

FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT STRATEGIES FOR TEACHERS

1: **ABC Brainstorming** - Using the ABC brainstorming strategy with students midway through a unit provides you with information about what students have learned about a particular topic. Working individually, in pairs, in small groups, or as a class, students brainstorm words or phrases that begin with each letter of the alphabet and are related to the current unit of study. Midway through a unit on fire safety, students may write “meeting place” next to the “M” and “stop, drop, and roll” next to the letter “S.” A glance through the brainstormed lists helps you determine what information is lacking and provides direction for planning opportunities that focus on these gaps in your students’ learning. A graphic organizer that can be used with the ABC brainstorming assessment strategy is available at <https://www.studenthandouts.com/graphic-organizers/>

2: **Analogies** - Ask students to create an analogy between something they are familiar with and the new information they have learned. When asked to create an analogy for an atom, students may come up with an atom being like a community. The nucleus of the atom is like your immediate family. The electrons that fly around the nucleus are like members of the community that you may or may not interact with on a regular basis. Asking students to explain their analogies will show the depth of their understanding about a topic.

3: **Checklists** - Class checklists are a great tool for collecting data about students during a unit of study. Before beginning a new unit, make a list of all the skills students will need to demonstrate mastery of the unit’s outcome(s). On a chart, list the students’ names down the left hand side and the skills across the top. Clip the chart to a clipboard and position it in an easily accessible place. As students are participating in various learning opportunities, observe the students and check off the skills you see students demonstrating with proficiency. Individual checklists can also be used to gather data about student learning. Students and/or teachers complete the checklists.

4: **Choral Response** - If you need a quick assessment of student understanding, ask students to respond to a series of questions “as a class.” If you listen carefully to the number and content of responses, you will get a good idea of whether or not the students are clear on what you are presenting. Choral response encourages all students to be actively engaged in the assessment process.

5: **Cloze Procedure** - The cloze procedure can be used to determine the level of student understanding regarding a particular topic or unit of study. Create or use a passage that relates to the unit. Make sure the passage is at a readability level for your students. Two or three passages at different readability levels may be needed to accommodate all the students in your class. Be sure to leave the first and last sentences intact to assist with student understanding. Two sites available online for creating cloze passages are [Lexical Tutor](#) and [edHelper](#).

6: **Concept Maps** - Concept maps are a type of web that provides a visual representation of student understanding about a particular topic being studied. Google “concept maps graphic organizers” for a variety of printable concept maps that your students can use. Students print the topic or main idea in the oval in the centre of the page. They then write supporting details in the spaces surrounding the centre oval. Depending on the age and ability of the students, they can also group similar supporting details together. Using concept maps is a skill that must be taught to students. Once students are familiar with concept maps, they can be used as a formative assessment strategy in any subject area.

7: **Conferences** - Student understanding can be formatively assessed using one-on-one conferences with each student in your class or with select students for whom you want to further assess their learning. Determine your target questions ahead of time to ensure you are gathering information related to your goal or outcome. Take notes during the conferences to refer to later when planning instruction.

8: Computer Surveys - Computer surveys are a quick way to determine what your students have learned about a topic of study. Create ten short response questions - true/false, multiple choice, or one word completion questions, and use a platform like [Google Forms](#) to create the assessment. Google Forms allows you to see individual responses as well as a class summary.

9: Demonstration Stations - The use of demonstration stations is a great way for students to show what they know and help you determine the direction of future instruction. Midway through a unit on magnets, set up a number of stations and have students demonstrate how magnets attract and repel, where the magnetic field is the strongest, the parts of a magnet, how magnets are attracted to some objects and not others, how a compass works, etc. At each station, the students could also explain their thought processes to you or write their thoughts in a science journal.

10: Discussions - Having a class discussion part way through a unit of study can provide you with valuable information regarding what your students know about the subject. Focus the discussions on higher level thinking skills and give students a few minutes to reflect on their learning before beginning the discussion. Encourage students to share what they have learned and how that knowledge may have an impact on their daily lives. Brainstorm ways that the knowledge could be transferred to other subject areas or situations the students may come across.

Listening carefully to the responses given by students will provide useful information for planning future instruction.

11: Double Entry Journals - Journals are a great way to formatively assess students and get a “window” into their thinking. Double entry journals are one form of journaling. A double entry journal has two columns. In the left column, students write key words, ideas, or quotations. They then give their personal response to these words in the right column. Students may include questions that arise out of their responding. By reading the students’ responses, you can assess students’ knowledge and understanding of the topic you are studying. For example, when studying flight provide students with the phrases “lift vs. gravity,” “Wright brothers,” and “laws of flight.” Students print these phrases in the left hand column of their journal and then respond to them in the right hand column. Reading over the student responses will provide you with information about student understanding. A template for a double entry journal is here: [Double Entry Journal Template](#).

12: Drawings - Some of your students may be able to show you what they know by creating a drawing or a series of drawings to demonstrate their understanding. Encourage students to share their thinking about what they are drawing to gain insight into what they have learned up to a given point in a unit of study. Have students annotate their drawings, to further explain their thinking.

13: Email Questions - Technology is a great resource for teachers and a medium that most students are familiar with and comfortable using. If your school provides all its students with email addresses, send questions to your students. The questions should focus on higher level thinking skills and demonstrate their learning during a current unit of study. Encourage students to think about all the learning opportunities they have participated in and how those activities fit in with their own background knowledge and experiences. (Or create and assign questions in Google Classroom if you have one)

14: Examples/Non-Examples - Encourage your students to provide you with examples and non-examples of a topic being studied. The examples and non-examples provide you with information regarding the depth of understanding of your students. For example, during a unit on recycling, ask your students to provide you with examples of recycling and examples that do not involve recycling. While studying a unit on mixtures and solutions in science, review mixtures and determine student understanding by asking students to provide you with examples and non-examples of mixtures. Ask students to explain their reasoning for classifying each example and non-example.

15: Exit Cards - Exit cards could be used on a regular basis to formatively assess what your students know, understand, and have learned during a current unit of study. Before students leave at the end of class, ask them a question or pose a problem for them to solve. Give students a problem involving interest to solve during a unit in maths or ask students to draw and label the planets when studying the solar system in science class. Students record their responses on a scrap piece of paper, a file card, or a sticky note. Collect the exit cards as the students leave the classroom. Glance through the exit cards to determine if students are generally understanding the topic or whether you need to provide further whole class or small group instruction in a particular area. Separate the exit cards into piles, indicating students who have mastered the outcome or are well on their way to doing so, students who are making steady progress, and students who need additional one-on-one or small group instruction. Exit cards can be used to create groupings for the next day's lesson and activities can be planned based on the students' responses.

[Link to Exit Cards](#) examples here.

16: Fist To Five - When you need a quick, immediate assessment, the fist of five is a great strategy. Ask your students a question and have them respond by showing you their level of understanding. Students hold up one finger if they are still unsure of a topic and need to be provided with more information. If they are on their way to fully understanding, they might hold up three or four fingers. Students who have mastered the unit and are able to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding would hold up five fingers. A glance around the classroom provides you with information about student learning and allows you to adapt your instruction accordingly.

17: Four Corners - A great way to get students out of their desks and moving is the four corners strategy. In each corner of the room, provide a label. Label one corner, "Strongly Agree," one corner, "Agree," the third corner, "Disagree," and the final corner, "Strongly Disagree." Call out a fact or statement about the current unit of study. Students go and stand in the corner that matches their response. Encourage students to share their reasons for choosing the response. Have one or two students from each corner share their answers with the rest of the class. By listening to the students as they discuss their reasons and share them with the class, you are provided with information that can guide future lessons.

18: Graffiti Wall - The graffiti wall is fun activity for students and gives you a visual representation of what your students have learned during a unit of study. Cover a part of a wall with white paper. Encourage students to write or draw what they have learned about a topic. Students can jot down facts, write personal opinions, connect their learning to other areas of study, etc. Using the graffiti wall activity partway through a unit provides you with information for further planning of instruction. If there appear to be gaps in your students' learning, you can target those areas and further assess to see if there is indeed a deficit that you need to focus on in future lessons. Students may have made connections that you were not expecting or hadn't even thought of when planning the unit. The information you collect from the graffiti wall is valuable formative assessment data. Leave the graffiti wall up during the remainder of the unit and students can continue to add comments and drawings.

19: Graphic Organizers - Graphic organizers have many uses in a differentiated classroom. Using graphic organizers to formatively assess students is one use. Graphic organizers provide a visual representation of student learning. Students complete the template with their thoughts and understandings about a unit of study. A search on Google will provide you with many examples and templates to use.

20: Individual Whiteboards - Individual whiteboards provide you with a quick assessment of

student learning. Ask students questions about a topic or unit of study. Students record their answers on individual whiteboards. Circulate throughout the class and observe students responding. Students can also be asked to hold up their whiteboards. A glance at the whiteboards will provide you with information regarding student knowledge and understanding.

21: Inside-Outside Circle - The inside-outside circle is a strategy that can provide you with information about student learning. Divide your students into two groups. One group is the inside circle and the other group forms the outside circle. Students pair up with other students in the opposing circle and face one another. The inside circle begins by responding to a question or statement provided by the teacher. After a set amount of time--perhaps a minute or two, students reverse roles and the outside partners respond. While students are responding, circulate around the circles and listen to comments and explanations being shared. This information will help guide further planning.

22: Learning Logs - Learning logs are notes students make during a unit of study. Time is set aside at the beginning or end of class for students to write about what they have learned, list any questions about the topic they may have, or make connections between the topic and their own lives. Learning logs provide you with valuable information about what students are learning and possible directions for future instruction.

23: List 10 Things - About midway through a unit of study, instruct students to list ten things they have learned during the unit. Gather these lists and read through them to get an idea of where students are in regard to understanding. Look for gaps in learning or misunderstandings. These gaps and misunderstandings can be addressed in future lessons.

24: Matching Activities - A fun way to assess student knowledge of vocabulary or facts is to match words with their definitions or group facts into given categories. Provide each student or pair of students with a set of cards. Be sure that there is only one word or one definition on each card. Students can also play a game of concentration with these cards. All cards are turned over so that the words and definitions are hidden. Students play this game with a partner. One student turns over two cards. If the two cards contain a word and a definition that match, they keep the pair of cards. Cards that do not match are turned back over and the other student takes a turn at finding a match. The activity continues until all words and definitions have been found.

Another way to use the matching activity is to put individual words onto each card and then have the students group the cards. When studying renewable and non-renewable resources, you would print words like “oil,” “oxygen,” “water,” “coal,” and “uranium” on the cards. Give each student or pair of students a set of cards. Students divide the cards into two piles. One pile would include renewable resources and the other pile would include non-renewable resources.

25: Observations - Observing students can provide valuable information about how students are progressing and what strategies they are using to learn. Recording information can take several different forms. You can use sticky notes to jot down your observations. At the end of the day, these sticky notes can be easily filed into individual student file folders or binders. Using a grid that contains all the names of the students in your class is another useful collection device. As you observe different students, you jot down information in their box on the grid. The grid allows you to see, at a glance, the names of the students who have not been observed. These students can then become the focus of your observation during the next class. File cards are another collection device. Notes about individual students can be collected on file cards. At the end of class, file these cards behind each student’s name. When you are ready to analyze your observations, simply pull out all the file cards on a particular student and read the comments you have made during your observations. If observations are taken over a number of classes, you can determine whether there is a pattern to the behaviours you observe.

26: One Minute Essays - The one minute essay is a quick formative assessment strategy that allows you to gauge student understanding of a particular topic. Pose a question to the students

have the students respond. Tell the students they have one minute to write down their response. Ensure the question you ask can be answered in one minute. Use questions that cause students to reflect on learning and make personal connections with their own lives. Use Bloom's Taxonomy of [question starters](#) if you are unsure of how to pose a question. Link here: [Bloom's Taxonomy Question Starters](#).

27: One Minute Fluency - Being able to read fluently is an important skill. Assess the fluency of your students on a regular basis to ensure they are reading at an appropriate rate for understanding at their grade level. One minute of listening to their sustained reading book can be enough to get an insight into whether or not they have chosen a text that is too difficult.

28: One Sentence Summaries - Asking students to provide you with a one sentence summary of what they have learned provides you with information about what your students know about a topic. Give students time to reflect on their learning and encourage students to think about their response. The depth of the student summaries will indicate their understanding of the topic or unit to date and provide you with direction for future planning of lessons.

29: Open-Ended Questions - Using open-ended questions allows you to determine the depth and breadth of student learning. Ask students questions that cannot be answered with "yes" or "no" or another one word answer. Open-ended questions require students to think about their answers and use their knowledge and understanding about a topic in their responses. Questions that involve the word "why" often encourage deeper thinking.

30: Paper Pass - Paper pass is a form of brainstorming that gets students up and moving from their desks. Chart paper with different target words or questions are posted around the classroom. Students rotate around the room to the different brainstorming sheets and add their comments about the topics and about what other students have written. The process for the paper pass can be informal or formal. An informal use of the paper pass permits students to wander around the classroom and respond to the topic words or questions of their choosing. A more formal use involves students being divided into groups and systematically rotating around the room and responding.

31: Peer-Assessments - Assessments by peers is a powerful way to gather information about students and their understanding. Students can use a set criteria to assess the work of their classmates. Peer-assessment can be used in different subject areas. In writing, for example, students can assess another student's piece of writing and provide feedback about what they observe.

32: Placemats - The placemat strategy is an enjoyable activity for students and provides you with information about their current level of understanding. Provide each group of four or five students with a large sheet of paper. In the middle of the paper write the topic or target question. Students divide the paper up so they each have a section to write in and there is room in the middle to summarize their responses. Students individually write or draw to demonstrate their understanding of the topic or target question in their area of the placemat. They then share what they have written or drawn with the other group members. After everyone has finished sharing, students discuss the information and come up with two or three main ideas. They write these ideas in the centre of the paper and share them with the rest of the class. An analysis of the placemats provides you with a glimpse of what the students have learned so far in the unit.

33: Problem Solving - Pose a problem to students and ask them how they would solve it. Students can respond orally or in writing. The responses given by the students indicate their level of understanding regarding the unit being studied. Information provided by the students gives you an indication of what type of instruction is needed during future lessons.

34: Questionnaires - Questionnaires can be used in various subject areas and for a variety of

purposes. When used as a formative assessment strategy, questionnaires provide teachers with information on student learning that they can use to plan further instruction.

35: Questioning - Questioning is a great formative assessment strategy to determine the depth of student understanding. Ask students lower level questions that focus on the facts and general information about a topic. Use higher level questions to encourage students to think about and reflect on their learning. During a unit on energy conservation, you may ask students to tell you different ways that they could conserve energy. The listing of ideas would be a lower level question. Asking students to describe one way they conserve energy and how this practice affects the environment would be a higher level question. (see Bloom's Taxonomy link in Strategy 26).

36: Quick Writes - Quick writes give teachers a visual of student learning. Provide students with an open-ended question and set an amount of time for having them write--from two to five minutes. Tell students not to worry about the conventions of writing but rather focus on getting their ideas down on paper. When the time is up, ask students to put their pencils down. Look through the quick writes for valuable information regarding the knowledge and understanding of your students have about a given topic. Using a quick write at the start of class is also a great way to activate the prior knowledge of your students.

37: Reflection Journals - Reflection journals are a type of journal that encourages students to think about what they have learned and make connections to their own lives. Reading through the entries that students create gives you information that can be used to plan future lessons.

38: Repeat Pre-Assessments (Set 1 and Set 2)- Another way to formatively assess your students is to repeat a pre-assessment strategy you used at the beginning of a unit of study. At the start of a unit on ecosystems, you may have asked your students to create a web or write a one-minute essay on ecosystems. Midway through the unit, repeat the strategy you used to collect pre-assessment data. Read through the student responses and compare the depth of understanding to the initial assessment. Most pre-assessment strategies can be repeated to determine what students have learned and to inform your instruction.

39: Response Cards - There are so many uses for response cards in a classroom. Ask a question and students respond by holding up a card. The most common response cards are yes/no questions. Students are provided with two cards. One card has the word "Yes" written on it and one card has the word "No" on it. After calling out a question, students respond by holding up their answer. Glance around the room and quickly assess student understanding. There are many different types of response cards. Try using true/false response cards, maths operations cards, or punctuation cards with your students.

40: Self-Assessments - Provide each student with a self-assessment related to your unit of study. Self-assessment involves students reflecting about their own learning in relation to unit goals or outcomes. Checklists or open-ended questions can be used to assist students with their reflections. Include questions that deal with student understanding about the topic and with the identification of areas that need more information or more practice. Students are often able to articulate their learning needs to us. We just need to ask the right questions. Self-assessments is one way of asking students about their learning and the information can then be used to help plan future instruction.

41: Sentence Prompts - Sentence prompts can be used in a variety of ways to informally assess students and gather information to inform instruction. Simple sentence starters such as the following could be used:

- I understand
- I don't understand
- I need more information about ...

42: Show of Hands - A simple strategy to gauge the understanding level of your students is through a show of hands. In a unit on problem solving, you may ask your students if they recall the steps needed to solve a problem or how to determine the operation of a problem. Through a quick show of hands you can decide whether you need to review with a few students or with the whole class. An alternative to this, is to get students who understand to put their hand diagonally across their chest. This is less distracting to others and children are more likely to be honest.

43: Student Composed Questions - Have students write “test” questions. Students compose the questions and possible answers. Students should think about what questions would show an in-depth understanding of a topic. When students have finished creating their questions and answers, they hand them in to you. Read through the questions and answers to get a feel for what the students have learned about a topic. Use the questions as prompts for class discussions or have students exchange their question sheets. Students answer the questions and return them to their owners to be “marked.” Students enjoy playing the role of the teacher. Encourage students to provide positive, descriptive feedback to the student who answered their questions.

44: Teach a Friend - A good strategy for determining if students understand a concept or process is to have them teach it to a friend. Students need to think about the knowledge and skills needed for understanding and include that information in their teaching. Pair students up and have them “teach” their partner about the concept or process.

45: Think-Pair-Share - The think-pair-share strategy is a great way to gather information about the level of understanding of your students. It is a quick and easy strategy that can be used a number of times throughout a unit of study. Ask students questions such as, “What did you learn during today’s lesson?” or “What connections can you make to your own life based on what you have learned so far?” Give students a few minutes to think about these questions. Pair students up with partners. Students share their thoughts with each other and then join a larger group or the whole class. Randomly call on students to share their ideas. By going through this process, students are able to solidify and refine their thinking before having to share their answers. Circulate throughout the class as students are sharing their thoughts and ideas to assess the overall depth of understanding.

46: Three Facts and a Fib - The three facts and a fib activity is a great strategy to find out what students have learned about a unit of study. Students write down three facts and one fib about a topic. They take turn sharing their three facts and a fib with a partner, in a small group, or with the entire class. Students enjoy trying to identify the “fib.” Circulate throughout the class as the students are writing and sharing what they have written.

47: Three Minute Pause - The three minute pause is a strategy that allows students to stop and reflect on learning, make connections to personal experiences, and ask for further information or clarification. Assign students to groups. Give students three minutes to complete this activity. First, the students summarize the main points of the new learning. Next, they make connections to personal experiences. Finally, they ask questions to further their understanding of the learning.

48: Three Things - The three things strategy involves giving each student a piece of paper and having them visually represent, through words or drawings, three things they have learned in the unit so far. Tell students to provide as many details as possible to determine the depth of their understanding. Have students share with a partner. By talking through their ideas, students may come up with more details to add. Give students a couple minutes to add or make changes to their “three things” and then have them hand them in so you can take a closer look at what they created. Circulate through the classroom as students are working and listen to what they are saying to their partners. Use this information to help plan future instruction.

49: 3-2-1 - The 3-2-1 strategy is a quick way to gain information about all the students in your

class and the level of understanding they have about a current unit of study. Ask students to jot down three things they have learned about a topic, make two personal connections to the topic, and one area that is unclear or one question they have about the topic.

50: Thumbs Up, Thumbs Down - Using the thumbs up/thumbs down strategy with your students is one way to determine whether students understand the information presented. After introducing students to new learning, do a quick comprehension check to see if students understand the information presented. Ask students to give you a thumbs up if they understand and a thumbs down if they don't understand and need more information. A sideways thumb can mean they feel sort of on the right track. Sometimes, thumbs down students can work with the teacher, whilst thumbs sideways students are paired with thumbs up students for clarification.

51: Traffic Light - Provide students with three circles. Give students a red circle, a yellow circle, and a green circle. To check for student understanding during a lesson or unit, ask students questions about their learning. If students are comfortable with the topic and ready to move on, they hold up their green circle. If they are fairly comfortable with the topic, they hold up their yellow circles. Students who are confused or require further instruction to understand, hold up the red circle. This is a quick strategy that provides you with immediate feedback and provides direction for your instruction. Great for juniors. There could also be a red, green and yellow cup they keep on their table and as they are working, they change based on how they are coping with the task.

52: Turn and Talk - The turn and talk strategy allows all students to talk about a question or topic that you have introduced in class. Students turn to a neighbour and discuss their thoughts and what they have learned about the question or topic. Both students are given the opportunity to speak. Circulate throughout the classroom during the turn and talk activity in order to get an idea of what they students know and have learned about the question or topic being studied.

53: Whip Around - Whip around is a formative assessment strategy that involves all the students in the class. First, you pose a question to the students. The students are given a few minutes to formulate their answers and make brief notes. You then repeat the question and "whip around" the room and have each student give one response from their notes.

54: Ask - Ask your students what they have learned during a unit. Have students identify what skills they need to practice or what information they require to help with their understanding of the topic. Students are often aware of the type of assistance they need. There are a number of ways to collect this information. Pose the question to the entire class and have them jot down their responses and hand them in. Meet with students one-on-one and have a conversation that focuses on the current unit of study and ask students what they need to help them continue to learn about the topic. Students can identify what they need to do to further their understanding and what you can do as a teacher.

55: Checklists - Checklists provide students with valuable information and indicate areas they need to focus their learning on. Provide checklists for tasks and assignments that are given to students so they have a means to assess whether they have completed all the steps in a task or included all the needed information in an assignment. If students are missing information, they can decide on what course of action they need to take to learn the information.

56: Journals - Journals provide useful information to both teachers and students. Encourage students to identify questions or needs they have about their learning and reflect on how they could take an active role in addressing these questions or needs. Respond to student questions with further suggestions and let students decide on the best course of action.

57: Process Exemplars (Worked Examples): - Process exemplars provide students with information about the thinking process that leads to understanding. Collect samples of student thinking by having students explain how they arrived at an answer. A good example of a process exemplar would be solving a two digit

multiplication question in math. Students record each step in their thinking and provide descriptions of how they solved the question. By providing a number of different process exemplars for each question, students realize there is more than one way to solve a problem and they can try out different processes and find the one that works the best for them.

58: Product Exemplars Provide exemplars for students to compare their work. When writing a narrative paragraph, for example, post a few examples of the type of paragraph you are wanting them to hand in. Students can compare their narrative paragraphs to the exemplars and determine what they need to change or add to their paragraph to demonstrate mastery of narrative writing at their grade level.

59: Self-Marking Quizzes - Create a number of quizzes that contain higher and lower level questions. Allow students to take these quizzes and use a key to mark the quizzes themselves. Students are able to determine their level of understanding regarding a particular topic or unit of study. They can also identify areas they need to spend more time learning by taking these self-marking quizzes. It is important to stress to students that the purpose of these quizzes is to identify areas for further development and that the number of correct or incorrect responses is not important.

60: Writing Continuums - Writing continuums provide valuable information to students which they can use to make decisions about their learning. Provide students with a number of different samples of writing that are written at different developmental levels. Students compare their writing sample to the samples on the continuum to determine what level they are working at and what they need to do to move to the next level. By analysing their writing, students are able to identify areas they need to develop and set goals to improve their writing. Collect writing samples from your students to create your writing continuum.