

STUDENT LEARNING QUESTIONS

Tools and Techniques: Writing Effective Student Learning Questions

Writing effective student learning questions takes practice and a bit of trial and error. Over time, you'll strengthen your ability to write great SLQs that produce valuable, actionable data. Be sure to use your coaches and your colleagues for inspiration and ideas. These guidelines and suggested questions for each of the Common Instructional Framework strategies will help you develop this important skill.

Keep In Mind

- Make your questions clear, specific, and easy to respond to. Be sure you could answer the questions if you were a Rounds participant.
- Take care to structure your questions for non-evaluative feedback (For example, How many? What percentage? What did you see? What did you hear?)
- Tie your SLQs tightly to the learning objectives for your lesson. The questions should help participants gather concrete data as evidence about the learning that did or didn't happen.
- Keep your SLQs open-ended so you have rich data to work with. Avoid yes/no answers.
- Be sure what you ask can practically be observed by your participants.
- Think of your observers as extra eyes and ears: What can they see and hear that you might not? Avoid questions that would lead to data and examples you would have had without extra observers in the room.
- Avoid leading questions. Ensure your SLQs are balanced, asking for evidence/lack of evidence, and examples of seeing/not seeing, learning/not learning, collaborating/not collaborating.
- Create forward-looking questions that will give you feedback and data that can inform your future teaching. If your questions are too specific to a particular lesson, the data you gather might be hard to incorporate because that lesson is over. If your questions are more generalized to the Common Instructional Framework, it will be easier for you to build on and react to your findings.

Collaborative Group Work

If you are planning a Collaborative Group Work activity, your Rounds participants can be extra eyes and ears as you circulate among the groups. You may want to assign an observer to a specific group to collect consistent quantitative data, or you might ask

them to circulate freely among the groups to record qualitative examples of interaction and participation.

Here are some SLQs that might work well for Collaborative Group Work:

- What evidence do you see of students working together to develop consensus/understanding?
- What evidence do you see of students discussing their ideas and problem solving as teams?
- How long did it take for all student groups to share and react to each other's work?
- Did you see evidence that students were not participating? What happened?
- Did you observe members participating in the activity equally, or is one student clearly leading the group?
- What evidence do you see of students valuing or not valuing the ideas of their partners?

Writing to Learn

If you are planning a Writing to Learn activity, think through how your Rounds participants will be involved and what they will be able to observe without disrupting the activity. You might consider having students share what they wrote in pairs or small groups to give your participants an opportunity to hear what was written without having to look over students' shoulders while they are writing.

Here are some SLQs that might work well for Writing to Learn:

- What percentage of students used the full time available for writing?
- What percentage of students referred to the text as they wrote?
- Please record examples of students appropriately using Writing to Learn to distribute the data they collected.
- Please record examples of students using vocabulary to show understanding or misunderstanding.
- Please record examples of students supporting their responses with evidence.
- What evidence did you see of the starter problem[not clear what this means] building support for the rest of the lesson?

Questioning

You can use your Rounds participants to capture examples of questions you might not be able to hear, or to keep track of more quantitative data.

Here are some SLQs that might work well for Questioning:

- Can you take note of student-to-student questions asked, especially those I wouldn't have been able to hear?
- Roughly what percentage of student questioning is directed toward other students?
- What evidence do you see of student questions building on previous knowledge?
- Did you observe students asking "three before me"?

Scaffolding

As in Questioning, you can invite your Rounds participants to record examples of scaffolding you might not have been able to hear yourself.

Here are some SLQs that might work well for Scaffolding:

- What examples did you see of students taking ownership of the terms and ideas discussed earlier this week and connecting them to what they are doing now?
- What evidence did you see of students scaffolding knowledge to their peers?
- What examples did you see of scaffolding helping the students access new information?
- Did you observe instances when additional scaffolding would have been helpful?

Classroom Talk

Again, your Rounds participants can serve as additional eyes and ears, capturing and recording student-to-student examples you might not hear yourself or providing another perspective on the more quantitative types of observations.

Here are some SLQs that might work well for Classroom Talk:

- What evidence did you see of students supporting the development of ideas through talk?
- Please record examples of student-to-student conversation you hear as they communicate and discuss their ideas.

- Did you observe students who are confused asking their peers for assistance? Please record examples?
- Did you observe students debating with their group members when preparing their display? Please record examples.
- What do students say or do to show that they value working together and communicating? Did the student talk build on the designed lesson?

Literacy Groups

If you are distributing a text for students to decode, be sure you have extra copies available for your Rounds participants so they have a context for the discussion. As in Collaborative Group Work, you can have your Rounds participants serve as extra eyes and ears as you circulate among groups. You could assign a participant to a particular group to get a deeper sense of how that group is functioning or have all participants circulate to capture evidence you might otherwise miss.

Here are some SLQs that might work well for Literacy Groups:

- Were the group roles clearly defined? What evidence did you see of the students managing the roles appropriately (or not) for their groups?
- What evidence did you see of students using their roles to dig deeper into the text?
- Please record examples of students having relevant and meaningful discussions (or not) about the text or topic.
- Did you observe members participating in the activity equally, or is one student clearly leading the group?
- Did students engage in thoughtful analysis of the characters and the concepts?

Overall Student Engagement

In practice, of course, many of the Common Instructional Framework strategies overlap and interweave. You might also want to include some more general questions about student engagement. Here are some examples.

- What percentage of students were engaged in the activity?
- What percentage of class time were the students on task?
- What percentage of students were able to work independently?
- What evidence do you see of students remaining focused (or not) when working in pairs or groups?

- How well did students transition to different tasks?
- What evidence did you see of students valuing different approaches (or not)?
- What different approaches to the problem did you observe students applying?
- What examples did you see of students who understand the content helping others to understand?