

Designing Questions with Content & Language Objectives in Mind

There are a great variety of ways to ask open-ended questions that require critical thinking and develop analytical skills such as those outlined in the Common Core State Standards. An excellent place to start is by beginning with **Why**, **How**, or **How and Why**. To answer such questions students need to analyze evidence and formulate historical interpretations based on that evidence. While many questions ask students to explain a historical issue/event/decision/or phenomena (e.g., What are the patterns of cultural integration? How do societies maintain order?), most require students to go beyond explanation and incorporate additional analytical skills (e.g., What causes cultural integration? How did the ways in which the French government maintained order change over the course of the French Revolution?). When considering the wording of your question, it is important to know what analytical skills you want your students to use in formulating the answer.

Question frame models:

Wording questions for explanation:

What are the patterns of _____?

How do _____?

How are _____ mutually interdependent?

What does _____ demonstrate about _____?

How is _____ achieved and maintained?

Wording questions of cause and consequence:

Explanatory Questions – these types of questions require students to gather evidence and form explanations of historical issues.

What were the causes (and/or consequences) of _____ and how did they influence _____?

(Without a follow-up question, “what were” questions could turn into a list.)

Why? *(Many but not all why questions address causes.)*

Why did _____ happen?

How did _____ influence/affect/foster _____?

In what ways did _____ influence/affect/foster _____?

What implications did _____ have on _____?

How was _____ responsible for _____?

What was the impact of _____ on _____?

What role did _____ play in _____?

How did _____ contribute to _____?

What factors contributed to _____?

Position/Argumentation Questions – these types of questions require students to take a stand and defend it with evidence.

What was the most significant cause of _____? Why?

What was the most significant consequence of _____? Why?

What were the most significant contributing factors in _____?

Overall, did the _____ have a more positive or negative effect on _____? Why?

Were the consequences of _____ more positive or negative? Why?

Spectrum Position/Argumentation Questions—these types of questions allow students to support answers across a spectrum of possibilities.

To what extent was _____ responsible for _____?

To what extent did the _____ affect/influence/foster _____?

Wording questions of comparison and contrast:

Explanatory Questions

- How are _____ and _____ similar?
What commonalities are there between _____ and _____?
How are _____ and _____ different?
What factors are responsible for the differences between _____ and _____?
How do _____ and _____ compare and contrast?
How did _____'s and _____'s views on _____ compare and contrast?
How are _____ and _____ similar and different?

Position/Argumentation Questions

- Are _____ and _____ more similar or different?
Are there more similarities or differences between _____ and _____?

Spectrum Position/Argumentation Questions

- To what extent are _____ and _____ similar? *(This also allows the student to respond with similarities and differences).*

Wording questions of continuity and change

- How did _____ change between _____ and _____?
How did _____ change over time?
How was _____ a continuation of _____?
How was _____ a departure from _____?
How was _____ a continuation of _____ and how was it a departure?
In what ways did _____ change and remain the same in the _____ period/era/years?
How does _____ show/demonstrate a progression of _____?

Questions including an analysis of causality

- How and why did _____ change over time?
How and why did _____ change between _____ and _____?
Does _____ show/demonstrate a progression of _____? How?
Was _____ a progression of _____? Why?

Spectrum Position/Argumentation Questions

- To what extent was _____ a continuation of _____ and to what extent was it a departure?
To what extent and in what ways do the views expressed about _____ illustrate changing _____ relations between _____ and _____?
Why was _____ significant?

Wording questions that compare perspectives

- What do these conflicting sources tell you about _____?
What were the different views held by _____ about _____?
How did _____ (large group encompassing multiple ideas or single perspective) view _____?
How did _____ challenge the prevailing views about _____?
In the debates over _____ which side appeared to present a more reasoned argument?
How do the perspectives of _____ (and _____) about _____ differ?
Why did _____ view _____ as _____?

Other wording for position/argumentation questions

Was/were _____ overall good or bad/positive or negative for _____?

Was/were _____ beneficial to _____?

Was _____ a/an _____ or a/an _____?

Was the _____ justified/worth it?

Was the _____ justified in _____ (action)?

Was/were _____ policies/actions responsible for _____?

Did _____ advance or hurt _____?

Did _____ support the need for _____?

Did _____ handle _____ effectively or poorly?

Should _____ be considered _____ or _____?

Should _____ have done/supported _____?

Who was the most effective (not best!) _____?

Who had a greater impact on _____? (*includes causality*).

Would _____ be better off had _____?

Notes:

- *These all assume that the directions require students to defend their positions.*
- *Requires that students have access to enough content knowledge that they can back their positions with solid evidence rather than opinions.*
- *Adding "To what extent" to the beginning of any of these questions allows a greater spectrum of answers.*
- *These can all be persuasive essay questions as well, if the students are directed to address the counter arguments.*

Changing the wording changes the skills required in the response.

Why do people immigrate? (*causality in a universal question*)

Why did the Irish immigrate to the U.S. in the early nineteenth century? (*causality in a specific example*)

Why did the Chinese immigrate to the U.S. in the later nineteenth century? (*causality in a specific example*)

How were the motivating factors for Irish and Chinese immigration to the U.S. in the nineteenth century similar and different? (*causality and comparison*)

How did immigration motivations and patterns to the U.S. change over the course of the nineteenth century? (*causality and change over time*)