

Self-
Assessment
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How many of us can easily answer the following questions regarding any kind of our knowledge: *Where am I and what do I know? Where do I want to go? How can I get there? What else do I need to know?* This can be a bit of a problem in our society because we are not used to evaluating and assessing our own work and achievements due to our cultural context. We often need someone else to tell us how well we did something. We also tend to be too much critical of ourselves because we do not want to be thought of as immodest. If we think of learning as a never-ending process then the students we teach should be aware of that. There is a way to involve our students, to make them more aware, active and responsible for the results of their work, and to motivate them at the same time. This can be done by introducing self-assessment into their work, by practising it and making it a habit.

Self-assessment is asking students to correct or assess their own work, performance, effort or progress. It should be a built-in part of English language teaching and each teacher should decide how often they want to do it. If we want to make the best of it, it can be done in L1 and in the form of a questionnaire. It is very important to make clear that there is no right or wrong answer. There is a number of ways how to do that.

With young learners a teacher can ask students to have a kind of portfolio, a worksheet with their drawings, illustrations and other work collected over a period of time. They can be asked to choose one of their drawings and to write in L1 what they have learned, or to write what they have liked or enjoyed most and briefly explain why.

With beginners, self-assessment can be used as one of the means for raising motivation. With questions like:

Why do you learn English?

- *I want to travel to different countries and be able to communicate*
- *I want to be able to watch English films and TV programmes and listen to English songs*
- *I want to read comic books, magazines and newspapers in English*
- *I want to study abroad*
- *I want to get a good job*
- *My parents want me to learn English*
- ...

you can give your students some ideas why English is important and learned all over the world and find out about their reasons for learning it as well.

On all other levels, by using self-assessment in the classroom you can easily diagnose problems and difficulties your students may have. For example:

Which of these things do you find most difficult in your English Classes?

- *listening to cassettes*
- *reading texts*
- *doing grammar exercises*
- *speaking in English*
- *writing compositions*
- *doing tests*
- *other*

This can be done for each skill separately, so as to identify weak areas. You can also rephrase this question and find out which of these activities your students like or dislike and reorganize the objectives of your course or syllabus.

Self-assessment can be done as a five-minute writing 'storm' at the end of the lesson. Tell your students that they have five minutes to write: *What I might do to make my learning better*, *The best/worst thing in the lesson today* or *Today I have learned...* and it will focus students' minds and encourage them to think about the classes from different perspective.

Self-assessment can also be used as one of the tools of diagnostic tests with mixed ability classes. In this way you may find out about the abilities and level of your learners and if you have no way of regrouping them (in secondary schools, for example) think of the way to organize your classes in the best possible way. In private language schools it can be a part of a placement test.

If you work with proficient students, English can be used and learners can be asked to keep reflective diaries. These can be very detailed and include a lot of information, such as what went on in class, what students feel they have learned or what problems they have had and how they are going to overcome them. But they may be somewhat impractical mainly due to restrictions of time. Therefore it is perhaps better for diaries to be simple and short and students can be asked to list the activities they enjoyed and the problems they had. In this way, students are given a rough record of the week's classes that they can refer to when thinking about their own progress.

You can use self-assessment even when testing. Doing a self-correction test, a teacher administers a test, collects and corrects it, but does not write anything on the test itself, except in his/her own list or register. Students take the test, find the key in groups, redo it in groups again and report to the class. Finally, each student corrects his/her test, marks it and returns to the teacher who only then gives the final mark. Of course, this can be done once or twice a school year, not every time you test your students.

At the end of semester or school year, you can just talk to your students before giving them a final mark and ask them to think for some time and honestly grade and assess their progress over that period of time. Or you can ask them to give themselves a mark out of ten for each skill, effort, homework, etc. This makes them analyse and see how they have worked and what they have learned during a certain period of time. When I did this with my students. most of my straight 5s told me that they thought they deserved a mark between 4 and 5. So, sometimes they are even stricter than we are.

Using self-assessment in the classroom should make our work easier, more objective and interesting. It will lessen the possibility of our making mistakes when assessing, and make us less responsible for our students' results. On the other hand, our students deserve a chance to participate in something they are an essential part of and tell us what they feel they do or do not know.