

Ideas for Formative Assessment

1. *Minute Papers* – At the end of each class, have your students take a minute or two to jot down on a slip of paper the most important point of the day. Or have them jot down the “muddiest” point of the day. Collect these papers and review them after class to find out what your students did and did not understand about your lesson. Respond accordingly in your next class session.
2. *Just-in-Time Teaching* – Have your students complete an online quiz the night before a class session. If there is a reading assignment for the class, have your students give questions they have about the reading. Then review their responses before class, modifying your lesson plan as appropriate and feasible to respond to what you learn about them from the quiz.
3. *Office Hours* – Use your office hours not only to answering student questions but also as a way to learn about your students. Find out what they do and do not understand. Experiment with different ways to explain course material and see which ways make sense to students.
4. *Test Review* – Instead of handing back the first test or major assignment during class, require your students to come to your office hours to pick it up and discuss it with you. This gives you a chance to discuss with them the difficulties they had on the test, providing you with information about their learning you can use going forward and giving them a chance to rethink their understandings of the material on the test.
5. *Group Work* – Have your students work in small groups during a portion of class time and circulate among them during this time. This gives you a chance to interact with individual students and small groups of students. Ask them questions about the work at hand that will give you a sense of how they are approaching it.
6. *Background Knowledge Probes* – On the first day of a topic, give your students a short, non-graded questionnaire designed to surface their pre-conceptions, perspectives, and experiences. This provides you with information you can use to make your lessons more responsive to your students’ learning needs and to take advantage of your students’ existing knowledge.
7. *Clicker Questions* – Pose multiple-choice questions to your students during class and have them submit their answers using handheld devices (“clickers”) as part of an electronic classroom response system. The distribution of responses these systems provide can be used to identify and respond to student misconceptions during class.
8. *Concept Maps* – Have your students identify the most important concepts related to a particular topic. Then have them write these concepts on a sheet of paper, drawing lines between related concepts. Have students label these lines to describe the relationships between concepts. Analyzing these concept maps after class provides you with a window into your students’ conceptual understanding of course material.
9. *Challenge Cycles* – Pose a difficult and perhaps ill-defined challenge to your students. Have them brainstorm in small groups or as a class potential solutions to the challenge, questions they have about the challenge, and possible resources for meeting the challenge. Then provide them with a few of those resources before letting them work in small groups on the challenge. Have these groups report their solutions to the class and invite discussion before moving on to the next challenge. This challenge cycle is learner-centered and provides useful formative assessment along the way.