

Brushing up on assessment

Assessment for learning

5

One of
ten guides for
school practitioners
and those looking
to brush up on
their assessment
knowledge

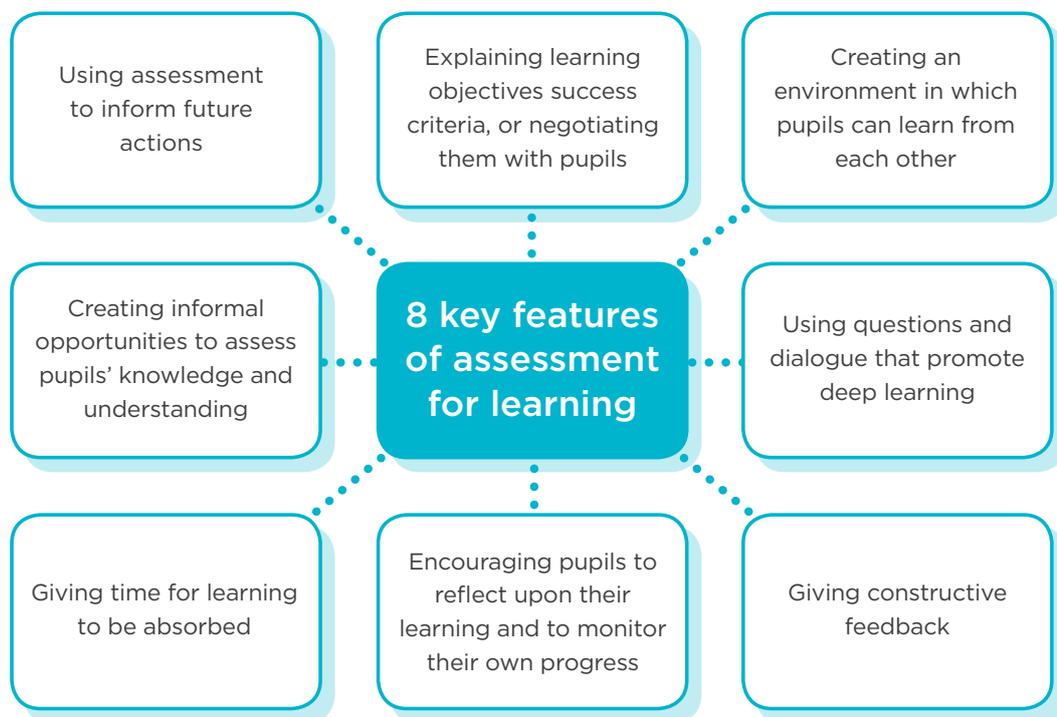
Assessment for learning (AfL), also known as *formative* assessment, refers to any assessment activity that guides learning. Unlike summative assessment which evaluates pupil knowledge and achievement after a period of learning is complete, assessment for learning involves evaluating small content areas as part of the ongoing learning process. This guide explores the key features of AfL and how it can be developed and applied effectively in the classroom.

Characteristics of effective classroom assessment



We note the recent work by Black and Wiliam (2018) which uses the term 'classroom assessment' to encompass both assessment of and assessment for learning, when the decision-making around the assessment (the why, how and what) lies with the teacher. This wider definition is useful when considering all the opportunities there are to use assessment to improve teaching and learning.

Underlying the AfL approach is the recognition that every teaching and learning task or activity offers assessment opportunities, and that AfL should be embedded in day-to-day classroom practice as a means of continuously assessing knowledge, informing teaching and providing feedback to improve pupil learning.



Strategies include effective questioning techniques, quality feedback, self-assessment and peer assessment, and using summative tests for formative purposes.

Learning objectives and success criteria



For AfL to be effective, it is important that the focus is on improvement – that pupils understand what they need to learn or the skills they need to develop. Teachers should therefore provide pupils with opportunities to discuss learning objectives and success criteria and to reflect and talk about their learning, progress and next steps. When setting learning objectives and success criteria, here are some things to bear in mind:

- Be aware of the potential for confusion between learning objectives and the context or activity in which the learning is taking place. Objectives should be skills based – linked to the skills being developed in the lesson – not a description of the activity.
- Pupils should understand not only the learning objectives (often expressed as ‘I can...’ statements) but also how they are going to get there. Success criteria should be broken down into a series of small, clearly defined, steps to enable pupils to demonstrate progress.

- Encourage pupils to focus on their own progress rather than comparing themselves with others. Their improvement rather than their attainment is what is important. Pupils need to know how to improve, but also need to be motivated to do so, by recognising that they are making progress and by understanding that success is a result of their own efforts.
- Spend time finding out what pupils already know in order to decide where to go next. Allow them time to respond to comments and to improve. Consolidating understanding and skills is important. Resist the pressure to rush on to the next topic if more consolidation is needed.

Providing feedback



Remember that marking should be in line with the school policy, with its prime focus to support learning. This means that the nature of marking will vary according to the task set and the learning objectives, and it may be superseded by verbal feedback. Often verbal feedback can be more effective than written feedback. Response partners can also work extremely well, with pupils working in pairs to generate or test out ideas, clarify their understanding, create a joint response, or assess and evaluate work. Importantly, formative assessment outcomes do not need to be recorded unless there is a reason which benefits learning.

Found this useful?

This guide is part of NFER Classroom's *'Brushing up on assessment'* series, a collection of free guides providing those looking to build their knowledge with an overview of key elements in primary assessment.

Sign up to our assessment newsletter (www.nfer.ac.uk/assessment-newsletter) to be the first to receive each guide as soon as it is published, as well as other exclusive assessment-focused content direct to your inbox.

Visit www.nfer.ac.uk/brush-up-assessment to view all the guides in this series.

Looking for assessment materials?

NFER Tests for years 1-5

Thousands of schools use NFER Tests to support attainment and progress monitoring. These termly assessments are:

Trialled with 60,000 children to ensure age-appropriate materials and meaningful data.

Written by a team with assessment expertise and teaching backgrounds.

Supported by an easy-to-use online analysis tool.

Visit www.nfer.ac.uk/tests to find out more.