

# Better Questions Protocol:

## Inquiry-Driven Practice for Midyear Strategy Selection

### Purpose

Marzano Research adapted this protocol from our Inquiry-Driven Practice professional learning suite, including *Teacher as Researcher*, which equips educators to use an action research approach to trying instructional strategies. Designed to be used independently or as part of a deeper inquiry process, this protocol helps educators focus midyear instructional decisions by clarifying the instructional problem to solve before selecting an evidence-based strategy to try in the classroom.

### When to Use

- Midyear, when instruction feels stalled or uneven
- Before adopting a new instructional strategy
- During PLCs, coaching conversations, or individual planning

### Step 1: Name the Instructional Problem

Focus on the problem, not the solution.

#### Prompt

What are students *not doing* that matters for learning right now (or for upcoming units)?

#### Examples

- Students attempt tasks but abandon them quickly
- Students answer questions but do not explain reasoning
- Students participate unevenly in discussion

## Step 2: Clarify the Target Outcome

Specify what improvement would look like.

### Prompt

If this improves, how will I know? What will students do differently?

### Examples

- Respond with greater accuracy or higher-quality work
- Use academic language more consistently and precisely
- Explain their thinking with clearer reasoning
- Monitor their own progress

## Step 3: Examine Current Instruction

Surface what may already be working.

### Prompt

What am I currently doing that might already support this outcome?

### Examples

- Existing routines or scaffolds
- Informal strategies
- Practices that could influence results even without change

## Step 4: Form a Hypothesis

Select a strategy with a clear beginning and end, where the outcome can be observed within a 2–4 week timeframe. (For evidence-based strategy ideas, visit the [Marzano Research Strategy Studio](#).)

### Prompt

If I use [specific instructional strategy], will [specific outcome] improve for [target group of students]?

### Examples

- If I use quizzes and games to provide additional exposure to the material during each class, will long-term retention improve for my grade 7 math students?
- If I use closed-book quizzes after presentation of materials to provide an opportunity for students to check their own learning, will scores on the end-of-unit test improve for my grade 9 history class?

## Step 5: Check for Practical Fit

Confirm that the strategy is testable and feasible within a 2–4 week timeframe.

### Quick Check

- Is the outcome measurable in this timeframe?
- Does the strategy involve clear steps for students?
- What is my current level of competence with this strategy?
- Can I implement this with reasonable fidelity?

### Examples

The strategy of implementing peer tutoring requires extended training, stable routines, and repeated cycles of feedback before results are visible, making outcomes difficult to measure within 2–4 weeks and limiting my ability to implement it with fidelity, so I will choose a different strategy for now.

The strategy of using worked examples followed by guided practice is likely to produce measurable outcomes within 2–4 weeks, provides clear steps for students, aligns with my current level of instructional skill, and can be implemented consistently within existing lessons, so this is an appropriate strategy to test.

## Output of the Protocol

By the end of this protocol, you will have:

- A specific instructional strategy to try.
- A clearly defined outcome you expect to improve and how it will be observed.
- A target group of students for whom the strategy is intended.

## Next Steps (Optional)

- Try the strategy informally and reflect on student response.
- Use a short pre/post check to see if the outcome changed.
- Conduct a structured inquiry cycle to strengthen the evidence.

*This protocol is intentionally designed to be useful on its own. More structured inquiry, tools, or collaboration can deepen its usefulness, but are not required to begin.*