

# Supporting language learning through formative assessment



Teacher Education  
through School-based  
Support in India  
[www.TESS-India.edu.in](http://www.TESS-India.edu.in)



<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/>




*TESS-India (Teacher Education through School-based Support) aims to improve the classroom practices of elementary and secondary teachers in India through the provision of Open Educational Resources (OERs) to support teachers in developing student-centred, participatory approaches. The TESS-India OERs provide teachers with a companion to the school textbook. They offer activities for teachers to try out in their classrooms with their students, together with case studies showing how other teachers have taught the topic and linked resources to support teachers in developing their lesson plans and subject knowledge.*

*TESS-India OERs have been collaboratively written by Indian and international authors to address Indian curriculum and contexts and are available for online and print use (<http://www.tess-india.edu.in/>). The OERs are available in several versions, appropriate for each participating Indian state and users are invited to adapt and localise the OERs further to meet local needs and contexts.*

*TESS-India is led by The Open University UK and funded by the UK government.*

### **Video resources**

*Some of the activities in this unit are accompanied by the following icon: . This indicates that you will find it helpful to view the TESS-India video resources for the specified pedagogic theme.*

*The TESS-India video resources illustrate key pedagogic techniques in a range of classroom contexts in India. We hope they will inspire you to experiment with similar practices. They are intended to complement and enhance your experience of working through the text-based units, but are not integral to them should you be unable to access them.*

*TESS-India video resources may be viewed online or downloaded from the TESS-India website, <http://www.tess-india.edu.in/>). Alternatively, you may have access to these videos on a CD or memory card.*

Version 2.0 SE13v1  
Karnataka

*Except for third party materials and otherwise stated, this content is made available under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike licence: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/>*

*TESS-India is led by The Open University UK and funded by UK aid from the UK government*

## What this unit is about



I'd like to use different ways of assessing my students' progress in English, but it's difficult with so many students and not enough time! Also, I'm using more speaking and listening activities in my classes and I'm not sure how to assess these skills. How can I assess my students' language learning and support them to learn?

This unit is about supporting your students' language learning through formative assessment. This kind of assessment is continuous and is carried out regularly throughout the school year. Formative assessment means collecting information about each of your students through a variety of activities, which helps you to assess their learning and progress. It will therefore help you to identify the students who are struggling, and to adjust your teaching so that you can support them. Similarly, it allows you to identify the students who are doing well and to plan how to provide them with challenging learning opportunities and use different learning materials so that they can progress. Formative assessment is promoted by the Right to Education Act 2009, as part of a curriculum that ensures the all-round development of the student.

The unit shows how you can carry out assessment of English in the course of your regular classroom teaching. It provides some ideas of how you can assess the different language skills: reading, listening, speaking and writing. It also has some suggestions for managing formative assessment within large classes.

## What you can learn in this unit

- How to assess language learning in the course of your regular classroom teaching.
- How to assess your students' reading, writing, listening and speaking skills in English.

## Why you should consider formative assessment

Many teachers assess their students' attainment in English through tests and exams given at regular intervals in the annual school calendar, with a final exam at the end of the school year. Tests and exams can be a good way to collect information about what students know, but they are much less useful in informing your teaching.

All teachers are concerned and interested in improving their students' learning and progress in English throughout the year. To do this you need to undertake formative assessment throughout the school year, which is continuous – or ongoing – assessment. This means assessing each student's progress in the course of regular classroom teaching for diagnosis, remedial action and enhancement of learning. It can include:

- observing your students as they carry out routine classroom activities, and making notes from your observations
- grading classroom and/or homework assignments, and keeping records of the grades
- keeping samples of students' work (written, art, projects, etc.) in a portfolio
- giving short informal tests and keeping records of grades.

This type of assessment will help you understand how well each student is doing in many different areas of English. It will also help you to see which problems individual students are having, so that you can plan activities that develop their skills and thinking.

# 1 Assessing language learning in regular classroom teaching

It is possible to assess students during regular classroom teaching. You can observe them as they carry out routine exercises and activities. Here are some examples of such activities, and how you could use them to collect information that can be used to assess your students. (You can read about many of these activities in other Secondary English units.)

- When students are working in pairs – such as dictating sentences to each other, or carrying out a speaking activity such as a role play or an interview – you can listen, observe and make notes about aspects of the activity (for example, about pronunciation).
- Before reading a lesson or starting a new chapter in the textbook, you can ask students questions about the topic (for example, a wedding they have attended or their favourite sporting heroes).
- Whenever you ask questions of the whole class, or invite students to make suggestions, you can observe who contributes and note the language that they use.
- When students are responding to a lesson (for example, answering comprehension questions) and working individually, in pairs or in groups, you can move around the classroom and note who is struggling to answer the questions.
- After teaching some new vocabulary or grammar, you can give a quick, short test about the words or grammatical structure (for example, asking students to complete gaps in sentences).
- If students are compiling a vocabulary logbook or a literature logbook, you can review the books and possibly grade them.
- You can grade project work completed by students either individually or in groups (for example, designing an advert, writing a class newspaper or writing an episode of a TV show).
- When students are doing a listening activity – such as listening to instructions and drawing a picture, answering questions about a passage that they have heard, or writing a summary of a text – you can walk around the room and observe who is struggling and who is doing well. You can take in completed work to grade.

This list shows that there are many different ways that you can assess your students in the course of your normal teaching – you don't have to include extra exercises and activities in order to assess your students. Using a variety of routine exercises and activities makes sure that you assess all aspects of language learning: listening, reading, speaking and writing, along with vocabulary and grammar.

You may feel that it is difficult to carry out formative assessment with large numbers of students. But it is not necessary to focus on each student in every class – you can alternate who you give feedback to and take in different students' work each time. Students can also assess their own or each other's work. Resource 1 has further suggestions about how you can collect information about each of your students when teaching large classes.

Once the information and evidence have been collected and recorded, it is important to interpret it in order to arrive at an understanding of how each student is learning and progressing. You then need to act on your findings to improve learning, maybe through feedback to students or finding new resources, or rearranging the groups, or repeating a learning point. For example, if you have noted that some of your students are

having problems with certain areas of English (such as the use of the past tense), you could then give those students extra practice in using tenses in future lessons.

Formative assessment can help you to provide meaningful learning opportunities to every student by establishing specific and differentiated learning activities, giving attention to the students who need more help and challenging the students who are more advanced. For more information, watch the video below and read Resource 2, 'Assessing progress and performance'.



## Video: Assessing progress and performance

### Case Study 1: Mr Sampath assesses his students during regular classroom teaching

*Mr Sampath teaches English to Class X at a government secondary school. He attended a training session on assessment at his local DIET and learned about the benefits of formative assessment. He decided to buy a notebook in order to keep records (notes and grades) of his students' progress in English.*

After I bought my notebook, I wrote down the names of all my students and started to make notes about each one. At first, I found that my notes were often about the same students. That made me realise that I didn't notice how some of the students in my class were doing, especially the quieter ones at the back of the room. The notebook showed me that I needed to start finding out about all the members of the class.

I started to make more effort to see how everyone in the class was doing. Let me give you an example. Recently, my students were writing the answers to some comprehension questions in pairs [see the activity in Resource 3]. As they began discussing and writing their answers, I moved to a pair and listened to their discussion. They seemed to have a good idea of the answer, so I moved to another pair. This time, it was clear that one of the students, Ramesh, was struggling with this question: 'Anne says teachers are most unpredictable. Is Mr Keesing unpredictable? How?'

What's the problem, Ramesh?

I don't understand the word 'unpredictable'.  
What does it mean?

It means you don't know what somebody is going to do next. Let's  
look at what the teacher does ... what does he do first?

I don't know. What is 'assigned'?

I explained the words and sentences that were preventing Ramesh from being able to answer the question. I then went back to my desk, and made a note about him in my notebook and about how I could better support his learning in future [Table 1].



**Table 1** Mr Sampath's notes on Ramesh's learning.

Name	Date	Activity	Comment/grade
Ramesh	09.04	Chapter 4 – reading exercise	Seems to be struggling with answering questions about the text – had some problems understanding vocabulary. Need to find some simpler texts for him to read?

Of course, I can't write about every student in every class, but I make notes when I can, and slowly over the term I am starting to get a better understanding of each student. So for example, I can see that Ramesh often has problems with understanding the texts in the book. I am planning to talk to him to see how I can help him to improve his reading skills. For instance, perhaps he can read some simpler texts at home that I can identify for him, or maybe I could pair him with Sita, who is a friend of his and is also better than him at reading, so she could help him.

Since using the notebook, I have found that I am learning more about each student in my class. And sometimes I ask questions of students that I didn't ask before, because I want to find out how they are all doing. I think it's helping students to learn English too. For example, I don't think that I used to help Ramesh very much. To be honest, I didn't know he was struggling with reading. Now I hope that I can help him to improve his reading skills.

Surprisingly, I realised that using the notebook also helped me in other ways like analysing what each student can do or finds difficult, and so on. This in turn helps me to provide concrete feedback to students and their parents, so that everyone has a better sense of what the students do well and what they need to work on and improve. Finally, collecting and analysing information about my students' learning also provided me with an opportunity to reflect on my own teaching methods and the materials I use, and has forced me to think about how I can teach my students in an easier and better way so that each of them learns.

### Activity 1: Try in the classroom – using a diary to keep records

Any teacher can use a notebook or diary to keep records of performance and grades about students. If you don't keep records already, start a diary in which you can write regular notes about students and keep records of their grades. As you keep your records, think about how you can support each student with their learning. If a student is doing well, how can you help encourage them and give them work that allows them to keep learning? If a student is struggling, how can you support them?

Keep your diary for at least a month and answer these questions:

- **After week 1:** How easy is it to use your notebook? If it's difficult, what changes can you make to make the process easier? Consider making fewer notes, observing fewer students in each class, choosing from a simple list of comments or using symbols for notes such as numbers or pictures (for example, ☺, ☹)
- **After week 2:** Are there any students that you don't have records of? Which ones? Make an effort to observe these students over the following week, or take in some work from them. Add their notes or grades to your notebook.
- **After week 3:** Look over your notebook. Which are the students that appear to be struggling (according to your notes and grades)? What do they appear to be struggling with? (For example, reading, vocabulary, grammar.) How can you help them? What changes could you make to your

teaching that might help them learn better?

Students struggle for many different reasons. It is important to talk to the student to find out what the problems that they face are so that you can think about ways to help. It is equally important that you provide feedback about their work in clear and simple action points so the student knows what corrective measures to take. This will also help you to plan ways that you can help the student. Perhaps you can give them extra exercises to do at home; or different exercises to do in class. Maybe the student can work with another student in the class who can help them.

The key to using a diary for keeping records about your students is finding a way that suits you and your students. If you have a large number of students, it will not be possible to make lots of notes about all of them every week. You will have to be realistic! Try to get notes about all of your students over a period of time – a term, for example. And make sure you communicate to your students and their parents how they are doing, so that they are aware of their strengths and weaknesses and can take steps to improve.

To learn more about how to do this, read Resource 4, 'Monitoring and giving feedback'.



Video: Monitoring and giving feedback

## 2 How to assess your students' listening skills in reading and listening to English

It can be difficult to assess reading and listening skills. When students speak or write in English, you can listen to what they say or read what they write. However, when they read or listen to English, it is difficult to know what they understand. Table 2 shows some activities you can do to collect information about what your students have understood when reading or listening to a text. These activities can be carried out in the course of regular classroom teaching, or as informal tests to form part of formative assessment.

*Table 2 Assessing what your students understand in English.*

Activity	Example
Comprehension questions	Students listen to or read a passage in English, and answer questions about it. You can use questions from the textbook, write your own, or even ask students to write questions. Questions and answers can be in English or your home language. This can be very beneficial for students who can read or listen to texts well, but struggle to write in English. If they can write in their home language, they can say what they have understood. It can be useful for students to review questions before they start reading or writing, so that they know what they need to find or listen out for.
Writing summaries	Students listen to or read a passage in English and write a summary about what they have understood. This can be written in the home language so that you are not assessing the students' writing skills but whether they have understood what they have heard or read. You can encourage students to take notes as they listen or read. They can use these notes to write the summaries.

Activity	Example
Discussions	Students can talk or write about what they found interesting or enjoyable in a text. This can be particularly useful with texts from the supplementary reader. They can discuss in English or the home language, as the purpose of doing this is to find out what they have understood.

Some teachers use reading aloud as a way to assess their students' reading skills. There are, however, some problems with using this technique for this purpose as it doesn't really tell you how much students have understood about a passage. In fact, it is more of a test of students' pronunciation skills.

Some teachers use dictation as a way of getting students to practise speaking, listening and writing. Dictations can be easy to mark and grade, and students can mark their own and each other's work. However, in dictations, students don't often focus on the meaning of what is being said, so make sure that you use other activities as well if you want to have a good idea of your students' listening skills.

To get a sense of your students' reading and listening abilities, it is best to use a variety of activities, with as many different texts as you can. These texts can be from the textbook, the supplementary reader or any other text (such as a story or newspaper article). For listening, you could read a short section of any of these. If you have access to a radio or a mobile phone with a speaker, you could play an audio recording. Whenever you do an activity like this, give students plenty of time to read a text, and let students listen to passages more than once.

## Activity 2: Try in the classroom – planning to assess your students' listening and reading skills

In the text above, you read about a variety of techniques that you can use in your regular classroom teaching to assess your students' skills at reading and listening (such as writing summaries, dictation, etc.). Make a copy of the table below and fill in how you are going to use the techniques over the next month. You will find a completed table with examples in Resource 5.

**Table 3** A form for planning to assess your students' listening and reading skills.

Class and chapter			
Week	Activity	In what ways will I assess the students during this activity?	How will I modify my teaching as a response?
1			
2			
3			
4			





## Pause for thought

After you have followed your plan for a month, answer these questions. Discuss them with a colleague if you can.

- What were the different ways in which you assessed your students' reading and listening skills? Were you able to assess the reading and listening skills of all your students?
- How did your observations and notes help you to support your students' learning and progress in reading and listening?
- Did you provide feedback to the students? Did this feedback help them to improve?

If you have a large class, it may be very difficult to assess all of your students over the course of a month. Your diary will help you to see which students you haven't observed. Try to do as many as you can, and make sure that you don't focus on the same students each time. It may also be possible to involve students in assessing one another in paired or group work and also in self-assessment.

Your observations will help you to see which students need help, and you can plan your teaching accordingly. For example, perhaps some of your students didn't perform very well in the dictation. You can focus on those words or grammar points that they struggled with. You should communicate your observations to your students in the form of clear feedback, so that they can have a good sense of their strengths and weaknesses. Make sure to let your students know what they are doing well, as well as about the areas where they can improve. Give them clear tips about what they can do to improve.

Assessing your students is easier if you make a plan. That way, you can see what you are going to do, and when and how you are going to do it. If your plan hasn't worked, make another one and try some different techniques. See what works for you and your class. The important thing is to keep trying. You can use the framework above to plan assessment for speaking and writing too.

## 3 How to assess your students' skills in speaking English

Speaking is often one of the areas of learning English that is not usually assessed. However, speaking is an important skill for students to develop, and it is important to include activities in the English classroom that provide opportunities for students to speak in English. These could be telling a story, a role play, an interview or a discussion. Assessing speaking activities can tell you about your students' progress in English, what they have learned, how confidently they can speak in English, or whether they are having problems speaking English.



## Pause for thought

Think about your students and classroom as you answer the next questions. If you can, discuss them with a colleague.

- Have you ever assessed the speaking skills of your students? How did you do it? Did you have any difficulties?
- If you have never assessed the speaking skills of your students, how do you think you would do it? What difficulties do you think you might have?
- Do you think any of the other language skills could be assessed while assessing

speaking skills?

Now compare your thoughts with what some teachers do to assess speaking. Are any of these ideas possible for you and your class? Note the ones that are.

I listen to students when they are talking during pair work activities and keep informal notes in my mind. Then when I have time, I write them down in my notebook.

I tell my students that speaking is part of their overall assessment, and I give grades for some speaking activities (for example, a debate or a role play). This makes them see that speaking is important. I always let everyone know when I am going to give grades for a speaking activity. That way, they can prepare and do their best. It's only fair!

I occasionally call students to the front of the class in pairs, and then give them a short speaking test – for example, I ask them to describe a picture. This is just two minutes for each pair, and they can help each other. Over a period of time I try to test all of the students.

Sometimes, after a speaking activity, I ask students to think about some questions. Did they speak as much as they could? Did they have problems with grammar or vocabulary? What can they do to improve their speaking skills? What kind of feedback did I give them so that they could improve? Was my feedback useful? Sometimes we discuss this together.

You can use any speaking activities to assess speaking skills, especially activities where students talk about themselves or an interesting topic. Activities such as reading a text aloud are not very useful for assessing speaking skills, as the only aspect of speaking that these activities assess is pronunciation. They don't take other aspects of speaking into account such as speaking confidently and fluently, taking part in activities, using vocabulary and grammar accurately and so on.

Often in speaking activities students are demonstrating what they have understood from a reading or listening activity. So keep in mind that when you are assessing speaking, you are often assessing other skills at the same time.

## Case Study 2: Mrs Agarwal assesses her students as they do a speaking activity

*Mrs Agarwal teaches English to Class IX students in a non-English medium government secondary school. She tells about the last time she assessed her students' speaking skills.*

My class was doing an interview in English. They were working in groups of four [see Figure 1]. Two had written questions and were playing the role of journalists; the other two were taking it in turns to play the role of the interviewee (on this occasion, a famous film star).



**Figure 1** Mrs Agarwal assesses her students while they take part in a role play activity.

I decided to listen and assess just two groups this time. Last time, I focused on other students, and next time I will focus on some different ones.

I keep a diary for my class, and in it I make notes and keep records of my students' performance and grades. One part of my diary is related to speaking skills, with a grid showing names, the date and type of activity, and then different aspects of speaking [see Table 4].

**Table 4** A grid in Mrs Agarwal's diary for monitoring her students' work.

Names	Date and activity	Participation	Speaking confidently and with little hesitation (fluency)	Accurate use of grammar (accuracy)	Use of vocabulary	Pronunciation

As my students carry out the speaking activity, I stand by them, listen and make notes [see Table 5].

**Table 5** A filled-in grid in Mrs Agarwal's diary for monitoring her students' work.

Names	Date and activity	Participation	Speaking confidently and with little hesitation (fluency)	Accurate use of grammar (accuracy)	Use of vocabulary	Pronunciation
Rahul	06.01.14, interview	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓
Anju	06.01.14, interview	✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓

You can see that I just use a simple 'tick' system. One tick means that the student is having problems; two ticks means that they are adequate; three ticks means that they are performing very well. The grid is very quick and easy to complete. I keep these informal records about students to help to get an understanding of each student's progress and to contribute to their overall assessment. I then share my notes with the students so that they have a sense of their own abilities and what they need to work on.

### Activity 3: Try in the classroom – using a record sheet to assess students' speaking skills

In Case Study 2, Mrs Agarwal used a record sheet to informally assess students' speaking skills, which she shares that with her students as feedback. Make a similar grid for your students, and try it out with one or two groups the next time your students are doing a speaking activity. You can use ticks, as in the case study, or you can add grades or comments. Make sure you let your students know what you are doing and share your feedback with them after the activity.



#### Pause for thought

After trying a record sheet in your classroom, think about the following questions:

- Was the record sheet easy to use and useful? If not, how would you change it to make it easier and more useful?
- The teacher in the case study gives equal importance to each aspect of speaking (e.g. fluency, pronunciation and so on). Does this work for your class? Would you prefer to give some aspects more or less importance?
- How did your students respond to the feedback? Did they find it motivating?

Feel free to change the grid. If it is difficult to use, simplify it and try again. If you find that one area is not as important as another, you can award more or fewer ticks. What is important is finding a grid that works for you and your students, and that allows you to collect information about your students' speaking skills and share it with them in a way that is meaningful and will help them improve.

## 4 How to assess your students' skills in writing English

Like speaking, writing in English is not just about producing grammatically accurate sentences. Writing a text involves a number of skills, and students may have spent some time writing drafts and reviewing their own and each other's work.

## Activity 4: Assessing written English

Think about your students and classroom as you answer the following question. If you can, share your ideas with a colleague.

Imagine that your students have written a text in English, such as a report about a school event. Imagine that you have collected your students' work and that you are now assessing it. What will you give marks for?

When you assess written English – especially longer texts such as reports, compositions, letters and so on – you can consider the following questions:

- Is the text appropriate? (For example, has the student written a report about a local school event, or has the student described the school in general?)
- Is the text clear and easy to understand? Is it organised and sequenced logically?
- Is there a wide range of vocabulary? Are words repeated often?
- Are there any spelling or grammar mistakes, or mistakes with punctuation?
- Is the style appropriate for the reader? (For example, a report about an event should be factual, and it should also be interesting to read.)
- What's good about the text? What is interesting about it? Has the writer thought about the reader of the text?

Note the final point in the list above: it is important to say what is good about a piece of work. This encourages students, and helps them to see what the purpose of writing is – not a vehicle for memorising and copying texts, but for expressing ideas and conveying a message to a reader.

Now read a case study about a teacher who has just assessed some written work of his Class X students, and see how he uses questions like the ones above to grade his students' work, and to give feedback to individuals.

### Case Study 3: Mr Sampath assesses some written work from Class X

*Mr Sampath teaches Class X at a government secondary school. His class recently studied Chapter 4 of First Flight, NCERT's Class X textbook. The chapter features an extract from Anne Frank's diary. At the end of the chapter is a writing exercise, detailed below.*

Now you know what a diary is and how to keep one. Can you keep a diary for a week recording the events that occur? You may share your diary with your class, if you wish to. Use the following hints to write your diary.

- Though your diary is very private, write as if you are writing for someone else.
- Present your thoughts in a convincing manner.
- Use words that convey your feelings, and words that 'paint pictures' for the reader.
- Be brief.

For this activity, I told students to write 50–100 words each day over the following week at home, and to bring in their completed diary after a week. Before they began writing, we discussed some ideas of what they could write about, and each day, I reminded them that they should be writing.

After one week, I put students into groups of four or five. I told them: 'Choose one interesting diary entry and share it with the group.' I allowed them ten minutes.

I then asked ten students to give me their diaries. I would like to look at each student's diary but that's difficult for me – I have 47 students, and there is a writing exercise in every other chapter of the textbook. I just haven't got the time to read and grade 47 pieces of written work that often! So what I do is take in work from ten different students each time so that I get to see written work from every student.

I then read through the ten diaries, and gave them feedback using questions, covering these areas:

1. Is this written as a diary?
2. Is it clear and easy to understand?
3. Is there a wide range of vocabulary?
4. Are there mistakes with grammar, spelling and punctuation?
5. What's good about the diary entries?

I wrote comments in each area and then gave a grade out of ten for each question to make a total of 50. The feedback is much more important for the students to help improve their learning, but the grade was easy for me to record and quickly copy into my notebook. Here is the feedback I gave to one student:

1. This is clearly written as a diary. You have clearly marked each day of the week, and have written about things that happened each day, and have conveyed your feelings. You have written between 50–100 words each day. Well done. (10/10)
2. The diary is mostly clear and easy to read, but I don't understand exactly what happened on Tuesday. Can you make this clearer? (7/10)
3. You have used quite a good range of vocabulary, and you have used some different words to convey your feelings. You could have used more words for 'happy' – for example, 'glad', 'pleased' or 'delighted'. Try to work on developing your vocabulary. (6/10)
4. There are a number of mistakes with the grammar, spelling and punctuation. Look at the corrections I have made and review the correct spellings. You should also review the rules for forming the past simple tense. Ask me if you have any questions. (5/10)
5. You have tried hard to make this interesting for the reader by writing about some interesting events and describing how you felt. I enjoyed your diary entry for Thursday. What a funny story! (9/10)

Overall grade: 37/50 (Good, but keep working on your vocabulary, grammar and spelling.)

When I read through and graded the ten diaries, I noticed that most of the students had problems in using the past simple and present perfect tenses correctly. I then decided that I would review these tenses using some of the examples from the diaries in the following class. It's clear that this class needs more practice in writing about their experiences.

This activity worked well and students liked having questions to guide their work and my feedback. This helped them know what to focus on. Since it is difficult for me to provide feedback to each student, the next time I do this I might try having the students assess each other's work and give each other feedback.



## Activity 5: Try in the classroom – assessing your students' writing skills

In Case Study 3, Mr Sampath assessed the written work that his students did as part of their regular classroom teaching. He assessed diary entries, but you can use the same techniques to assess any kind of writing activity:

1. Find the next writing exercise in your textbook. Alternatively, you could create a writing activity such as some paragraphs about a topic in the textbook, a letter, a report, a story, or a diary, like the teacher did in Case Study 3.
2. Write the questions you will use for assessment on chart paper or on the blackboard, so your students know what you will be grading and what is important to think about when writing. Discuss the questions so that students are aware of what they need to do to get a good mark. You could give them some examples. You can use these questions to begin with:
  - a. Is the text appropriate? For instance, if you asked the student to write a story, have they written one? Or have they written a different kind of text, such as a report?
  - b. Is the text clear and easy to understand? Is it organised and sequenced logically?
  - c. Is there a wide range of vocabulary? Are words repeated often?
  - d. Are there any spelling or grammar mistakes, or mistakes with punctuation?
  - e. Is the style appropriate for the reader?
  - f. What's good about the text? What is interesting about it? Has the writer thought about the reader of the text?
3. When students have finished, take in their work. If you have a large class, take in the work of a group of your students. If you do this, make sure that you choose different students each time. You could also ask students to assess each other's work using the grid.
4. When you grade their work, try to include comments for each student in easy-to-understand terms that they can use for improvement.
5. Record the grades in your notebook.
6. What has the assessment told you about your students' learning? Are there areas you need to review again?



### Pause for thought

Here are some questions for you to think about after trying this activity. If possible, discuss these questions with a colleague.

- Did the questions help you to grade your students' work?
- If not, how could you change them to make them more useful?
- Did students find the feedback easy to follow and use for improvement?
- Could your students assess each other's work using the questions?

You may find that the questions suggested in this activity are not completely appropriate for your students and the writing task. You can experiment with and change the questions, perhaps omitting some and adding others. Discuss appropriate questions with your colleagues if you can, or with your students.

Make sure that the questions are clear to your students and that the feedback that you give them based on the questions is simple and easy to follow. You can check this by giving them an opportunity to implement changes based on the feedback, and by checking these changes.

These questions can also be useful for students to review or assess their own work, or to use to assess each other's written work. Therefore, it may not always be necessary for you to check and grade your students' work, as they can check their own and each other's. (For more information on this, see also the unit *Whole-class writing routines*.)

## 5 Summary

Assessment is important for teachers and students. It helps teachers to see a student's progress and weaknesses, and can help them to see how they can support and help individual students' progress with their learning. Assessment also helps students to understand their strengths and weaknesses, and know what to focus on to improve.

Assessment need not consist of tests and exams at the end of a term or school year. It can take place during the school year as part of regular classroom teaching, and you can assess regular lessons and exercises from the textbook, speaking activities and written work.

As you observe and grade regular classroom activities, as well as keeping records of grades and comments in a diary, you will begin to get an understanding of the progress of every student in your class. Sharing this with your students will help them understand what they need to do to improve. Your observations will also help you see how you can modify your teaching in order to develop your students' skills and support their language learning.

If you would like to read more about assessing language learning, see the additional resources section.

## Resources

### Resource 1: Assessing students in large classes

Table R1.1 shows some example activities that you can use to assess English in the course of your regular classroom teaching. However, it can be difficult to carry this out with large classes, so the table offers some possible problems and solutions.

**Table R1.1** *Activities for assessment in a large class, with possible problems and solutions.*

Activity for assessment	Possible problems	Possible solutions
When students are working in pairs, such as dictating sentences to each other or carrying out a speaking activity such as a role play or an interview, the teacher listens, observes and makes notes (e.g. about pronunciation).	It is impossible to listen to all of the pairs. Students make a lot of mistakes.	Listen to a few pairs each time there is a pair work activity, but listen to different students each time, and if you can, make notes. Use the notes to get an understanding of who is having problems and who is not.
Before reading a text or starting a new chapter, the teacher asks the class questions about the topic (e.g. a wedding you have been to). The teacher observes who contributes and notes the language they use.	The same students always answer the questions. It's difficult to remember who has said what and everything that is said.	Don't let the same students dominate classroom discussion. If you can, keep notes about who regularly contributes and make a point of asking students who haven't contributed to recent lessons.

Activity for assessment	Possible problems	Possible solutions
When students are responding to a lesson, e.g. answering comprehension questions. The teacher moves around the classroom and notes who is struggling to answer the questions.	There are too many students and not enough time to check all of them.	Tell the students to exchange their notebooks and then read out the answers, and get students to grade each other's work. From time to time, take in different students' notebooks and note down the grades.
After teaching some new vocabulary or grammar, the teacher gives a quick, short test about what has been taught.	It's difficult to grade the tests of all the students in the class.	Tell students to exchange their tests, then read out the answers and get students to grade each other's tests. Take in the tests and note down the grades.
If students are compiling a vocabulary logbook, the teacher takes the books in to check and possibly grade them.	It's difficult to check the logbooks of all the students.	From time to time, take in different students' logbooks and look through them. Aim to look at every student's book over the school year.
Teacher grades project work completed by students either individually or in groups (e.g. designing an advert, writing a class newspaper or writing an episode of a TV show).	It's impossible to grade the project work of all the students.	See above. Students can do project work in groups to reduce their workload. Alternatively, tell students to display project work on the wall, and grade the work when you have time to look at it.
When students are doing a listening activity (e.g. listening to instructions and drawing, answering questions, writing a summary of a text), the teacher walks around the room and observes who is struggling. The teacher takes in completed work to grade.	It's difficult to check the work of all the students.	If you can, walk around the room and observe a few different students each time you do an activity. When you can, make a few notes about the students to understand the progress of each one. Take in work from different students from time to time and note grades and comments.

## Resource 2: Assessing progress and performance

Assessing students' learning has two purposes:

- **Summative assessment** looks back and makes a judgement on what has already been learnt. It is often conducted in the form of tests that are graded, telling students their attainment on the questions in that test. This also helps in reporting outcomes.
- **Formative assessment** (or assessment for learning) is quite different, being more informal and diagnostic in nature. Teachers use it as part of the learning process, for example questioning to check whether students have understood something. The outcomes of this assessment are then used to change the next learning experience. Monitoring and feedback are part of formative assessment.

Formative assessment enhances learning because in order to learn, most students must:

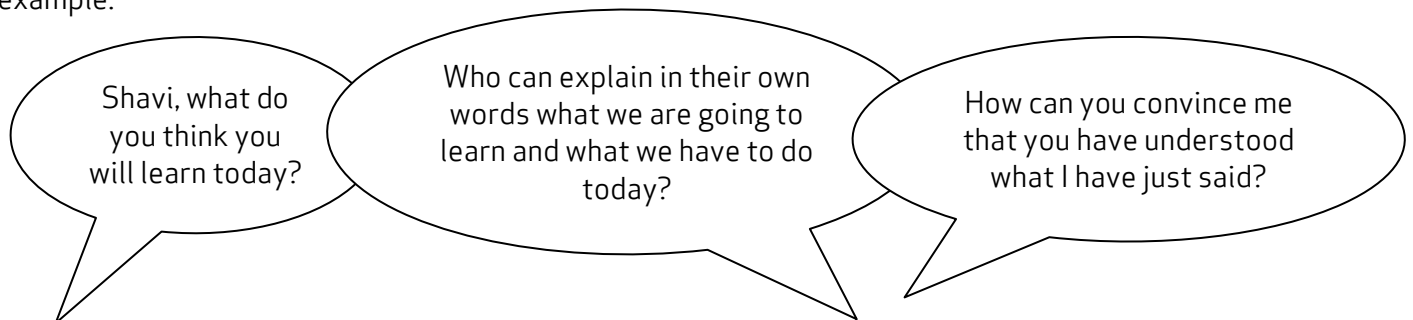
- understand what they are expected to learn
- know where they are now with that learning
- understand how they can make progress (that is, what to study and how to study)
- know when they have reached the goals and expected outcomes.

As a teacher, you will get the best out of your students if you attend to the four points above in every lesson. Thus assessment can be undertaken before, during and after instruction:

- **Before:** Assessing before the teaching begins can help you identify what the students know and can do prior to instruction. It determines the baseline and gives you a starting point for planning your teaching. Enhancing your understanding of what your students know reduces the chance of re-teaching the students something they have already mastered or omitting something they possibly should (but do not yet) know or understand.
- **During:** Assessing during classroom teaching involves checking if students are learning and improving. This will help you make adjustments in your teaching methodology, resources and activities. It will help you understand how the student is progressing towards the desired objective and how successful your teaching is.
- **After:** Assessment that occurs after teaching confirms what students have learnt and shows you who has learnt and who still needs support. This will allow you to assess the effectiveness of your teaching goal.

### **Before: being clear about what your students will learn**

When you decide what the students must learn in a lesson or series of lessons, you need to share this with them. Carefully distinguish what the students are expected to learn from what you are asking them to do. Ask an open question that gives you the chance to assess whether they have really understood. For example:



Give the students a few seconds to think before they answer, or perhaps ask the students to first discuss their answers in pairs or small groups. When they tell you their answer, you will know whether they understand what it is they have to learn.

### **Before: knowing where students are in their learning**

In order to help your students improve, both you and they need to know the current state of their knowledge and understanding. Once you have shared the intended learning outcomes or goals, you could do the following:

- Ask the students to work in pairs to make a mind map or list of what they already know about that topic, giving them enough time to complete it but not too long for those with few ideas. You should then review the mind maps or lists.

- Write the important vocabulary on the board and ask for volunteers to say what they know about each word. Then ask the rest of the class to put their thumbs up if they understand the word, thumbs down if they know very little or nothing, and thumbs horizontal if they know something.

Knowing where to start will mean that you can plan lessons that are relevant and constructive for your students. It is also important that your students are able to assess how well they are learning so that both you and they know what they need to learn next. Providing opportunities for your students to take charge of their own learning will help to make them life-long learners.

### **During: ensuring students' progress in learning**

When you talk to students about their current progress, make sure that they find your feedback both useful and constructive. Do this by:

- helping students know their strengths and how they might further improve
- being clear about what needs further development
- being positive about how they might develop their learning, checking that they understand and feel able to use the advice.

You will also need to provide opportunities for students to improve their learning. This means that you may have to modify your lesson plans to close the gap between where your students are now in their learning and where you wish them to be. In order to do this you might have to:

- go back over some work that you thought they knew already
- group students according to needs, giving them differentiated tasks
- encourage students to decide for themselves which of several resources they need to study so that they can 'fill their own gap'
- use 'low entry, high ceiling' tasks so that all students can make progress – these are designed so that all students can start the task but the more able ones are not restricted and can progress to extend their learning.

By slowing the pace of lessons down, very often you can actually speed up learning because you give students the time and confidence to think and understand what they need to do to improve. By letting students talk about their work among themselves, and reflect on where the gaps are and how they might close them, you are providing them with ways to assess themselves.

### **After: collecting and interpreting evidence, and planning ahead**

While teaching–learning is taking place and after setting a classwork or homework task, it is important to:

- find out how well your students are doing
- use this to inform your planning for the next lesson
- feed it back to students.

The four key states of assessment are discussed below.

#### **Collecting information or evidence**

Every student learns differently, at their own pace and style, both inside and outside the school. Therefore, you need to do two things while assessing students:

- Collect information from a variety of sources – from your own experience, the student, other students, other teachers, parents and community members.
- Assess students individually, in pairs and in groups, and promote self-assessment. Using different methods is important, as no single method can provide all the information you need. Different ways of

collecting information about the students' learning and progress include observing, listening, discussing topics and themes, and reviewing written class and homework.

## Recording

In all schools across India the most common form of recording is through the use of report card, but this may not allow you to record all aspects of a student's learning or behaviours. There are some simple ways of doing this that you may like to consider, such as:

- noting down what you observe while teaching–learning is going on in a diary/notebook/register
- keeping samples of students' work (written, art, craft, projects, poems, etc.) in a portfolio
- preparing every student's profile
- noting down any unusual incidents, changes, problems, strengths and learning evidences of students.

## Interpreting the evidence

Once information and evidence have been collected and recorded, it is important to interpret it in order to form an understanding of how each student is learning and progressing. This requires careful reflection and analysis. You then need to act on your findings to improve learning, maybe through feedback to students or finding new resources, rearranging the groups, or repeating a learning point.

## Planning for improvement

Assessment can help you to provide meaningful learning opportunities to every student by establishing specific and differentiated learning activities, giving attention to the students who need more help and challenging the students who are more advanced.

# Resource 3: From the diary of Anne Frank

The text in this resource is taken from Chapter 4 of the NCERT Class X textbook *First Flight*. It discusses an extract from Anne Frank's diary,

## Thinking about the text

1. Was Anne right when she said that the world would not be interested in the musings of a thirteen-year-old girl?
2. There are some examples of diary or journal entries in the 'Before You Read' section. Compare these with what Anne writes in her diary. What language was the diary originally written in? In what way is Anne's diary different?
3. Why does Anne need to give a brief sketch about her family? Does she treat 'Kitty' as an insider or an outsider?
4. How does Anne feel about her father, her grandmother, Mrs Kuperus and Mr Keesing? What do these tell you about her?
5. What does Anne write in her first essay?
6. Anne says teachers are most unpredictable. Is Mr Keesing unpredictable? How?
7. What do these statements tell you about Anne Frank as a person?
  - i. 'We don't seem to be able to get any closer, and that's the problem. Maybe it's my fault that we don't confide in each other.'
  - ii. 'I don't want to jot down the facts in this diary the way most people would, but I want the diary to be my friend.'



- iii. 'Margot went to Holland in December, and I followed in February, when I was plunked down on the table as a birthday present for Margot.'
- iv. 'If you ask me, there are so many dummies that about a quarter of the class should be kept back, but teachers are the most unpredictable creatures on earth.'
- v. 'Anyone could ramble on and leave big spaces between the words, but the trick was to come up with convincing arguments to prove the necessity of talking.'

## Thinking about language

### I. Look at the following words.

headmistress long-awaited homework notebook stiff-backed outbursts

These words are compound words. They are made up of two or more words. Compound words can be:

- nouns: 'headmistress', 'homework', 'notebook', 'outbursts'
- adjectives: 'long-awaited', 'stiff-backed'
- verbs: 'sleep-walk', 'baby-sit'.

Match the compound words under 'A' with their meanings under 'B'.

Use each in a sentence.

A	B
Heartbreaking	Obeying and respecting the law
Homesick	Think about pleasant things, forgetting about the present
Blockhead	Something produced by a person, machine or organisation
Law-abiding	Producing great sadness
Overdo	An occasion when vehicles/machines stop working
Daydream	An informal word which means a very stupid person
Breakdown	Missing home and family very much
Output	Do something to an excessive degree

### II. Phrasal verbs

A phrasal verb is a verb followed by a preposition or an adverb. Its meaning is often different from the meanings of its parts. Compare the meanings of the verbs *get on* and *run away* in (a) and (b) below. You can easily guess their meanings in (a) but in (b) they have special meanings.

- a. She got on at Agra when the bus stopped for breakfast.  
Dev Anand ran away from home when he was a teenager.
- b. She's eager to get on in life. (succeed)  
The visitors ran away with the match. (won easily)

Some phrasal verbs have three parts: a verb followed by an adverb and a preposition.

- c. Our car *ran out of* petrol just outside the city limits.
  - d. The government wants to *reach out to* the people with this new campaign.
- 
1. The text you've just read has a number of phrasal verbs commonly used in English. Look up the following in a dictionary for their meanings (under the entry for the italicised word).
    - i. *plunge* (right) in
    - ii. *kept back*
    - iii. *ramble on*
    - iv. *get along with*
  2. Now find the sentences in the lesson that have the phrasal verbs given below. Match them with their meanings. (You have already found out the meanings of some of them.) Are their meanings the same as that of their parts? (Note that two parts of a phrasal verb may occur separated in the text.)
    - i. plunge in – speak or write without focus
    - ii. kept back – stay indoors
    - iii. move up – make (them) remain quiet
    - iv. ramble on – have a good relationship with
    - v. get along with – give an assignment (homework) to a person in authority (the teacher)
    - vi. calm down – compensate
    - vii. stay in – go straight to the topic
    - viii. make up for – go to the next grade
    - ix. hand in – not promoted

## Resource 4: Monitoring and giving feedback

Improving students' performance involves constantly monitoring and responding to them, so that they know what is expected of them and they get feedback after completing tasks. They can improve their performance through your constructive feedback.

### Monitoring

Effective teachers monitor their students most of the time. Generally, most teachers monitor their students' work by listening and observing what they do in class. Monitoring students' progress is critical because it helps them to:

- achieve higher grades
- be more aware of their performance and more responsible for their learning
- improve their learning
- predict achievement on state and local standardised tests.

It will also help you as a teacher to decide:

- when to ask a question or give a prompt
- when to praise
- whether to challenge
- how to include different groups of students in a task
- what to do about mistakes.

Students improve most when they are given clear and prompt feedback on their progress. Using monitoring will enable you to give regular feedback, letting your students know how they are doing and what else they need to do to advance their learning.

One of the challenges you will face is helping students to set their own learning targets, also known as self-monitoring. Students, especially struggling ones, are not used to having ownership of their own learning. But you can help any student to set their own targets or goals for a project, plan out their work and set deadlines, and self-monitor their progress. Practising the process and mastering the skill of self-monitoring will serve them well in school and throughout their lives.

## Listening to and observing students

Most of the time, listening to and observing students is done naturally by teachers; it is a simple monitoring tool. For example, you may:

- listen to your students reading aloud
- listen to discussions in pair or groupwork
- observe students using resources outdoors or in the classroom
- observe the body language of groups as they work.

Make sure that the observations you collect are true evidence of student learning or progress. Only document what you can see, hear, justify or count.

As students work, move around the classroom in order to make brief observation notes. You can use a class list to record which students need more help, and also to note any emerging misunderstandings. You can use these observations and notes to give feedback to the whole class or prompt and encourage groups or individuals.

## Giving feedback

Feedback is information that you give to a student about how they have performed in relation to a stated goal or expected outcome. Effective feedback provides the student with:

- information about what happened
- an evaluation of how well the action or task was performed
- guidance as to how their performance can be improved.

When you give feedback to each student, it should help them to know:

- what they can actually do
- what they cannot do yet
- how their work compares with that of others
- how they can improve.

It is important to remember that effective feedback helps students. You do not want to inhibit learning because your feedback is unclear or unfair. Effective feedback is:

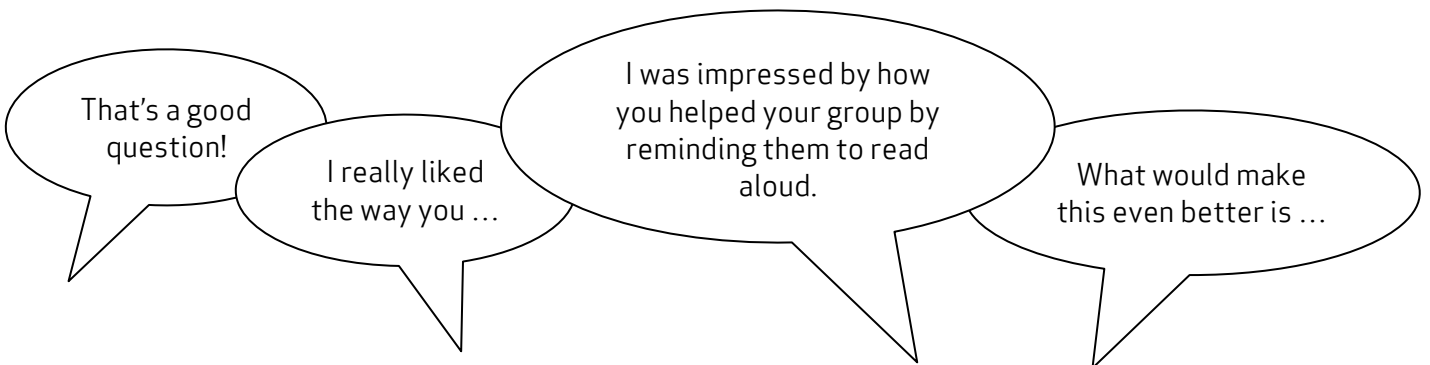
- **focused** on the task being undertaken and the learning that the student needs to do
- **clear and honest**, telling the student what is good about their learning as well as what requires improvement
- **actionable**, telling the student to do something that they are able to do
- given in **appropriate language** that the student can understand

- given at the **right time** – if it's given too soon, the student will think 'I was just going to do that!'; too late, and the student's focus will have moved elsewhere and they will not want to go back and do what is asked.

Whether feedback is spoken or written in the students' workbooks, it becomes more effective if it follows the guidelines given below.

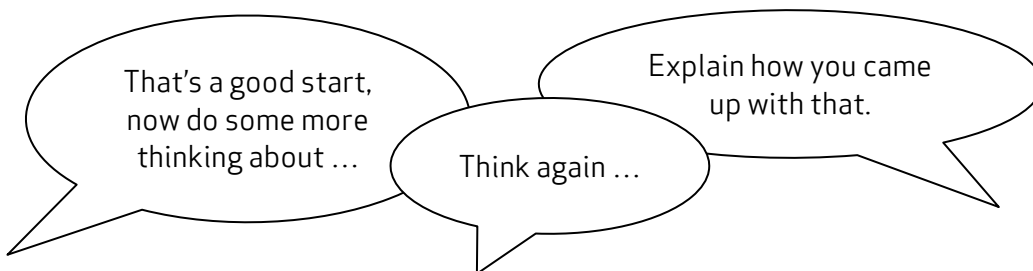
### Using praise and positive language

When we are praised and encouraged, we generally feel a great deal better than when we are criticised or corrected. Reinforcement and positive language is motivating for the whole class and for individuals of all ages. Remember that praise must be specific and targeted on the work done rather than about the student themselves, otherwise it will not help the student progress. 'Well done' is non-specific, so it is better to say one of the following:

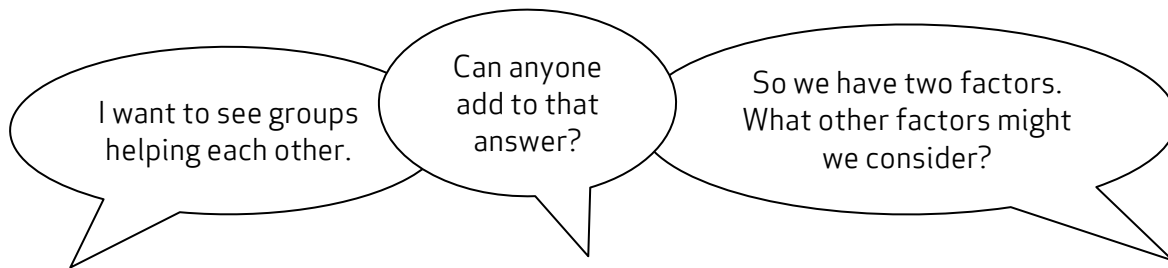


### Using prompting as well as correction

The dialogue that you have with your students helps their learning. If you tell them that an answer is incorrect and finish the dialogue there, you miss the opportunity to help them to keep thinking and trying for themselves. If you give students a hint or ask them a further question, you prompt them to think more deeply and encourage them to find answers and take responsibility for their own learning. For example, you can encourage a better answer or prompt a different angle on a problem by saying such things as:



It may be appropriate to encourage other students to help each other. You can do this by opening your questions to the rest of the class with such comments as:



Correcting students with a 'yes' or 'no' might be appropriate to tasks such as spelling or number practice, but even here you can prompt students to look for emerging patterns in their answers, make connections with similar answers or open a discussion about why a certain answer is incorrect.

Self-correction and peer correction is effective and you can encourage this by asking students to check their own and each other's work while doing tasks or assignments in pairs. It is best to focus on one aspect to correct at a time so that there is not too much confusing information.

## Resource 5: Planning to assess your students' reading and listening skills

*Table R5.1 A completed form for planning to assess your students' listening and reading skills (see Activity 2/Table 3).*

Class and chapter		Class X. Chapter 8: <i>Mijbil the Otter</i> (NCERT Class X textbook: <i>First Flight</i> )	
Week	Activity	In what ways will I assess the students during this activity?	How will I modify my teaching as a response?
1	Students listen to the first text with books closed. They make notes of important things to consider when having a pet. They discuss their notes in pairs.	Walk around the room while reading aloud and observe a few students as they make notes and discuss. Record notes about the observations in the diary. If students find it difficult, repeat reading the text two or three times.	Many students found certain words from the text difficult. Review these. Write these words on the board and ask students to write their own sentences using the words.
2	Students read Part II of the story silently. They discuss and answer the comprehension questions in groups of three.	Walk around the room as students discuss and answer the comprehension questions. Grade a few students' work on the spot, and give them feedback about it. Record notes about grades and observations in the diary.	Students had a good sense of the story and could find the correct answer in the text. Many had problems writing things in their own words. Try more independent writing activities to build students confidence.

Week	Activity	In what ways will I assess the students during this activity?	How will I modify my teaching as a response?
3	Students read Part III of the story silently. They write a summary individually in their home language. Discuss the passage afterwards as a whole class.	Ask a number of students to hand in the written summaries. Grade the summaries according to how much students have understood about the story. Record grades in the diary.	Most students did not understand the text. Choose an easier one for the next class – and one that might be more interesting for them.
4	A dictation. Students listen to a paragraph from the story and summarise it.	Students exchange notebooks and correct and grade each other's dictations using the original paragraph in the story. As students give a grade, walk around and make a note of some of the grades (or collect some of the notebooks) and note grades in the diary.	Students enjoyed this activity. They focused too much, however, on grammar and punctuation. I would like them to focus more on understanding what each other says. Repeat activity and ask them to focus on meaning.

## Additional resources

- The Central Board of Secondary Education's guide to CCE (continuous and comprehensive evaluation): <http://www.cbse.nic.in/cce/index.html>
- A discussion about assessment: <http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/article/assessment>
- Ongoing assessment: <http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/article/ongoing-assessment-fun-not-fear>

## References/bibliography

Coombe, C., Folse, K. and Hubley, N. (2007) *A Practical Guide to Assessing English Language Learners*. Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press.

National Council of Educational Research and Training (2005) *National Curriculum Framework*, National Council of Educational Research and Training. Available from:

<http://www.ncert.nic.in/rightside/links/pdf/framework/english/nf2005.pdf> (accessed 25 September 2014).

National Council of Educational Research and Training (2006) *First Flight: Textbook in English for Class X*, National Council of Educational Research and Training. Available from:

<http://www.ncert.nic.in/NCERTS/textbook/textbook.htm> (accessed 13 October 2014).



# Acknowledgements

This content is made available under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike licence (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/>), unless identified otherwise. The licence excludes the use of the TESS-India, OU and UKAID logos, which may only be used unadapted within the TESS-India project.

Every effort has been made to contact copyright owners. If any have been inadvertently overlooked the publishers will be pleased to make the necessary arrangements at the first opportunity.

Video (including video stills): thanks are extended to the teacher educators, headteachers, teachers and students across India who worked with The Open University in the productions.