

Assessment and feedback.

Activity: Checking learning

Introduction

Do you check and summarise learning?

Some teachers and trainers intend to do it at the end of a session, but find that time runs out and the session ends in a flurry of packing up and without a sense of completion.

Others manage their time efficiently, and give themselves time to finish a session in an orderly way. They then take the traditional route of checking and summarising learning by standing in front of the group, asking if there's anything anyone is not clear about, and then telling the group what the session has been about.

But there is more to checking and summarising learning than this!

Our purpose in checking learning is to bring to the surface any misunderstandings that learners might have. When you know where their confusions lie, you can help them more clearly. It follows, then, that you should build checking into your session plans. The activities that you design for learners should include elements that enable you to assess the learners' levels of understanding

The purpose of summarising is to reinforce learning. Again, it's something to build into the activities you design, because it's most effective when learners do it for themselves.

Both checking and summarising enable you to make 'formative' assessments of your learners.

Formative assessment is undertaken on an ongoing basis, as opposed to summative assessment which is undertaken at the end of a session or course. This means that you will be assessing their learning on an ongoing basis, and using the information that emerges to adapt your teaching.

When you have completed all of the tasks, you will have:

- reviewed your current practice in assessing and summarising;
- considered the benefits of formative assessment and learner-centred summarising;
- discussed with your colleagues or consider how you might incorporate these approaches;
- made plans for including them in sessions you are currently planning.

Guidance on formative or ongoing assessment.

Benefits of ongoing assessment

- It provides you with information that enables you to adapt your future sessions.
- It enables you to assess what learners have learned.
- It shows you where learners are having difficulties, and alerts you to the need to take action.
- It enables you to recognise and reward personal effort.

NB: You should make it clear at the outset what you will be assessing and how you will do the assessments.

Feedback will be constructive and valuable when:

- it highlights what's been achieved, offers guidance to learners on how to improve, and is followed by the teacher or trainer ensuring learners act on it;
- it is given in time for learners to act on it and reap the benefits rather than at the end of a session or course (that is, it is 'formative' rather than 'summative').

Learner-centred approaches to assessment:

- self-assessment and peer assessment;
- individual or group presentations;
- learners ask questions of each other;
- learners in one group explain their reasoning to another group;
- learners map their learning on the board (e.g. by constructing a spidergram);
- learners answer questions posed by the teacher or trainer.

Task 1: Assessment

1. Working on your own or with colleagues, review your current practice. What methods come to mind that you commonly use?

Notes

Task 2. Assessment.

Now complete the checklists on the next page. It might remind you of other things you do and offer you new methods to consider.

Assessment methods checklist: Review your own practice		
Do you use these:	Often 3 Sometimes 2 Rarely 1	3, 2, 1
Self-assessment: Teacher or trainer reminds learners about the learning objectives for the session. Learners check themselves against: 'what I have learned; what I now know and can do; target for improvement'.		
Peer assessment: Learners exchange and assess each others' work and give feedback. They need to work from clear assessment criteria, possibly worked solutions or a marking scheme. They should give 'a strength' and 'something that could be done to improve the work'.		
Tests and quizzes: Teacher or trainer asks questions and learners respond. This can be done on paper or aloud, individually or competitively, in groups or as whole class.		
Targeted questioning: Learners are asked an open question – one that requires more than a yes/no answer. They work on this individually, or better still in pairs. Teacher or trainer nominates learners to give their answers, rather than asking for volunteers.		
Diagnostic questioning: Teacher or trainer asks question that requires an explanation e.g. Why would the accident report be important to an insurance company? Continuing probing reveals extent of understanding and misconceptions.		
Past questions, unit/topic tests: Learners are given a worksheet with a range of questions, starting with easy ones and getting harder. Teacher or trainer marks them giving formative constructive feedback.		
Learners create a leaflet, poster, handout or worksheet: Learners are given a brief (such as 'Create a handout/worksheet summarising the main ways to be sure of working safely at heights'). They work alone or in pairs to create it.		
Concept maps, mind maps, spidergrams: Learners work individually, or in pairs or groups, to create a diagrammatic representation of what they know of a topic. This can be done at the start of a topic, to demonstrate what they know already, or at the end, to show what they have learned, to summarise learning or to relate new knowledge to old.		

Assessment methods checklist: Review your own practice (contd)			
Do you use these:	Often 3	Sometimes 2	Rarely 1
			3, 2, 1
Three-minute essay or 'letter to a friend': Learners are asked to write a brief description of what has been covered in a session or in the last session, what they remember about a topic, or how to do something.			
Gap-filling exercise to encourage reading for meaning: Learners complete the gaps with correct answers.			
Explaining tasks: Learners study worked examples, then explain the 'how' and 'why' of the method or approach to each other. Or learners explain the key points of a lesson to each other.			
Matching, grouping, ranking, labelling activities: Activities in which learners sort or match cause and effect, question and answer; categorise things and label diagrams.			
Others:			

Task 3. Assessment

The next step is to start experimenting with something new. Either refer back to the session plan that you created or else take a plan for a session you have yet to deliver. How might you build in additional assessments? Make your choices from the checklist above. Prepare whatever materials are necessary and then discuss with your colleagues if you have the opportunity

Task 4. Assessment.

After you have run the session, review how it went, paying particular attention to your use of assessments.

If your new strategies worked, incorporate them into your repertoire of techniques and use them again.

If they didn't work as you would have liked, reflect on why and seek feedback from your colleagues. Then try the methods again, but differently.

Repeat this sequence of 'Plan, Do, Review' with assessments for other sessions so that you build a collection of assessment tools that you and your colleagues can use.

Guidance on effective summaries Characteristics of effective summaries:

- clarify key points;
- involve learners;
- eliminate insignificant information;
- categorise details;
- integrate information and topics;
- involve generalisation, polish, re-thinking, reflection;
- provide you with information about
- what your learners have absorbed, so that you can adapt your teaching.

Managing effective summaries

When you're planning your session, build in time for assessment and summaries, so that:

- you can assess the extent to which learners understand the material and concepts;
- they get helpful feedback and additional clarity where needed;
- their learning is reinforced.

Use approaches that draw out information from the learners.

Change the pace of the session by bringing the whole group together, and forming a circle, or standing round a table.

Make sure that learners have something to take away, such as written notes or a record of constructive feedback.

Task 5. Summarising

1. Working on your own or with colleagues, review your current practice. What methods do you commonly use?

Notes



Task 6. Summarising.

Now complete the checklist below. It might remind you of other things you do and offer you new methods to consider.

Effective summaries: Reflecting on your own practice	
	Comments
When you're planning a session, how often do you allocate time for summarising?	
What do you do to involve learners in summarising a session or part of a session?	
When it's time to summarise, what do you do to change the pace e.g. asking learners to move, come to the front, use the boards, stand around a table?	
What do you do to help you manage time as well as achieve the learning objectives?	
How do you encourage learners to feedback their views?	
How do you encourage participation? For example, do you use praise and acceptance names, positive body language?	
What do you do to ensure that only one person speaks at a time?	
How do you prevent the discussion being dominated by one or two people?	
What do you do to ensure that everyone feels involved, even if they don't contribute?	
How often do you summarise the key learning points verbally as they are made?	
What do you do to record the key learning points visually?	
How do you manage discussions so that learners are clear about the outcomes?	

Task 8. Summarising.

As with the work you've just done on building in assessments, the next step is to start experimenting with something new. Either refer back to the session plan that you created, or else take a plan for a session you have yet to deliver.

- At what points might it be useful to build in a way for learners to do a summary?
- How will you do it?

Task 9. Summarising.

After you have run the session, review how it went, paying particular attention to your use of summaries.

If your new strategies worked, incorporate them into your repertoire of techniques and use them again.

If they didn't work as you would have liked, reflect on why and seek feedback from your colleagues. Then try the methods again, but differently. Share the outcomes with your colleagues.

Repeat this sequence of 'Plan, Do, Review' with assessments for other sessions so that you build a collection of assessment tools that you and your colleagues can use.