

Sequencing Questions

In the classroom some of the most productive discussions come from analytical questions. For example, faculty may assign a reading and ask a starting question such as "What do you think the author was trying to say in this paper?"

Many students, especially in introductory classes, may be unfamiliar with that model of discourse and must be led into it. One successful ploy is to ask questions in an ascending hierarchy.

1. Ask for an *affective* response that relates to their feelings. For example: What was your reaction to this reading? Did you like it?
2. Build into *descriptive* questions that require passages from the readings or descriptions that support the affective response. For example: What did the author say that made you feel that way? What examples or arguments was the author using?
3. Finally, ask *analytic* questions. For example: Why do you think the author made this statement? What problem do you think the author is addressing? Do you think the author makes a convincing case? Why or why not?

Instructors are so familiar with their topic and analytic discourse that they may forget where students struggle. As a result, instructors sometimes forget to enable students to come to terms with their feelings about a topic before reaching into abstract aspects. The opportunity to explore emotions helps students shift into an analytic perspective.