Stepping Stones to Formative Assessment

Use these resources to check for progress on your own formative assessment journey. They are intended to serve as an outline for those just starting out and as a review and checklist for those who are already in the process.

These resources cannot be used by themselves as an entire formative assessment professional learning system. They are stepping stones along the path.

Part I. Learn About Formative Assessment

1.1   Inventory your comprehensive assessment system.

1.2   Clear up misconceptions about formative assessment.

Part II. Plan For Formative Assessment

2.1   Identify elements of formative practice that you do well and those you would like to improve.

2.2   Decide how you can improve formative assessment practices in your context.

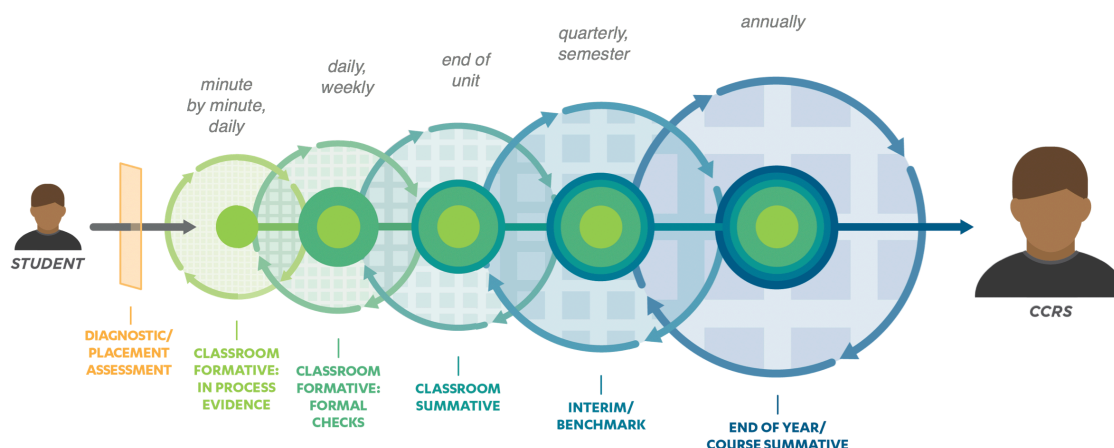2.3   Write your own learning goals to continue the work.

Part III. Teach With Formative Assessment

3.1   Apply the four-step formative assessment process to your instruction.

3.2   Ask these questions to provide feedback about learning goals and success criteria.

3.3   Analyze whether you are using a variety of evidence-gathering tools.

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o *Inventory your comprehensive assessment system. For each assessment type, list what you use and discuss how these assessments work together to provide usable data about student progress and needs.*

A **COMPREHENSIVE ASSESSMENT SYSTEM** presents a framework for a balanced assessment system. The comprehensive assessment system outlines how states, districts, and schools can align different types of assessments to propel students toward college and career readiness. Assessment types serve distinct information needs of stakeholders, from the detailed evidence that teachers and students need for daily instruction, to the gross indicators that others need for accountability and improvement.

ASSESSMENT TYPE	GRAIN SIZE	TIMING	USES	USERS
Diagnostic/ Placement	small	as needed	• Diagnose strengths and weakness in students' existing knowledge and skills • Eligibility and placement for special programs	students · teachers · parents · specialists · school leaders
Classroom formative: In process evidence	small	minute by minute daily	• Collect ongoing evidence of students' progress to inform immediate instruction • Feedback to students to move them toward achieving lesson learning goals	students · teachers
Classroom formative: Formal checks	small	daily weekly	• Evaluate what students have learned • Information on students' strengths and gaps in knowledge and skills • Inform parents of student progress	students · teachers · parents
Classroom summative	medium	end of unit	• Chart student progress on classroom and unit goals • Identify gaps in student learning • Grading • Grade-level or school-level progress checks • Inform parents of student progress	students · teachers · parents · school leaders
Interim/ Benchmark	medium	quarterly semester	• Monitor student status and progress on intermediate and/or long-term learning goals • Predict whether students are likely to test proficient on end-of-year tests • Evaluate relative performance of classrooms, schools, programs • Support school and district data-based decision making	students · teachers · parents · school & district leaders
End of year/ course summative	large	annually	• Broad view of students' achievement on major grade-level or course expectations • General view on student proficiency relative to grade-level college and career ready standards • Evaluate school curricula, program effectiveness; inform improvement planning	students · teachers · parents · school & district leaders · state

Herman, J. (2016). *Comprehensive standards-based assessment systems supporting learning*. Los Angeles, CA: University of California, Los Angeles, National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing (CRESST). Retrieved from https://www.csai-online.org/resources/comprehensive-standards-based-assessment-systems-supporting-learning

Which of these **best** describes your understanding of formative assessment?

A.   Formative assessments are strategies that teachers use to obtain information about students' learning. Some examples are learning logs, exit tickets, questioning and discussion, conferencing, and rubrics.

B.   Formative assessment provides teachers with early warning signals about students who are falling behind and who may benefit from additional help prior to end-of-year testing. Formative assessment informs decisions about curricular adjustments and professional learning needs.

C.   Formative assessment is a process used by students and teachers during instruction to elicit and use evidence to improve understanding of intended learning outcomes and support students to become more self-directed learners.

D.   Formative assessments are assignments, projects, or tests that provide feedback to students about their achievement on a unit of study.

The **FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT PROCESS** includes establishing learning goals, articulating success criteria, collecting and analyzing evidence of learning, and adjusting instruction both during and immediately after the lesson.

Sometimes the term "formative assessment" is inaccurately used to describe the activities or assessment tasks that elicit evidence of student learning. These might look like quizzes or check-ins. They can range in complexity from a "thumbs up/thumbs down" to an exit slip to a rough draft of an essay. It is common to find lists of "effective formative assessments" that describe a variety of such tasks. These tasks by themselves do not constitute the formative assessment process.

Choice (A) is a partial definition of formative assessment. It describes tasks and tools that teachers can use to gather evidence about students. But without relevant, thoughtful learning goals and clear, well-communicated success criteria, pedagogically responsive changes to instruction, and active student engagement, these tasks and tools can result in irrelevant and disconnected data about student learning. ✘ This is the most common misconception about formative assessment.

Choice (B) defines interim assessments, which are given a few times a year and may result in school program decisions that typically do not have immediate effect on daily instruction. Formative assessment is immediate, continuous, classroom-based, and daily.

Choice (C) is a simplified version of the FAST SCASS* definition of formative assessment. For many educators, the concept of formative assessment as an in-depth, all-inclusive instructional practice that extends well beyond strategies and tools requires a significant shift in thinking. ✓ This is the correct answer.

Choice (D) describes classroom summative assessments. This one is a bit tricky in that these assessments *can* be formative if they are used to change instruction immediately after they are administered and if students receive feedback they can use to influence their learning of that content (e.g., if students re-write or revise their project after receiving feedback). However, if they are only receiving comments about their achievement on that unit, and the class moves on to a different set of learning goals, the assessment was not formative in function.

* The Formative Assessment for Students and Teachers (FAST) State Collaborative on Assessment and Student Standards (SCASS)

Plan for **FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT 2.1**

o *Identify elements of formative practice that you do well and those you would like to improve.*

o *Look at your self-assessment ratings across the four categories. What can you conclude about your current strengths and weaknesses? How will you use this information to develop a vision and implementation plan?*

The 20 elements listed below are adapted from the FAST SCASS definition of formative assessment. For each element, ask: *How well do we already do this?* If you can, jot down a specific example or two for each element you do well. For elements that are not yet observed or can be improved, write a suggestion for how it could be implemented.

INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICE

0 = not at all or not applicable   3 = extremely well

		0	1	2	3
1.	Teachers plan instruction.	0	1	2	3
2.	Professional learning supports classroom instruction that is ongoing (rather than a single or limited number of events).	0	1	2	3
3.	Professional learning focuses primarily on classroom instruction and interactions.	0	1	2	3
4.	Teachers regularly collect evidence of student learning.	0	1	2	3
5.	Teachers regularly analyze evidence of student learning.	0	1	2	3
6.	Teachers use evidence of student learning to adjust instruction.	0	1	2	3
7.	Teachers respond effectively to individual students.	0	1	2	3

LEARNING GOALS

0 = not at all or not applicable   3 = extremely well

		0	1	2	3
8.	College and career ready standards and/or other standards determine learning goals.	0	1	2	3
9.	Learning goals are situated within a progression of learning.	0	1	2	3
10.	Learning goals can be reasonably accomplished in a lesson.	0	1	2	3

STUDENT INVOLVEMENT

0 = not at all or not applicable   3 = extremely well

11.	Students direct their own learning.	0	1	2	3
12.	Students engage in self-assessment and peer feedback.	0	1	2	3
13.	Students know how to achieve their learning goals.	0	1	2	3
14.	Students can identify any gaps between their understanding and the learning goals.	0	1	2	3
15.	Students regularly receive actionable feedback from peers and teachers.	0	1	2	3

EQUITY AND CULTURE

0 = not at all or not applicable   3 = extremely well

16.	Educational culture benefits all students.	0	1	2	3
17.	Educational culture benefits all teachers.	0	1	2	3
18.	Educational culture is respectful and collaborative.	0	1	2	3
19.	Students are actively encouraged to take risks and learn from mistakes.	0	1	2	3
20.	Students have multiple modes and opportunities to demonstrate their learning.	0	1	2	3

Plan for **FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT 2.2**

o *Decide how you can improve formative assessment practices in your context, whether at the state, district, school, or classroom level.*

What can you do to influence how well formative assessment is implemented? Who is responsible for what?.

VISION & PLANNING

	What do you already have in place?	What could you do next?
1. Long-term commitment *What is your timeline?*		
2. Definitional clarity *Will you commit to formative assessment as an instructional process that shapes daily classroom learning and teaching?*		
3. Alignment to existing initiatives and priorities *Can you find meaningful connections between your current programs and formative assessment?*		
4. Partnerships *How can external partners provide additional resources and assistance?*		

LEADERSHIP

	What do you already have in place?	What could you do next?
5. Lead learner *Are you willing to engage in the work alongside students and other educators?*		
6. Team builder *Have you identified individuals who can spread formative assessment throughout schools?*		
7. Communicator *How will you regularly inspire and remind your community of progress toward the vision and long-term plan?*		

RESOURCES

	What do you already have in place?	What could you do next?
8. Standards, assessment, and curriculum *Has the state or district provided the yearlong scope and sequence of instruction, a clear and comprehensible articulation of your district's comprehensive assessment system, and the necessary instructional resources to implement formative assessment?*		
9. Time *When will teachers, coaches, and administrators do this work?*		
10. Funding *What content and services are necessary to do this work well, and how will that be provided?*		
11. Structures *What kind of collaboration, communication, and reflection tools and structures will you use to keep the work moving forward?*		

o   *Write your own learning goals to continue the work.*

Some suggestions to get you started:

☐ Learn about a specific formative assessment topic in more depth. This might include a deeper dive into the nuts and bolts of formative assessment.

☐ Find out more about your local context: contact people who know about prior instructional initiatives at your school and district, talk to teachers and other stakeholders about how formative assessment can lead to improved instructional practice.

☐ Explore your state and district resources for formative assessment.

☐ Look for external partners and organizations that can provide assistance.

☐ Be able to explain the role of formative assessment in your comprehensive assessment system to district leaders, coaches, other administrators, teachers, parents, and students.

☐ Evaluate your current programs for their formative assessment qualities. Analyze how gaps can be addressed, and how formative assessment practices can be integrated with your existing initiatives.

LEARNING GOALS
What knowledge or skill will you seek next?

SUCCESS CRITERIA
What observable actions will lead to accomplishing this goal?

o *Apply the four-step formative assessment process to your instruction, with both student and adult learners.*

LEARNING GOALS	SUCCESS CRITERIA	EVIDENCE-GATHERING OPPORTUNITIES	PLANNED PEDAGOGICAL RESPONSES
What is the learning intended by the end of this lesson?	What will students do to show they are progressing toward the Learning Goal?	How will teachers and students collect information about students' progress toward the Learning Goal?	What will teachers do in response to evidence about students' progress toward the Learning Goal?

If this is your first time seeing these ideas, we suggest you read:

Haubner, J. P., Chang, S., Mancevice, N., & Herman, J. (2017). *Lesson revision: Improving lesson plans with formative assessment and college and career ready standards*. Los Angeles: The Regents of the University of California. Retrieved from https://www.csai-online.org/sites/default/files/Lesson_Revision_With_Formative_Assessment.pdf.

LEARNING GOALS

1   Are the goals aligned to standards?
Do the goals come from multiple strands?
If so, how will the strands be integrated and prioritized?

2   Can all students accomplish these goals in the time allotted?
Are the goals written in a way that accommodates differentiation?
Are the goals reasonable in scope?

3   Are these learning goals worthy of the time and effort?
Will these goals contribute significantly to students' yearlong progress?
Will these goals transfer to other areas or deepen students' skills and knowledge?

4   Do these goals connect to past or future learning?
Are these goals part of a progression of learning?

5   Did student input and interest influence these goals?
Are these goals motivating and relevant to students?

6   Will your students understand the language of the goals?
Are new vocabulary and concepts intentionally and carefully introduced?

7   Will your students understand why they are learning this?
Have students been able to ask questions (before or during the lesson)?

SUCCESS CRITERIA

8   Can you observe student responses?
Can you see or hear what students do to accomplish the criteria?

9   Can you record data about student progress?
For at least some of the criteria, are you able to track progress formally?

10   Are criteria aligned to learning goals?
When you observe students completing these criteria, will you have a good sense of whether they are progressing toward the learning goals?

11   Will your students understand the language of the criteria?
Are new vocabulary and concepts intentionally and carefully introduced?

12   Will your students know what to do?
Have students been able to ask questions (before or during the lesson)?

13   Will these criteria lead to success?
If students successfully complete these criteria, will they achieve the learning goals?

o *Analyze whether you are using a variety of evidence-gathering tools..*

Use this chart to keep track of the types of Evidence-Gathering Opportunities in the lesson. Use tally marks to count task types and participant structures, or fill it in with specific lesson tasks. The intention is to help you plan a good distribution of task types. Some examples have been provided below.

TASK TYPES

PARTICIPANT STRUCTURE	Classroom Talk	Student Work	Peer and Self-Assessment
Independent			
Pair			
Small Group			
Whole Class			

Examples are not intended to be exhaustive. It is likely that many of the classroom routines and instructional strategies you already use will fit somewhere on this chart. Many tasks can fall into multiple categories. The tool is intended only to encourage you to use a variety of tasks, not to force lesson tasks into tidy little boxes.

	Classroom Talk	Student Work	Peer and Self-Assessment
Independent	Conference with teacher	Written response, essay, jigsaw	Thumbs up/thumbs down, exit ticket, reflection journal
Pair	Turn and talk, peer conference, teacher and peer questioning, pair share, elbow partners	Presentation, work plan, graphic organizer, reading guide	Peer conference using rubric, peer editing
Small Group	Teacher and peer questioning, discussion, share work	Presentation, work plan, graphic organizer, reading guide, jigsaw	Carousel, group presentation feedback
Whole Class	Teacher and peer questioning, classroom discussion	Class play, 4 corners, class debate	Gallery walk, parking lot