Assessment and feedback

Overall approach to assessment and feedback

The Amplify ELA program focuses on helping teachers meet the requirements and expectations of the state, district, school, and parents as part of a highly functional, instructional feedback loop. Each formative assessment has been designed to give teachers data that will make them more powerful in the classroom. They will have a greater impact as they see patterns developing, and will use their time and energy most efficiently to get the most out of each student. The summative assessments ensure that students are making adequate progress at key points in the year and that all parties can be kept informed about students' status. To see when these formative and summative assessments should take place throughout each grade, refer to the pacing guide in Section 1, Planning your year. Amplify ELA also provides a Gradebook and models for calculating grades that enable each school and district to have maximum flexibility in their communication with students and parents.

This assessment program includes (described in more detail below)**:**

1. **A system for providing regular feedback on written work**
2. **Formative assessments**
   - Writing Habits: Productivity (automated)
     —Assessment, Report, Data, Teacher Response
   - Reading Comprehension (automated)
     —Assessment, Report, Data, Teacher Response
   - Vocabulary (automated)
     —Assessment, Report, Data, Teacher Response
   - Writing Skills: Focus, Use of Evidence, Conventions (partially autoscored)
     —Assessment, Report, Data, Teacher Response
   - Writing Habits: Sharing, Responding (paper tracking)
     —Assessment, Report, Data, Teacher Response
3. **Summative assessments**
   - Beacon Benchmark Assessments
     —Reading
     —Writing
   - Essays
4. **Grading and Gradebook**
   - Grading Lesson Activities
   - The Gradebook
   - Marking Period Grading Guide
5. **Looking-at-Student-Work Protocol (LASW)**
6. **Rubrics and student work samples, found in Section 4**

Feedback and Revision Assignments

The Amplify ELA approach to feedback and Revision Assignments

When ELA teachers think about assessing student work, they often cringe a little. Teachers spend an enormous amount of time writing supportive comments, correcting students' work, pointing out three issues to work on, or just one—and students most often ignore the painstaking work their teachers have put in. Even when students do take the time to look at the teacher's feedback, those students most often don't show, in their next piece, that they have really taken it in and improved their writing as a result. Many teachers try to reinforce written comments with oral conferences, but struggle to keep up with the pace required to reach every student. After decades of working with ELA teachers, Amplify ELA knows that feedback on written work is the single biggest pain point for these teachers.

So, before learning more about the extensive Amplify ELA assessment program, take some time to understand how the curriculum is set up to help teachers establish an effective feedback loop based on student writing that will maximize the impact of every comment you write, every over-the-shoulder conference you give, and every classroom-sharing session you facilitate. The Amplify ELA assessment program will produce a lot of student work, a lot of data, and lot of useful suggestions about how to analyze that data and respond. But teachers need a plan for providing feedback to students about this work; otherwise, the papers, real or electronic, start to stack up.

The power of feedback embedded within the curriculum

Writing is a skill of communication, so students learn an enormous amount about whether or not their writing is communicating effectively. Amplify ELA knows, from decades of classroom testing, that the more information students get about how a piece of writing is communicating to an authentic audience, the more motivated they will be to write, and the more quickly they will make progress in the skills they are practicing. Thankfully, the teacher does not bear the burden of providing all of this feedback in written comments. In fact, while written comments are a key part of feedback on student work, they are only one part of a larger system that includes daily opportunities for students to find out whether or not their efforts at producing writing are having the intended impact.

Embedded within the curriculum are the following key feedback tools that ensure students get frequent and effective feedback from their teachers and peers.

Over-the-shoulder conferences (OTSCs) allow the teacher to provide "in the moment" feedback to students as they work through a challenging activity or complete a writing prompt.

Sharing is an essential part of the Amplify ELA writing routine. Every time the students write for an authentic audience, sitting for 10-15 minutes and producing 120-140 words to develop a specific idea about a text, they know that they are trying to communicate something to real people—not just produce words on a page to match a rubric. Significantly, this sharing protocol has been refined over decades in a diverse group of middle school classrooms to make the most of middle school students' energy and attention to their peers and to reduce the risk of negative experiences.

Spotlight is a digital app within the Amplify ELA platform that enables the teacher to easily highlight strong examples of student work and project these excerpts to use for instruction—or simply for student appreciation. The app is integrated into the platform so that while teachers are looking at student work for grading or to write comments, they can simply copy and paste a few sentences into the Spotlight app and name the "wall" that can easily be projected.

Revision Assignments ask students to do a short piece of differentiated revision on one of their pieces of writing. Students practice a particular skill at the same time as they practice the skill of revising itself, trying to improve a short piece of writing in a small, manageable way, outside of the complexities of extended essay writing.

Written comments allow students to have the teacher's recorded feedback about specific language in a piece of writing where the student used a skill effectively. These short, targeted comments both provide specific feedback on that piece of writing and a small model to guide future writing.

Good feedback

Students need to know the small ways in which they are increasing their writing power and control so they can continue on this path. In order to gain this control, they need to learn the names for the new skills they are learning, understand when the time is right to use these skills, and be able to articulate the ways their writing is improving. Vague praise can motivate students for a while, but it doesn't keep them going when they face more difficult learning challenges and practice new skills.

Whether a teacher is conducting a quick OTSC or asking students to respond to a peer's writing during Sharing, the specifics of the feedback can be the difference between feedback that acts as a pat on the back and feedback that empowers students to realize and understand the impact of their writing decisions. Below, see how to provide effective feedback in the context of each of the Amplify ELA feedback tools listed above.

Over-the-shoulder conferences (OTSCs)

OTSCs give the teacher the opportunity to work closely with individual students, while keeping the rest of the class running smoothly. Instead of lining up kids at the teacher's desk or meeting them outside class for a longer sit-down, OTSCs allow the teacher to circulate around the room while the students are writing, working independently or working in pairs. The teacher will give individual students customized feedback that is bite-sized, encouraging, and immediately actionable. Because OTSCs are meant to be quick, typically lasting less than a minute, the teacher can reach 10 or 12 students during a single in-class writing period, and can reach all students every week. All students—those who are demonstrating a skill and those who are struggling with a skill—benefit from feedback, so all students should get OTSCs.

Steps for using OTSCs

1. Note the sample OTSCs: Whenever the curriculum presents students with a writing prompt, the digital program will show a ⟩ symbol. The teacher clicks on this symbol and sees what to look for as the students are writing. When he or she taps on each of these sort of behaviors or kinds of writing, the teacher will see suggestions for things to do or say to help adjust a student's writing or simply push him or her to dig more deeply.

2. Don't try to read the whole thing: Once students have started writing, the teacher quietly approaches one student and looks over his or her shoulder to see what has been written thus far. The teacher silently reads a section of the writing to quickly assess the student's work with the targeted skill. It is not necessary to start at the beginning or read the entire piece.

3. Find something you like: The teacher points to a place in the student's writing that catches his or her attention or shows an effective use of the skill the students are practicing. The teacher whispers a sentence or two about what he or she noticed and, if needed, provides a piece of quick, specific instruction for that student. The teacher can answer the student's questions, but should not get into a long conversation.

4. Move on quickly and strategically: The teacher moves on to another student, spreading the conferences around the room based on what he or she sees in the students' writing, and on which students are most in need of feedback in order to make progress. By the time students have completed the "Get Started" sub-unit, very few students should be raising hands because they are stuck, and the teacher should instead be reacting to what he or she sees in the students' work.

5. Check back if you gave a student something to do: The teacher circles back to the students with whom he or she has already conferenced and checks on what they have done in response to the comments.

How to use sample OTSCs

• The sample OTSCs in the program itself, found when one taps on the ⟩ icon during Writing Prompts and other activities, describe likely scenarios that come up when students answer that particular question within that particular text—often anticipating misconceptions or ways in which students may get stuck with a piece of language. These instances are only suggestions to help the teacher understand the sorts of things to look for in the students' work and in the text itself—and the sorts of responses that are helpful. Teachers should see these specific suggestions as examples of general things that work.

• Below, are examples of OTSCs by skill. Note that teachers often find places in the writing where the students are using a skill well—that is the most effective OTSC. If the teacher can't find an example of the student using a skill well, the teacher can offer the student a reminder of the skill he or she should be practicing, and/or provide a student with direct instructions to practice the skill in that moment.

Sample over-the-shoulder conferences by skill

Focus	Showing	Use of Evidence	Conventions
Now I feel like I know just about everything there is to know about feeding a carnivorous plant! Your sharp focus made that happen. How many possible moments do you have here? (Three.) Right. Remember, your job is to choose just one moment and focus on it. That's the skill we're working on right now.	You showed me how hot it was when you wrote about sweat dripping off the tip of your nose. The description helps me see it. You mention several times that it was a ridiculously cold day. Write two or three sentences that show the reader just how cold it was. Use details and descriptions to really convince me that it was that cold. Raise your hand and call me over when you finish.	Fantastic! You quoted the exact words from a passage in the book to show how hysterical that moment was. It's convincing. It's clear that you believe the character was really mad, but remember to include textual details or a quote from this scene in the book as evidence to support your idea. I love the point you're making here about how much the narrator is in awe of the older boy. Now, focus on this passage here, and write three more sentences that explain what you see happening at this moment in the book. When you've written them, let me know, and I'll come back.	Varying sentence styles the way you do right here keeps me on my toes and makes it fun for me to read. Remember that a complete sentence has a subject and a predicate. This is a sentence fragment. Rewrite this sentence two different ways so that both ways include a subject and predicate. Circle the one you like best. I'll swing back shortly to see them.

Sharing

Sharing works best when students know that the risk they took to read their writing will be rewarded with feedback about specific words and phrases that worked. Eye contact, smiles, and supportive, targeted responses make it clear to students that their classmates are paying close, careful attention. When students listen carefully and respond with specific, skill-related comments, they are also strengthening their ability to read and analyze text. Listening and responding during Sharing is good practice for the close reading and textual analysis students will perform when writing responses to fiction and non-fiction.

Steps for sharing

1. It is ideal for the teacher to move directly into Sharing after students complete the Writing Prompt, but if the lesson timing does not work out, make sure to pick up the Sharing in the next day's instruction.

2. The teacher calls on a reader to share a piece of writing loudly and clearly, and makes sure everyone can see the reader. (It is nice if students can sit in a circle, but not necessary.)

3. Each reader calls on 2-3 students for their responses, and encourages students to use the Response Starters they see on their device, especially in the beginning of the year. (The teacher will need to remind students to call on each other at first.)

4. The teacher asks follow-up questions of students who are responding to ensure that responses are specific.

5. The teacher chooses another reader and repeats the process, allowing at least two students to share every day.

6. The teacher generally cuts off Sharing after 5-10 minutes, while students are still really enjoying it; they should look forward to doing it again.

Tips for sharing

- Teachers should establish clear, consistent expectations that enable students to trust that a Sharing session will never turn into a public critique or, worse, an opportunity for unkindness.
- Teachers can post the Rules for Sharing poster, review it with students, and enforce the rules, cutting off any student before he or she has a chance to do any damage.
- Teachers can encourage students to use the Response Starters that they see on their devices to ensure they always give positive, specific, and skill-related responses to their peers. As students show they have the idea, teachers can encourage them to find their own ways of phrasing their observations.
- In cases in which students are emotionally troubled, the teacher can scaffold the Sharing session further by first asking students to write their responses on a piece of paper, then the teacher can read it out loud. At the next stage, the student shows the teacher the response written on paper and the student can read it himself or herself, building up trust until the Sharing session runs with full student participation.

Sample sharing responses

Cheery, friendly, but vague and not useful to the writer	Positive, specific responses about the impact of a piece
• Your entry was really cool. • Yeah, that's awesome how you used all those long sentences. • I liked the descriptive words in your entry. • Your piece was really funny.	• When you described his face as "tomato red," I could really picture that. • I liked when you used the word "scrambled" to describe getting ready in the morning because that shows me how panicked you were when you overslept. • You used a quote: "Mr Coombes was standing in the middle of it, dominating everything." This convinced me that he made the kids feel small. • I laughed when you described Tom's new way of being tricky, "pretending to pretend that he wanted to get caught."

Move students from making those comments in the left column to comments in the right column

Very few students will start out responding to writing with comments like the ones in the right-hand column. However, students need these sorts of comments in order to understand exactly which words they wrote reached out and grabbed the audience. In any case, over time, general praise wears off and will not serve to motivate students. For the first weeks of Sharing, the teacher has to patiently push students to be more specific. After students provide the friendly but vague comments like the ones on the left, the teacher follows up by asking, "What is an example of a descriptive word that you liked?" Or, "Which words did you hear that made you laugh?" The student who read may even have to read a part of his or her piece again in order for students to listen and capture specific language. The teacher may model specific and effective responses about the impact of a piece during Sharing sessions, during the use of the Spotlight app described below and, of course, with his or her own oral and written feedback.

Spotlight

The teacher uses the Spotlight app to create and project a wall of strong student excerpts. Spotlight allows the teacher to compare two pieces of writing side by side, shine the spotlight on one piece of writing, annotate the excerpts, and/or create a slide show of many excerpts. By posting brief examples of students' effective use of skills, teachers give their students an easy, powerful way to learn from and motivate each other. Students pay close attention when they see their own words used as exemplars and are more invested in the lesson when the words belong to a classmate.

Steps for using Spotlight

1. The use of Spotlight in instruction is built into the early lessons of the first unit. The day before those lessons occur, teachers will find an icon at the end of the lesson's activities called "Before Next Lesson," which will alert the teacher of the need to create a Spotlight wall for an upcoming lesson.

2. After the early weeks of lessons, Amplify ELA recommends that teachers use Spotlight walls to greet students as they walk into the classroom the day after they complete a Writing Prompt. Something that may have taken a teacher 15 minutes or more in the past to set up with paper now takes only a minute once the teacher is used to the app. Spotlight walls are also much more visually compelling and can become part of the regular classroom routine.

3. The teacher selects Spotlights during the regular course of reading student work and writing comments or scoring it. As the teacher finds strong examples of the skill being taught, he or she copies and pastes it onto the wall and Spotlight formats it. The excerpt should be bite-sized—300 words or fewer—so that you can Spotlight at least 2-3 students a day with a big font that is easy to read quickly.

4. Like an editor preparing a piece for publication, the teacher edits the excerpts so they are free of spelling and grammar errors, but leaves a student's quirky sentence structure so that students get a sense of the different voices and perspectives coming through every day.

5. The teacher lets the students discover the excerpts projected as they walk into class; they are delighted and surprised when they see which of their classmates happen to be spotlighted on a given day. If the teacher chooses to use the excerpts to review a skill, he or she should approach the writing in the way he or she would approach any text—and let the students closely read the language, describing what they see and what meaning they make of it.

6. Spotlight keeps track of which students have been spotlighted—and how long it has been since a student has been spotlighted to encourage teachers to find something within each student's writing to spotlight on a regular basis. This sort of distributed public feedback serves to strengthen the writing community, reinforcing in concrete ways that every student has something to contribute.

Revision Assignments

Revision Assignments (RAs) ask students to practice a skill by revising a short passage of their own writing outside of the context of drafting an essay and producing a polished piece of writing.

Revision Assignments have two goals.

1. Students gain practice in a particular skill by trying to use this skill to express something that matters to the student, rather than in drills that ask students to practice with a model piece of writing that the student doesn't care about. When the student practices this skill with writing that he or she cares about, and is trying to make more clear or powerful, he or she notices the impact of the skill on his or her language and ability to communicate.

    The teacher checks to see whether or not the student showed an understanding of the skill, based on how the student has made the revision: For example, he or she combines the sentences grammatically, writes additional sentences about the same idea, and finds more relevant evidence to support the claim.

2. Students gain practice in the skill of revision itself. Most students—most people, actually— dread revising work. It is most often done in high-stakes situations based on the assumption that the original work is necessarily flawed and needs to be fixed. Students need to learn how revision is actually an experimental process that is surprising and worth their time.

Amplify ELA invented the Revision Assignment to enable students to practice revision in an experimental state of mind. Students simply apply a skill to their writing, step back, and notice whether or not this instance of practicing this skill made the piece better or not.

Over time, a teacher can tell if a student is getting good at the skill of revision when:

1. The student is very comfortable and even excited about changing his or her writing (and doesn't get defensive or tired at the thought of it).

2. The student has the discernment to tell when a revision has improved a piece of writing and when it has not (and, thus, when working on a longer project, keeps working on a piece until he or she finds the right revisions and making the right improvements).

3. The student translates these skills into the essay-writing process because he or she has many ideas about how any piece of writing could be changed (and doesn't have to wait for the teacher's directions).

Steps for using Revision Assignments

1. The "Before Next" section at the end of a lesson alerts the teacher to an RA in an upcoming lesson.
2. The teacher highlights a small section in each student's writing where that student could further practice the targeted skill.
3. During class, the teacher gives students 12-15 minutes for revising, ensuring students have the needed time to experiment and check their work.
4. The teacher checks the completed Revision Assignments to make sure students have followed directions and to assess whether they demonstrated an understanding of the targeted skill.

Writing comments on student work

All of the tools described above provide students with specific, ongoing daily feedback so that the teacher does not need to write extensive written comments on every piece of student work. Students are producing about two pieces of writing a week and most teachers would drop from exhaustion trying to keep up with that pace.

But students do benefit from seeing written comments on their work—particularly in-line comments on a specific part of the piece—that show them that the teacher took the time to consider a specific piece of writing, that some part of the writing stood out, got the teacher's attention.

When to comment

Amplify ELA lessons start students writing on the first day of class. The students' experiences in the first lesson itself should set up students with plenty to write about and strong motivation to turn out some sentences. But every student is going to write with some hesitation while wondering how his or her teacher will treat the work. When your students receive your first set of in-line comments, which show you have found something to enjoy in each of their written pieces, you will see a boost of energy in the writing output.

Receiving regular written comments convinces students that the teacher is interested in what they have to say and motivates students to continue to apply their best efforts to regular writing. Written comments also teach students about the impact their writing choices have on the reader. If students do not receive written comments after 2-3 weeks of lessons, we notice a fall off in production. Writing comments more often than every two weeks for certain students is one way to boost unproductive students' output.

Steps for writing comments

1. Depending on his or her work style, the teacher should plan to comment often enough that every student receives a comment at least once every 10 lessons.
2. To comment, a teacher opens the student's work, finds a place in the work where the student shows strength, and highlights it. This way, the student will see exactly which words got the teacher's attention.
3. The teacher then writes a comment (see Tips below) which he or she can choose to send right then or hold until the teacher has commented on all of the students' work.
4. The teacher should zero in on just one or at most two moments in the student's work, choosing the skill being practiced in class, or, if the prompt asked the student to integrate skills, on the writing skill next in the hierarchy (see the Skills section about the order in which students should work on their writing skills).
5. Because the teacher is neither commenting on the overall effectiveness of the whole piece, nor making sure to catch the student's errors, the teacher should be able to spend no more 2-3 minutes commenting on each student's work to ensure that he or she gets to all students at least once every two weeks.

Tips for effective comments

Amplify has studied the impact of teacher comments over two decades to see which sorts of comments have the greatest impact on students' motivation and skill development and finds that comments are most effective when they:

- Point to particular parts of a student's piece rather than say something about the overall impact of the piece as a whole.
- Describe what the student has done with language that got you to stop and comment (like you would if you were close reading a text).
- Name the skill the student is using, if applicable (e.g., catching the student writing in complete sentences, or highlighting an example of framing a quotation, even if it could be better).
- Explain how the student's use of language had a personal impact. For example, it made the teacher laugh, clarified a point, helped show a character' point of view, or left the teacher a little confused.
- Are generally upbeat—but not full of praise. The teacher wants the student to focus on what sort of impact he or she is having with the writing, rather than on whether or not he or she has pleased the teacher.

Sample written comments

The following sample comments provide models that can be used verbatim or as a model for a teacher's own comments. Teachers should seek to write even shorter comments than what is presented below; sometimes, words are added to make the context of the comment clear. But, generally, students respond most readily to the shortest, most specific comments.

Focus	
The student is focused on a moment (either in the text or from his or her experience): By breaking the action in this moment into much smaller pieces, you help me experience it with you—and see that it changes your opinion. The way you fully describe this passage in the text shows me exactly what you do and don't understand about it.	**The student is focused on the same topic, claim, or idea throughout the "page" of writing:** I can see here how your evidence helps introduce your claim that the narrator is not sane. And then, the second time, you support your claim with evidence and you explain more about what you mean by "not sane."

Showing

The student uses sensory details to bring the reader into the scene:
These sound words help me hear exactly what was happening. Yum! Your description of the taste actually made my stomach growl.

These details show how creepy that place was. Glad I'm not there.

Conventions

In a piece full of fragments and run-ons, you find a complete sentence and show the student the impact.

Right here, because you have written in a complete sentence and finished your idea, I can understand what you mean about Tom's attitude.

You find a section that, but for some missing punctuation, could be quite clear.

I've had to read this a few times and I'm still not sure if I'm understanding what you mean here—but it seems like you are getting to your main point. Almost.

Use of Evidence

The student describes what he or she notices in the text:

When you note that he could still describe "the red poppies" even though he was on a battlefield, you show how hopeful he remains.

Using the word "shocking" to describe this quote made me think again about his treatment.

When you use the verb_____, it gets me to look more precisely at what Frederick Douglass did at that time.

This strong verb shows me how powerful the pressure was on _____ (this character).

These details (highlight a few) help me see the character's inner conflict.

The student has selected the "just right" evidence to support his or her idea:

Quoting these two phrases, "all of them" and "he alone," from the paragraph, illustrates your idea that he stands apart.

This quote is a convincing way to show Walter's confidence in his ability to succeed.

That direct quote about nothing "moving his iron heart" shows me the cruelty of slavery.

This (highlight the spot in the writing) shows me that you see the difference between what the scientists knew and didn't know, and what the author explains to us about modern science.

The student shows that he or she understands the context of the text:

Good reminder that these doctors had no access to antibiotics. It helps me understand why they "accepted death as a daily partner in their work."

The student's claim or idea about the text resonates with the teacher. Be careful with these sorts of comments; they need to be very specific so that students are still getting feedback about the impact of the writing—not generalized feedback that they have pleased you:

Ha! It probably is unusual for a little brother to "emerge victorious in every wrestling match."

I agree this word describes exactly how Walter is acting.

The student has perfectly punctuated a direct quote (maybe after a few weeks of trying): Here, now finally, I don't have to wonder which words are yours and which words are the author's!

The student frames a direct quote with his or her own explanation of the text:
This direct quote followed by your explanation helps me see why you selected this piece of dialogue instead of the one above it.

Logical structure

The student has considered how to structure his or her writing and has made a strong choice:
This clear transition helps me follow the point you are making about the shift in Ruth's mood.
This introductory sentence gives me a heads up that this is not going to be a typical essay.

Commenting on Revision Assignments

The student's Revision Assignment shows an improved use of the skill he or she was assigned to practice:

By adding this (highlight) piece of evidence about Phineas's state of mind, you show that his brain might now be similar to an adolescent's.

When I first read this, I thought you were jumping back and forth between a couple of ideas. But combining these sentences makes me see how they are related to explaining one particular metaphor that Hughes uses.

Formative assessments and reporting

The Amplify ELA formative assessments are designed so that teachers can see patterns in students' skill development that enable them to spot problems, as well as adjust instruction to accelerate students' development. The formative assessments help teachers determine whether a student has attained a skill and decide which skill should be targeted when there are opportunities for differentiation. The assessments are themselves part of explicit, sequential, and systematic instruction. These formative assessments track a set of skills that are more narrowly defined than the standards themselves, and so show up much more regularly than the standards-based benchmark assessments; in some cases, almost daily.

For each of the formative assessments in the Amplify ELA program, find descriptions of:

- **The Skill:** a quick reminder of the skill being assessed
- **The Assessment:** how does the program check students' capacity
- **The Report:** the method for tracking student performance
- **The Data:** interpreting the results
- **Teacher Response:** directions for taking action in response to the data

A note about the Teacher Response: The Amplify program tries to direct teachers to intervene at moments when their actions will have the greatest impact. The lessons themselves have been sequenced and designed so that the teacher will have moments to note progress or lack of it and have time to intervene if necessary and move ahead or not. More information about the resources found in the Amplify program that enable the teacher to differentiate instruction is found in the section that follows. In general, the teacher will use the data from these formative assessments to:

- Make informed decisions about how to maximize his or her instructional time for the whole class— choosing to extend or cut short various activities.
- Differentiate his or her instruction.
- Create action plans to provide extra support for designated students.
- Share data with peers and administrators about growth in his or her classroom.

Formative assessment: writing habits: productivity

The skill:

The most important and first prerequisite of writing skill is the habit of producing writing. No one will become a better writer unless he or she practices a lot. Most teachers report lack of productivity as their number one frustration with student writing. And, frankly, it is impossible to really be sure if students' have mastered a skill if they are only producing a few sentences. So, as the students level of productivity decreases, they also reduce the level of skillfulness they can show on the writing skills rubrics.

A students' writing productivity is also a great measure of engagement. Real writing takes an incredible amount of energy—and it is the best measure of students' true commitment to the academic work of a class. If, in order to express their unique ideas, students are willing to go back into the text to reread and hunt for evidence, they are engaged. And when they are engaged, students will be motivated to write to and above their word-count threshold.

The assessment:

At least two times per week, students respond to a prompt that asks them about their ideas about a piece of text. Students are expected to reach a threshold of words depending on grade: 120 words for sixth grade, 130 words for seventh grade, 140 words for eighth grade. This is the level of productivity at which students will make the most progress. At each level below this threshold, the piece of writing can only show a certain level on the rubrics that measure the skills in focus, conventions, and use of evidence.

PRODUCTIVITY

12/19

12/19 students wrote
at least 130 words
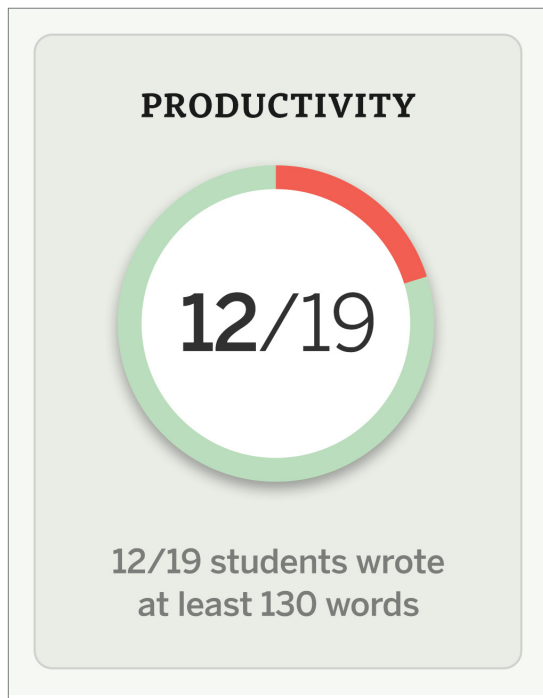
The report:

A digital program makes tracking productivity easy. Students and teachers can simply look at the word count on their devices to see if they are reaching their thresholds. To make sure that everyone stays on top of this important metric, the system reports on it daily, letting the teacher know what percent of the class has met the threshold and then listing all of the students and their current word counts, highlighting the names of the students in red who are below 50 words.
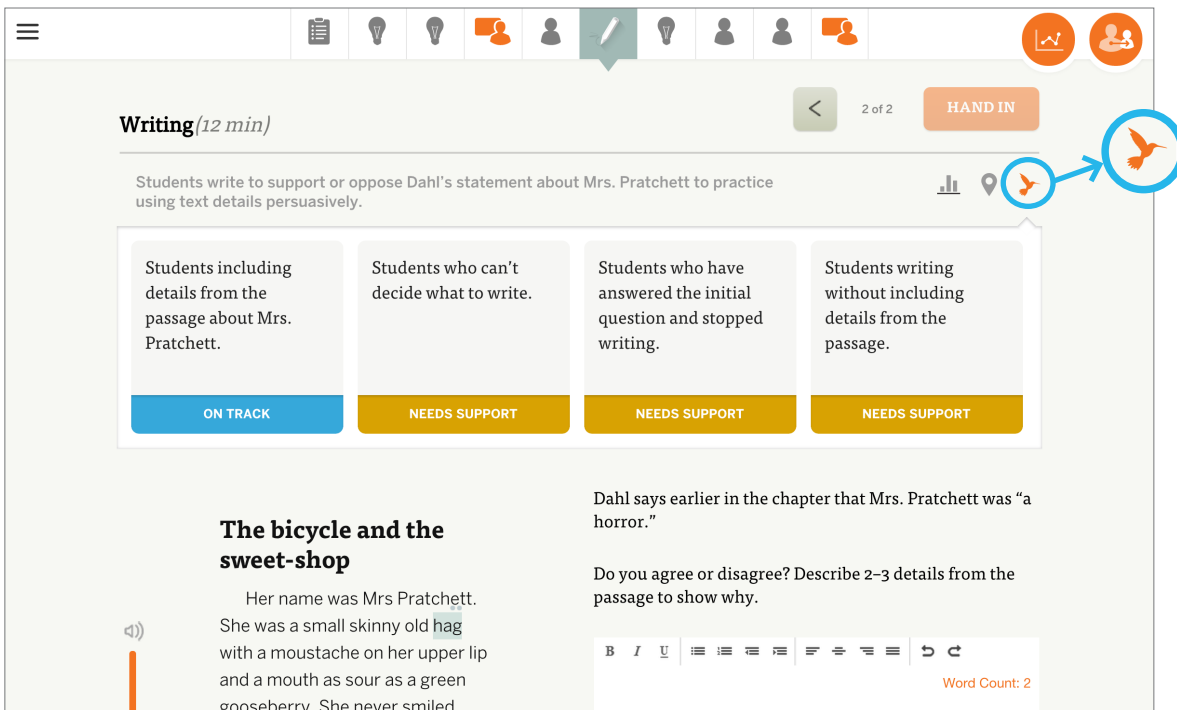
The data:

Early in the year, in the Get Started sub-unit of Unit A, teachers will see that very few of their students are reaching the threshold. But, there are writing prompts almost daily in that sub-unit, and teachers should see the numbers increasing daily so that by the time students enter the second sub-unit of Unit A, teachers should see that at least 80 percent of the class is meeting the threshold—or very close to it. If the percentage is lower than 80 percent because some students are just missing it, a teacher should not make major adjustments, but the teachers should be shooting for 100 percent over any given week and an 80 percent goal on a particular assessment simply takes into account the occasional absence or interruption. At certain points in the year, often at the beginning of a unit, teachers should expect that when students are learning how to deal with a new sort of text, students' writing productivity will decrease for a couple of prompts before rising again.

Teacher response:

There are two primary places to look for help with student productivity.

1. Within the lessons, there is a symbol that looks like ✒. Every time the lesson includes a writing prompt, the teacher can tap on that symbol to get suggestions for what to say in a particular situation to students during over-the-shoulder conferences (OTSCs), often just in order to get students to develop their idea a little bit more or even to get a student who is completely stuck, to start writing.

2. On the daily report itself, there is a button to click to remind the teacher of all of the ways in which he or she can intervene to improve student productivity. Here is the content of those suggestions:

Time:

Teachers should give extra time (but not during class) for particular students to write. If they can reliably control any part of students' free time (recess, lunch, after school) without completely ruining the day, they can invite students to come during that free time to complete the Writing Prompt. They can stay as long as it takes to finish the targeted number of words. Teachers won't have to invite them more than a few times before they figure out how to reach the target during class time. If the student is struggling, the teacher can reduce the target temporarily (and then gradually raise it), but should make sure it is higher than the target the student has been able to meet during class thus far.

Teachers should remember, they are "giving" the student this time. This strategy should not be presented as a punishment.

Sharing session:

Teachers can work on improving the whole-class Sharing session. The Amplify ELA Sharing protocol, implemented systematically, has been tested with a large variety of middle school students and will work—and is essential to driving consistent writing productivity for each student.

Extra feedback can be given to particular students with written comments, the Spotlight app, and OTSCs.

Written comments:

Written comments don't need to be spread equally among your students at all times. Choose a few students who are not producing enough writing and see what happens when, for a week, you give them a quick, authentic response to a sentence here and there every time they write. Make sure these lucky students open the work and read the feedback out loud (maybe privately, while other students are doing vocabulary exercises).

Spotlight app:

As soon as the student reaches a new productivity target, the teacher can post a sentence or two from this student's writing as a model of strong writing. Calling out even the smallest victories is effective.

Teachers can try one or more of the following strategies during OTSCs:

1. **Reduce the targeted number of words for that student:** Yes, it sounds counterintuitive, but you want the student to set a manageable goal and enjoy success. Point out how many words he or she seems to be writing regularly and together set a goal of 5-50 words above that. Write the number on an index card on the student's desk. Let the student settle at that number for a few days before asking him or her to set a new goal. "When you hit that number, raise your hand so that I can read what you wrote."

2. **Let the student talk it out:** Let the student dictate his or her answer. Write down the first few sentences the student gives you that are specific. Turn the device back to the student to write the next sentence. If necessary, take the device back and take dictation for the next sentence. "When you have written two of your own, raise your hand and I'll come back and take down one more."

3. **Make a "word bank" with student-generated words:** (include phrases, not just individual words). Ask the student to take a minute to tell you about his or her topic. List some of the words and phrases that the student uses correctly in the answer space on the device. Hand the device back to the student so that he or she can use those words and phrases in sentences.You can also use this technique with a group of students by writing the words and phrases on the board.

4. **Give the student a place to start (and a reason to start):** Write a good opening line to get a student started, or write a sentence in the middle of an entry to help the student keep writing. For example: "When I walked into the Aquarium, I sniffed, and the next thing I saw…" Or maybe try inserting a sentence with which your student will disagree and see if you can provoke your student to write over your sentence! (Just make sure this is a student who is paying attention) For example: "Dahl felt really awful that he had made fun of an old lady…."

5. **Help students find the textual evidence they need:** When students are writing about the text and need to include textual evidence, post specific paragraph numbers for the class, or have these paragraph references ready to share during OTSCs. By finding the textual evidence for students, you allow them to focus on discovering what they think about it. Make sure to reduce this support over time. Students need to learn on their own how to find those moments in the text that interest them.

6. **Ask the student to draw a picture:** Ask the student to draw a picture of a specific moment, and have him or her label the picture using descriptive words. Have the student begin writing by adding a sentence to each label. Then, ask the student to add more details to describe the picture more fully.

Formative assessment: reading comprehension

The skill:
Reading comprehension is the skill of understanding what the author is saying in both very concrete and more abstract ways. See the Skills section for further discussion.

The assessment:
The Reading Comprehension check is a series of 5-8 multiple choice questions tied to a text that the students have not seen before—often the next section of text they are reading in a longer piece. The checks occur on an average of three times a week as part of the students' independent work, or "Solo." These activities show students the correct answers so that these formative assessments are also learning experiences.

The report:
The best place to look for student results on comprehension checks are in the Gradebook.

The data:
The teacher should not expect all students to be able to comprehend each text independently, especially at the beginning of a unit, when the lessons are introducing new kinds of text, often at an increased level of text complexity. The teacher should look at the data in two ways:

1. What percentage of my class understood the passage? (Do I need to review these answers before continuing on with the next lesson?)

2. Is there a particular student who seems to be missing basic points about this text and requires differentiated instruction?

Teacher response:
At first, don't worry, do nothing: The early lessons in a unit assume that many students will not be able to read the text independently because they are getting used to a new genre and/or a new level of text complexity. These lessons often begin with exercises around Working with the Text Out Loud or Interpreting the Text with Drama to make sure that all students are accessing the text with a good level of comprehension.

Notice when the lessons assume understanding, and review if necessary: If the lesson itself does not include a section that works on deepening comprehension of the section of text covered by the assessment, make sure to take a few minutes to review it with the whole class. In most cases, the platform will have already shown students the right answers—but the teacher should push students to a deeper understanding, asking them to discuss why the incorrect answers are incorrect.

Take note of particular students' performance over time: If particular students show in several comprehension checks that they are not able to understand a particular genre or at a particular level of text complexity, the first way to intervene is with fluency training. (See the section on differentiation for students reading below grade level.) Over time, encouraging a student to work directly on building his or her vocabulary should also increase a students' reading comprehension.

Formative assessment: building vocabulary

The skill:
The skill here is both acquiring new words and learning how to acquire new words. It is such an important part of becoming a strong reader that Amplify has developed an extensive program that threads through students' experience reading and writing as well as includes particular instruction designed primarily around learning new words. That approach is described above in the Skills section on vocabulary.

The assessment:
Within the vocabulary activities that students do independently daily are particular exercises that look at students' ability to tell which usage of a word is better than another. Other exercises create whole worlds with well developed characters and settings, and measure students' ability to simply notice whether or not a word is being used properly in that new world.

The report:
The vocabulary report automatically reports to the teacher, on a daily basis, how many activities students are completing and how many of those activities students are getting correct.

The data: Students are learning vocabulary in order to read and write better. So the data in the vocabulary report should be seen as secondary to the data that tells the teacher something about the student's actual ability to comprehend, or express himself or herself effectively. But if a student is having trouble comprehending, the vocabulary data is a good place to look.

Teacher response:

If students are not making it through many activities during the short time allotted to vocabulary during class, or if the student is getting a lot of answers incorrect (meaning, he or she probably needs to go even more slowly to look for context clues), then teachers can encourage students to work on building their vocabulary in four ways:

1. Students should play with the Vocabulary app outside of class. Students who feel too rushed in the five-minute session during class will relax and enjoy the fun visuals and surprising settings, taking enough time to really figure out the context and make sense of each word.

2. Students should play the games that build vocabulary. See Section 3, The World of Lexica, for a list of games that engage students in a variety of ways. If a student doesn't like one, he or she might very well like the next one. These games have been built by commercial game companies and tested as much for student engagement as for learning efficacy.

3. Students should check out projected.com. ProjectEd is an Amplify website that sponsors multimedia contests for students and creators to use video to define words and explain concepts. Many of the videos throughout the Amplify ELA curriculum have been generated through ProjectEd contests. Students love them. Going to the website itself brings out students' fascination with language by letting the students explore a lot of different approaches to the same word, with as many as 10 videos on the same word. There are guides and tools to support students who want to try to define and explain a word with video and have never done so before.

4. Use the lesson brief to identify the words that the vocabulary activities are focusing on that day. These words come from the text. Make a special effort to use them and highlight them when you come across them. Try to remind students to attempt to use at least one of them in their writing.

Formative assessment: writing skills

The Skill:

The skills here are three of the key writing skills students practice when they respond to the prompts found in the lessons about two times a week: Focus, Conventions, Use of Evidence. These skills are described in more depth in the previous section, Skills instruction and practice. Amplify ELA suggests that teachers track these three particular skills because they are relevant to every prompt in which students write about text, and, thus, it is every easy to track progress over time, when writing about particular genres and about texts at certain levels of complexity. These three skills also serve as proxies for the three skills that SBAC looks at in the Writing Part of the text.

The Assessment:

At least two times per week, students respond to a prompt that asks them about their ideas about a piece of text. This is the same assessment that serves to measure students' ability to produce text. And, in fact, how much text students produce affects the score they can get on each of these three skills—students have to produce enough words to show that they can fully develop an idea, that they can describe all of their evidence, and that they can write without too many errors. At the most extreme, if students are only writing 50 words, it is impossible to know whether or not the next 50 words would be focused and free of distracting errors. The teacher scores students on these three skills using the rubrics provided in Section IV along with examples of student work at each level and at each grade. Those rubrics show the teacher how to consider students' productivity in word count when scoring for skills.

The Report:

The teacher can see student scores in the Gradebook.

The Data:

Teachers should look for progress over time, remembering that they have the whole year to help students master these skills. First, the teacher should look at the productivity assessment (which is generated automatically). Once students are reliably producing writing, the teacher can start to score for focus, expecting that students will not have the hang of it at first—but should show movement to a 3 or at least a 2 by the end of the first unit. In the next unit, the texts will become more challenging, and continuing to score at a 3 or above will be a challenge for many students. By the end of the second unit, students should be scoring a 3 with this new type of text. And so on. You will often see a dip in writing performance at the beginning of a unit as students face new sorts of challenges.

Once students show progress in focus, teachers can use the conventions rubric to check whether or not they need a particular grammar intervention. Amplify ELA has noted that students make much quicker progress on skills like sentence completion once they are writing a focused piece full of interconnected ideas. It is then that they start to understand, if they for some reason missed it in elementary school, why they need punctuation to set apart one idea from another to make themselves understood.

The teacher can wait until the second or third unit, after students have shown their proficiency in focus to start scoring and tracking in the Skill: Use of Evidence. The teacher will have been teaching that skill all along, of course, and should note students' effectiveness in his or her comments and other forms of feedback. But the teacher wants them to be sure they are using evidence to develop a focused idea—not just slapping it in there—before he or she scores and tracks this skill.

Teacher response:

The teacher has many tools at his or her disposal to address lack of progress in these three skills. Because the students will continue to have the opportunity to practice the skills at least two times a week when they write in response to the prompt, teachers do not need to create new instructional experiences for students; they can simply intervene during these practice sessions with skill-targeted feedback, as described above.

The program also builds in the Flex Day lesson (every 5-6 lessons) as an opportunity for teachers to target instruction on a particular writing skill by choosing Revision Assignments that are organized to guide students to practice one of each of these skills. Additionally, lesson briefs for the Flex Day lesson explains to the teacher how to use the four-volume set called *Mastering Conventions* to teach grade-level grammar skills and to intervene if students' writing shows they need support with foundational grammar skills.

Formative assessment: writing habits

The skill:

In addition to the writing habit of producing writing, assessed automatically, the Amplify ELA program suggests that teachers track two additional habits, those of sharing writing and responding to others' writing. By tracking these skills, the teacher ensures that every student is participating and benefiting from the discussion of student work—and not just the most skillful students.

The report:

Amplify recommends that teachers keep a public list of students in each class that the teacher or a student can access and check off when a student shares or responds during the structured Sharing time of the lesson. That way, everyone has access to the same information and students can support each other in the goal of distributing the participation across the class.

The assessment:

Students have many opportunities to share their work and respond to others' work throughout the Amplify's lessons. But this assessment should be done during the Sharing session in order to make sure that every student pushes himself or herself to actually present his or her writing to the class, and that every student is listening carefully when classmates present their work.

The data:

Teachers should use the list to help students see which students have shared and responded and which students have not. Teachers may let some enthusiastic students share twice before everyone has shared once in order to maintain energy—but should look for the broadest possible participation.

Teacher response:

The teacher needs to remain confident that every student will share sooner or later, while not pressuring any individual student on any particular day. There are several ways to make that day come sooner:

1. Make sure the Sharing session has not slipped into any sort of negative middle-school back-and-forth. Re-establish the rules for responding, and require that students use the Response Starters for a period of time. Interrupt any negative comments immediately.

2. Help students plan ahead and choose what they will share. Point out strong writing while doing over-the-shoulder conferences or while writing comments. Students don't have to share the entry that they just wrote; if they feel more confident in an older entry, they can share that one.

3. Make sure to Spotlight work from students who are having trouble volunteering to share. The teacher can read the Spotlighted work out loud. Once the student writer sees his or her work published in such a nice visual way, he or she may be willing to read from the Spotlight out loud.

4. Suggest that a student select only 2-3 sentences to share instead of a whole entry.

Summative assessments

Amplify summative assessments ask students to integrate several skills and ensure that students are making adequate progress at key points in the year and that all parties are kept informed about their status. Amplify offers two kinds of summative assessments:

1. Reading and writing benchmark assessments that help the teacher evaluate where students are in their learning progress with key reading and writing skills, and determine whether they are on track to performing well on annual state summative assessments. These tests are administered outside of the Amplify ELA platform, under testing conditions.

2. End-of-unit essays in which students integrate all of the reading and writing skills they have developed up until that point, apply some new skills having to do with writing longer pieces with multiple drafts, and produce a polished, edited piece of work over several lessons.

Each kind of summative assessment is explained in full below:

Benchmark assessments by Amplify mCLASS Beacon
The two types of assessments per grade are each designed to be completed in 45 minutes and are administered in the early fall (around week 3) and mid-winter (around week 20).

Reading comprehension assessment: measures students' comprehension of texts in literature and non-fiction across a wide range of standards.

Writing assessment: measures students' ability to write an argument or an informative extended response that synthesizes evidence from two texts.

Assessments are delivered through the Amplify mCLASS Beacon web-based platform, and all necessary assessment materials can also be downloaded as PDFs to be administered in a paper-pencil format. mClass Beacon can report results to schools with information on individual student performance or class performance.

Teachers and administrators compare a student's first and second benchmarks to determine whether the student is making progress. The assessments will also help teachers reflect on upcoming instruction to plan effectively and readjust priorities and resources.

Reading comprehension assessment
Overview
The mClass Beacon reading comprehension assessment is designed to show progress toward comprehension of texts that students will read on annual state summative assessments. Specifically, this assessment shows whether students comprehend text of a certain type and complexity, as expressed by quantitative (Lexile) and qualitative measures. Through the reading comprehension assessments, students become familiar with the range of language and types of questions used in the year-end assessments. Each assessment includes three types of authentic text from the 6-to-8 Lexile band: fiction, narrative non-fiction, and informational non-fiction. Each assessment will have one short constructed response question and one extended constructed response question, in order to assess students' ability to respond to and analyze a text using writing skills.

Administering the test
The reading assessment is designed to be completed during a 45-minute class period. Amplify suggests that the teacher administer Reading Assessment 1 after students have completed three weeks of the Amplify ELA lessons (approximately 15 lessons). Reading Assessment 2 should be administered after students have completed about 20 weeks of the Amplify ELA lessons. This time frame allows the teacher time to evaluate students' performance and plan additional support before the state summative assessments.

Scoring
The Amplify mCLASS Beacon Web-based platform will contain the correct answers needed to score selected responses and the rubrics used to score constructed responses. If students are entering answers directly onto the platform, most item types are auto-scored, but constructed and extended responses need to be scored by the teacher using an online scoring tool or by bubbles in rubric scores on an answer sheet.

Each correct answer and rubric is aligned with specific CCSS standards, and, overall, the items represent a balance of all the standards. For this reason, the composite score is the best indicator whether students comprehend text of the type and complexity they will encounter on future state summative assessments.

Working with assessment results
A student's composite score on the reading assessment is an important but not solely predictive indicator of whether that student is on track to perform well on future state summative assessments. The teacher should not expect the majority of students to exhibit mastery with each reading assessment; they are implemented early enough in the year that teachers have plenty of time to respond. For students who score below proficient, teachers should keep careful track of their performance on the regular formative reading assessments. In the section above on formative assessments, a teacher will find suggestions for how to respond when a student is not making progress in reading comprehension.

Writing assessment

Overview

The mCLASS Beacon writing assessments are designed to show progress with the type of writing tasks that students will encounter on annual state summative assessments. Each writing assessment includes one extended response question focused on two non-fiction passages, in order to assess students' ability to analyze and synthesize two texts. Specifically, this assessment shows whether students can write using clear focus, developed evidence, logical structure, and maintain control over conventions. These are four skills students will practice using the Amplify lessons and that align to the major writing strands evaluated on the summative state assessments. Through the writing assessments, students become familiar with the range of texts and types of questions used in the year-end assessments.

Administering the assessment

Each writing assessment is designed to be completed during a 45 minute class period. Amplify suggests that the teacher administer Writing Assessment 1 after students have completed three weeks of the Amplify ELA lessons (approximately 15 lessons). Writing Assessment 2 should be administered after students have completed about 20 weeks of the Amplify ELA lessons. This time frame allows the teacher time to evaluate students' performance and plan additional support before the state summative assessments.

Scoring

Each writing assessment can be scored for Focus, Use of Evidence, Logical Structure, and Conventions. The teacher scores each skill separately, and can score between 1-4 on these skills. The Amplify ELA mCLASS Beacon web-based platform contains the four rubrics used to score the writing of extended responses. The student writing responses need to be scored by the teacher using an online scoring tool or by bubbles in rubric scores on an answer sheet.

Each of the four rubrics is aligned with specific CCSS standards, and, overall, the items represent a balance of all the standards measured by the state summative assessments. In this case, however, look at the score for each of the four skills as a distinct entity; this will provide the most accurate information about how students are progressing and which students may need extra support.

Working with assessment results

A student's scores on the writing assessment is an important but not solely predictive indicator of whether that student is on track to perform well on state summative assessments. The teacher should not expect the majority of students to exhibit proficiency with each skill on Assessment 1, and in fact, even by Assessment 2, teachers should rest assured that they still have significant time to make progress with these students before the state assessment. Use the rubric scores from these assessments in conjunction with the rubric scores you see on the students' formative writing assessments to decide which skill to target next for each student. See more information about how to target each of these writing skills in the section on that formative writing assessment.

Essay writing

The essays are an opportunity for teachers to assess whether students can integrate the understanding and skills they have built throughout a unit into the production of one extended piece of writing. In each unit, the teacher will find a sub-unit containing lessons dedicated to the instruction, production, and assessment of this essay. Amplify recognizes that essay writing is the most complex expression of ELA skills and thus carefully breaks down each part of the process into its component parts and teaches it in a logical order—both within the lessons in each of the sub-units and also by carefully building the essay sub-units so that they build on one another. Because students are integrating so many skills in the essay units, and managing a multiday project, the essay units are particularly careful about controlling the amount of new information presented to the students by helping students find explicit connections back to the points in the unit where they have originally learned about a topic or skill necessary to complete the essay.

The essays vary from unit to unit because they each point students to finding the unique insights and energy of the texts in that unit; however, there are many common elements so that students can practice essay writing skills and systematically build towards a real comfort with the form.

These essay lessons are different from the lessons in the other sub-units in that each day's work builds toward one complete, polished piece of writing that students will complete by the end of the essay sub-unit. Thus, the lessons keep returning to the work of the previous days. The digital tools go a long way toward helping middle school students maintain organization throughout this process. The revision process in these lessons uses the same steps students have previously followed in Revision Assignments (see more about Revision Assignments in the Feedback section). However, during essay lessons, students are not just doing exercises to practice a skill; instead, they are trying to actually improve the final piece, as in traditional revising.

The essay lessons early in the year start simply so that students can focus on integrating what they have learned in the unit while completing this multiday task. Over time, as they write many essays and work on writing in other ways, students develop the organizational skills and effective revision habits that result in better, more polished essays.

By the end of the year, students are writing essays that flow from their internalized understanding of argumentative structure, rather than adhering to the rules of a formula. The Lesson Brief for the first essay lesson in the sequence explains the logic behind its sequencing of elements and provides details about writing an essay on each unit's text(s).

Writing skills in essays

For the essay writing skills, Amplify has chosen a summative approach to make sure to capture the broad range of writing skills that students need to perform. This longer list of skills that Amplify assesses in the essay contrasts with the short focused list of just three skills that the formative assessments focus on in every single writing prompt, twice a week. The formative assessments enable the teacher to see patterns weekly and adjust daily lessons, while the summative assessments check more thoroughly and make sure students' skills are developing across the whole range of standards.

Each essay sub-unit focuses on particular skills, building the students' capacity to master the whole essay by the middle of each grade. The rubrics and the specific skills that each essay focuses on is included in the lesson materials for that essay. Below you will find a list of the skills addressed in the essay units and the rubrics provided for scoring. Notice that the skills of Use of Evidence and Logical Structure are broken out into sub-skills. These two skills are particularly important when writing an essay and by assessing the sub-skills separately, the teacher can provide an overall grade that is weighted toward a student's ability to craft an argument or present information and also understand the extent to which the student is having either trouble sourcing the evidence or connecting it logically.

Focus

1 Needs Improvement	2 Developing Proficiency	3 Proficient	4 Exceeds Expectations
Almost none of the sentences develop one overall idea	Some sentences develop one overall idea.	Most sentences develop one overall idea.	All sentences develop one overall idea.

Use of Evidence: Describing

1 Needs Improvement	2 Developing Proficiency	3 Proficient	4 Exceeds Expectations
The student does not describe what s/he notices in textual evidence.	The student describes what s/he notices in some pieces of textual evidence.	The student describes what s/he notices in most pieces of textual evidence.	The student describes what s/he notices in all pieces of textual evidence.

Use of Evidence: Explaining

1 Needs Improvement	2 Developing Proficiency	3 Proficient	4 Exceeds Expectations
The student does not explain the connection between the evidence and the overall ideas.	The student explains the connection between some of the evidence and the overall ideas.	The student explains the connection between most of the evidence and the overall ideas.	The student explains the connection between all of the evidence and the overall ideas.

Logical Structure: Paragraphs

1 Needs Improvement	2 Developing Proficiency	3 Proficient	4 Exceeds Expectations
Almost none of the paragraphs focus on a clearly defined topic or idea.	Some paragraphs focus on a clearly defined topic or idea.	All paragraphs focus on a clearly defined topic or idea.	All paragraphs focus on a clearly defined topic or idea and build on or refer to the idea in other paragraphs.

Logical Structure: Introduction

1 Needs Improvement	2 Developing Proficiency	3 Proficient	4 Exceeds Expectations
Does not include an engaging lead that is connected to the overall idea. Student has not written a claim statement that articulates one overall idea.	Includes a lead that is somewhat connected to the overall idea. Student has not written a claim statement that somewhat articulates one overall idea.	Includes a lead that is connected to the overall idea. Student has not written a claim statement that articulates one overall idea.	Includes an engaging lead that is closely connected to the overall idea. Student has written a claim statement that skillfully articulates one overall idea.

Logical Structure: Conclusion

1 Needs Improvement	2 Developing Proficiency	3 Proficient	4 Exceeds Expectations
Does not follow from the overall idea. Does not include a final thought.	Somewhat follows from the overall idea and includes a final thought.	Follows from the overall idea and includes a final thought.	Clearly follows from the overall idea and includes a final thought.

Conventions: Sentence Completion and Punctuation

1 Needs Improvement	2 Developing Proficiency	3 Proficient	4 Exceeds Expectations
There are many fragments and/or run-ons that prevent the reader from understanding the writing.	Most sentences are complete. Errors do impede the reader's ability to understand the writing.	Most sentences are complete and punctuated correctly. Errors might distract the reader but do not impede the readers ability to understand the writing.	Almost all sentences are complete and punctuated correctly.

Conventions: Punctuation and Citation of Direct Quotes

1 Needs Improvement	2 Developing Proficiency	3 Proficient	4 Exceeds Expectations
Quotes are not punctuated and cited according to the Guidelines for Punctuating and Citing a Direct Quote.	Some quotes are punctuated and cited according to the Guidelines for Punctuating and Citing a Direct Quote.	Most quotes are punctuated and cited according to the Guidelines for Punctuating and Citing a Direct Quote.	All quotes are punctuated and cited according to the Guidelines for Punctuating and Citing a Direct Quote.

Grading and the Gradebook

Amplify ELA does not have just one approach to grading to suggest to teachers because every district and school has its own requirements and expectations around grading. In consultation with his or her supervisors, each teacher will determine how to weigh the different elements of work in the Amplify program that will make up a student's grade. Every activity submitted can be graded—and teachers can export these grades to a school-wide or district-wide grading software program to calculate end-of-term grades.

Amplify recommends that teachers approach grading differently from how they approach scoring:

- Teachers should score in order to get the most accurate determination of a student's performance against a standard. The score can be used for all sorts of purposes, often more to guide the teacher's instruction than to provide feedback to the student; there are so many more nuanced ways of providing feedback. The Amplify digital Gradebook separates the score from the grade and does not automatically release the rubric scores to students so that teachers can focus on scoring with accuracy.
- The grade, on the other hand, is a necessary communication between teacher and student about how he or she is meeting or not meeting expectations. We encourage teachers to include in the consideration of grades, some element of the students' productivity along with their performance. A teacher will see that an increase in production will ultimately lead to an increase in performance.

In the chart that follows, Amplify points out how to derive students' grades from the various scores found in the formative and summative assessments, so that grades emerge from the work teachers do to inform their instruction and do not add an additional layer of labor on top of it.

Skill	Scored Items	Communicates a Student's Production or Performance
Writing and Reading Routines: • Productivity • Revising • Sharing and responding • Rereading	• Words produced in response to daily writing prompt • Revision Assignment completion • Sharing/responding • Solo completion	Production
• Focus • Use of evidence conventions	Growth in scores in responses to daily writing prompts	Production
• Focus • Use of evidence conventions	Essays	Performance
• Focus • Use of evidence: describing • Use of evidence: explaining • Logical structure: paragraphs • Logical structure: introduction • Logical structure: conclusion • Conventions: sentence completion and punctuation • Conventions: punctuation and citation of direct quotes		Performance
Reading comprehension	Reading comprehension checks	Performance

The Gradebook

When a student submits work to a teacher using the Amplify ELA program, whether it is a filled in a data table with evidence and interpretations, an answer to a short answer question, an essay, or even simply the students' choice of highlighted text, the teacher can score it (based on a rubric), grade it, and provide written feedback. Auto-scored elements like multiple choice questions accumulate scores in the Gradebook. The teacher can also choose which of these elements, the grade, the score, and the written feedback to send to the student. The student's work shows up for the teacher with all the parts of the lesson around it, so that teachers can easily remember the context for the assigned task. Happily, by just looking at the digital Gradebook, the teacher can see who has completed his or her work—so, the teacher never has to sit with a stack of papers, just checking off for completion.

The Gradebook collects the scores on the student work that is automatically scored as well as the scores entered by the teacher. Gradebook gives teachers a view of student achievement at the lesson level and also shows student work and achievement over time.

Writing	Grade	Comment	Word Count	Conventions	Focus	Use Of Evidence	Last Submitted	Print or Send
S1, demostudent1	A		138	4	3	2	SEP 2 12:19 pm	
S10, demostudent10	HANDED IN	1	92	3	2	2		
S11, demostudent11	C+	1	87	2	1	2	SEP 2 1:03 pm	
S12, demostudent12	B-		122	3	2	2	SEP 4 11:52 am	
S13, demostudent13	B		116	3	2	3	SEP 3 3:34 pm	
S14, demostudent14	IN PROGRESS							
S15, demostudent15	A		127	3	3	3	SEP 4 8:44 pm	
S16, demostudent16	A-	1	119	3	3	2	SEP 2 12:21 pm	
S17, demostudent17								

Gradebook — LESSON 7 — The Election of the Red Successors

Looking at Student Work Protocol

In addition to utilizing the many opportunities that assessment provides to communicate with students and parents, and to adjust instruction in response to data, Amplify recognizes that assessment of student work also presents opportunities for educators to work together to learn about students' progress, to improve instructional practice, and to improve the efficacy of their instructional practices.

The following Looking at Student Work (LASW) Protocol is designed to help teachers discuss student work in a collegial and effective way and, in particular, to focus on the accuracy of scoring and the quality of the feedback that students are receiving.

Scoring

1. Distribute the piece so that everyone has a copy, digital or paper, and read it aloud.

2. Distribute rubrics for writing skills.

3. Choose a writing skill and define it.

4. Direct each participant individually to look for evidence of where the student exhibits the skill, and to privately write down a score on a note card.

5. Pass around the notecards so that participants can see the range of scores and then ask participants to state and explain their scores. Try to come to a consensus.

6. Choose to score this piece either on another skill, or choose another piece from this same student to look for progress (or lack thereof) and repeat this process.

Feedback (helpful to do with printed-out pieces)

1. **Discuss the strengths in this piece of writing:** Each participant should comment on specific characteristics of the language that had an impact on him or her as a reader or that contributed to clarity or power in the piece.

2. **Individually, target and reinforce the student's use of a skill:** Each participant should write a comment in the margin of the piece that targets a place where the student used the targeted skill effectively. The comment should be written as if a student will be reading it, in order to help the student understand how using the skill conveyed something meaningful to the reader.

3. **Pass around the student work and notice each other's comments:** As they read each other's comments, participants should imagine that they are the student receiving the feedback and try to imagine what he or she might make of it. Would the student have a good model of the use of this skill and why the skill matters? Would the student feel a connection to a real reader? Which comments are longer, shorter? More formal, informal? What is the effect on you as the imaginary student?

4. **Discuss which Revision Assignment is appropriate:** Turn to the Flex Day Lesson Brief materials and choose from the possible skills. Which part of the writing might the teacher highlight as a starting point for the revision?

5. If time allows, look at another piece from this same student, even if there is not enough time to go through the entire protocol. Teachers often start to feel that they really know a student's writing from this close analysis of one piece and are surprised to discover other aspects of the student's writing from looking at just one more. By opening this door, teachers start to talk about the importance of looking at a student's work over time in order to understand how to best guide his or her learning.

Student goal-setting guide

Overview

Most adolescents want to be heard and understood. They want their ideas to have an impact. So, while you will have access to a range of data about your students' growth, your students are most engaged with their learning when they are excited about their ideas. The classroom habits and routines within this curriculum will help you create a responsive community, where students are convinced that the world wants to hear their ideas and you are guiding them to set goals around skillfully explaining their ideas.

Data reports and numbers are not implicitly exciting to students. Why does a kid spend hours working on his jump shot in the backyard? Not so he can move from a 20 percent reliability to a 40 percent reliability, but so he can improve his ability to score in a game. Why do kids spend hours kicking the ball around in favelas in Brazil? They want to be able to make the ball do what they want it to do; they want to be key players.

Throughout the curriculum you will find methods and tips to help students set goals and to take responsibility for their own growth while providing the space for students to feel the impact of that growth. As you consider the goal-setting strategies, keep the following throughlines in mind:

- **Clarify expectations:** Students must have a clear understanding of expectations in order to set reasonable goals. Just as a little leaguer needs to know how far he must hit the ball to score a home run, a student needs clear guidance about routines and skills.
- **Help students set small, achievable goals:** A quick turnaround on small goals often has more impact than constant check-ins about a big, long-term goal. The idea of "scoring proficient" at the end of the year is abstract and tough for a 12-year-old to keep in the forefront of his or her mind. Instead, for example, a reminder that a student is expected to share once a month and a quick conference to help a student find a strong piece of evidence means the student both understands that the expectation is real and feels the success of reaching the goal quickly.
- **Provide regular, specific feedback:** Many of these skills and activities are new for your students, and they need specific and regular feedback about what the goal looks like, both in exemplars and—more importantly—in their own work. Some extraordinary athletes can perfectly mimic the tennis serve of their professional idol. Most of us, however, make much quicker progress when a coach says, "Right there, the way you angled the racket put just the right amount of spin on that serve. Try doing that again."

Use the following tools to help students self-assess and set achievable learning goals.

Writing

Throughout the year, students will practice writing in class for 10 to 15 minutes a couple of times a week. The Get Started lessons in Unit One make sure that each of your students quickly experiences the impact of conveying his or her observations.

- They practice focus (writing about one thing that catches their attention) and quickly write something that delights them and their classmates.
- They learn the clear expectations of sharing and responding to their classmates' writing, so even the risk-averse sixth-grader understands that his or her peers will tell them one way in which their words made an impact. More than any 'A' grade you give out for sharing, the positive comment of a peer will keep them writing.
- The lessons have them set clear and realistic goals about productivity. Not "write what suits you" or "write as much as you can," but "write for the whole 10 minutes" and "work your way gradually toward X number of words." These are both expectations that students can easily self-assess.

Once the Get Started lessons are complete, your students—with your help—should use this writing time as a clear space for setting goals and receiving feedback on those goals. During this time, teachers support writers with targeted feedback about the particular skill they are practicing in the moment. You will find guidelines for this feedback by clicking on the ✈ symbol in writing activities to bring up "Look Fors"—models of direct speech teachers can use to offer brief, targeted over-the-shoulder conferences. (See the section on feedback in this program guide for more information.) Look to these for opportunities to help a student set a goal he or she can achieve in that moment of writing. Consider this example: A teacher says, "Here you're listing several parts of the text that prove Mrs. Pratchett is a horror. Which part really stands out in your mind? Now write 3-5 more sentences explaining how her dirty hands make her a horror. Describe what grabbed your attention." When the teacher circles back to consider how the student has responded, she provides clear feedback on progress: "This direct quote about her fingernails really convinces me." Students respond to this feedback by using different strategies to improve their writing.

The sharing sessions that follow all writing practices are places where students set explicit or implicit goals. When a student generates excitement amongst his peers by sharing a piece, other students are likely to experiment with similar skills in their writing. On a more structured note, since every student has a goal to share (at least once in the first month of school) and every student understands that he or she is to respond to one something specific in a peer's writing, the teacher can help students set goals within those expectations. Perhaps an EL's goal is to share, but she is particularly anxious about sharing. Helping her choose just a section of a piece to share and practicing that read-aloud with the student will provide the support she needs to be successful with that goal.

Revision

Revision Assignments are another important place for kids to assess their progress toward goals and to keep practicing skills. Revision requires the integration of a number of skills and the perspective to see which ones are needed. All students should set goals around revising, but few middle school students can do so successfully. Instead Amplify provides students with a powerful tool called the revision assignment, where they revise a particular aspect of one section of their writing and consider the before and after.

- On each Flex Day, students have the opportunity to select one of their completed pieces of writing to revise. Help students set goals for this selection, for example, by asking them to select a piece of writing where they feel they were effective in focusing on one idea as they developed a piece of evidence.
- Students then find one small place in this writing where they can apply one specific skill, such as focus. They then compare the piece before the revision assignment with the piece after it's been revised. As they review the results of their choices in this small revision, help them gauge the impact of their choices.
- As students repeat this activity over the course of a number of flex days, they build a tool kit of revision strategies they can use independently. They then have a strategy for setting achievable goals around revision while they learn to make critical revision choices independently.

Spotlight

Spotlight allows you to display and curate your students' work as models for the skills you are teaching. Use these displays to set and celebrate achievable goals with your students. These excerpts of two to five sentences are precise and realistic models for the skills you want students to practice. When you regularly prepare and rotate your Spotlights, emphasize the specific ways students are using a skill effectively. All students now have a realistic model for achieving success with that skill.

1. Use these moments when you present Spotlights as goal-setting opportunities. Discussing and displaying Spotlights before students begin a new writing activity or a revision assignment offers a clear model for them to try to emulate.

2. Equally important, Spotlights are an opportunity for you to acknowledge and celebrate students who have been progressing toward a goal. A student who has been working hard and experimenting with a skill will inevitably have one to five sentences that use that skill in an interesting way. Posting that small excerpt is a tangible celebration of that student's work. Students are demonstrably excited when they see even a small snippet of their work showcased in this way.

Essay writing

During the multi-day essay sequence, students regularly reflect on progress and set goals. They plan their work for each day, review what they have accomplished to make decisions around revision, and determine whether to experiment with a challenge element (for example, a counter-argument) or use their time to develop other sections more completely. For example:

- Students are asked to self-reflect at the end of a day's work. They might be asked to share their most convincing piece of evidence, or to identify the work they accomplished, as in the following activity:

> **Check the response that best explains the work that you did today:**
> - I wrote one or more body paragraphs where I described and explained how my evidence supports my claim.
> - I wrote one paragraph where I described and explained how my evidence supports my claim.
> - I wrote one or more body paragraphs but I do not think that I described and explained how my evidence supports my claim.

- Students begin most essay lessons with a review of the work they have done so far and the work they will do next. Again, there are teacher tips at the beginning and end of each essay lesson to help the teacher use these as goal-setting opportunities. In particular, the structure of the flex day—at the midpoint of most essay sequences— allows the teacher to guide students to pace their work in order to complete their body paragraphs, reconsider and refine their claim statement, or—depending on the student's progress and goals—plan a counterclaim.
- Students are asked to apply a critical eye to the work they have accomplished. As a closing activity during one of the last lessons, students reflect on their writing and select one convincing sentence to share. "Go back and find the one sentence that you want everyone to hear. You are looking for the most interesting sentence in all that you have written so far."

Models of student work

The Amplify ELA program provides teachers with annotated exemplars or models of student work. The teacher versions of these essays are useful because teachers can see a range of writing where all the skills are represented for each grade level. The models include exemplars of students who score a 4 in every skill category of the rubric.

Some teachers share the student versions of these models so students can be actively involved in understanding how the skills work and in setting goals for their own work.

- Once teachers have introduced a skill and students have begun to apply the skill in their writing, teachers might present the student model writing for this skill. Each model is highlighted so students can see clear examples of effective skill use. The teacher presents the model along with the rubric for that skill to help students set goals for their own progress.
- Teachers can repeat this process as students learn new skills and write each essay.

Keep in mind, however, that the most effective learning happens when we show a student strong skill use in his or her own work. Many middle school writers get all tangled up in their thinking when asked to look at an exemplar; they try to imitate the exemplar and can't write clearly about their own unique ideas. Being specific about where an individual student has used a skill effectively in his or her own writing not only provides a model of skill use, but is a model that the student knows she can repeat or surpass.

Independent reading

During independent reading, students set weekly goals, reflect on their reading, and log progress.

1. Students record a reading goal for the upcoming week and later record actual pages read the previous week.

2. Students reflect on their reading when they describe and critique one reading strategy they have used and when they decide on another reading strategy they could try.

Dedicating this time to supporting independent reading has been shown to engage students and motivate them to read more and to read more deeply. Checking the reading tracker and conferencing with students about independent reading is a great way to see how students do with goal setting.

Vocabulary

The vocabulary program is designed to nurture students' love of reading; learning words allows them to dig avidly into a broader range of texts. This is obviously the teacher's first priority for building vocabulary, and the embedded Reveal Tool supports students in reading without having the academic vocabulary become an obstacle. Students also need to be conscious of their developing vocabularies and aware of how language works, and setting goals around vocabulary can help them understand how their progress with words translates into progress with reading and writing. Teachers can use reveal along with Amplify's vocabulary app to give students a clear picture of their progress with vocabulary. For example, the reveal tool creates a personal glossary for each student that contains the words whose definitions they have accessed while reading. Students can review this personal glossary as they complete each text, and consider which words they now feel comfortable with and which words they still need on this glossary. The vocabulary app allows students to set goals around when and how many vocabulary activities they can complete, while receiving clear information about their progress. Finally, each lesson presents students with a short list of "words to know"—academic vocabulary that is particularly helpful in understanding that series of lessons. Teachers are encouraged to use these words frequently, but the teacher may also ask each student to select one word from the list to incorporate into that day's writing.

Games

Goal-setting is a natural cycle within the Amplify game world. As students work independently, they internalize the cycle of setting goals, reflecting on progress, and working toward the next level. The Amplify game world provides a setting that lays out clear expectations, establishes small, achievable goals, and provides regular, specific feedback. In each game the expectations and key to progress is clear, whether students are putting together sentences that make logical sense or finding clues in texts from the library. As students work to meet game challenges—creating the sentence sequence that will build a bridge off the island or finding the correct answer from a text to gain the next clue—the game world provides the satisfaction of instantaneous feedback on progress.are able to work independently and internalize the cycle of setting goals, reflecting on progress and working towards the next level.