



Targeted Questioning



Targeted Questioning:

- Identifies specific content knowledge for critical thinking
- Identifies specific students for engaged learning
- Helps build reflective skills (all students think about a question targeted for another learner, evaluating whether they could have answered it as well)
- Increases the interaction between students and faculty in learning environments

Changing open questioning to **targeted questioning** sometimes is as simple as directing questions to individual students you already know. However, as a skill it can be honed to a high degree of pedagogical savvy, while simultaneously developing significant knowledge about the learning needs of your students.

Good users of **targeted questioning** engage their students' cognitive powers in ways that traditional lecturing cannot. By involving multiple responders within a specific section of a lecture, faculty can use **targeted questioning** as a diagnostic tool to explore how well students comprehend the material. By building targeted questions and follow ups, a presentation that was once described as 'one-speaking-at-many' becomes a shared conversation of learners, where many voices share the stage.

Many instructors ask open questions to their students. For example: "So what is the single diagnosis pediatricians make most often?" or "How much of your total body weight is water? And what is the percentage of distribution between extra and intra-cellular fluid?" The intention of the instructor is clear enough: questions get students to think about the material. However, open questions, asked to no specific answerer, often become rhetorical as soon as they are asked.

Open questions speak to many at once. They represent a passive paradigm, for they demand very little from the learners present. In short fashion students discern that no individual need to answer the question: generally the instructor offers an answer herself.

A more effective questioning method is to **target** a specific student and then ask that student the question. Now, rather than speaking at the group, the instructor is speaking with one student, and that student's attention level is much changed. On top of that, other students recognize that they, too, might be called on and their attention is also changed. While it would not be fair to call this a fully active paradigm, it enhances the interaction between instructor and student, and what was purely passive is now evolving toward a more active approach.

Targeted questioning raises the attention levels of the students in the learning environment. When students know they might be called on, they come to class with different expectations, for they do not want to be shown as unable to respond to a question. They will prepare better, and they will be more ready to ask their own questions in return.

Targeted Questioning also enhances the instructor's knowledge of the students in the class. Proper targeting takes into consideration that there are students who will:

- enjoy certain questions
- need certain questions
- avoid certain questions

When the instructor understands those issues, better questions can be derived from the material and asked of specific students. Better questions make for better learning. Indeed, it might be said that the goal of significant learning is to develop our abilities to ask better questions.