

**The Insight**

Feedback is an important part of the assessment process. Carefully designed feedback on formative assessments can help students grow as motivated, self-regulated learners.

**Implications**

How might the seven principles described in this *Learning Insights* article be applicable to your teaching?

*“[I]f formative assessment is exclusively in the hands of teachers, then it is difficult to see how students can become empowered and develop the self-regulation skills needed to prepare them for learning outside university and throughout life”* (Boud, 2000, in Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006).

**Promoting Self-Regulated Learning**

In the previous *Learning Insights* article, Lincoln Gibbs reminds us of the value of involving students in our conversations about assessment. He notes that some benefits of student-centered approaches to assessment are increased student engagement and motivation as well as greater student ownership of their learning. Additionally, student-centered assessment – and in particular, formative assessment and certain feedback strategies – can help students develop self-regulation skills. Self-regulation skills include setting goals, identifying ways to reach those goals, making and monitoring progress towards goals, and harnessing both cognitive and emotional skills to process and apply feedback.

David Nicol and Debra Macfarlane-Dick (2006) offer seven principles for structuring feedback to promote self-regulation. These principles are best applied to formative assessments – low-stakes assessments that provide students with practice, information on their learning and progress, and opportunities to make improvements (homework or ungraded classwork are two examples). Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick assert that such feedback should:

- 1) Clarify the outcomes and criteria that constitute good performance;
- 2) Foster students’ self-assessment and reflection;
- 3) Provide “high quality information” to students;
- 4) Prompt conversations (between students and teachers and among students) about learning;
- 5) Attend to issues of motivation and self-esteem;
- 6) Create opportunities for students to improve their performance; and
- 7) Engage faculty in using information about student performance to make changes in their teaching.

These seven principles might seem demanding! It might be helpful to first define what each principle means to you, given your course learning outcomes, your students, your discipline, and your own beliefs about teaching and learning. From there, you could identify one or two strategies for integrating the principles into assignments and assessments. An example of integration strategies for a general hypothetical assessment activity is shown below.

**Assessment: Written weekly reflections on the research process used to develop a research paper.**

<b>Principle</b>	<b>Integration Strategies</b>
Clarify the outcomes and criteria that constitute good performance.	Give students examples of well-written and poorly written journals. Facilitate a class discussion about the attributes of each example.
Foster students' self-assessment and reflection.	Have students regularly grade their journals using a rubric, and analyze differences between the grades they give themselves and the grades you give them.
Provide "high quality information" to students.	Use a well-designed rubric to give feedback.
Prompt conversations (between students and teachers and among students) about learning.	Involve students in the process of creating a grading rubric for the journals.
Attend to issues of motivation and self-esteem.	Invite students to discuss (in class) various factors that helped or hindered their work (e.g., how well they grasped the topic, the strategies they used to write the journal, their beliefs about their progress in this class) and identify changes to make in the future.
Create opportunities for students to improve their performance.	Invite students to resubmit up to three journals. Consider only allowing resubmission after they have had a peer review their work.
Engage faculty in using information about student performance to make changes in their teaching.	Analyze journal entries to determine what topics you may need to re-teach.

The above table lists just some examples; there are many others. It is important to find a balance between confronting new approaches to teaching and learning and finding strategies that feel authentic and manageable. Ultimately, integrating these principles into your students' learning experiences can guide students in becoming more self-regulated and reflective learners.

**Reference:**

Nicol, D.J. & Macfarlane-Dick, D. (2006). Formative assessment and self-regulated learning: A model and seven principles of good feedback practice. *Studies in Higher Education, 31*(2), 199-218. doi: 10.1080/03075070600572090