



The Daily Question: Building Student Trust and Interest in Your Course

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“The question of the day is great and gets the class to know each other and be involved.”

SETTING: USNA ACADEMICS

Your setting is different, but this technique should be transferable to your course.

Graduates of the Naval Academy serve at least five years as commissioned officers in the Navy or Marine Corps.

There are small sections (17-21 students) with mandatory attendance and no teaching assistants.

The midshipmen are under time pressure – six courses and physical education requirements. Their future positions depend on class rank, so there is peer competition.

Every midshipman must take or validate at least four mathematics courses: three semesters of Calculus and one other course. Most humanities majors – English, History, foreign language, Political Science, Economics – take **Introductory Statistics** or Probability with Naval Applications as their fourth course.



“I like coming to this class. I learned a lot from the life questions he’d ask us.”

WHAT IS IT?

The instructor poses a question to the class. One by one, students answer orally – providing a census of the classroom. Finally the instructor answers last. **The entire process takes less than five minutes.**

THE GROUND RULES

Some questions may make students uncomfortable. Passing is always an option, and the answers and any ensuing discussion stay in the classroom.

Course Policies remain in effect:

- The classroom is a place of mutual respect.
- We won’t belittle people for expressing opinions.
- Debates and critical analysis are good; personal attacks are not.
- We won’t tolerate crude, sexually explicit or offensive jokes or remarks.
- We won’t use profanity.

Instructor Advice:

Be focused on the student’s answers – distractions will derail attempts at community. Maintain an awareness of time – it is ok to limit responses. Be honest in your answers – inauthenticity is a death knell.

“It takes two minutes, and changes the dynamic of the entire classroom.”

THE QUESTIONS

Feel free to take a handout with the list of questions. Some questions relate directly to course topics, while others are ice-breakers.

Topic	Question
Data Classification	What is your birth order?
Exploratory Data Analysis	How much sleep did you get in last 24 hours? How many times did you take ACT/SAT?
Unions and Intersections	What was the size of your high school class? Form groups of three. What’s the most bizarre thing you have in common?
Measures of Relative Position	What were you known for in high school?

- What is the funniest thing you did as a child that people still talk about?
- What is the story behind your name?
- What is your pet peeve?
- For what reason do others often seek your help or advice?

“[The question] creates an even more open environment that sparks class discussions and enthusiasm to do the work.”

RESULTS

Anonymously, 81 of 247 students (33% across 12 sections) directly mentioned the daily question in their end-of-semester Student Opinion Forms, all positively.

Why might the daily question work?

It provides opportunity for student self-expression, allows students to learn about each other, communicates value for every individual, and enables personal and professional sharing from the instructor.

Anecdotally, **the daily question opens the aperture to learning.**

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[†] The views expressed are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the United States Naval Academy, Department of the Navy, Department of Defense, or United States Government.