

Blank Levels of Questioning — Handout for Teachers & Teaching Assistants



4

Who Developed This?

Dr Marion Blank was a developmental psychologist who studied how teachers use language and how children develop understanding through questions. She identified a **four-level framework of questioning** that moves from *concrete* to *abstract* language and reasoning.

This framework is widely used in:

- Early years / primary classroom discourse
 - Speech, language and communication support (SLCN)
 - Reading comprehension and thinking skills activities
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What Are the Four Blank Levels?

Level 1 — Matching Perception (Naming)

★ *Concrete and here-and-now*

These questions focus on what the child can *see, hear or touch*. Responses may be short or non-verbal (e.g., pointing).

Example Questions

- **What is this?**
- **Find one like this.**
- **What did you hear?**
- **Who is that?**

Use when: Introducing vocabulary and foundational naming skills. Great for EYFS / KS1.

Level 2 — Selective Analysis of Perception (Describing)

★ *Detail & description*

Children describe, compare, classify or notice features (size, colour, function) of something familiar.

Example Questions

- **Describe what is happening.**
- **What size/colour is it?**
- **How are these different?**
- **What can you do with it?**

Use when: Encouraging descriptive language and observation skills.

Level 3 — Reordering Perception (Retelling / Sequencing)

★ *Thinking beyond what's visible*

Involves storytelling, sequencing, generalising, predicting and integrating information.

Example Questions

- **What will happen next?**
- **Tell the story.**
- **How are these the same?**
- **What could they say?**

Use when: Building narrative, prediction and reasoning skills.

Level 4 — Reasoning About Perception (Justifying)

★ *Abstract thinking & problem solving*

Children need to use reasoning, explanation, inference and past experience.

Example Questions

- **What will happen if...?**
- **Why did it happen?**
- **How can we tell?**
- **Why shouldn't we do that?**

Use when: Stretching students toward deeper thinking and justifying answers.

Why Use Blank Levels?

✓ Helps adults *match questions to a child's language level* for better comprehension.

✓ Encourages *progression from concrete to abstract thinking*.

✓ Useful across **all curriculum subjects** and not just reading.

✓ Supports children with **SEND, EAL, and language development needs**.

Free Videos and webpages

Here are videos you can show staff or use in training:

[What are Blank Levels? - Resource Library - Sheffield Children's NHS Foundation Trust](#)

Free Printable & Online Resources

Free Handouts & Charts

[Blanks Levels of Questioning - Speech Pathology - Twinkl](#)

✓ **Twinkl Blank Levels Quick Reference Cards** – overview with example questions (login required for free downloads).

✓ **TeachersPayTeachers Free Blank Levels Resources** – some free printables and themed activities.

Classroom Activities

✓ **Blank Levels Activity Packs** (minibeasts/transport/farm etc.) – questions by level with visual scenes (Twinkl).

Tips for Teachers & TAs

- ✦ **Start at the child's level:** Ask a Level 1 or 2 question first.
 - ✦ **Use visuals:** Pictures or objects help anchor questions.
 - ✦ **Wait time:** Give children plenty of time to think.
 - ✦ **Scaffold up:** If a question is too hard, break it into smaller bits.
 - ✦ **Encourage answers:** Reinforce all attempts and model expanded answers.
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Quick Question Planner (copy for staff)

Level	Question Focus	Example
1	Naming & matching	What is this?
2	Describing & comparing	How are these different?
3	Story & sequencing	What happens next?
4	Reasoning & explaining	Why did that happen?

❏ Summary

Blank Levels of Questioning is a **research-based framework** developed by Dr Marion Blank to help adults use *language intentionally* and support children's comprehension and reasoning skills. Use this structure to **differentiate questioning**, help learners *progress linguistically*, and deepen understanding in all subjects.