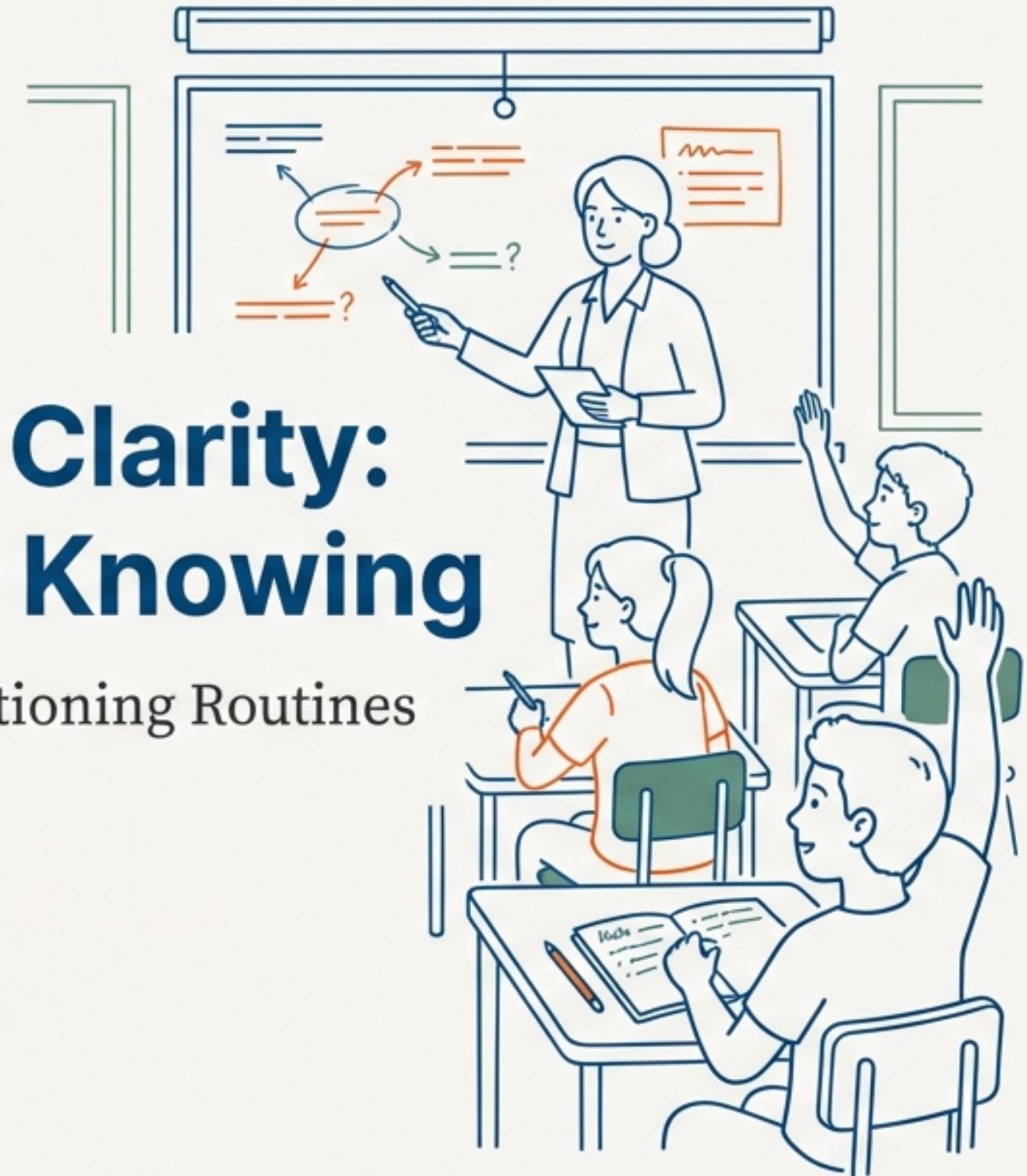


# Questioning for Clarity: From Guessing to Knowing

A Playbook for High-Impact Questioning Routines



# The Fog of the Classroom: Are They With You?

We ask questions to check for understanding. But what if our main method gives us the wrong answer?



## The "Hands Up" Illusion

- “Hands up” often shows confidence, not learning.
- It creates an illusion of success while many students remain passive or lost.
- It gives us data from the same few students, not the whole class.

## The Consequence

- We can't see misconceptions until it's too late.
- We don't know who needs help right now.
- We move on based on incomplete evidence.

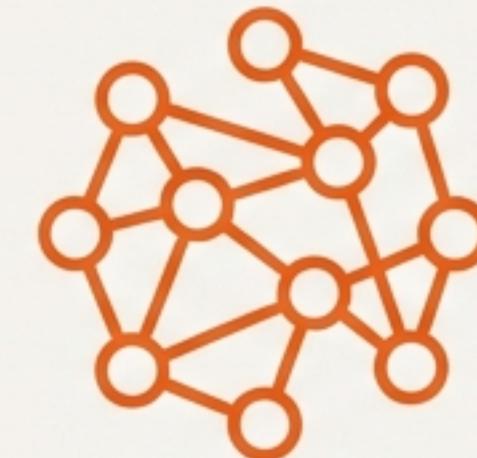
# The Bridge to Clarity: Three Core Principles

To move from guessing to knowing, we anchor our practice in three simple but powerful principles.



## Plan for Purpose

Questions must be planned, not improvised. Every question has a specific job to do.



## See Everyone's Thinking

"Hands up" is not evidence. We need routines that involve every student and make their thinking visible.



## Act on the Evidence

Questioning isn't about getting answers; it's about gathering data we can act on *in the moment*. The "why" behind your chosen technique must be clear.

# Your High-Impact Questioning Playbook

The following seven techniques are reliable, evidence-based routines to bring the core principles to life in your classroom. Each is a tool designed for a specific purpose. Master the routine, and you master the data.



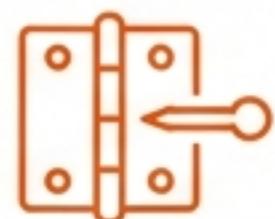
Cold Call + No Opt-Out



Think-Pair-Share-Square



Pose-Pause-Pounce



Hinge Questions



Whole-Class Voting



Mini Whiteboards



Front the Writing

# Play #1: Cold Call + No Opt-Out

Ensure everyone is ready and everyone succeeds.

## What it is

- **Cold Call:** Teacher selects who answers, not volunteers.
- **No Opt-Out:** If a pupil can't answer, they are supported to give the correct answer, ensuring success.

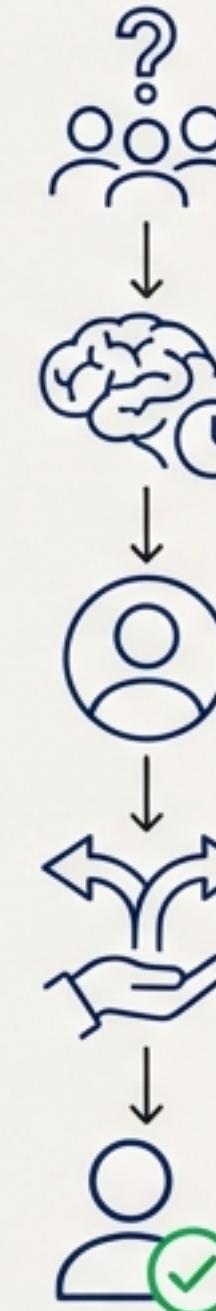
## Why it works

- Boosts participation and accountability.
- Reduces the "I don't know" opt-out culture.
- Creates a predictable, calm, and supportive climate.

## Avoid These Traps

- Naming the pupil *before* the question (others stop thinking).
- "Rescuing" the student too quickly.
- Using a punitive tone. Keep it calm and matter-of-fact.

## The Routine



Ask the question to the *whole class*.

Pause for thinking time.

Name the pupil.

If unsure, scaffold or bounce  
(phone-a-friend, rephrase, etc.).

End with the original pupil stating  
the complete, correct answer.

# Plays #2 & #3: Architecting Deeper Thinking

## Pose–Pause–Pounce

**What it is:** A simple three-step routine to increase thinking time.

### The Routine

1.  **Pose** the question to everyone.
2.  **Pause** for 3-7 seconds minimum.  
(Critical!)
3.  **Pounce** by naming a student to answer, then probe with “Why?” or “How do you know?”

### Why it works

Reduces rushed, shallow answers and increases participation.

## Think–Pair–Share–Square

**What it is:** Structured talk to rehearse and improve answers.

### The Routine

1.  **Think** (silent, timed).
2.  **Pair** (A speaks, B listens; then swap).
3.  **Share** (Teacher cold calls pairs).
4.  **Square** (Pairs merge to agree on the best answer).

### Why it works

Supports EAL/SEND pupils and improves answer quality before public speaking.

# Plays #4 & #5: Making Whole-Class Learning Visible

## Whole-Class Voting

### What it is

Every pupil commits to an answer simultaneously using ABCD cards, fingers, or digital polls.

### Why it works

Provides fast, actionable feedback for the teacher and increases student commitment.

### The Routine

1. Everyone chooses an answer **silently**.
2. On 3, **show me**.
3. Scan the room.
4. Probe both right and wrong answers:  
“Why **B**? What made **A** tempting?”



## Mini Whiteboards (MWBs)

### What it is

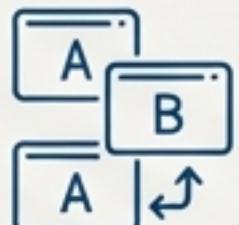
All pupils write an answer and show it on command.

### Why it works

Maximizes participation and shows the *process* of their thinking, not just the answer.

### The Routine

1. Give the question + success criteria.
2. Time for **silent writing**.
3. “**Boards up**” on your count.
4. Scan for patterns and **select examples** to discuss.



# Spotlight: The Hinge Question

The moment you decide: proceed, adapt, or re-teach.

## What it is:

A planned multiple-choice question posed at a critical point in the lesson.

A good hinge is:



**Quick:** Answered in under 60 seconds.

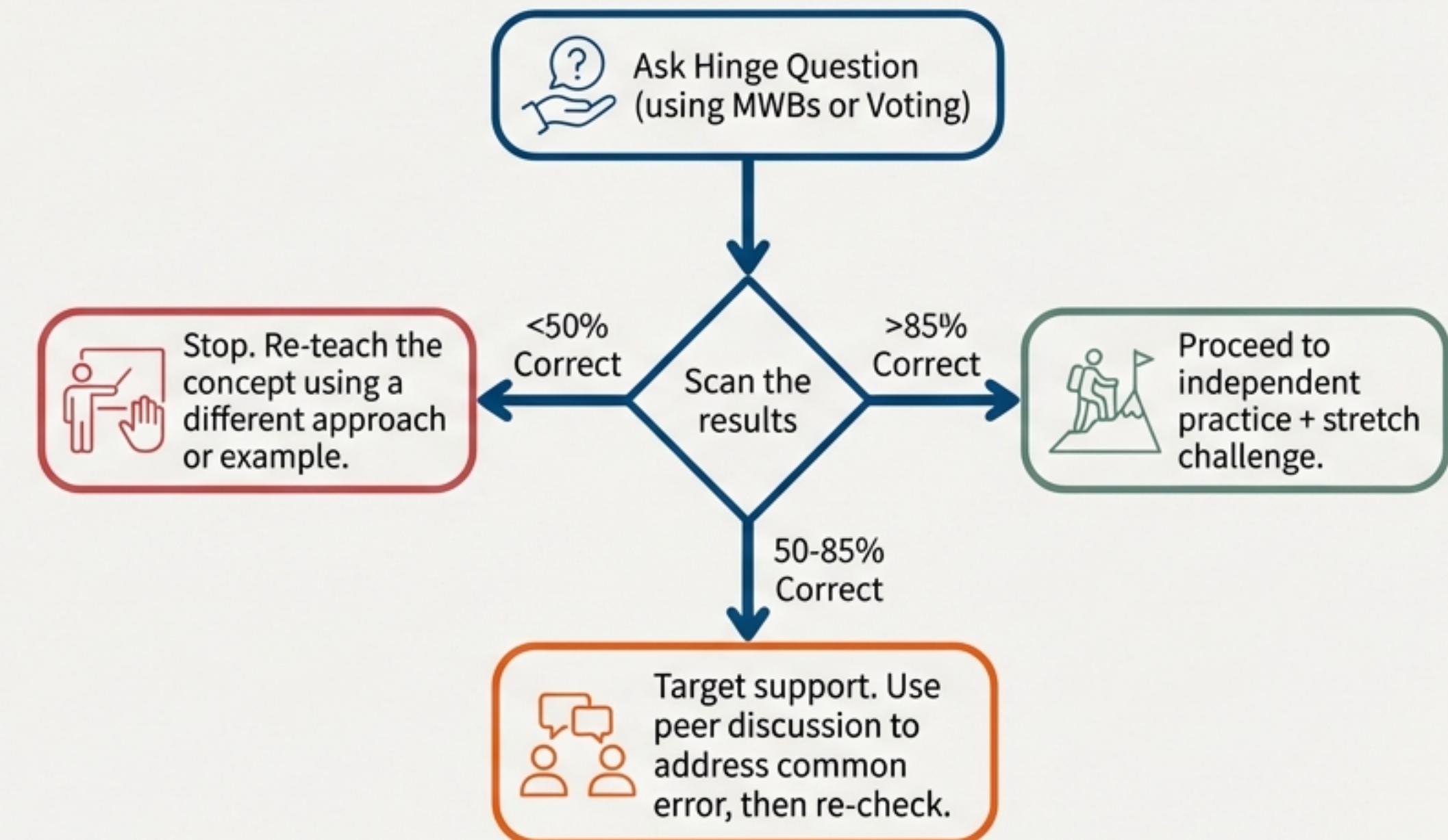


**Diagnostic:** Wrong answers reveal specific, common misconceptions.



**Actionable:** The data you get changes what you do next.

## Visual: The 'If-Then' Decision Flowchart



# Play #7: Front the Writing

Anchor discussion in thought, not improvisation.

## What it is

A routine where pupils write a short response *first*, before any discussion. This ensures everyone has produced thinking.

## Why it works

- Reduces the “blank page” fear.
- Improves the quality and structure of spoken answers.
- Provides a scaffold for weaker writers and EAL/SEND pupils.

## The Routine

1. Provide a short prompt.
2. Give 60-120 seconds of silent writing time.
3. Use Pair-Share for students to refine their written ideas.
4. Cold call students to share their improved answers.



### \*\*Powerful Scaffolds\*\*

- Sentence stems: “It is \_\_\_ because \_\_\_.”
- Word bank with Tier 2/3 vocabulary.
- A model answer fragment.

# Planning for Impact: A Four-Point Checklist

Great questioning isn't improvised. For each key question in your lesson plan, ask yourself these four things.

1

## What is my PURPOSE?

- Retrieval / Check Understanding / Misconception Check / Stretch?

2

## What is my TECHNIQUE?

- Cold Call / MWBs / Hinge / Think-Pair-Share? Why this one?

3

## What do I EXPECT?

- What is the correct answer?
- What are the 2-3 most likely *wrong* answers or misconceptions?

4

## How will I FOLLOW UP?

- "If they get it wrong, I will..." (e.g., provide a sentence stem, ask a simpler question, use a model).
- "If they get it right, I will..." (e.g., ask them to justify, apply, or explain).

# What Mastery Looks Like in the Classroom

You know these routines are becoming second nature when your classroom looks and feels like this:

- ✓ Questions are posed to everyone before a name is called.
- ✓ Wait time is consistent and expected.
- ✓ Cold calling feels calm, routine, and supportive.
- ✓ “I don’t know” is followed by support, not the end of the exchange.
- ✓ You visibly adapt your teaching based on data from a hinge question.
- ✓ You probe for deeper thinking with “why?”, “how do you know?”, and “what’s the evidence?”.

# Common Traps & How to Escape Them

Focus on these “tighten up” targets to accelerate your progress.

Instead of This...	Try This...
Asking many questions quickly.	Asking fewer questions, but probing deeper with follow-ups.
A 1-2 second pause.	Silently counting to 5 in your head to ensure sufficient wait time.
Defaulting to “hands up.”	Intentionally choosing a whole-class response method like MWBs or Voting.
Hoping a good question comes to you.	Planning your key hinge questions and the “if-then” actions you’ll take.
A different script every time.	Using consistent scripts (“Boards up in 3, 2, 1...”) so routines become automatic for students.

# From Fog to Clarity

## The Fog



- Guessing what students know
- Hearing from the confident few
- Reacting to problems too late

## The Clarity



- Seeing evidence of understanding
- Hearing from everyone
- Adapting your teaching in real-time

You now have the tools not just to ask better questions, but to get better evidence.  
Use it to see your students' learning with certainty and precision.