

Formative and Summative Feedback

Student work can be assessed, evaluated, and responded to formatively or summatively. All teachers are very familiar with summative feedback and what goes into it: we grade papers, evaluate presentations, and score exams against rubrics or other pre-determined benchmarks in order to sum up a period of learning with a moment of evaluation. It is likely, though, that you provide formative feedback much more often over the course of the semester, whether you're aware of it or not. Formative feedback responds to students as learners, still in the process of mastery. Its key purpose is to aid progress, allowing an instructor to both gauge student comprehension and guide students toward deeper critical thinking and readiness for growth.

Some strategies for providing actionable formative feedback:

Ask your students to do **in-class writing** in response to course content and consider one of the following:

- Read and return the writing with a single sentence or question.
- Read all the responses but instead of commenting on each, provide oral, class-wide feedback in the next session (by intervening on what you discovered was a common misconception, or sharing an exceptionally engaged response).

Scaffold your assignments, building in many opportunities for students to develop a stronger final product. In response to a **low-stakes assignment**, you might:

- Hold a short oral **conference**.
- Train students in formative **peer review** strategies.
- Mark an outline or draft with a few questions that solicit **performances of understanding**.

Some strategies for providing productive summative feedback:

- State your expectations for an assignment up front, outlining them on a handout.
- Facilitate a class discussion about how you'll grade and provide a rubric or sample work.
- Read through student work once before marking.
- Develop a comment bank made up of questions or responses that you'll commonly utilize in response to a particular assignment. The comment bank will help you notice patterns of response, and therefore of student learning, and will speed up your response time.
- In your summative feedback, cite specific passages that represent levels of skills mastery and reflect the assigned grade.

References

- Elbow, Peter. "High Stakes and Low Stakes in Assigning and Responding to Writing." *New Directions for Teaching and Learning*, vol. 69, 1997, pp. 5-13.
- Sommers, Nancy. "Responding to Student Writing." *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 33, no. 2, 1982, pp. 148-156.
- White, Edward M. *Assigning, Responding, Evaluating: A Writing Teacher's Guide*. 4th ed. New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2007.

See also

- High-stakes and Low-stakes Assignments
- Peer Review
- Scaffolding Student Learning