

PIE Coffee Hour & Teaching Workshop

Question-Handling for International TAs

Presenters: Kate Hill, FSU Department of Biology, Elyssa Fenton, FSU Department of Spanish and Larry Bodkin, FSU School of Communication

Table Discussion #1

What questions have you experienced in the classroom that you did not anticipate?

What questions have students asked you where you were unsure of an appropriate response?



Handling
questions when
you don't
understand the
question

What to do
when you don't
know the
answer

Managing
potential
questions and
scenarios

The question-
handling
environment

Overview/Objectives



Handling
questions when
you don't
understand the
question

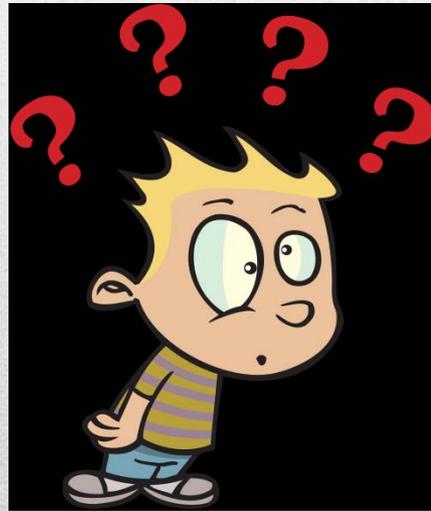
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Handling questions you don't understand!





Do you understand the question?

- You don't understand their speech.
--Accent or speed
- You miss a key word or two.
- You don't understand the essence of their question / what exactly they are trying to ask.





Strategies for understanding the question:

- Option 1:
 - Ask the student to rephrase the question.

How would you ask students to rephrase questions?



When you still cannot understand the question:

- Option 2:
 - Ask another student to rephrase the question for you.

How would you ask another student to rephrase the question for you?



When you still aren't completely sure if you understood the question:

- Option 3:
 - Attempt to restate your understanding of the question and ask the student if you are correct.

This strategy is an effective listening strategy that can be used for any exchange.



Handling questions when you don't understand the question

What to do when you don't know the answer

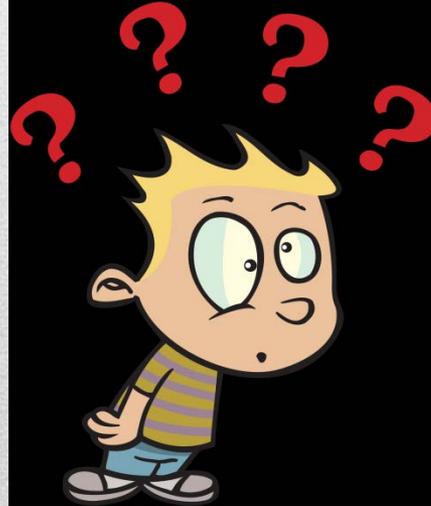
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What to do when you don't know the answer





Not every question requires
an immediate answer

Don't be panicked!

You need to
know how to
handle your class
and students.

There are many
good ways of
answering
questions!

Handling Questions



Option 1:

That's a very good question! But, honestly, I don't know the answer right now. Could you email that question to me? I need some time to think about it. I will get back to you soon.

- In your culture, do you feel comfortable to say “I don't know”?
- Make sure you do get back to your students with an answer.

What to say when you don't know the answer...



Option 2:

Does anyone know the answer? I want to hear what others think.

Option 3:

I like your question, but I've never thought about that before.
I will let you know.

What to say when you don't
know the answer...

- It is OK to be honest with your students if you don't have the answer right away.
- It is OK to ask for help.
- It is important to always get back to your students with an answer.

Cultural Differences



Handling questions when you don't understand the question

What to do when you don't know the answer

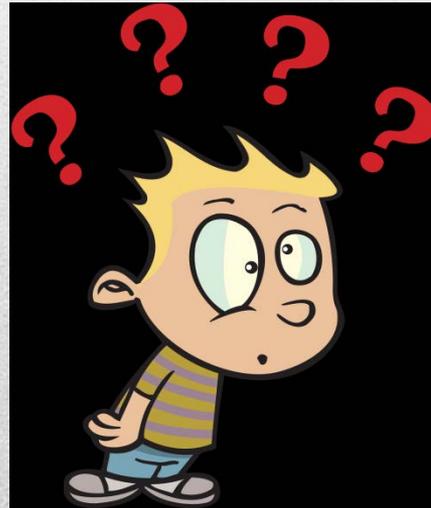
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Managing Potential Questions and Scenarios



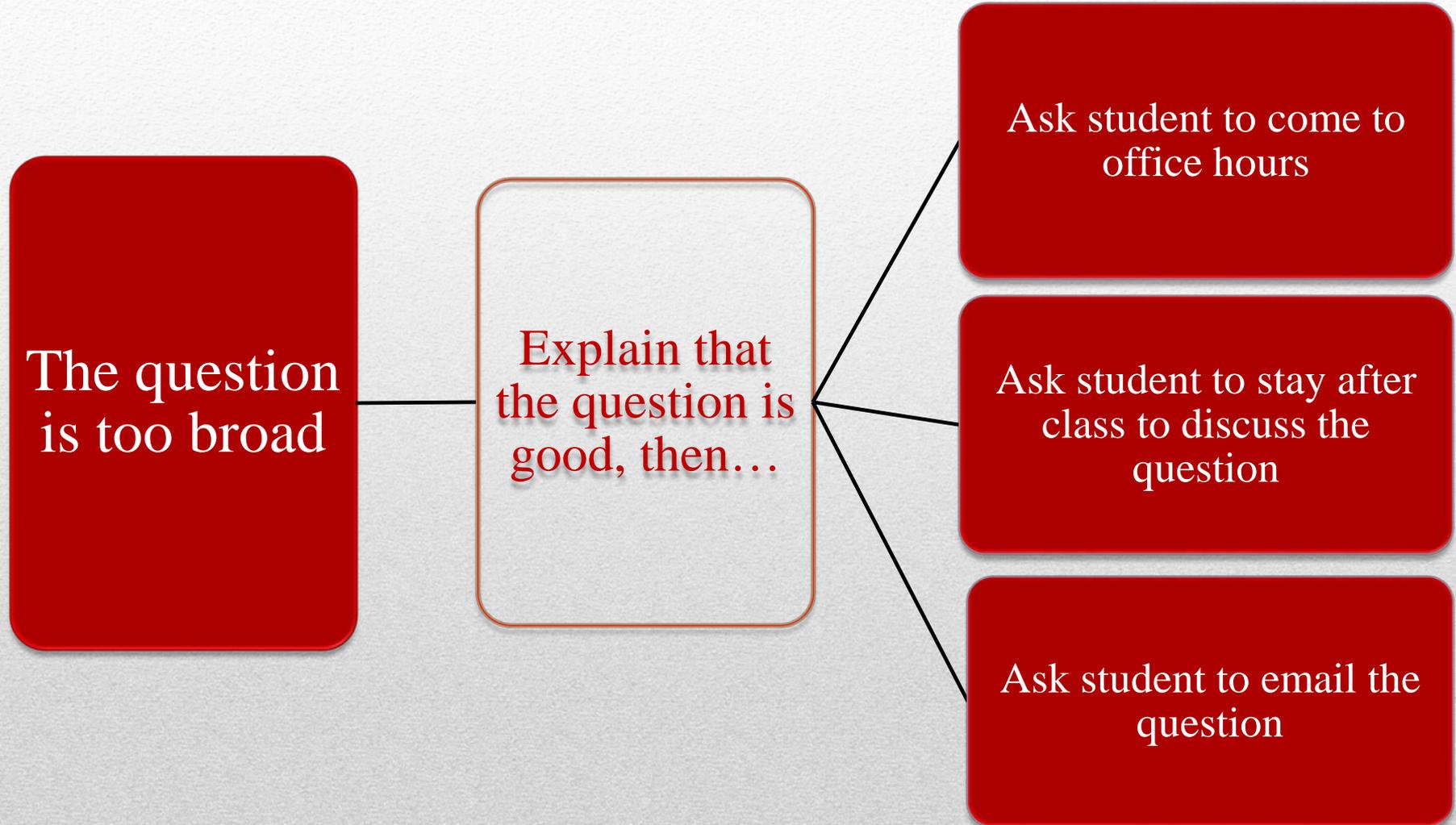


Off-Topic Questions

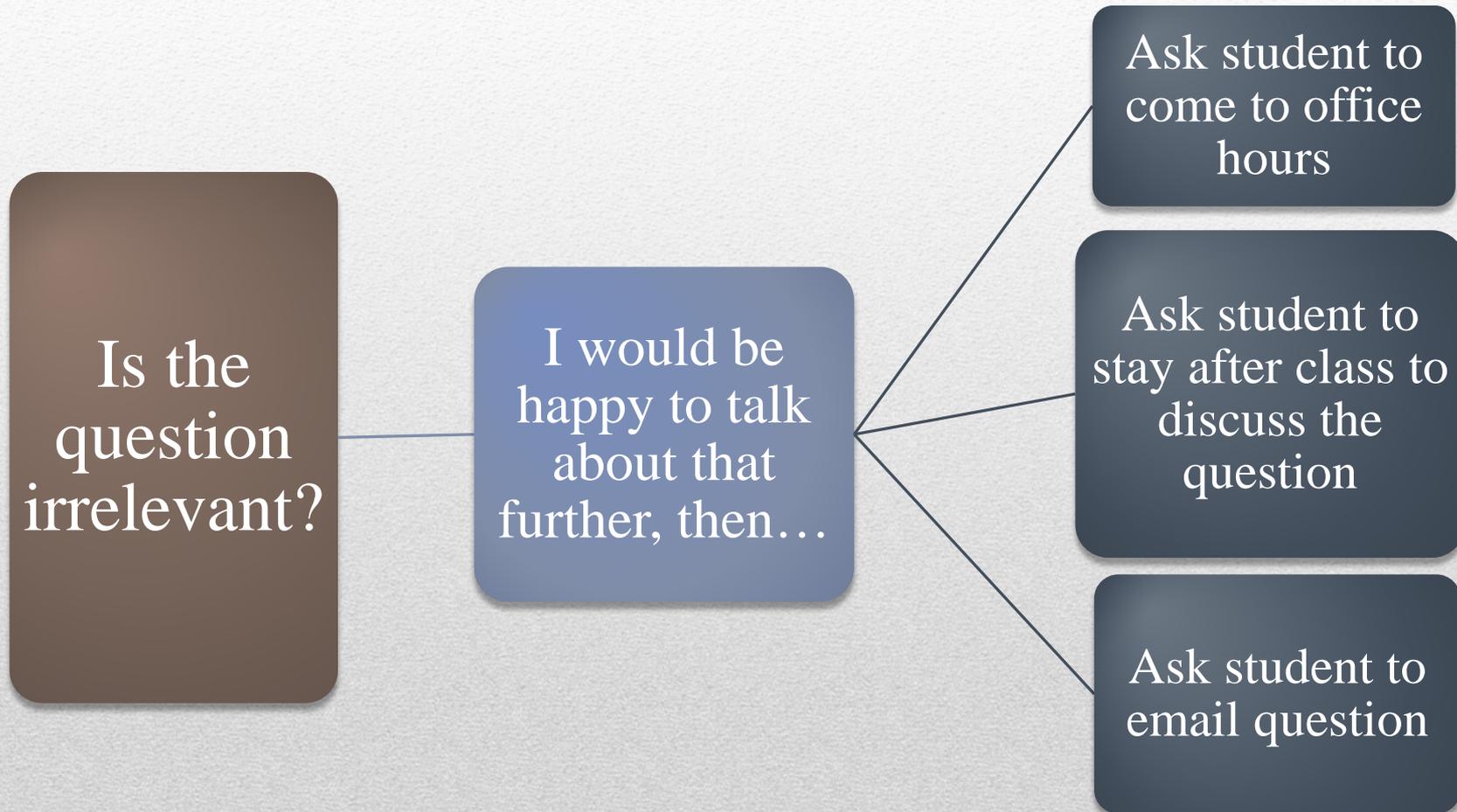
- Questions that are good, but beyond the scope of the class or the day's lecture (**too broad**)
- Questions that are **irrelevant**
- Questions or comments that are even **offensive**
- Questions that interfere with other students' learning

How do we navigate and then deflect these questions?

Navigating the Question



Navigating the Question





Navigating the Question

The question is
offensive

Explain that the question is
off topic and will not be
discussed





Coffee & Pie Break!



Grade Disputes

Class Content
Misunderstandings

Student Project
Dynamics

Disruptive or Off-
Task Students

Scenarios

Grade Dispute

After passing back papers in class, Joe confronts you angrily about his grade, “Why did you give me this score? This is so unfair! Now I can’t get into law school because you gave me a B in your class! My writing was perfect! Why did you take off so many points? You are ruining my life!”

What do you do?

Potential Solutions

- o Refer to rubric and provide specific comments on student work
- o 24-hour waiting period for discussing grades
- o No re-grades unless there was a significant error
- o Ask for guidance or assistance from other TAs or a faculty member
- o Suggest a private meeting
- o Use a 3rd party as a mediator

Class Content Misunderstanding

After explaining the Chi-Square statistical test to your students, many of the groups are struggling to complete the practice problems and are asking you questions.

You circulate around the classroom answering the questions, and then notice that the few groups who haven't asked questions are completing the problems incorrectly. You've already presented the new material, and you are not sure of a different way to explain Chi-Square tests that would make more sense to your students.

What do you do?

Potential Solutions

- o Do an example problem together with the class
- o Provide a tool to check for understanding during or at the end of class (Exit Ticket)
- o Provide practice problems and associated readings
- o Check for student comprehension
- o Ask students to articulate what they know about a particular topic & make notes about their responses
- o Speak with other TAs or faculty about developing an alternative method for presenting the content
- o Use Blackboard retention center to identify struggling students

Student Project Dynamics

One of your students, Emilia has just sent you an email:

Hello Connor,

I wanted to let you know that Glen isn't helping us at all with our group project. We told him to write the summary section of our report and he missed the deadline. He's making our group look bad when we need to present! Can you tell him to start working or at least take some points off his grade? It doesn't seem fair that Kennedy and I are left doing all of the work for a 3-person group project.

Sincerely,
Emilia

How do you respond?



Potential Solutions

- o Provide clear instructions regarding student responsibilities and roles in syllabus
- o Ask students to generate a “group contract” when groups are first assigned
- o Act as a listener, students can solve conflicts!
- o Ask students to offer solutions
- o Incorporate peer review of group participation
- o Set up a meeting either individually or with the group

Disruptive or Off-Task Students

Shannon has been sitting in the front row of your lecture class and keeps pulling out her phone and texting friends. Other students around her seem distracted and are trying to catch a glimpse of what she is writing in her text. You have moved closer to Shannon while lecturing, but her phone is still out!

What do you do?



Potential Solutions

- o Verify that the behavior is off-task before redirecting
- o Redirect and move away to prevent conflict
- o Use private feedback rather than public feedback for misbehavior
- o Be firm and fair
- o Ask to meet after class to prevent class disruption



Handling questions when you don't understand the question

Manage & navigate too-broad, irrelevant, and offensive questions

What to do when you don't know the answer

The question-handling environment

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Video Example

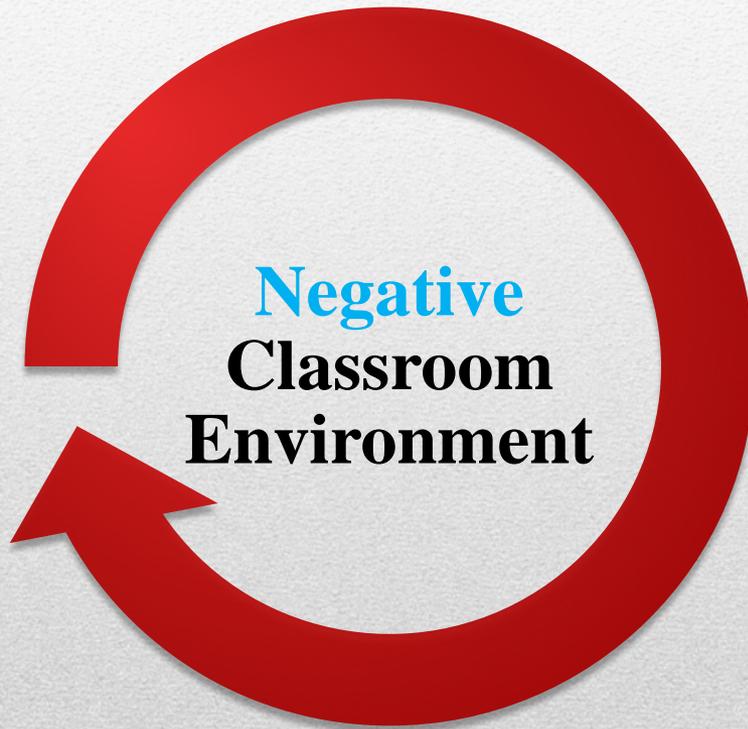


Fostering a Positive Environment



- Body Language
 - Equal Opportunity
 - Teacher Attitude
 - Time During Discussion
-

Fostering a Negative Environment



- Body Language
 - Equal Opportunity
 - Teacher Attitude
 - Time During Discussion
-



Takeaways

BODY LANGUAGE

Make eye contact

Face your students

Be approachable



EQUAL OPPORTUNITY

Answer a variety

Call on different students

Reiterate office hours



TEACHER ATTITUDE

Reputation

Attention to students

Positive attitude



DISCUSSION TIME

Beginning of class

During class

End of class

