

FORMATIVE ASSESSMENTS PART ONE

Last week, we ended the Teacher’s Corner with an example of some activities that would successfully prepare students for a particular summative assessment. This week, we will explore ideas for formative assessments you can use in your own classroom. These assessments will help you collect data to check students’ progress after you teach a single lesson or concept. Formative assessments are valuable because they provide data that show if students are grasping smaller concepts or skills that they need in order to build proficiency and succeed on summative assessments.

ANECDOTAL NOTES

One very simple way to collect data is taking notes. Observing your students and writing down notes about what you see them doing is a great way to gather information. Watching your students work, listening to them speak during group discussions, observing how they follow steps in a process, and paying attention as they read aloud are all opportunities to see where they succeed and what they are struggling with.

Note-taking does not have to be a complicated process. You can use a regular notebook or three-ring binder and dedicate a section to each of your students. This can be organized using dividers or tabs, or simply by writing a student’s name at the top of a section in the notebook. You can create a schedule and plan to observe certain students each day. Student-specific notes are helpful for uncovering repeated mistakes made by students and/or their improvement. For example, you notice that some of your students continually omit inflectional endings such as –ing, –s, and –ed when they read aloud. Once you plan activities to bring this to their attention and allow them to practice, you can use your notes to be sure they consistently read the inflectional endings. A table similar to the one shown below is an easy way to organize student-specific notes in any subject.

Student Name:		
Date	Strengths	Areas for Improvement

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Notes do not have to be linked to a particular student to be helpful. Teachers can also take notes about the entire class by circulating around the room and writing down any information they find useful. For example, you observe your students changing singular nouns to plural and notice that many of them add -s to nouns that end in -y. General notes like these can help you determine what your class needs to review. In this instance, your notes show that your students do not understand the rules for changing singular nouns that end in -y to the plural form. Now you can reteach the rules and provide your class with additional practice.

Taking notes about the things your class does well is also useful. When students successfully apply what you have taught, you can determine the concepts and skills they have mastered. This helps you decide when they are ready to move on to new material. You can also use your notes to give your class positive feedback such as verbal praise. Another idea is to keep a list of things students do well posted somewhere in the classroom and add more of their strengths to the list as you observe them.

CHECKLISTS

Checklists can be used for a variety of assessment tasks. They are especially helpful in determining areas of weakness for performance tasks like presentations, or written work like essays and compositions. For instance, you have given your students a major assignment where they must research a topic and present it to the class. A checklist of presentation skills, like the one shown below, is an excellent assessment tool because it communicates the exact criteria students need to address in order to succeed.

Presenter Name:		Reviewer Name:	
Presentation Skill	Does the presenter do this?		Write some notes about what the presenter did well, or ideas about how the presenter could improve his/her skills.
	Yes	No	
Speak clearly			

Use appropriate volume			
Speak with appropriate speed			
Make eye contact while speaking			
Stay within time limit			

As a formative assessment, have students practice their presentation in pairs. The partners can use the checklist to give each other feedback on what they still need to improve. Additionally, you can collect the checklists, analyze them, and determine if a portion of your class needs further instruction on a specific presentation skill. By using the data, you can plan to review the skill that your students need to work on most.

Similarly, you can adapt the above checklist to give students feedback on written work like essays and compositions. The checklist should consist of the skills you want them to include in a composition, such as a specific tense, certain vocabulary, an introduction, three body paragraphs, and a conclusion. Use the checklist to formatively assess these skills, give feedback, or review the topics where the class shows the most weakness.

EXIT TICKETS

Exit tickets are short assessments designed to quickly assess whether students have learned the content from the lesson in which they just participated. These assessments are given at the end of the lesson and are often handed in as a “ticket” to leave the classroom or transition to the next activity. Many teachers distribute index cards, sticky notes, or half sheets of paper for students to use to complete these tasks. Below are some examples of the different types of exit tickets that teachers use.

- Sentence frames or sentence starters that require students to fill in key parts of the content they learned, sometimes with added illustrations.

The four stages in the life cycle of a butterfly are _____, _____, _____, and _____.

Draw the stages in order:

- Words orally dictated by the teacher for students to write. This type of exit ticket is used to test students' mastery of a particular spelling pattern or phonics skill. In this example, students have to write words such as *blue*, *black*, *blade*, *brick*, *bring*, and *bright* to demonstrate their ability to use the two blends shown below.

<u>bl-</u>	<u>br-</u>
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- Sorting words according to grammar or spelling rules. In this example, students have to place the singular nouns *branch*, *fox*, *baby*, *family*, *lunch*, *supply*, *class*, and *dish* in the correct category according to the ending of the plural form.

<u>-es</u>	<u>-ies</u>
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Additional types of exit ticket assessments include:

- Sequencing events or steps in a process
- Defending one's position on a key issue using evidence from the lesson
- Answering 1-2 multiple-choice questions on a topic
- A cloze paragraph on a topic, with or without a word bank
- An oral answer to a question posed by the teacher (to individual students)
- Sorting content-based information into learned categories depending on characteristics
- Employing a specific language structure or grammar rule to respond to a prompt orally or in writing
- Using new vocabulary correctly in a response

Exit tickets should be short and measure the skill or content you presented in your lesson. You can determine if your students learned what you taught by examining whether they are able to successfully complete the exit ticket. If they do not succeed, you should plan to reteach the material.

Next week in the Teacher's Corner, we will examine three more ways to incorporate formative assessments in your classroom. In addition, we will discuss how to use data from these assessments to help your students.