Teaching English Through English
Module 3
Effective Question and Answer

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Module 3: Start Here

"The wise man doesn't give the right answers, he poses the right questions."
- Claude Levi-Strauss

Questions and responses are used daily in the classroom and they are also fundamental to classroom teacher talk. When you model good questioning and responding approaches using English, students will be encouraged to learn and follow. From the easiest interrogative sentence formation to systematic scaffolding of an activity, you can use questions and responses to increase the interaction and students learning. In this module, you will explore the different ways of asking questions and getting students responses using English in your communicative language classroom.

By the end of the module, you will be able to:

- understand how different types of questions are used in teacher talk
- form beginner friendly questions
- scaffold students' response in more comfortable and effective ways
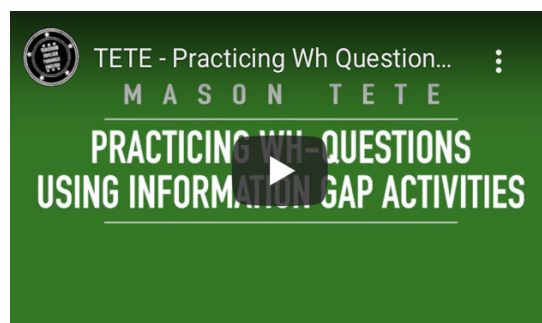- practice basic question forms and answers with students

Explore

 3.1. Watch

Explore ideas for effective question and answer by watching two videos.

- **Video 1: Asking Questions during Listening Tasks**

  - o This video will introduce you different types of questions for different learning goals in listening activities. Click here for a PDF of the script for Video 1.
  - o Link to YouTube: https://youtu.be/C_5iY3Tbcy4

- **Video 2: Practicing Wh-Questions Using Information Gap Activities**

  - o This video will show you an example of how to lead your students to form and use basic wh-questions in classroom activities. Click here for a PDF of the script for Video 2.
  - o Link to YouTube: https://youtu.be/Ld0_3Ph8bRw

Hello English teachers! Are you ready to power up your English class? Here are some tips for supporting students by asking questions before and during listening activities.

Listening is not simply receiving information produced by a speaker. It is an important part of oral language development and interaction in English. Teachers can help students process and understand the listening input by using various questioning strategies. Here are some teacher talk examples to promote meaningful and effective engagement during listening activities.

Predicting

To make listening activities more effective, teachers can prepare a set of prediction questions. Adding visuals, realia, or references also help the students think ahead about the topic.

For example, before the students listen to an audio clip, you can ask:

"Before you listen, what do you think this dialogue will be about?"
"Before you listen, brainstorm what you think about this topic."
"Look at this frog [realia]. What do you think about when you see this frog?"
"When you see this picture [show a visual], what thoughts come to your mind?"

You can also give time for interaction among students by asking them to predict together:

"Before you listen, ask your elbow partner 'What do you think when you see this picture?'"

Understanding Main Ideas

Sometimes, teachers want their students to only focus on understanding the main idea of the listening material. What kinds of questions would you ask, in order to guide your students to focus on the main idea? Let's take a look at these examples:

"Is the speaker describing a vacation or a day in the office?"
"Is the radio report about the news or weather?"
"Did the speaker like or dislike the movie?"
"What is the topic of the conversation?"
"Why is the speaker asking the man questions?"

Notice the first four examples are closed questions. They are designed for students to make a choice or provide a specific answer. These closed questions help novice level language learners focus on the main idea. The last question is an open-ended question, and this type of question can be also used to prompt a variety of topic-related responses, which works well in an intermediate or upper-level class.

In addition, using visual aids to facilitate question-and-answer activities, such as a handout or poster, will also make the listening task more effective for student learning.

Specific Information

Listening for specific details is as important as listening for main ideas. Whether it is listening to a weather forecast, airport announcements, or giving directions, encouraging students to listen for specific details is a real-life skill they will need. Let's see how the next set of questions are extended to elicit specific information during a listening activity.

T: Class. What do you think the three friends are talking about?
Ss: Goals!
T: Can you give me a full sentence, Eric?
S: They are talking about their goals for this year.
T: Good! Who are these three friends? Can anyone tell me their names?
S: Mark, Jin, Kamila
T: That's correct! Now, let's listen to it again. What is Mark's goal? What is Jin's goal? What is Kamila's goal for this year? Take notes as you listen again for their goals.

In this first example, the teacher extends the questions from the main idea of "goals" to listen for "specific goals of each person."

Let's see another example.

T: "Yes, this is an announcement at the airport. Now, listen carefully, again. Listen for the time the plane departs for San Francisco and from which gate number.
T: Can somebody tell me what you are going to listen to?"
S: "The time and gate number for San Francisco?"
T: "Thank you, Nina. That's right! We will listen for the departure time and the gate number."

Similarly, in this second example, the teacher moves from the main idea from the first listening to asking for specific information in the second listening. As you see in these two examples, detailed listening requires learners to identify the specific information. Teachers will mostly use "Wh-questions", and they need to check if students understand the task correctly throughout

the activity. It is always helpful to give the questions in advance in order to prepare your students to listen for specific information.

Making Inference and asking opinions

If the language proficiency level of your students is advanced, the teacher can prepare and move toward inference questions or personal opinion questions such as agree/disagree. Inferential questions ask what might not be said directly but can be clearly guessed. So, the teacher can ask various forms of inferential questions such as:

"What makes you think that they are planning for a trip?"
"What might happen if Kamila comes after 10 o'clock?"
"What can you infer from the picture on the page?"
"What message is the author trying to give?"
"Can you infer the meaning from the woman's final response?"

Asking opinions might be used for the most advanced level of learners. This process of questions and answers requires higher language competency, especially from the students. The teacher might ask:

"What is your opinion about this topic?"
"Do you agree or disagree? Could you tell your elbow partner why you agree or disagree?"
"What do you think is the best way to solve this problem?"

Now, do you feel prepared to use a variety of questions for listening tasks? Feel free to go back to the beginning of this video and practice saying these questions out loud.

Thanks for watching and learning! Now, let's go and do it!

Teaching English Through English
Module 3 Video 2 Script
Practicing Wh-Questions Using Information Gap Activities

Hello English teachers! Are you ready to power up your English class? Here are some tips for practicing Wh-questions and answers in your English class.

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English teachers need to use different forms of questions for various purposes, and we also need to teach our students how to form and use questions. Wh-questions are so useful for communication, so practicing how to ask who, what, when, where, which, why, and how is a great start! And one of the fun and clever ways to utilize the Wh-questions is by using an information gap activity. An information gap activity is an activity where learners are missing some information they need to complete a task, so there is a need to talk with someone else to fill in the gap and finish the task.

Have you ever used an information gap activity in your teaching? If so, you may already know how useful it is in a communicative classroom. If not, here is an example of how to use information gap activities to encourage students to make questions and answers in English.

Example Activity
Step 1. Provide a context. Explain to your students that they are going to use Wh-questions to ask and find out missing information about a girl who went on a trip. You can say,

"You are going to create and use Wh-questions who, what, when, where, which, why, and how to find out about Lena and her recent trip. Let's think about what you want to ask Lena.

Step 2. Help students prepare questions for the activity. If students are novice language learners, you may help develop questions with the whole class prior to beginning the activity. So let's try this out together! You can be my students preparing for this activity.

"Class, Let's brainstorm! Think about what kind of questions you can create to ask Lena about her trip and write them in your notebook. I will give you 15 seconds. Ready? Let's get to it!

[clock for 15 seconds]

Welcome back! So, what questions did you come up with? Let me share some of my examples with you. These are also useful types of questions that you and your students might use when giving directions, having a conversation, and doing activities.

Where did Lena go?
Who did she go with?
How did she go?
When did she arrive there?
Where did she stay?
Which hotel did she stay?
Why did she stay there?
How long did she stay?
What did she eat?
What did she drink?
What did she do?
What did she send?
What did she buy?
Which places did she go sightseeing?
Where/What did she visit?
What did she see?
What was the weather like?
What were the people like?"

There are lots of questions using, "what", right? Actually, the list could go on and on.

Step 3.Give out a handout or note cards with information needed to answer the questions. After the class writes down some questions, students are given information on a notecard about Lena's trip. Each note card has a few pieces of information that may provide answers to the questions that students created in Step 2. For example, each note card can have information like this:

Notecard 1: Paris, warm, sunny

Notecard 2: train, coffee, paintings

Notecard 3: museums, postcards, 3 friends

You can definitely mix up the information and include other information on many different notecards.

At this point, you can say,

"On the notecard you received, there is some information about Lena's trip. It will not include answers to all of your questions, since each notecard has just pieces of information. First, read the information on your notecard. Then, write the answers for the questions that you have information about."

For example, *"Sasha, what do you have on your notecard?" And Sasha may answer, "I have 'Paris, warm and sunny.'"*

Then you can respond by saying, *"Can you answer some of the questions? Be sure to use complete sentences."* The student may answer, *"She went to Paris. And the weather was warm and sunny."*

And you can say, *"Great, now I will give you five minutes. Find the answers for as many questions as you can. Please write your answers in your notebook using complete sentences."*

Step 4. Review the questions and answers as a whole group. After a set amount of time spent on giving and receiving answers from one another, students can come back as a whole group and review the questions and answers aloud. Beginner language learners can practice speaking in the simple past tense in this activity, using the Wh-questions.

I encourage you to try adapting this information gap activity for many different purposes in your language class. This is just one of the many ways of doing this activity. Be creative when you apply this in your class.

Thanks for watching and learning. Now, let's go do it!

3.2. Read

Explore ideas for effective question and answer by reading at least two articles.

- **Article 1**: Questions and Responses

    o This article presents various ways that teachers can scaffold questions and responses for their beginner learners. Simple response strategies are also offered to engage students and check their understanding.

    o Source: U.S. Department of State, American English. (n.d.). *Scaffolding part one: Questions and responses.* https://americanenglish.state.gov/files/ae/resource_files/september_teachers_corner_week_3_final_1.pdf

- **Article 2**: Display Questions vs. Referential Questions by Hyunsun Chung

    o This article shares how teachers and ask questions to students so that they can "display" their knowledge or share their opinions about a topic.

    o Source: Chung, H. (2021). Display questions vs. referential questions . *English Speaking Nation for Uzbekistan Program.*

SCAFFOLDING PART ONE: QUESTIONS AND RESPONSES

Because of their limited vocabulary and language skills, beginner-level students may have trouble showing their understanding and responding to questions when compared to more advanced peers. Teachers should provide scaffolds for learning questions: starting with very basic language structures and then building up to more complex structures. Scaffolding helps beginners to show what they are learning from an early stage, even if the students are still acquiring the language that they need to express ideas on their own.

This week in the Teacher's Corner, we will discuss how to scaffold questions to help beginning learners become more comfortable with responding to questions. We will also explore several simple response strategies for beginners that help to engage students and to check their understanding.

CREATING OR ADAPTING BEGINNER-FRIENDLY QUESTIONS

A teacher who asks an open-ended question to a class of beginner students will likely be met with blank stares, confusion, or silence (See examples of open-ended questions below.). Learners at this level usually do not have the language skills they need to comprehend an open-ended question, much less respond to it. Even if students understand what is being asked, they may be shy to speak or worried about making errors. To avoid this situation, we can ask or adapt questions in several different ways to make them more accessible to our beginners.

Yes/No Questions: Posing questions to which students can simply respond "yes" or "no" allows students to express opinions or show what they have learned without having to depend on vocabulary or language forms they may not have. For instance, compare the following questions:

Open-Ended Response	Yes/No Response
What characteristics tell you that an animal is a mammal?	Is this animal (in the picture) a mammal?
How do you know a shape is a rectangle?	Does a rectangle have four sides?
What is the weather like today?	Is the weather sunny today?
What foods do you like to eat?	Do you like to eat eggs? Rice? Fish?

As shown in the table above, yes/no questions can be used to review content or for students to share information about themselves.

Either/Or Questions: Posing an either/or question allows beginner-level students to choose the correct answer from only two options. Consider the table below, which shows how the same open-ended questions can be posed in the either-or format:

Open-Ended Response	Either/Or Response
What characteristics tell you that an animal is a mammal?	• Is this animal (pictured) a mammal or a reptile? • Which one is a mammal: a fish or a horse?
How do you know a shape is a rectangle?	• Is this shape (pictured) a rectangle or a square? • Which shape has four sides of equal length: a rectangle or a square?
What is the weather like today?	• Is the weather today sunny or cloudy?
What foods do you like to eat?	• Do you like to eat chicken or fish? • Do you eat eggs for breakfast or dinner?

Limiting Answer Choices: Often students take tests or complete work with multiple-choice questions. For beginners, the standard multiple-choice question with four answer choices can be overwhelming or confusing. To make these questions more accessible, we can limit the number of options. To do this, we can simply cross out two of the incorrect options, or create activities with only two options for each question. As beginners become more proficient, we can add in a third choice and eventually work up to four.

INCREASING WAIT TIME

After asking a question, some teachers can become uncomfortable if students do not respond quickly. However, students who are just starting to learn a language need more time to think about what they are hearing and to articulate a response. For this reason, teachers who have beginner-level students are encouraged to give students more time to think about and answer questions.

Pose, Then Pause: A good strategy with beginner-level students is to include some "think time" after asking a question. This works especially well for questions that require a more open-ended response that requires students to produce more language. For instance, a teacher might say "What will you do after

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school today?" and then indicate to students that they have time to think about their response. The amount of "think time" may vary based on learners' ages and proficiency, but 10-30 seconds is usually sufficient. Here are some other options: use a timer; give students a verbal cue by saying something like "Think about this. Then I will ask you to answer"; or give students a visual cue (such as a signal or gesture) to indicate "think time." Once students have had time to think about their responses, they can raise their hands to respond. For more information on decreasing teacher talk time, check out this American English webinar: Teacher Talk: Presentation Skills for Teachers.

Calling on Students: Even when beginner students are ready to respond, they may still need additional time to answer. Beginners may start to answer but struggle to produce the needed language, or they may make an error during their responses. As teachers, we are often quick to respond and to assist our students in these situations. However, if our goal is to help learners develop their English, it may actually be better if we wait to let the student work to form a response on his or her own. If the student continues to have difficulty after 5-10 seconds, we can then provide guidance or ask a clarifying question to help.

NON-TRADITIONAL STUDENT RESPONSES

In addition to asking questions that are easier to respond to, teachers can also let beginner students communicate responses in non-verbal ways. Even though it is important to give beginners frequent chances to practice producing language in the English classroom, mixing in some non-verbal activities can have positive effects. The following non-verbal strategies can be used with any of the question formats described above. These strategies can take away some of the pressure that beginners often feel when speaking English, and successful communication, even if non-verbal, can motivate students.

Hand Signals: Students can respond to yes/no questions by using a hand signal such as the "thumbs up" for yes or "thumbs down" for no. Hand signals can also be used to show agreement or disagreement with a statement, or to indicate whether something is true or false.

If asking students to make a choice between multiple options, designate a number for each option. Then students can indicate their answer choice by holding up one, two, or three fingers, etc. As mentioned in the earlier discussion about multiple-choice questions, do not give beginners too many choices at first.

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Stand Up/Sit Down: When responding to questions with two answer options, students can stand or sit to indicate their response. Similar to hand signals, this strategy can be used for yes/no questions, true/false questions, agree/disagree statements, or either/or questions.

Move to the Answer: This strategy also uses the full body to respond. Designate different areas of the classroom for different responses. For example, divide the classroom in half and designate sides as yes/no, true/false, agree/disagree, etc. To respond to the question, students move to the side that indicates their response. This strategy can also be used for reviewing content that lends itself to two different categories or topics.

As students become more proficient, the corners of the room can be used, and thus the number of responses can be increased. For example, if using multiple-choice questions, label the corners A, B, C, and D. This technique can also be used to help students "sort" information into up to four different categories.

Display Questions vs. Referential Questions

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Display questions (DQs)

Display questions (DQs) are questions asked by teachers in order to prompt learners to "display" their knowledge. Teachers can expect specific answers for DQs, so it is a strategy for encouraging students to share their knowledge and understanding of a topic. Examples of display questions are yes-or-no questions, true-or-false questions, and wh-questions (what, where, when, why, who, and how questions).

Here is an example of how DQs can be used within teacher-student interactions in a lesson:

In Unit 10 World Literature of tenth grade textbook, the questions following a short reading about William Shakespeare are typical display questions.

T: Today, we will study the text about William Shakespeare. First, I will give you a few minutes to read the text. Afterward, I will give you some questions...Okay?
S: Yes.
T: How old was he when he married his wife?
S: Eighteen.
T: You are right, who can answer in a full sentence?
S: He was eighteen.

T: Good. What was his wife's name?
S: Anne Hathaway.
T: Yes, her name was Anne Hathaway. Do you know what Shakespeare was famous for?
S: ...
T: It is okay, think it over.
S: ...for writing?

As seen in the example, DQs can initiate classroom interaction and be used to check comprehension. This sequence is called an Interaction-Response-Feedback (IRF). In language classrooms, DQs have their purpose and are usually aimed at finding out what learners can say in the target language. However, in this example, the interaction gets dull and the teacher fails to elicit more responses from the students. Why? The IRF sequence does not resemble a real conversation that would take place outside of the classroom.

Referential questions (RQs)

Referential questions (RQs) are asked in order to find out the students' responses to questions that teachers do not already know the answers to. Contrast to display questions, RQs have a real communicative purpose. RQs encourage students' high-order thinking skills and authentic use of second language because students must develop their responses based on their own opinion and with a level of critical thinking.

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Many teachers agree that teachers' use of RQs could prompt students to provide significantly longer and syntactically more complex responses than the use of display questions.

Here is an example of how RQs can be used in a dialogue between the teacher and student:

Unit 1 My Country, My Pride in Tenth Grade textbook

T: Last week, we read about three cities in Europe. Did you like reading about those cities, Mickela?
S: Yes, of course, I liked them.
T: Good, I liked reading them too. Which city did you like most?
S: I think I liked Venice the most.
T: Oh, can you tell us why?
S: It says the city is magical and my aunt said she went there before.
T: Really? I also went to Venice before. And I agree that the city is magical and very unique. What did your aunt say about the city?
S: She said the city is so beautiful with buildings and water. I want to visit there too. Oh, I have a question, what does 'spire' mean in the text?
T: Good question. Is there anybody who knows what spire means?
S: The tops of the buildings?

T: Yes, I think you are right. Do we have 'spires' in our city? …
S: Yes. _____ has spires.
T: OK, that is a nice example. Who else can tell me about the city you picked, and why?

This example is a mix of display questions, interaction and follow-ups, and referential questions. In the process, the student interrupts the teacher once and asks her own question. It has the moments of real conversation in the IRF process. If the student and teacher have differences of opinion, more authentic conversations can be elicited. Teachers need to make sure to capture the moments when the true conversation occurs with students' contribution. Proper teacher talk and teacher reaction to students' responses are keys to creating space for a communicative language classroom.

Self-check chart
        Finally, below is a chart to reference in order to check whether certain actions are happening in your classroom talk and teacher-student interactions. When possible, it is useful to self-check by video recording your classroom interaction using one of these tools. You can create your own questions depending on your teaching context as well.

Errors	Are there errors in the language of either the teacher or the students?
Feedback errors	When students make errors, do they receive feedback? If so, from whom?
Genuine questions	Do teachers and students ask questions to which they don't know the answer in advance?
Display questions	Do teachers ask questions that they know the answers to so that learners can display their knowledge of the language (or lack of it)?
Negotiation for meaning	Do teachers and students work to understand what the other speakers are saying? What efforts are made by the teacher and students?
Metalinguistic comments	Do the teachers and students talk about language, in addition to using it to transmit information?

Reference

Spada, N. (2006). *How languages are learned*. Oxford University Press.

3.3. Search

Explore more teaching resources about effective question and answer. You can also search these websites for more teaching resources:

- Comprehensible Classroom: Comprehension Checks
- FluentU English Educator Blog

(Hint: Try using these keywords: comprehension check in English, ESL feedback)

Take notes here:

Do

3.4. Think

Do you use English when you ask questions in your classroom? If yes, what are some examples of the questions that you ask? If not, what are some challenges that prevent you asking questions in English?

When you ask them questions, do your students try to answer in English? What might help them to answer in English during the lesson?

Take notes here:

3.5. Create

Choose a part (reading or listening) in your textbook and create a set of questions that fits for the learning goal of the part you've selected. Think about a possible question and answer situation that might happen in that learning sequence. Use the tasks and languages for different goals you have watched and read in the module such as an information gap activity.

Practice saying your script as needed, before recording your video.

Note: This will be added to your Portfolio.

3.6. Share

Share the video you have created in your group chat. You may use the following message as a template:

Example: Hello, Colleagues! The (activity/video/routine/ instructions) I want to share is called
_____ (activity title). I chose this

activity(part) to create the classroom dialogue because _____

_____. (Be sure to attach your activity file.)

3.7. Apply

After you share your example dialogue, read through your colleagues' posts in the group chat. Find at least one or two that you can use in your next class.

1. Consider these questions when selecting your colleagues examples to apply in your classroom instruction:

    § Which of the suggested ways of giving questions do you think can be adaptable to your teaching context? Why and why not?
    § How did the other teacher use it and what made these strategies effective?

OR

2. If you already had a chance to practice in your classroom what you learned in this module, then use the self-check chart in the Article 2 to examine how the questions and responses were used in your lesson.

Take notes here:

3.8. Reflect

Write 1-2 paragraphs to reflect on Module 3 (300-500 words). You may use what you have created, shared, and applied in the previous tasks.

Note: This will be added to your Portfolio.

Take notes here:

Module 3 Checklist:

☐ I watched two videos.
☐ I read two articles.
☐ I searched for a few new web resources to help my teaching.
☐ I thought about my practice of asking and answering questions in English and wrote down some reflections.

☐ I created a question and answer sequence in English that fits the learning goal for a part of my textbook/lesson.
☐ I shared my question and answer sequence with my colleagues on Telegram.
☐ I applied at least one new question and answer sequence from my Telegram group in my teaching context.
☐ I wrote 1-2 paragraphs to reflect on my learning in Module 3.