

Suggestions for Assessing Student Writing

Be sure to know what you want students to be able to do and why. Good assessment practices start with a pedagogically sound assignment description and learning goals for the writing task at hand. The type of feedback given on any task should depend on the learning goals you have for students and the purpose of the assignment. Think early on about why you want students to complete a given writing project (see guide to writing strong assignments page). What do you want them to know? What do you want students to be able to do? Why? How will you know when they have reached these goals? What methods of assessment will allow you to see that students have accomplished these goals (portfolio assessment assigning multiple drafts, rubric, etc)? What will distinguish the strongest projects from the weakest?

Begin designing writing assignments with your learning goals and methods of assessment in mind.

Plan and implement activities that support students in meeting the learning goals. How will you support students in meeting these goals? What writing activities will you allow time for? How can you help students meet these learning goals?

Begin giving feedback early in the writing process. Give multiple types of feedback early in the writing process. For example, talking with students about ideas, write written responses on drafts, have students respond to their peers' drafts in process, etc. These are all ways for students to receive feedback while they are still in the process of revising.

Structure opportunities for feedback at various points in the writing process. Students should also have opportunities to receive feedback on their writing at various stages in the writing process. This does not mean that teachers need to respond to every draft of a writing project. Structuring time for peer response and group workshops can be a very effective way for students to receive feedback from other writers in the class and for them to begin to learn to revise and edit their own writing.

Be open with students about your expectations and the purposes of the assignments. Students respond better to writing projects when they understand why the project is important and what they can learn through the process of completing it. Be explicit about your goals for them as writers and

why those goals are important to their learning. Additionally, talk with students about methods of assessment. Some teachers have students help collaboratively design rubrics for the grading of writing. Whatever methods of assessment you choose, be sure to let students in on how they will be evaluated.

Do not burden students with excessive feedback. Our instinct as teachers, especially when we are really interested in students' writing is to offer as many comments and suggestions as we can. However, providing too much feedback can leave students feeling daunted and uncertain where to start in terms of revision. Try to choose one or two things to focus on when responding to a draft. Offer students concrete possibilities or strategies for revision.

Allow students to maintain control over their paper. Instead of acting as an editor, suggest options or open-ended alternatives the student can choose for their revision path. Help students learn to assess their own writing and the advice they get about it.

Purposes of Responding We provide different kinds of response at different moments. But we might also fall into a kind of "default" mode, working to get through the papers without making a conscious choice about how and why we want to respond to a given assignment. So it might be helpful to identify the two major kinds of response we provide:

- **Formative Response:** response that aims primarily to help students develop their writing. Might focus on confidence-building, on engaging the student in a conversation about her ideas or writing choices so as to help student to see herself as a successful and promising writer. Might focus on helping student develop a particular writing project, from one draft to next. Or, might suggest to student some general skills she could focus on developing over the course of a semester.
- **Evaluative Response:** response that focuses on evaluation of how well a student has done. Might be related to a grade. Might be used primarily on a final product or portfolio. Tends to emphasize whether or not student has met the criteria operative for specific assignment and to explain that judgment.

TEACHER FEEDBACK STRATEGIES

NOTEBOOKS

# OF ASSESSMENTS PER DAY: 5-7	TURNAROUND TIME: same/next day	TIME PER ASSESSMENT: 5-10 minutes
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PROCESS DESCRIPTION: Students respond to a prompt in their notebook. Teacher reads and makes 1-2 suggestions for improvement. Students rewrite/respond to the same prompt again with suggestions in mind. Process is repeated until response meets criteria.

GOOGLE DOC SUGGESTIONS

# OF ASSESSMENTS PER DAY: 15 per day	TURNAROUND TIME: 2 days	TIME PER ASSESSMENT: <5 minutes
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PROCESS DESCRIPTION: Students respond to prompt in a Google Doc and share with the teacher. Teacher reads and makes 2-3 corrections/suggestions for improvement using *suggestions & comments* features. Students review suggestions & comments and reply with an explanation for the correction.

WRITING DAY

# OF ASSESSMENTS PER DAY: 3-5	TURNAROUND TIME: 1 week	TIME PER ASSESSMENT: 5-10 minutes
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PROCESS DESCRIPTION: Students submit a response to the writing prompt. Teacher reads and provides feedback regarding pre-determined skill(s) to be assessed for that week (i.e. claim, evidence, development of ideas, punctuation, verb tense, etc.) Teacher completes feedback for all of the responses, and returns the responses to the students on the same day of the following week.

SINGLE SKILL ASSESSMENT

# OF ASSESSMENTS PER DAY: 10-20	TURNAROUND TIME: 2 days	TIME PER ASSESSMENT: 5-10 minutes
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PROCESS DESCRIPTION: Following explicit skill instruction (mini lesson or full unit focus), students submit a response to the writing prompt. Teacher reads and provides feedback regarding the specific skill (e.g. identified evidence) that was just studied.

As instruction progresses, teacher continues to assess the previously taught/mastered skills and adds new skill to assessment as they are explicitly taught.

SKILL MASTERY CHECKLIST

# OF ASSESSMENTS PER DAY: 5-10	TURNAROUND TIME: 1-2 days	TIME PER ASSESSMENT: 5 minutes
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PROCESS DESCRIPTION: Focusing on a specific set of related skills (e.g. make a claim, support with evidence, explain evidence with warrant), teacher reads and checks only for the set of skills.

Checklist could be used to indicate correct/present or incorrect/missing or to identify level of mastery (e.g. introductory, emerging, mastery)

WRITING PORTFOLIO

# OF ASSESSMENTS PER DAY: 1-2	TURNAROUND TIME: 2-5 days	TIME PER ASSESSMENT: 30 minutes
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PROCESS DESCRIPTION: Using a full checklist/rubric required skills, such as the GED rubric or similar checklist, student and/or teacher collect samples of student writing that demonstrates necessary skills.

Rubric can be used to indicate level of mastery for each skill and/or for level of mastery within skill sets.

**Useful for a cumulative assessment, but may be too time consuming to use as formative assessment.