learning needs. The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) mentions the usefulness of graphic organisers in their Metacognition and Self-regulated Learning guidance report (page 14) and Special Educational Needs in Mainstream Schools guidance report (page 23).

Group work

There is no one way to do group work, but there are some things you should bear in mind when planning for group work to happen in your lessons. For example, you should consider group size, opportunities for all members of a group to participate, and for the group to be clear on what the successful outcomes of their work would be. One example of group work is Rainbow grouping, where learners work in groups of up to 6 on a shared topic such as carrying out a short piece of research then each group member is given a different coloured card and re-grouped by colour so that in the new groups there are representatives from every original group who present and feed back to one another. Alternatively, a good first step to group work is to assign roles to each group member. The roles you assign may depend on the task; for example, you might assign a learner the role of summarising the group's discussions into a few sentences, or the role recording notes. For further information on group work please see "Collaborative learning approaches" in the Education Endowment Foundation toolkit.

Further reading:

Cambridge International Education (n.d.). Education Brief on Active Learning

<https://www.cambridgeinternational.org/support-and-training-for-schools/leading-learning-and-teaching-with-cambridge/education-briefs-and-animations/>

A more detailed introduction to active learning with reference to research.

Cambridge International Education (n.d.). Getting started with... guides (including Active Learning)

<https://www.cambridgeinternational.org/support-and-training-for-schools/leading-learning-and-teaching-with-cambridge/getting-started-with/>

An accessible introduction to active learning.