

Tricks and Tips for Fieldwork Supervision: Asking Effective Questions

Teaching is often thought of as the activity of telling students something, or giving them information. In fact, **asking good questions**-not telling-should be the dominant activity of clinical instruction.

Questioning allows the fieldwork educator to:

- determine learning needs
- stimulate thinking
- transfer responsibility for learning to the learner
- model essential professional behavior

As an educator, you must know both what **types of questions** to ask and **how to ask questions effectively**

Questions can be categorized as follows:

1. **Low-level questions:**
 - a. Ask for recall of facts, concepts, principles, or definitions.
2. **Higher-level questions:**
 - a. Ask students to analyze, synthesize or evaluate information and to form judgments.
3. **Affective questioning:**
 - a. Raising questions about affective issues is important, in addition to cognitive questioning, because it helps students **identify their own attitudes and feelings** and conveys the preceptor's attitude that **affective issues are important in clinical work**.
4. **Open questions (divergent):**
 - Allow a range of possible answers, invite reflection and speculation, and stimulate problem solving.
 - Require higher-level cognitive performance and elicit longer answers.
 - Expose student's thinking processes and level of expertise.
 - Allow students to display what they know and don't know.
 - Should be used as often as possible, and in a sequence that helps students build their understanding.

Open questions can be used to prompt students to:

- **Diagnose:** "What is your interpretation of the data?"
- **Decide:** "What interventions do you suggest?"
- **Hypothesize:** "What would you do if this patient were 20 and not 40 years old?"

- **Challenge:** "What leads you to that conclusion?"
- **Summarize:** "What are the important issues that emerged today?"

To summarize:

- Whenever possible, ask rather than tell.
- Ask one question at a time, as concisely as possible.
- Remember to pause and wait to let the student respond.
- Adjust the difficulty of your questions to the student's abilities, working towards increasingly higher levels of thinking.
- Include questions that help students explore their attitudes and feelings.
- Ask questions about process as well as outcome.
- Model the kinds of questions you want students to ask themselves.
- Avoid playing "Guess what I'm thinking".
- If you question students in the presence of clients, be sensitive to the patient needs.