

Blank Levels

What are they?

Blank Levels are based on research conducted by Blank, Rose and Berlin (1978) about the understanding of levels of questioning. There are four levels of questions which range from very simple, concrete questions to more complex, abstract questions. It is important for adults to ask questions at the right level for a child in order to support the child's success and comprehension development.

Level One: Questions relate to the immediate environment and require concrete thinking. The language matches what the child can see, hear, touch etc. Examples include



- "Is it a —?" (yes/no response)
- 'What's this?' – adult points to the picture or object
- 'Show me the...' 'Where is the...'
- 'Find another one like this'
- 'What did you see/hear/touch?' (indicating something in the *immediate* past)

Level Two: The child is encouraged to think about parts or details of the objects or situation. These questions involve some analysis such as classifying/ grouping objects, describing and understanding object functions.



- Completing a sentence e.g. 'you sleep in a...', 'you water a garden with a....'
- Answer questions about something in the here and now e.g. 'Who?', 'what?', 'where?'
- Describing a scene (what's happening?)
- Identifying associated objects e.g. 'what goes with (e.g. a toothbrush)'
- Identifying other items in a category e.g. 'What else is (e.g. an animal)?'
- Identifying objects by function e.g. 'what do we (eat) with?' 'tell me what you do with it...'
- Attending to two characteristics e.g. 'find me one that is X and Y'
- Identifying how things are different e.g. What's the difference between (a car and a bike)?

Level Three: The child is required to use their own knowledge to make basic predictions, assume the role of another, or make generalizations. Children begin to think beyond the 'here and now'.

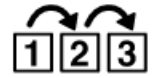
- Following a set of directions e.g. put the sand in the bucket, tap it down and turn it over.

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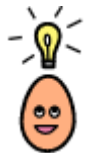


- Give an example which is conditional e.g. selecting an object or set of objects by exclusion (e.g. 'what else could they use to put plants in that is not made of plastic?' / 'find another animal that has no legs')
- Identifying similarities e.g. how are these the same?
- Arranging a set of pictures into a sequence
- Telling a story or describe an even from a sequence of pictures
- Summarising the story/event in one sentence e.g. 'what have you done?'
- Predicting e.g. 'what will happen next?'
- Predicting what someone may say/feel e.g. 'how does the boy feel?'
- Defining words e.g. 'what does x mean?'



Level Four: This is the most abstract level. These questions involve problem solving, predictions, solutions and explanations. They require the child to use their own knowledge and to think about what may, might, could and would happen and justify the reason for thinking this.

- Justifying a prediction or decision e.g. 'why will the plant grow'
- Identifying the cause of an event e.g. 'what made it happen?'
- Solving a problem e.g. 'what could you do?'
- Solving a problem from another's view point e.g. 'what could she do?'
- Making an inference drawn from an observation e.g. 'How can you tell that it's old?'
- Explaining the means to a goal e.g. 'Why should we use that?'
- Explaining why something can't be done e.g. 'Why can't we grow a plant without water?'
- Explaining the logic of compound words (why is this called...?)



How to use them?

Questions can be asked as part of learning activities as well as when talking through social situations or behaviour. Ask questions at the right level for the child so that the child is able to respond to them. Support the child to develop their comprehension skills by asking a few questions at the next level up and modelling the answers for the child to hear. The child can join in if they can. Remember to give the child lots of time to think about the question before they respond.

It is useful for all teaching staff and parents/carers to be aware of the types of language/questions the child may find difficult, and how to turn them into easier questions. Questions can be simplified by:

- 1) **Make questions more concrete:** Abstract: "How do you think daddy bear felt when baby bear wouldn't give him a bed-time kiss?" → Concrete: "Look at daddy bear's face. What is he doing?"
- 2) **Relate questions to personal experiences:** Simplify a question such as, "Why do you think fire-fighters wear such big heavy coats?" to "What does it feel like when you stand close to a fire?"
- 3) **Ask questions about very recent events or objects that are present:** Instead of asking, "What do you think you will do at playgroup tomorrow?" ask, "what did you play with today?" or, "what are you playing with now?"
- 4) **Use familiar vocabulary when asking questions:** Instead of, "what is the purpose of a knife?", try, "what can you do with a knife?"
- 5) **Develop Higher Order Thinking Skills:** For older children, keep using those higher-order thinking questions (level 3 and 4). Instead of telling your child how to solve a problem, ask questions to help them think through it on their own.





Top tips for success

- Remember that commenting is the best strategy for teaching children language. Children need to hear language modelled to them over and over to help them understand and use language. Try to balance the number of questions you ask by asking one question for every four comments that you make.

Further training / information –

- To access training through the Councils Communication Support Team you will need to register with Services for Schools: <https://schools.cornwall.gov.uk/Enquiry/SignUp>
- You can also contact the council's Communication Support Team to access further mentoring and coaching support with using Blank Levels. A referral can be made via this email: cst@cornwall.gov.uk
- ELKLAN training courses- <https://www.elklan.co.uk/Training/Practitioners/>
- ELKLAN Language Builders 'Language Builders for 5-11's' by Elklan available online for approximately £22:00.

Links for videos-

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w-EFnokgHW4>