



FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT

## Putting the FORM in Formative Assessment

Formative assessment works best when students understand what their learning looks like. Here are

some guidelines for making it fun, organic, relevant, and meaningful.

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September 26, 2016

Everywhere you look in the education world these days, you find the words "formative assessment." This phrase is one of education's hottest buzzwords, and with good reason. Formative assessment is essential for student learning.

As teachers, we often create our formative assessments based on what we see in the classroom, whether we're deciding to make up an exit ticket on the spot or doing a "thumbs up/down" check after a classroom discussion. While these are valuable, there is a benefit to being more systematic in planning formative assessment. Ask yourself some questions:

- What is essential for students to know or be able to do after this lesson?
- How can I assess that?
- How will this information change that lesson or tomorrow's lesson?

To make formative assessment accessible and manageable for teachers while maximizing its benefits, I try to emphasize four things: **F**un, **O**rganic, **R**elevant, and **M**eaningful. I call it putting the FORM in formative assessment.

## **Make It Fun**

Technology is a great way to make formative assessment more exciting and to engage students in the process. **Plickers** (<https://plickers.com/>) has been a huge hit with students in the classrooms I've seen. It's perfect for teachers in schools that don't have regular access to technology, as it only takes the teacher's cell phone and a projector to make it work. Other sites like **Kahoot** (<https://getkahoot.com/>) and **Socrative** (<http://www.socrative.com/>) make assessing student learning a game that students enjoy. These Edutopia posts give more **fun formative assessment ideas** (<http://www.edutopia.org/discussion/10-fun-filled-formative-assessment-ideas>) and ways to **use technology for formative assessment** (<http://www.edutopia.org/blog/tech-friendly-formative-assessment-tools-monica-burns>) . When you engage the students in the assessment process, you get more buy-in, you get a more accurate snapshot of their learning, and you get them excited about their own learning.

## **Make It Organic**

Not every formative assessment has to be elaborate. A simple one-question exit ticket will often give you the information that you need. Ask students to answer your focus question or define the objective of the lesson. Have them solve one or two example problems to see if they understand the skill or concept you've taught that day. This is not only quick for you to plan and

implement, but it will also tell you exactly what you need to know: "Did students learn what I wanted them to learn from my lesson?" A helpful tip I share with teachers is that you don't always need to check every exit ticket. Depending on the lesson, you can select a random (or representative) sampling of your class to get a general picture of whether students understood the lesson, and to help guide your lesson planning the next day.

## **Make It Relevant**

Often, I see stacks of exit tickets checked or even graded, and then immediately thrown in the garbage. While it's helpful for you to have the information about what students know and don't know, wouldn't it also be helpful for the students to have that information? Feedback is an important part of the formative assessment process. When you provide students with feedback, they can practice building their own **metacognition** (<http://www.edutopia.org/blog/metacognition-gift-that-keeps-giving-donna-wilson-marcus-conyers>) (understanding of their own learning). Additionally, show students directly how you're using that feedback to alter your instruction. It will help them comprehend how you help them learn and how they need to engage in their own learning process.

## **Make It Meaningful**

Everyone is extremely busy, but it does you no good to give out an exit ticket and then let that stack of exit tickets sit on your desk for days. If the point was to determine whether the students learned the objective from a given lesson, you need that feedback immediately to determine how you'll move forward with your instruction. If you aren't using that information to drive your planning and instruction, then it just becomes a time filler and/or a waste of paper.

If we can follow these steps, we make our formative assessment more worthwhile, more purposeful, and more effective, and we drive student learning further than we did before. In the comments section below, please tell us about your formative assessment strategies.

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