

Question Starts

A routine for creating thought-provoking questions.

1. Brainstorm a list of at least 12 questions about the topic, concept or object. Use these question-starts to help you think of interesting questions:

Why...?

What are the reasons...?

What if...?

What is the purpose of...?

How would it be different if...?

Suppose that...?

What if we knew...?

What would change if...?

2. Review the brainstormed list and star the questions that seem most interesting. Then, select one or more of the starred questions to discuss for a few moments.
3. Reflect: What new ideas do you have about the topic, concept or object that you didn't have before?

Purpose: What kind of thinking does this routine encourage?

This routine provides students with the opportunity to practice developing good questions that provoke thinking and inquiry into a topic. It also helps students brainstorm lots of different kinds of questions about a topic. The purpose of asking deep and interesting questions is to get at the complexity and depth of a topic. The purpose of brainstorming varied questions about a topic is to get at the breadth and multi-dimensionality of a topic.

Application: When and where can I use it?

Use Question Starts to expand and deepen students' thinking, to encourage students' curiosity, and to increase their motivation to inquire. This routine can be used when you are introducing a new topic to help students get a sense of the breadth of a topic. It can be used when you're in the middle of studying a topic as a way of enlivening students' curiosity. And it can be used when you are near the end of studying a topic, as a way of showing students how the knowledge they have gained about the topic helps them to ask ever more interesting questions. This routine can also be used continuously throughout a topic, to help the class keep a visible, evolving list of questions about the topic that can be added to at anytime.

Launch: What are some tips for starting and using this routine?

Before using Question Starts, you might want to ask students what they think makes a good question. Then, when you show the Question Starts, explain that this routine is a tool for asking good questions. Start the routine by providing a topic—Stockholm, a compass, the Equator, good sportsmanship. Ask them to use the Question Starts to generate a list of questions about the topic. Initially, it's best to work together as an entire group. Once students get the hang of the routine, you can have them work in small groups or even solo. Or mix it up. For example, do step 1 as a whole class, do step 2 in pairs, and step 3 as a whole class again.

After students finish generating questions, you can use the questions they created in a variety of ways: pick one of the questions to investigate further, have a discussion about some of the questions, give students information to read about the topic, ask them to investigate it in other ways, or do nothing further as simply creating the list of questions is worthwhile since it gives students a sense of the breadth of a topic and sparks curiosity about it. Students' questions can be written down and recorded so that they are listed for all to see. If students are working solo, they can keep their list of questions in a journal, or you can create a "collage" out of students' individual lists and display it on the classroom wall.

Share your experience with this thinking routine on social media using the hashtags [#PZThinkingRoutines](#) and [#QuestionStarts](#).