



Effective Assessments: Using Assessments to Encourage Student Engagement

The goal of assessing work is not to judge a student or to simply give a grade. We want students to value learning for its own sake instead of focusing on the grade. How can we assess student work in a way that supports the learning process and encourages greater engagement?

Assess each student as a unique individual. Don't expect the same thing from every student. The goal is to nurture the student's confidence while helping to strengthen weaknesses and improve overall skills. We want to encourage students to reach their own individual level of excellence, which varies from student to student.

Be sensitive in your assessments. Show support for students' past efforts while guiding them gently toward greater competency. Constructive criticism can be difficult for all of us to integrate. This is especially true for younger children (and their parents), or teens in the midst of learning about themselves, a time often rife with self-doubt.

Always find something positive to notice. Let the student know what he or she is doing well. This is just as important as noticing what needs work.

Give specific, focused feedback. Sometimes a student is best supported by very targeted, detail-oriented feedback, and other times a more global approach makes sense. Include clear, actionable goals.

Prioritize the skills to be developed. Although there may be many areas that need improving, break down the process into achievable portions. Choose two or three specific areas that need improvement and keep your lesson comments focused on those areas. Let everything else go until the next lesson.

Remember to consider the skill level of the student. If you have a high school student preparing for college, more detailed lesson comments would be in order. For a middle school student struggling to learn writing mechanics, a careful sequence of focused lesson comments can provide encouraging guidance. Provide feedback that helps to build confidence while offering support for developing skills.

Take the long view in your work with your student. If you focus too narrowly on individual assignments and point out every mistake at once, you risk diminishing engagement and motivation. You have at least a semester to help the student develop skills, and you may have a student for years. By providing too much constructive feedback too early, we risk losing a student's trust.

Encourage discussions and debates about the lesson material. Parents, siblings, and friends are excellent sounding boards and conversation partners. Encourage students to talk about assignments and related issues that arise. Communicating opinions and listening to the perspective of others can help students be more invested in the work.

Recognize that many factors should be taken into account in the grading process. Use your judgment as an educator to assign the grade that will best reflect the child's learning. Overall, a student should not be assessed compared to where they "should" be, but instead according to the progress they have made. Take into account the overall quality of the student's efforts and abilities.

Enjoy getting to know your students! Students will put more effort into their assignments, and will enjoy the process more, if they have a sense that you care about them and their work.