

Why isn't assessment always assessment for learning – and what can we do about it?

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Assessment for learning (AfL)

AfL is an environment where:

- Students are engaged in learning activities that are productive, relevant, meaningful or 'authentic' in the context of the subject they are studying.
- Students have opportunities to practice, try out or rehearse what they are learning in order to improve and develop
- There is an appropriate balance between learning/formative assessment and being 'tested'/summative assessment.
- Provides a good supply of formal and informal feedback from a range of sources – tutor, peers, self, others (e.g. externals), automated sources.
- Helps students develop as self-assessors/self-directed learners.

Source: CETL AfL @ Northumbria (http://northumbria.ac.uk/cetl_afl/)

Seven principles for feedback/formative assessment

- Helps clarify what good performance is (goals, criteria, expected standards)
- Facilitates the development of reflection and self-assessment in learning
- Delivers high-quality information to students about their learning
- Encourages teacher and peer dialogue around learning
- Encourages positive motivational beliefs and self-esteem
- Provides opportunities to close the gap between current and desired performance
- Provides information to teachers than can be used to shape teaching

Nicol, D & MacFarlane-Dick, D (2006)

Three ways of thinking about assessment

Measurement	Judgement	Quality Control
Assesses tasks remote from the world outside the classroom Assesses tasks directly from the curriculum as taught	Assesses tasks that reflect outside context	Assessment tasks are tightly specified
Separates learning, teaching and assessment	Integrates learning, teaching & assessment Use of formative assessment	Separates learning, teaching and assessment
Assesses individuals	Assesses individuals <i>and</i> groups	Emphasis on individual assessment
Tasks prescribed by teachers Exams/tests in controlled conditions	Assess holistic tasks Diverse types of assessment	Tasks must generate an evidence base
Students not well-informed	Students involved in the nature and form of assessment tasks	Transparency – informing students and others via documentation
One right answer	Possibility of alternative answers	Explicit standards
Scores (measurable) Objectivity Test instruments, validity and reliability	Multiple sources of evidence Inference Informed judgement, triangulation	Scores that are auditable
Normal distribution	Use of criteria and standards	Consistency in outcomes (e.g. % of first class marks)

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