

Self-Assessment Tools

Checklists, rubrics, and structures for reflection are all tools that can help students with self-assessment.

Checklists tell students what to include in their work

A checklist spells out what needs to be included in a piece of work. You might list, for example, the key elements of a fictional story, a plan for a science experiment, or the components of a commercial jingle.

Students drafting persuasive essays, as in the opening vignette, might consult a checklist to make sure they're including key elements of this type of writing:

- * An introduction that clearly states their position
- * At least three reasons or examples that support the position
- * Each reason developed with details and evidence
- * A conclusion that summarizes their argument

As students work on assignments, checklists serve as useful reminders of specific expectations and can help students stay focused and on task when working independently. Students can only be reminded of what they already know, so be sure your checklists contain items that you've already introduced to them. See two examples of checklists on the next page.

Persuasive Essay Checklist

Name: _____

My topic: _____

- I clearly state my position in the introduction.
- I give at least three reasons to support my position.
- I support each reason with details and evidence.
- I stay focused on the topic.
- My conclusion summarizes my argument.

Other things I want to make sure I do:

Notes: _____

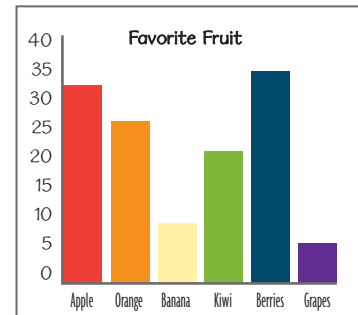
Making a Bar Graph

Name: _____

- My graph is clear and easy to read.
- My graph shows the data correctly.

Look at the sample graph. Does your graph have these elements?

- Title
- Scales
- Bars all the same width
- Labels



Rubrics help students assess how well they've met expectations

A rubric lists the criteria for good work. Rubrics might list levels of performance: for example, Ms. Johnson's rubric for the persuasive essay lesson might list the checklist elements and describe, for each one, what that element would look like in a piece of writing that was either advanced (level 4), proficient (level 3), approaching (level 2), or beginning (level 1). Rubrics might also state just the expectations for proficient work—level 3—with space for teachers to note ways in which a student's work falls short of or surpasses this standard. (See page 161 for examples.)

Whether you choose a multi-point or single-point format, your rubrics should provide students with important guidelines without constraining creativity. Criteria on a rubric should allow students the latitude to make choices in their learning and bring their own voice into their work.

Who creates the rubrics?

You might take sole responsibility for creating rubrics or you might involve students in the creation process. When students help create rubrics, they increase their understanding of lesson goals and expectations and are more invested in the lesson and in performing at a high standard.

Here are two tips for how to bring students' voices into creating rubrics:

- * **Ask general questions about the work:** “How will we know it’s ‘good’ work?” “What should we see if your ideas are working?” “What will make the assignment a success?”
- * **Ask questions that help students access prior knowledge:** “What have we learned about the elements of nonfiction texts?” The resulting list can be incorporated into both a checklist and a rubric.

Introducing rubrics

Careful introduction helps students use rubrics effectively. Consider this example from a second grade classroom:

Mr. Lin takes care from day one to create an atmosphere that supports a growth mindset. And it’s in that spirit that he introduces use of rubrics during a unit on scientific observation and note-taking. He lets students know that they’re going to begin working with rubrics to help them assess their own progress toward important goals.

He says, “You might think it’s only the teacher’s job to use a rubric to look at student work. But this year, it will also be your job to look at your own work and to think about how well you are meeting the goals of doing strong scientific observation and note-taking. You’ll also use our rubric to figure out what else you need to do to meet those goals.”

Mr. Lin begins by brainstorming with students the essential characteristics of scientific observation and note-taking. As students call out ideas he lists them on the interactive whiteboard: “You put down a lot of facts.” “It’s just what you see.” “It’s just about the thing you’re looking at.” He quickly uses this list to create a basic single-point rubric on the board, noting proficient performance expectations for observation and for note-taking.

He then says to the class, “Let’s put these ideas to work.” He gives students a page from a student’s observation journal from a previous year to practice using the rubric. Students work together in pairs to discover how the notes match the expectations on the rubric. Mr. Lin again takes ideas from students, asking them for evidence to support their claims.

Once students have shared a range of ideas, Mr. Lin tells them that the student who wrote the journal used feedback from a rubric to set a new goal of adding more detail to his notes—more facts describing what he saw. He finishes the discussion by asking students to chat with their elbow partner about one item on the rubric they want to pay attention to in their upcoming work.

Use rubrics to support a growth mindset

To keep the process of using rubrics focused on growth, present them as tools that will help students learn and move forward. Then take time to help students understand how to use each rubric. You could present a sample rubric, as Mr. Lin did, and have students analyze a sample of their own work.

You could also have students look at a variety of sample pieces and use a rubric to assess the work. When students have a chance to analyze examples with varying levels of quality, they can understand what “proficient” work looks like and get a concrete idea of what they can do to stretch themselves to achieve that level of work.

Reflection helps students make sense of both content and process

To be effective with self-assessment, students need to develop their ability to think critically about the work they’re doing. To help students learn and practice these critical thinking skills, you can build in time for reflection throughout their work block as well as during the closing segment of lessons. You can also use reflection along with checklists and rubrics. In the opening vignette, Ms. Johnson asks students to compare their drafts to the rubric and then reflect: “What is one piece of your draft that you think meets a level three or four? What is one thing you’d like to work on in revision?”

Persuasive Essay Rubric

Name: _____ Essay topic: _____

	4 - Advanced	3 - Proficient	2 - Approaching	1 - Beginning
Focus/topic/ opening	Strongly and clearly states a personal opinion. Introduces the main points of the opinion/argument.	Clearly names the personal opinion. Makes some reference to the main points of the opinion/argument.	Personal opinion is not clearly stated. Makes little or no reference to the main points of the opinion/argument.	Personal opinion is not easily understood. Makes no reference to the main points of the opinion/argument.
Support for position	Includes three or more reasons for the opinion and each reason is supported by evidence (facts, statistics, examples). The writer addresses potential reader concerns, biases, or arguments and has provided at least one counter-argument.	Includes three or more reasons for the opinion and each reason is supported by evidence (facts, statistics, examples).	Includes two reasons for the opinion and provides minimal evidence for each reason (facts, statistics, examples).	Includes one reason for the opinion but provides little evidence to support the reason.
Transitions	Uses a variety of transitions that clearly show how ideas are connected.	Transitions show how ideas are connected. Uses some variety in transitions.	Some transitions are used; connections between ideas are not clear.	Transitions are unclear or not present.
Closing paragraph	The conclusion leaves the reader clearly understanding the writer's opinion. Author clearly summarizes opinion/argument.	The conclusion leaves the reader understanding the writer's opinion. Author summarizes opinion/argument.	Author is not clear in summarizing opinion/argument.	There is no conclusion.
Grammar and spelling	Contains few if any errors.	Contains few errors and errors do not interfere with meaning.	Contains many errors and errors interfere with meaning.	Contains many errors that interfere with meaning and make essay illegible.

Persuasive Essay Rubric

Name: _____ Essay topic: _____

Concerns <i>Areas for improvement</i>	Criteria for Proficient Work	Advanced <i>Evidence of exceeding standards</i>
	Criteria #1: Focus/topic/opening Clearly names the personal opinion. Makes some reference to the main points of the opinion/argument.	
	Criteria #2: Support for position Includes three or more reasons for the opinion and each reason is supported by evidence (facts, statistics, examples).	
	Criteria #3: Transitions Transitions show how ideas are connected, and some variety of transitions are used.	
	Criteria #4: Closing paragraph The conclusion leaves the reader understanding the writer's opinion. Author summarizes opinion/argument.	
	Criteria #5: Grammar and spelling Contains few errors and errors do not interfere with meaning.	

Open-ended questions prompt reflective thinking

Open-ended questions that you ask during coaching and at the end of lessons are a great way to help students synthesize new information, think critically about their work, and identify new directions in learning.

- * Questions such as “What are some ways you figured that out?” and “What more would you like to learn about this?” prompt students to think about their own thinking.
- * Questions such as “How is this strategy helping you?” or “What about your work is (or is not) the way you wanted it to be?” help students reflect on progress and think about whether they need to change anything in their process.
- * Questions such as “What do you know?” “What don’t you know yet?” and “What do you want to know?” help students think critically about their learning.

Reflection formats provide structure for students’ thinking about their work

You can incorporate reflection into daily instruction through regular use of open-ended questions. You can also provide formats for more structured reflection that students can use anytime to reflect on goals and on work they’ve done to reach those goals. Following are three tools that help structure reflection.

Reflection sheets. Reflection sheets, which you can use as part of closing a lesson or unit, might include questions and prompts such as:

- * What am I learning from this assignment?
- * How am I meeting my goal for learning?

F A Q • Where does peer feedback fit?

If managed well, having students give each other feedback on work in progress is valuable and can increase their engagement with learning. Peer feedback works best in partnerships or small groups of three students. Using a checklist or rubric, students listen to or look at classmates’ work and provide specific feedback on what is going well and suggestions for improvement. Students incorporate this feedback as they continue their work.

Introduce peer feedback after you’ve established a positive classroom climate of trust and respect. Take the time to teach, model, and practice the various skills involved, such as how to give and receive both positive and negative feedback.

- * What do I enjoy about this assignment?
- * What am I finding hard or challenging about this assignment?
- * What was the most important thing I learned in doing this activity or assignment?
- * I am proud of _____.
- * My goal for next time is _____.

Reflection journals. Students can keep a daily or weekly journal to record reflections on their own learning, challenges, and accomplishments, in response to prompts that you provide. The prompts might include questions and statements similar to those on reflection sheets.

You might also make these prompts specific to a particular assignment, as Ms. Johnson did when she asked students to reflect on one strength in their essay and one thing they wanted to work on.

Online tools. Some teachers use online tools such as blogs or shared documents as a way for students to record their reflections. These can be set up to be private between the student and teacher or shared with the classroom community.

Structures That Support Silent Reflection

Think to Yourself

The teacher poses a focus question and students silently answer the question to themselves.

Be sure to give students enough time (a minute or two) to think of an answer. You could ask students to give you a thumbs-up when they've got an answer.

Notes:

Thumb Gauge

This is a quick reflection. The teacher poses a focus question such as "Do you think your choice helped you with your work today?" or "How well were you able to follow our class rules as you worked today?" Students respond with thumbs up ("yes" or "very well"), thumbs to the side ("sort of" or "not sure"), or thumbs down ("no" or "not very well").

Student responses can be public, with thumbs visible to all, or private, with thumbs held close to the body.

Notes:

Fist to Five

This is another quick reflection similar to the Thumb Gauge. The teacher poses a question such as "How well do you think you were able to work independently today?" or "How did you like the work you did today?" Students respond by holding up zero to five fingers. Zero (a fist) means "not at all." Five means "very well." As with Thumb Gauge, this can be done privately with hands held close to the body.

Notes:

Journaling

The teacher poses a focus question and students respond in writing. The writing can be brief (a sentence) or more complex (a paragraph or a letter to themselves). Young students can create a sketch or drawing as a response to a reflection question.

Notes:

Self-Evaluation

Teachers select criteria they want students to think about and ask them to communicate how well they met the criteria related to academic goals, social skills, or both. Formats for self-evaluation include rating scales, rubrics, or scoring sheets. The criteria can be established by the teacher, either alone or in discussion with students, or can be based on curriculum frameworks or standards. Self-evaluation is most appropriate when choice activities demonstrate mastery of knowledge or skills.

Notes:

Agree, Disagree

Divide the classroom in half with an imaginary line, or designate two separate places in the room that students can move to. Designate one side or space for students who agree and the other for students who disagree. The teacher says aloud a statement about the Academic Choice lesson, for example, "I learned something new today from the work I did" or "I wish I had more time today to work (or practice)." Students then move to the area of the room that represents their response to the statement. The process can be continued for several rounds.

Notes:

Structures That Support Reflecting With a Partner

To reflect with a partner, students pair up and each responds to a focus question. Depending on students' needs and abilities, teachers can assign partners or allow students to choose partners. They can also use one of the following structures to encourage talking with a variety of partners.

Inside, Outside Circles

Students count off by twos. The ones stand and form an inner circle, facing outward. The twos stand and each faces a one, creating the outer circle. The teacher asks a focus question or poses a statement for discussion, for example, "What's one thing you like about your work today?" Each partner has a brief, teacher-designated amount of time to respond to the question. At the end of the time, the teacher signals for quiet attention and directs the outside circle to take a step to the right to face a new partner. The teacher then asks a new focus question. This process repeats several times.

Notes:

Mix and Mingle to Music

The teacher plays some music and students walk around the classroom. When the music stops, students quickly find a partner. The teacher poses a question for reflection and partners take turns answering. After a few minutes, the teacher signals for quiet attention and begins to play music again. Students walk about the classroom until the music stops and then find new partners. The process repeats several times.

To help students talk with a range of classmates, challenge them to partner up with students they don't usually talk with.

Notes:

Swap Meet

This reflection begins with students making notes about information, techniques, or strategies they've learned during the lesson. They can do this individually or as part of a small group. They then mingle around the classroom, forming quick partnerships to share ideas. Students continue to find new partners and share ideas for a set amount of time.

To help keep things focused, you could provide a note-taking sheet that students fill out as they mingle and chat—or students could simply jot ideas on a notecard or sticky note.

Notes:

Structures That Support Sharing With a Group

Maître d'

The teacher plays the role of a maître d' at a restaurant and calls out tables for a certain number of customers, such as "Tables for three." Students then form groups of that number. Once groups are formed, the teacher gives a topic or asks a question to prompt reflection. Each student in the small group takes a turn to respond and share his or her answer. After a designated time, the teacher calls out a different table grouping. Students quickly reform into groups of that number and the teacher poses a new reflection question or topic.

Notes:

Two–Four–Eight

Students pair up and respond to a focus question. After each partner has a chance to share, pairs join another pair to form groups of four. Students then share their answers from the previous pairing or respond to a new question. Foursomes then join, creating groups of eight, and responses are shared one more time.

If needed, provide a structure to ensure that all voices are heard (for example, students go around a small group clockwise with each person saying one thing).

Notes:

Four Corners

The teacher indicates four corners or areas of the room that students can move to in response to a statement or question. For example, if the statement is “I am excited to make a different choice next time,” the areas might represent “strongly agree,” “agree,” “disagree,” and “strongly disagree.”

The teacher makes the statement (or poses a question) and students go to the area of their choice. Once in that area, students discuss their response.

Before students move, the teacher lets them know whether they’ll discuss their response with one other person or with everyone who chose the same area.

Notes:

Around-the-Circle Sharing

Students gather in a circle. The teacher asks a focus question and each student takes a turn briefly responding to the question. Before using this structure, the teacher should first be sure to model giving a focused, brief response. Extra support can be provided by using a sentence stem (“I did _____ because _____”).

Notes:

Snowball

Each student takes a piece of paper and writes a short response to a focus question. They do not need to write their names on the paper. After writing, the students crumple their paper into a “snowball.” Students gather in a standing circle and, on the teacher’s signal, toss their snowballs onto the floor in the center of the circle. They then pick up a snowball closest to them. Taking turns, everyone reads aloud the snowball they chose. The teacher can close with a few reflection prompts, such as “What are some ideas you heard?” or “What stood out to you as you listened to these ideas?”

Notes:

Structures That Support Reflecting On a Work Product

Museum Walk

Students walk quietly around the room observing the work their classmates have placed on display. The teacher can give a focus for students to think about as they look at one another's work, such as "See how many different ways we found to show the number 12." The walk may conclude with a few students offering questions and comments for anyone in the group or with some students sharing their responses to the focus question.

Notes:

Simultaneous Display

Students sit in a circle and all those who wish to share their work hold it up or place it on the floor in front of them. The teacher provides a focus, such as looking for new ideas, to guide the group in purposeful observation. This structure enables everyone to have their work seen and to see and gather ideas for future work.

Notes:

Individual Presentations of Work

Everyone gathers in a circle and individual students present their work—or work-in-progress—to the whole class in what is sometimes called a representing meeting. These meetings might be as brief as ten minutes or, for longer Academic Choice projects, might extend over several sessions so everyone has an opportunity to present and share. To help keep everyone focused and the meetings an appropriate length of time, only three to five students usually share their work at each meeting. Teachers lengthen or shorten the amount of time for each meeting depending on students' ages and skills.

For these meetings to be successful, it's important to teach and practice how to make a clear, brief presentation and respond to a focus question. Listeners need to learn how to listen thoughtfully and formulate useful and respectful questions and comments.

Although representing meetings can be the only form of reflection for a given Academic Choice lesson, they often happen in conjunction with individual reflection or with partner sharing.

Notes:

Sample Focus Questions for Reflection

- What is a new fact you learned about _____ from your work?
- How did your choice help you practice and learn more about _____?
- What is something you now know about _____ that you didn't before our work session?
- What is something else you want to learn about _____?
- How did your choice of content help you understand/learn the process?
- Has your learning changed your view/opinion on _____?
- What is a piece of information about _____ that you feel every _____ grader should know?
- What would you do differently if you could do this work again?
- What is one thing that surprised you about your work?
- What was one problem you had while you were working? How did you solve it?
- What is one thing you like about your work?
- What's one way we/you followed a class rule while we/you were working?
- "A Glow and a Grow"—What's one thing you feel proud of or like about your work? What's one thing you want to try or do differently next time?