

# 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.

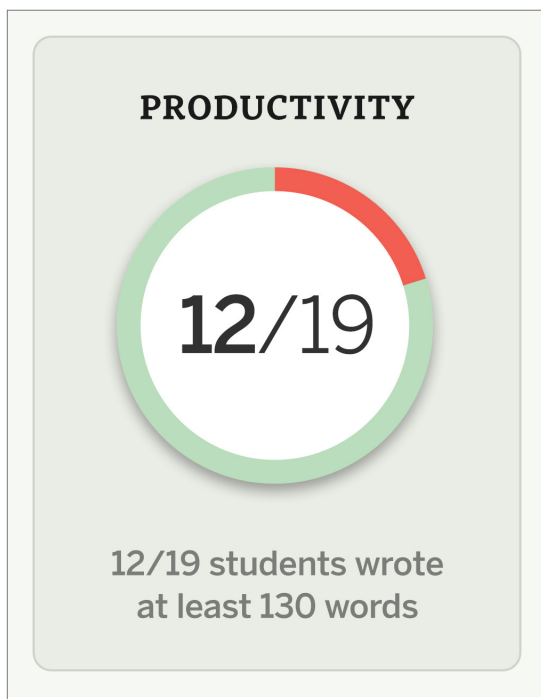
**Formative assessment: writing habits: productivity****The skill:**

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.

**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.

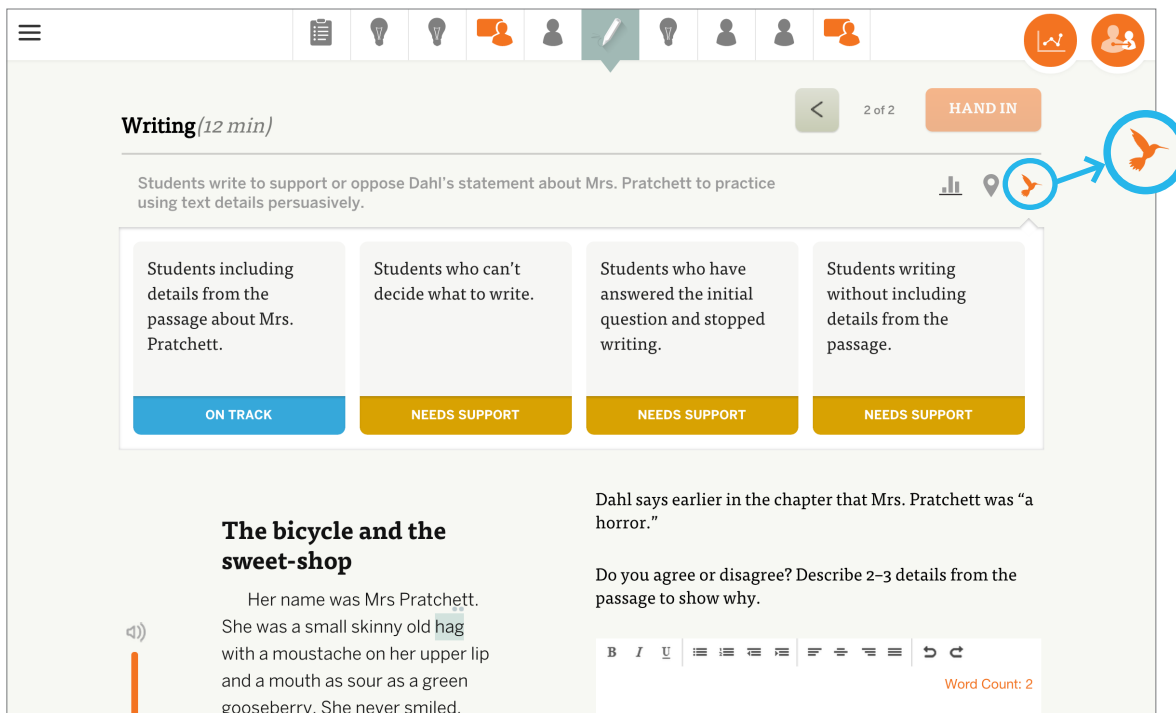
**The data:**

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.



The screenshot displays a writing prompt interface. At the top, there is a navigation bar with various icons. The main content area is titled "Writing (12 min)" and includes a prompt: "Students write to support or oppose Dahl's statement about Mrs. Pratchett to practice using text details persuasively." Below the prompt is a progress report with four categories:

Category	Status
Students including details from the passage about Mrs. Pratchett.	ON TRACK
Students who can't decide what to write.	NEEDS SUPPORT
Students who have answered the initial question and stopped writing.	NEEDS SUPPORT
Students writing without including details from the passage.	NEEDS SUPPORT

Below the progress report is a text editor with the following text:

**The bicycle and the sweet-shop**

Her name was Mrs Pratchett. She was a small skinny old hag with a moustache on her upper lip and a mouth as sour as a green gooseberry. She never smiled.

Dahl says earlier in the chapter that Mrs. Pratchett was "a horror."

Do you agree or disagree? Describe 2–3 details from the passage to show why.

The text editor includes a word count of 2 and a toolbar with various editing options.

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](https://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.