

## E-3: Check for academic understanding

### Consider different types of questioning

#### What different types of questioning can be used to check for understanding?

Closed and open questions are the two main types of questions that check for academic understanding. While you should integrate open questions into your lessons to push student thinking, both types of questions can be used in combination depending on your purposes. To determine when to use open and closed questions, consider the functions of each and the advantages and disadvantages. **You can also consider using alternative, “non-questioning” checks for understanding** (see Tools section for examples)- methods where students demonstrate their understanding through different activities.

Type	Examples	Question Function	Advantages	Disadvantages
<b>Closed</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“Who were the first three presidents?”</li> <li>“What is the least common denominator of these fractions?”</li> <li>“What are the three states of matter?”</li> </ul>	To check the retention of previously learned information; to focus thinking on a particular point.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Effective when assessing specific student knowledge or comprehension.</li> <li>Easier to integrate into lessons than open questions</li> <li>Can be used to build students up to open questions later in the lesson or unit.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Only assess lower-level ideas</li> <li>Don't push student thinking or encourage discussion</li> <li>Shouldn't be the sole means of questioning</li> </ul>
<b>Open</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“What would life be like if we were all the same color?”</li> <li>“Given what we know about gravity on the moon, how do you think basketball would be different if played there?”</li> <li>“Why do quadratic equations result in curves?”</li> </ul>	To promote discussion or student interaction; to stimulate student thinking; to allow freedom to hypothesize, speculate, and share ideas.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Demand more complex, higher-level thinking</li> <li>Stimulate student thought and encourage classroom participation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Can be confusing or lead to tangential discussions</li> <li>Take longer to discuss</li> </ul>

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### What types of questions are *not* good for checking understanding?

#### Rhetorical questions

For example: “This is correct, right?”, “Does everyone understand?”  
Visit the common pitfall page to read why to avoid using rhetorical questions.

#### Socratic questioning to teach

Good questioning can often serve as a way to deliver new academic content (E-1). When questions are used to teach, however, this is distinct from checking for understanding. Checking for understanding is done to assess comprehension—not to deliver instruction.

Consider the following two examples:

Questioning to teach	Checking for understanding:
Teacher: “I have a question that I thought about the other day when the wind was blowing. Does weather influence what the earth looks like? And if so, how?”	Teacher: “What are the different components of weather that we just explored and defined?” Students: “Temperature, wind, precipitation...”

The Socratic Method certainly has considerable merits. Questions should be asked to stimulate student thought--a fundamental and powerful instructional tool that can be used at all ages and in all content areas. In many ways, it is the most natural method of engaging students in presenting new material (E-1). However, be sure to recognize the difference between question-based discourse used for introducing new material (“questioning to teach”) and questioning for checking for students’ understanding.