ALN
ASSESSMENT LEARNING NETWORK
LEARNING POINT

Online formative assessment strategies that help students with disabilities

Using the formative assessment process is important for all kinds of learning. But it can be especially important for distance learning, which sometimes can feel to students like an endless "to-do" list with no particular goal in mind. Effective use of the formative assessment process can improve learning for all students, and it is particularly helpful for students with disabilities.

Formative assessment helps to focus students on three important questions:

1. *Where am I going? (What is my learning target?)*

2. *What do I understand now? (What evidence do I have of my learning?)*

3. *How do I get closer to the learning target? (Using formative feedback to make adjustments and set goals)*

Formative learning is important for students with disabilities because its elements correspond with the process of self-regulated learning. It also helps students gain confidence in their ability to learn content they find difficult by helping them envision what successful learning looks like. Many formative assessment strategies can be used to fuel the learning cycle, and most can be easily adapted for distance learning. Assessment
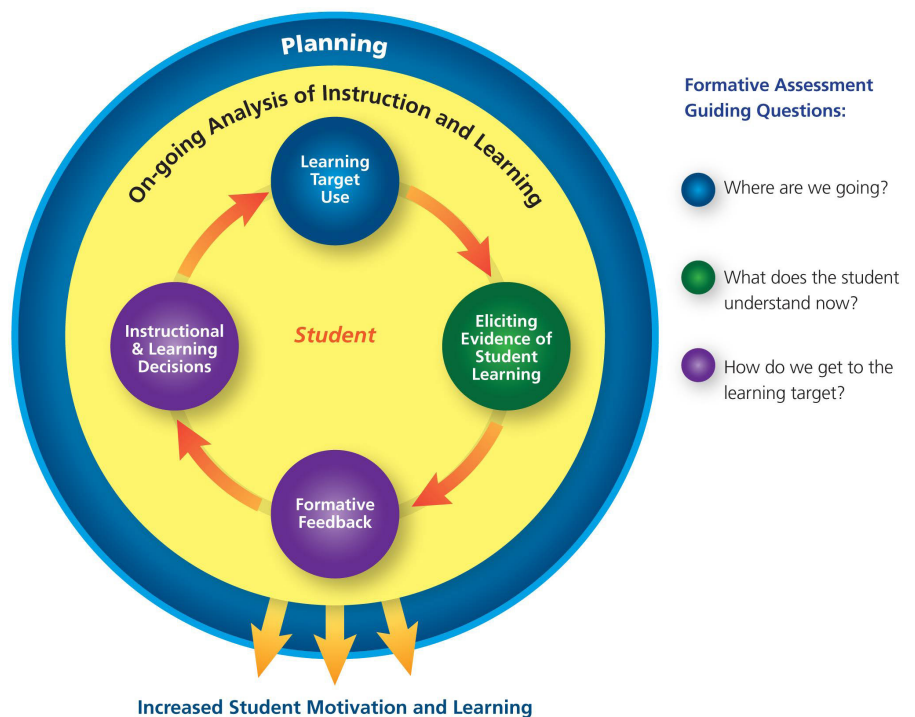
expert Susan Brookhart (Brookhart 2020) recommends five strategies as first steps for getting started.

Strategy 1. Establish and communicate clear learning targets

A learning target is a statement of what students will learn in a lesson. They are often coupled with student performance expectations and a set of "look-fors" that describe what suc-

cessful learning looks like. Without a clear learning target and success criteria, performance tasks in an online learning platform may turn into a meaningless "check-list" of activities. It's helpful to explain why the day's learning target is important, how what the student learned yesterday prepared them for today's lesson, and how today's learning will help them tomorrow and beyond.

Figure 1: The Formative Assessment Process

Formative Assessment Guiding Questions:

● Where are we going?

● What does the student understand now?

● How do we get to the learning target?

**Increased Student Motivation and Learning**

Strategy 2. Establish and communicate clear criteria for success

Success criteria give students specific things to look for in their work. They are how students—and teachers—know they are making progress toward a learning target. Success criteria describe the qualities that should be noticed in student work—they are not scores or grades. Bonus for students learning at home: Clear success criteria can help parents and caregivers to focus on their student's learning as opposed to just "getting things right." When possible, show students examples of student work, and ask them to reflect on why some are closer to meeting the success criteria than others before they start their own work.

Strategy 3. Build in opportunities for student self-assessment based on criteria

Whenever possible, incorporate self-assessment and student questioning into online lessons. Teachers can:

- Format success criteria into tools students can use as they do their assignments (e.g., bullet list, checklist, or simple rubric).
- Create reflection steps in assignment directions where students can use the tool(s).
- Use success criteria to create self-checking quizzes or smart
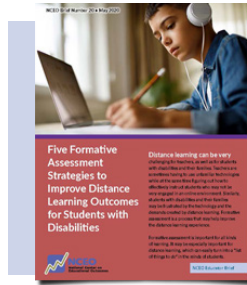
flashcards for students to use for self-assessment.

- Include a "mid-point reflection" in a document-based lesson or include pause points in a video or slide lesson.
- Use some "checking for understanding" strategies (if you are learning in a live "synchronous" session).

Strategy 4. Give brief, clear, actionable feedback based on the criteria

Feedback is more important than ever for students working alone, with parents or caregivers, or in small groups within an online learning platform. It helps students move along in the formative learning cycle toward a learning goal. Feedback can be brief, but it is most helpful when it is precise and when it references the success criteria. For example, point out one criterion toward which a student made progress. Then, identify another criterion where the student could improve. If the online learning platform supports it, provide some feedback in a dialogue with students.

Strategy 5. Give students opportunities to revise assignments or re-do similar assignments

Feedback is most useful when students can use it to adjust their learning and move along the formative learning cycle. Those opportunities should be a planned part of instruction. Online learning may have an advantage over face-to-face learning here because much of the work is done asynchronously (away from live instruction) and is independent of how other students are spending their time. Here are some ideas to try:

- Build at least one feedback-and-revision cycle into assignment directions.
- Assign a few additional similar problems and let the student use feedback as a guide.
- Add a reflection question that asks what the student did differently the second time they tackled the assignment.

Again, these strategies offer only a beginning, but they are critical when starting to use the formative assessment process during online learning. Students with disabilities, like all students, should know where they are going, what they know now, and how to move forward. Because formative assessment strategies emphasize student understanding of their learning, they can help address the "get-it-done" mentality some students bring to online learning.

Reference:

Brookhart, S. (2020, May). *Five formative assessment strategies to improve distance learning outcomes for students with disabilities.* (NCEO Brief #20). National Center on Educational Outcomes.

To learn more

Five Formative Assessment Strategies to Improve Distance Learning Outcomes for Students with Disabilities. NCEO Brief Number 20, May 2020
http://bit.ly/Brookhart-FAStrategies

Formative Assessment for Students with Disabilities. Council of Chief State School Officers, 2017
https://bit.ly/3dxBMc6

Learning Point: What are learning targets?
http://bit.ly/LP-Targets

Learning Point: What is formative feedback? Why is feedback from the teacher important?
http://bit.ly/LP-FormativeFeedback