

Evaluating Student Work

Gradating student work and thereby providing helpful feedback is important to student achievement.

1. If the student knows what the standard is, he/she is more likely to stretch to achieve it.
2. If the feedback is given quickly, adjustments can be made quickly.
3. If feedback is slow or non-existent, errors may persist.
4. Work evaluation can motivate the student to higher achievement levels if delivered in a positive way.
5. Students can focus on what is important if they know what the lesson's work standards and goals are.

As important as work evaluation is, why do home school parents find it so challenging?

One of the most difficult tasks in home schooling is that which involves fair and valuable assessments of students' work. When the student is our own child, and future opportunities depend upon the report of the quality of the academic performance, there can be a conflict of interests.

We also might have difficulty determining how to assess such subjects as p.e., art, music and other activities that do not require a written response. In addition, it might be difficult to determine what our objectives or goals for a lesson are before the lesson occurs.

We might just design a lesson without any thought to what the purpose of the lesson is. However, if we can take some time before each assignment to express to the student what we hope is achieved through the exercise, it is more likely that the student will focus their attention on what is important.

OBJECTIVES: Goals of a lesson or a study.

Objectives should not be too easy or too difficult. The perfect level for an objective is in the area that will stretch the student's learning into new areas without causing frustration.

Objectives should be stated in a way that is "measurable". When writing a course description the best way to do this is to start the expression of an objective with the word "to" followed by a verb.

Examples:

- *To write a paragraph using correct spelling.
- *To compare the two main characters in this novel.
- *To know the capitals of the 50 states.
- *To draw an outline of the Washington state boundary and fill in the main geographical regions from memory.

Objectives can be formally stated as in a course description for a self-designed course, or can be stated orally before a student begins a lesson. An informal objective stated orally would be this, "Before you study this list of spelling words, be sure to pay close attention to the double vowels. You will be tested on these in about 30 minutes." An informal objective statement like that would certainly give the student focus during the study time.

As students work toward achieving an objective, they should also be aware of what standard is acceptable. While studying for that spelling test, the student will probably apply more diligence if he / she knows that only 3 mistakes are allowed as opposed to 8.

FEEDBACK: The return of information about the result of a process or activity.

For students to learn from mistakes or understand when their work quality has hit the mark, feedback is essential.

To illustrate this fact, imagine that you are a student who has been given an assignment to read two books from the NARNIA series and then to compare the two main characters in each of the novels.

You spend 2 weeks reading the 2 books, and then write the 5-page essay using the skills you hope the teacher will appreciate.

Your paper is handed in on time and then you wait for some response from the teacher. A week goes by, then two without the paper being returned. During the third week, the teacher again assigns two more books to be read and another comparison paper to be written. But this time she states, "Please improve upon the quality of the essay you handed in last time." The papers are then handed back from 3 weeks prior, but there are no grades or comments on the essays what so ever. How can a student know how to improve without feedback?

Another component of effective feedback is that it must be quick. For a math student who has learned a process wrong, he can quickly relearn if the feedback comes right away. Wrong habits are hard to break. The sooner the error is caught, the easier the correct skill can be established.

MEASUREMENT OF STUDENT PERFORMANCE

The quality of student achievement can be observed and measured in a variety of ways.

Multiple Choice, True/False, Matching Tests

These exams take time to write but are easy to correct. Divide the number of correct responses by the number possible to determine a percentage grade.

Essay Tests

These are easy to write but hard to grade. Your objectives should be stated clearly so the essay can be focused and evaluated according to how closely the student's work met the goals. Essay tests can be graded according to content of the writing, but also according to correct "mechanics" such as spelling, grammar, complete sentences and punctuation. One form provided in this manual is the "Quick Guide" which will list guidelines for the student and the evaluator.

Checklists

Checklists are especially helpful when training a student on correct procedures such as work habits, science lab skills, equipment safety, format essay writing or technical procedures. These can set forth valuable items/areas for determining how thoroughly a student follows instruction.

Observations and Records

An anecdotal record is a brief narrative objectively describing the activities surrounding an event or lesson. The date, time, and place are included so that patterns can be seen over time as other records are kept. A helpful time to write such narratives would be when the student is involved with p.e., performances, or speeches to name a few.

Discussions

Students can gain very helpful and immediate feedback if the results of the work are discussed immediately after the lesson is completed. Keep constructive criticism "sandwiched" between positive statements.

Daily Work Grades

Count the number of problems or "possible" errors. Count the number of correct responses and divide that total by the number of problems. For instance, if there were 25 math problems on a page and the student missed 2 problems, divide the 23 correct by the 25 possible. The score will be 92%. If there were 10 spelling words and the student missed 3, then divide 7 by 10 and the score computed will be 70%.

Self-evaluations

It is valuable for students to establish goals for themselves and then to consider how closely they attained the goals. Self-evaluation can become more accurate over time, but a self-evaluation should never be used as the ONLY source of a course grade.

Rubrics

These helpful grading tools can be as general or specific as you make them. They organize the evaluation criteria, describe expectations of student work, and measure the levels of performance proficiency. Many are provided in this manual, but they are easy to generate and quick to use.

THE VALUE OF WORK ASSESSMENT FOR STUDENTS

With feedback on the quality of work to guide them, students are more likely to produce work that meets the set standard. They more easily understand what excellent work looks like. They know what the criteria are for this level of work. They are able to see concrete ways to improve their work in order to meet the standards.

THE VALUE OF WORK ASSESSMENT FOR TEACHERS

Assessment helps with selecting, clarifying and evaluating the education objectives. It helps with instruction (where to begin, how quickly to proceed). It helps clarify student progress and performance. It can help motivate and encourage students. It can help determine program effectiveness.