

Effective Questioning, Active Listening and Attentive Silence

Active Learning vs. Passive Learning

Studies have shown that learning is retained as follows:

10% of what we read
20% of what we hear
30% of what we see
50% of what we see and hear
70% of what we say
90% of what we say as we do

If a student will retain more by saying and doing, a tutor should incorporate these types of activities to make the tutoring sessions as effective as possible for the student. Passive learning does not engage the student while active learning has the student discovering, processing and applying the information.

Effective Questioning

Why ask questions instead of providing answers?

- Asking questions requires the student to be active in their learning using their knowledge to solve a problem. The student's answer will also provide information as to what is understood and what needs more work. Strictly providing answers encourages students to become passive learners.

What are open-ended questions?

- Open-ended questions invite the student to tell the process or story in their own words. They are the opposite of closed-ended questions which require only a yes or no response. Use “how”, “what” or “why” questions.

What are probing questions?

- A probing question from the tutor will require the student to go beyond their first response in order to clarify, justify or further explain their initial answer. In other words, the students are asked to use critical thinking skills to extend their knowledge beyond facts to deepen their understanding of the concept.

What does “wait time” accomplish?

- Wait time is needed after a question is posed to allow the student adequate time to think. The student’s response will then be more useful in determining what is and is not understood.

What if a student does not or cannot answer the question?

- Try rephrasing the question. Give a hint. Ask probing questions to get the student to share what they do know. Allow plenty of wait time.

How should a tutor handle a wrong answer?

- Give clues to help discover the correct answer. Redirect the student to the point of misunderstanding. Never frustrate the student by continually making the student “fish” for a response that is difficult. If you give the student the answer, have them repeat it, write it or demonstrate the process used to get it.

Questioning by the tutor involves the student. When used, effective and meaningful learning takes place and the information is transferred to long term memory.

Active Listening

- Give your full attention to the person speaking
- Use your body language to show that you are listening.
- Make sure your mind is focused, too. Thoughts move about 4 times as fast as speech which makes it easy for the mind to wander.
- Pay attention to the nonverbal clues some of which may be in contradiction to what is being said.
- Let yourself finish listening before you begin to speak.
- Let the speaker finish before you begin to talk.
- Ask questions. This shows that you are listening.

Good tutors are good listeners. Listening sets the stage for the student to be able to learn by his/her own talking, questioning and/or thinking out loud. The goal of listening is to let the speaker experience being understood.

Attentive Silence

- Remember that you understand the concepts that the students may be struggling to learn. Therefore, it can be difficult to gauge the amount of time the student needs to process the information and share their answer. As you pose questions, give the students adequate thinking time. Patiently wait for a response. Attentive silence can be uncomfortable but if used appropriately, it encourages the student to think critically and become more independent.

Tutoring Tips

1. Ask one question at a time.
2. Be truthful. If you don't know the answer, don't be afraid to admit it.
3. Concentrate on what the student is saying.
4. Listen much. Talk little.
5. Be consistent with body, voice and words.
6. Turn off your cell phone during tutoring sessions.