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PRACTICES + SKILLS FOR CATECHISTS & EDUCATORS

Video Guide

Creative Learning Methods & Activities: Art of Questioning

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Art of Questioning

Ideas from the Video Presentation

Questioning is an art. And like any art, it rewards attention, practice, and intention. When we ask the right questions — at the right moment — we can open-up a learning space where every person in the room feels engaged, valued, and genuinely curious.

1. Begin with a Question.

So where do questions belong in a lesson? Everywhere. Begin with a question that sparks curiosity and invites discussion. To do this well, try open-ended “what if” or “why do you think” prompts rather than yes/no questions. Write your opening question before you plan anything else in the lesson — it'll shape everything that follows.

Opening questions before introducing a Gospel story might sound like: “Has anyone ever felt like God was far away? What was that like?” or “If you could ask Jesus one question, what would it be?” Even something as simple as “What do you think prayer is for?” before a lesson on the Our Father invites learners in rather than talking at them.

2. Pause and Check.

Then, as you move through the content together, pause and check in. After introducing a new idea, ask learners to restate it in their own words, or connect it to something they already know. Build in these natural stopping points rather than saving questions for the end.

When teaching young children about Baptism, for example, you might pause and ask: “Has anyone seen a Baptism? What did you notice?” or “Why do you think water is used and not something else?” These pauses surface what children are actually thinking — which is often richer than we expect.

3. Name the Questions that Remain.

And at the end? Resist the urge to wrap everything up neatly. Name the questions that remain. Because one of the most important things we can model for our learners is that great questions often outlast their answers — and that's not a problem. That's what lifelong learning looks like.

4. Pay Attention to Learners' Questions.

As you teach, pay attention to the questions your learners are asking. Write them down. Those questions are windows into how they're thinking. Some will signal a gap in understanding; others will reveal exactly the kind of critical thinking you're hoping to cultivate.

5. Questions that Promote Learning.

Researcher John Hattie, in his landmark work on visible learning, identified specific types of questions that promote deep learning. What's striking about Hattie's findings is that these questions aren't primarily about content — they're about thinking. That means they work beautifully in faith formation, where the goal was never just information transfer, but transformation. Let's walk through each type.

Questions of Clarification and Elaboration

First, Hattie speaks of questions of clarification and elaboration: Why do you think that? These questions invite learners to say more and go deeper. After a student says, “I think God forgives us

because God loves us,” you might follow up with: Can you say more about what that love looks like to you?

Questions of Comparing and Organizing

Second, are questions of comparing and organizing: How is that different from what we said earlier? These help learners build connections. For example: We talked last week about the Prodigal Son and this week about Zacchaeus. How are those two stories similar? Where do they differ?

Questions of Reasoning

Third are questions of reasoning: How do you know that? These are some of the most powerful questions a catechist can ask — not to challenge, but to strengthen thinking. You said the Eucharist is the most important sacrament. What makes you say that?

Questions of Alternatives and Consequences

Fourth are questions of alternatives and consequences: What would be a different view? What might happen if...? These open-up perspective-taking and moral reasoning. What if the Good Samaritan had kept walking? How does the story change?

Questions of Thinking Progress

Fifth are questions of thinking progress: What could we improve in our thinking about this? At the end of a session on prayer, you might ask: Based on everything we've shared today, what's one thing you want to try differently in your prayer?

Questions of Learning Voice

Sixth are questions of learner voice: What can you add to that response? This is the invitation. It signals that every voice matters. It's also a beautiful echo of what we believe as Catholics — that the Spirit speaks through the community, not just the catechist at the front of the room.

Questions of Extension and Creativity

Finally for Hattie are questions of extension and creativity: Who has another perspective? Who sees this differently? After discussing a Scripture passage, try: Is there a character in this story we haven't talked about yet? What might the story look like from their point of view?

14. Make Questioning Playful

There are also wonderful ways to make questioning more interactive and even playful. Try using dice — number each face with a different question type and let the roll determine what kind of question a learner generates or answers. Or label the dice faces with the words how, when, why, what, what if, and who — then ask learners to form a question using whatever word they roll.

Conclusion

Of all the skills a catechist can develop, learning to ask a great question might be the most underrated. One well-crafted question — regardless of age group or topic — can turn a flat lesson into a living conversation.

Jesus himself was a master of the question. He questioned his followers. He questioned the Pharisees. He turned assumptions upside down with a single sentence. Questioning is not just a technique. For us, it's part of our vocation.

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Art of Questioning – Checklist

Questioning is an art that rewards attention, practice, and intention. Use this checklist when planning a session to make sure questions are woven through the beginning, middle, and end — not just tacked on.

1. Begin with a Question

Write your opening question before you plan anything else — it will shape everything that follows.

- ☐ Have I written an open-ended opening question (avoiding yes/no)?
- ☐ Does it use a “what if” or “why do you think” framing?
- ☐ Did I write this question before planning the rest of the lesson?
- ☐ Does it invite learners in, rather than talking at them?

Examples: “Has anyone ever felt like God was far away? What was that like?” “If you could ask Jesus one question, what would it be?” “What do you think prayer is for?”

2. Pause and Check

- ☐ Have I built in natural stopping points throughout the lesson (not just questions at the end)?
- ☐ Do I have a plan to ask learners to restate a new idea in their own words?
- ☐ Have I planned a question that connects new content to something learners already know?

Examples: “Has anyone seen a Baptism? What did you notice?” “Why do you think water is used and not something else?”

3. Name the Questions that Remain

- ☐ Have I resisted the urge to wrap everything up too neatly at the end?
- ☐ Do I have a plan to name open/unresolved questions explicitly?
- ☐ Am I prepared to model that great questions can outlast their answers?

4. Pay Attention to Learners’ Questions

- ☐ Do I have a way to jot down questions learners raise during the session?
- ☐ Will I review these afterward to notice gaps in understanding or signs of critical thinking?

5. Questions that Promote Learning (Hattie’s Question Types)

Aim to include a mix of these question types across the session — they focus on thinking, not just content.

- ☐ *Clarification and Elaboration:* Have I planned a “Why do you think that?” or “Can you say more?” follow-up?
- ☐ *Comparing and Organizing:* Have I planned a question connecting today’s content to something learned earlier?
- ☐ *Reasoning:* Have I planned a “How do you know that?” or “What makes you say that?” question?
- ☐ *Alternatives and Consequences:* Have I planned a “What if...?” or perspective-shifting question?
- ☐ *Thinking Progress:* Have I planned a closing question like “What’s one thing you want to try differently?”

- ☐ *Learner Voice*: Have I planned a moment to ask, “What can you add to that response?” or invite another voice in?
- ☐ *Extension and Creativity*: Have I planned a question inviting an alternate perspective (“Who sees this differently?”)?

6. Make Questioning Playful

- ☐ Have I considered using a question-type dice or similar playful tool?
- ☐ If using dice: are faces labeled with question types or prompt words (how, when, why, what, what if, who)?

Quick Pre-Session Question Planner

Use this table to plan key questions before the session begins.

Moment	Planned Question	Type/Purpose
Opening		
Mid-lesson pause 1		
Mid-lesson pause 2		
Closing		
Unresolved question to name		

Reflection

- ☐ Did my questions invite genuine thinking, not just right answers?
- ☐ Did I notice and record any striking learner questions?
- ☐ Did I leave space for open questions rather than closing every loop?

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Art of Questioning – Activities

Opening Question Activities

1. “One Big Question” Launch. Write one open-ended question on the board before learners arrive, connected to the day’s topic. Let it sit visibly as they settle in, then open discussion with it directly.

- *Children:* Keep it concrete and personal (“Has anyone ever felt like God was far away?”).
- *Adolescents:* Let the question be genuinely unresolved (“Can you love someone you’ve never seen?”).

2. “If You Could Ask Jesus...” Before a Gospel story, ask: “If you could ask Jesus one question, what would it be?” Collect answers on slips of paper or aloud, then revisit them after the story to see if any were answered.

3. Picture Wondering. Show an image tied to the topic and ask only: “What do you wonder when you look at this?” Let responses lead into the lesson rather than announcing the topic first.

Mid-Lesson Pause Activities

4. “Say It Your Way” Check-In. After introducing a new idea, pause and ask learners to restate it in their own words to a partner before continuing. Surfaces understanding (or confusion) immediately.

5. “What Did You Notice?” Pause. After a story, ritual description, or video clip, pause and ask: “What did you notice? What surprised you?” before moving to explanation.

- *Children:* Use very concrete prompts (“Why do you think water is used and not something else?”).
- *Adolescents:* Push toward interpretation (“Why do you think the author included that detail?”).

6. Connection Pause. Stop mid-lesson and ask: “How does this connect to something we already talked about?” Builds the habit of linking new content to prior learning rather than treating each week as isolated.

Thinking-Focused Question Activities (Hattie-Style)

Rotate through these question types across a session to deepen thinking, not just recall.

7. “Say More” Round. Whenever a learner gives a short answer, follow up with: “Can you say more about that?” or “Why do you think that?” Make this a consistent habit rather than an occasional prompt.

8. Compare-the-Stories Match-Up. Present two stories learners have studied (e.g., the Prodigal Son and Zacchaeus) and ask: “How are these similar? How are they different?” Works well as a partner or small-group task.

9. “How Do You Know?” Challenge. When a learner makes a claim (“The Eucharist is the most important sacrament”), respond with genuine curiosity: “What makes you say that?” Not to challenge them, but to strengthen their reasoning.

10. “What If...?” Rewrite. Take a familiar parable and ask: “What if the Good Samaritan had kept walking? How would the story change?” Invites moral reasoning and perspective-taking.

- *Children:* Keep the alternate scenario simple and concrete.

- *Adolescents*: Push into harder “what if” territory — moral gray areas, modern parallels.

11. “One Thing to Try” Closer. At the end of a session on prayer or practice, ask: “Based on everything we’ve shared today, what’s one thing you want to try differently?”

12. “Add to That” Relay. After a learner answers, ask the group: “Who can add to that?” before moving on. Signals that every voice matters and builds on itself, echoing how the Spirit speaks through the whole community.

13. Untold Perspective. After discussing a Scripture passage, ask: “Is there a character in this story we haven’t talked about yet? What might it look like from their point of view?”

- *Children*: Use very familiar characters (a bystander, a sibling in a parable).
- *Adolescents*: Try more marginal or overlooked characters for a bigger stretch.

Playful Questioning Activities

14. Question-Type Dice. Number the faces of a die 1-6, each tied to a different question type (clarification, comparison, reasoning, alternatives, thinking progress, voice/extension). Learners roll and generate or answer a question of that type.

15. Prompt-Word Dice. Label die faces with: how, when, why, what, what if, who. Learners roll and must form a question about the day’s topic using that word.

- *Children*: Do this as a whole group with you modeling first.
- *Teens*: Let small groups run this independently and share their best question with the class.

16. Question Swap. Have each learner write one question they still have about the topic on a card. Shuffle and redistribute so each person tries to answer someone else’s question — or simply sit with it if no one has an answer.

Naming What Remains

17. “Questions We’re Still Sitting With” Wall. Keep an ongoing poster or list where unresolved questions from any session get written and displayed. Revisit occasionally — sometimes an answer emerges weeks later, sometimes it doesn’t, and that’s named as okay.

18. Question Journal. Keep a running log (yours or theirs) of striking questions learners raise. Periodically share a few back with the group: “Someone asked this a few weeks ago — I’ve been thinking about it. Has anyone else?” For *Adolescents*: Especially effective — it signals their questions are taken seriously over time, not just in the moment.

Age-Adaptation Note

Younger children need questions that are concrete, personal, and paired with something to see, touch, or point to. Teens are ready for questions that stay genuinely open — moral complexity, unresolved tension, and real perspective-taking — and often disengage if questions feel like they have an obvious “right” answer. In both cases, the goal is the same: questions that invite thinking, not just recall, and that model faith as something explored together rather than delivered from the front of the room.