

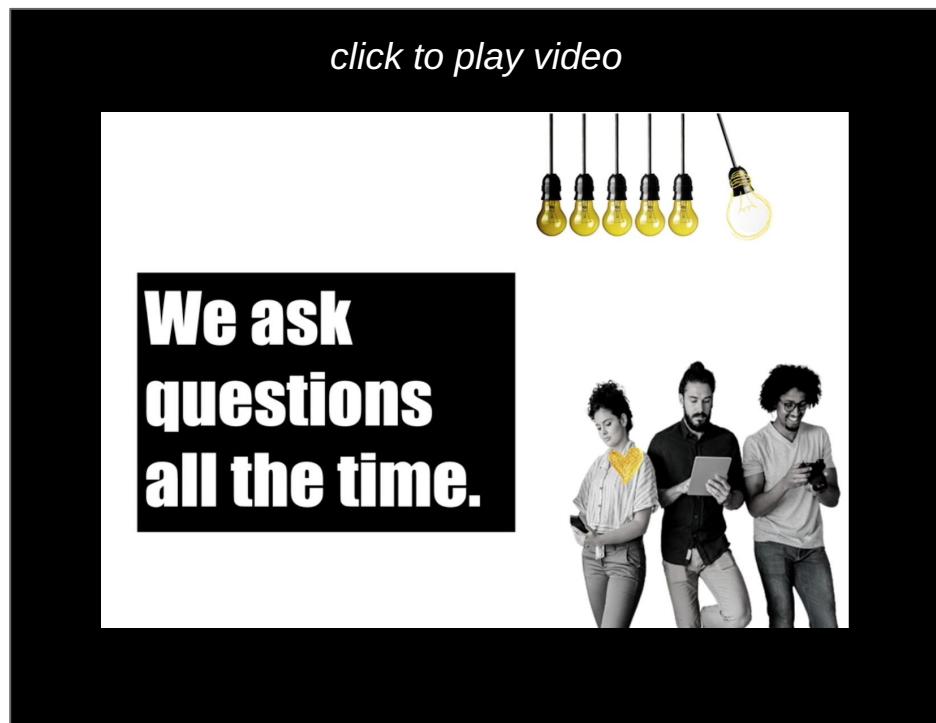
THE AGENTIC LEARNING STRATEGY:

QUESTIONING



Questioning... so what?

What is it and why is it important?



Meet Rohan. He's made a little video for you...



Ready to figure out
how to use this
strategy?

Let's dive in.

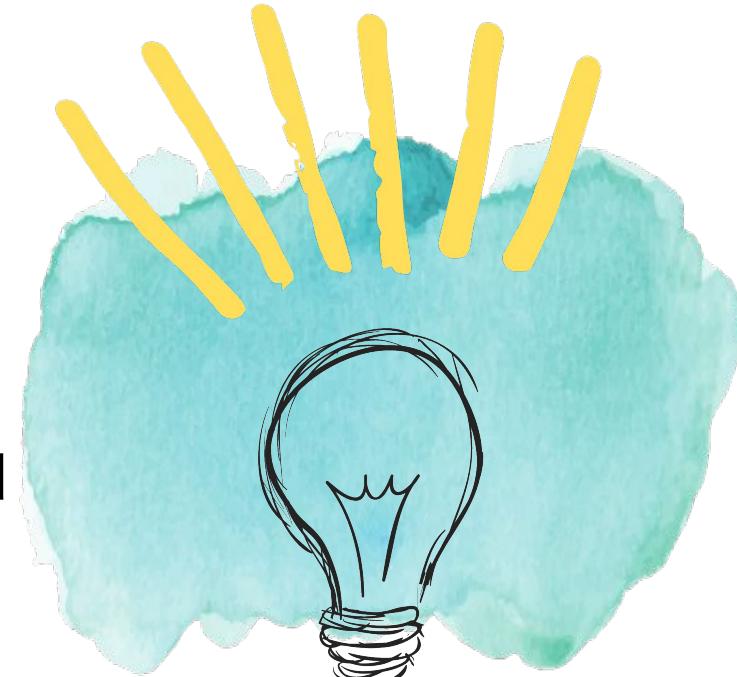
**ASK
QUESTIONS**



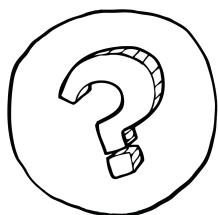
One way to strengthen our ability to question is to practice categorizing questions.

In 2000 a couple of literacy researchers noticed that all questions can be divided into two categories: “Thick” Questions and “Thin” Questions.

Take a minute to imagine what these categories might refer to.



*What would make a
question **thick** or **thin**?*



Take a look at the questions here.

Which ones could you answer with a quick Google search?

Which ones might lead you into an exploration where one question leads to another?

Which ones feel thick?

Which ones feel thin?

- *Is the universe ever-expanding?*
- *Will electric cars stop climate change?*
- *Why does the caged bird sing?*
- *Do humans have free will?*
- *Who was Thomas Sankara?*
- *How many people live in Myanmar?*
- *What is a greenhouse gas?*
- *How do plants make food from light?*



THICK

A **THICK** question deals with the big picture, big issues, and complex relationships.

THICK questions usually require more research, sorting out what different people believe...often including your own point of view or interpretation.

&

THIN

A **THIN** question focuses on specific facts and details.

Answers to **THIN** questions orient us, and provided detail.

THICK

questions often look like...

Why...?

What if...?

I wonder...?

How would I feel if...?

What might...?

& THIN

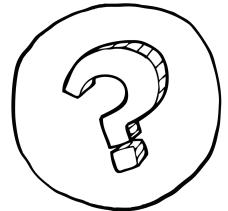
questions look more like...

When...?

Where...?

Who...?

How many...?





THICK

questions can guide you towards what you want to learn, and help you sustain your curiosity.



THIN

questions can help you clarify questions, understand new information, and find specific facts.





THICK & THIN

THICK questions often require a lot of background information and factual knowledge. That's what **THIN** questions are for!

THIN questions can help you understand the details and make sense of the bigger picture. These often lead you to asking some **THICK** questions!



Now let's look at these questions again.

Which ones could lead you into an interesting exploration of new ideas, beliefs and facts?

Which ones help you understand a discrete phenomenon, situation, person or place?

- *Is the universe ever-expanding?*
- *Will electric cars stop climate change?*
- *Why does the caged bird sing?*
- *Who was Thomas Sankara?*
- *How many people live in Myanmar?*
- *How could we make reparations to Indigenous and Black people?*
- *How do plants make food from light?*

Is this question **THICK** or **THIN**?

If you were using the **questioning** strategy by thinking about **thick** and **thin** questions, you might end up with a checklist (like the one below) to help you categorize your questions.

- | | |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Does this question lead to more questions? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Can this be answered briefly, in a few words or sentences? |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Does this question require background knowledge? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Could I Google the answer to this? |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> If you asked different people, would they give you different answers? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Is this a “Yes” or “No” question? |

If you answered “yes”, it’s probably

THICK!

If you answered “yes”, it’s probably

THIN!

Want to dig into some **QUESTIONING TOOLS** that are especially helpful in the school context?



Try these!



Ask questions to help you figure out what you want to learn

K-W-L CHART

KWL Chart | Learning Activity

KWL CHART

WHAT TO DO:
In this activity, you have the opportunity to...

STEP 1. Think about the topic to be explored. In the left-hand column, brainstorm a list of everything you already know about it...or what you think you know about it.

STEP 2. Now, think about what you might want to learn about the topic? Brainstorm a list of questions that are interesting to you.

STEP 3. After you've explored the topic, answered your questions, and potentially asked and answered additional questions, loop back here and make a list of the most important things you learned about the topic. Don't try to list everything; just focus on the few ideas or pieces of information that you want to make sure you remember over time. The act of writing these down will literally help your brain take this new learning and move it from your short-term memory to your long-term memory, where you can access it when you need it later.

KNOW
What do you already know about this topic?

WANT
List the questions you have about this topic:
What do you want to learn?

LEARNED
Summarize what you learned about the topic.

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The K-W-L chart is a tool that you can use to think about what you already **Know**, and then to pose thick and thin questions to identify what you **Want** to learn.

This may seem overly simple, but these steps naturally support the way the brain learns: always start with what we know; then figure out what we care about learning.

Finally, make sure we can articulate what we have **Learned**. Don't skip this last step if you want your brain to actually remember what you learned: this is where encoding happens (a fancy neuroscience term for embedding new learning in your brain).



Creating and revising questions

QFT Guide

Question Formulation Technique (QFT) Worksheet
QUESTION FORMULATION TECHNIQUE WORKSHEET
Adapted from the Right Question Institute (RQI)

WHAT TO DO:
Creating questions to use in an interview or to guide a project is a skill! Follow the steps below to draft, improve, and select the best questions to use for your project.

STEP 1: Review the rules for asking questions.

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

What might be difficult about following these rules?

STEP 2: Ask questions.
Your topic or area of interest is the Question Focus (QFocus). Look at your QFocus (it should not be a question) and think about all the things you would like to find out. Write those out away.

Don't forget:

- Follow the rules.
- Number your questions.

QFocus:

Questions:

- [question]

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The **Question Formulation Technique (QFT)** can help you create questions to use in an interview or questions to guide your own learning. First, you brainstorm a list of questions you have. Then you refine those questions, using a lens such as thick/thin or open/closed questions in order to improve the quality of your question. After you have a list of high quality questions, you pick the ones that hold the most interest to you.

The last step is an important one that often gets overlooked. After you have asked your questions and have some responses, reflect on your questions so that you can continue to strengthen your questioning skills. Ask yourself: Which questions worked, which didn't? How might I improve my process for creating great or useful questions?





Use questions to revise your work

Questions for Revision

Questions for Revision | Learning Activity

QUESTIONS FOR REVISION

WHAT TO DO:
Revision is an important part of improving your work. Once you have a draft—and before, or after, you receive feedback—you can use these questions to plan revisions.

QUESTIONS FOR REVISION	MY NEXT STEPS FOR REVISION
ADD OR REMOVE IDEAS <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Do you address all the main ideas you planned to cover?<input type="checkbox"/> Will additional ideas strengthen the presentation or clutter it?<input type="checkbox"/> Did you include material you did not intend? Is the material relevant to your purpose, audience, and main idea?<input type="checkbox"/> Do you have any ideas that can be removed without weakening your presentation?	
FURTHER DEVELOP IDEAS <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Do you have sufficient supporting details for each main idea?<input type="checkbox"/> Do you need to expand some ideas for clarity?<input type="checkbox"/> Should you need to expand additional ideas, apply additional discovery techniques?<input type="checkbox"/> Do you have enough examples, details, or other evidence to support your main ideas, purpose, and the needs of your audience?	
STRENGTHEN ORGANIZATION <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Does the organization of your work make sense?<input type="checkbox"/> What pattern of organization are you using and why?<input type="checkbox"/> Will rearranging ideas help support your work better?	
REVIEW VISUALS <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Do my visuals enhance my presentation?<input type="checkbox"/> Do the visuals complement one another?<input type="checkbox"/> Is the overall look of the presentation coherent?	

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Adapted from Kelly Gallagher's Teaching Adolescent Writers

Questions can help at all stages of our learning process. We can use questions to help us decide what we want to learn and how we want to learn it. We can also use questions to help us revise and refine our work along the way.

This **Question for Revision** tool is a set of questions in different categories designed to help you evaluate your work, while also prompting you to think of ways to improve your work.





Ask and answer questions with your peers

Peer Questioning

Peer Questioning | Learning Activity

PEER QUESTIONING

WHAT TO DO

STEP 1. Create a group of 3-4 people.

STEP 2. Individually, As you read, look at, or watch something, write down questions that occur to you.

STEP 3. After you finish reading, looking at, or watching, choose some of the **Question Stems** to help you refine your questions and/or spark new questions:

- Explain why...
 - How are...and...related?
 - How does...affect...?
- Identify...
 - What would be the best choice if...?
 - What could invent or create based on...?
- What is the main idea of...?
- How could you use...to...?
- What is the significance of...?
- How valuable is...?
- How are...and...similar?
- How are...and...different?
- What is another example of...?
- What do you think would happen if...?
- What would you do if...?
- What conclusions can you draw about...?
- What is the cause of...? Why?
- Compare...and...with regard to...
- Explain why...? Why?
- Compare...and...with regard to...
- What else have we seen something like...?
- Which...do you think is best and why?
- How is...related to...that we studied earlier?
- What evidence do you have to support your answer?

STEP 4. After you finish refining your questions, meet up with your partner or small group and ask and answer each other's questions.

STEP 5. Reflect on this process for developing questions:

- Did asking and answering questions with your peers help you better understand the material?
- What new insights do you now have?
- Which questions got you to think the most deeply? Why do you think that is?

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Sometimes it's both more fun and more effective to collaborate with peers to develop and respond to questions. They think differently, are different interests, care about different things.

When reading a text, watching a video, looking at a chart or graph, or map, or piece of art, thinking about questions and responses with peers can bring the piece to life in unexpected ways.

This activity provides some guidance on how to organize a peer questioning session. As you get familiar with this process you may find ways to adapt it to fit your needs.





Create high quality questions to guide your study

QAR CHART

Question-Answer-Relationship Chart | Learning Activity

QUESTION-ANSWER-RELATIONSHIP CHART

WHAT TO DO:

STEP 1. Identify a text, or video, or other resource that you want to read very closely.

STEP 2. As you look at the resource, make a list of questions, and then categorize them according to the categories in this table. See if you can develop a question for each category.

IN-THE-TEXT QUESTIONS	DEEPER SEARCH QUESTIONS
Right There Questions: Questions whose answers can be found in the resource.	Think and Search Questions: Questions that require you to gather details and ideas from several parts of the resource in order to answer.
Author and You Questions: Questions that are based on information found in the resource that also relate to your life and experience. You will need to use your own experiences and knowledge to answer these questions.	On My Own Questions: Questions about the topic that you can answer based on your prior experiences and knowledge; you don't need to use the resource to answer these questions.

STEP 3. Reflect: Once you categorized your questions, think about:

- Did you notice any trends?
- Are certain kinds of questions easier for you to ask and respond to, and are other types more challenging?
- How could you strengthen your questioning skills in the areas that are more challenging for you?

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The **Question-Answer Relationship** (QAR) chart helps you categorize questions and responses as you learn from a resource. The categories in this activity can help you think about where to look for answers to questions, asking yourself: *Is the answer in the resource? Do I need to make a prediction or inference about what I'm seeing? Do I need to make a plan to get the answer from another resource?*

Asking questions is an important part of engaging with resources. It's a way to help you monitor what both your level of understanding, and where your interest and curiosity is peaked.





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reDesign is an educational design and social impact consultancy. Our mission is to help create equitable, learner-centered communities where all young people thrive.

