

# Ten ways to foster curiosity and engagement

Ways to present your lesson or subject	What does it do?	What are the benefits & points of connection?	Some strategic extending questions	What ideas resonate with this?
<b>Offer ideas as live and go off piste</b> <i>(Groundhog Day)</i>	Stresses inquiry and the sense of possibility and discovery by not focusing on what is already done, dusted and certain.	Allows students to feel that they have something to contribute to the debates that may have real purchase	How can we best present our subject as still relevant and dynamic and allow students to recapture that sense of discovery?	<i>'Could be' language invites students to think how else things might be. 'Is' language simply has to be grasped. If something is the absolute truth, all you can do is try you best to understand and remember it.'</i> Ellen Langer
<b>Stress the big ideas and concepts</b> <i>(Minority Report)</i>	Focuses on what a subject gives to the world and what it is there to explain or offer.	Offers a chance for students to work out how they feel about your subject and an understanding of why they personally may want to pursue it later.	What is the big idea behind our subject and how can it be offered to students in a form that they can involve themselves with?	<i>'If one learns from others but does not think, one will be bewildered. If on the other hand one thinks but does not learn from others, one will be in peril.'</i> Confucius
<b>Plan in and set up complexity and doubt</b> <i>(Purple Rose of Cairo)</i>	Concentrates on paradox, ambiguities that a subject cannot answer and examines why things are still uncertain.	Encourages students to realize that there is often not a right answer, that the unexpected is possible and that binary opposites may never be resolved, simply mediated.	How do we encourage confusion endurance with the security that students sometimes need? What anomalies can we introduce that challenge comfortable assumptions?	<i>'As change accelerates, we now find that ambiguity multiplies, and illusions of certainty become more difficult to maintain. The ability to thrive with ambiguity must become part of our everyday lives. Poise in the face of paradox is a key not only to effectiveness, but to sanity in a rapidly changing world.'</i> Michael Gelb

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<p><b>Investigate a variety of narratives</b></p> <p><i>(The History Boys)</i></p>	<p>Introduces early thinkers/experts whose inferred versions of reality were the currency before the current reigning narrative.</p>	<p>Makes clear to students that your subject is still evolving and struggling to shape knowledge through often opposing ideas.</p>	<p>How can we organise and integrate such content into a developing narrative structure? What is the currently successful story and why?</p>	<p><i>'The test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in mind at the same time and still retain the ability to function.'</i> F. Scott Fitzgerald</p>
<p><b>Focus on core ideas and texts</b></p> <p><i>(Citizen Kane)</i></p>	<p>Locates the threshold concepts that have helped to shape a subject and shows how they are part of its 'back story'.</p>	<p>Demonstrates to students that texts can change the way people understand the world and that there are organising ideas/principles.</p>	<p>What texts helped us to 'get' our subject? What gave us a sense of security and insight? What is the unifying idea to the events/facts for us?</p>	<p><i>'Do not seek to follow in the footsteps of the men of old, seek what they sought.'</i> Basho</p>
<p><b>Take the 'spoon feeding' stabilizers off and reduce safety and mimicry</b></p> <p><i>(The History Boys)</i></p>	<p>Encourages engagement with chunks of complexity and reduces the habit of mere accurate retention and the attitude of dependency.</p>	<p>Makes for more meaningful engagement by students and develops <i>dispositions to learn</i>, as well as learning capabilities.</p>	<p>How can we counteract the tendency of students to want everything too 'bite sized' and encourage them to develop their chewing muscles?</p>	<p><i>'Easy is boring; impossible is depressing... there are two types of topics: tame ones and wild ones. Much of the curriculum is too tame. To engage and stretch students, they should be presented with subject matter that is a bit wilder – not so pre-digested and neatened up; more intriguing; offering more ways of going about it.'</i> David Perkins</p>

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<p><b>Set up sticky situations and explore desirable difficulties</b></p> <p><i>(Finding Nemo)</i></p>	<p>Allows the development of the skill of knowing what to do when you don't know what to do and that learning is learnable.</p>	<p>Sets up situations where students are required to get themselves unstuck by developing coping strategies and improving resilience</p>	<p>How can we teach students to deal with the emotional side of difficulties and upsets, so they can understand that grappling with challenges is more important than any amount of easy success?</p>	<p><i>'It doesn't help a child to tackle a difficult task if they succeed constantly on an easy one. It doesn't teach them to persist in the face of obstacles if obstacles are always eliminated.... What children learn best from are slightly difficult tasks which they have to struggle through. Knowing they can cope with difficulties is what makes children seek challenges and overcome further problems.'</i></p> <p>Carol Dweck</p>
<p><b>Create interesting hooks</b></p> <p><i>(The Curious case of Benjamin Button)</i></p>	<p>Uses interesting 'what if' questions with meaningful trailers to involve students emotionally and imaginatively to guide them.</p>	<p>Gets students engaged and encourages discovery that points to more interesting terrain for exploration and allows them to find creative depictions of understanding and retell the stories in their own words, gestures or actions.</p>	<p>What 'trailer type' activities will assist our students to develop affective engagement? What metaphors, images and personifications can support how we depict the content?</p>	<p><i>'Systems thinking' means good learners get pleasure from seeing how things fit together. They are interested in the big picture, and how new learning expands it. They look for analogies in their own memory that give them a handle on a complicated new domain. 'What's it like?' they ask themselves.'</i></p> <p>Peter Senge</p>

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<p><b>Utilize real world problems</b></p> <p><i>(How to train your dragon)</i></p>	<p>Sets up issues and problems that experts in your subject face and deal with.</p>	<p>Involves your students in the learning process and develops learning how to learn, and involves co-construction and working like an expert which establishes roles that can be real.</p>	<p>What features of our subject allow students to properly investigate and research and offer chances to uncover layers of meaning?</p>	<p><i>'From an early age children are able to engage meaningfully in dialogue about their own learning, and can use frameworks to access their own intuitive understanding of themselves as learners. This seems to indicate that teachers could now desist from treating the children as <b>passengers</b> in the voyage of their own learning, and [instead] treat young learners as co-pilots.'</i></p> <p>Hilary Dyer</p>
<p><b>Share what resonates and what makes you excited</b></p> <p><i>(Etre et Avoir)</i></p>	<p>Make it clear that there are significant moments when we enjoy teaching our subject even when it is hard.</p>	<p>Encourages realisation that there is a passion that drives teachers and that their subject actually matters to them. This helps students connect emotionally to the material and trace the implications of seeing the world from your particular viewpoint.</p>	<p>What is emotionally engaging about your subject? Why is it meaningful? How did you gain expertise? How do you use personal anecdotes, stories and epiphanies in the classroom?</p>	<p><i>'Children are designed to be little apprentices, and they will happily apprentice themselves to anyone they like who is doing something interesting –Even watching you struggle a bit is good learning. Teachers and parents are not omniscient or omnipotent, and it helps children grow if they can be privy to some of their elders' uncertainties: not when they are falling apart, but when they are floundering just a little.'</i></p> <p>Guy Claxton</p>