



The Question Formulation Technique (QFT)

Dan Rothstein and Luz Santana, authors of *Make Just One Change: Teach Students to Ask Their Own Questions*, put forth two simple arguments:

- All students should learn how to formulate their own questions
- All teachers can easily teach this skill as part of their regular practice.

In this approach to questioning, the teacher introduces a teacher-constructed Question Focus (QFocus) related to a unit or text. This can be done at the beginning of the unit to introduce students to a new topic; it can be done in the middle of a unit to deepen comprehension, stimulate new lines of thought, or prepare students for a long-term assignment; it can be done at the end of a unit to generate further study (34). In response to the QFocus, students will:

- Produce their own questions
- Improve their questions
- Prioritize their questions

The Question Focus

A QFocus can be a statement, a quote, an image, almost anything except a question prompt. The work of creating an effective QFocus resembles the work we do in designing an effective prompt. It should have a clear focus, provoke and stimulate new thinking, and not reveal a teacher's bias or preferences. When the teacher displays the QFocus, s/he should not comment on it.

Produce Your Questions

Students discuss the rules for producing their own questions:

- Ask as many questions as you can.
- Do not stop to discuss, judge, or answer the questions.
- Write down every question *exactly* as it is stated.
- Change any statement into a question.

Before revealing the QFocus, allow 3-4 minutes for students to discuss the rules. This step captures students' interest and helps students to remember the rules.

Students work in groups of 4-5; one student in each group assumes the role of recorder. Display the QFocus. Allow 5 minutes. Circulate and enforce the rules!

Improve Your Questions

In their groups, students categorize their questions. The authors recommend categorizing questions as close-ended or open-ended, but if students have been working on the types and levels of questions, they can apply that knowledge to this step (for example, students can categorize their questions as "on the line," "between the line," and "beyond the line" questions). Students can be challenged to change questions from close-ended to open-ended.

Prioritize Your Questions

Students choose their three most important questions and list them by order of importance. Share and compare the priority questions produced by each group; ask students why they consider these the most important questions. The next steps depend upon your purposes.

For a brief but helpful outline of the QFT, read this article published in 2011 in the Harvard Education Letter: <http://hepg.org/hel/article/507#home>