

Assessment and feedback in an online context: Hinge questions

Evidence Based Education

What's the idea?

Moving from the classroom to online learning presents new challenges, including around assessment and feedback practices. Many of the principles of good feedback and assessment can still apply to the online environment, they just need to be reframed to fit this new context.

Hinge questions, for example, can be a great way to assess where pupils are in their learning and if they are ready to move on to the next topic or if there are still areas that require further improvement. This compact guide therefore looks at the principles of hinge questions and how they can be applied to online learning.

What does the research say?

In a classroom environment, teachers may use proxies and nonverbal cues for pupils' understanding such as smiling or nodding – although such proxies are often poor indicators of learning, so should be interpreted cautiously for this purpose – and can also move around the classroom to see how they are progressing. In an online environment, it is more difficult to get this regular feedback so it is important to incorporate opportunities to check on pupils' learning.

A hinge question is one way of telling if pupils are ready to move on in their learning. According to Dylan Wiliam

(2015) lessons never go to plan which is why teachers should build plan B into plan A from the start. This involves asking hinge questions somewhere in the middle of a lesson / sequence of lessons to check if all students are ready to move on. Hinge questions should elicit a response from every single student, be time-efficient, inform whether the teacher goes forward or needs to repeat previously taught content and elicit the right response for the right reason. The crucial aspect of using this technique is to have a plan of how to move individual pupils or groups of pupils on in their learning based on their answers to the questions. Hinge questions can be powerful, but should be used with caution: information gleaned from just one question can be unreliable, especially if the quality of the question used is poor.

Hinge questions differ from retrieval questions as their main purpose is for teachers to check pupils' understanding and inform their next steps in teaching. You can learn more about this in the Checking Understanding Compact Guide that forms part of this series.

How does this work in practice?

Multiple choice questions are a straightforward and time-efficient tool for use as hinge questions. There are different ways to design informative hinge questions in the form of multiple choice questions. They could have three options, one of which is clearly right, and two of which are wrong but for different reasons. This helps the teacher to understand what exactly pupils have misunderstood about a specific topic,

and allows them to design more targeted follow-on activities. Regular well-targeted questioning can increase teachers' certainty that pupils are learning and that the learning sticks.

In online learning sessions, you could either use the chat function and ask the whole group or just individual students to make sure that they are all engaged. You could have a daily 'big idea' question and then multiple smaller questions that provide you with the information you need to know if pupils are engaged and learning. It might be a good idea to think about and prepare these questions during your initial planning to ensure that you receive regular feedback on pupils' learning.

Top tips

- Use hinge questions to check pupils' understanding
- Have a plan for those pupils who are ready to move on in their learning and those who require further support
- Use multiple choice questions that include answers that are wrong, but for different reasons
- Include questions in your lesson planning to make sure you receive regular feedback on pupils' learning.

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

- Doherty J (2017) Skilful Questioning: The beating heart of good pedagogy. *Impact* 1.
- Evidence Based Education (2020) Assessment and feedback in an online context. Podcast available online
- Wiliam D (2015) Designing great hinge questions. *Educational Leadership: Journal of the Department of Supervision and Curriculum Development* 73: 40–44.