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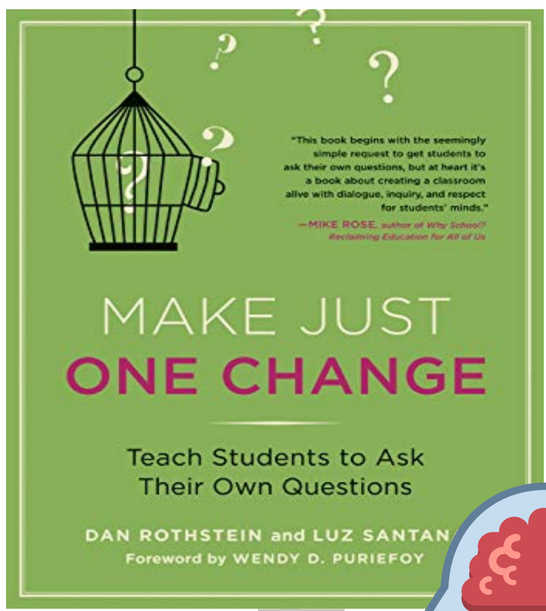
Lilly Bethesda, 2019



The Question Formulation Technique© Process

A Brief Guide for Teachers

adapted from *Make Just One Change* by Rothstein and Santana
and from rightquestion.org, the website for the Right Question Institute

1 Develop the Q-Focus.

The Q-Focus is the "topic" around which students will develop questions. It should be relatively short and clear, and it should encourage students to develop a variety of questions. This means it should also be sufficiently general or broad. The Q-Focus does not have to be a word pr phrase. It can be an image or aural aid. Make sure it's connected to your learning outcomes and what you want students to DO with their questions.

2 Use the QFT Group Worksheet; put students in groups, and orient them to the task.

Use or adapt the QFT Worksheet to fit your needs. Students should go through the process in small groups of 3-5. After you hand out the sheet, ask students to write our their names, your name, the Q-Focus, and to identify a note taker. Provide students with an overview of the QFT process and explain WHY you are having them engage in it. The first time students engage in the QFT, it may take up to 90 minutes. As they become familiar with the process, it takes less time.

3 Discuss the rules.

The four rules are included on the group sheet:

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

Before students begin, ask them to reflect and to discuss which of these four rules they think will be easiest to follow and the most difficult. Ask them to explain their responses. You can record their thoughts on the board. The first time students engage in the QFT, this discussion is important. Usually when they repeat the process, it is sufficient to remind them of the rules.

4 Give students enough time produce questions.

Question production should take 7-10 minutes. As students produce questions, circulate the room to listen and to make sure that they are following the rules. It's also important to ask students to number their questions (1,2,3, etc) as they go along. This will come in handy at a later step. When you observe "lulls" in the process early on, avoid interjecting. Let students pause, write, and engage in the divergent thinking of the process.

5 Categorize questions.

When students are done producing questions, tell them to go back through their lists and to categorize the closed-ended questions with a "C" and the open-ended with an "O". This should take just a couple of minutes; it's a good idea to ask or remind them of the differences.

6 Discuss question types.

As students review their questions, ask them to share aloud the disadvantages and advantages of both open and closed questions. They are often taught that open questions are better, but they need to understand that each has a purpose.

7 Improve questions.

Ask students to change one of their open-ended questions to closed-ended and one of their closed-ended questions to open. Have them share the original questions and the revised question. Allow the class to critique which is better.

8 Prioritize questions.

Ask student groups to select three priority questions. This moves them from divergent thinking to convergent thinking. How they select their priority questions will largely depend on your learning objectives and what you will have students do with their questions.

Examples of prioritization instructions from the Right Question Institute website:

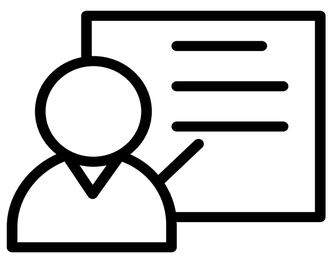
Choose 3 questions that…
- you consider most important.
- will help with your research.
- can be used for your experiment.
- will guide your reading/ writing.
- can be answered as you read.
- will help you solve the problem.

9 Share and discuss.

Students should share their priority questions by writing them on the board or on large paper and posting them for their classmates to see. They should also provide a rationale for their choices. There is space to draft this on the group worksheet. To begin reflecting on process, ask student where their priority questions fell on their lists. Usually, each group will have a priority question that they developed later in the process. Point out that developing "good" questions can take time and also collaboration.

10 Discuss next steps.

Provide students with some direction on how their questions will be used, based on your learning outcomes and objectives.



11 Reflect.

Ask students:
- what did you learn about asking questions?
- how can use what you learned during the QFT in other contexts, classes, etc.?

General Tips from the Right Question Institute:

- The role of the teacher is to facilitate the students moving through the different steps of the QFT as simply as possible.
- Monitor group work and give clarifying instructions as needed. Go around the room to observe group work and interactions during the process. Listen for the types of questions they are asking. Try your best not to get pulled into their discussions. Avoid answering any questions while students are in the process of producing questions.
- Validate all student contributions equally. For example: “thank you” acknowledges contributions neutrally. Using different words to validate different students’ contributions (e.g. good, great, excellent question) may affect student behavior.
- Avoid giving examples of questions students should be asking. If you do, you will be setting the direction of the questions and impeding upon students’ independent thinking.
- Allow groups to work at their own pace. It is okay if some groups produce more questions than others. If a group seems stuck, prompt them with the QFocus. For example, “Look at your QFocus and think about if there’s anything you would like to know about it and ask a question.” The value of producing questions is in the process of thinking and not in the number of questions produced.

To access QFT Resources, go to the RQI website: https://rightquestion.org/education/#rtabs-1