



FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT STRATEGIES FOR ADULT LEARNERS

Formative assessments allow students to show their thinking and allow teachers to see and gauge students' cognitive processes.

What Is Formative Assessment?

Formative assessment is the use of assessment to provide feedback to teachers and students during learning. Information gained through informal assessments provides opportunities for teachers to adjust the ways in which they deliver instruction. For example, they may reteach a concept, use alternative instructional approaches, or offer more opportunities for practice and reinforcement. These activities can lead to improved student success.

When incorporated into classroom practice, formative assessment provides the information needed to adjust teaching and learning while they are happening. In this sense, formative assessment informs both teachers and learners about learner understanding at a point when timely adjustments can be made. (In comparison, summative assessment is often a one-time event that occurs at the end of a learning unit and is used to make judgments about student competence.)

Why Use Formative Assessment?

Teachers can use the results of formative assessments to adjust their teaching strategies and match students with appropriate materials and learning conditions. Information gained from formative assessment can help a teacher determine (1) how to group students, (2) whether students need alternative materials, (3) how much time to allocate to specific learning activities, (4) which concepts need to be re-taught to specific students, and (5) which students are ready to advance.

Some Recommended Strategies

Forms of assessment can range from performance-based assessments to reflection journals to multiple-choice items. They can include checklists, rubrics, written papers or oral presentations, graphic organizers, Socratic questioning, etc. They can be teacher observations of student performance, teacher questioning/class discussions, analysis of student work, student self-assessment, KWL charts, and student journals, among other informal assessments. The following approaches are useful for assessing students' knowledge about a given topic as well as their writing skills:

- **Quick Write:** As a pre- or post-assessment tool, 1- to 3-minute quick writes on a topic or big idea can be revealing. Student responses often show what they do or do not understand about a topic. They also give the teacher insights into the reasoning processes that students are using.
- **Graphic Organizers:** These include Venn diagrams, word/idea webs or concept maps, cause/effect charts, flowcharts, and sequence charts. One example is the KWL chart. A KWL chart has three columns: "know," "want to know," and "learn." Learners list in the left column what they know about a topic or idea and in the center column what they want to know about the topic or idea. After reading or instruction, they return to the chart to list in the right column what they learned about the topic or idea or what they still would like to learn. KWL charts can be completed as a class with the teacher or independently. Graphic organizers can be used to assess prior knowledge, record learning during a lecture or class reading, or organize knowledge after learning.





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- **Cloze Writing:** The cloze procedure consists of fill-in-the-blank activities for sentences and paragraphs that can be used to assess knowledge. The teacher selects a passage of text, marks out some of the words, and then rewrites the text with blank lines where the marked-out words were. Supports, such as a glossary, can be used for sentences. For a more extended response, students can be given a short story (for example) for which they must write a one-paragraph ending. The brainstorming for this activity can be done in pairs or small groups, and then each student can write his or her own one-paragraph ending.
- **Think-Pair-Share** or **Write-Pair-Share:** These types of activities ensure that everyone has a chance to talk and process their thinking. Ask for two minutes of silence while each student considers his or her response to a prompt, text, lecture, etc. Then students take turns sharing their reflections with a partner. Some reflections can then be shared with the whole group.
- **Entry/Exit Cards:** As students arrive to class, they respond to a prompt displayed on the board or a flipchart (e.g., a sentence or short paragraph) related to the topic of that day's lesson. Alternatively, students can be asked for an "exit card" that provides insight into what they learned from the day's activities or what they predict might follow.
- **Student Reflection:** The teacher can encourage students to reflect on their accomplishments as well as their challenges by asking students to answer questions that spark critical thinking:
 - What was your task, the goal, or the outcome for this activity?
 - What are some important concepts and ideas that you discovered/learned? Why are they important?
 - How did you solve the problem or task? Did you reach your goal? Explain.
 - Would you make changes if you had to do it again? Explain.

A significant body of evidence links formative assessment with student achievement. By encouraging student reflection on their learning and by involving students in decisions related to next steps in reaching their learning goals, teachers both motivate and empower students in the assessment and learning process. Formative assessment can help teachers improve the quality of instruction and help students reach their full potential.

Note: Content for this guide is edited and condensed from *TEAL Center Fact Sheet No. 9: Formative Assessment* and from the Glossary in the *TEAL Just Write! Guide*. See: <https://lincs.ed.gov/federal-initiatives/teal/guide/formativeassessment>

