
Formative Assessment Strategies

for Every Classroom—2nd Edition

Acknowledgments	vii
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RATIONALE AND PLANNING

Section 1: What Is Formative Assessment?	3
Section 2: How Does Formative Assessment Work?	7
Section 3: Creating Your Own Formative Assessment Tools	11
Section 4: Organization of This Action Tool	17
Index of Student Tools and the Formative Assessment Process	18
Index of Student Tools by Level and Type of Participation	21

TEACHER TOOLS

Section 1: Creating Classroom Assignments	
Creating Quality Classroom Assignments	29
Blueprint for Pre-assessment	32
Intervention Framework	36
Section 2: Giving Good Feedback	
The Feedback Universe	49
Words to Live (and Learn) By	52
Class Observation Tool	55
Individual Observation Tool	59
Group Observation Tool	63

STUDENT TOOLS

Section 1: Tools to Use When an Assignment Is Given	
Clear Targets	71
Sorting Work	75
What's So Good About It?	79
The Rubric Machine	83
The Rubric Translator	87
K-W-L Chart	91

How Did I Get Here?.....	95
Crystal Ball.....	98
Riddle Me This.....	101
What Does It Mean to Me?	105
Planning Sheet.....	109
“Pack” for Your Work.....	113
 Section 2: Tools to Use During Direct Instruction	
Build from the Blueprint	119
“Why” Boxes	123
Spill the Beans	126
Circle Around.....	129
Happy/Sad.....	133
Up the Ladder	135
The Sticking Point	138
Most and Least Clear	141
Hit the Target.....	145
Huh?	148
Notes Organizer (1)	152
Notes Organizer (2)	155
 Section 3: Tools to Use During Individual or Group Work on Projects	
Mirror, Mirror	161
Me, Me, Me!	165
Rocket Science	169
Individual Planner	172
Group Planner	175
Action Log.....	179
Evidence Basket	182
Under the Microscope	186
Conference Call	189
Feedback Request Sheet	193
Rubric’s Cube.....	196
What Do You Think? What Do I Think?	199
Peer Review Form.....	203
Groupies.....	206
Mission: Possible	210

Section 4: Tools to Use Before Summative Assessment

Minute Math	215
Awesome and On My Way	218
Cell Phone	221
Home Help Sheet.	224
T.E.S.T.	227
“I Get It”	230

Section 5: Tools to Use After Summative Assessment

Do-Overs	235
Dear Diary	239
Progress Map	243
Strengths and Weaknesses.	246
Exercise Program	249
Goal Setting	252
Effort-o-Meter	255
Go Over a Test	261

About the Author	265
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What Is Formative Assessment?

Formative assessment refers to the ongoing process students and teachers engage in when they

1. Focus on learning goals.
2. Take stock of where current work is in relation to the goal.
3. Take action to move closer to the goal.

The best formative assessment involves both students and teachers in a recursive process. It starts with the teacher, who models the process for the students. At first, the concept of what good work “looks like” belongs to the teacher. The teacher describes, explains, or demonstrates the concepts or skills to be taught, or assigns student investigations—reading assigned material, locating and reading materials to answer a question, doing activities or experiments—to put content into students’ hands. For example, the teacher shares the aspects of a good descriptive paragraph and tells students how their work compares to the ideal. Gradually, students internalize the learning goals and become able to see the target themselves. They begin to be able to decide how close they are to it.

A student’s self-assessment process marks the transition to independent learning. When students monitor their own learning and make some of their own decisions about what they need to do next, they are using metacognitive skills. These are important skills in their own right. Learning how to learn—that is, learning the metacognitive skills that will ultimately contribute to lifelong learning—begins with specific acts of self-assessment. Students learn how to monitor their own performance first with respect to specific learning goals they understand; for example, they learn to check sentences for specific comma faults or to check math problems for specific errors. These specific acts of self-assessment during the formative assessment process are critical building blocks as well as strategies for achieving the immediate learning goals. Gradually, students begin to be able to monitor more and more aspects of their work at once.

Creating Quality Classroom Assignments

STEPS IN THE FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT PROCESS SUPPORTED BY THIS TOOL:

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Understand target | <input type="checkbox"/> Evaluate strengths and weaknesses |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Produce work | <input type="checkbox"/> Prescribe action for improvement |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Compare work with target | <input type="checkbox"/> Take action for improvement |

HOW TO USE:

- Identify the learning target or targets.
- Select or construct an assignment that will help students reach that target.
- Use the tool to evaluate the assignment with regard to content match, cognitive process match, clarity, and explicit criteria.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR:

- Assignments are ready to give to students only when you are able to answer *yes* to all questions. Be able to back up your answers with specific evidence from the assignment.

NEXT STEPS:

- If you answer *no* to one of the questions, be able to say exactly what needs to be done to make the answer *yes*. This is trickier than it may seem at first. For example, commenting “Create more higher-order questions” may sound helpful, but you will only accomplish this successfully if you know how to write questions that indeed tap higher-order thinking.
- Use the information to revise your assignment *before* you give it to the students.

TIPS/VARIATIONS:

- For teacher-made assignments, use the tool to help you design and construct your assignments at the outset.