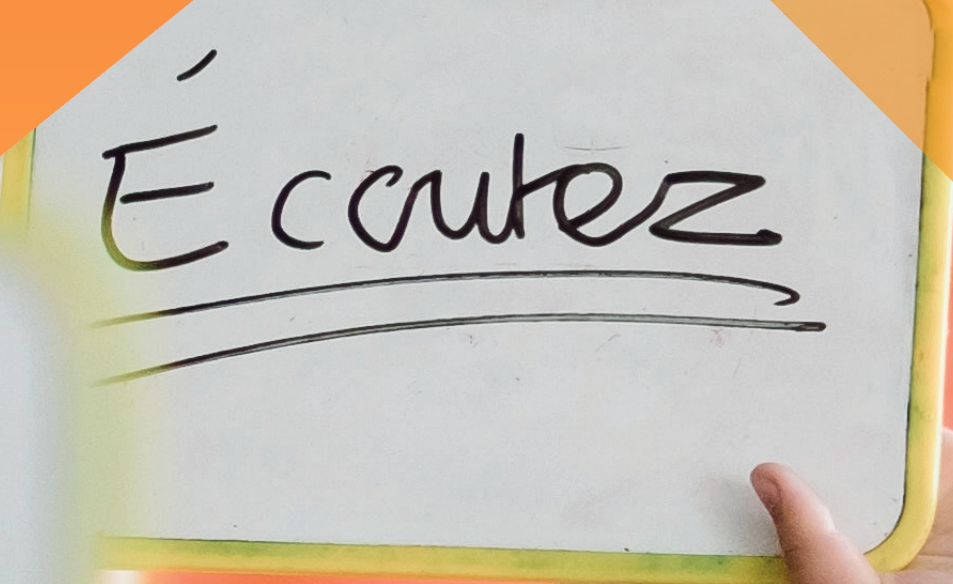




Shotton Hall  
Research School

**5 MINUTES ON...**

# **FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT**

A hand is holding a whiteboard with a yellow border. The word 'Écoutez' is written in black cursive on the board. The background is a blurred classroom setting with other people's heads visible.

Écoutez

# What is Formative Assessment?

**Formative assessment is an ongoing process in which teachers use evidence about student learning to inform and adapt their teaching, and provide feedback that supports student progress.**

It is distinct from summative assessment, which evaluates learning at the end of a unit or course. Dylan Wiliam describes it as “all activities undertaken by teachers and/or their students that provide information to be modify teaching and learning activities” (Wiliam, 2018).

The EEF’s ‘Teacher Feedback to Improve Pupil Learning’ guidance report defines it as a ‘*means providing teaching that is adaptive to pupils’ needs and using evidence about learning to adjust instruction to ensure that learning moves forward.*’



## What can we learn from the evidence?

✓ **Improved Outcomes:** Formative assessment has a high impact on pupil achievement. The EEF’s Teaching and Learning Toolkit highlights that effective feedback, a key element of formative assessment, can boost progress by an average of 6 additional months per year (EEF, 2021).

✓ **Equity:** Formative assessment helps bridge gaps between high- and low-achieving pupils by providing tailored support (Wiliam, 2018).

✓ **Pupil Engagement:** Doug Lemov emphasises that formative assessment fosters active participation and makes pupils partners in their learning journey (Teach Like a Champion 2.0, Lemov, 2015).

✓ **Benefits for pupils:**

- Allows pupils to **understand what they know**. *How did I do? Am I right? How do I know I have explained this correctly? How can I improve?*
- Allows pupils to **understand what they DON’T know**.

- By regularly revisiting prior knowledge, it helps to **build schema** and consolidate learning to long term memory.
- Gives pupils clear **next steps** in their learning.

✓ **Benefits for teachers:**

- Gives us important data and feedback on what is understood and not understood so we can **adapt** our teaching.
- Alerts us to when part of the material needs to be **retaught**.
- Ensures pupils are taught **relevant** material.
- Allows **challenge** to remain high (when teachers only select pupils who volunteer and are worried about getting through the material, they tend to ask fewer demanding questions to keep going forwards).
- Opportunity to identify **misconceptions**, strengths and areas for development.

# What makes for effective formative assessment? How do we do it really well?

- ✓ **Focus on Clarity:** Teachers should have clear **intention or purpose** – what should pupils be learning? What do we **want all pupils to know** and be able to do?

How will we know when they are **successful**? This should be **explicitly discussed** – this knowledge of what success looks like will also aid metacognition.

- ✓ **Elicit Evidence Frequently:** Use questioning, observations, and quick checks for understanding throughout lessons. Effective formative assessment switches between methods, within both **planned and**

**spontaneous** moments to make teaching highly **responsive, adapting** to the feedback pupils are giving through their responses. Involve as many pupils as possible to ensure the information gathered is **representative of the whole group**.

- ✓ **Provide Actionable Feedback:** Ensure feedback is specific, constructive, and helps pupils understand next steps.
- ✓ **Iterate and Adapt:** Use the evidence gathered to adapt teaching in the lesson and future planning.



## Examples of formative assessment strategies:

There are many examples of formative assessment strategies. The key thing for teachers to remember is that they should 'pick the right tool for the job'. This means they need to be clear about what it is they want to assess and then pick the formative assessment strategy which will best fulfil that purpose. **How** we use these strategies is important because, ideally, we want to gauge as **wide** a student response as possible, at the **right time**.

Some strategies might include:

- ✓ Different questioning strategies such as cold-calling and use of mini whiteboards to record responses.
- ✓ Low-stakes testing/quizzing for learning
- ✓ Structured discussions, such as 'think/pair/share'
- ✓ Teacher observations
- ✓ Carefully designed tasks

# Top Teaching Tips



## Tip 1 Mini whiteboards

### Why?

- ✔ **Promote Active Participation:** Mini whiteboards ensure that **all** pupils are actively involved in the learning process. Instead of a few pupils answering aloud, every pupil writes and shows their response, keeping the whole class engaged.
- ✔ **Enable Real-Time Formative Assessment:** Teacher can quickly gauge understanding across the entire class by scanning pupils' responses. This allows for immediate adaptations to teaching and better identification of misconceptions.
- ✔ **Encourage Risk-Taking in a Low-Stakes Way:** More pupils may be willing to take academic risks on a whiteboard where mistakes can be easily erased. This creates a safe environment for learning from errors.
- ✔ **Boost Efficiency in Learning Activities:** Mini whiteboards allow for quick, visible feedback without requiring lengthy transitions or the use of other materials like exercise books. This means you can maximise lesson time.



### How?

- ✔ **Pose a question which will gauge understanding.**
- ✔ **Give a clear time limit and thinking time for an answer and insist on an agreed format for responses.**
- ✔ **Ensure all pupils display their whiteboards at the same time using strategies such as countdowns and signals.**
- ✔ **Scan boards and make a decision:**
  - If pupils have understood, move on.
  - Where there is a small number of pupils with a misconception, correct the misconception.
  - Where there are mostly incorrect answers, unpick the misconception, reteach the class and then check again for understanding.
- ✔ **Evaluate learning and adapt teaching accordingly.**

# Top Teaching Tips

## Tip 2

### Cold call



### Why?

- ✔ **Promote Active Engagement:** Cold calling ensures that all pupils stay mentally engaged because they know they might be called on at any moment. This fosters a culture where pupils are actively thinking about the material rather than passively observing.
- ✔ **Increase Participation and Equity:** By cold calling, teachers can ensure participation from all pupils, not just those who regularly volunteer. This method helps create an equitable classroom environment by giving everyone an opportunity to contribute.

- ✔ **Check for Understanding:** Teachers can use cold call strategically to gauge whether all pupils are grasping the material. It provides real-time feedback on pupil understanding, allowing the teacher to adapt teaching as needed.
- ✔ **Normalise High Expectations:** Regularly using cold calling communicates the expectation that all pupils should be prepared to think critically and share their thoughts. It helps establish a rigorous and focused learning environment.



### How?

- ✔ **Prepare**  
Before the lesson you should identify where in the lesson you will need to check for understanding. Prepare some questions that will prove to you what pupils know.
- ✔ **Pose the question**  
Ensure you have the full attention of the class and the pose the question to everyone. For example: 'How do we form the present tense in French?'
- ✔ **Wait ...**  
Ensure that pupils have enough time to think. Around 5 seconds should be appropriate.
- ✔ **Cold call**  
'Lucy, I'd love to hear your thoughts'

**Adaptations:** As you introduce this strategy, you may be faced with pupils who are anxious about speaking out loud. To support pupils to build their confidence, you could allow pupils to make notes before responding or you could allow them to discuss with a partner before responding. Over time, the aim is to build pupil participation and confidence.

# Questions to ask yourself

## Before the lesson ...

- How will I check for everyone's understanding?
- Is the assessment strategy I am deploying the right tool for the job? Will it give me a representative sample of pupil responses?
- How is my formative assessment helping the pupils build their understanding of what I am teaching?

## During the lesson ...

- What have pupils understood? (Note: it is more beneficial to consider **what** rather than **if** pupils have understood).
- Before moving on, am I certain that pupils have understood?
- How should I respond or adapt my teaching in light of what I have discovered?

## After the lesson ...

- What did I learn from my formative assessment in the lesson? How will this affect my planning for next lesson?

## Useful Wider Reading

Education Endowment Foundation (EEF). (2021). Teaching and Learning Toolkit: Feedback. <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk>.

Lemov, D. (2015). Teach Like a Champion 2.0: 62 Techniques that Put Students on the Path to College. Jossey-Bass.

William, D (2018), Embedded Formative Assessment (Second Edition), Solution Tree Press 2020)



Shotton Hall  
Research School

**Shotton Hall Research School**

The Academy at Shotton Hall  
Passfield Way  
Peterlee  
County Durham  
SR8 1AU

enquiries@shottonhallresearchschool.co.uk  
0191 518 0222

[www.researchschool.org.uk/shottonhall](http://www.researchschool.org.uk/shottonhall)

Proud to be part of:



North East  
Learning Trust