

20 Bell Ringer Ideas

Grouped by what they are for, and all of them work in any subject. Nothing here has to be bought or printed in advance. Built for grades 6–12.

The first two groups are the ones with evidence behind them. Practice testing and distributed practice were the only two techniques rated **high utility** in Dunlosky and colleagues' review of ten study techniques; rereading, highlighting and summarizing were rated low. The third group below is for days when you need something else, and it is labelled honestly as such.

#	Retrieval — ask about last week, not last night
1	Three things you remember from Monday. No notes, no neighbor.
2	Brain dump: two minutes, everything you can recall about the unit so far.
3	One question from last week's material that you could not answer today.
4	What did we conclude about ____? State it in one sentence, from memory.
5	Two vocabulary terms from two weeks ago, defined in your own words.
6	Draw the process we studied Tuesday. Labels only, no sentences.
7	What is the single most important thing from last unit, and why that one?
8	Yesterday, last week, last month: one fact from each.

#	Spaced practice and connection
9	Here is a term from September. Where does it connect to what we are doing now?
10	Two ideas from different units. What do they have in common?
11	Correct this: a wrong statement about older material, fixed and explained.
12	Predict: based on what we already know, what happens next?
13	Which of these three problems is from last unit? Solve that one.
14	Explain last week's idea to someone who missed class. Four sentences.

#	Openers that set up thinking — use sparingly, weaker evidence
15	One-sentence response to a short quotation connected to today's work.
16	Two questions you want answered before this unit ends.
17	What would change if the opposite were true?
18	Rank these three things by importance. Be ready to defend the order.
19	A number on the board. What could it be measuring?
20	One thing from this class you have used or noticed outside of school.

The Five-Minute Rule and a Three-Day Rotation

Post it, start it without a word, stop it on time, and use the answers. The last two are where most openers fail.

Four rules

1	Post it before the bell.	Students start without being told. That is the whole point of a routine.
2	Ask about last week, not last night.	Students cannot retrieve what they have not learned yet.
3	Stop on time — including on the good days.	An opener that regularly runs to twelve minutes takes about a tenth of the instructional year from everything downstream of it.
4	Spend ninety seconds on the answers.	Read two aloud, correct the common error, name the thing most people forgot. A question you collect and never mention teaches students the first five minutes are a formality.

A three-day rotation you can run all year

Day	What it asks about	Why
Monday	Last week	Close enough to recall, far enough to be retrieval rather than copying.
Wednesday	The last unit	Spacing. The gap is the mechanism, not the difficulty.
Friday	The previous month	The hardest and the most useful. Expect wrong answers; that is the data.
A student who was absent	Answer from what you do have	"What do you remember about ____?" is answerable by someone who missed a day. Nothing here punishes lateness or absence.
Materials	Nothing to buy	Every task on this sheet runs on a board, a scrap of paper, and what is already in the room.

Plan next week

Day	The question (about last week / last unit / last month)	What I will do with the answers

Five mistakes worth avoiding: making it about today's lesson, requiring materials not already on the table, changing the format every day, never referencing the answers again, and punishing lateness. Predictability is the goal, not novelty — rotate among three or four shapes so students know what a do-now is without being told.