



Students Employ Self-Assessments to Advance Their Abilities

STUDENT SELF-ASSESSMENT

	YES	NO
1	X	
2	X	
3		X
4	X	
5		X

By John McCormack

“Knowing yourself is the beginning of all wisdom.” —Aristotle

Integrating self-reflection and assessment into the classroom is a valuable practice, according to Julayne Masterman-Thomas, MS, BSBA, CMA (AAMA), an associate professor in the health sciences department at Ivy Tech Community College in Indiana.

“I love to see the students’ self-reflections!” says Masterman-Thomas. “Usually, I get the ‘Aha!’ moments included in self-reflection assignments. For example, students say things like ‘I never knew it was important to learn about different cultural backgrounds and how communication, including body language, can affect my interaction with patients.’ So, self-reflection and assessment [exercises] are great for me, and frankly, it’s fantastic for the students as well.”

The challenge for educators, however, is to take this philosophical idea of self-reflection and put it into practice. Specifically, educators need to implement effective self-reflection and assessment into their curricula and everyday teaching practices.

Investing in You

Self-assessment is defined as a process by which students monitor and evaluate the quality of their thinking and behavior when learning and identify strategies that improve their understanding and skills. That is, self-assessment occurs when students evaluate their own work to improve performance, as they identify discrepancies between their current and desired performance.¹

Additionally, the benefits of self-assessment for students should motivate educators to incorporate opportunities for reflection into their lessons. “Self-assessment is a great way to move students to take responsibility for their learning. It also cultivates lifelong skills and habits. Long after the lectures, readings, and activities on specific content have faded into memory, today’s students can benefit from knowing how to recognize their learning successes and take action to improve themselves,” says Chad Gotch, PhD, an associate professor of educational psychology at Washington State University.

More specifically, self-assessment and reflection can bring three significant benefits to the classroom, according to Dr. Gotch. To start, self-reflection and assessment can

enable students to better understand where they are headed intellectually and set better goals for their learning. After establishing goals, students can better assess their current position on the path toward these ultimate objectives. Finally, through these self-awareness activities, students gain the perspective to act on what they see in their current performance and approach future learning with more focus and success.

“If you provide multiple opportunities to self-assess, you can stack these benefits. For example, a student can ask themselves, ‘What worked before when I faced a challenge like this?’ and refine their learning strategies,” notes Dr. Gotch.

Ultimately, self-assessment can have an overall positive impact on students, particularly in relation to their self-perception of their performance, according to James McMillan, PhD, a professor and chair of the foundations of education department at Virginia Commonwealth University. “Overall, students increase their self-confidence and motivation,” he says. “They learn through experience that their efforts pay off with better performance, which strengthens [their] persistence and perseverance. They also become more

resilient learners, learning how to manage mistakes and misunderstandings. Most important, perhaps, is that students hone skills that will help them learn in the future.”

Customized Options

Educators can employ a variety of self-reflection and assessment practices with students^{2,3}:

- **Journaling.** By recording their thoughts, emotions, and personal experiences, students can identify patterns, track changes, and gain a deeper understanding of their individual obstacles and challenges.

- **Online Self-Assessment Questionnaires.**

Designed by professionals, these tools can help students better understand strengths and weaknesses and fine-tune goals.

- **Goal-Setting Apps.** These help students set goals and track progress with built-in reminders and visualizations.
- **The SMART Approach.** This approach prompts students to set their goals with the following qualities:

- Specific
- Measurable
- Achievable
- Relevant
- Time-bound

- **Exit cards.** Students track what they learned and what they need more help with on a small card or a Post-it given to each student at the end of a lesson.
- **Traffic lights.** Students indicate their

DIY Self-Assessment

To successfully implement self-reflection, educators should adopt a variety of best practices:

Time it right. “Make sure self-assessment is done when students have the most potential to act upon the assessment. Reflecting on a test of content that won’t be tested again is not as powerful as examining progress within the flow of learning,” says Chad Gotch, PhD.

Encourage specificity. “Self-assessment is more effective when it is focused on specific tasks or chunks of learning rather than global evaluations,” says Dr. Gotch. For instance, nurturing students to think like “I get these few codes mixed up and should find a way that works for me to better understand them” gives students clearer focus than “I’m bad at coding.”

Set clear expectations. “Explain to students the nature of [the] criteria for judging a performance [as] correct or incorrect. This can be done by giving students examples of student work and having them evaluate the work with specific criteria, asking students to come up with criteria, and showing students how performance could be improved to meet [the] targeted performance. [Educators] can analyze work samples with students to show them how [the] criteria are applied,” says James McMillan, PhD.

Take baby steps. “There is no need to go all in, all at once. ... Start small and scaffold to more extensive self-assessment processes,” advises Dr. McMillan.

Keep it simple. “Students normally do not like lengthy assignments to attempt to understand themselves—self-assessments and reflections can be completed in an easy, fun, and quick format,” says Kelsie Spetelunas, CMA (AAMA).

understanding of particular work using a traffic light icon. Students label their work with colors according to whether they think they have good (green), partial (yellow), or little (red) understanding.

- **Dedicated improvement and reflection time.** Students read and make use of the feedback they have received. To make this valuable, every student needs to have plenty of feedback (from themselves, the educator, and their peers) that they can respond to.

While educators have many self-reflection and assessment options to choose from, they should carefully implement each tool with best practices in mind.

Real Life Receipts

When deploying these tools and following best practices, the benefits associated with self-reflection and assessment can be seen

in the medical assisting classroom on a daily basis.

Indeed, Jessica Blessinger, CMA (AAMA), who served as a medical assisting clinical educator at Hancock Regional Hospital in Greenfield, Indiana, from 2021 to 2024, has found that students in the medical assistant program benefit from taking a look inward.

“Students can focus on their strengths and weaknesses, which in turn can allow them to have [fewer] barriers along their learning journey. If the student knows how they learn best, this can be channeled into an ideal way for them to learn a new skill,” says Blessinger, who currently works as a patient care technician at Hancock Health.

Self-assessments and reflections continue to yield benefits long after students leave the classroom too. “You do not stop self-reflecting once you end your education,” concludes Kelsie Spetelunas, CMA (AAMA), IV lead at Dartmouth Health in New Hampshire. “Every day requires you to reflect and assess, whether it be about home, work, children, spouses, etc. Self-assessing helps you grow professionally, personally, and mentally.” ♦

References

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