Inquiry-based Learning

Inquiry-based learning is a pedagogical approach grounded in belief in students’ capacities to shape and manage their own learning, and in the innate drive of human curiosity. The format of inquiry-based learning courses or assignments varies substantially, but the strategy is perhaps most easily understood as a **scaffolded**, student-centered research project. For example, an inquiry-guided process might begin with students exploring a subject for research, then developing a series of relevant research questions, designing a course for research identifying tools and methods, and finally answering their questions, analyzing their data, and sharing findings with a broader learning community.

Not surprisingly, the process of asking and answering questions is key to inquiry-based learning, and it’s important that instructors let go of the need to answer every question (or the belief that we should be able to). Inquiry-guided learning values strong question posing as an academic skill in and of itself, and makes students responsible for answering their own and each other’s questions.

**Some ways to implement inquiry-based approaches:**

- Start small by beginning new units or lessons with a chance for students to generate questions based on the title or topic description. You might use these questions as the basis for an assignment (researching answers for a short written response), or revisit the questions at various points in the unit, reflecting on those you’ve addressed and posing new ones.
- For more substantial inquiry-based projects to be effective students must have sufficient guidance and **scaffolding**—that is, you should provide structured support for each component of their inquiry in the form of readings, models, instruction, and feedback.
- Devote portions of class time for students (individually or in groups) to work on and develop inquiry projects and use the time to observe, support, and conference.

**References**


**See also**

Formative and Summative Feedback
Peer Review
Scaffolding Student Learning