



At the beginning of the project, students are introduced to key content in an authentic context via a stimulus or hook, which in PBL we call an entry event. Students use the entry event to initiate inquiry by reflecting on their prior knowledge of the key content and then generating questions that they “need to know” the answer to in order to successfully complete the project, and what their next steps might be to answer their questions. These questions, or need to knows, are used in an ongoing way throughout the project to track learning and guide inquiry.

WHY IS IT USEFUL?

As we implement rigorous “main course” projects--where standards and skills are learned through the work of the project--generating and using need to knows allows skill and knowledge acquisition to be tied to students’ questions and immediate needs. Since learning becomes a process of finding answers to their own questions, students find greater purpose in their work, which results in increased engagement.



WHAT DO I DO?

Use this simple table on chart paper or in a digital document to capture need to knows:



KNOWS	NEED TO KNOWS	NEXT STEPS

Here are several recommended steps for facilitating the initial generation of need to knows:

STEPS	INSIGHTS/SUGGESTIONS
1. Launch the project with an entry event that engages students and stimulates their thinking. (Time: depends on the project)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design the entry event in such a way that the key knowledge, understanding, success skills you plan to teach in this unit are included. This will enable students to ask the questions that you want them to answer during the project. • Depending on the nature of the entry event, you might also share the driving question and the project information sheet, which offer project details, to make sure students will ask questions about the key knowledge, understanding and success skills addressed in the project.

STEPS	INSIGHTS/SUGGESTIONS
<p>2. Create a chart (like the one on the previous page) on the whiteboard, chart paper, or in a Google Doc. Start with what students know to activate their prior knowledge. Ask: "What do you need to know about [the topic] or to do this task?" Have them popcorn out their responses. Capture their words in the shared space. (Time: 5 – 10 minutes)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow think time for students, but don't spend too much time on the knows. Students will have the opportunity to add new ideas to this list over time. • Capture students' words just as they share them without editing their language. • Ask for clarification when necessary. • You may wish to have students record their questions on sticky notes and post them on the board or on a chart so that you can move them as they are answered.
<p>3. Switch to need to knows. Have students generate questions about what they need to know to address the problem, challenge, or scenario posed in the entry event or answer the driving question. Ask: "What do you need to know about [the topic] or to do this task?" (Time: 10 – 20 minutes)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give an example of a question and then ask students to work in pairs to generate a preliminary list of questions. • Again, after allowing students time to think and collaboration, capture their questions just as they pose them without editing. Ask for clarification when necessary. • It is a good idea to spend more time on the need to knows that you did for the know, to draw out the key knowledge, understanding and success skills for the project. • At this step, don't worry if some of their questions are irrelevant. Figuring out what you actually need to know is part of the inquiry process. • Keep these somewhere that is easily accessible for all students to reference throughout the project.
<p>4. Once students have exhausted their questions, move on to next steps. In this phase, encourage students to think about how they would initiate the process of answering their questions. Ask: "What are the very next steps you could take/should do to start answering your questions?" (Time: 5 – 10 minutes)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage students to move beyond simple ideas like "We should do research." Probe for what specifically they would like to research, and how they would approach researching the question. (e.g. by online search, asking experts, surveying users of a product, etc) • If you have already formed teams, following next steps you may allow them to begin their research process. You might have them track their learning in a learning log.

PRIMARY GRADES CONSIDERATIONS

Pre-K to 1st: Consider breaking this process down into a few days. Sprinkle in relevant whole group readings to ignite further questions and to help students to think more on the topic. This process works better when done as a whole group with younger students.

TROUBLESHOOTING TIPS



No one offers any questions.

Give students time to think and write independently or Think-Pair-Share before asking for a whole group share out.



The questions are simplistic.

Use the **Question Formulation Technique** to build



Students asked interesting questions beyond the scope of the project.

Creating and maintaining the need to know list includes prioritizing the list throughout the project. When doing this, recognize that there are interesting questions that are outside the scope of the project. If these questions are of great interest to your students, perhaps there's an enrichment opportunity here for those who want to follow that path of inquiry, or a future project.



The questions are all logistical (due dates and timelines), not about the key learning of the project.

Make sure the entry event includes the key content of the project. If the content is seeded there, have students do a close reading or review of the entry event. You could also create separate columns to highlight the difference between logistical and content questions.



KNOWS		NEED TO KNOWS	
<i>Logistical</i>	<i>Content</i>	<i>Logistical</i>	<i>Content</i>

USING IT THROUGHOUT THE PROJECT

The need to knows are revisited throughout the project in order to facilitate the inquiry process. (See *Revising Need to Knows* strategy). For the teacher, the need to knows provide insight into how to guide instruction so that students are supported in answering them. Likewise, for the students, need to knows guide their path of inquiry by narrowing their focus, as well as grounding their learning in their initial questions. In this respect, need to knows can be referred to at the beginning of lessons to frame the learning, and again at the end to reflect on the learning. As with any inquiry process, new questions arise from new knowledge and understanding, so

don't forget to continue to add more need to knows to the list as they arise!

A more extensive explanation of leveraging need to knows throughout the project can be found in the *Revisiting Need to Knows* strategy.

OPTIONAL VARIATIONS & ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Think Puzzle Explore routine or other **Core Thinking Routines**

Question Formulation Technique

Detailed blog on the **Need to Know Process**