

## PowerPoint Slides

### **What if a Student Asks a Question I Can't Answer?**

Presented by:

**Dr. Therese Huston**





### **Presenter Bio:**

**Therese Huston** is the founding Director of the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning at Seattle University. She had a great time writing her first book, *Teaching What You Don't Know* and is eager to write the sequel. Her other published works focus mainly on faculty mentoring, morale, and retention. Therese earned her Ph.D. in cognitive psychology at Carnegie Mellon University and her B.A. in psychology from Carleton College. Each spring, she facilitates a writing retreat on the scholarship of teaching and learning, and she regularly consults with faculty and administrators to identify sustainable ways to improve what we do as teachers and learners. She is on the Board of Directors of the Professional and Organizational Development network in higher education, and she teaches a course in neuropsychology.



### **Need tech help?**

Please call our Customer Service department at (800) 433-0499 ext.2 or email them at [support@magnapubs.com](mailto:support@magnapubs.com).

©2010 Magna Publications Inc.

All rights reserved. It is unlawful to duplicate, transfer, or transmit this program in any manner without written consent from Magna Publications.

The information contained in this online seminar is for professional development purposes but does not substitute for legal advice. Specific legal advice should be discussed with a professional attorney.

To make this program available to all your faculty and staff, contact Magna's Customer Service department at 1-800-433-0499 ext. 2 and ask about our Campus Access License.

# What If a Student Asks a Question I Can't Answer?

Dr. Therese Huston

1

---

---

---

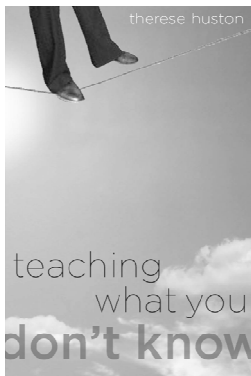
---

---

---

---

---



Dr. Therese Huston  
Seattle University  
*Teaching What You Don't Know.*  
(2009).  
Cambridge, MA: Harvard  
University Press

2

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Outcomes

By the end of seminar, you will have

- Briefly reviewed research on why it's important to encourage questions
- Concrete language for responding to questions you can't answer

3

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Outcomes

Participants will also

- Consider the hidden negative implications of certain strategies
- Identify better alternatives

4

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Preparations



- Please grab a pen or pencil and some paper.

5

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Common Problem

- A student asks a question you can't answer
  - Can happen in your area of expertise
  - Certainly happens outside of your expertise
  - *How do you respond?*

6

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Why is it stressful?

- Students expect / pay me to know
- Vulnerable or under-prepared ("Is the answer in the reading?")
- Over-prepared
- Challenge to your credibility

7

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Credibility Check-in

- Rate each statement on a scale of 1 to 5
  - 5 = Do this always, in every class
  - 1 = Never do this

8

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Credibility Check-in Part 1

### Questions

1. I regularly ask students if they have questions or understand my explanations
2. I attempt to answer all students' questions
3. I give clear expectations & unchanging answers to questions re: course policies & graded work

(COOK, 2002) 9

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Credibility Check-in Part 2

### Other credibility sources

4. I show up on time for class
5. I follow all course policies outlined in the syllabus
6. I explain difficult concepts in terms students understand
7. I am highly familiar with the text
8. I remind students of upcoming due dates

(COOK, 2002)

10

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Three-Part Strategy for Handling Questions

- **Step 1: Clarify**

Huston (2009)

11

---

---

---

---

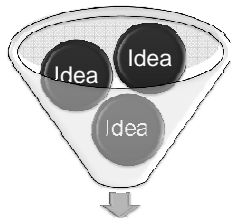
---

---

---

---

## Clarify



Single confusing question with multiple parts

(Adapted from ADUBATO, n.d.)

12

---

---

---

---

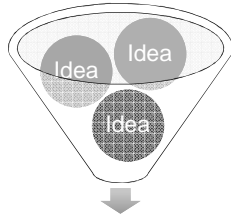
---

---

---

---

## Restate



More answerable question

(Adapted from ADUBATO, n.d.)

13

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Three-Part Strategy for Handling Questions

### Step 2: Acknowledge

- "Great question"
- "I'm so glad you asked that"
- "David, that's an interesting question, but it takes us off-topic. Can I return to it later?"

(Huston, 2009)

14

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Three-Part Strategy for Handling Questions

### • Step 3: Answer

(Huston, 2009)

15

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Answering – Several Approaches

- Ask the class the answer
- Go meta
  - Ask “How should one answer a question like this?”
- Offer an educated guess
- Offer to find an answer
- Admit you don’t know

(DAI, 2010; HUSTON, 2009) 16

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Admitting You Don’t Know

- That’s a great question. No one has ever asked me that.
- I believe the literature is mixed on that....
- To be honest, I haven’t read that literature.

(HUSTON, 2009) 17

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Other Phrases

- I’m not sure of the answer, and I don’t want to lead you astray. Let me think about it.
- That’s a very precise question, and it deserves a precise answer. Let me get back to you on it.

(HUSTON, 2009) 18

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---



## Do, Don't, & Maybe

Do	Don't	Maybe
Confirm you've answered the question	Get angry with students for asking	Ask a student to research the answer
Let students know if you were wrong	Fake it	
Ask "What are your questions?" instead of "Does anyone have any..."		

19

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

"What if students discover I'm not perfect?  
... I don't try to be perfect, not anymore.  
They won't learn better if I'm perfect.  
They will learn better if they feel  
comfortable asking questions."

- *Codrina Popescu*  
Ursinus College, PA

20

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Conclusions

- Create an environment where students ask questions
- It's ok if you don't know
- Don't pretend you're certain when you're not

21

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Thank you for your time

We would like to hear from you! Please consider completing an evaluation form found at [www.surveymonkey.com/mentorhuston](http://www.surveymonkey.com/mentorhuston)

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---