



Ask Three Before Me

Purpose

Routine questions like “Where do we write our name?” and “What’s the date?” usually do not need a response directly from the teacher. The Ask Three Before Me strategy frees you to answer those questions that clearly require teacher input and to assist students in genuine need. It also helps students and teams take more responsibility for their own learning by reinforcing the idea that they can depend on someone other than the teacher for help.

Breaking It Down

- Before the students begin any activity, make it clear that if they have questions, they need to ask three other people (teammates or students nearby) before coming to you.
- Firmly enforce the rule. Whenever a student asks you a question, your response should be, “Did you ask three before me?” If they have not consulted others, defer the question first to teammates or nearby students.
- If the student still has not received a satisfactory answer after asking three people for help, you should then offer assistance.

During what parts of a lesson are you most likely to need the ASK THREE BEFORE ME strategy?

Fine-Tuning the Technique

- Consistency is key, especially early in the year. If you find that the strategy is not taking hold, make a conscious effort to respond to the student’s questions by asking, “Have you asked three before me?” Over time, this repetition will set and reinforce the standard.
- Initially, you might want to post the rule on the board as a reminder for the students.
- Another way to establish Ask Three Before Me in your classroom is to make it a weekly team cooperation goal and to award team cooperation points whenever you notice teams using the strategy.
- The students should consult those closest to them, not their friends across the room. If volume is a problem, work with the students on appropriate voice levels by practicing indoor voices or six-inch voices instead of outdoor voices, for example.
- As the students gain experience working together, you can extend the strategy to higher-order thinking questions as well. The more you encourage the students to consult their classmates first, the more you reinforce effective teamwork and problem-solving skills.

TOSS IT BACK

Like the ASK THREE BEFORE ME strategy, TOSS IT BACK reinforces the idea that the students can depend on one another to find the answers to many of their questions. Toss higher-order questions back to the students or teams, by asking “What do you think? What do your teammates think?” After you toss it back, make sure to clarify any lingering misunderstandings or questions that the students might have.