Seven Strategies of Assessment for Learning: An Overview

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“Students at the Center”
San Diego County Office of Education

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Seven Strategies of Assessment for Learning: An Overview

“Innovations that include strengthening the practice of formative assessment produce significant and often substantial learning gains.”

--Black & Wiliam, 1998b, p. 140

Research reviews over the last decade have heightened awareness of formative assessment’s power to increase achievement, but not all that is labeled “formative assessment” is equally effective. In this session, we will explore the Seven Strategies of Assessment for Learning, which organize research-based recommendations about formative assessment practices into an instructional framework that has consistently improved motivation and achievement through deep student involvement.

Information in this handout is based on the text, Seven Strategies of Assessment for Learning, 2e (2015).

Review of High-Impact Formative Assessment Practices

Table Discussion

What formative assessment practices are you familiar with?

Share at your table and list some here:
High-Impact Formative Assessment Practices

Research from many countries over several decades (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Hattie 2009) on a diverse array of interventions featuring formative use of assessment data or processes has identified several categories of high-impact practices. Practices yielding large achievement gains involved the following actions:

1. **Diagnostic assessment**: Use of classroom discussions, classroom tasks, and homework to determine the current state of student learning/understanding, with action taken to improve learning/correct misunderstandings

2. **Feedback**: Provision of descriptive feedback, with guidance on how to improve, during the learning

3. **Peer and self-assessment**: Development of student self-and peer-assessment skills

   **Who examines?**

   **Who interprets?**

   **Who acts?**

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Partner Discussion

1. Are all categories represented on your chart?

2. What adjustments to current practice might you want to make?
Seven Strategies of Assessment for Learning

D. Royce Sadler’s “Indispensable Conditions” for Improvement in Learning

The student:

- Comes to hold a concept of quality roughly similar to that of the teacher
- Is able to monitor continuously the quality of work produced during the act of production
- Has a repertoire of alternative moves or strategies to employ when faced with incomplete mastery

--Sadler, 1989, p. 21

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Where Am I Going?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strategy 1: Provide a clear and understandable vision of the learning target.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Strategy 2: Use examples and models of strong and weak work.</td>
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<th>Where Am I Now?</th>
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<td>Strategy 3: Offer regular descriptive feedback during the learning.</td>
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<td>Strategy 4: Teach students to self-assess and set goals for next steps.</td>
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<th>How Can I Close the Gap?</th>
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<tr>
<td>Strategy 5: Use evidence of student learning needs to determine next steps in teaching.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Strategy 6: Design focused instruction, followed by practice with feedback.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Strategy 7: Provide opportunities for students to track, reflect on, and share their learning progress.</td>
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</tbody>
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Table Activity

1. Assign a different strategy to each person at your table. Continue assigning until you run out of strategies.

2. Read the explanation of your strategy(ies) that follow. Be prepared to summarize your strategy(ies), noting what is most important and giving an example if you can. (5 minutes)

Summary:

Example:

3. Beginning with Strategy 1, share your summaries and examples with your table group. As you listen, note ideas that are familiar and those that are new. (20 minutes)

Where Am I Going?

Strategy 1: Provide a clear and understandable vision of the learning target.
Begin by giving students a vision of the learning destination. Share with your students the learning targets, objectives, or goals either at the outset of instruction or before they begin an independent practice activity. There are three ways to do this: (1) state the learning target as is, (2) convert the learning target into student-friendly language, or (3) for learning targets assessed with a rubric, convert the rubric to student-friendly language. Introduce the language of quality to students. Check to make sure students understand what learning target is at the heart of the lesson by asking, “Why are we doing this activity? What are we learning?”

Strategy 2: Use examples and models of strong and weak work.
Help students sort through what is and isn’t quality work by using strong and weak models from anonymous student work, examples from life beyond school, and your own work. Begin with examples that demonstrate strengths and weaknesses related to problems students commonly experience, especially the problems that most concern you. Ask students to analyze these samples for quality and then to justify their judgments. Use only anonymous work. When you engage students in analyzing examples or models, they develop a vision of what the knowledge, understanding, skill, product, or performance looks like when it’s executed well.

Model creating a product or performance yourself. Show students the true beginnings, the problems you encounter, and how you think through decisions along the way. Don’t hide the development and revision part, or students will think they are doing it wrong when it is messy at the beginning, and they won’t know how to work through the rough patches.
Where Am I Now?

Strategy 3: Offer regular descriptive feedback during the learning.

Effective feedback can be defined as information provided to students that results in an improvement in learning. In our current system, most of the work students do is graded, and marks or grades may be the only formal feedback they receive. Unfortunately, marks and grades deliver a coded summary evaluation without specific information about what students did well or what their next steps in learning might be.

Effective feedback identifies student strengths and weaknesses with respect to the specific learning target(s) they are trying to achieve in a given assignment. It helps students answer the question, “Where am I now?” with respect to “Where do I need to be?” And it points the way to “How can I close the gap?” With those answers in mind, offer feedback instead of grades on work that is for practice and offer students opportunities to act on it before holding them accountable for mastery. Giving students time to act allows them to grow with guidance. Also, providing this kind of feedback models the kind of thinking you want students to engage in when they self-assess and identify next steps.

Involves students as peer feedback-givers. Research literature includes promising learning gains attributable to peer feedback (c.f., White & Frederiksen, 1998). To offer each other useful feedback, students must understand the intended learning targets, objectives, or goals (Strategy 1); be clear about how to distinguish levels of quality (Strategy 2); and have practiced with protocols for offering feedback in a controlled situation (Strategy 3).

Strategy 4: Teach students to self-assess and set goals for next steps.

With this strategy, we transfer the ownership of learning to the student. In essence, when we teach students to self-assess and set goals, we teach them to provide their own feedback. To be accurate self-assessors, students need a clear vision of the intended learning (Strategy 1), practice with identifying strengths and weaknesses in a variety of examples (Strategy 2), and exposure to feedback that models “self-assessment” thinking: “What have I done well? Where do I need to continue working?” (Strategy 3).

This strategy is a proven contributor to increased learning and a necessary part of becoming a self-regulated learner. It is not what we do if we have the time or if we have the “right” students—those who can already do it. Monitoring and regulating their own learning can be taught to all kinds of students, including those with mild to moderate learning disabilities (Andrade, 2010). Struggling students especially are the right students, and they have the most to gain from learning how to do this kind of thinking.

How Can I Close the Gap?

Strategy 5: Use evidence of student learning needs to determine next steps in teaching.

With this strategy, we build a feedback loop into the teaching cycle, checking for understanding and continuing instruction guided by information about what students have and have not yet mastered. After having delivered a lesson and after students have done something in response, we use what they have done to determine further learning needs. Do their responses reveal incomplete understanding, flawed reasoning, or misconceptions? Are they ready to receive feedback? Strategy 5 includes a repertoire of approaches to diagnose the type of student learning needs in preparation for addressing them.

Strategy 6: Design focused instruction, followed by practice with feedback.

This strategy scaffolds learning by narrowing the focus of a lesson to address specific misconceptions or problems identified in Strategy 5. If you are working on a learning target having more than one aspect of quality, build competence one block at a time by addressing one component at a time. For example, mathematics problem solving requires choosing the right strategy as one component. A science experiment
lab report requires a statement of the hypothesis as one component. Writing requires an introduction as one component. Identify the components of quality and then teach them one part at a time, making sure students understand that all of the parts ultimately will come together.

After delivering instruction targeted to an area of need, let students practice and get better before re-assessing and grading. Give them opportunities to revise their work, product, or performance, based on feedback focused just on that area of need prior to the graded event. This narrows the volume of feedback students, especially struggling learners, need to attend to at a given time and raises their chances of success in doing so. It is a time saver for you and more instructionally powerful for students.

**Strategy 7: Provide opportunities for students to track, reflect on, and share their learning progress.**

Any activity that requires students to reflect on what they are learning and to share their progress reinforces the learning and helps them develop insights into themselves as learners. These kinds of activities give students the opportunity to notice their own strengths, to see how far they have come, and to feel in control of the conditions of their success. By reflecting on their learning, they deepen their understanding and will remember it longer. By sharing their progress, students develop a deeper commitment to making progress.

**These Strategies as a Progression**

The seven strategies are not a recipe to be followed step by step, although they do build on one another. Strategy 4 and Strategy 7 are “destinations,” Strategies 1 through 3 are “enablers,” and Strategies 5 and 6 are “floaters.” The destination strategies are where we want students to arrive as a result of being learners in our classrooms. These essential college and career readiness skills can be developed as early as prekindergarten. The enabler strategies, especially Strategies 1 and 2, are generally undervalued, and yet without them—without a clear picture of where we are going—it is hard to determine where we are now and even harder to identify actions to close the gap. Imagine attempting to get from Point A to Point B using a GPS system that only gives your current location, which is akin to what grades do. Strategies 1 and 2 equip the GPS system with information it needs to communicate next steps. The floater strategies 5 and 6 can happen any time and often employ the use of the preceding strategies as part of the lessons. Taken together, these formative assessment strategies represent actions that will strengthen students’ sense of self-efficacy (their belief that effort will lead to improvement), their motivation to try, and ultimately, their achievement.


**Partner Discussion: “Plus Delta”**

Which strategies are working well in your classrooms?

Which strategies might you/your teachers want to focus on strengthening? What might you/they need to change?
Goal Orientations, Effects on Student Motivation, and Connections to the Seven Strategies

(Text in this section is adapted from Seven Strategies of Assessment for Learning, 2e, pp. 15-19.)

It would be so much easier to teach if all students decided to put forth the effort needed to succeed. Many studies (Ames, 1992; Black & Wiliam, 1998a; Butler, 1988; Halvorson, 2012; Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Schunk, 1996) have found that students’ willingness to persist at a task is influenced by their goal orientation. This is a term researchers use to define different ideas students have about why they are doing their work in school. A goal orientation can be thought of as how a student answers the question, “What is the aim of my work?” or “Why am I doing this assignment?”

To illustrate the concept of goal orientation, let’s say you ask a student what she learned today in school. It’s possible she’ll draw a blank. She may tell you what she did—“We worked on a math problem about camping,” or “We watched our teacher cook stuff in Science and then we got to eat it”—but she may not be able to tell you why. This student’s attention is not focused on what she is supposed to be learning from the activity—it’s focused on what she is supposed to be doing. She may not even know the goal in math class was to learn to use the problem solving strategy “draw a picture” to solve a problem, or that the intended learning behind the teacher’s cooking was for students to draw inferences about the differences between a physical change and a chemical change.

Partner Discussion

How might your students answer the question, “What is the aim of my work?”

Goal orientations can be thought of as falling into three categories (Ames, 1992, Black & Wiliam, 1998a, Halvorson, 2012):

1. A performance or ego orientation, where the student’s goal is to prove ability or hide a perceived lack of ability
2. A task-completion orientation, where the student’s goal is to get it done and get a grade
3. A learning orientation, where the student’s goal is to get better
### Performance or Ego Orientation (Ames, 1992, pp. 262-263; Halvorson, 2012, pp. 43-52)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus of Effort</th>
<th>Protecting sense of self-worth</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Goal</td>
<td>To attain recognition of having performed at a superior level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belief</td>
<td>Achievement is a function of ability, not a result of effort</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Works to exceed performance of others or to hide learning needs
- Believes initial lack of success indicates lack of ability
- Quits, cheats, or chooses easier work when faced with difficulty
- “I don’t know what I’m doing, so I’m not smart enough to do this.”

“How do I get the highest ‘A’?” or “How do I avoid being seen as not smart enough?”

### Task-Completion Orientation (Schunk 1996; Black & Wiliam, 1998)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus of Effort</th>
<th>Assignment completion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Goal</td>
<td>To get the points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belief</td>
<td>Points and grades, rather than learning, are the aim of school</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Works just hard enough to get assignments turned in and/or to get points
- Believes that effort in school is about getting points—it matters less who does the work
- Looks for alternate ways to get points when faced with difficulty

“When is it due?” or “How much is this worth?”


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus of Effort</th>
<th>Improving work and getting better</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Goal</td>
<td>To find out what you don’t know and master it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belief</td>
<td>Achievement is the result of effort</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Develops willingness to try and persistence to keep trying
- Believes that effort will lead to eventual success
- Exhibits “failure tolerance” when faced with difficulty—initial failure can be overcome by a change in strategy

“What can I learn from this mistake?”
From the Common Core State Standards

College- and career-ready students are...
- Motivated to learn independently of external rewards and punishments
- Self-directed learners who know how to assess their own learning needs
- Inclined to seek out and use resources to assist them in learning

College- and career-ready students exhibit...
- Willingness to try
- Persistence
- Belief that effort will pay off through eventual success

Establishing a Culture for Learning

“Distinguished” Level 4:
- The classroom culture is a cognitively busy place, characterized by a shared belief in the importance of learning
- The teacher conveys high expectations for learning for all students and insists on hard work
- Students assume responsibility for high quality by initiating improvements, making revisions, adding detail and/or helping peers

Goal orientations are a response to a set of conditions:
- Students can hold one set in one classroom and another in a different one.
- Our assessment practices do a great deal to shape

Key Factors in Developing a Learning Orientation in Students

1. Having clear learning targets and making them clear to students
2. Focusing instruction, learning activities, and diagnostic assessments on the learning targets
3. Ensuring your assessment practices treat learning as a progression and mistakes as a way to learn
4. Structuring sufficient practice time with feedback before the graded event
5. Teaching students to self-assess and set meaningful goals for further learning
Figure 2.11

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning Targets</th>
<th>Working Log</th>
<th>Strengths</th>
<th>Challenges</th>
<th>Green/Yellow/Red</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I can estimate a limit using a numerical table.</td>
<td>Aug 10, # 1-8</td>
<td>Easy to determine limit</td>
<td>I find there is nothing challenging about using a numerical table.</td>
<td>Green</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Aug 14, # 1-3</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Aug 16, # 1-3</td>
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<tr>
<td>I can justify a limit algebraically: factoring, rationalizing, LCD.</td>
<td>Factoring</td>
<td>I think LCD problems are the easiest.</td>
<td>Some problems or factoring can be hard to factor (Aug 16 # 1).</td>
<td>Red Yellow Green</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Aug 10, # 1, 2</td>
<td>I’m good at rationalizing.</td>
<td>Easy to target negative signs on LCD problems.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Aug 14, # 1</td>
<td>After factoring the problem is a piece of cake.</td>
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<td>Aug 15, # 1, 2</td>
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<td>Aug 16, # 1</td>
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<td>Aug 15, # 3</td>
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<td>Aug 16, # 2</td>
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<td></td>
<td>LCD</td>
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<td>Aug 10, # 5, 6</td>
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<td>Aug 14, # 3</td>
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<td>Aug 15, # 4</td>
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<td>Aug 16, # 3</td>
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<tr>
<td>I can determine a limit from a graph.</td>
<td>Aug 14, # 1-12</td>
<td>It is a very quick way to find a limit.</td>
<td>Graphs with sympotopes can be a bit confusing at times.</td>
<td>Green</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Aug 16, # 4-11</td>
<td>Easy to do in general.</td>
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Source: Used with permission from Jennifer McDaniel, Clay County Schools: Manchester, KY. Unpublished classroom materials.
Introducing a Student-Friendly Definition and Using It to Improve Achievement

The following scenario, transcribed from a demonstration teaching lesson, is an example of how you can use a student-friendly version of a reasoning learning target as the basis of a lesson. In this case, the teacher is introducing fourth graders to the reading learning target, “Makes inferences based on what is read.” As you read through the scenario, look for Strategy 1, introducing the definition of inference, and Strategy 2, using strong and weak examples.

Activity Directions:

1. Assign the following roles around your table: Teacher, Luke, Sarah, Maria, Jerome, and Jamal. Also identify a narrator to read the parenthetical parts.

2. Read the following scenario as a Readers’ Theater exercise.

3. When you have finished, see if you can identify when the teacher and students were engaged in a Strategy 1 activity and when they switched to a Strategy 2 activity.

Scenario

TEACHER: Have any of you ever known what you’re getting for a present before you opened the package? *(Hands wave in the air.)*

What was it? Luke?

LUKE: It was a basketball.

TEACHER: How did you know it was a basketball? Did it say ‘To Luke—Basketball’ on the tag?

LUKE: Noooo. I knew it was one because I asked for it, and it was round, and it bounced.

TEACHER: So you made a guess, based on clues.

LUKE: Yeah.

TEACHER: How about you, Sarah?

SARAH: It was a bike.

TEACHER: What were your clues?

SARAH: Well my mom said it was a pony, but I knew it was a bike.

TEACHER: How did you know it wasn’t a pony?

SARAH: It was too skinny.

*(The teacher then asks for other examples—‘What did you get? How did you know?’—reiterating the concept that students made correct guesses based on clues.)*

TEACHER: You all made guesses and you were right because you had some clues. When we make a guess based on clues, we call that an inference.

*(She writes the word “inference” and the definition “a guess based on clues” on a piece of chart paper.)*

Let’s practice inferring some more.

*(She walks up to a student wearing a turquoise sweater.)*

I’m going to make an inference that Maria’s favorite color is turquoise. Maria, is your favorite color turquoise?
MARIA: Well, no.
TEACHER: What happened here? I made a guess and I based it on a clue. What went wrong?
LUKE: You didn’t have enough clues. Just because she’s wearing a turquoise sweater today doesn’t mean she loves it.
JEROME: Yeah, Maria hardly ever wears turquoise.
TEACHER: What would I have to see in order to make a confident guess that her favorite color is turquoise?
LUKE: All her pencils would be turquoise. The mirror in her locker would be turquoise. She would wear turquoise every day.
TEACHER: So it’s not enough to have one clue to make a good inference. I might need three or four clues.
JAMAL: Well if she wore turquoise every day, that’s just one clue, but it happens over and over.
TEACHER: So we could call that a repeated clue? An inference, to be a good one, needs to be based on enough clues—more than one piece of evidence or the same evidence repeated over and over?
JAMAL: Yeah.
TEACHER: Let’s call this a level 3 inference.
(Under the definition of inference, she writes: 3 = A guess based on enough clues.)
Now, think about the guess that Maria’s favorite color is turquoise. Let’s call that a level 2 inference. How would we define that? It’s a guess, but what’s wrong with it?
JAMAL: It doesn’t have enough clues.
(The teacher writes: 2 = A guess, but not enough clues.)
TEACHER: Okay. Now what if I guessed that Jerome’s favorite color is orange? What would you call that? Is it an inference? It’s a guess isn’t it?
(Jerome is not wearing any orange.)
JEROME: Yeah but you don’t have any evidence.
TEACHER: What kind of an inference is it?
JEROME: A bad one.
TEACHER: So, we could call a poor inference a wild guess because it’s not based on any clues. Let’s call this a level 1 inference.
(The teacher writes: 1 = Wild guess—no clues.)

We are learning to...

Make good inferences

What we are looking for...

Guesses that are based on clues

Wild Guess

No Clues!
Developing Formative Assessment Competencies

This inventory is designed to help you determine the formative assessment knowledge and skills you have already and which ones you might target for further learning. Each of the statements on the inventory represents the learning targets for a chapter of the text; you can use the following scale to evaluate your level of competence for each learning target:

5 = I implement fully in my classroom
4 = I implement partially in my classroom
3 = I have complete understanding
2 = I have partial understanding
1 = This is a new idea to me

Please note that some of the learning targets do not require action, only understanding. For those learning targets the “4” and “5” boxes have been grayed out.

Chapter 1: “Assessment in Support of Learning”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter Learning Target</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>1</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Understand the importance of using assessment practices that meet both teachers’ and</td>
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<td>students’ information needs</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Know what the Seven Strategies of Assessment for Learning are and how they connect</td>
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<td>to research on high-impact formative assessment practices</td>
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<td>3. Understand how formative assessment practices can help shift the classroom culture</td>
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<td>to a learning orientation.</td>
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Comments/thoughts:

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<td>clear vision of the intended learning.</td>
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<td>• Convert learning targets into student-friendly language.</td>
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<td>clear vision of the intended learning.</td>
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<td>• Identify rubrics suited for formative use.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1. Know how to share different types of learning targets with students so they have a</td>
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<td>clear vision of the intended learning.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Introduce the concepts of quality represented in a rubric to students.</td>
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<td>2. Know how to monitor student awareness of the intended learning.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Know how to use strong and weak examples effectively to deepen conceptual understanding and to make standards of quality clear.</td>
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</tbody>
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**Comments/Thoughts:**

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### Chapter 3: “Where Am I Now? Effective Feedback”

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<tr>
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<th>4</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Understand the characteristics of effective feedback.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Know how to offer feedback effectively and efficiently.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Know how to select feedback options suited to students’ grade level and the kind of learning to be addressed.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Know how to prepare students to give each other effective feedback.</td>
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Chapter 4: “Where Am I Now? Self-Assessment and Goal Setting”

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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Understand the impact of self-assessment and goal setting on student motivation and achievement.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Understand the conditions that maximize the impact of self-assessment and goal setting.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Know how to teach students to self-assess accurately with a focus on learning targets.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Know how to prepare students to create specific and challenging goals.</td>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Understand the importance of the feedback loop to increasing student learning.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Believe in the necessity of building time for the feedback loop into a teaching cycle.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Have a repertoire of strategies to diagnose student learning needs.</td>
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### Chapter 6: “How Can I Close the Gap? Focused Practice and Revision”

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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Understand the value of practice in a risk-free zone.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Have a repertoire of strategies to use as instruction accompanied by practice and</td>
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<td>revision before the graded event.</td>
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### Chapter 7: “How Can I Close the Gap? Tracking, Reflecting on, and Sharing Learning”

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Have a repertoire of strategies for keeping students in touch with their learning progress.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Have a repertoire of strategies for engaging students in metacognitive reflection on their learning and on themselves as learners.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Have a repertoire of opportunities for students to share their learning progress with others.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Be able to track, reflect on, and share your own learning progress throughout your study and application of the Seven Strategies of Assessment for Learning.</td>
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