

Blank's Levels of Questioning

Blank's Levels of Questioning is a questioning framework developed by in the 1970s by psychologist Marion Blank to help develop key oral language comprehension skills in children. There are four levels of questioning which become more complex, moving from simple, concrete questions, to more abstract. They can be used to assess pupils' skills, and support development in the classroom.

Blank based her model on the idea that children first learn to use language in concrete way - what they see, hear, taste, and this is demonstrated in the way they first learn to use nouns and simple ways to describe their surroundings. As children develop, they use language to understand more abstract concepts - explain things they can't see, make predictions and inferences.

The framework can be used to identify the right level of challenge for pupils, and support pupils with all levels of need to develop general language and vocabulary, alongside comprehension, reasoning and problem solving.

The four levels

Level 1: Matching perception (naming)

Questions are focussed on the immediate environment with responses expected to be short, or nonverbal. Children usually develop this understanding at around 3 years.

Examples:

- What can you see?
- What is ____ doing?
- Who is this? (pointing)

Level 2: Selective Analysis of Perception (describing)

Questions refer to details known to the pupil, but not necessarily present. This can involve describing and understanding function, and usually develops around 4 years.

Examples:

- What happened?
- Where is ____? (remembering information)
- How are these different?

Level 3: Reordering Perception (retelling)

Questions are more abstract and not about what is in front of a pupil, relying on their knowledge of past experiences and

reasoning. Children usually develop understanding of basic predictions and generalisations around 4 ½ years

Examples:

- What will happen next?
- Find the things that are not ____?
- What could he say?

Level 4: Reasoning about Perception (justifying)

Questions require a further level of higher reasoning, problem-solving, prediction of consequences and explanations of their answers. Understanding of this level of questions usually develops around 5 years.

Examples:

- Why did ____?
- Why can't we ____?
- How can we tell ____?

There are many ways the levels can be used in the classroom to support learning. Questioning allows pupils to practise ideas and develop their understanding. We use questions to formatively assess and adapt teaching in the moment, and to stretch and challenge pupil thinking. By moving up and down the levels of questioning, we can scaffold explanations and pitch instruction to meet the needs of each pupil.

Use the levels to interrogate pupil knowledge and orchestrate discussion. Start with simple questions focussed on what's in front of them, and build in opportunities for retrieval of prior learning with more complex follow-up questions. Give pupils sufficient time to answer (up to ten seconds), and repeat the question if necessary.

When introducing higher-level questions, model how to do this by verbalising your own thought process, using lower-level questions to build up the picture of abstract reasoning, and show how questions can often have multiple correct answers.



Edu-blog Spotlight

Bob Pritchard is a physics teacher and EEF Associate (Science) for the Education Endowment Foundation. He blogs at occasionalwitters.com and tweets as @rjpritchard.



In a recent post, Bob offers a gentle reminder from experience that trying to engage pupils with a 'fun' lesson can backfire, and we need to make sure we 'focus on the important stuff'.

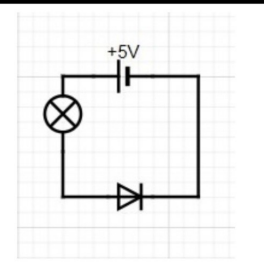
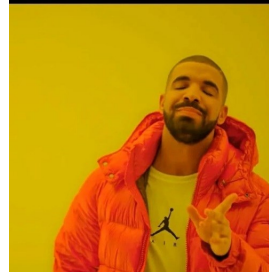
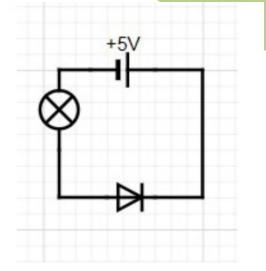
His story is one of teaching diodes to his GCSE classes, something he has done many times, and he outlines the way he normally approaches this: describing what it does, using some familiar analogies, showing them example circuit diagrams and prompting problem solving to check for understanding.

On this occasion he writes about, he tells of how he 'somehow ended up referring to the very well known Drake Hotline Bling meme. It was along the lines of "diode pointing in direction of current = good, against current = bad".' This seemed to go down well with pupils.

A month later, when presenting recall questions, the only class out of the three he was quizzing to do significantly worse than the others was the one he had used the meme with. The problem he found was that pupils remembered the meme, but they were unable to remember why it had been used.

Bob reminds us that the thing memes are good at is 'replicating themselves' - it had stopped the pupils remembering what was important. It can be easy to try and switch things round and refresh lessons, but remember what you want pupils to remember first.

Full post and comments: <https://bit.ly/3uqtgZa>



Cognitive Bias of the Half-term

Cognitive biases are shortcuts in our thinking but they can make us lose objectivity. Each issue we introduce a new bias to help you avoid its pitfalls.

Selection Bias

Selection bias occurs when people chosen as part of a sample group are not really a random sample, and may not be representative of the group as a whole.

For example, if you wanted to survey parents and carers about engagement with the school community and asked those attending a coffee morning, you would be likely to be asking those already engaged in school activities, and not hear from those who don't.

Tried and Tested

If you're stuck for inspiration finding extracts of books for pupils to practise comprehension and analysis (or just trying to find something for yourself), RecommendMeABook.com could be the answer.

The website shows you the first page of a random book, without seeing the front cover, so you can read without judgement, and if you like it you can click to reveal the book it's from and save to your 'bookshelf'. If you don't like it, move onto the next one.

There are currently 3951 books in their database of previews, and you can filter choices by genre and book type. There is no 'children's' option, so this is something you may want to use with older pupils with higher reading ages.

