

# How Students Create Their Own Learning Assessments



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This post is last of a series based on excerpts from my book on *Student-Engaged Assessment: Strategies to Empower All Learners* by Laura Greenstein and Mary Ann Burke (2020). You can purchase the book from [Roman and Littlefield](#) for charts, examples, and worksheets on how to engage students to become owners of their learning successes.

## How to Integrate Assessments in Daily Learning

Assessment-capable learners can be integrate the use of assessments into their daily routines of learning with these examples:

*Student Clarity:* Ms. Macri wants to engage middle school students in assessing this big-picture standard: “Determine central ideas of a text and

explain how the author conveys their point of view. Use textual evidence.” Lanika says, “I will read the Gettysburg Address and tell you when Lincoln wrote it, who he was speaking to, and how people reacted to it.” Damon says, “I will read the Gettysburg Address, summarize three key ideas, record three persuasive phrases, and explain why Lincoln’s ideas are still relevant today.” Ramona says, “I will rewrite the Gettysburg Address to reflect today’s political events, controversies, and contradictions.”

*Ms. Macri’s Analysis of Clarity:* Lanika uses the words when, who, and how. These indicate more of a description of the document and less of an analysis of purpose and perspective. Damon uses the words summarize, main ideas, and persuasive phrases. Damon’s learning intention is more closely matched to the standard. He is able to show understanding and interpretation in relation to his own learning intentions and actions. Ramona has reached beyond the standard by showing her understanding of political positions and controversies. Mrs. Macri suggests that Lanika refers to the evidence she used to support her ideas.

*Relevance to Daily Life:* Ms. Macri notes that some students are developing understanding by creating a narrative of the war from a northern or southern perspective. Others are ready for extending their learning. They compare the Gettysburg Address to Martin Luther King’s “I Have a Dream” speech or another historical speech of their choosing. As the unit moves forward, students quiz each other on the vocabulary of the speeches (i.e., proposition, endure, hallowed) using a [Formative](#) Assessment when

self-correcting their work.

*Reasonable Challenge for Student Growth:* Lanika is advised to deconstruct the goal into three main ideas and then describe her own learning intentions.

Relying on an exemplar and feedback, she rewrites it like this: "I will start by rereading the Gettysburg address, underlining the main ideas, and circling persuasive words such as self-evident and dedicate. Then in my summary, I will use those words and ideas to explain Lincoln's thinking and persuasive techniques." Once mastery of central ideas is demonstrated, the students are asked to explain the ideas to someone from another time period or debate whether this could happen today. They also display their results on a graphic organizer, such as [Canva](#) or [Popplet](#), explaining the political, economic, and social influences.

*Students' Choice:* Ms. Macri asks them how they can show deeper understanding beyond the vocabulary and ideas that Lincoln was expressing. In the past, she gave students three "points of view" statements, and each student selected one and explained how Lincoln used words and imagery to support his ideas. She decides to offer other options for showing their learning. In small groups, they brainstorm ideas such as put on a play, compare it to other presidential addresses (e.g., FDR's 1933 Inauguration speech), or write a letter to the editor on a current issue in the style of the Gettysburg address.

*Students' Tracking of Improvement/Progress:* Students use learning trackers to annotate progress as well as challenges. They seek help from additional resources as needed, from peers as relevant, and from the

teacher as necessary. The students have agreed to use the teacher's designed rubric for now. Scoring is based on their understanding of content, summary, analysis of a position, and use of evidence to support ideas.

Ms. Macri asked her students for feedback on their learning. They suggested that additional scoring criteria such as originality and collaboration should be included. They rated the unit as high on engagement, personal relevance, and depth of learning, but made recommendations for a clearer sequence and more flexible timeframe next time.

## What Does Student-Owned Assessment Engagement Look Like?

When students are engaged *IN* assessment, they have a role in selecting the assessments, monitoring progress, and adjusting their learning process. When they have a role *AS* assessors, they are planning, learning, and displaying outcomes. Personalizing the learning tasks and assessments are an essential element of ownership. Directions in a guidebook or steps in a recipe may seem clear, until students are expected to turn north, or blanch the vegetables, or don't understand the meaning in step 3. Even clear directions can get derailed as students think they know better or find themselves getting sidetracked.

Mr. Golden understands this so he begins most units with a pre-assessment. He may use a quick quiz using Google Forms or electronic sticky notes such as [lino](#). Mr.

Golden notices that collectively students can define DNA, RNA, chromosomes, and mutation, but have less familiarity with the transmission of genetic defects. He decides to start with a brief review in small groups of students with mixed abilities. In this way, he is starting where his students are, reviewing prior learning, and getting them ready to construct new understandings. Once the groundwork is put in place, he considers ways to engage learners as assessors throughout teaching and learning.

## How Students Create Their Own Assessments

Assessments can be like rainbows. They may come in different sizes and clarity, yet all rely on the same spectrum of colors in reflecting the sun's light. Like rainbows, there are also multiple ways for students to show and reflect what they know about a character's motives, healthy eating, fractions, or global languages. Below are examples of varied and personalized paths for demonstrating intentional learning followed by methods that encourage accurate self-assessment:

*Choice:* The importance of choice was introduced in the previous chapter as a strategy for engagement. Choice also empowers students with options for display learning processes and outcomes through progressions and taxonomies. For example, Janessa knows that topical vocabulary will be assessed with quickie quizzes throughout learning, but she is also aware that there will be opportunities to demonstrate her ability to apply and display their understanding

through media and other artifacts.

*Voice:* Voice means that students have opportunities to express preferences and share perspectives. It also means listening carefully to what another is saying. A clear and focused voice is important for all students, from those with quiet voices to those who have found a voice that is loud and persistent. For many students, thinking out loud builds stronger connections to learning. In relation to assessment, students can be given voice by intentionally asking for their thoughts, ideas, and experiences on topics and assessments as in the following examples:

*Students' Assessment of Their Learning Outcomes:*

Students can use phrases on the list below, or generate their own responses to their lingering gaps and points of confusion. Later, this can be used to review a test or assignment that has been scored and returned.

"I made a simple mistake with \_\_\_\_\_. Next time I will \_\_\_\_\_."

"I was absent the day we learned and practiced this skill. Are there any review sheets?"

"The words in the question confused me. I think I could give a better answer if I understood what regulated and militia mean."

"The school I came from didn't teach the background information I need for this question. Where's Oregon?"

*Students' Tracking Progress:* There are multiple models for tracking numerical scores. Traditional charts and graphs may be easy to use, but they don't offer adequate insight into the causes and influences on learning outcomes. They may make it hard to tell

whether the student is having a bad day, is perplexed by a learning strategy, or doesn't understand the learning intention. There are also numerous ways for students to chart their own scores.

## Individualized Student Tracking of Academic Progress

As agents of assessment, students also track their developing mastery, record quantitative progress, and also assess qualitative outcomes. Students can start by developing a communal grid of the topic's goals. On it, each student records their individual learning intentions. A goal may be to develop conversational fluency about dining using another language. One student may want to record himself saying ten foods from the lesson and get suggestions for improvement in pronunciation from the teacher. Another student may prefer to have a conversation with one or two peers and receive feedback from them on the clarity of their interaction with the waiter and accurate use of vocabulary.

Our next few posts will focus on how parents can partner with their children and their schools to achieve academic success. For more charts, examples, and worksheets on how to engage students to own their learning, you can purchase *Student-Engaged Assessment: Strategies to Empower All Learners* by Laura Greenstein and Mary Ann Burke (2020) from [Roman and Littlefield](#).

