

Designing Open-ended, Text-Based Questions Using the Patterned Way of Reading, Writing, and Talking

What are open-ended, text-based questions?

Open-ended, text-based questions are questions about texts that have multiple responses that are based on evidence from the text. Unlike a close-ended question that's looking for a specific, often short response, an open-ended question usually requires a more in-depth response that is supported with evidence from the text. Below are examples using "Thank You, M'am."

Close-ended

What is the boy's name?
How old is he?
What is Mrs. Jones's full name?
How does Roger feel when he's caught?

Open-ended

What do you know about Roger? Use evidence from the text to support your response.
Why doesn't Roger run when he has the chance?

Why use these questions?

There are a number of advantages to using open-ended, text-based questions. Open-ended, text-based questions:

- Allow multiple entry points for students. Students are able to answer the question from their perspective.
- Provide teachers with a window into students' thinking and comprehension of a text.
- Allow students to construct an overall understanding of a text.
- Mirror the kinds of questions proficient readers ask themselves about a text. Proficient readers rarely concern themselves with the insignificant details that are often the subject of close-ended questions.

IFL Patterned Way of Reading, Writing, and Talking

Rereading is a key method proficient readers use to make sense of complex texts that are open to multiple interpretations. We at IFL work to apprentice students to adopt this approach by asking them to read or skim texts multiple times with different open-ended, text-based questions to guide each reading. These open-ended, text-based questions are sequenced to move learners from literal comprehension to higher-level thinking about a text. The number of readings depends on the complexity of the text and the lesson's academic purpose.

Each time we ask students to reread the text, we also ask them to construct a response to the open-ended, text-based question that guides that reading. After they have read the text and responded to the question, we engage students in discussion. The talk formats we use and the amount of time spent on each discussion vary based on the students' ability, the difficulty of the text and question, and the instructional purpose.

Below is a key tool that we use to guide students' multiple reading, writing, and discussion. The writing in italics is a brief explanation about the purpose of each reading.

IFL Patterned Way of Reading, Writing, and Talking

Read to get the gist



Write and talk to learn: know, express, and track thinking

The purpose of this first reading is for students to understand what is happening literally in the text. Sample narrative text questions: What's happening? Who are the characters? What do we know about them? Sample informational text questions: What are the main ideas? What are the supporting ideas and evidence? Sample persuasive text questions: What's the central argument? What ideas or reasons support the argument? Who's the audience? Most times, the discussion on the gist of a text is fairly short.

Reread to find significant moments



Write and talk to learn: select and explain ideas; reflect on writing and thinking

This second reading involves having students reread or skim through a text for the purpose of identifying moments that strike them as significant to that text. Students are then asked to explain the significance of the chosen moments. The purpose of this reading is twofold: (1) for students to begin to think about the overall meaning of the text and (2) for students to practice using and explaining textual evidence. Sample questions: What moments strike you as most significant to the text? Explain the significance of each moment; What moments strike you as most significant to the (character's development, author's argument, overarching questions, etc.)? Explain the significance.

Read again to interpret the ideas in the text



Write to develop interpretation of ideas

The question for this reading is an interpretive question – a thought-provoking question that has multiple, varied responses based on evidence from the text. To answer the question, students review the text to develop an interpretation in response to the question and support it with evidence from the text. The question should support students to: (1) gain deeper understanding of the overarching questions and texts and (2) successfully engage with formative and summative assessments.

Read again differently to analyze the author's methods



WriteLike – Write like the text and in imitation of an author's syntax and grammatical structures

This fourth reading asks students to analyze the author's craft. Students are asked to consider (1) the choices the author made when writing this text and (2) how those choices impact the meaning and influence the reader's impressions of the events, characters, ideas, arguments, etc. After analyzing the author's methods, students are often asked to imitate the methods in their own writing.