



Use assessments of student writing to inform instruction and feedback



The formative assessment cycle is a process where teachers regularly assess student skill levels, adapt instruction based on the assessment data, and then reassess skill levels. When teachers monitor student progress throughout the entire writing process, it provides helpful information for lesson planning and provides additional feedback to students. Assessment should occur on a regular basis, not just through final written products. This helps teachers better understand student progress and therefore can provide students with targeted instruction.

How to carry out the recommendation

1. Assess students' strengths and areas for improvement before teaching a new strategy or skill.
2. Analyze student writing to tailor instruction and target feedback.
3. Regularly monitor students' progress while teaching writing strategies and skills.

Potential roadblocks

1. Writing is a nuanced discipline and each of my students needs support with a unique collection of skills. I do not have the resources to provide that level of differentiation.
2. I don't have time to regularly conduct formative assessments for all of my students.
3. I am not allowed to modify my school's curriculum or standards. How can I still use formative assessment?

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Reference: Graham, S., Bruch, J., Fitzgerald, J., Friedrich, L., Furgeson, J., Greene, K., . . . Smither Wulsin, C. (2016). *Teaching secondary students to write effectively* (NCEE 2017-4002). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance. Retrieved from <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/PracticeGuide/22>



How to carry out the recommendation

1. Assess students' strengths and areas for improvement before teaching a new strategy or skill.

Utilize frequent assessment to identify strengths and challenges for individual students and groups of students. Assessment can occur through class work, complex essay writing, or on-demand writing prompts. On-demand writing prompts are short writing assignments that are carefully designed to assess student skills. Effective on-demand writing prompts identify a purpose and audience, offer some form of student choice, are age appropriate, and should reflect authentic topics. For on-demand writing samples and design guidelines, reference page 46 in the practice guide referenced on the first page of this document. Teacher teams can collaborate to design common prompts and analyze common data. The use of a graphic organizer helps identify common student strengths and areas of need across student groups. A sample organizer is located on page 47 of the practice guide referenced on the first page of this document.

2. Analyze student writing to tailor instruction and target feedback.

Choose learning objectives and create lessons that challenge students based on formative assessment data. Customize lessons and assignments for different instructional groupings, including individual students, small groups, classes, and grade levels. Support student growth through specific feedback targeted to the students' identified needs. Provide constructive feedback using protocols such as "Glow and Grow" and "Praise-Question-Polish." Student teams can aggregate and review school and grade-level data for trends in overall strengths and areas of need.

Type of Feedback	Purpose	Outcome
Teacher Feedback	To highlight the strengths, successes, and challenges of student writing	Scaffolds instruction and customizes supports for the student's text and writing process
Peer Feedback	To highlight the strengths, successes, and challenges of student writing	Supports student in developing a deeper understanding of effective writing and constructive feedback
Self-Assessments	To review one's own writing as a reader	Identifies areas of text that require clarification and helps raise awareness of where the student has grown and in which areas they still need support

3. Regularly monitor students' progress while teaching writing strategies and skills.

Monitor student progress at regular intervals. The frequency of monitoring students depends on their progress and learning goals. Through the use of tracking tools or visual representations, student growth and areas in need of improvement can be monitored and used to inform student groupings and instruction. Refer to page 54 of the practice guide for a sample data-tracking sheet.

Potential roadblocks and how to address them

Roadblock	Suggested Approach
<i>Writing is a nuanced discipline and each of my students needs support with a unique collection of skills. I do not have the resources to provide that level of differentiation.</i>	Finding time to personalize instruction for students is difficult but beneficial because it is targeted support and students feel cared for when someone takes the time to customize instruction for them. Teachers should allot a small amount of class time, 5 to 10 minutes weekly, to work with students who need help in similar areas. Small-group instruction can occur while other students are completing independent work assignments. Collaborate with colleagues from other content areas about strategies for efficiently supporting student writing in the classroom.
<i>I don't have time to regularly conduct formative assessments for all of my students.</i>	Use existing assignments and assessments as a formative assessment. Provide students with opportunities to participate in formative assessments through peer and self-assessments.
<i>I am not allowed to modify my school's curriculum or standards. How can I still use formative assessment?</i>	Data-informed instruction can occur with existing curriculum and standards; the goal is to identify what areas of the curriculum students have not mastered and to support them in those areas.



For more information on the research evidence and references to support this recommendation, or for more detailed explanation from the What Works Clearinghouse committee who developed this recommendation, please refer to the practice guide cited at the bottom of the first page of this document.