

Eleven strategies for developing assessment-capable students

Here are eight tools, which may be useful in developing self-assessment practices

1. Clarify learning goals and success criteria. Assessment requires reference against something, a standard of achievement or goal for learning, so that it can provide information about the gap between current and desired performance. Make expected learning outcomes explicit through sharing (or co-constructing with students) learning goals and success criteria. Make goals worthwhile, meaningful and challenging, and talk about why this learning is important.

Use rubrics, worked examples, and exemplars which illustrate the success criteria, and promote focused discussion to clarify what constitutes quality work. It is usually more effective if students help set the criteria. For example, ask students to analyse a set of exemplars and determine what makes them effective in order to generate success criteria for their own work. Or brainstorm with students what might be important in a given learning intention or activity (such as reading aloud to others). Group common ideas together, and display, use and regularly revise them.

Make sure the language of goals and criteria is accessible and meaningful. Remind students of expected components in their work through verbal prompts and posters, checklists, thinking routines and graphic organisers.

2. Create a positive climate. Make your classroom a non-comparative, non-competitive environment, free of risks to self-esteem, based on co-operation and dialogue. Frame making mistakes and risk taking as positive behaviours and valuable learning opportunities for other students. Normalise mistake making and confusion by modelling your own learning and problem solving. Teach students that seeking feedback from oneself and others is a hallmark of a successful learner. Encourage students to work in friendship pairs and friendship groups.

3. Integrate feedback that enables the student to adjust their actions so they can improve. Provide substantive, ongoing opportunities for assessment conversations with students. Link feedback to the desired goal and give information about the students' present position in relation to the goal, and what they need to do to meet the goal. Ensure feedback is clear and specific (e.g. "Make sure you give a few hints at the beginning of your story about who is responsible for the crime" rather than "Review the example of an introduction given in class"). Use feedback to enable students to make their own decisions about how to improve their work. Circulate feedback among learners so all learners benefit.

4. Teach students how to access, interpret and use assessment evidence. Discuss why and how students can go about seeking evidence to improve their learning. Discuss what kinds of feedback are most helpful, and why it can sometimes be difficult to assess their own and others' work. Give students time to give, receive, and reflect on descriptive feedback (and an opportunity for discussion with the teacher), as well as to set and reset their goals and success criteria.

5. Encourage students to use assessment information to improve their work during its production. Assessment information needs to be available to students while they are working so that students can adjust their performance/production of work. Collaboratively set and check visible intermediate goals towards outcomes as the lesson proceeds. Review student-generated success criteria – is there anything that needs to be added, changed, taken away?

6. Give students time to revise a piece of work once they have received feedback on it. Emphasise that good outcomes are about effort, and thoughtful improvement, rather than getting it right first time.

7. Engage students as owners of their own learning. Encourage students to decide what to do to improve their performance and devolve responsibility to them. Consider offering a selection of appropriate moves or strategies. Attempt to create a dialogue with students rather than telling them what they need to do. Direct students to other students who are on the right track. Involve students in decisions about timeframes, for example: "There are five minutes to finish – raise your hand if this is not enough time". Ask students to collect and organise their own evidence of learning, and to thus be accountable for their learning.

- 8. Build students' assessment skills through peer assessment opportunities.** Peer assessment enables students to develop the skills they need for self-assessment. Students can be more objective appraising someone else's work, as well as gain insights into different ways to approach tasks, and their common problems. Embed peer assessment opportunities into instruction, and teach and model strategies for peer assessment. Show students collections of samples or exemplars and ask them to record what they think is important in the work, as well as one or two things that could be done to improve the work. Ask students the kinds of things they need to look for in other pupils' work. Create loops of dialogue and feedback around the class.
- 9. Create occasions for students to showcase their work to other audiences, including their parents and other classes,** through special events or simply by giving students their own personal display area on a bulletin board. Engage students in selecting their work for presentation, and invite them to reflect on what they want this audience to notice about their work. Ask the audience to give some brief feedback – perhaps two things they really liked and one suggestion for improvement.
- 10. Provide opportunities, and support, for students to engage in self-assessment.** Teach students the language to describe, discuss, and evaluate learning. Display exemplars and ask them to compare their work to the exemplars and decide which sample most resembles their work and why. Support them to interpret and apply success criteria, and give students feedback on their self-assessments. Help students to use self-assessment data to improve their performance. Provide sufficient time for revision after self-assessment.
- 11. Use summative assessments for formative purposes.** For example, ask students to analyse past papers, or to set questions and mark answers. Get students to reflect on their work in order to plan effective revision, or to rework examination answers in class. Ensure students are the beneficiaries, rather than victims, of summative tests.

...and where you could go wrong

- Being the only person in the classroom who knows what the class is trying to learn and what it should look like – this severely hampers students!
- Giving numerical scores or grades alongside feedback; students ignore comments when marks are given. Abandon giving marks so that students will better engage in improving work.
- Testing at the end of a unit or module when it is too late to work with the results.
- Attributing performance to a lack of ability rather than a lack of effort. Comparisons between students and competitive environments encourage low-achieving students to view themselves as low ability, and hence reduce effort.