

Elaborative Interrogation

Years 7–12 | Deep Learning Strategy

WHAT IS ELABORATIVE INTERROGATION?

Elaborative interrogation is the habit of asking "Why?" and "How does this work?" about everything you study. Rather than accepting facts at face value, you actively explain the mechanisms and reasons behind them. This forces a deeper level of processing that builds understanding, not just surface-level recall.

WHY DOES IT WORK? THE PSYCHOLOGY

- Asking "why" forces you to connect new information to existing knowledge, creating richer memory networks.
- Elaborative interrogation activates the same neural pathways as the Feynman technique but is faster and can be applied to any piece of information.
- Pressley et al. (1992) found students using elaborative interrogation significantly outperformed those who simply read material on recall tests.
- It is particularly powerful for conceptual subjects like Biology, Chemistry, Physics, and Economics.

"Never just memorise a fact. Ask: why is this true? How does this work? What would happen if it didn't? That's where understanding lives."

HOW TO USE ELABORATIVE INTERROGATION

- As you read or review notes, pause after each key fact or concept.
- Ask yourself: "Why is this the case?" or "How does this mechanism work?"
- Write out the answer in your own words before moving on.
- If you cannot explain why, that is a signal to look it up — not skip it.
- Also ask: "How does this connect to what I already know?"

ELABORATIVE INTERROGATION PRACTICE

Subject / Topic:

Fact / Concept	Why / How? (Your Explanation)

What connections did you find between ideas in this topic?

NST Tip

Use "why chains" — ask why, get an answer, then ask why again. Keep going 3–5 levels deep. This is how scientists and top students build genuine mastery of complex content.