

INSTRUCTIONAL TASK 24

TASK 24

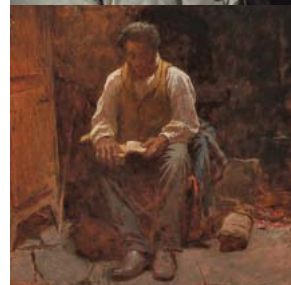
QFT (QUESTION FORMULATION TECHNIQUE)

The strategy involves teaching two skills: how to formulate questions and how to prioritize questions for effective research and/or decision-making. At first glance, these might seem like fairly basic skills however they involve very sophisticated thinking. QFT requires students to PRODUCE, IMPROVE, and PRIORITIZE questions. This task can be extended to include planning research; gathering and evaluating sources; and developing claims and using evidence from collected sources. The first time a class uses this strategy the teacher should allow approximately 45 minutes; subsequent use will be less time consuming as students become more familiar with the process and ultimately can take as little as 15 minutes.

Steps Outlined:

- Prior to class create Question Focus Statement (alternatively, use the Question Focus examples provided with the bundles).
Guidelines for creation:
 - The statement should have a clear focus
 - It is NOT a question!
 - The statement provokes a new line of thinking
 - It does not show teacher bias/preference; your students shouldn't know or guess your opinion based on the wording of the statement
 - tips: consider what you want to accomplish (interest, comprehension); generate possibilities; consider pros/cons; use provocative words like "always" or "must"; consider using an article/book title as a Question Focus Statement
 - Ex. POLLUTION (too broad, but lots of knowledge) POLLUTION HARMS LOCAL RESIDENTS (might be too narrow, but forces thinking about local connections)
- Review rules (see below; 5-7 min the first time, 1-2 min later)
 - Do not skip this step!!** The first time using this strategy spend 5-7 minutes reviewing the rules; review briefly in subsequent uses.
 - THE RULES:
 - Ask as many questions as you can
 - Do not discuss or judge or answer any of the questions
 - Record the questions exactly as stated
 - Change any statements into questions
 - Discussion (for first use or as refresher if students require it): reflect for 2-3 minutes; share in a small group: discuss for 5
 - What are some challenges in following these rules?
 - Which rule is the most difficult to follow? Which is easiest?
- Generate questions (5-7 min)
 - Introduce the Question Focus Statement (that you created in step 1)
 - Divide students into groups of 3 or 4 and distribute chart paper/markers (or other mechanism for recording questions)
 - Direct students to ask as many questions as they can and record each question as stated. They are not to discuss or judge the question. Your focus is on enforcing rules
 - Do not offer examples or model the task!! If students struggle to create questions offer question starter words such as "who" "what" etc.

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INSTRUCTIONAL TASK 24 (continued)

3. Generate questions (*continued from previous page*)
 - e. Number of questions each group creates does not matter; limit the time for generating questions to 5-7 minutes.
 - f. Note: Sometimes a Question Focus Statement doesn't seem to work; have a back up Question Focus Statement.
4. Categorize questions (10 min)
 - a. Define Close-ended (explanatory) and Open-ended (argumentative) for students. Close-ended questions have an answer that is generally agreed upon while open-ended questions have a variety of answers and there is debate about the answers and the interpretation of evidence.
Examples:
 - i. Who is the president? (close-ended)
 - ii. Who is qualified to be president? (close- and open-ended, depending on answers; 35 years old, etc. OR knowledge and background basis)
 - iii. Who can be considered qualified to be president? (open-ended)
 - b. Students remain in groups and classify their questions as close-ended or open-ended by writing a 'C' or 'O' next to each question.
 - c. As a class discuss the advantages and disadvantages of each type of question. The conversation should focus on the types of information that can be gained from each question and purpose in asking the question. Some questions require explanations as answers (factual and agreed upon) while others will use evidence to support one of a few possible answers.
 - d. Students then edit two questions, changing them from one type to another—a closed to an open and vice versa—and consider the different types of answers and information elicited from the questions
5. Improve questions—based on step 4, students focus on the idea that the construction and phrasing of a question shapes the kind of information they can expect to receive and re-write/edit their questions to more adequately address the Question Focus Statement.
6. Prioritize questions
 - a. Students are directed to prioritize the questions based on the teacher's instructional goals. Suggestions for prioritizing include:
 - i. most important/interesting/relevant questions
 - ii. Three questions that need to be answered first
 - iii. Nesting the questions: Which ones are compelling questions and which are supporting questions that can help answer the compelling question?
 - b. Once students have selected questions they discuss their reasoning and report to class. The teacher records all questions for further use.
7. Further steps in this process are based on the teacher's instructional goals. Students might begin research for a project, use provided documents to find answers to questions, use a student generated question as a basis for an essay/presentation, maintain a list of questions to be answered throughout a unit of study, or reflect on the process of generating questions.

Extensions:

Why is your question worth studying? Have others done this research?

Suggestions for use:

Elements of the strategy can be used to begin or end a class period, introduce a new unit/topic, guide research or reading. It can also be used with individual students to assist them ('unstick' them) in determining a focus for a writing assignment.

Sources:

Rothstein, Dan and Luz Santana. *Make Just One Change*. Cambridge: Harvard Education Press. 2011. www.rightquestion.org