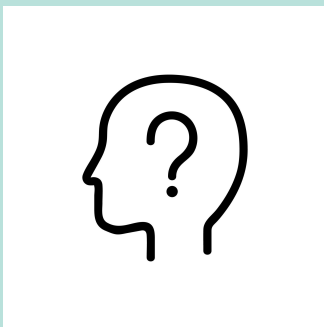


# So What'Cha, What'cha, What'cha Want?

## Teaching Learners to Ask Their Own Questions



Presented by  
**Ali Buchanan**, ESOL and  
Communications Specialist  
**Virginia Adult Learning Resource  
Center (VALRC)**

**Literacy Volunteers of  
Charlottesville/Albemarle  
Mini-Conference**  
June 13, 2026



# About Me

- M.Ed. in TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages)
- ESOL and Communications Specialist at the VALRC
- Tutor and Citizenship Teacher at LVCA
- Former ESL instructor at TJACE, former ESL tutor at Speak! Language Center
- Former middle/high school French teacher
- Part of the Right Question Institute Strategy Pilot Project (Adult Ed) this past spring
- Avid reader, lover of travel, baker



*“If you are free, you need to free somebody else. If you have some power, then your job is to empower somebody else.”*

*- Toni Morrison*



# Virginia Adult Learning Resource Center (VALRC)

**Our Vision:** That the field of adult education and literacy will have the best available tools and training to help adult learners build a better future.

A division of the Center for Teacher Leadership at Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU). We strengthen Virginia's adult education and literacy system through professional development, resources, and collaborative projects.



# Right Question Institute: The Question Formulation Technique

**The Question Formulation Technique (QFT)** is a rigorous, scaffolded protocol that facilitates learning how to ask better questions. The QFT was created by the Right Question Institute (RQI).



# Connecting the QFT to Adult Education

When learners formulate their own questions...

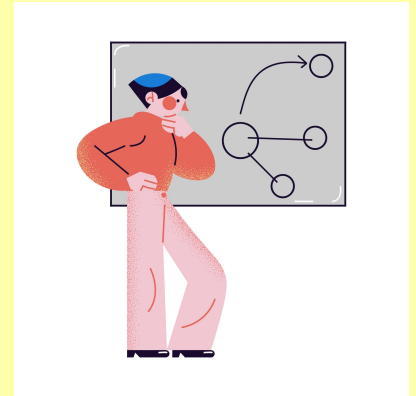
- They strengthen their ability to think and learn independently
- They have a stronger sense of agency
- They can advocate and make their voice heard
- They will be able to learn more deeply in the classroom



# Using the QFT

Students learn to:

- ★ **Produce** their own questions
- ★ **Improve** their questions
- ★ **Strategize** on how to use their questions
- ★ **Reflect** on what they have learned and how they learned it



# Rules for Producing Questions

1. Ask questions
2. Follow the rules
  - a. Ask as many questions as you can
  - b. Do not stop to answer, judge, or discuss
  - c. Write down every question exactly as it was stated
  - d. Change any statements into questions
3. Number the questions

# Question Focus

The doctor may be changing your medication.

- *Please write this statement at the top of your paper*
- *Remember: number the questions. Follow the rules.*

# After the questions...

## Improve questions

- Go down your list of questions and label each with a “C” for **closed-ended** or “O” for **open-ended**.
  - **Closed-ended**: can be answered with “yes” or “no” or with one word.
  - **Open-ended**: require an explanation and cannot be answered with “yes”, “no”, or one word.
- Practice changing your questions to get different information.
- Change one of each:
  - Closed → Open
  - Open → Closed

# After the questions...

## Strategize

- Choose your three most important questions for you. Mark them with an “X.” or draw a star.
- Why did you choose those three questions?

## Reflect

- What did you learn?
- How can you use it?

# Tips for Facilitating the QFT

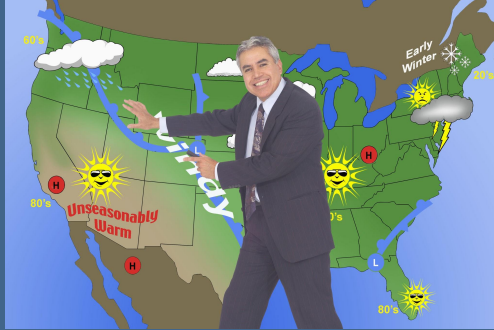
- Introduce the process as quickly as possible
- Do not explain the topic, question focus, or give examples of questions
  - Do not model the exercise
- Learners should ask the questions, but should not answer them during this exercise.
- Make sure to leave time for **reflection**. What did they learn? How can they use it?
- One on one: participant can write down questions or you can do it for them. **Write what is stated exactly.**
- Try the QFT like this first. You should do a reflection on what you can modify for your learner the next time. For example, you could introduce some common questioning words for pre-teaching.

# Ways to Use the QFT...

- Background knowledge before a new unit
  - QFocus: “Your landlord is raising your rent.”
  - Use this before a housing unit or a unit about daily tasks.
- An aid for reading comprehension
  - Read a News for You article or Newsela article. Have your learner use the QFT to come up with questions about the reading.
  - QFocus: Recount important points about this reading.
- Conduct an interview
  - QFocus: You need to ask a fellow learner about themselves.

# Ways to Use the QFT...

- Use a visual →
  - Qfocus: Your qfocus is the visual. See what questions your learner can ask.



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# Question Focus Design

## Question Focus

- Can be a statement, a visual, audio, anything that will prompt people to ask questions
- Only requirement is that the question focus should not be a question
- One key tip for an effective question focus is that **the simpler the better**



# Question Focus Design

## Developing a Question Focus

1. Name your purpose in using the QFT
  - a. To prepare a student for a particular life situation
  - b. To help a student problem solve
2. Write down 2-5 ideas for a question focus
  - a. You have passed your citizenship interview
  - b. You are eligible for the U.S. citizenship test
3. Choose one of the ideas
  - a. You are eligible for the U.S. citizenship test
4. Revise your question focus
  - a. It can help to problematize your question focus : you can add something that shows that it is a problem. For example, what do I need to do for my citizenship test? How can I be ready?
  - b. Final QFocus: You want to prepare for your U.S. citizenship test.

# The Right Question Institute

- Create a free account to access the templates, more materials, videos, webinars.
- New Community of Practice Program - starting end of summer/early September.
  - Interested? Contact Theresa Sladek ([tsladek@literacymn.org](mailto:tsladek@literacymn.org)) and David Rosen ([djrosen123@gmail.com](mailto:djrosen123@gmail.com)) for more information about the program.



# Tutoring Resources Collection

Find resources for your lessons with the [VALRC's Tutoring Resources Collection.](#)

Have a great resource you want to share?  
Email me or [vdesk@vcu.edu](mailto:vdesk@vcu.edu) to add it to the collection!

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# Contact

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