Answers to Exercise 3.4

Questioning to Increase Response Rates

1. Mr. Severs is beginning a social studies unit about current events, and he would like to get an idea of what his students already know about the national and global stages. He prepares a number of questions about recent political happenings. At the start of class, he hands out voting devices in alphabetical order. When each student has one, Mr. Severs asks his first question. “Which of these people is not a member of President Obama’s cabinet? Is it (A) Hillary Clinton, (B) William Reilly, (C) Janet Napolitano, or (D) Rahm Emanuel?” He gives his students a few moments to think about the question and vote for the answer they think is correct. When all of the votes are in, he shows everyone a bar graph depicting how the class voted. He asks more questions as class goes on, each time showing the class the results and explaining the correct answer. When class is over, he takes a deeper look at the individual responses of each student. Now he knows that, in general, his class doesn’t know much about current events, but he has three or four students who do appear to keep up.

This classroom scenario depicts the use of simultaneous individual response through a voting technology. Mr. Severs is using a technological voting system that allows all students to vote for which answer they think is correct, and then he is able to show the class the results. He is also able to gather feedback about individual students.

2. Ms. Palmer has drawn names in order to pair students up in the beginning of her language arts class. During the lesson she asks a few questions about the book they have been reading and gives the students a set amount of time to construct a reply. After her first question, “How did Jacob respond when he didn’t make the Olympic team the first time?” she waits a few minutes and then calls on Jared and Kendra. “He was really depressed about it, and he stopped training and went to work for his dad’s restaurant,” Jared says. Ms. Palmer asks Kendra how she might respond in the same situation. “I would be really upset too. Gymnastics is a sport that traditionally really young athletes compete in. I might have stopped training too, but I would have gone to college instead of working for my dad. I probably would have moved on from athletics.” Ms. Palmer then asks another pair to discuss the outcome of Jacob’s next Olympic quest. After one student responds, she asks the other student how he feels about Jacob’s decision to continue his quest given that he did eventually make the team but did not win a medal.

This classroom scenario depicts a teacher who is using paired response. Ms. Palmer pairs her students before beginning the activity. She then asks a question and gives each pair of students time to collaborate. When she calls on one pair of students, one student responds to the question directly and another student elaborates by discussing how he or she might feel in a similar circumstance.
3. *Mr. Vinci has four students who are quite interested in various aspects of photography and will consistently volunteer to answer his questions or show the class the photos they took for the previous assignment. Although he appreciates their enthusiasm, he has noticed that many of his other students will refrain from volunteering because they know these four students will. He institutes a new policy in response. At the beginning of every class, he gathers the photos from the last assignment, and when he asks a question, he selects a photo at random. The student who took the photo is called on to answer the question. He finds that doing this also means that more photos taken by his students are shown in class.*

This classroom scenario depicts a teacher who is calling on students randomly. Because Mr. Vinci calls on whichever student took the selected photo, all students must be alert and prepared to answer each of his questions.

4. *Ms. Montrose likes to get an idea of how confident students feel in what they are learning in the days and weeks before an exam. If they are confident, they are more likely to do well, and if they are not, Ms. Montrose can offer some personal one-on-one time prior to the exam. As the last activity in class one day, she asks the class how well they feel they understand the topic: “Give me a thumbs up if you think you understand this well enough to get an A on the test; hold your thumb out to the side if you think you are getting better but are not quite ready for a test yet, and give me a thumbs down if you don’t feel you understand this material very well at all.” Once they have signaled their feelings, she reminds them before the bell rings that she is available for extra help before and after school by appointment.*

Ms. Montrose is using simultaneous individual response. Specifically she is using hand signals to get an idea of how confident her students are about the content. All students are responding, and additionally, Ms. Montrose gets a better idea of how well students think they know the material and which students might need her help before the exam.