

Essential Questions Primer Assignment

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1. Essential Questions help to focus learning, contain big ideas and foster critical thinking. I like the characteristic checklist on the ASCD website that showed that EQs should have most or all of these characteristics:

1. Is *open-ended*; that is, it typically will not have a single, final, and correct answer.
2. Is *thought-provoking* and *intellectually engaging*, often sparking discussion and debate.
3. Calls for *higher-order thinking*, such as analysis, inference, evaluation, prediction. It cannot be effectively answered by recall alone.
4. Points toward *important, transferable ideas* within (and sometimes across) disciplines.
5. Raises *additional questions* and sparks further inquiry.
6. Requires *support* and *justification*, not just an answer.
7. *Recur*s over time; that is, the question can and should be revisited again and again.

Unit Questions break down an essential question into parts that helps the students answer the essential question. They are also open-ended and foster critical thinking but are not as big. They might be thought of as subcategory questions of the original essential question.

Content Questions, on the other hand tend to be closed, with one right answer, and are fact-based. Students would synthesize information gleaned from content questions to answer unit questions and then essential questions.

2. Examples of each for EdTech for Grade 5 Math

- Essential - What can I, as a teacher, do to ensure that the use of technology in my classroom has a positive impact on instruction and learning?
- Unit - How can I find tech tools that will transform learning in my lessons on fractions?
- Content - Using [AdaptedMind](#) (2.0 resource) - what will my lesson plan be to enhance my unit on fractions and create learner engagement in the topic?

3. The relationship between the above questions:

- The essential question is broad and open-ended and gets the teacher thinking about new and different ways to help student learning.
- The unit question is a subset of the essential question. It leads the learner in a direction. It too, is open-ended but is narrowed down to a specific topic. There is more than one answer to this question.
- The content question has specific answers, but leads the learner to understand and answer the unit and essential questions.

4. Essential Questions online resources

1. [ASCD Website](#) - from a book called: Essential Questions, Chapter 1, by Jay McTighe and Grant Wiggins

This website gives definitions of many types of questions, examples of essential questions in content areas as well as other types of questions, shows validity of and reasons for essential questions and more.

2. [What are Essential Questions](#) - Helps with how to make EQs and has a development of EQs checklist.

3. [NJ Standards Clarification Project](#) (and its homepage [NJDOE Academic and Professional Standards](#)) - Connects State standards to Big Idea, EQs and Enduring Questions

4. [Essential and Unit Questions](#) - assists with the relationship between these

5. [Intel > Curriculum Framing Questions](#) - shows definitions for Essential, Unit, and Content questions, though of questionable scholarlyness.

5. Achievement - One way to study the effects of achievement between traditional text and test (which we do not have for teachers) and an essential question led lesson would be observation. Are the teachers actively engaged in learning how to enhance lessons with technology? Are they using technology in a transformational way in their classroom? Then, observing the implementation of what they (the teacher) has learned and the engagement of students in the “before” and “after” scenarios would show the difference in achievement of the essential question led lesson. It is difficult to assess teachers on the effect of their learning without looking at how their students achieve.