

## Teaching and Tools Presents: Formative Assessment, high and low tech approaches to soliciting feedback

Welcome to the Teaching and Tools podcast brought to you by eLearning at Everett Community College. I'm Instructional Designer Derek Jorgenson, here to provide you a condensed version of an in-person workshop on the topic of Formative Assessment that was held Wednesday, April 19, at Everett Community College.

To start, it's important to define formative assessment and identify the purpose behind the efforts. Formative assessments are strategies designed to garner feedback from a group of individuals regarding their knowledge and perceptions during the learning process. The intent is to modify the teaching and learning approaches based on the feedback with the goal of improving the experience for everyone involved. That's a big, broad definition, but it has to be, because formative assessments can be used in so many situations and there are hundreds of different methods that can be used to complete the process. In simpler terms, formative assessments are a way to "check the pulse" within a classroom setting in order to develop a thoughtful path forward. Formative assessment is just one piece of the assessment landscape. Summative assessments are the more formal and final type of assessment, and are generally thought of in terms of graded projects, assignments, and exams. The summative assessment happens at the end of a learning session or unit. Again, this is a contrast to the formative assessment approach, when we choose to get a current read of the learning and understanding.

There are literally hundreds of ways to formatively assess students. The approaches range widely, and choosing a measure is all about your needs, resources, and preferences. Some of the approaches are immediate and others are delayed. Some are anonymous and others are collective. Some are casual and others are formal. Some use technology and others do not. With so many options available, there's almost no excuse to not try some of them.

If you prefer to incorporate technology into your classroom, you might think about using some of the online resources that have been developed for assessment. Online tools are readily available, and most offer free and subscription-level services. If you choose to pay, you get access to more features and support. This is certainly true of most online polling software. Poll Everywhere, Kahoot! and

Plickers are designed to let participants use a mobile device (whether it is a smart phone, tablet, or laptop) to provide immediate, anonymous responses to a question or prompt. Results are automatically compiled, and the instructor can display the composite results instantly. Other technologies that allow for online feedback include Formative, Google Forms, and Canvas.

I always like to promote services that have institutional support and universal campus access, so Google Forms and Canvas deserve some extra attention. Google Forms has an Assessment tool that allows you to create a survey or poll that can be populated with your questions. In a similar fashion, Canvas allows you to create a quiz that can be used to gather anonymous responses. As members of EvCC, you and your students have built-in access to Google Forms and Canvas quizzes.

If you are looking for additional technology-based formative assessment approaches, take a few seconds to search the Internet for Formative Assessment Tools. Then you can spend a few hours or days immersing yourself in the sea of online options.

You don't need to rely on technology to complete meaningful formative assessments. The number of technology-free formative assessment approaches dwarfs the tech-based methods. You will find a world of ideas if you search online for Formative Assessment Questions. Here are just a few of my favorites:

- The Elevator speech: have students synthesize the elements of a complex concept or idea into a 20-30 second speech, highlighting the very most important components. The elevator speech is also a good way to think about how you as an instructor talk about your teaching and research interests. Can you sum it up and hit all the important notes in a brief conversation? I'm not proposing a 140 character limit to content, but the ability to communicate important ideas succinctly is an important skill, and listening to brief responses can let an instructor gauge students' understanding of a concept.
- Creating a Venn diagram is a visual twist on comparing and contrasting two concepts. Students can work independently or collaborate on a diagram that notes what makes ideas different and recognizes where concepts overlap.
- Simple questions regarding the clearest and muddiest points get directly to the heart of the matter, but usually aren't effective unless the students are comfortable with each other and are used to class discussion. A slight variation, such as what was most interesting or what concept didn't seem to fit in a chapter, might allow for more meaningful feedback.

Not all formative assessment has to be content-based. I like to give my students a voice in choosing some of the classroom activities and learning approaches used. Asking what they would like to do more of and what they would like to do less of can inform future lesson plans. Of course there are limits to what I'm willing to change, but I try to make the classroom a participatory environment and relinquish control, so long as I feel the learning outcomes and course objectives can be met.

No matter which approach you take, make an effort to engage in formative assessment on a regular basis. My goal is to engage in content-based formative assessment for every unit or chapter in a class. I ask for feedback on the approach of our class in week four or five of each quarter. Making adjustments at this stage is still feasible, and the changes are almost always noted in favorable ways in student evaluations at the end of the term. That's yet another incentive for integrating formative assessment into your classes.

That wraps up this installment of Teaching and Tools, brought to you by the eLearning department of Everett Community College. Thanks for listening! Check out the eLearning webpage at [www.everettcc.edu/elearning](http://www.everettcc.edu/elearning) for more information, including a list of upcoming workshops. The Center for Transformative Teaching Blog also offers a wealth of information; check it out at [ctt.evccblogs.com](http://ctt.evccblogs.com). I'm Derek Jorgenson, your Instructional Designer. Until next time – onward!