Formative Assessment

Is formative assessment a process? Absolutely. One quiz, test, lab activity or demonstration does not constitute formative assessment. This type of assessment involves frequent check-ins with students during instruction; the feedback from which help guide adjustments to the curriculum and/or lesson plans that will improve students’ achievement of your course learning outcomes. Formative assessment can be obtrusive, or stop the flow of instruction while students take the assessment. We understand that time is extremely valuable on Saturdays, so this week we will highlight two quick obtrusive assessments that can provide great insight into your students’ learning. Try one or both during this session. Combined with unobtrusive assessments, like the “Skills Checklist” from last week, and student-generated assessments, which will be next week’s focus, you’ll discover the vital process that is formative assessment.

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Three Types of Formative Assessment Defined

Obtrusive Assessments:
- Interrupt the normal flow of activity in the classroom
- Instruction does not occur during obtrusive assessments
- Examples: quizzes, tests, demonstrations, performances, oral questioning, presentations

Unobtrusive Assessments:
- Do not interrupt the flow of the lesson
- Students might not be aware that they are being assessed
- Examples: teacher observations, “Skills Checklist,” accurate completion of a task/assignment

Student-generated Assessments:
- Students generate ideas about the manner in which they will demonstrate their knowledge of the subject matter
- Examples: Students might use any of the types of obtrusive assessments above; self-reflections, interviews

Formative Assessment Techniques: “Putting It into Practice”

Obtrusive Assessment: “RSQC2”
- RSQC2, or Recall, Summarize, Question, Connect, and Comment, is a quick obtrusive assessment technique that allows you to compare detailed information on students’ understandings and potential misunderstandings that need to be addressed in a timely manner.

1. Recall: At the beginning of class, ask students to make a list of some of the most important points from the previous class.
2. Summarize: Including some of the points listed in Step 1, ask students to create a one-sentence summary that describes the previous class.
3. Question: Have students jot down a question that was unanswered after the previous class.
4. Connect: Ask students to connect the main points of the previous class to the essential questions (you may direct them to the syllabus or write EQs on the board).
5. Comment: Invite students to write an evaluative comment about the class. You may consider providing sentence starters, such as “The thing I enjoyed the most/least...” or “What I found to be most/least useful...”

Obtrusive Assessment: “Exit Cards”
- Similar to the RSQC2 technique above, Exit Cards are a quick and simple form of obtrusive assessment that is very useful for designing tiered instruction and student groupings.

1. At the end of class, pass out index cards or half-slips of paper to students.
2. Ask students to respond to a question(s), solve a problem, or summarize their understanding after the day’s lesson.
3. Using the results, you can sort students into groups for tiered instruction or re-teaching activities for the following session.