

Helping Students Assess Their Own Learning

Through self-assessment and reflection students learn to assess their own learning for the purpose of improving it. To become capable assessors of their learning, students must have clear goals, the opportunity to help create a definition of quality work, ongoing feedback, and the opportunity to correct or self-adjust their work before they turn it in. After finishing the project, students need to reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of their work, make plans for improvement, and integrate the assignment with previous learning (Paris & Ayres, 1994; Stiggins, 1997; Wiggins, 1998). Through self assessment, students become more responsible for their own educational growth; more reflective, autonomous, motivated, and effective.

Students' self-assessments are an essential part of guiding instruction because they provide further evidence of student efforts and achievements. Self-assessments improve communication because students become aware of areas in which they are having difficulties and are better able to articulate their needs (Kulm, 1994).

Self-assessment takes many forms, including:

- Writing conferences
- Discussion (whole-class or small-group)
- Reflection journals
- Self-assessment checklists
- Teacher-student interviews
- Rubrics

These types of self-assessment share a common theme: they ask students to review their work to determine what they have learned, how they have learned, and what areas of confusion still exist. Through these forms students assess their progress in knowledge, skills, strategies, processes, and attitudes. The *Assessing Projects* application has several sample self-reflection assessments to help students assess their individual efforts, their participation in a group, their thinking processes, their written assignments and presentations, and their performance of skills and processes.

Students do not learn to assess their learning on their own; they need to be taught strategies for self-monitoring and self-assessment. An effective strategy might be to:

1. Model using a checklist or rubric to assess a piece of writing using think-aloud strategies as you look at each criteria
2. Students try the technique themselves using one of their writing samples
3. Students review each others' writing and self assessment and make comments
4. Students discuss whether and how well the technique worked and what to do differently next time

An effective way to foster student self-assessment is to ask the students to develop the criteria for the assessments themselves. To do this, students must analyze each aspect of their learning processes and products, thereby leading to a much deeper understanding.

Students' observations and reflections also provide valuable feedback for refining instructional plans. As students discuss their learning and the strategies they use,

review the responses to see if students are learning what was expected, and then modify instruction as necessary. When students are given opportunities to suggest how they can be helped in their learning and indicate what activities or instructional strategies have been most effective, they become more empowered and actively engaged in the learning process.