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# What Is Formative Assessment in Reading Instruction?

The consistent use of formative assessment is your greatest tool as a reading teacher. Formative assessment directly informs your teaching choices and decisions. It is based on the needs and strengths that you observe in your students' reading. Regular use of formative assessment is your path to being a reflective, responsive reading teacher.

Formative Assessment Is . . .	Formative Assessment Is Not . . .
A tool to inform planning for in-the-moment and future teaching.	A means for assigning a score or grade.
Flexible and versatile. There are many different forms and methods.	A fixed method.
Sometimes planned and other times spontaneous and in the moment.	Always a formal or planned process.
Ongoing. It never stops.	Something done once a day, week, or even periodically.



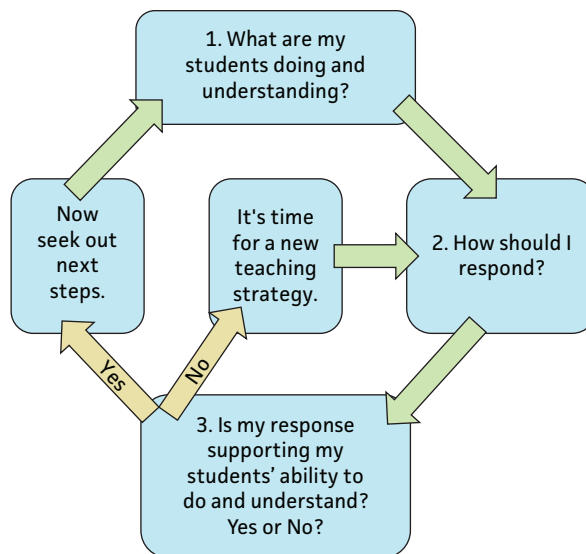
## Terms to Know

**Formative assessment:** Has the goal of informing instruction based on observation and evidence to enhance student learning.

**Summative assessment:** Has the goal of evaluating student learning, typically to assign a score or grade.

When you approach teaching with the constant lens of formative assessment, you are always asking yourself these questions:

- 1 What are my students doing and understanding?
- 2 How should I respond?
- 3 Is my response supporting my students' ability to do and understand?



The following two examples from the classroom describe the power and impact of using formative assessment.

## EXAMPLE OF ASSESSMENT INFORMING FUTURE TEACHING

- 1 *What are my students doing and understanding?*  
When discussing character traits during an interactive read aloud, Mr. Sinosa noticed that many of the responses from his students were not based on the character’s actions or words, but rather how the character appears in the pictures. This noticing informed his teaching for the next lesson.
- 2 *How should I respond?*  
Mr. Sinosa debated between creating a couple of small strategy groups to directly teach identifying traits based on a character’s actions and words or doing another interactive read aloud, this time directly pointing out to students how a character’s words and actions can help readers identify some of their character traits. He opted for the interactive read aloud.
- 3 *Is my response supporting my students’ ability to do and understand?*  
After the interactive read aloud the next day, Mr. Sinosa noticed that most of the class was now responding in the way he had hoped. He also identified four students who would further benefit from a strategy group on identifying character traits and planned that strategy group for the next day.

## EXAMPLE OF ASSESSMENT INFORMING IN-THE-MOMENT TEACHING

- 1 *What are my students doing and understanding?*  
During a reading conference with Andy, Ms. Carter noticed he was fluently reading with an expressive voice, but that he was not consistently reading through entire multisyllabic words or monitoring for meaning while he read those words. For example, instead of reading the word “elements,” he read “elementary.” Instead of reading “something,” he read “sometimes.” This observation during the conference led Ms. Carter to her next steps.

