The Master Teacher's

Assessment Handbook

By the Authors of
the Master Teacher Pd Program

THE MASTER TEACHER®
Develop · Support · Honor

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The Four C's Of Assessment

"Good," "Excellent," and "Great" are useful words in a teacher's daily vocabulary. But if you return an essay question with such a comment and no further details about what's good or what could be better, students won't have any idea how to improve. A statement such as, "Your use of metaphors gives me a vivid picture of how the character was feeling" is much more meaningful than telling a student, "Excellent writing." And, on the flip side, saying "You can do better" is subjective. It can discourage or even put the student on the defensive. Keep in mind that assignments should be designed to measure what students have learned and what they still need to know.

Perceptions about student work can vary greatly from teacher to teacher.

While assessment is an active topic in our schools, there is limited evidence that standardized test scores or report card grades offer genuinely informative data about learning to students or their parents. Inconsistent use of such data can become a confusing dilemma for students since perceptions about their work and progress can vary greatly from teacher to teacher. However, if the goal is to provide specific feedback that shows what students have learned and what they still need to know, we can address these inconsistencies by looking through the lens of four assessment C's.

The first C of assessment is **clarity**. Each assignment, unit of study, or course needs to have specific and tangible goals. And the goals we establish must be both measurable and challenging. To check for clarity, we can ask: *What is it I want students to learn? What is it*

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each student should be able to do as a result of this assignment, unit, or course? How have I communicated this information to students?

The second C is **chunking**. If we break lessons into concise, compact steps and assess these steps as information is presented, it keeps students from becoming overwhelmed or giving up completely. To practice chunking, we can ask: *Is my instruction and assessment adapted to accommodate student needs, styles, and learning rates? How well do students seem to be able to digest what I am teaching?*

The third C is **connectedness**. When our curriculum, standards, and assessments are linked into a cohesive whole, it breeds academic relevance for each learner. To evaluate connectedness, we can ask: *Is student performance data used to revise and refine my selection of curriculum, instruction, and assessment activities? How do I communicate these connections to my students?*

The fourth C is **capacity**. Academic growth is cultivated in a nurturing environment in which knowledge and effective feedback expand student thinking. To build academic capacity, we can ask: *Do my assessments allow students to apply their learning to the real world in both predictable and unpredictable ways?*

Assessment data informs our teaching and tells students how they can improve.

Anchoring classroom assessments in the four C's not only informs our teaching but also enables us to give vital feedback to students so they know how to improve. For assessment feedback to positively impact learning, it must be multilayered, ongoing, and include both formative and summative measures. Formative assessments check for understanding as we teach, while summative approaches determine the degree to which students did or did not learn something. Within each lesson or unit of study, different assessments can be introduced for different purposes.

Formative assessments may include quizzes, writing prompts, story summaries, paraphrasing, role-playing, demonstrations, journals, or graphic organizers or story maps. Summative assessments, on the other hand, are cumulative. They encompass end-of-the-chapter exams, common assessments by course or subject area, oral

interviews, essays, performance tasks, and class presentations. Just remember to identify essential questions and big ideas *before* you begin to teach and decide how to measure what your students learn.

In the past, it was often more important for students to get the answer right or beat the bell-shaped curve than it was for them to process complex information. Teaching was rooted in the belief that intelligence was fixed, rather than something that could be acquired or expanded. As a result, students were often labeled and tracked, which prompted our assessments to turn out winners and losers. Progress checks followed a cycle of assign, test, grade, and teach.

The Master Teacher wouldn't dream of spending an entire semester teaching students what they already know.

In today's schools, we use assessment data for much broader purposes. Assessment information may tell us we're moving too slowly or too quickly. It may reveal that the curriculum is too narrow or too broad. Or it may show that the resources we're using aren't promoting the retention and transfer we had hoped for. Having this information as we teach allows us to make adjustments and boost instructional effectiveness. It would be a shame to wait until the end of the semester to find out that our students have failed to grasp a concept. Conversely, the Master Teacher wouldn't dream of spending an entire semester teaching students something they already know.

The Master Teacher knows that effective assessments activate learning rather than ambush it. After all, there's a person behind each grade we give, score we calculate, or comment we scribble in the margin. Our students will be more successful if we personalize these grades, scores, and comments. And when we tell students where they are on the learning continuum and how they can improve, they develop self-evaluation skills of their own. Reviewing and revising one's assessment repertoire is the hallmark of a Master Teacher.

To Learn More:

Nelson, K. J., & Bailey, K. (2008). *Starting strong: Surviving and thriving as a new teacher.* Newbury Park, CA: Corwin Press.

Reeves, D. B. (2002). *Making standards work: How to implement standards-based assessments in the classroom, school, and district* (3rd ed.). Denver, CO: Advanced Learning Press.

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Personal Learning Journal

This is your personal journal for student assessment. It focuses on a four-step learning process specifically designed to enhance lifetime learning. Every step is important. To actually acquire and remember knowledge, it's important to write what you learned as well as what you already knew. Likewise, it's essential to know what worked and didn't work—and to reflect. When reflection is followed by adjustments, that is, what you will do differently as well as when you will do it, long-term learning and improvement are enhanced.

Simply write your journal entry after reading each message, and apply what you've learned in the classroom. This journal will help you retain the material and provide you with notes to review at a later date.

I. Learning/Planning

a. What did I already know about this topic?

b. What did I learn that was new?

II. Action/Application

a. What did I do that worked?

b. What did I do that didn't work?

c. What did I *not* do—and what happened?

III. Reflection/Assessment

a. What will I do with what I've learned from my experience?

b. What do I still need to learn on this subject?

c. How can I get this information?

IV. Change/Adjustment

a. What will I do differently the next time?

b. When will I use what I've learned? (first day or week of school, before grade cards go out, etc.)

c. What impact do I think it will have on my students and/or colleagues?