



basic education

Department:
Basic Education
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

Private Bag X895, Pretoria, 0001, Sol Plaatje House, 222 Struben Street, Pretoria, 0002 South Africa, Tel: (012) 357 3000, Fax (012) 323 0601, www.education.gov.za

TO: HEADS OF DEPARTMENT
HEADS OF PROVINCIAL EXAMINATION
HEADS OF PROVINCIAL CURRICULUM
DISTRICT DIRECTORS
CIRCUIT MANAGERS
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NATIONAL ASSESSMENT CIRCULAR 3 OF 2020

IMPLEMENTATION OF FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT IN THE GENERAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING (GET) BAND

- 1.1 National Assessment Circular 02 of 2020, on the Implementation and Quality Assurance of the amended 2020 Assessment Programme in the General Education and Training (GET) band (Grades R-9) stipulates that School Based Assessment (SBA) with an emphasis on formative assessment must direct teaching and learning and also assess the development of learner competencies in the classroom.
- 1.2 Formative assessment must be integrated into the process of teaching and learning. The collection of evidence generated through both formative and summative tasks should inform the overall progression of a learner into the next grade.
- 1.3 This circular provides guidance regarding the implementation of formative assessment during the process of teaching and learning. It also aims to ensure that there is clarity and a shared understanding on the implementation of formative assessment.
- 1.4 **Annexure A** lists the key characteristics of formative assessment and provides suitable implementation strategies for the classroom context. The strategies are foregrounded by a set of definitions that will assist in promoting a shared understanding among teachers and officials supporting schools.
- 1.5 Building on these strategies, the Department of Basic Education will formulate a national strategy for supporting and training officials and teachers on implementing formative assessment and how to use summative data for formative purposes. This will include the issuing of a more detailed and practical training guide to schools and the training of teachers.

- 1.6 All schools are expected to effectively implement formative assessment to support learning.
- 1.7 All enquiries regarding this circular must be directed to Dr M Chetty by telephone on (012) 357 3835 or email at chetty.m@dbe.gov.za.

Your support in ensuring implementation of this circular will be greatly appreciated.



MR HM MWELI
DIRECTOR-GENERAL
DATE: [29/09/2020](#)

GUIDELINES ON IMPLEMENTING FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT

1. DEFINITION OF FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT

In defining formative assessment, it is imperative to start by understanding the difference between **Assessment of Learning** and **Assessment for Learning**.

- a. Assessment of Learning (AoL), also known as Summative Assessment refers to the planned and systematic process of obtaining evidence about what learners know, understand and can do after completion of a lesson or a unit of learning. An end-of-term test, examination, assignment or project is an example of summative assessment. Results of summative assessment are usually recorded and may be used for promotion and progression purposes.
- b. Assessment for Learning (AfL) refers to the process of obtaining and using assessment evidence for the purposes of improving learning. In practice, this approach is implemented in two ways: (i) formative assessment, and (ii) formative use of summative assessment information. Thus, formative assessment refers to one way in which the AfL approach is implemented.
- c. Formative assessment refers to all assessments undertaken during the lesson, by learners and teachers, to obtain evidence for use in supporting learners to improve their knowledge, understanding or skills. The primary purpose of formative assessment is to improve learning.
- d. Formative assessment in lesson plans sets forth the learning experience for further engagement by learners to improve learning and for teachers to improve their teaching.
- e. In the context of the classroom, formative assessment evidence can be obtained from spontaneous and planned activities. Spontaneous activities include impromptu questions or discussion that occur during lessons while planned activities include all exercises and questions planned before the lessons, e.g. classwork exercises and higher order thinking questions.
- f. The formative use of summative results refers to the use of summative assessment responses to improve the teaching and learning process. In practice, this can only occur after the summative assessment results are available. For example, after marking a class test or the final exams, a teacher analyses the results to identify areas in which learners performed well or poorly and the uses this evidence: (i) to take specific action to improve on learners' knowledge, understanding and skills (revision or revisiting of specific concepts or skills; and/or (ii) to improve planning, preparation and teaching of lessons.

2. CHARACTERISTICS OF FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT.

2.1. The essential characteristics of formative assessment are:

- a. it helps set up a learning experience;
- b. it involves **both** learners and teachers;
- c. it is conducted **during** the lesson;
- d. it is based on **informal evidence**, which is obtained through planned and/or spontaneous activities;

- e. it requires the teacher to provide task related **feedback** that learners can apply; and
 - f. it leads to specific **actions** that addresses learners' learning needs.
- 2.2. Formative assessment is integrated into the teaching and learning process. Thus, formative assessment is an ongoing process and not a single event.
 - 2.3. Formative assessment is not the repeated use of tests and examinations and does not involve awarding of marks to learners. It is not continuous testing.
 - 2.4. Formative assessment promotes active involvement of learners in their own learning while the teacher plays a facilitation role.
 - 2.5. Providing learners with feedback that leads to information and action for improving learners' knowledge, understanding and skills is the most important function of formative assessment.
 - 2.6. Teachers can make notes of their subjective observations about learners. These notes can be used to indicate levels of mastery and characterise developmental stages of the learner. In cases where formal assessments are not conducted, evidence from formative assessments can be used to provide feedback to parents.
 - 2.7. For effective implementation of formative assessment during the lesson, teachers must possess the requisite subject content knowledge. Content knowledge helps teachers to first identify what learners need to learn, and plan and prepare their lessons accordingly.

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT

Effective implementation of formative assessment must begin well before the lesson starts, and involves teachers better focusing on the following strategies:

- a. Planning and preparation that focusses learning;
- b. Sharing lesson objectives and success criteria with learners;
- c. Using questioning, discussions and activities to obtain evidence of learning;
- d. Providing feedback that improves learners' knowledge, understanding and skills;
- e. Supporting learners' use of self-assessment to identify and address their learning gaps; and
- f. Using assessment evidence to reflect on and improve their teaching practices.

Each of these strategies is described in further detail in this section below.

- 3.1. Planning and preparation that focusses learning requires teachers to identify what learners need to learn, and plan and prepare lessons to support learners attaining these learning outcomes.

The effective implementation of this strategy requires teachers to:

- a. First determine what learners need to learn, using information from the CAPS documents and/or the revised ATPs. To accurately identify the learning objectives, teacher must have the requisite subject knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge for the grade or phase that they teach.

- b. Identify relevant activities and questions for use during the lesson to support learners attain the lesson outcomes. It is important that teachers prepare relevant questions they plan to use before the lesson.
 - c. Use appropriate lesson planning and preparation templates to specify how the lesson will be presented using formative assessment strategies and techniques.
- 3.2. Sharing the lessons objectives and success criteria with learners is used by the teacher to ensure that **all** learners understand what it is that they need to learn and what evidence learners need to show in order to determine if they had attained the lesson outcomes.
- To implement this strategy correctly, teachers must ensure that the lesson objectives and success criteria are:
- a. shared with learners using learner-friendly language;
 - b. are understood by all learners before the lesson begins;
 - c. kept visible to all learners throughout the lesson;
 - d. referred to during the lesson to remind learners of what they are learning; and
 - e. checked at the end of the lesson to determine if the objectives have been attained.
- 3.3. Using questioning, discussion and activities to obtain evidence of learning, which is used to determine what learners know, understand and can do regarding the lesson objective. The effective implementation of this strategy requires that teachers:
- a. Should create a positive learning environment where learners' responses/contributions are respected by all;
 - b. Use techniques to allow all learners an opportunity to participate in the lesson. For example, name sticks to select learners randomly to participate in the lesson. It is important for teachers to focus on **all** learners, not only those learners who are vocal or who always put their hands up;
 - c. Allow learners with time to think about their responses to questions. This could be done by providing learners with some time to think before answering or allowing learners to discuss their responses with a partner first;
 - d. Use higher order questions that engage all learners during the lesson. These questions must be prepared before the lesson, and should be specified in the lesson plan; and
 - e. Create opportunities for learners to engage in effective dialogue with one another, and to support each other to attain the lesson objectives.
- 3.4. Providing feedback that improves learners' knowledge, understanding and skills. This involves the use of both oral and written comments about their work to provide learners with clear steps on what to do next to attain the lesson objectives.
- The effective implementation of this strategy requires that teachers:
- a. Use criteria against which feedback is provided.

- b. Use learner friendly language to guide learners to address their learning gaps. Note that comments such as 'well done' "incomplete" and "you must improve" do not help in showing learners what should be done to improve their work.
- c. Use symbols and codes that highlight the nature of the error in learners' work, e.g. 'sp' for spelling mistake or 'ce' for a calculation error. Ensure learners are familiar with the codes (display a code chart in the classroom).
- d. Provide opportunities for learners to apply the feedback provided.
- e. Review and check whether the feedback provided has led to an improvement on the part of the learner.

3.5. Supporting learners' use of self-assessment to identify and address their learning gaps implies that the teacher must train learners to support each other or to identify and address their own learning gaps regarding the lesson objectives.

The effective implementation of this strategy requires that teachers:

- a. Train and support learners on how to use self-assessment correctly. Note that marking their own work is part of self-assessment.
- b. Create opportunities during the lesson to use peer and self-assessment.
- c. Monitor and support learners as they undertake self-assessment process.
- d. Use learner friendly language that will guide learners to address their learning gaps.
- e. Self-assessment is a reflective process for learners to analyse their own work subjectively.

3.6. Use assessment evidence to reflect on and improve teaching practices requires teachers to review the lesson objectives and reflect on the assessment evidence obtained from learners in order to improve their own teaching practices.

The effective implementation of this strategy requires that teachers:

- a. Regularly reflect on lesson planning, preparation and presentation.
- b. Reflect on how to improve their use of the formative assessment strategies.
- c. Reflect on methods and techniques for improving learner involvement in all lessons.
- d. Regularly participate in discussions on how to improve their teaching practices, preferably with professional learning communities.