

# Assessment for Learning for Key Stage 3



# CONTENTS

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Rationale and Overview</b>	<b>2</b>
Why Introduce AfL to Your Classroom(s)?	3
Ties to the Revised Curriculum	6
Putting AfL Into Practice	6
<b>Key Elements of AfL</b>	<b>8</b>
Sharing Learning Intentions	8
Sharing Success Criteria	12
Formative Feedback	15
Effective Questioning	21
Helping Pupils to Reflect on Their Learning	26
<b>Appendix 1: Resources</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>Appendix 2: Further Reading</b>	<b>34</b>

## Acknowledgements

The Partnership Management Board would like to thank the many people who contributed to the development and production of the contents of this pack. They include colleagues from:

Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA)  
Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS)  
The Education and Library Boards  
Regional Training Unit (RTU)  
Classroom 2000 (C2K)

The Partnership Management Board would also like to thank all the schools who so generously allowed us to take photographs. Their participation celebrates pupils enjoying learning. Their involvement makes the materials real.

# Introduction

When we hear the term 'assessment', we often think of exams, tests, marks, stress and pass or fail. It is easy to view it as an end product that is separate from the learning and teaching process. This, however, is only one type of assessment: assessment **of** learning (summative assessment). It takes place after the learning and tells us what has been achieved.

Assessment for Learning (AfL), on the other hand, focuses on the learning process (rather than the end product) and attempts not to prove learning, but rather improve it. It is formative assessment. It is a way for us to take stock during the learning process and can help inform us of how the learning is progressing.

Summative assessment and AfL (formative assessment) are not opposing or contradictory practices. That is, the use of AfL in the classroom does not mean you will suddenly stop marking pupils' work; summative assessment will always have a place in educational practice. Instead, they are complementary approaches, as the use of AfL can help pupils perform better on summative assessment tasks and summative assessment can reflect the impact of AfL.

While the Revised Curriculum does not require you to integrate AfL practices into your classroom(s), we strongly recommend the use of AfL as best practice. The introduction and regular use of AfL in the classroom can help you to fulfil other statutory components of the revised curriculum (like *Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities*, *Learning for Life and Work* (at Key Stage 3), and *Personal Development and Mutual Understanding* (at Key Stages 1 and 2)). In addition, AfL offers significant advantages for pupils.

This document will:

- explain what AfL is;
- introduce its elements; and
- introduce some practical strategies to plan and promote AfL in your school/classroom.

'Assessment for Learning is the process of seeking and interpreting evidence for use by learners and their teachers to decide **where** the learners are in their learning, **where** they need to go next, and **how** best to get them there.'

*Assessment for Learning: 10 Principles*  
The Assessment Reform Group, 2002

# Rationale and Overview

Assessment for Learning is based on extensive research conducted by Paul Black and Dylan Wiliam. In their 1998 study *Inside the Black Box*, they refined the term 'formative assessment' by emphasising that assessment is only formative when:

- it is an integral part of the learning and teaching process; and
- assessment evidence is actually *used* to:
  - modify teaching to meet the needs of pupils; and
  - improve learning.

Unlike summative assessment, AfL is conducted during day-to-day classroom practice and takes place *during* learning. It also gives pupils an active role in the assessment process. Pupils work with the teacher to determine what is being learned and to identify what the next steps should be. Both parties then use the feedback (which includes information on how the pupils are learning, their progress, the nature of their understanding and the difficulties they are having) to improve the learning.

This emphasis on the pupils' role in the learning process is founded upon the constructivist view of learning, which says: however neatly we may design, package and deliver learning experiences, in the end learning is a process that is instigated and managed by the *learner*. It's the learner who constructs the learning.

No matter what artistry we employ as teachers, learning is still something that learners have to do for themselves.

In Assessment for Learning:

- there is a high emphasis on *transferable learning*;
- assessment becomes a much more *transparent process* because it is based on critical information that is shared with learners; and
- learners are able to *take responsibility* for their own learning and, eventually, for their own assessment, too.

It is not something extra or 'bolted on' that you have to do. Rather, it neatly integrates with your existing classroom practice.

AfL involves the following key actions:

- sharing *learning intentions*;
- sharing and negotiating *success criteria*;
- giving *feedback* to pupils;
- effective *questioning*; and
- encouraging pupils to *assess and evaluate their own and others' work*.

## Why Introduce AfL to Your Classroom(s)?

Adopting strategies that support Assessment for Learning can transform learning and teaching and take away the stigma that haunts assessment. In fact, research has shown that Assessment for Learning can have a significant effect on how well pupils achieve in terms of their attainment, behaviour, motivation, engagement and their ability to work independently.

### It Improves Performance

Black and Wiliam's 1998 literature review examined 250 research articles from 160 journals published over a nine-year period. From this, they documented significant, and often substantial, quantifiable learning gains due to AfL practices. Their review of over 20 studies on classroom assessment showed increases in primary and post-primary performance ranging from 15 to 30 percent compared to control groups. In post-primary, differential effects were measured at approximately half a level at Key Stage 3, over half a grade at GCSE, and two full grades at GCSE after two to three years. They concluded that no other single improvement initiative improved performance levels to the extent that formative assessment did. Subsequent research in UK schools has substantiated these figures. For instance, research conducted in primary schools through the Gillingham Partnership's Formative Assessment Project 2002 indicated improved standardised test scores in reading and numeracy as well as improvements in writing levels.



### It Increases Learning Independence

The impact of AfL on learning independence is as important as its benefits to performance. AfL practices make clear what is being learned, why, and how success will be measured. Pupils who understand their own goals and their role in learning are more independent in managing their learning; they know what to do, how they have to work and take more responsibility for their own learning and assessment. Assessment for Learning helps cultivate these valuable skills by giving pupils a role in determining these components of the learning as well as experience in providing feedback and assessing themselves and their peers. The learning is no longer something they receive; it becomes something they pursue and have a hand in shaping. This benefits learners later in life as well as in the classroom.

### It Improves Morale, Motivation and Risk-Taking

Knowing the goals and success indicators may help pupils to gain learning independence, but they are not the only influencing factors. Morale and motivation are also pivotal components, and here, too, AfL plays an important role.

Black and Wiliam found that many assessment approaches used in classrooms compare pupils with one another – particularly those that focus on marks and grades. Evidence shows that pupils interpret the prime purpose of these assessments to be competition rather than personal improvement. As a result, feedback from these types of assessment actually reduces pupil morale. It teaches them, particularly low-attaining pupils, that they lack ability, leading them to believe they are unable to learn.



These findings correlate with those of Carol Dweck, Professor of Psychology at Stanford University. For over 20 years Dweck has been researching students' motivations for learning. Her research concludes that conventional assessment approaches produce students who purposely avoid risk and difficult tasks.

Dweck found that practices that focus on rewards like gold stars, grades or place-in-class ranking encourage learners to focus on and prize their performance over their learning. In turn, pupils (especially high-achievers) avoid risk-taking or extending themselves, which is part and parcel of new learning, because risk means decreased likelihood of reward.

AfL practices, in contrast, emphasise the learning over the performance (grading or ranking). In some cases, it omits grades altogether. In this atmosphere, pupils are more free to experiment, take risks and extend themselves; there isn't necessarily a performance reward to secure or a prize to compete for with their classmates. This places a value on learning for learning's sake and promotes a 'you can do' ethos, because pupils discover first-hand that getting into difficulties and making mistakes is all part of effective learning. Every pupil's confidence is improved because the expectation is that they can achieve.

### **It Enhances Relationships and Reflection**

AfL also helps foster a more positive classroom environment. It strengthens teacher-pupil relationships by increasing two-way communication. These high-quality interactions between you and your pupils can make them more motivated to learn and more aware of their learning.

And finally, Assessment for Learning can also improve planning and delivery of learning. This is because AfL practices lead you to analyse and make the underpinning rationale for learning explicit to both yourself and pupils. It creates an opportunity to quality assure and amend activities to ensure they meet the learning needs.

But to realise these advantages, AfL must be embedded as part of normal classroom practice.

## Ties to the Revised Curriculum

Although AfL stands on its own merits, it is also an extremely valuable tool for implementing the revised curriculum. The aim of the Northern Ireland curriculum is:

*to empower young people to achieve their potential and to make informed and responsible choices throughout their lives.*

Assessment for Learning practices contribute strongly to this aim by:

- giving pupils a framework that empowers them to take charge of their learning;
- emphasising that everyone has the potential to succeed; and
- encouraging pupils to accept responsibility for their own development.

What's more, AfL supports the revised curriculum's statutory elements: *Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities, Personal Development and Mutual Understanding, and Learning for Life and Work.*

Like AfL, these cornerstones of the curriculum seek to promote learning as active, meaningful and collaborative. These areas also emphasise pupil choices, challenging tasks, developing a shared language of learning and reflection on learning, all of which are fundamental aspects of AfL.

Assessment for Learning is directly linked to *Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities*, as both promote the concepts of:

- setting open-ended challenges;
- making thinking important;
- making thinking and learning explicit;
- effective questioning;
- enabling collaborative learning;
- promoting independent learning; and
- making connections.

Adopting AfL practices in your classroom, therefore, allows you to fulfil many aspects of the revised curriculum through a single initiative.

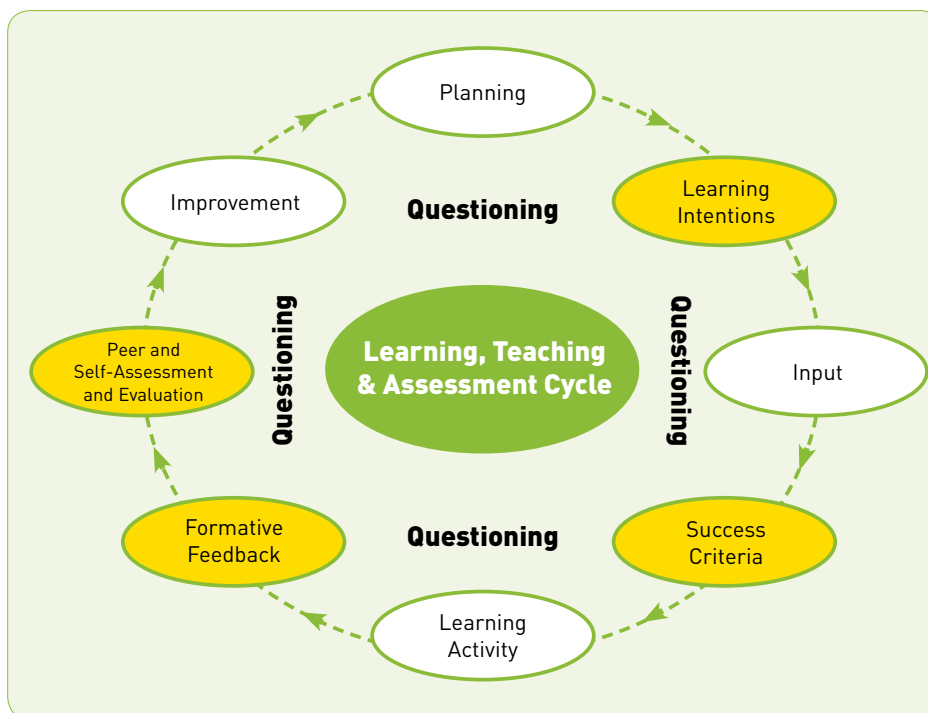
## Putting AfL Into Practice

Assessment for Learning is not a revolutionary concept. You probably already use learner-centred approaches and a range of formative assessment strategies in your classroom. However, AfL requires the application of specific elements to produce the desired results. As stated earlier, these are:

- **learning intentions and success criteria** – so that pupils understand what they are trying to learn, why and what is expected of them;

- **feedback** – about the quality of their work and what they can do to make it better;
- **questioning** – to create a classroom climate where pupils come up with their own ideas, think aloud and explore their understanding; and
- **peer and self-assessment and self-evaluation** – to enable them to recognise success in their own and others' work and to focus on *how* they are learning as well as *what* they are learning.

These elements have most value when they are seen as integrated and mutually supportive of the process of learning rather than having discrete effects. The diagram below illustrates how these elements can be an integral, embedded part of the learning-teaching-assessment cycle.



When integrating AfL into your classroom practice, we recommend that you take one area at a time and allow for its development rather than rush into a succession of rapid changes.

Also, do not underestimate the time, effort and planning required to effect real improvements. It can be very easy to engage with the suggested strategies at a superficial level. It is important for you to take time to understand the rationale underpinning each element and to make sense of it in your own classroom context.

Advice on the whole-school planning of AfL is available in the planning booklet provided with your *Curriculum Support and Implementation Box*.

# Key Elements of AfL

## Sharing Learning Intentions

A learning intention is simply a description of what you want your pupils to know, understand or be able to do by the end of a lesson. It tells pupils what the focus for learning is going to be.

The concept of learning intentions is not new – as a teacher you devise learning intentions regularly. However, you may, instead, call them ‘learning objectives’, ‘learning goals’ or ‘learning aims’. In AfL, the word ‘intention’ is used purposely because it puts greater emphasis on the process of learning rather than the end product.

### Why Use Learning Intentions?

Firstly, discussing learning intentions helps focus you and the pupils on the learning rather than the activity.

Informing pupils about what they are going to learn and why they should learn it gives pupils the tools they need to take more responsibility for their own learning and achieve learning independence. Practice shows that pupils who regularly receive this information in the classroom are:

- more focused for longer periods of time;
- more motivated;
- more involved in their learning; and
- better able to take responsibility for their own learning.

This step also immediately and actively involves pupils with their own learning, even before the activity or lesson has begun, and it offers opportunities for key interactions between you and your pupils.

‘The first ‘active’ element of formative assessment in the classroom is the sharing of learning intentions with children... Without the learning intention, children are merely victims of the teacher’s whim.’

Shirley Clarke, 2002

### Framing and Delivering Learning Intentions

Learning intentions need to be shared with pupils before they begin an activity or lesson. For best effect, you should follow these five steps when using learning intentions to introduce a new activity:

- Identify what pupils will be learning (We are learning to ...).
- Explain the reason for the learning (We are learning this because ...).

- Share (and sometimes negotiate) the learning and the reason with pupils.
- Present the information in language that they can understand.
- Revisit the learning intention throughout the activity or lesson.

It's very easy for both you and your pupils to confuse what they are **doing** with what they are **learning**. Remember, learning intentions are most effective when they **focus on the learning** rather than the learning activity.

When writing learning intentions it is best to:

- separate the task instructions from the learning intention; and
- be clear about what you want pupils to **learn**.

## Defining the Learning

To frame learning intentions, you need to define the learning. We are all familiar with learning being described in terms of what pupils know, understand and are able to do. You can, therefore, express the learning in terms of:

- knowledge;
- understanding; and
- skills.

Knowledge is factual information, for instance the parts of a plant, key events of World War One, etc. Understanding typically concerns concepts, reasons or processes (the need for a healthy diet, the difference between convection, conduction and radiation, etc.). Skills are proficiencies, dexterities or abilities acquired through training or experience (for example applying techniques, drawing conclusions based on evidence, using a multiplication grid, collaboration, etc.).



## What Makes a Good Learning Intention?

The most useful learning intentions are those that focus on generic, transferable skills. This means that pupils can take these skills away with them to use and apply in other contexts. It also encourages them to make connections across the curriculum and recognise where they are using the same or similar skills in unfamiliar contexts.

For example, some quality learning intentions are as follows:

- We are learning to work effectively in groups.
- We are learning to use evidence to support an opinion.
- We are learning to carry out a fair test.
- We are learning to interpret data.

Another advantage of generic learning intentions is that pupils of all abilities are able to achieve them; the differentiation is in the way the pupils achieve or demonstrate the intention, not by creating different learning intentions for pupils of different abilities.

## Putting Learning Intentions Into Practice

Here are some tips for using learning intentions effectively.

### 1. Start small.

You don't need to have a learning intention for every lesson. You could start with one aspect of the curriculum, like narrative writing within Literacy, and highlight its respective learning intentions. If you do want to use learning intentions on an ongoing basis, you will probably only need to create learning intentions two or three times per week, as that is approximately how often new learning is introduced in classrooms.

### 2. Separate the learning from the task/activity.

This helps pupils (and you) to focus not on the activity, but on what they will have learned by doing it.

### 3. Tell them why they are learning something.

This can motivate pupils and also help them to see connections in the curriculum. When possible, give a real-life rationale for the learning.

### 4. Use appropriate language.

Remember to use the language of learning: better to say 'we are learning to' rather than 'we are doing'.

### 5. Display the learning intention.

This helps pupils to maintain focus while they are working – you could use an interactive whiteboard/flip chart/WALT board, etc. A display will also help remind you to refer back to the learning intention throughout the lesson, and the pupils can take a role in designing the display, if you choose.

### 6. Discuss the learning intention with pupils.

This allows the pupils to internalise and explore what is required of them. You can also use the learning intention as a focus for evaluation during plenary sessions. Encourage your pupils to use the language of thinking and learning when they reflect on whether they have achieved a learning intention.



## Sharing Success Criteria

If learning intentions describe what pupils will learn during an activity or lesson, then success criteria are the statements that help pupils recognise if they have been successful in their learning. They summarise the main teaching points (key ingredients) or processes (key steps), and they always link directly to the learning intention. They essentially spell out the steps required to achieve the learning intention, offering explicit guidance on how to be successful. By referring to the success criteria, pupils know if they have achieved the learning intention.

In AfL, success criteria:

- are linked to the learning intention;
- are specific to an activity;
- are discussed and agreed with the pupils prior to beginning the learning activity;
- scaffold and focus pupils while they are engaged in the activity; and
- are used as the basis for feedback and peer and self-assessment.

### Why Use Success Criteria?

Sharing and agreeing success criteria is an important part of AfL for a number of reasons. The most significant benefits are that success criteria can help to cultivate independent learners, provide effective feedback and create confident pupils who contribute to activities.

First of all, sharing success criteria encourages an independent approach to learning. When pupils have success criteria at hand, they are more informed about how they will be assessed. Consequently, they are better able to assess their own work to identify success and areas for improvement. This involves them in their own performance and learning. In time, pupils who have experience of working to success criteria and contributing to the development of success criteria are more apt to use these to assess their own achievements, address their own concerns and identify areas for improvement without relying upon others for guidance. This learning independence is a quality and skill that benefits pupils both in the classroom as well as in life beyond the classroom.

‘...success criteria summarise the **key steps** or **ingredients** the student needs in order to fulfil the learning intention – the main things to do, include or focus on.’

Shirley Clarke

Success criteria also allow you and the pupils to give accurate feedback – they keep you both focused on the criteria that the work will be assessed against.

Also, best practice suggests that you discuss and agree success criteria with the pupils in advance of lessons and activities. This discussion aspect is particularly important in the classroom because:

- it helps foster a positive classroom environment;
- it encourages pupils to be involved in the learning and upcoming activity even before it's begun;
- it can help build pupil self-esteem by offering them opportunities to contribute; and
- its collaborative aspect is a useful tool to strengthen the teacher-pupil relationship.

### Creating Success Criteria

When creating the success criteria, it is important to focus on process and characteristics rather than the final effect. Take a look at the example provided below:

Learning Intention: We are learning to write a narrative.	
Activity: Write a ghost story.	
I will be successful if: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• people enjoy reading my story; and</li> <li>• it frightens them.</li> </ul>	I will be successful if I: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• set the scene in the opening paragraph;</li> <li>• build up tension/suspense;</li> <li>• use spooky adjectives and powerful verbs; and</li> <li>• end with a cliffhanger.</li> </ul>

In this example, there are two sets of suggested success criteria. Which set is more helpful to pupils?

The criteria on the left are not success criteria because they focus on reaction rather than guidance on how to achieve the effect.

You can see that the success criteria listed on the right, however, provide pupils with the key ingredients needed to show that they fulfil the learning intention. If they can do these things, then they have shown they understand how to write a narrative.

## How to Share Success Criteria

As a teacher, generating quality success criteria will come to you quite easily. However, pupils can't be expected to recognise success immediately or understand how to use success criteria. The process takes time and needs to be developed. However, you can help your pupils along by:

- modelling the process for them;
- putting the criteria into child-friendly language;
- allowing time to discuss the criteria; and
- letting the pupils work in groups to practise creating and using the criteria.

Modelling the process is particularly important for helping pupils understand the value and purpose of success criteria. You may initially want to create success criteria yourself and then simply discuss them with your pupils. Using a sample work is another good way to help pupils recognise success. By taking a piece of work (perhaps from another class), you and your pupils can use it to draw out essential features, qualities and aspects that meet its success criteria.

Success criteria should also be in child-friendly language to ensure they understand exactly what is expected. However, success criteria needn't always be in written form. You can use images (for example digital pictures or different stages of an experiment/practical activity) to illustrate the process.

Planning time to discuss and negotiate success criteria with your pupils will provide them with a clear understanding of what is required prior to undertaking the activity. Allowing pupils to work in groups to prioritise and agree success criteria will give them an opportunity to contribute and gain experience with the process while benefiting from a sense of safety in numbers.



## Formative Feedback

Quality feedback is essential for effective learning and teaching. Feedback can motivate pupils by building self-esteem and reinforcing the positive. However, feedback can often be too little, too late, too vague and too impersonal.

It is likely that you currently offer your pupils an array of feedback throughout the day. This may include phrases like 'Well done' and 'Try harder'. However, statements like these, while supportive, are not examples of formative feedback.

Formative feedback comments on the quality of a pupil's work and offers advice on how to improve. It contains three elements:

- evidence on where the pupil is now (this is their success as it relates to the agreed criteria);
- a definition of the desired goal; and
- practical strategies to close the gap.

Note that it's this advice on *how* to improve that is critical, as to be truly formative, the feedback must inform the *next steps* in the learning process. Formative feedback points pupils towards *ways* to realise the improvement and reach the goal.

To be truly formative, it must help plan the next steps in learning. Formative feedback:

- is timely;
- relates to the focus of the learning (learning intention);
- identifies where success has occurred;
- identifies where and how improvement can take place;
- allows time for improvement; and
- is accessible to the pupil in terms of meaning/vocabulary.

### Why Use Formative Feedback?

Teachers spend a lot of time and effort marking pupil work. This can be useful as a summative measure for the teacher to *prove* the learning – to find out what learning has taken place. However, in terms of AfL, the question we must ask is: Does a mark help the pupil?

Research indicates that the answer is no; marking has little or no effect on *improving* the learning. For example, telling pupils that they scored four out of ten tells them that they are not achieving, but it says nothing about how to do better.

In addition, over-emphasis on, and over-use of, grades and marks can create a competitive culture in your classroom. Research indicates that this leads to high achievers becoming complacent and low achievers becoming demotivated.

For example, research by Carol Dweck found that feedback in the form of gold-stars, grades, or place-in-class ranking focuses students on performance rather than their learning. As a result, learners actively avoid risk and extending themselves during new learning in order to ensure they secure the reward.

Formative feedback counteracts these issues by:

- focusing on improvement;
- de-emphasising competition; and
- improving motivation and learning ambition.

AfL practices strive to help pupils concentrate on how to improve their own performance rather than compare themselves to others.

### Types of Formative Feedback

There are two types of feedback that may be given to pupils: written and oral.

Written feedback tends to be given after a task or homework. Written feedback is typically given in one of three forms:

- a mark/grade (e.g. 4/10, B+);
- a mark/grade and a comment; or
- a comment only.

However, there is a very strong argument for making written feedback comment-only. Research shows that pupils make most progress in their learning when feedback is in the form of comments only, with no marks or grades attached. Even when comments are included, pupils tend to ignore them as their feelings of achievement or failure have already been reinforced by the mark or grade. In fact, when receiving comments paired with marks, the first thing a pupil will look at is their mark; the next thing they will look at is their neighbour's mark. Often, pupils do not even read the comment.

The information below, which substantiates this, is from two Israeli studies referred to by Black and Wiliam (1998). But this was also a key finding in the King's College research and is backed by findings in a range of countries.

Groups of pupils given:	Improvement in Work	Interest in Subject
Marks/grades only	Nil	+ for high attainers - for middle/low
Marks/grades + comments	Nil	+ for high attainers - for middle/low
Comments only	30%	+ for all groups

Note that while it's not necessary to apply comment-only marking to every piece of work, it's a strategy that should be built into assessment to improve and benefit the learning process. To introduce it, start small and consider choosing one occasion a month for comment-only marking. Another option is to 'spread the load' by focusing the use of comment-only marking on one group of pupils at any one time.

Oral feedback is usually given during a lesson. Oral feedback is sometimes underestimated because it is less formal, but it is an effective way of decreasing the workload and can be a very powerful and effective tool. This is especially the case with younger pupils, as it:

- is personal and specific to the pupil;
- is immediate and so allows for quick remediation and improvement; and
- reinforces the relationship between teacher and pupil and allows for the pupil to respond and participate.

Also, to help ensure AfL and formative feedback is successfully embraced and becomes rooted in your practice, it's important that pupils and parents are made aware of the different types of feedback – that comments and oral feedback can be just as important as marks.

### Timing of Formative Feedback

As stated earlier, too often the feedback given is too little, too late, or too vague. If we make sure our feedback includes the three key components of formative feedback (a statement on where the pupil is now, a goal, and strategies on how to close the gap), then we eliminate the risk of our feedback being vague.



But what about the timing? When should we be offering the feedback?

Ideally, formative feedback should take place during the learning. Feedback can be given as pupils work on a task or assignment, but once they've completed their work, that doesn't mean the learning has to end there. Instead, you can extend the learning process by offering feedback and allowing time for improvements to be made (for example, give your feedback and let pupils go away, try to follow the advice and improve the work).

This allows the pupils to take the feedback on board and immediately:

- make efforts to close the gap; and
- realise the improvement.

This is more effective and productive to the learning experience than end-of-task feedback measures (usually summative), which require pupils to remember the feedback and apply your recommended strategies to a future task.

### Learning from the Feedback

To ensure that pupils learn from the feedback you offer, not only must you allow time for pupils to read your comments and allow time for improvements to be made to the work but you must also:

- state or write comments so that they are understood by your pupils.

Studies show that pupils often do not read the comments we write, particularly when they are paired with marks. However, it might surprise you to know that when they do read them, often pupils cannot understand the marks we give or comments we write. How can pupils process and use the feedback if they don't understand it in the first place?

Below are some common feedback statements (in bold) as well as comments (in italics) from pupils on how useful they find these:

**'Develop these ideas further...'**

*'Teachers expect you to know what they mean in comments.'* (Year 10)

*'It would be good if teachers wrote how you could improve your work more.'*

**'Good work ...'**

*'Good' doesn't help much – he's just saying that it's not really very good.*

*I'd like it if he just told the truth.'* (P4)

*'If I get a 'good', I don't often know what I've done good.'* (Year 8)

**'You must try harder...'**

*'I get 'try harder' a lot, but it doesn't really help me do any better.'*

In these quotations, we can actually see that pupils are asking us to be specific about what has been achieved and then give clear advice on how to improve. These feedback statements here, and others like 'Well done' and 'See to your punctuation', are just too vague to be helpful to pupils. Using formative feedback in your classroom, however, can remedy this by offering pupils the guidance they need on how to improve their learning.

### Feedback Strategies and Prompts for Improvement

When offering written feedback, there are a number of strategies you could make use of. One that we recommend trying is a structured approach. This is only one approach and can be used as often as manageable. It can also be used alongside other types of assessment, but you should explain it to pupils before you introduce it as a strategy.

First, find two successes. By identifying two successes, you are showing pupils where they are now - where they have achieved success in relation to the learning.

Then identify an area of the work that they can immediately improve. This might not be the 'worst' aspect of their work. You should identify an *achievable* and *realistic* goal.

Next, provide them with a prompt on how to improve. A prompt gives them a practical strategy to close the gap. Then, finally, give the pupils time to improve.

With this approach, you needn't necessarily write huge amounts; you can use symbols instead. Examples of structured feedback that you may already be familiar with are 'Two Stars and a Wish' or 'Tickled Pink and Green for Go'.



To close the gap between where a pupil is and where you want them to be in their learning, there are three types of prompts that promote improvement. They also help you differentiate your support. These are:

- reminder prompts;
- scaffold prompts; and
- example prompts.

Here is an example of each, taken from research by Shirley Clarke:

Reminder Prompt	<b><i>Say more about how you feel about this person.</i></b>
Scaffold Prompt	<b><i>Can you describe how this person is a 'good' friend. Describe something that happened that showed they are a good friend.</i></b>
Example Prompt	<b><i>Choose one of these or one of your own: 'He is a good friend because he never says unkind things about me'; or 'My friend is a friend because he never tells me lies.'</i></b>

Reminders are the least supportive type of prompt - the most basic instruction on how to improve the work/learning and the most suitable prompt for able pupils. Scaffold prompts are for pupils who need more support than a simple reminder. Example prompts are the most supportive type of prompt and are extremely successful with all pupils, but especially with average or below average pupils; they are the most explicit, instructional and illustrative statements of how to improve.

You should select which to use based on your pupils' needs.

## Effective Questioning

Questioning is an integral part of Assessment for Learning. Research shows that teachers ask questions every 72 seconds, on average. However, 38 percent of these are actually answered by the teacher, not the pupils. Effective questioning, therefore, is about asking questions in a way that elicits maximum feedback, which can then be used to evaluate, plan and expand learning.

### Your Classroom's Learning Climate

The learning climate in your classroom can heavily influence how successfully questioning is used and how beneficial it is to pupils' learning. A positive learning climate is one where:

- risk-taking is encouraged;
- there exists a community of enquiry; and
- there is a commitment to learning for all pupils.

In order for pupils to take risks, they need to know that all contributions are encouraged and valued and that making errors is part of the learning experience. Is it okay to give a 'wrong' answer? Is everybody's opinion valued in your classroom ... by you ... by the other pupils?

One way to encourage risk-taking is to create agreed 'ground rules' and to flag these up on a regular basis (e.g. think time, valuing all contributions, standard conventions of talking and listening, etc). Problem-solving activities can also encourage pupils to hypothesise and think aloud. These also illustrate for pupils the trial and error of the learning process and can help them become more comfortable with making errors in order to reach conclusions.

Creating a community of enquiry/independent thinking and learning will also help to foster a positive climate. Supportive relationships (teacher-pupil and pupil-pupil) are extremely important. These can help to create an environment where you are part of the learning community as well. You can foster relationships in the class by setting up collaborative ways of working and using flexible groupings.

Finally, all of the adults in your classroom must demonstrate a commitment to learning for all pupils. You can reinforce a shared belief that all of your pupils have the capacity to learn by emphasising progression in learning rather than performance. This can help to promote self-belief and personal satisfaction on completion of tasks and encourage pupils to feel secure in coming up with their own ideas, thinking out loud and explaining their reasoning.

Using some of these approaches to create the right climate can also promote effective questioning. In turn, effective questioning can help to develop, reinforce and perpetuate a positive classroom culture.

## Purposes of Effective Questioning

In AfL, effective questioning serves two main purposes: to assist with assessment and to improve understanding.

Questioning for assessment is teacher-led. It helps you obtain evidence about where pupils are in their learning. This information about pupil knowledge, understanding and skills can then inform planning and the selection of teaching strategies to move pupils from where they are to where they need to go.

Questioning for understanding can be both teacher-led and pupil-led. When teacher-led, it can help pupils make connections that aren't immediately apparent and can unobtrusively guide pupils to the facts, solutions, and conclusions they need to discover. Pupil-led questioning is a key process in learning and allows them to develop independence, work through problems, and to reflect on and evaluate their own understanding.

## Strategies for Effective Questioning

To introduce effective questioning to your classroom, there are a few simple strategies you can follow. These are:

- asking better questions;
- asking questions better;
- dealing with answers productively; and
- encouraging pupil questions.

## Asking Better Questions

The first thing you can do to ask better questions is to plan more carefully and take more care when framing your questions. Ask yourself:

- What do I want my pupils to learn?
- How do I want them to learn it?
- How will I find out if they have learned it?

Your answers to these questions will help you to ensure that your questions to pupils reinforce the focus for learning and draw out their understanding of the learning.

Next, try asking fewer questions. Many of the questions teachers ask pupils are not meant to be answered; they are really instructions ('Would everyone line up, please?'), rhetorical questions ('Do you think I didn't see that?'), or answered by the teacher. Therefore, try asking the questions that you really want pupils to answer.

We also advise that you use more 'open' questions. Different types of questions serve different purposes. Some seek facts only and others encourage and extend pupils' understanding. Where recall is required and you want to know what they know, closed questions are appropriate. However, when you want to

know what they understand, use more open-ended questions (e.g. 'Why do you think...?', 'Could you tell me more about...?' or even 'closed' questions with more than one possible answer, such as 'What colour is the sky?'). These will extend learning and aid reflection.

You can also frame questions to encourage more thoughtful answers (e.g. rather than asking 'What is  $7+8$ ?' ask 'How many ways can we make 15?'). Alternatively, to encourage pupils to take risks, you could use 'have a go' questions (perhaps deliberately difficult or open-ended) where pupils do not have to find the right answer but are rewarded for exploring options and sharing possible solutions.

Sequencing your questions is also useful. Single, stand-alone questions rarely achieve the kind of outcomes aimed for, and a barrage of closed questions can sometimes 'close down' the learning. The best questions look ahead and help you to move the lesson forward. By carefully planning the sequence of questions, you can expand the learning, encourage pupils to the desired outcome/answer and help them on their learning journey. For example, your questions could move from narrow to broad (specific to general) or from broad to narrow (general to specific).

Finally, prepare 'key questions'. Preparing three or four 'key questions' before a lesson or activity can help you to introduce the lesson and its learning intentions, structure the lesson, make links within the lesson and keep everyone on task. These can be displayed on prompt cards or in the form of a mind map.



### Asking Questions Better

The second strategy is to ask questions better. This includes the way you ask questions as well as how you allow pupils to respond.

One useful technique is to involve the whole class. If you want to promote a risk-taking culture, you need to ensure that pupils in your classroom do not feel threatened. By addressing the group rather than an individual, you can increase pupil involvement, and it may also help you to observe pupil participation and engagement. You can involve the whole class by simply walking around the room while asking/directing questions.

Another suggestion is to 'Think, Pair, Share'. Pupils are sometimes intimidated by having to speak up in a whole-class situation. This approach involves everyone and allows pupils to think about their answer, discuss it with a partner and then share it with a group. This can take the focus off the individual, improve self-esteem and give shy pupils a voice.

Providing pupils with 'think time' will also improve your questioning process. Research shows that teachers typically allow less than one second of wait time between posing the question and asking for the answer (sometimes by providing the answer themselves). By increasing that wait time to three or five seconds, you can make a significant difference to your question's effectiveness. Doing so:

- gives pupils the vital time they need to order their thoughts;
- produces more pupils who are ready to offer an answer;
- results in fewer '*I don't know's*';
- produces more thoughtful, creative and extended answers; and
- benefits all children, no matter what their ability.

However, make sure pupils know and understand that there is time to think so that they do not feel pressured to answer right away.

Finally, to help you ask questions better, consider a 'no hands up' approach. When you ask a question and one pupil in a class puts his or her hand up, often everyone else in the class stops thinking or trying to work out the answer. By asking for 'no hands up', you can encourage all pupils to stay engaged with the question for longer.

### Dealing With Answers Productively

Effective questioning concerns how well we deal with responses from pupils, not just how well we pose questions. Part of your role as teacher is to listen actively for the answers you seek but at the same time not overlook other answers and responses that may reveal more about the pupils' level of understanding.

One tip for dealing productively with answers is to put 'wrong' answers to use by turning them into a springboard for improved understanding. The trick is to point out the error in such a way that you don't actually say '*No, that's wrong*' and at the same time steer the pupil towards a better response.

Using prompt statements is also recommended. These prompt pupils to rethink and review what has already been discussed and/or give cues to guide them and nudge them in the right direction. For example, ask them, 'Why do you think that...?', 'Could you explain...?' or 'What about...?'. Remember, prompts do not always have to be verbal. A nod, smile or encouraging hand gesture can also be used to prompt pupils' answers.

Finally, always listen and respond positively to pupils who are genuinely contributing to the discussion. This can encourage them to take risks and volunteer answers rather than being silent because they are afraid to give the 'wrong' answer.

### Generating Pupils' Questions

As a teacher, you ask the majority of questions in the classroom (somewhere in the region of 50 to 70 percent more than the pupils). Encouraging pupils to ask questions is a key process in learning and:

- promotes pupil involvement;
- develops independence;
- helps pupils to work through difficulties (rather than automatically asking for help);
- develops the ability to explain things more easily; and
- develops reflection and evaluation of their own learning.

One way to encourage questions from your pupils is to create opportunities for them to practise their skills. For example, by providing an appropriate object or stimulus, you can stimulate their curiosity and encourage them to ask questions. Alternatively, you can have your pupils create questions about part of a text (or a topic) as a means of finding a way into it. Pupils who come up with their own questions are much more likely to remember the answer.

Modelling how to think aloud and frame questions is also essential, so that pupils know how to go about it. This allows pupils to develop the appropriate vocabulary for questioning and to understand the difference between a good and bad question. You can also provide prompts/frameworks for questioning as a useful aid to pupils. KWL grids and questioning grids are good resources for this.

Finally, plan time for pupil questions into your lessons. Your pupils will be more inclined to ask questions if there is a supportive atmosphere in the classroom.

## Helping Pupils to Reflect on Their Learning

Pupil reflection is an important element of AfL; it promotes independent learning, communication and support in the classroom. You can develop pupil reflection in your classroom through the use of peer and self-assessment and self-evaluation.

Assessment and evaluation are equally important for pupil development. Each of these methods of pupil reflection needs to be modelled, developed and supported, and success criteria can be used to guide both, but it's important to recognise the differences between them; they are not synonymous.

Assessment describes activities that enable pupils to reflect on *what* has been learned and then to judge it against a set of criteria. It is an essential component of Assessment for Learning, as it is the means by which pupils take responsibility for their own learning.

Evaluation describes the process pupils use to gain an understanding of *how* they are learning. Evaluation looks at pupils as learners and enables them to discuss the process that they engaged in and also to understand more about the way they learn best.

'Independent learners ... are able to engage in self-reflection and to identify the next steps in their learning. Teachers should equip learners with the desire and the capacity to take charge of their learning through developing the skills of self-assessment.'

Assessment Reform Group, 2002

### Why Promote Pupil Reflection?

Classroom constraints on time and resources mean it is becoming more difficult for teachers to provide quality feedback to an entire class at any one time. Many of you will have experienced the snaking queue of pupils at your desk – the feedback bottleneck. For this reason alone, it makes sense to involve pupils in the assessment and evaluation of their own work. However, more significantly, peer and self-assessment and self-evaluation are also important additional forms of assessment that are influential in:

- creating independent learners;
- increasing pupil self-esteem;
- developing pupils' ability to recognise quality;
- improving pupils' understanding;
- strengthening the pupil voice in the classroom; and
- providing valuable feedback in language pupils understand.

When pupils are encouraged to assess their own work, they are given a more active role in the learning process. They come to take responsibility for their own learning and become more independent and self-reliant, meaning they don't always need you (or a parent) to help them.

This independence enables them to be more focused and motivated in their work. By working collaboratively, pupils can develop the habits and skills of discussing their work and learning and thus become more confident. This independence, motivation and confidence inevitably improves their self-esteem and contributes to the creation of a positive learning culture.

When we give pupils the skills to look at their own work and others' work critically and constructively, they develop a 'nose' for quality. They see their own areas for development by recognising them in the work of others. For example, a pupil who advises another, 'If you had written it neater, I would have been able to read it easier,' will reflect on his own presentation of work.

Analysing their own and others' work can help them to deepen their understanding of the subject at hand, but it also provides them with skills they can use throughout life in a host of different contexts. For this reason, pupil reflection supports the Revised Curriculum's *Personal Development and Mutual Understanding* objectives at Key Stages 1 and 2 and its *Learning for Life and Work* objectives at Key Stage 3.

Pupil reflection can also strengthen the pupil voice in your class. Feedback from a group to a teacher can sometimes command more attention than that of an individual pupil. It can help improve communication between you and your pupils about their learning.



Finally, through their partner and group work, pupils are able to provide each other with valuable feedback. Often, when this process is working well, the feedback is more helpful than that given by the teacher, as it enables them to learn from and support each other. Even young children can become extremely good at working with a learning partner or 'buddy'. The opportunity to discuss, explain and challenge each other enables them to achieve more than they can unaided. It also gives them a valuable opportunity to learn from each other. What's more, during peer assessment, the exchanges between pupils are in their own language, which can enhance their understanding of the work's strengths and drawbacks.

'I enjoy working with partners and not friends. (Friends) don't tell you the truth. It needs to be someone who is honest with you and helps you improve.'

Upper Primary Pupil

### Preparing Pupils to Carry Out Assessment

Before pupils can conduct peer or self-assessment, they must understand what is meant by assessment. You must also help them to understand the difference between assessment and correction.

Peer and self-assessment are about more than correction. They are about:

- getting pupils actively involved in the work;
- providing them with information about what they need to learn and how they will know if they have been successful; and
- helping them to advise each other on *how* to improve, not just what they got correct.

You can also prepare your pupils by:

- sharing the lesson's learning intentions and success criteria;
- modelling the assessment and feedback processes; and
- building the right climate.

For pupil reflection to be effective, your pupils must first know what it is they are making judgements on. Making learning intentions and success criteria clear will help your pupils to understand what counts as 'quality'.

Until they become proficient in assessing work against intentions and criteria, you will need to model the process for them and give them time to practise what you've demonstrated. This will provide them with the training they need in order to judge others' work and help them to build confidence in assessing their own work.

One way to develop assessment skills is to have your class, or groups within it, discuss a piece of work (from a different year group or in a plenary session).

Together, highlight the work's strengths, identify areas for improvement, and suggest/agree ways in which the piece could be improved.

You can also model the assessment process as you deliver formative feedback to pupils, especially when it becomes the basis for dialogue between you and the pupil. This includes tying feedback to the success criteria, providing prompts for improvement and allowing pupils time to revisit their work and close the gap. Using effective questioning can also help pupils consider the requirements of their piece of work and remind them to refer back regularly to the learning intentions and success criteria.

Finally, it's important that you build the right climate for pupil reflection. This includes cultivating an openness about learning. Pupils regularly need to discuss their learning openly, share their understanding and see that mistakes are a necessary part of improvement. In a classroom with an ethos of mutual respect and one where both pupils and the teacher talk about learning, pupils can openly give constructive feedback to one another. Formative feedback and effective questioning can help you to create a classroom climate where this openness is the norm.



Building the right climate also requires you to set expectations about group work, so give pupils guidance on what behaviours you expect them to display in group or partner situations. This could include listening to others and taking turns, for example.

### More on Modelling

When modelling how to assess or evaluate work, one useful method is the highlighting method (sometimes referred to as 'Tickled Pink and Green for Go'). This method was also discussed in the section on Formative Feedback.

Here you and the class can look at a piece of work (perhaps from another class or year group) and jointly identify two aspects of the work where the author successfully met the success criteria. These are then highlighted in pink. Everyone then agrees one aspect of the work that offers the most scope for improvement (this won't always be the worst part of the work), and this is then highlighted in green. Finally, the class comes up with a prompt suggesting how the author could improve that part of their work. After completing an assessment together as a class, and to reinforce the process, you could then pair up pupils and ask them to replicate the process together on a second piece of work.

Another useful method is the 'Two Stars and a Wish' approach. This is a good, structured way to help pupils gain confidence in assessing their own work and it works well for assessing both written exercises as well as work in practical areas of the curriculum like Art and Design. A sample form is overleaf:

2 Stars and a Wish	What I think about my work:	My teacher thinks ...
		
		
		

Your pupils could use this form to record their self-assessments, perhaps as part of a Learning Diary, and to share these with you in 'conference'. Like the highlighting method, the 'two stars' should refer to two aspects of the work that successfully meet the success criteria, and the 'wish' should refer to the area needing improvement.

It's important that you encourage your pupils to use the language of learning intentions and success criteria in their comments. Seeing your 'Two Stars and a Wish' comments beside their own will also reinforce for them how to do this.

Some other simple ideas include using traffic light icons, 'thumbs up' or a numerical scale to communicate their understanding. With the traffic lights icons, pupils use colours to indicate whether they feel they have good understanding (green), partial understanding (amber) or little understanding (red) about the learning. With 'thumbs up', pupils put their thumbs up to indicate if they feel happy or confident, thumbs down to indicate they are not confident, or waver/horizontal thumbs to indicate that they feel uncertain. A numerical scale (for example 1-5) can also be used to indicate their degree of understanding.

## Self-evaluation

For pupils, reflecting on *how* they have learned can be a more difficult skill to develop than assessing what has been learned or produced. Oral responses are easier and more motivating for pupils than written reflections, which can be more onerous. Therefore, you can encourage self-evaluation through a short plenary session at the start, during or end of the learning. Self-evaluation can also be done individually, with learning partners, or through collaborative group work.

You can use prompts to assist your pupils during the self-evaluation process. When devising prompts, it is useful to think about the effective questioning techniques we covered earlier.

Here are some sample prompts:

- The most important thing I learned was ...
- What I found difficult was ...
- What I enjoyed most was ...
- What I want to find out more about is ...
- What I need more help with is ...
- What still puzzles me is ...
- What surprised me was ...
- What I have learned that is new is ...
- What helped me when something got tricky was ...
- What really made me think was ...
- Right now I feel ...
- I might have learned better if ...
- What I would change about this activity to help another class learn is ...

These prompts, and others, will assist pupils with the self-evaluation process and can be very useful in plenary sessions. Having to hand a long list of prompts, like this, also helps you to vary the prompt or focus for reflection and offers your pupils choices. You can frame these as questions, relate them to a specific learning intention or relate them to a broader piece of work.

Prompts can also be used in Learning Logs, and many teachers put self-evaluation prompts on display in the classroom to keep them accessible and in the minds of their pupils. A sample Learning Log is available in the *AfL Delivery Materials for CPD Units* booklet in your *Curriculum Support and Implementation Box*.

## Additional Strategies to Make Reflection Work

To realise the benefits, you must not only prepare the pupils for how to assess and evaluate properly, and give them opportunities to put what they've observed into practice, but you should also do the following:

- make it routine;
- give learners the information they need;
- keep it varied;
- build it in;
- focus on strengths;
- make it lead somewhere; and
- explain it to parents.

The use of peer and self-assessment and self-evaluation in the classroom must be part of a well established routine. You can do this by making sure pupils know that work will be checked by themselves or another pupil at a specific time during the lesson, and then adhere consistently to this routine.

You must also give pupils the information they need so they can become independent and self-reliant. This means using and referring to learning intentions and success criteria regularly.

Keeping the reflection strategies varied will help pupils to maintain their interest and motivation. It may also encourage them to develop a variety of their own approaches.

It is also important to remember that reflection and collaborative working does not just happen. You must build it into your teaching plan to ensure there is time for it. Doing so will create opportunities for pupils to understand what reflection is about and to develop the habits and skills that will help them to maximise the gains that are possible.

Focusing on our pupils' strengths is essential to developing in them a 'can do' attitude, a belief that they can actually improve and knowledge that making an effort can lead to success.

You must also make the peer and self-assessment and self-evaluation processes lead somewhere. Help them to see the connections between the learning that has taken place in the past with the learning that is happening today and the learning planned for the future. Doing this will help you to develop pupils who value their role in the learning process.

Finally, you must explain the process and its merits to parents. Parents can assist you with getting your pupils to think more about what they are learning and how they are learning it. For example, encourage parents ask their children about what helps them to learn and what makes it hard for them to learn. Parents can also talk about what helped them to learn at school and what they found difficult.

## Appendix 1: Resources

This guidance is part of a range of resources, outlined below, to support the implementation of Assessment for Learning.

Name of Resource	Purpose
<i>Planning for Implementation: The Revised Northern Ireland Curriculum</i> DVD (with briefing sheets & Critical Questions)	Whole-staff awareness raising and discussion
AfL CPD units CD	Presentations and activities for facilitators, senior management, school curriculum teams and/or teachers
<i>Active Learning and Teaching Methods</i>	A collection of activities for use by classroom teachers
<i>Assessment for Learning in Action</i> (DVD)	A DVD showing clips of how AfL is used in the classroom
Assessment for Learning Handbook (available in the Autumn term, 2007)	Practical handbook based on the experiences of teachers involved in the Northern Ireland Action Research Project

Additional resources on Assessment for Learning, produced by Learning Unlimited, will be available on LNI and [www.nicurriculum.org.uk](http://www.nicurriculum.org.uk).

## Appendix 2: Further Reading

You may also find the following publications and websites informative:

Black, P., Harrison, C., Lee, C., Marshall, B. and Wiliam, D. **Assessment for Learning: Putting It into Practice** (Open University Press: 2003)  
ISBN: 0335212972

Black, P., Harrison, C., Lee, C., Marshall, B. and Wiliam, D. **Working Inside the Black Box: Assessment for Learning in the Classroom** (Infer Nelson Publishing)  
ISBN: 0708713793

Clarke, S. **Enriching Feedback in the Primary Classroom** (Hodder Murray: 2003)  
ISBN: 0340872586

Clarke, S. **Formative Assessment in Action: Weaving the Elements Together** (Hodder Arnold: 2005) – ISBN: 0340907827

Clarke, S. **Formative Assessment in the Secondary Classroom** (Hodder Murray: 2005) – ISBN: 0340887664

Wiliam, D. and Black, P. **Inside the Black Box: Raising Standards Through Classroom Assessment: Vol. 1** (Infer Nelson Publishing: 2006) – ISBN: 0708713815

Wragg, E.C. **Assessment and Learning in the Secondary School** (Successful Teaching (Routledge Falmer: 2001) – ISBN: 0415249589

**Assessment Reform Group** – <http://arg.educ.cam.ac.uk/>

**AAIA (Association of Assessment Inspectors and Advisers)**  
[www.aaia.org.uk/](http://www.aaia.org.uk/)

**DfES: The Standards Site** – [www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/personalisedlearning/five/afl](http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/personalisedlearning/five/afl)

**Dylan Wiliam (wide range of background reading)** – [www.dylanwiliam.net](http://www.dylanwiliam.net)

**NCCA** – [www.ncca.ie/index.asp?locID=351&docID=-1](http://www.ncca.ie/index.asp?locID=351&docID=-1)

**QCA** – [www.qca.org.uk/7659.html](http://www.qca.org.uk/7659.html)

**Scotland: Assessment is for Learning** – [www.ltscotland.org.uk/assess/](http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/assess/)

**Teachers' TV** – (AfL videos can be found under Whole-School Issues: Assessment)  
[www.teachers.tv/](http://www.teachers.tv/)

