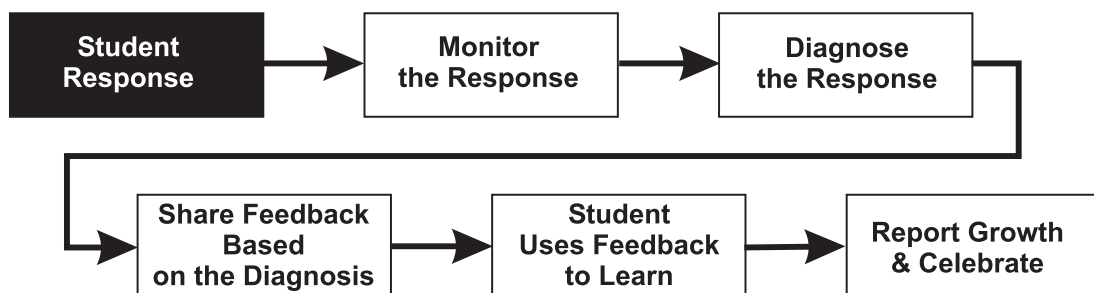


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Formative Assessment: Student Response

Overview

- ◆ Setting the Stage
- ◆ Questions
- ◆ Formative Assessment Introduction
- ◆ Preassessment of Your Students
- ◆ Sharing the Learning Standards with Your Students
- ◆ Sharing the Quality of Learning with Your Students
- ◆ Summary



Setting the Stage

Mr. Davis, a social studies teacher at Roxboro Middle School, teaches a Civil War unit. He starts off with a lecture, has many textbook exercises for his students, sprinkles in some quizzes, and then at the end of the unit gives a final examination. Approximately 70% of his students pass the final. Meanwhile, Miss Potter, who also teaches the same social studies unit, starts off her unit with sharing the goals of the unit, explains why these goals are important to the students, gives a preassessment, shows her students samples of exemplary work to help them understand the quality she requires, does some lecturing, engages students in many in-depth activities, observes and gives feedback to each student frequently throughout the unit, has students regularly peer assess and self-assess their learning, and has a final project. Through using formative assessment, all of her students receive a proficient grade, and many receive an above-proficient grade.

Questions

- ◆ What is formative assessment?
- ◆ What are the major components of formative assessment?
- ◆ What are the similarities between formative assessment and standards-based education?
- ◆ How can you share learning goals with your students?
- ◆ How can you share the quality of the learning goals with your students?

Formative Assessment Introduction

Understand Formative Assessment and Summative Assessment Differences

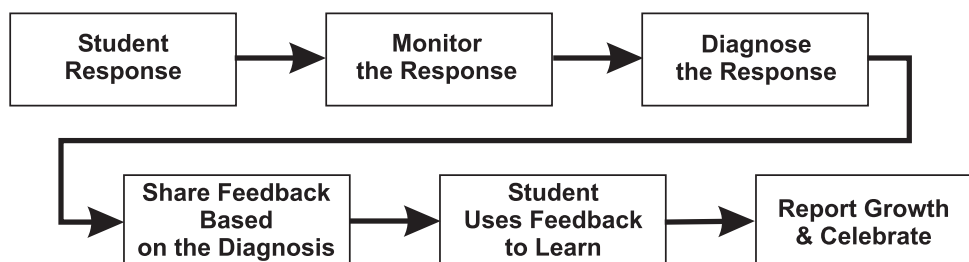
Any time you assess students, you either assess in a summative or a formative way (Scriben, 1967). In a summative manner you tell students their grades or the final results; these summative assessments usually are at the end of a lesson, unit, quarter, or year. Often summative assessments are of the forced choice type such as multiple choice, and they are done during “testing” time. Conversely, in formative assessments, students do not receive a grade, but they do receive feedback that helps them to improve. You do formative assessments as part of the regular classroom learning; you embed formative assessment into classroom learning.

Summative assessments often imply an “end” to the learning; formative assessments promote “along-the-way” assessment (Tomlinson & McTighe, 2006).

Define Formative Assessment

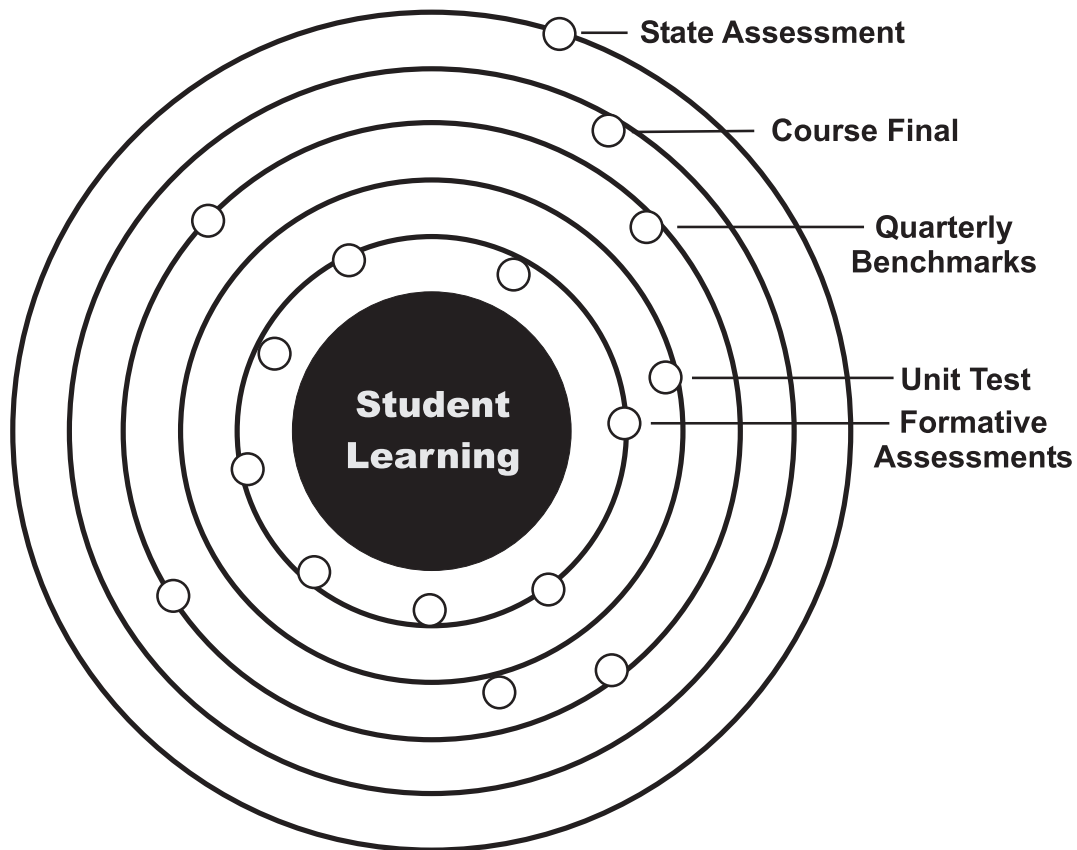
Formative assessment refers to assessment that is specifically intended to generate feedback to improve and accelerate student learning (Sadler, 1998). You may have heard formative assessment referred to as “continuous assessment” (Erickson, 2007), “early warning assessment” (Johnson, 2005), “interactive formative assessment” (Cowie & Bell, 1999), or “dynamic assessment” (Shepard, 2000). Formative assessment occurs when you feed information back to the students in ways that enable the students to learn better, or when students can engage in a similar self-reflective process (National Center for Fair and Open Testing, 2007). Heritage (2007b) expands the concept by saying that the process involves obtaining evidence about student learning, providing feedback to students, and closing the gap between the learner’s current and desired state. Formative assessment is not a specific type of assessment, rather it is the manner in which the assessment is used (Afflerbach 2005). Popham (2008) emphasizes that formative assessment is a process. Figure 1.2 illustrates the aspects of formative assessment.

Figure 1.1. Formative Assessment Process



Incorporate Formative Assessments into the Bigger Assessment Picture

State tests, course finals, quarterly benchmarks, and unit tests are important because they summarize your students’ past learning; however, they do not help the students improve on a regular weekly basis as classroom formative assessments do. These summative assessments reveal what was learned, but they do not provide specific suggestions for the students to improve. When you use formative assessments you identify the present status of the students in terms of the learning standard, diagnose what to do to assist them, provide feedback, allow students to make the changes, and celebrate their learning successes. The following visual demonstrate the bigger picture of assessment.

Figure 1.2. Big Assessment Picture

Learn the Advantages of Formative Assessment

Why would you want to use formative assessment? When teachers use formative assessment, students can learn in six to seven months what will normally take a school year to learn (Leahy, Lyon, Thompson, & Wiliam, 2005). Furthermore, Ainsworth and Viegut (2006, p. 23) explain that when you use formative assessment, you are better able to: determine what standards students already know and to what degree; decide what changes in instruction to make so that all students succeed; create appropriate lessons, activities, and groupings; and inform students about their progress to help them set goals. Also, formative feedback is the most powerful single moderator in the enhancement of achievement (Hattie, 1998). In addition, the research of Black and Wiliam (1998) emphasize that this approach works extremely well with at-risk students.

Connect Formative Assessment Process and the Standards

Formative assessment focuses on helping the teacher understand “how” students can improve in their learning so that they can be proficient. Standards-based education has been focused on “what” the students learn; standards refer to the specific learning designated by national educational organizations, state departments of education, or local school districts. Once you help students to know what they are to learn, they can focus on how to learn it well. Standards-based education and a formative assessment approach share many common characteristics. When standards-based education and a formative assessment approach are combined, teachers like you have a powerful learning tool.

Identify Formative Assessment Strategies

The purpose of formative assessment, helping students improve in their learning, is a simple concept, yet this simple concept encompasses many distinct strategies. Many educators (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Sadler, 1998b; Stiggins, 2007; Heritage, 2007a) have identified what constitutes formative assessment.

- ◆ Preassessing students
- ◆ Sharing learning goals with students
- ◆ Sharing or co-creating of learning criteria with students
- ◆ Employing quality classroom discourse and questioning
- ◆ Using rich and challenging tasks that elicit students’ responses
- ◆ Identifying the gap between where the students are now and the desired standard goal
- ◆ Providing feedback that helps students identify how to improve
- ◆ Using self-assessment and peer assessment
- ◆ Providing students with opportunities to close the gap between current and desired performance
- ◆ Celebrating learning progressions

This formative assessment listing looks very similar to a standards-based learning chart designed by O’Shea (2006, pp. 98–100) as shown in Figure 1.3 where the standard component is on the left and the formative assessment is on the right.

Figure 1.3. Standards-Based Learning

Components*	In a formative assessment approach and a standards-based lesson
Edits the chosen standard to select a key goal for the unit. Paraphrases it in the student's language.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Tells the students the standard in their language. ◆ Has posted the standard and refers to it throughout the unit.
Plans for assessments on the standard before, during, and after the unit.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Preassesses students to determine their present status in the standard. ◆ Informs students of the high level of expectation in the standard, and shows them exemplars. ◆ Informs students of the format of assessments. ◆ Frequently gives formative standards-based assessments and analyzes the results. ◆ Gives a post-assessment that represents the highest thinking level of the standard.
Develops performance tasks.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Tells students how in-class tasks, homework, and projects advance them in the standard. ◆ Assigns performance tasks that clearly demonstrate the standard. ◆ Observes the results of each performance task to adjust instruction.
Scaffolds the performance tasks.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Scaffolds through using various sequential performance tasks to help all students climb the cognitive ladder in the standard.
Incorporates the standard's key vocabulary throughout the unit.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Includes key vocabulary in teaching and requires it in students' oral, visual, and written responses.

*From *Standards to Success* (pp. 98–100), by M. R. O'Shea, 2006, Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

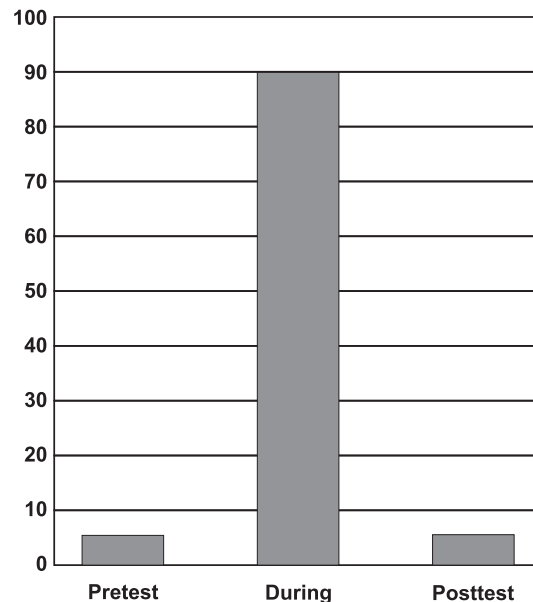
In addition, Reif's (2004) explanation of standards-based learning mirrors a description of formative assessment. Curriculum and instruction are not based on a textbook but on the standards that all students are to meet through differentiated instruction. Also, assessments are not used to determine a grade but to inform students of expectations and achievements. In the same manner, student feedback is much more than just a letter grade; student feedback focuses on progress toward meeting the standards. Students do more than focus on the current activity; they

describe where they are in the learning progress and know what they can do to achieve the learning goals. Teachers in teams collaboratively assess students' work and decide how to improve the students' performance

Preassessment of Your Students

Once you have identified the standard and its highest quality level, create a preassessment (pretest, diagnostic tests, or baseline data test). The preassessment allows you to monitor and adjust instruction. Do you start your class within the first few weeks of the year with a diagnostic test of where the students are in terms of the skills and knowledge that they need for your class so you can create differentiated instruction for the learning success of all students (Tomlinson & McTighe, 2006)? Stronge's (2002) research reveals that teachers in schools with high achievement rates use preassessment to support targeted teaching. Figure 1.4 represents a formative assessment view of the percentage of assessments done at different parts of the unit (Tuttle, 2007e).

Figure 1.4. Unit Assessment Percents



If your diagnostic test does not cover the whole year, does it cover a truly representative part of the course? A high school business teacher, Mr. Barrera, has his students write a business application letter during the second class. He quickly determines which parts of a business letter the students can do already and which the students need improvement in. After looking at this short diagnostic test, he has a solid idea of what he can do to improve student learning in the course and how to modify the upcoming unit.

Your students take the pretest several weeks before the unit so that you have adequate planning time to modify the unit. These pretests do not have to be complex. They will assess the whole standard or the goals (major components of the standard) at its highest level of thinking, and they will assess the comprehensive nature and the in-depth nature of the standard. A pretest covers one of many different aspects (Tuttle, 2007c):

- ◆ All the year's key concepts: A science teacher has developed two questions for each of the key goals that she covers during the year. She gives this pretest at the beginning of the year to have a baseline for all her students. Another science teacher selects standards-based questions from the standards testing program, has the students take the online assessment, and studies the results.
- ◆ Content on the state assessment: A Spanish teacher may give the students the previous year's state assessment during the second week of the school year to see what skills and knowledge the students presently possess.
- ◆ Overarching skills or concepts: An English teacher uses a reading comprehension pretest at the beginning of the year to determine how well the students comprehend reading materials. The English teacher realizes that if students do not have a high degree of reading comprehension, they will not do well in the course.
- ◆ Several standards goals found in a unit: A math teacher pulls out four questions that are the most difficult and that represent different standards goals from the unit; she asks her students to solve these problems.
- ◆ A specific goal within a unit: Within a big government and civics unit, a social studies teacher creates several pretests, each one focusing on a different goal, such as the purpose of the Constitution, the three branches of government, and the Bills of Rights in daily life. As the students finish one section of the unit, they have a pretest on the next section.
- ◆ Misconceptions: As a science teacher plans the unit, he thinks about all the misconceptions that previous students have displayed about this standard, and he examines the results from previous year's tests. He pinpoints the difficulties that students had. He writes a pretest to assess his present students for these misconceptions.
- ◆ Performance tasks: A Mandarin language teacher assesses at the highest level and in the same way that the state assessments evaluates the speaking skill. She has her students talk about a topic such as hobbies to see if they can say 10 coherent sentences within a short time period.

- ◆ Students' self-assessment: Students are given a list of goals or performance tasks, and they check off which ones they are very confident that they can do in an elementary music course. Although this a perception pretest, it helps the students reflect on their own skills and knowledge and provides the teacher a view of what they feel are their strengths and learning gaps (Tomlinson & McTighe, 2006).

In addition to giving the preassessment, you will want to be able to analyze the results. For example, Mr. Barrera in his global studies class created an analytic rubric (a rubric in which each critical component is rated individually); he records the results for each part of the rubric in a spreadsheet. He can easily see the class strengths and learning gaps as well as individual's results. He focuses on closing the gap and providing enrichment for those who are already proficient. Meanwhile, Ms. Ariani has her global studies students take an online preassessment on the major geographic, economic, religious, and cultural aspects of the countries she will cover in the next unit. The online program provides her with an analysis of each question so that she can fine-tune her upcoming unit to maximize student learning through differentiated instruction (Tuttle, 2007e, 2007f).

Sharing the Learning Standards with Your Students

Once your district, school, or team has selected the standards from national educational organizations, state education departments, or your local school district for your subject area, and you have unpacked those standards (deciding what students will know or be able to do at the end of the unit), you have the responsibility of communicating those standards to the students. As you and your team try to better understand the standard, you analyze the verbs used in the standard to understand what students are expected to do or know. Once you and the students know where they are going academically, you and they can provide better feedback to grow in that learning. Standards make a hidden learning curriculum into an explicit and overt one for the students. Standards serve as a road map for the students' learning (Heritage, 2007a). However, before you share the standard and its goals, you will want to make sure that the students can understand the standard.

Reword the Standards

You may reword the standards for your students so that the standards are stated in student-friendly language. When you translate the standards, you come to better understand what the standard expects. You study the performance standards and then reword them into "I can" statements that students and parents

can understand. For example, the National Geography Standard 2 of “how to use mental maps to organize information about people, places, and environments in a spatial context” becomes rewritten into the elementary Hawaii content standard of “I can name and locate on a map the seven continents, four oceans, the equator, North Pole, South Pole, Northern Hemisphere, and Southern Hemisphere” (Hawaii Geographic Alliance, 2006).

In another strategy, you find the equivalent of your state standard in another state that has student-friendly language instead of the teacher language used in most state standards. A New York State Education Department’s (n.d.) state version of Standard 2: World History Key Idea 1 is “the study of world history requires an understanding of world cultures and civilizations, including an analysis of important ideas, social and cultural values, beliefs, and traditions.” You and your high school students can compare that standard’s wording to the South Carolina’s family friendly list of learning, which explains what the students will be learning for 10th grade social studies: “Compare the origins and characteristics of the Mayan, Aztecan, and Incan civilizations” (South Carolina Education Oversight Committee, 2007). As you and your students look at standards written in student friendly language, you all can better understand them.

Because students are the ones who are to demonstrate their success in the standard, they can rewrite the standard in their own words. They do this individually, in small groups, or as a whole class. You facilitate their analyzing and interpreting of the standard into the student’s own words. Through your facilitating questions, the students can go from the top level “What does this standard want you to be able to do or know?” to “What skills or knowledge do you have to demonstrate to be successful?” One strategy is to have the students identify the key verbs in the standard and then to rewrite these verbs into equivalent-level thinking verbs. The students’ discussion will quickly reveal much about their understanding of this standard.

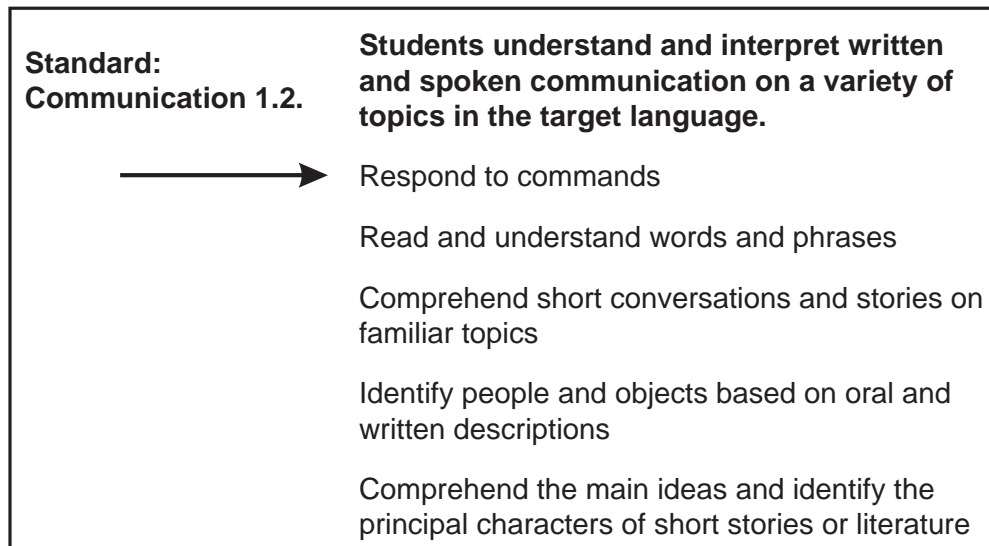
By asking the students a situational question, you can help elicit a standard from them. As you ask them the situational question of, “What would our life be like without electricity?,” you draw out from them the social studies standard about changes over time. By using a know, want to know, and learned (KWL) chart for a given topic in your class, the topic becomes the starting point for the classroom learning. As an elementary science teacher, you ask your students to make a KWL chart about plants as you help them formulate questions about what all living things need.

Post the Standards

Your classroom instruction does not become a standards-based formative assessment approach simply by posting the standards in your room. Posting the standard becomes effective when you enlarge the standards to list the critical key goals for your class. For example, as an Arizona world language teacher, you list

the standard and the major goals that you have for the Communication Standard 1.2 and indicate with an arrow which specific goal the students will be developing in this class (State Education Department of Arizona, n.d.) as in Figure 1.5.

Figure 1.5. Communication Standard and Goals



For this language goal, you start off each class by asking the students to state the day's learning goal and to paraphrase it in their own words.

Change Your Teacher Talk and Your Students' Talk to Be Standards Based

When you teach in a formative assessment approach and standards-based approach, you no longer talk about the learning activity, but you change your talk to focus on the standard's learning purpose for any lesson or unit. As a standards-based English teacher, you will not say "We are going to spend the next two weeks reading Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*," which is an activity. Instead you say, "We will be developing your skills in comparing and contrasting, which is an important part of Standard 3: Critical Analysis. By the end of this unit, you will be able to compare and contrast the different themes in Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*." Those two different verbal introductions to the unit convey very different meanings to the students about what they are expected to learn. The first statement tells the students nothing about what they are to learn, it just tells the students that they will be reading, the context of their learning. The second statement clearly explains what the students are expected to do at the end and what learning context (the novel) they will use.

In a formative assessment approach, you use statements such as "We are learning to..." when you refer to the standard's purpose of activity. Likewise, you

use statements such as “Remember to....” when you refer to success criteria. Immediately before the students start a learning task, you can ask “So what do you need to remember to do to... (achieve the standard)?” You word process their responses so they can use them as criteria for their own self-assessment and for feedback. You can post these in the room and give each student a copy of the criteria written in their own words (Primary National Strategy, 2004, p. 4).

Not only does your classroom teacher-talk change, but even more importantly, students classroom talk changes to reflect their understanding of the learning goals expected of them. For example, frequently during your middle school math lesson based on the Idaho math standards, you ask “What are we learning today?,” and you expect to hear a paraphrase of the standard such as “We are evaluating simple algebraic expressions using substitutions.” (Idaho State Department of Education, 2007). The students’ answers indicate that they are focused on the standard and not just on the activity. Their classroom talk centers on the standard.

Modify Daily Agendas to Become Learning Agendas

Likewise, instead of giving the daily agenda that lists that day’s activities, state the daily agenda by listing the learning goals that you want the students to successfully learn or do. If you write on the chalkboard, blog, or class website, “Finish reading Chapter 2 and answer the end of the chapter questions,” the students do not know what you expect them to learn; they only know what they are to do. Your agenda is an activity, not a learning goal. The students will only know when they are done answering the questions but not what they are to learn from the experience. If you write, “After reading the chapter, contrast pre-Revolutionary life to post-Revolutionary life in five ways,” then the students have a specific purpose that helps them work toward achieving the social studies standard. Students know what they are to learn from reading. As they read, they will be focused on the post-Revolutionary life and trying to identify differences with the pre-Revolutionary life. Here are several examples of the difference between non-standards-based daily agendas and formative assessment daily learning agendas as shown in Figure 1.6.

Figure 1.6. Non-Standard to Formative Agenda

Non–Standards-Based Daily Agenda	Formative Assessment Daily Learning Agenda
Social studies: Finish reading Chapter 2	Contrast pre-Revolutionary life to post-Revolutionary in five ways in a chart based on your readings
Math: Do problems	Explore multiple ways of creating numbers such as 100
Mandarin language: Restaurant words	Role-play a conversation with a waiter about five problems in the restaurant

Begin and End the Class with the Standard

Each day you can start your class with a review of the standard and how that translates into your daily lesson. You can either employ the standard-to-the-class approach or the standard-skills-mastery approach. In the standard-to-the-class approach, show the students the path from the general outcome to the specific learning goal for the day. When students have a firm orientation as to where they are to end up in the unit, they better self-assess how far they have progressed. For example, as a high school business teacher, you use the following standard from the National Business Education Association (2001):

Foundation of Communication Standard I: Communicate in a clear, courteous, concise, and correct manner on personal and professional levels:

Major goal: Produce clear and concise computer-generated professional letters.

Goal: Produce clear and concise computer-generated direct request letters.

Specific learning goal: Produce clear and concise computer-generated direct request order letters.

Assessment: Write a direct-request order letter and check it against an exemplar.

In the standards-skill-mastery approach, you review those goals or those building blocks (components of each goal) for which the students have already shown proficiency. When students see their successes, they are motivated to continue in their learning. When you end each class with a review and affirmation of the major goals for the standard, you help students realize how much progress they have made each day. For example, a high school business teacher lists the following:

Foundation of Communication Standard I: Communicate in a clear, courteous, concise, and correct manner on personal and professional levels.

Goal: Produce clear and concise computer-generated direct request letters.

Skills presently mastered by the class:

- Can use a block style
- Can include all the necessary parts of the letter (return address, your address, salutation, etc.)
- Can identify the request letter body general format of: first paragraph, front-load the message; second paragraph, give details; and third paragraph, specify action date
- Can identify the specific items needed in the front-load section, the detail sections, and the specific action for an order letter

Label Each Assignment as to the Specific Critical Goal of the Standard

Imagine how much more focused the students will be about the learning goal if every time you give an in-class assignment, homework, or a project, you label the precise standard and critical goal for the classroom learning. Within a lesson and within a unit, focus on the same standard and the same goal so you can easily copy that standard goal from your word processor to any assignment. The part of the standard that will vary is the particular learning goal that the students achieve as you help them to quickly move from memorization up to higher levels of thinking. Students have both a telescopic view of the standard and a microscopic view of the particular learning task (standards-based activity) when you include both the standard and the particular learning task. For example, as a science teacher using the Kansas State Education Department's (n.d.) standard for physical science, you write on the top of a worksheet:

Standard 2: Physical science: You will increase your understanding of the properties of objects and materials that you encounter on a daily basis. You will compare, describe, sort, and classify these materials by observable properties.

Topic: States of water

Learning task: Observe water going from a frozen cube, to water, and to vapor

Sharing the Quality of Learning

Once students know what they are to learn or do, they want to know how well they are to learn it or the quality of learning you expect of them. Just as you carefully selected those standards that your students are to learn, you will examine the standard and the state assessment to identify the high level of quality that the standard requires. During this analysis, you might consider studying the verbs in

the standard that indicate how well students are to do or know a particular learning. You can demonstrate this quality in many ways as described in the following sections.

Find or Create Exemplars to Show the Class the High Expectation Level for the Standard

An *exemplar*, a model piece of work, clearly shows an above-proficient demonstration of the standard. It exemplifies both the in-depth and comprehensive nature of the learning. Do not identify an assignment as exemplary for other than standards-based reasons. If you select an inferior work to motivate a particular student, then you have lowered the high expectations for the whole class. Being the cutest, the most decorative, the longest, the neatest, or the most glitzy does not make an activity an exemplar; only directly showing the standard at its highest level makes it an exemplar.

If you have taught the standard previously, you may have saved some student exemplars that show a mastery of the standard at its highest level of thinking. If so, show the class these exemplars at the beginning of the lesson or unit. Emphasize how these exemplars proficiently demonstrate the standard or have the students explain why these are exemplars. If you do not have exemplars from past years, ask your colleagues in your building or district, ask colleagues in the professional organizations to which you belong, or search the Internet for exemplars from other teachers or organizations. Sometimes you will find something that comes close to being exemplary and then you can modify it to be of the high quality you expect in the standard. Sometimes I have taken parts from the work of several students and put those selected parts together to create a single exemplar. If you cannot find an exemplar, then create one. Creating the exemplar may take time, but your exemplar will precisely demonstrate the standard for the students. An additional benefit of your creating the exemplar is you also identify the exact skills the students will be required to use for above-proficient standard work. Your team might help you in creating exemplars that all of you can use. For example, your high school business team can create a model business letter for ordering supplies. Students identify all the parts that are contained in the exemplar so that they know what to include in their letters.

When students see several different exemplars for the same standard, they realize that the standard becomes the important focus, not the manner in which they present the standard learning. They also see that each exemplar has the same high level of thinking (Clarke, 2005). If you have a digital camera, you can take pictures of exemplars that students produce in the classroom and use those exemplars to help other students in their learning journey.

In your classroom post the exemplar and then have a sheet that explains what makes it an exemplar. Your sheet identifies the standard, its critical goal, the

performance tasks demonstrated, and the highest level of thinking required by that standard. For example, as an art teacher, have your students focus on photography to create an original work of art (California State Board of Education, 2007). Post this exemplar explanation (Figure 1.7) in your room or to your class blog (a web-based discussion area) or website so that students can refer to it throughout the unit. Ask students to compare their work to the exemplar and note any differences.

Figure 1.7. Art Exemplar Explanation

<p>California Visual and Performing Arts Standard 2: Creative Expression</p> <p>Students apply artistic processes and skills, using a variety of media to communicate meaning and intent in original works of art.</p> <p>Communication and Expression through Original Works of Art</p> <p>2.6: Create an original work of art, using film, photography, computer graphics, or video.</p> <p>Exemplar: A photograph of a couple sitting in a gorge</p>	<p>This is an exemplar because it</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Uses the rule of thirds to place the couple in the intersection of horizontal and vertical thirds. ◆ Uses perspective. Has the couple looking at the far away trees that the gorge narrows into. ◆ Uses color contrast. Contrasts the couple's bright clothing colors with the earth tones of the gorge.
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Reeves (2006) advocates that schools and classrooms have a wall of fame where students' exemplary work (the fame) can be posted so that all students know that they can succeed in learning the standard. In addition, the students see what other students have done to succeed. These exemplars serve as formative learning guides for the students.

Learn to Identify Quality Standard Work through the Use of Assessment Tools

You can help your students to not only know what they are to learn but also understand the high quality that you expect of them through the use of various assessment tools such as rubrics (assess explicitly stated criteria for student work), rating scales (rate specified learning on a number scale such as 1–10), checklists (check off existing learning from a list), and success criteria (identify demonstrated behaviors from a listing of those critical behaviors or traits for this particular learning). The quality can be measured by the level of thinking required. Such assessment tools empower students to peer assess and self-assess themselves.

The Nebraska Department of Education (2007) has identified various levels of quality learning involved in a social studies “the causes and effects of a war” learning goal:

Beginning: Lists or names the causes of the war

Progressing: Prioritizes the causes of the war

Proficient: Indicates the cause and the effects of the war

Advanced: Compares and contrasts the cause and effect of one conflict to a different conflict

With these levels, you and your students see the progress of learning from a beginning level to an advanced level. Your school district, school, or teams identify the learning levels for the major learning goals and share these with the students so they understand the level expected of them.

You can create your own assessment tool or obtain one from a colleague. To find a rubric online, search for your learning goal +rubric, for example, conflict +rubric or “Civil War” +rubric. As you look at a preexisting assessment tool such as an online rubric, verify that the rubric assesses your specific standard and assesses it at its highest level. Unfortunately some web-based rubric generators do not contain levels of performance or quality that explain the difference in quality levels such as those between advanced, proficient, growing, and starting in the standard:

Advanced—Has a complete explanation (or shows complete understanding)

Proficient—Adequately explains the information

Growing—Has some of the information

Starting—Has a little of the information

How do these statements help students who received a starting designation? Even if the rubric specifies a number of sentences for each level, students still do not understand the quality difference because more sentences does not necessarily mean more quality. When the rubric information is so vague, then the students do not have a formative path to follow for success. Such rubrics are not helpful in a formative assessment approach.

Furthermore, many rubrics do not distinguish between which categories (criteria or dimensions) are critical and which are less critical. For example, on the New York State Comprehensive Writing Assessment (New York State Education Department, 2007), the content that the students write and the grammar conventions that they use are each given the same scoring weight. A student may not communicate the prescribed content but still score high on the rubric because the rubric uses a holistic grading system in which the overall score is determined by which category has the most mini-scores.

The three questions proposed by Sadler (1998) can help evaluate any assessment tool:

- ◆ Does it clearly indicate the standard and the high quality expected for the standard?
- ◆ Does it clearly indicate to the student how the student's present performance compares to this standard and quality?
- ◆ Does it clearly indicate to the student how to close the gap between where the student is now in the learning progression and the expected high quality of the standard?

Guide your students in better understanding the quality desired in a pre-existing assessment tool, such as a teacher rubric, or through their creating their own assessment tool. Some strategies are:

- ◆ Model the feedback process based on a rubric as you do a think-aloud as a student would for a sample work (Clarke, 2005). Explain aloud how you assess the work as you go through each part of the rubric.
- ◆ Students paraphrase the assessment tool in pairs and mutually decide on what the individual parts of the rubric means.
- ◆ Students, individually, and then as a whole class, analyze previous students' work according to a standards-based assessment tool. You encourage a discussion over what the rubric really requires and where evidence of this is found in the student's work. Furthermore, you make sure that when the students talk about a piece of work, they use the standard's vocabulary found in the scoring tool as the basis for their feedback to others.
- ◆ The students can go through the rubric line by line as they apply it to a sample work. They highlight each rubric key word in a specific color and then highlight evidence of that key word in the student's work in the same color. Next they indicate what improvements the student can do to demonstrate the standard at a proficient level.
- ◆ Students analyze two or more exemplary products with the assessment tool to see how quality work can be done in various forms.
- ◆ Students rate several examples of students' work by using an assessment tool to improve their ability to recognize high-quality standards-based student work (Reeves, 2004). As students become more discriminating, they can be given several pieces of students' work that are on the border of two levels such as proficient and above-proficient.
- ◆ When students are co-creators of a rubric, they are more invested in the criteria, and they come to understand the standard better (Stiggins, 2007a). You can show them several pieces of work, have them decide on

the differences, and have them use those differences to create a rubric for a proficient piece of work. Then you have the class try out the rubric by assessing several pieces of work.

Summary

- ◆ Formative assessment refers to the monitoring, diagnosing, and giving feedback that helps students to improve their learning in the current learning standard.
- ◆ Formative assessment moves students forward in their learning, whereas summative assessment tells them what their learning was.
- ◆ Formative assessment and standards-based education share many common characteristics. Standards-based education focuses more on “what” the students are to learn, whereas formative assessment focuses more on “how” to help the learners be successful.
- ◆ You can share the learning goals with your students in many different ways so that they are sure of the ending targets; therefore, they can focus their efforts.
- ◆ Likewise, you can help the students understand the quality expected of them in their learning through assessment tools such as rubrics, rating scales, checklists, and exemplars. They can generate their own quality lists so that they can achieve the high level expected of them.
- ◆ By preassessing your students before instruction, you know the entering learning status of your students and therefore, you can better differentiate instruction to promote better learning.