



LEARNING POINT

What are learning targets?

Why are they important in the formative assessment process?

Learning targets written in student-friendly language are used to help students understand what they are learning and how to reach the target. They describe what success looks like once the target is reached. When learning targets are connected to past and future learning, they can also help students to understand the planned sequence of instruction.

Within the Formative Assessment for Michigan Educator (FAME) program, the “Learning Target Use” component supports teachers in the use of learning targets. Teachers become clear about what students are to learn, and they show students what constitutes acceptable performance. The use of learning targets is critical for the students to respond to the guiding question: Where am I going?

This component of the FAME program provides both the teacher and students with a clear understanding to guide the next step of learning. It enables students to understand what they need to learn and how they are going to get there.

Why are learning targets important?

Learning is positively impacted when students understand the intended purpose of a lesson. Overall, learning targets play a central role in effective teaching and meaningful learning to raise student achievement through the formative assessment

process (Brookhart, Moss, & Long, 2011; Moss & Brookhart, 2009). The teacher and students are guided by learning targets as they work together in the formative assessment process to collect and interpret evidence of student understanding to improve learning outcomes.

Students must first understand the learning target before they are able to participate in other aspects of the formative assessment process. Many experts in the field agree that one of the most important things for students to learn is the intention of the lesson, including the content they will learn, why they are learning the

content, the depth of understanding to which they need to learn it, and how to demonstrate their new learning (Moss & Brookhart, 2009; Seidle, Rimmele, & Prenzel, 2005; Stiggins, Arter, Chappuis, & Chappuis, 2009).

Learning targets defined

Learning targets are student-friendly descriptions of the knowledge, skills, and reasoning that students need to learn or accomplish in a given lesson. Learning targets can be thought of as lesson-sized chunks of knowledge and skills that lead to broader learning goals for students (Leahy, Lyon, Thompson, & William, 2005). Embed

To learn more

Formative assessment: What do teachers need to know and do?

Margaret Heritage. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 89(2), 140–146.
<https://bit.ly/3yvG0PJ>

What do we mean by formative assessment?

ALN Learning Point (Michigan Assessment Consortium, 2016).
<http://bit.ly/LP-FormativeAssessment>

What are learning progressions?

ALN Learning Point (Michigan Assessment Consortium, 2018).
<https://bit.ly/LP-Progressions>

Learning targets: How students aim for understanding in today's lesson

Connie M. Moss and Susn M. Brookhart. (ASCD, 2012)
<http://www.ascd.org/Publications/Books/Overview/Learning-Targets.aspx>

ding learning targets in instruction involves intentional planning and implementation as well as a clear purpose for instruction.

Teacher's instructional practice

Learning targets guide a teacher's instructional decisions and formative assessment practices. Designing learning targets includes the following elements*:

1. **Description of what students will learn** (also known as a learning target or learning target statement)
2. **Learning experiences students will engage in to demonstrate their attainment of the new knowledge and skills** (this is often referred to as performance task or performance of understanding)
3. **Criteria so that students know they have reached the learning target** (also referred to as success criteria)
4. **Connection of the lesson to previous and future learning experiences and targets** (see ALN Learning Point on Learning Progressions) so students understand why they are learning what they are learning and what learning will follow the current lesson
5. **Instruction of the lesson-sized chunk of knowledge and skills to students**

Learning targets and success criteria

The formative assessment process must be rooted in the subject matter disciplines. The description of what students will learn, or the learning target, is developed based on state- or district-level content standards and the instructional objective(s) for a lesson.

A learning target is specific to a lesson and describes a unique learning intention. To clarify—a lesson can last 45 minutes or it can occur over several class periods. The teacher shares the learning targets with students

consistently and intentionally and delivers instruction so that students are clear on what they will be able to do at the end of the lesson.

The discussion of the knowledge and skills needed to achieve the learning target is shared in the form of success criteria. Success criteria provide a specific and concrete understanding of what it looks like to reach the learning target, which guides both instruction and assessment. A variety of formats from lists to rubrics can be used to share the success criteria.

The learning target defines the intended learning, and the success criteria are the arrows that help the learner achieve the target and demonstrate mastery.

* Formative assessment professional learning opportunities such as the Michigan Department of Education's FAME Project, provides further description of the teachers' instructional practice in the program materials.

Success criteria communicate the performances of learning that help the teacher and student know when students have achieved the learning target, when they have made some progress, and when they have more learning to do. Success criteria are clear, closely linked to the learning target, and focus on the learning. They are communicated from the students' perspective and illustrate the expected learning. Together, learning targets and success criteria support rich, productive learning experiences.

A teacher will develop proficiency with learning target use over time. The indicators listed in Figure 1 can help teachers identify their current level of practice and next steps as they develop proficiency.

Figure 1: Indicators of Successful Practice for Learning Target Use in the Formative Assessment Process

INDICATORS OF SUCCESSFUL PRACTICE

The indicators of successful practice outline the key aspects of Learning Target Use in the formative assessment process. They can be used for self-assessment and to set goals as a teacher develops proficiency with instructional planning in the formative assessment process.

- The teacher prepares content for the learning target in advance of the lesson.
- The learning target for the lesson focuses on concepts/skills from content/grade level standards.
- The learning target uses student-friendly language.
- The learning target is connected to the instructional activities/performance of understanding.
- Use of learning targets reflects formative assessment process knowledge, content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and knowledge of students.
- The teacher clearly communicates the learning target to the students at the beginning of the lesson and makes connections to past and future learning.
- The teacher explains the knowledge and skills needed to accomplish the learning target.
- The teacher references the learning target throughout the lesson and gathers evidence of student understanding of the target.