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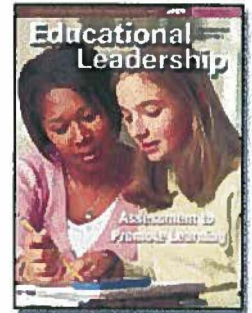
Assessment to Promote Learning Pages 39-43

Helping Students Understand Assessment

Jan Chappuis

Formative assessments promote learning when they help students answer three questions: Where am I going? Where am I now? and How can I close the gap?

During the last decade, many schools have begun to emphasize formative assessment. As teachers work to develop short-cycle or common assessments and engage in data-driven decision making, they typically remain in the central decision-making role. This approach reflects the underlying assumption that teachers control learning. Although teachers must create the conditions for learning, however, students ultimately decide whether they feel capable of learning and whether they will do the work. Therefore, students are equally important users of formative assessment information. The research tells us why.



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Necessary Components of Formative Assessment

In their 1998 synthesis of research, Black and Wiliam reported that formative assessment produced significant learning gains, with effect sizes between 0.4 and 0.7. They noted, however, that in schools achieving these gains, students were the primary users of formative assessment information. In such schools,

Formative assessment began with offering students a clear picture of learning targets.

Students received feedback on their work that helped them understand where they were with respect to the desired learning target.

Students engaged in self-assessment.

Formative assessment provided an understanding of specific steps that students could take to improve.

Sadler (1989) had previously reported similar findings. In describing the role of formative assessment in developing expertise, he identified three conditions required for students to improve:

The student comes to hold a concept of quality roughly similar to that held by the teacher, is able to monitor continuously the quality of what is being produced during the act of production itself, and has a repertoire of alternative moves or strategies from which to draw at any given point. (p. 121)

This research on effective formative assessment suggests that students should be able to answer three basic questions: Where am I going? Where am I now? and How can I close the gap? (adapted from Atkin, Black, & Coffey, 2001). The seven strategies described in the following sections can help ensure systematic student involvement in the formative assessment process (Stiggins, Arter, Chappuis, & Chappuis, 2004).

Where Am I Going?

Students need to know what learning targets they are responsible for mastering, and at what level. Marzano (2005) asserts that students who can identify what they are learning significantly outscore those who cannot.

Strategy 1: Provide a clear and understandable vision of the learning target. Share the learning targets before you begin instruction, in language your students can understand. For example, when introducing a reading comprehension unit calling for inference, you might say, "We are learning to *infer*. This means we are learning to make reasonable guesses on the basis of clues." Or provide students with a written list of learning targets described in student-friendly language, such as,

We are learning about fractions. We are learning to

Read and write fractions with halves, thirds, fourths, and tenths.

Read and write mixed numbers (whole numbers plus fractions).

Change fractions written as tenths into decimals.

When working with more complex content standards that call for performance assessment, such as "Writes clearly and effectively," introduce the language of the scoring guide that the school will use to define quality. To do this, ask students what they think constitutes good writing, and then help them identify where their concept of good writing matches the concepts in the scoring guide. If the scoring guide is above students' reading level you might want to create a student-friendly version.

Strategy 2: Use examples of strong and weak work. To know where they are going, students must know what excellent performance looks like. Ask students to evaluate anonymous work samples for quality and then to discuss and defend their judgments, using the language of the scoring guide in the case of performance assessments. Such an exercise will help students develop skill in accurate self-assessment.

Teachers often use strong examples, or exemplars, but avoid using weak examples because they worry that students will accidentally emulate them. On the contrary, when students evaluate weak examples that mirror common problems, they become more proficient at identifying their own weaknesses and gain a better understanding of quality. To introduce work samples to students, you might

1. Distribute to students a student-friendly version of the scoring guide you will use to evaluate their final products.
2. Choose one aspect of quality (one trait) to focus on.
3. Show an overhead transparency of a strong anonymous sample, but don't let students know it's a strong example. Have students work independently to score it for the one trait using the student-friendly scoring guide. You may ask students to underline the statements in the scoring guide that they believe describe the work they're examining.
4. After students have settled on a score independently, have them share their scores in small groups, using the language of the scoring guide to explain their reasoning.
5. Ask the class to vote and tally their scores on an overhead transparency. Then ask for volunteers to share their scores and the rationale behind them. Listen for, and encourage, use of the language of the scoring guide.

6. Repeat this process with a weak anonymous sample, focusing on the same trait. Do this several times, alternating between strong and weak papers, until students are able to distinguish between strong and weak work and independently give rationales reflecting the concepts in the scoring guide (Stiggins et al., 2004).

Where Am I Now?

When my daughter was in 3rd grade, she once brought home a math paper with a smiley face, a minus 3, and an *M* at the top. When we asked her what the *M* meant she had learned, she looked at us as though we were trying to trick her and replied, "Math?" When we asked her what that meant she needed to work on, she frowned and ventured, "Math?"

Papers marked like this one do not give students the information they need. At best, such marks might tell the student, "I'm doing OK in math," but they will not enable the student to assess his or her own strengths and weaknesses. You can use the following two strategies to help students identify how they are currently performing in relation to the learning and actions that are expected of them.

Strategy 3: Offer regular descriptive feedback. Black and Wiliam (1998) recommend that to improve formative assessment, teachers should reduce *evaluative* feedback—such as "B+. Good work!" or "You didn't put enough effort into this"—and increase *descriptive* feedback, such as "You maintained eye contact with your audience throughout your whole presentation" or "Your problem-solving strategy for dividing all the people into equal groups worked well right up to the end, but you need to figure out what to do with the remaining people."

The quality of the feedback, rather than its quantity, determines its effectiveness (Bangert-Downs, Kulik, Kulik & Morgan, 1991; Sadler, 1989). The most effective feedback identifies success and also offers students a recipe for corrective action (Bloom, 1984; Brown, 1994). Grades and other coded marks—such as ✓ + and 92%—do not tell students what areas they need to improve. Instead, such marks signal that the work on this piece is finished.

Here are some simple actions you can take to provide effective feedback:

After students have practiced using a scoring guide with anonymous work and they understand the meaning of the phrases in the scoring guide, highlight phrases that describe strengths and weaknesses their work. If you are working with a multitrait scoring guide, limit feedback to one or two traits at a time. Have students *traffic light* their work (Atkin et al., 2001), marking it with a green, yellow, or red dot to indicate the level of help they need. Allow students with green and yellow dots to provide descriptive feedback to one another, while you provide feedback for students with red dots.

Strategy 4: Teach students to self-assess and set goals. In giving students descriptive feedback, you have modeled the kind of thinking you want them to do as self-assessors. As a next step, turn that task over to students and guide them in practicing self-assessment and goal setting. You may find it useful to have students identify the strengths and weaknesses of their work before you offer your own feedback. Have them complete a form like the one in Figure 1 and staple it to their work when they turn it in. Respond with your feedback, either on the form or orally.

Figure 1. Student Self-Assessment Form

My Strengths and Areas to Improve

Trait(s): _____

Name: _____

Name of Paper: _____

Date: _____

My Opinion

My strengths are _____

What I think I need to work on is _____

My Teacher's or Classmate's Opinion

Strengths include _____

Work on _____

My Plan

What I will do now is _____

Next time I'll ask for feedback from _____

Source: From Classroom Assessment for Student Learning: Doing It Right—Using It Well, by R. J. Stiggins, J. Arter, J. Chappuis, and S. Chappuis, 2004, Portland, OR: Assessment Training Institute. Reprinted with permission.

To help students align their expectations with yours, ask them to turn in a scoring guide with their work, highlighting in yellow the phrases in the guide that they believe represent the quality of their work. On the same scoring guide, highlight in blue the phrases that you think describe their work, and return the guide to them. Where the highlighted phrases are green (blue over yellow), your feedback matches the student's self-assessment. Any highlighted phrases that remain blue or yellow, however, indicate areas in which the student probably needs to refine his or her vision of quality (Stiggins et al., 2004).

If you are using a selected-response test, you can arrange the items according to the learning targets they

assess and give students the list of learning targets correlated to the test item numbers. When they receive their corrected test, students can identify which learning targets they have mastered and which learning targets they need to work on further. They can then develop a plan for how they will improve the targeted areas. This practice is especially effective if students have the opportunity to retake the test.

How Can I Close the Gap?

The final essential step in making formative assessment work is to keep students in touch with what they can do to close the gap between where they are now and where they need to be.

Strategy 5: Design lessons to focus on one aspect of quality at a time. This strategy breaks learning into more manageable chunks for students. For example, suppose that students are learning to design and conduct scientific investigations, and one part of the scoring guide describes the qualities of a good hypothesis. If students are having trouble formulating hypotheses, they can refer to that portion of the scoring guide as the differentiate between strong and weak examples of hypotheses, practice drafting hypotheses, give one another descriptive feedback on their drafts, and assess their own drafts' strengths and weaknesses.

Strategy 6: Teach students focused revision. Let students practice revising their work before being held accountable by a final grade. You might begin with one of the anonymous, weak work samples that your students have evaluated (see *Strategy 2*). Focusing on just the single aspect of quality that they evaluated, ask students to work in pairs to either revise the sample or create a revision plan describing what the anonymous student needs to do to improve the work. Then ask students to apply the same process to their own work, either revising it to make it better or submitting a revision plan. For example, after assessing their draft hypotheses in science, students could use the scoring guide to write out what they need to do to improve the hypotheses.

Strategy 7: Engage students in self-reflection and let them document and share their learning. We know the power of self-reflection to deepen learning for adults. It also works for students. One of the strongest motivators is the opportunity to look back and see progress.

In a skill-based course, such as physical education, students can fill out a daily form that asks two questions: "What are two important things you learned from today's class?" and "What is one goal you have for tomorrow's class?"

Student portfolios can also promote students' self-reflection. In collecting their work and insights in portfolios students have the opportunity to reflect on their learning, develop an internal feedback loop, and understand themselves better as learners. To use portfolios in this way, students must clearly understand their learning goals, the steps that they have taken toward reaching those goals, and how far they have come. Involving students in parent-teacher conferences can accomplish the same purpose. Students gain insight from explaining to their parents the learning that their work represents, their strengths as learners, and what they plan to work on next.

Students at the Center

The seven strategies described here are designed to help students better understand their learning goals, recognize their own skill level in relation to the goals, and take responsibility for reaching the goals. By expanding our formative assessment practices to systematically involve students as decision makers, teachers acknowledge the contributions that students make to their own success and give them the opportunity and

structure they need to become active partners in improving their learning.

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Where Am I Going?

Jan Chappuis

Strategy 1: Provide a clear and understandable vision of the learning target.

Begin by giving students a vision of the learning destination. Share with your students the learning targets, objectives, or goals either at the outset of instruction or before they begin an independent practice activity.

There are three ways to do this: (1) state the learning target as is, (2) convert the learning target into student-friendly language, or (3) for learning targets assessed with a rubric, convert the rubric to student-friendly language. Introduce the language of quality to students. Check to make sure students understand what learning target is at the heart of the lesson by asking, “Why are we doing this activity? What are we learning?”

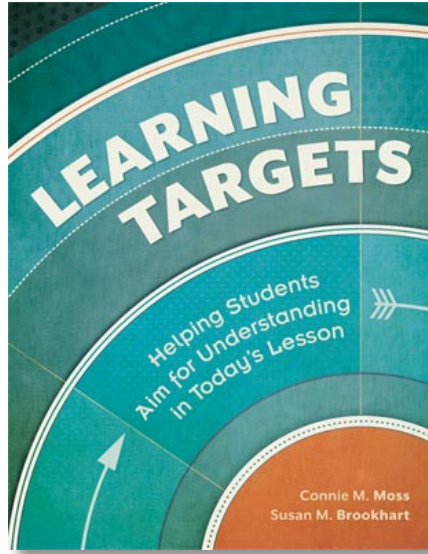
Strategy 2: Use examples and models of strong and weak work.

Help students sort through what is and isn’t quality work by using strong and weak models from anonymous student work, examples from life beyond school, and your own work. Begin with examples that demonstrate strengths and weaknesses related to problems students commonly experience, especially the problems that most concern you. Ask students to analyze these samples for quality and then to justify their judgments. Use only anonymous work. When you engage students in analyzing examples or models, they develop a vision of what the knowledge, understanding, skill, product, or performance looks like when it’s executed well.

Model creating a product or performance yourself. Show students the true beginnings, the problems you encounter, and how you think through decisions along the way. Don’t hide the development and revision part, or students will think they are doing it wrong when it is messy at the beginning, and they won’t know how to work through the rough patches.

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Learning Targets: Helping Students Aim for Understanding In Today's Lesson



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Learning Targets, Student Look-Fors, Performance of Understanding, Formative Learning Cycle



1. Learning Targets

- If students are not using it (aiming for understanding of important concepts and becoming more proficient in targeted skills) they are not engaged in the formative assessment process, and your learning intention is NOT a learning target.
- Students must know what good work means in today's lesson:
 - What they are expected to learn.
 - How well they are expected to learn it.
 - What they will be asked to do to demonstrate their learning.
 - How well they will have to do it.



2. Student Look Fors (Success Criteria)

- Criteria the students can use to judge how close they have come to the target in language that describes mastery of the target, rather than in grading or scoring language (letters, points, numbers, percentage right, number correct, etc.).



3. Every Lesson Needs a Performance of Understanding:

- Perfect fit for the learning target and makes it crystal clear to everyone.
- Deepens students understanding of important content.
- Opportunity for students to try out the learning target and apply their student look-fors.
- Helps students aim for understanding and assess what they know and what they need to learn more about.
- Produces compelling and undeniable evidence of student learning through what students do, say, make or write.
- Students conclude: *If I can do this, then I will know that I have reached my learning target.*
- Teacher concludes: *If my students can do this, then I will have strong evidence that they've mastered the learning target.*



4. A Formative Learning Cycle That Feeds Students and Learning Forward.

- In today's lesson, students and teachers partner during a formative learning cycle that makes learning visible and maximizes opportunities to feed students and their learning forward.
- It provides a "golden second chance" that encourages, expects, and teaches students to improve their work as part of today's lesson.
- Without a learning target, student look-fors, and a performance of understanding, feedback is just advice—someone telling you what to do—and has no formative value.

The Role of Learning Targets and Success Criteria “Student Look-Fors”

- 1. Formative assessment is the Means not the Ends.** Unless students see, recognize and understand what they are learning and how they will know when they reach mastery, they will never become independent, self-directed, assessment capable learners. Remember the goal here is to produce competent, self-regulated, and motivated learners who can set goals and assess their own progress.
- 2. Instructional objectives are too broad and too impersonal to guide learning.** Students need teachers to describe for them in student friendly and age appropriate terms (language they can understand) exactly what is important **to learn** (not what is important to do or to score) in the lesson/activity at hand. This description should be framed from the point of view of a student who has yet to master the content.
- 3. Learning targets describe what the student will come to know or be able to do as a result of today’s lesson.** They do not describe what they will score or do. Learning targets are not “directions for an activity”. They are an exact description of what students will learn. They usually begin with a phrase like: *Today we are learning...*
- 4. It is not enough for students to hear what they are going to learn, they must understand how teachers will assess the quality of their work and how they can assess the quality of their own work.** Teachers should share success criteria (student look fors) students can use as they are learning and working that answer the question: *How will I know when I am producing quality work?*
- 5. The purpose of sharing learning targets and success criteria (student look fors) is to guide the learning of the students, the actions of the teacher, and the evidence that the classroom learning team will collect to support an assumption that learning has occurred.** Work that students do should provide teachers and students with strong evidence of their standing in relation to mastery of the learning target for today’s lesson.
- 6. The best way to share a learning target is to design activities and assignments—performances of understanding—that provide the strongest evidence of where each student is in relation to today’s learning target (Moss & Brookhart, 2012).** What are students actually doing during today’s lesson to: deepen their understanding of content (knowledge and skills), assess the quality of their work as they are learning, provide evidence of what they know and can do and how well they know it and can do it.
- 7. To raise student achievement, you must be very clear about what achievement actually means!** Achievement means that you are looking for evidence of “something”. Teachers and students should know EXACTLY what that “something” is for today’s lesson, and gather compelling evidence to determine if students have “achieved” that exact “something”. Raising student achievement during TODAY’s lesson and every lesson means that so students achieve short terms (lesson-sized) goals that add up to long-term achievement goals. The key to raising student achievement is to have a learning target for today’s lesson!



Building a Learning Target

Characteristics of a Learning Target (Moss & Brookhart, 2012)

- A learning target describes for the students exactly what they are going to learn by the end of today's lesson.
- It describes learning in developmentally appropriate language that the student can understand.
- It is stated from the point of view of a student who has yet to master the content, skill or process that makes up the target.
- The learning target is connected to the specific performance of understanding for today's lesson—what you will ask your students to do, make, say, or write that will deepen their understanding, help them aim for mastery of the target, allow them to self-assess the quality of their learning, and will provide you and the student with evidence of what the student's level of understanding?
- A high-quality learning target contains student look-fors—criteria the students can use to judge how close they have come to the target in language that describes mastery of the target, rather than in grading or scoring language (letters, points, numbers, percentage right, number correct, etc.).

A 4-Step Framework for Verbally Sharing the Learning Target:

To share the learning target with your students at the beginning of a lesson, ask yourself the following three questions from the students' point of view:

1. *What will I be able to do when I finish today's lesson?*
2. *What idea, topic, subject is important for me to learn and understand so I can use this information to do it?*
3. *How will I be asked to show that I can do this? And,*
4. *How well will I have to do it?*

What is the purpose of sharing the target verbally?

Your mission is to help students *aim for understanding in today's lesson*. It is the "WHY" of the lesson. It answers for students why you are asking them to learn this chunk of information, on this day, so that they can deepen their understanding, show what they have learned in this way, and describe for them exactly how well they will be expected to demonstrate their new learning.

Elementary Level Example

Lesson on Question Marks

What will I be able to do when I finish today's lesson?	What idea, topic, subject is important for me to learn and understand so I can use this information to do it?	How will I be asked to show that I can do this? (Performance of Understanding?)	How well will I have to do it? (Student Look-Fors?)
<p><i>Yesterday, we learned about the question mark, what it looks like and that it comes at the end of an asking sentence.</i></p> <p><i>Today we are learning to write an asking sentence that has a question mark at the end.</i></p>	<p><i>To be able to do this we must learn and understand that some asking sentences begin with a "question" word like: Who, what, where, when, why or how.</i></p>	<p><i>You will show that you can do this by rewriting a list of telling sentences as asking sentences and ending each one with a question mark.</i></p>	<p><i>You will know that you have hit the learning target when you are able to say:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>• I can use one of the asking words to change my telling sentence into a question.</i> <i>• I can place a question mark at the end of my asking sentence.</i> <i>• I can answer my new asking sentence by using my "telling" sentence.</i>

* After telling the students about the target, share it in other ways like giving students examples and non-examples to examine and assess using the student look-fors as part of their guided practice.

Middle Level Example

Lesson on the Assassination of President John F. Kennedy

What will I be able to do when I finish today's lesson?	What idea, topic, subject is important for me to learn and understand so I can use this information to do it?	How will I be asked to show that I can do this? (Performance of Understanding?)	How well will I have to do it? (Student Look-Fors?)
<p><i>Yesterday, we learned how to perform an historical investigation and practiced the steps that we should use to find out what happened and why it happened.</i></p> <p><i>Today we are learning to look closely at an historical event that people disagree about to this day—they disagree about what happened and why it happened.</i></p>	<p><i>To be able to do this we must learn and understand that even when an historical event is documented in a variety of ways, people can still question the event and look at it from differing points of view.</i></p>	<p><i>You will show that you can do this in two phases.</i></p> <p><i>First you will work in your groups to examine the historical documents I have chosen for you and decide what we know for sure and what we do not know for certain.</i></p> <p><i>Then each of you will write a short 2-paragraph statement that explains one disagreement that people have about this event.</i></p>	<p><i>You will know that you have hit the learning target when you are able to say:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>• I can briefly describe a specific disagreement that people have about the assassination of President Kennedy.</i> <i>• I can describe specific pieces of evidence that exist to support the two sides of the disagreement?</i>

* After sharing verbally the teacher can share in other ways like giving students a checklist of their “look fors” so they can self-assess as they are producing their short 2-paragraph statement.

High School Example

Lesson on the Countries of Western Europe

What will I be able to do when I finish today's lesson?	What idea, topic, subject is important for me to learn and understand so I can use this information to do it?	How will I be asked to show that I can do this? (Performance of Understanding?)	How well will I have to do it? (Student Look-Fors?)
<p><i>Yesterday, we learned that migration patterns impacted the political, social, and economic development of the countries in Western Europe.</i></p> <p><i>Today we are learning to evaluate the impact that migration had on Switzerland in 2008.</i></p>	<p><i>To be able to do this we will study what happened during the 2008 election in Switzerland and pay particular attention to the "Black Sheep" posters used to protest against foreigners moving into Switzerland from other nations.</i></p>	<p><i>After our discussion you will be asked to outline a well-supported opinion in favor of, or opposed to, Switzerland's strong stance against immigrants from other nations.</i></p>	<p><i>You will know that you have hit the learning target when you are able to say: I can create an outline that:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Begins with an introduction that states my position, provides some background information and presents a thesis statement.</i> <i>Presents my three strongest points, one by one, supporting each point with concrete evidence.</i>

After sharing the target verbally, teachers can share it in other ways like:

- providing students with examples of the outline for them to compare with the look-fors as part of guided practice,
- giving students a template for creating the outline,
- supplying a descriptive, analytical rubric students can use to judge the quality of their outline as they are producing it.

Checklist for Rubric Quality		Notes
Descriptor Content		
	The rubric emphasizes direct evidence of understanding/application of the learning standard(s).	
	The rubric is aligned with the instructions and/or any checklist given to students to guide task completion.	
	The descriptors give feedback on both what is present as well as what is missing for each level.	
	When quantitative terms are used, they are supported with quality attributes.	
	When adjectives are used, they are defined with specific descriptors that clarify the difference between performance levels.	
	Could students use this rubric as a working guide for producing quality work; will it encourage self-assessment?	
Performance Levels and Criteria		
	The performance levels are defined in clear language that is respectful to students and encourages improvement (not demeaning or emotional in nature, not random.)	
	The performance levels are preferably arranged left to right so that the highest level is first.	
	The criteria are organized in a purposeful order.	
	The number of criteria is small enough to allow for focused revision.	
	There is equal “spacing” in the increments of performance levels.	
	The top level for each criterion is above the expected standard – it is a stretch for high-achieving students.	
	The “proficient” level is aligned directly to the standards.	
	Can the rubric provide a clear, quick explanation of a student’s grade or level assignment?	



Layout		
	There is space for necessary student information and comments/assessment notes.	
	Both font and format are user friendly.	
Reflective Questions to Guide the Rubric Development <i>Process</i>		
	Are models of student work included for each performance level?	
	Did/would this rubric produce consistent results if various experienced teachers used it to assess the same student work?	
	Am I comfortable with how well this rubric worked as a tool for assessing my students' understanding and application of the standards addressed by the task?	

Rubric Template

Rubric For _____

Performance Levels →				
Criteria ↓	4	3	2	1

Using Strong and Weak Work

- The teacher discusses with the class the criteria for a 2 or 4-point short answer/extended response question. Students practice scoring sample answers and explain why the answer received a particular score. The class or a small group discusses how the weak papers could be improved to achieve a 4-point score!
- The teacher shows examples of strong and weak work and compares the work to the rubric or criteria for the assignment.
- The teacher shows examples of strong and weak work. The students provide feedback to the work samples by giving the examples stars and stairs. The stars are the positive qualities of the work, and the stairs are the areas of the work that need improvement.
- The students work in small groups to score and discuss student responses. The group votes on the best example to share with the entire class.
- The teacher allows the students to correct their own answers after going over strong and weak examples.
- The teacher shows the students a strong example of an assignment and allows the students to 'discover' the criteria for the assignment based on the strong sample. The teacher lists the criteria on the board. The next day, the teacher passes out the criteria that the students had input in creating.
- The teacher completes a "math daily edit". The students have to find the teachers deliberate mistake that is on the answer key from the homework. The students are required to politely point out the teacher's error and then offer suggestions or explain how the work could be improved. Students love to 'catch the teacher!'

What Do You Already Do?

Strategies 1 and 2

Make a list of practices you already implement or plan to implement for each strategy.

Strategy	My Practice/Activity
1a. Provide students with a clear and understandable vision of the learning target.	
1b. Use rubrics to help define learning targets.	
2. Use examples and models of strong and weak work.	
➔ Student Goal Setting	

Seven Strategies of Assessment for Learning (Chappuis, 2015)