

12 QUESTIONS YOUR STUDENTS SHOULD BE ABLE TO ANSWER

by Jane Kennedy



In this article you will learn...

- Students, as well as teachers, must be able to answer key questions about their learning.
- These questions fall into four broad areas: curriculum, instruction, assessment, and climate, which make up an integrated learning framework.
- Students must be supported across the entire learning framework in order to take full ownership of their learning.

Categories: [feature](#), [Teaching](#)

Tags: [learning framework](#), [ownership mindset](#), [student ownership](#)



Reading Time: 7 minutes

What are the kinds of questions students generally have to answer on any given school day? Most of them require recalling facts or knowing certain processes and procedures. A smaller number of questions ask students to tell how or why they got a certain answer, revealing their thinking processes.

But there is another category of questions that are essential if students are to develop an **ownership mindset**—that is, to know that they alone have the authority, capacity, and responsibility for their own learning.

When students take **ownership of their learning**, they can answer a variety of questions that are seldom asked in a traditional classroom, either because it's assumed that students "just know" or because they are the kinds of questions that teachers, not students, are usually required to answer. These are questions about:

- **Curriculum**—what students are learning,
- **Instruction**—how they are learning it,
- **Assessment**—how well they are learning it, and
- **Climate**—what their role is in the classroom and in their learning.

We as educators know that it's our job to know the answers to these essential questions. But if students are to take ownership of their learning, they need to know the answers, too.

Curriculum

Curriculum includes everything students need to know and be able to do at the end of a lesson, unit, or course. It is **what they are learning**. To demonstrate increased student ownership in the area of curriculum, each and every student must be able to clearly articulate answers to the following questions:

- *What am I learning?*
- *Why am I learning this?*
- *How will I demonstrate I have learned it?*



Therefore, every student must understand the content and skills they are going to learn—before they have learned them—as well as why that content is important and how they will be expected to demonstrate mastery of what they have learned.

Instruction

By instruction, we mean the strategies students will use to learn the content and skills set forth by the curriculum. This is **how the learning takes place**. When students own their learning, they should be able to answer these questions:

- *How will I learn this?*
- *How will this strategy help me learn this?*
- *How can I use this strategy in the future and in different situations?*



Understanding the process for learning is **metacognitive**—thinking about thinking. Increased metacognitive thinking helps students learn to recognize what learning strategies work best for them and begin to make decisions about what they need to do in order to master certain types of content and skills.

Assessment

We're not talking about standardized tests here. Instead, assessment refers to how students know when they are learning something successfully and when they are struggling. It's **knowing how well they are learning**. If students are to own their learning, they should know how well they are learning long before they find out their grade on the spelling test or end-of-unit quiz. At any point in the learning process, they should be able to answer questions like these:

- *How will I know I have learned this?*
- *How will I know if I am progressing in my learning?*
- *What can I do if I am struggling?*



Assessment begins with knowing what the learning goal is, and that goal must be concrete. If students don't know what mastery of certain content or a specific skill looks like, they are likely to struggle, give up, or check out. Students also need to understand the steps along the way and how they build toward the final goal. And once students are able to measure their progress toward a learning outcome, they need to know what they can do to help themselves if they find that they are struggling.

Climate

When it comes to climate, what we're talking about involves **building a student-centered environment where all students know *their role is to learn***. When the classroom climate truly supports student ownership, every student can answer the following questions:

- *What is my role in the class?*
- *How will I support others in their learning?*
- *How will I take risks in my learning?*

The academic climate in a school and classroom determines how students receive academic-specific feedback, how students cooperate and collaborate to enhance one another's learning, and how safe students feel to be able to take risks with their learning, such as taking on challenging projects and persisting through difficult tasks. A positive classroom climate provides students with the support they need to answer the questions above and to take full ownership of their learning.



A Complete Learning Framework

None of these four areas exists in isolation. All of them work together in an **integrated learning framework**, each impacting the others in numerous ways.



For students to own their learning, they need support across all four areas of the learning framework: **curriculum, instruction, assessment, and climate**. This support comes first and foremost from teachers, but it also comes from fellow students as well as the school and district administration. Our goal at Elevated Achievement is to help teachers and administrators increase student ownership in every school and classroom by giving them the meaningful support they need across all four areas of the learning framework.

When each and every student can answer all 12 questions across the complete learning framework, you will know that they have truly taken ownership of their learning—greatly increasing their motivation to learn and elevating their academic achievement.

[Continue the Learning](#)

Check out these articles and resources to continue your learning about this topic...

- [Our Article, "The Most Crucial Decision Teachers Make Every Day"](#)
- [Our Downloadable Resources for Developing Student Ownership](#)
- [Our Book, *Developing Student Ownership: Supporting Students to Own Their Learning through the Use of Strategic Learning Practices*](#)

The Learning Brief

In this article you learned...

- Students, as well as teachers, must be able to answer key questions about their learning.
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