

7 Benefits of inquiry-based activity strategies for teachers

Like any teaching method, there are strategies to help you successfully run an inquiry activity. These strategies will also allow you and your students to enjoy the full extent of inquiry-based learning's benefits.

1. Keep guiding principles in mind

To run an inquiry activity, there are broad principles you should follow:

- Learners are at the centre of the inquiry process. You, along with the resources and technology you provide are there to support them.
- Inquiry activities themselves should concentrate on building information-processing and critical thinking abilities.
- You should monitor how students develop these skills as they build conceptual understanding of the topic in question.
- As well as facilitating the exercise, try to learn more about your students' learning habits and inquiry-based learning in general.

Keeping these principles in mind should keep you and your students focused on the overarching purposes of inquiry-based learning.

2. Demonstrate how to participate

Because students may not be familiar with inquiry-based learning, consider demonstrating how to participate in an inquiry activity. Specifically, they must learn how to:

- Contribute ideas
- Develop those ideas
- Question themselves and group members in a constructive manner
- Investigate, to the fullest extent possible, their ideas and hypotheses

Launching amock-exercise for the class to tackle as a group, actively participate to give students a first-hand look at how to complete these steps. For example, after presenting an open question, facilitate and contribute to a brainstorming session. This will exemplify pitching and developing ideas. Demonstrating how to participate in this way should prepare students for future exercises.

3. Surprise students

To spark curiosity and enjoy its aforementioned benefits, run a surprise inquiry activity. With little to no context, start class by:

- Playing a video
- Handing out a mathematical formula or list of math word problems
- Distributing a primary source document

The content piece must relate to a topic that interests students, effectively engaging them. After they've examined the content, split them into small groups and give them an open question to answer. For example, you may ask them to determine applications for the mathematical formula or word problems. As research about curiosity indicates, their findings and conclusions should stick with them beyond the activity.

4. Use Inquiry when traditional methods won't work

Structured or guided inquiry activities can lend themselves to topics that students typically struggle to grasp, allowing them to process content in different ways. Investigating a question you present, they should be able to use their own techniques to analyze information that may normally be too challenging otherwise. As a result, they'll likely form conclusions that make sense to them. You can then discuss these conclusions and fill knowledge gaps to ensure everyone is on the same page. Furthermore, monitoring students throughout the activity can teach you about their learning styles, informing how to approach other difficult lessons. If you are writing report card comments, you may use the opportunity to observe student behavior.

5. Understand when inquiry won't work

Inquiry-based learning delivers its share of benefits, but you must recognize which lessons don't call for inquiry. Take this scenario as an example: You want to run a guided inquiry activity for math class, which (a) introduces negative integers and (b) requires students to determine the concept's application in real-life scenarios. Asking students to read an introductory text about negative integers will likely drain time and cause confusion. On the other hand, a brief overview will allow them to spend more time on the latter part of the activity, which focuses on analysis and discovery. As this example shows, there are cases when a simple explanation will suffice over an elongated activity.

6. Don't wait for the perfect question

A student can ask a question that stimulates classmates' curiosity, signaling you to prepare or launch an inquiry activity. But this is rarely the case. And you shouldn't wait for it. Rather, you can initiate an inquiry activity when you feel it is appropriate. But it must use a guiding question that:

- Reflects a core curriculum concept
- Has engaged students from past or other classes
- Interests students, as indicated in previous lessons and discussions

The question's source, whether from you or your students, is secondary.

7. Run a check-in afterwards

Allotting time for class-wide reflection lets students discuss challenges and discoveries, filling knowledge gaps and supplementing findings. This prepares them for future lessons and inquiry activities. They'll learn about an array of ideas to consider throughout their study of the specific topic, and strategies to try during the next exercise. It can be especially helpful for learners who struggle in small groups, giving them a different way to process the activity's outcomes.

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