Formative Assessment – Develop a formative assessment rubric

[Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority. The logo for the Victoria State Government. Formative Assessment - Develop a formative assessment rubric.]

NARRATOR: Hi, I'm Narelle. I'll be presenting this video about how to develop a formative assessment rubric.

[A flow chart with three stages: Plan, Assess, Review. The Plan stage lists "describe a learning continuum," "develop a formative assessment rubric," and "design a task," unpacking parts 1 and 2 of the Guide to Formative Assessment Rubrics of the Victorian Curriculum, F to 10. The Assess stage lists "collect evidence," "moderate," and "interpret and uses evidence," unpacking part 3 of the guide. The Review stage lists "improve rubrics," "refine learning continuum," and "refine task," which is part of review and refine for best practice.]

NARRATOR: This is the second video within the Plan section of the formative assessment videos. This video relates to developing a formative assessment rubric that will act as the focus of your formative assessment. This unpacks part two of the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority Guide to Formative Assessment Rubrics.

The purpose of this video is to explain how to design a formative assessment rubric that is useful for formative assessment purposes.

[An example rubric design, with a learning continuum along the top and four subsequent phases. Each phase corresponds to a set of quality criteria. Additionally, below the continuum is a column for organising elements, matched up with columns labelled "Action" and “Insufficient evidence”.]

NARRATOR: In the first video, you wrote a learning continuum. You wrote phases that describe increasing levels of sophistication within a specific topic or set of skills. The idea of a small grain size was introduced. Breaking the large grain size curriculum into smaller grain size phases can help teachers provide detailed goals and feedback.

This video will explain how to turn your learning continuum into a rubric. It will explain the rubric structure and the role of quality criteria in rubrics. Rubrics allow you to break down the skills in the learning continuum so that accurate assessment can be undertaken. The structure of the rubric that is explained in this video is more fine grained than the learning continuum. This will help direct your decision making during assessment.

Assessment using the rubric tells teachers where students can be placed on a learning continuum. This helps teachers to identify zones of proximal development for each student. To write a rubric for your learning continuum, you need to think about the main ideas that you want to formatively assess. They might be strands or sub strands in the curriculum.

[The Organising Element column is highlighted.]

NARRATOR: They are highlighted here and written in the Organising Element section of the assessment matrix. Organising Elements group actions into categories for topics that have multiple foci. If all of your actions describe a similar set of skills, such as storing data, then you have only one organising element. However, if you are assessing a range of ideas, then you can use multiple organising elements.

The example here is a rubric on data and information in Digital Technologies. The teachers designing this rubric decided to use two organising elements - acquire and store data, and visualise and interpret data.

The next task is to select the actions that will represent the phases of your learning continuum. The actions group together the things a student can do, say, make or write. Teachers should attend to, assess and prioritise these actions when teaching a specific topic. Together, this knowledge helps teachers identify a student's place on a learning continuum.

Let's use an example to develop your understanding of actions. Imagine a learning continuum that describes increasing levels of teacher competence. It will be used to identify suitable teachers to employ in your school. You decide that the most important skills are classroom management, content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and communication skills. These then are your organising elements. Actions can then be identified and grouped together within the organising elements.

For example, managing classroom activities and managing challenging behaviour are skills that fall within classroom management. The actions you select are the actions you pay attention to, as they are matched to your purpose and context. These skills were selected because they represent important things that teachers do, say, make or write. They are demonstrable through a teacher's work. These actions can be demonstrated at varying levels of sophistication and they can be described in a way that would help you decide between potential candidates.

[The Action column is highlighted.]

NARRATOR: Actions are the observable things a student can do, say, make or write that you deem important components of the skills you want to assess. Actions should use verbs and comprise skills that are typically demonstrated at different levels of sophistication by students. When choosing actions, you should think about the skills that you are likely to see in the context of your classroom, and that can be improved with instruction.

Some assessments function like checklists. They contain long lists of skills that teachers are required to evaluate. This can be time consuming and overly detailed. The purpose of prioritising a few key actions is to build a focused assessment that makes the workload manageable for students and teachers.

[The corresponding row in Quality Criteria is highlighted.]

NARRATOR: Your next step is to write levels of quality of performance or quality criteria for each action. The quality criteria are short statements that describe something a student can do, say, make or write and that relate to a specific action. Criteria are written horizontally across the page. The distance from left to right of the page indicates the relative difficulty of the skill. For example, criteria to the right have a higher estimated difficulty.

There does not need to be a quality criterion in every box. Our experience tells us that inclusion of more than four quality criteria within one action compromises the ability of the teacher to accurately discern between levels. This can lead to moderation issues. Across the set of actions, there must always be at least one criterion that aligns with each phase of the learning continuum.

We have three steps to help guide your writing of quality criteria. I'll describe these now. The main focus of quality criteria is to describe how well the student can demonstrate an action. Each action should track increasing sophistication by describing something a student can do, say, make, or write. Each criterion should describe a progressively more difficult level of sophistication than the previous criterion. It is assumed that if a student can do a higher level criterion, then they can also do the criteria in the lower levels of that action. Ensure that criteria within an action relate specifically to that action.

Are there criteria that might accidentally place a ceiling on a student's performance? Your quality criteria should feature language that allows a student to perform to their best ability on every skill. Are there criteria included that will challenge even your highest-ability student - that is, a stretch criteria? Your quality criteria should enable consistent judgment across occasions and multiple users. This means subjective terms such as appropriate, correct or excellent should not be used. Subjectivity allows for interpretation, and this can make the rubrics less useful to students and teachers. Draw on the verbs used in Bloom's Revised Taxonomy and SOLO Taxonomy. This ensures you focus on clear and objective verbs to direct student and teacher attention.

You should aim to feature different verbs at each level to signal shifts in sophistication. When the verb is at the start of a quality criterion, it clearly indicates the level of complexity required. You should not have more than four quality criteria for any action. Remove any additional levels by deleting the ones that might be difficult to distinguish.

To self-assess, look across your quality criteria and reflect on the thing that is improving as the students move through this action. Are the levels discernible? Or do they have too many shades of grey that will prevent you and other teachers from making consistent judgments? Do you need to shift your thinking from the product or task to the skills and knowledge the student is developing when describing levels of increasing sophistication? Do your criteria identify skills that a student can do, say, make or write? Read the criteria out aloud. Can you visualise a student that is doing that skill in front of you?

Step three asks you to consider the intended users and audience for the rubric. This will typically be yourself and other teachers. Students, parents or education support staff may also be involved in the use of the rubric as they may be asked to make judgments of student proficiency rather than the teacher. Students might also be required to self-assess their work using the rubric.

The rubric should contain only language that is matched to the typical knowledge and skills of the user. It should not contain teacher-specific language that is overly technical. Of course, subject-specific language, such as fair test in Science and protagonist in English, are, however, suitable.

A rubric should only use positive language. Even for the lowest level, it should describe something that the student can do rather than what a student is lacking or cannot do. When you read each quality criterion, check the phrasing and ask yourself, is this something I would teach my students? This will help you to check that the language is positive. For example, if the quality criterion states, "Student mumbles," when describing an oral presentation, you should recognise that you would not teach mumbling. Therefore, a statement phrased in this way should not be included in the rubric. It is OK, though, to use a low-level skill like addresses the class because you want to reward incremental success in learning.

To self-assess, look across your quality criteria and reflect on the focus of improvement as the students move through each action. Are the levels discernible, or are there too many shades of grey that will prevent you and other teachers from making consistent judgments? Is it possible that you need to shift your thinking from the product or task to the core skill to describe levels of increasing sophistication? Does your set of actions and criteria support consistent judgment? Would a different person use the rubrics in the same way?

From reviewing your quality criteria, can you find adjectives and adverbs? If so, try to cross them out and see if the steps still make sense. If crossing them out made the levels exactly the same, see if you can delete one criteria to maintain separation between the levels. Similarly, if you detect only very small and nuanced differences in criteria, try removing any additional criteria. This will ensure that the shifts in complexity are clear and will be consistently identified by people using the rubric.

Is the language used as simple as possible? Ask yourself if teachers outside of your learning domain would be able to pick up this set of rubrics and use them to evaluate student proficiency. Check for words that are not typically shared or taught with the students and remove them.

Do the criteria features skills that the student can do, say, make or write? Say the verb out loud. Can you visualise a student demonstrating that skill? Check for criteria and skills that you would not want to observe your student demonstrating, and remove them completely or try to phrase them in a positive way.

Now you are ready to write organising elements, write actions, and write quality criteria.

[More information available at vcaa.vic.gov.au. Authorised and published by the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority.]