**Overview**

**What is Formative Assessment?**

“Formative assessment is a planned, ongoing process used by all students and teachers during learning and teaching to elicit and use evidence of student learning to improve student understanding of intended learning outcomes and support students to become self-directed learners”

*Source:* [*CCSSO*](https://ccsso.org/resource-library/revising-definition-formative-assessment)*, 2018 (p.2)*

[Formative assessment](https://csaa.wested.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/FA_Enabler_of_Learning.pdf) is a continuous process integrated into daily instruction that provides information about student progress towards learning goals. It helps teachers identify where students are in their learning so they can provide “just right” instruction, scaffolds, and supports to move learning forward. Feedback from formative assessment can also support student agency, helping them become more active, [self-regulating](https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/west/pdf/REL_2021041.pdf), and independent learners. As such, it is a [critical lever for improving student learning](https://www.wested.org/resources/formativeassessmentprimer/) and a key component of a [comprehensive assessment system](https://www.wested.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/resource-designing-a-comprehensive-assessment-system.pdf) that incorporates information about student learning from a variety of sources and assessment types (diagnostic, summative, interim/benchmarks, etc.). Thus, formative assessment practices are foundational to supporting English learners and implementing high-quality ESL instruction regardless of context or ESL instructional delivery approach.

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| **Elements of Effective Formative Assessment to Support ESL Instruction** |
|  | * Clear language learning goals and success criteria that integrate academic, social, and instructional language within the context of content area topics and analytical practices (aligned to the WIDA English Language Standards and MA Curriculum Frameworks).
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| * Student understanding and agreement with learning goals and success criteria.
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| * Carefully planned and sequenced learning activities as well as dynamic, in-the-moment methods for gathering evidence of learning related to language goals and success criteria.
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| * Language samples and/or performance gathered during the lesson through various formal and [informal](https://www.colorincolorado.org/article/using-informal-assessments-english-language-learners) methods as evidence of learning.
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| * Teachers and students interpreting evidence gathered to determine where students are in relation to learning goals and success criteria and to identify gaps in learning.
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| * Teachers and students providing feedback linked to learning goals and success criteria that provides students information for how to improve.
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| * Teachers and students taking action to promote new learning and closing identified gaps.
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| **Challenges**  | **Opportunities**  |
| * Competing priorities for effective use of instructional time
* Lack of use of formative assessment data to inform instruction
* English learners not involved in formative assessment
* Mismatching between formative assessment goals and methods
 | * Leveraging formative assessment to promote student learning
* Drawing from students’ full language resources (first language and English) to formatively assess language learning
* Establishing classroom cultures that support formative assessment also builds stronger learning environments
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**Strategies and Best Practices**

To support effective formative assessment, educators across low, mid, and high-incidence districts can:

* **Incorporate formative assessment as part of a larger classroom system of assessment** (such as the one proposed in the Next Generation ESL Assessment Framework) to leverage [assessment *as*, *for* and *of* learning](https://resources.corwin.com/sites/default/files/resource_1.5.pdf).
* **Gather formative assessment evidence** of student learning and progress across all [dimensions of language use](https://wida.wisc.edu/sites/default/files/resource/WIDA-ELD-Standards-Framework-2020.pdf) (discourse, sentence, and word/phrase levels) and language domains (or [modes of communication](https://wida.wisc.edu/sites/default/files/resource/WIDA-ELD-Standards-Framework-2020.pdf): listening, speaking, writing, reading, representing, and viewing).
* **Develop an understanding of how students develop language resources across languages (primary and English)** based on sound theories of second language acquisition. This understanding of language [learning progressions](https://www.michiganassessmentconsortium.org/wp-content/uploads/Learning-Progressions.pdf) and skills set of emergent bilinguals is essential for developing appropriate learning goals, selection of language to formatively assess, and drive feedback to students.
* **Calibrate learning goals and success criteria to students’ English language proficiency levels** and provide appropriate scaffolds and supports. The WIDA ELD Standards Framework 2020 Edition [Proficiency Level Descriptors](https://wida.wisc.edu/teach/standards/eld#statements) can be used as a starting point for calibrating learning goals.
* **Ensure formative assessment strategies clearly identify students’ current language abilities** in relation to established learning goals and success criteria. Carefully design formative assessments so all students, regardless of English language proficiency level, can demonstrate their learning.
* **Provide descriptive feedback** that [students can use](https://edtechbooks.org/language_acquisition/effective_ell_appropriate_feedback) to improve their learning/meet identified gaps. Ensure feedback is timely, clear, and specifically connected to language learning goals and success criteria.

*Adapted from Heritage, 2010;* [*Cook & White, 2010*](https://ccsso.confex.com/ccsso/2010/webprogram/Presentation/Session1462/FLARE_Present_CCSSO_062010_V5.pdf)*;* [*Hattie & Timperley, 2007*](http://www.columbia.edu/~mvp19/ETF/Feedback.pdf)

* **Foster a collaborative, trusting, and** [**psychologically safe**](https://blog.innerdrive.co.uk/psychological-safety-in-the-classroom#:~:text=A%20psychologically%20safe%20classroom%20is,not%20a%20sign%20of%20weakness.) **classroom culture** where students can take risks with language, and teachers and students are partners in learning.
* **Provide** [**multiple and extended interactive activities**](https://ell.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/events/4_Assessment%20as%20contingent%20learning.final_Heritage_Walqui_Linquanti.pdf) along with appropriate [scaffolds](https://www.fordham.edu/download/downloads/id/4912/scaffolding_strategies_for_ells.pdf) and supports that allow students to showcase their thinking and language competence.
* **Teach and model a growth mindset** that supports using evidence for improvement. Involve students in the formative assessment process (co-developing learning goals and success criteria, assessing instruction as well as student learning, through peer and [self-assessment](http://www.ccsenet.org/journal/index.php/elt/article/view/0/41108), etc.).
* **Provide opportunities for students to use feedback** to improve their language knowledge and abilities shortly after feedback is provided.

**Using Self-Assessment for Language Learning**

* Define criteria students will use to assess their work
* Teach students how to apply criteria
* Give students feedback on self-assessment
* Help students use self-assessment data to improve
* Provide enough time for revisions or further practice after self-assessment
* Do not turn self-assessment into self-evaluation by counting it towards a final grade

*Adapted from* [*Ross, 2006*](https://scholarworks.umass.edu/pare/vol11/iss1/10/) *and* [*Jamrus & Razali*](https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1233021)*, 2019*

* **Strategically follow up on evidence gathered from self-assessment** through a variety of pedagogical moves (questioning students further to better understand difficulties, helping students clarify their thinking and resolve misunderstandings, adjusting ongoing activities or future lessons, adapting, or removing current scaffolds and supports, providing additional direct instruction, etc.).

**Suggestions for Low, Middle and High-Incidence Districts**

Formative assessment is an essential component of effective teaching of English learners, whether they serve small or large numbers of English. Below are some additional considerations for implementing practices and strategies outlined above:

* **Educators in low and mid-incidence districts can start small, with a firm foundation.** Incorporate formative assessment as part of instructional priorities for the whole school. Focus on developing educator capacity to implement formative assessment practices with teachers who currently teach English learners. From there, provide professional learning about formative assessment incrementally to all other educators who may eventually teach English learners.
* **Educators in high incidence districts can develop strategies for managing assessment data sets for large groups of students**. Invest in databases, software, and related professional learning to help educators combine, disaggregate, review, and act on relevant classroom-level formative assessment data.

**Actions-at-a-Glance**

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| **Actions For Classroom Educators** |
| * Use information from formative assessment as well as established [English language proficiency benchmarks](https://www.doe.mass.edu/ele/resources/benchmarks/) and [WIDA English Language Development Standards](https://wida.wisc.edu/sites/default/files/resource/WIDA-ELD-Standards-Framework-2020.pdf) to drive future learning rather than to evaluate student performance and tell students about ways formative assessment data is used to improve instruction.
* Teach students strategies for giving and receiving feedback well, selecting new tactics, acting on feedback, and monitoring their progress in relation to language goals.
* Adjust instruction, scaffolds and/or supports based on evidence from formative assessment.
* Build on English learners’ social and emotional competencies, and explicitly support further [social and emotional development](https://www.colorincolorado.org/school-support/programs-success/social-and-emotional-learning-best-practices-and-promising-programs) to sustain this type of classroom culture.
* Provide frequent feedback about language learning that is tailored to students’ needs (not too complex nor too vague) and actionable, providing suggestions for how to improve rather than the correct answer.
* Allow for [multiple means of representation, engagement, and expression](https://udlguidelines.cast.org/) and provide scaffolds and supports as part of formative assessments.
* Leverage students’ first/home language during the formative assessment process (to ensure students understand learning goals and success criteria, to elicit information about students thinking and source of challenges, translated peer and self-assessment rubrics, etc.) - especially useful for students at earlier English language proficiency levels and students with interrupted or limited formal education (SLIFE).
* Use a [variety of strategies](https://pdo.ascd.org/lmscourses/PD13OC002/media/ELL_CC_M4_Reading_Using_Formative01.pdf) to gather evidence of learning and focus on gathering evidence of [language learning over time](https://ellstudents.com/blogs/the-confianza-way/100836678-formative-assessment-for-ells) (such as through portfolios).
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| **Actions For School and District Leaders** |
| * Provide professional learning opportunities focused on formative assessment as well as on and how to develop and implement valid and reliable assessments for English learners.
* Highlight the value of formative assessment and establish regular times and processes for analyzing formative and other English learner performance/work data (collaborative planning time for educators who share English learners, designated time during scheduled meetings, etc.).
* Invest in infrastructure (new software or data management tools, retooling existing data management systems, etc.) and resources (professional development, staff, etc.) to support data-informed formative assessment processes.
* Learn about and promote ways to disaggregate, analyze and present data in ways that support [asset-based](https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1174512.pdf) approaches, rather than deficit thinking.
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**Instructional Planning Resources**

## **DESE Practical Tools and Resources**

[Next Generation ESL Model Curriculum Units](https://www.doe.mass.edu/ele/instruction/mcu/) present examples of formative assessment activities and strategies for gauging English learners’ language development and using this information to inform ESL instruction.

Next Generation ESL Unit and Lesson Planning Tools and Resources incorporate formative assessment practices as an important component of ESL curriculum development.

**DESE Guidance**

Culturally Relevant and Critical Consciousness Frameworks provide guidance for culturally relevant teaching and leading, including specific look fors related to supporting learners in the development of academic proficiency and academic identity in service of academic achievement as well as related student and teacher outcomes, actions, and dispositions.

[Massachusetts Blueprint for English Learner Success](https://www.doe.mass.edu/ele/blueprint/blueprint.docx) and related [Blueprint for English Learner Success Quick Reference Guides](https://www.doe.mass.edu/ele/blueprint/dashboard.html) present essential conditions and actions educators can take to provide equitable experiences and outcomes for English learners (for connections to formative assessment, see Pillar 1, Building Block 3: Asset Based Approaches).

Next Generation Assessment Framework highlights formative assessment as an essential practice to promote effective ESL instruction.

**Federal Resources**

[The Association between Teachers’ Use of Formative Assessment Practices and Students’ Use of Self-Regulated Learning Strategies](https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/west/pdf/REL_2021041.pdf) examines the association between teachers’ formative assessment practices and participation in formative assessment trainings and students’ use of self-regulation strategies. The findings (p. 5-10) can help school and district leaders decide how to systematically roll out formative assessment–centered professional learning opportunities for teachers.

[Supporting Students’ Independent Learning with Self-Assessment Strategies](https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/west/relwestFiles/pdf/4-2-3-12_Infographic_Supporting_Students_Independent_Learning_FINAL_508.pdf) promotes the benefits of student self-assessment and contains links to resources focused on strategies for developing students’ capacity to self-assess.

**Other Featured Resources**

[A Strategy for Giving Corrective Feedback for ELLs](https://www.edutopia.org/article/strategy-giving-corrective-feedback-ells) explains how to use sentence frames and explicit feedback to support English learners’ development.

[Balanced Assessment Framework](https://www.azed.gov/sites/default/files/2017/08/ADE%20Balanced%20Assessment%20Framework%203_2_2018.pdf?id=598093f33217e1170830a006) provides guidance teachers can use to improve their continuum of assessment practices, including refining purpose of assessments and how to use data from each assessment type to improve student achievement.

[Building Blocks, Learning Goals, and Success Criteria: Planning Instruction and Formative Assessment for K-8 Math Standards](https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED565342.pdf) and [Building Blocks, Learning Goals and Success Criteria: Planning Instruction and Formative Assessment for K-12 ELA and Literacy Standards](https://cresst.org/wp-content/uploads/BuildingBlocks_ELA_0.pdf) assist teachers in establishing key components for lesson planning and formative assessment based on standards. This process, with some adaptations, could be used for developing ESL lesson plans based on the WIDA ELD Standards Framework 202 Edition and the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks.

[California English Language Development/ELA Standards Chapter 8: Assessment](https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/rl/cf/documents/elaeldfwchapter8.pdf) defines formative assessment and presents effective strategies and examples (see pages 824-834) as well as ideas for involving students in the assessment process (p.845-849) and measuring progress in language development (p. 850-857).

[EL Formative Assessment Checklist for Distance Learning: 10 Considerations for EL Formative Assessments for Distance Learning](https://getsupported.net/free-tools/#toppage) provides ten research-based considerations to help reflect on current practices and discover new strategies for developing effective assessments for ELs during distance learning.

[Focusing Formative Assessment on the Needs of English Learners](https://www.wested.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/1391626953FormativeAssessment_report5-3.pdf) explains how formative assessment can enhance the teaching and learning of English learners, ideas about summative assessment of English learners that can inform effective formative assessment practices, and opportunities and challenges inherent in integrating formative assessment into instruction for English learners in the context of standards-based instruction.

[Formative Assessment (WIDA Focus Bulletin)](https://edu.wyoming.gov/downloads/federally-funded-programs/title-iii/wida-focus-formative-assessment.pdf) defines formative assessment and key steps and provides guidance for focusing formative assessment on language development (see pages 3-5).

[Formative Assessment as Contingent Teaching and Learning](https://ell.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/Assessment%20as%20contingent%20learning%20for%20AERA%202013%20FINAL.pdf) discusses classroom centered practices of formative assessment and how they can be used to support contingent teaching and learning for English learners.

[Formative Assessment for ELLs](https://ellstudents.com/blogs/the-confianza-way/100836678-formative-assessment-for-ells) provides ideas of formative assessments for English learners.

[Formative Assessment: Examples of Practice](https://www.ccsso.org/sites/default/files/2017-12/Formative_Assessment_Examples_2008.pdf) provides vignettes with brief examples and counterexamples of formative assessment as well as extended examples of formative assessment practice, including teacher and student actions in relation to one or more of the attributes of formative assessment practice. Vignettes are taken from teacher observations conducted in a variety of schools across the U.S. and illustrate formative assessment practice across a range of grade levels and content areas.

[High Leverage Principles of Effective Instruction for English Language Learners](https://csaa.wested.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/HighLeveragePrinciplesforELinstruction_Resource_0.pdf) presents steps, guiding prompts, and ideas for leveraging formative assessment to support English learners’ language development and academic achievement (Principle 5, p. 33-42) as well as an annotated example illustrating these ideas (p. 43-47) and relevant resources (p. 53-54).

[How to Build a Balanced Assessment System](https://www.nwea.org/blog/2020/how-to-build-a-balanced-assessment-system/#:~:text=A%20balanced%20assessment%20system%20intentionally,emphasis%20placed%20on%20formative%20assessment.) provides guidance for integrating formative assessment into a larger system of classroom assessment.

[Lesson Revision: Improving Lesson Plans with Formative Assessment and College and Career Ready Standards](https://cresst.org/wp-content/uploads/Lesson_Revision_With_Formative_Assessment.pdf) provides a process teachers can use to revise existing lesson plans so that they incorporate the formative assessment process and align with standards (see Evidence Analysis Gathering Tool, p. 27, Formative Assessment Lesson Framework, p. 28 and examples of what that framework could look like, p. 8).

[Progress Monitoring Language Development Through Formative Assessment](https://www.cde.state.co.us/cde_english/formativeassessmentfinal) presents a definition of formative assessment and strategies for each stage of the formative assessment process (see slides 34-52).

[Quality Student Interactions: Why Are They Crucial to Language Learning and How Can We Support Them?](http://www.nysed.gov/common/nysed/files/programs/bilingual-ed/quality_student_interactions-2.pdf) provides a rationale for the essential role of social interactions for students, describes quality student interactions and ways to make them happen, and provides a classroom vignette illustrating them.

[Stepping Stones to Formative Assessment](https://csaa.wested.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/CSAI_Formative_Assessment_Stepping_Stones.pdf) presents guiding questions and a rubric for planning and evaluating formative assessment practices at the classroom and school levels.

[Students Use the Formative Assessment Feedback Loop](https://csaa.wested.org/formative-insight/students-use-the-formative-assessment-feedback-loop/) provides an example of how a teacher incorporated formative assessment in his classroom, including the effective strategies he used.

[Understanding Formative Assessment](https://www.wested.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/1370912451resource13071-3.pdf) defines formative assessment and includes a description of the key features of formative assessment, summary of concepts in learning and measurement theory that are central to effective formative assessment, a summary of concepts in measurement theory that are central to effective formative assessment a brief review of research summaries on the effect of formative assessment on student learning.

[Formative Assessments: Using Feedback to Guide Instruction](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ecp5tFwXA_M) showcases how an educator uses formative assessment to gather data, provide feedback to students, and adapt instruction. The example is from a middle school science classroom but can be helpful to ESL educators as well.

[Using Self-Assessment as a Tool for English Language Learning](http://www.ccsenet.org/journal/index.php/elt/article/view/0/41108) provides recommendations for building English learners’ capacity to self-assess their language learning and move it forward.

[Using the Formative Assessment Rubrics, Reflection and Observation Tools to Support Professional Reflection on Practice](https://www.azed.gov/sites/default/files/2018/06/FARROP_Final%20with%20letters.pdf) provides a set of rubrics and tools to support self-reflection and peer observation connected to general formative assessment strategies that teachers should employ. These can be used within the context of school-based professional development, with formal or informal groups of teachers, or by individuals who are interested in improving formative assessment practice.

[**For additional resources you may wish to consult, click here.**](https://www.doe.mass.edu/ele/esl-toolkit/tools-resources/)