Teaching For Success®

Quick Answers

Q: What I Can I Do to Stimulate Creative Thinking?

A: Preposterous Question Exercise

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Use preposterous questions, they can be very effective in the classroom or online. Specifically, I have used absurd, excessive, fantastical, and outrageous questions in many of my psychology classes. For example, in my psychology courses, I have asked the following preposterous questions to stimulate creative thinking:

- What if we were immortal?
- What if we never needed to sleep?
- What if your could not fail at anything you tried?
- What if divorce was illegal?

Well, you get the idea. To start, divide your students in to small groups and tell them to thoroughly consider the question including all social, political, economic, psychological, biological etc. issues that they can generate.

Allow the groups to work for about ten minutes and then come back as a whole and share their responses. This activity could also be extended into a writing assignment. In general, the more preposterous the question, the better. The questions also work well if you can start with one question and then ask the students to completely switch gears by asking an opposite question. For example, what if puberty began for all children at four years old? Then, what if puberty began for all children at twenty-one years old?

Use preposterous questions to:

- Introduce a learning topic; students love to wrap their minds around such unusual class questions.
- Engage your students in critical thinking, analyzing cause and effect, assessing multiple possibilities, comparing options, and identifying the ambiguities in many issues.
- Build creative thinking skills by answering an instructor generated list or questions created during a small group mind-storming list generation exercise.
- Generate cooperative learning, brainstorming and small group or dyad interaction.
- Highlight the larger implications to issues under discussion.
- Challenge students to demonstrate creative integration of learned knowledge across curricula.