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BY **INSTRUCTURE**

KEY STRATEGIES FOR IMPACTFUL FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT

Creating an effective formative assessment program that drives learning forward.

Assessment Fundamentals

Assessment plays an integral role in the teaching and learning process and is an essential tool that helps teachers identify their students' educational needs. Assessments check for understanding, measure student learning, and provide meaningful insights into student progress.

When using assessments in the classroom, it's important to remember—not all are created equal. There are three main types of assessments, and while each may be used to assess the same content or learning standards, the purpose that triggers the assessment is what sets them apart.

Formative assessment

Formative assessment is an ongoing process used during instruction to check for student understanding and guide classroom instruction accordingly. Formative assessments answer the question, "What's next in my students' learning?

Interim assessments

Interim assessments are administered periodically and used to measure growth against a goal and prepare for summative assessment. Interim assessments answer the question, "Are my students' progressing in their learning?

Summative assessments

Summative assessments are standardized and used to measure student performance, often at the end of a unit, end of a course, or end of a school year. Typically, summative assessments answer the question, "What did my students learn?"

> " Assessment becomes formative when the evidence is used to adapt the teaching to meet the student needs.
>
> **BLACK & WILLIAM (1998)** "

This guide will focus on how a thoughtful, well-designed formative assessment approach can help teachers understand where students are in their learning, design a blueprint for informing instruction, and in turn, positively impact student learning outcomes.

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Key Strategies for Impactful Formative Assessment

Assessing with Purposeful Intent →

Formative assessment is not an assessment of learning, but rather, an assessment for learning. Because it is defined by purpose rather than format, formative assessment can be applied in different ways and spans a broad spectrum of classroom application. At the heart of formative assessment are these key purposes:

- Help educators recognize what students know and don't know, so they can effectively drive learning forward.

- Help students identify their strengths and weaknesses and target areas that need work.
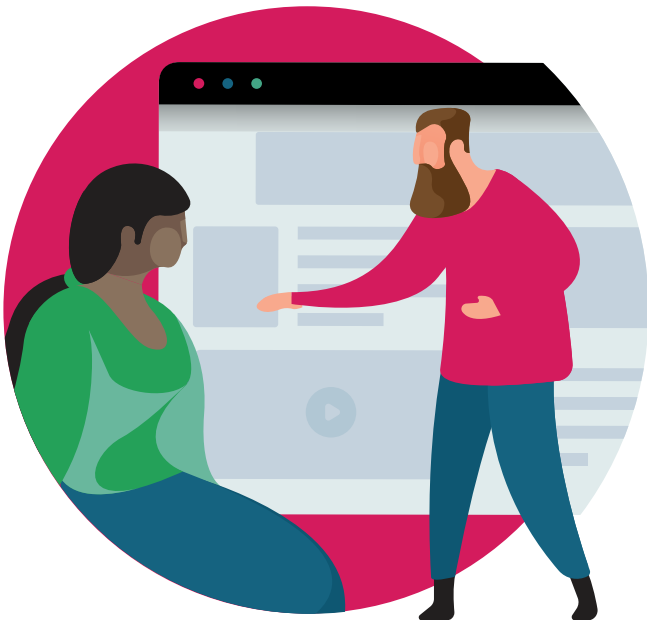
7 Characteristics of Successful Formative Assessments

1. Guide the learning process

2. Take place as a regular part of classroom life

3. Offer immediate feedback so teachers can adjust instruction in the moment

4. Focus on the needs of individual students in a classroom

5. Help students set goals and assume responsibility for learning

6. Describe growth as well as identify needs

7. Point the way for immediate action

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4 Attitudes that Impact Assessment Success ➡

Four implement formative assessments that positively impact student outcomes, teachers need to have the right attitude and mindset toward assessment. Four key attitudes provide a foundation for achieving formative assessment success:

OPTIMISM

Let's start with optimism, specifically, having a growth mindset. Renowned education researcher John Hattie determined the impact of various factors that influence teaching and learning. His work answers the question, "Which studies back the most effective teaching and learning practices?" Hattie's research shows us there is a data-driven reason for adopting a growth mindset for assessment. According to Hattie's findings, very few things teachers do have negative or reverse effects on students. The answer to "what works?" Mostly everything. But as dedicated educators, we strive to determine what works best for our students.

OWNERSHIP

Formative assessments provide an opportunity for students to take more responsibility for learning, and for teachers to use feedback to customize instruction. You are the expert on the students in your classroom, so your instinct should guide your formative assessment practice. Trust your judgment about what is going to be most impactful in your classroom.

FRUGALITY

Even though formative assessments should be part of the regular instructional cycle, they still have a cost. Taking the time to assess students, even informally, impacts a classroom's most valuable resources: instruction time, teachers' energy, and students' attention. Invest resources in the formative assessments that yield the greatest return. Ask yourself which formative strategies and techniques will be most effective and have the greatest impact with the least disruption to classroom time.

CURIOSITY

School and district leadership, students, parents, and the community are all interested in assessment outcomes. As a result, assessments often place heightened pressure on both teachers and students. However, it's important to remember that assessment is a powerful classroom practice that can lead to positive outcomes. Instead of approaching assessment with anxiety and seeking evidence of what isn't working, try to find ways to approach assessment data with curiosity. Ask yourself, what is surprising about these results? Why is it surprising? Did I ask the right question to begin with? Approaching the analysis of assessment data with curiosity is more likely to lead to creativity and a positive assessment experience.

A Formative Assessment Framework ➡

As previously described, formative assessment is part of the teaching and learning process. It's an effective way to solicit actionable feedback that can be used to adjust instructional strategies and move learning forward. When engaging in the process of formative assessment, consider a thoughtful approach to the following four areas: Intent, Action, Analysis, and Reflection.

INTENT

At the intent phase you'll want to ask what do I want to know, when will I use the information and how will this impact instruction. Start with clear answers to these questions.

What do I want to know?

The answer should be targeted and specific. For example: "Do my students know how to use semicolons?" or "Can they describe the difference between mass and weight?"

When am I going to use the information?

- **Now:** analyze the data to make an immediate instructional adjustment.

- **Soon:** choosing to make a near-future adjustment to instruction allows the teacher to collect multiple data points, keeping in mind a bigger-picture instructional goal.

- **Just in time**: make "last-chance instructional adjustment" before a graded performance or test with higher stakes. For example, a dress rehearsal formative test that replicates a state assessment.

Ideally, the answer should never be too far in the future. Keep frugality in mind; if you aren't going to use the data in the near term, then perhaps it's not the right time for that assessment.

How am I going to use the information?

- To make an immediate adjustment in a lesson

- To determine if remediation is necessary for a student/group of students

- To decide whether reteaching is necessary

- To understand if students are prepared for an end of year exam

ACTION

"What am I going to do?" The answer is influenced by the questions answered at the intent phase. Once you know what you need to accomplish, you can move on to create an action plan.

Choose the Right Technique

There are many approaches to formative assessment. Frugality should influence the technique you choose. Select a format that is the simplest method to get the information you need—avoid increasing cognitive load without payoff.

Some examples include:

Direct observation: Marking checklists, listening, noticing nonverbal signals like body language

Group collaborations: Round Robin charts

Quick captures of brief student responses: Quick Nod, Thumbs Up-Middle-Down, Chalkboard Splash, classroom polls, Twitter voting, One-Minute Papers

Student self-evaluation conversations: Peer-to-peer in, Think/Pair/Share, student-teacher conference

Quizzes: These may be (but don't have to be) completed individually by each student

ANALYSIS

Once intent has been identified, an action plan has been created, and the assessment has been administered, it's time to analyze the data. Curiosity and ownership are essential attitudes that need to guide your approach to analysis.

Often when analyzing assessment data, it's easy to make assumptions without realizing you're making them. If a student performs poorly on a math test, you could assume the student struggles with the concepts addressed on the test. But what if the results mean something else? If the results seem "off" to you based on your expertise as an educator and your knowledge of your students, then pause.

Let's dig into another example: If you administer an assessment and five typically high-performing students perform poorly, then you may want to analyze the content you used. Sometimes you may need to revisit your original intention: Was the question you sought to answer the right one? Did you seek to answer one question, but the results seem to answer a different question? Do you need to make adjustments to what you thought you needed to know?

Feedback d= .73   Formative Evaluation d= .90

Source: Visible Learning by John Hattie ©2009

REFLECTION

After you've analyzed assessment results, you need to reflect on the entire process. Was your intent right, or does it need to be adjusted? Did you pick the right technique or content for the assessment, or should you try something else?

The Influence of Feedback

John Hattie uses a "barometer of influence" to communicate how effective various practices are for learning. Each of these sections can be described as follows:

- **Reverse Effects**: Negative effect on learning.

- **Developmental Effects:** What a student would likely accomplish without instruction.

- **Teacher Effects:** This is the "typical" zone—what would normally be accomplished in a school year.

- **Desired Effects:** This is the zone in which a practice has a statistically significant positive effect. Instead of answering the question "what works," practices in this zone are those which work best.

Hattie's research led him to develop the top ten teaching practices that have the most statistically significant impact on student learning. Two of the ten practices—formative evaluation (or asking questions to check for understanding) and receiving feedback—are directly related to formative assessment.

Receiving Feedback

The act of receiving feedback from students is represented on Hattie's Barometer of Influence at 0.73. Formative assessment is the practice of eliciting feedback from students.

Formative Evaluation

Formative evaluation of your own classroom practices and techniques has an effect of 0.9, even more powerful than feedback. Let's put this into perspective—the difference between the impact of feedback from your students and your own formative evaluation is like observing the height difference between someone that is 5'1" tall and someone who is 6'3". In other words, a very obvious difference. Educators who are willing to embrace reflective practices and feedback for their own practices have a statistically significant positive impact on the learning that happens in their classrooms.

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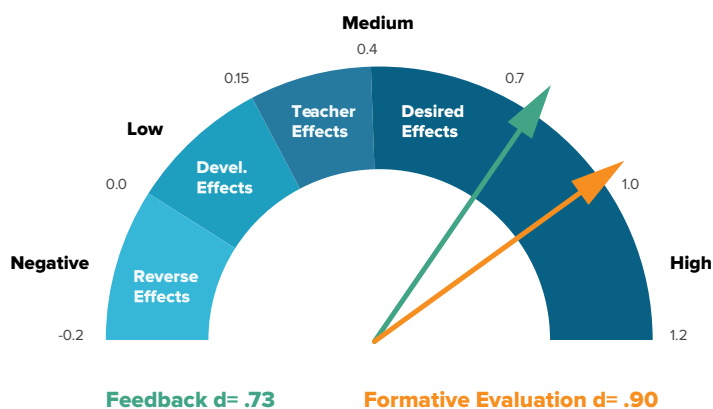
When teachers seek, or are least open to, feedback from students as to what students know, what they understand, where they make errors, when they have misconceptions, when they are not engaged—teaching and learning can be synchronized and powerful.

HATTIE (2009)

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Key Strategies for Impactful Formative Assessment

Assessment for Learning: Instructure's Assessment Solutions ➡️

Mastery by Instructure brings together the assessment tools and quality content educators need to implement a successful assessment program.

With **Mastery Connec**t, teachers can administer formative assessments and immediately see student mastery levels of key learning standards in an intuitive, visual way. Using the Mastery Tracker tool, educators gain actionable insights about student progress through formative data, so they can identify learning needs, adjust teaching strategies and instruction in real-time and in context, and promote student success.

To fuel the formative process, Instructure offers high quality, standards-aligned assessment content that provides teachers the meaningful insights they need to improve teaching and learning. Developed by assessment and curriculum experts and designed to assess students on the right skills and concepts with proper rigor, Instructure's formative assessment offerings include:

- **Mastery Item Bank:** a collection of 98K+ standards-based items in ELA, math, science, and social studies for teachers to build formatives that best fit classroom needs, tell them what students know, and where they need to take their instruction next.

- **Mastery View Formative Assessments:** a collection of prebuilt assessments that give educators an instant view into student mastery levels of key state standards, so they can more effectively assess learning needs without the time requirements or pressure associated with high-stakes testing.

Checklist: A Proven Process for Using Formative Assessments

✓ Understand what you want to assess and why

✓ Determine the best formative technique for your intent

✓ Deliver the assessment

✓ Evaluate the assessment results and feedback

✓ Identify where to go next: which standards should be revisited or retaught and which students need targeted interventions

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Key Strategies for Impactful Formative Assessment

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Formative assessment is one of the most powerful tools available to teachers. With a thoughtful approach to the practice and access to high-quality assessment content, educators can understand what their students know and don't know and make instructional decisions that drive learning forward and improve student outcomes.

Learn more about how Mastery by Instructure supports teachers, students, and administrators throughout the formative process.

References

Black, P. & Wiliam, D. (October 1998). Inside the black box: Raising standards through classroom assessment. Phi Delta Kappan.

Hattie, J. A. (2009). Visible Learning: A Synthesis of Over 800 Meta-Analyses Relating to Achievement (18, 173, 181).

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Powering the World's Smartest Classrooms.

Instructure is an education technology company dedicated to helping everyone learn together. We amplify the power of teaching and elevate the learning process, leading to improved student outcomes. Today, Instructure supports more than 30 million educators and learners at more than 6,000 organizations around the world.

The Instructure Learning Platform makes learning more personal and student success more equitable by delivering the solutions you need to support, enrich, and connect every aspect of teaching and learning. The Instructure Learning Platform includes:

Canvas by Instructure: providing a robust foundation for teaching and learning—both in and out of the classroom—for all students, while seamlessly integrating with other learning tools.

Mastery by Instructure: bringing together the assessment tools and quality content educators need to implement a successful assessment program that drives learning forward.

Elevate by Instructure: improving the use of data and technology to help solve district challenges and give educators the information they need to make impactful decisions.

Impact by Instructure: helping teachers and students adopt educational technology to promote deeper engagement with learning.

Learn more at **https://www.instructure.com/k-12**.