10 TIPS
for Providing Formative Feedback

Formative feedback stimulates students' thinking and provides teachers with information to guide future instruction.

Feedback may be motivational, informative, or corrective. You may provide it imme-diately or delay it, and you may decide to present it either in writing or verbally. Here are 10 things to remember about using formative feedback.

1 I**probes the status of learners' knowledge.** By using formative feedback, you can inquire into the student's current knowledge and experience. Use feedback to explore the what, how, and why of the student's thinking.

2 **It challenges the critical thinking process.** Target feedback to encourage learners to conduct the error analysis themselves. Ask them questions like "Did you make any assumptions when __ ?" and "Would you consider your __ to be strong or weak?"

3 **It aligns with self-assessment.** Ask a student to assess his or her own performance and then help him or her diagnose any areas that need improvement. Give sufficient information so that students can address those areas. Be sure to focus your feedback on the task, not the learner.

4 **It provides non-evaluative input.** Make your comments constructive to guide learners to the next level of under-standing. For example, you could say "You might consider measuring __ . What would happen if__ ?" Avoid com-parisons with other students-directly or indirectly-or providing an overall grade at this stage of assessment.

5 **You can use formative feedback to make observations.** Consider how a student's thinking has changed over time and point this out to the student to reinforce his or her thought process. Feedback like this supports students' autono-my when they are completing assignments.

6 **Make your comments simple and specific.** Rather than giving many suggestions for improvement, work with the learner to set a single goal for the next assignment. Give only enough information to initiate new thinking, remove uncer-tainties, or clarify objectives. Provide feedback in small chunks so that it is not overwhelming or ignored.

7 **Offer formative feedback frequently.** Build in multiple checkpoints for feedback. Provide timely responses to stu-dents' work. Use immediate feedback to help students retain procedural or conceptual knowledge. To promote transfer of learning, consider using delayed feedback.

8 **Formative feedback should be differentiated.** Tailor your comments based on the learner's characteristics. There is no "one-size-fits-all" formative feedback. Provide early, structured, and corrective support for low-achieving students by offering explicit guidance or directive feedback. For high-achieving students, provide verification and facilitative feed-back in the form of accuracy checks, hints, cues, and prompts. Consider the nature of the task and instructional goals and customize your comments to ensure your feedback is valid, objective, focused, and clear to the learner.

9 **You can use multimedia formats to provide formative feedback.** Explore the potential of multiple modes for feed-back, including written, verbal, graphic, video, and electronic means.

10 **Do not allow formative feedback to interrupt active learning.** Minimize the use of formative feedback during implementation of an assignment. Comments at this time may take control or overly influence the direction of the task. They may also distract the learner from focusing on the task at hand.
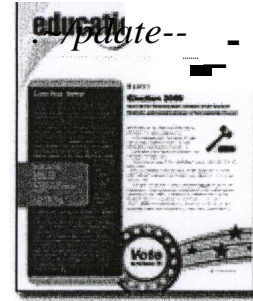
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In the Classroom with Deirdra Grode: Transforming Teaching

Throughout my teaching career, I often noticed that several students would earn failing scores each time I graded a class exam or project. Then, when it was time to move on to the next lesson, these students were unprepared to move forward. In recent years, frustrated with not being able to better prepare all of my students, I began using formative assessment, which W. James Popham defines in his 2008 book *Transformative Assessment* as "a planned process in which teachers or students use assessment-based evidence to adjust what they're currently doing."

Using formative assessments has had a positive impact on my instruction. Now, instead of scoring projects or essays on first viewing, I build in opportunities to discover any lack of mastery .. Frequent evaluation of student progress informs me of when I need to reteach material to a small group, individual students, or to the full class, and if I need to modify the way I will deliver instruction in the future. As a result, students' grades and mastery of skills and knowledge have improved.

Surveys also serve as powerful formative assessment tools to gauge the effectiveness of instruction, classroom rules, and school culture. I have frequently engaged students in surveys to discern how I can most effectively serve their needs. The surveys give students an opportunity to think about their own learning habits, set goals, and make adjustments that would benefit them.

Formative assessment can occur in classrooms through numerous forms, including ongoing testing, multiple draft submissions, and student conferences. A colleague of mine who teaches math has students carry dry erase boards to class and hold up their answers as they complete problems. He receives immediate feedback and can then provide guidance during class to students who need it. Several teachers in our K-12 school use the writers' workshop model, which allows for frequent review of student work in individual conferences and also informs the process of grouping students for rninilessons.

I also use formative analyses to inform my teaching. For example, a few years ago I observed the photographer of the students' graduation pictures give the boys diplomas and the girls roses to hold as props for their photos. When only one student was upset by this gender stereotyping, I realized I needed to prepare a few lessons on critical theory. The students studied feminist theory and wore paper eyeglasses as a way of viewing the world briefly with "feminist lenses" to show a different perspective. The students better understood the concern their classmate had that day. Throughout the rest of the school year, I heard students referring to feminist lenses and noting examples of degradation and gender-based stereotyping in video games, literature, and music. The lessons on critical theory were academic, yet the gains extended beyond the classroom.

Formative assessment looks different in every classroom, but it serves a common purpose-to improve instruction and help children achieve more. I hope that more teachers as well as administrators will embrace formative assessment as a means of moving all students forward.