

Questioning

Questioning, along with directed conversation, is one strategy for communicating learning targets. The strategy can be simple or elaborate, depending on the particular students and content. Sometimes all that is needed is that a teacher ask students what questions they have about an assignment. Listening to these questions can provide the teacher with some information about what the students think they are to do and what they are to learn.

A variation on simple questioning as a strategy to communicate the learning target is for the teacher to describe a lesson's target and an assignment or activity that embodies it and then to ask students to repeat what she said in their own words. A slightly more complex version of this questioning strategy is to use a think-pair-share activity. The teacher can have pairs of students (1) explain what they think they are going to learn, in their own words, (2) explain why they think it is important, and (3) figure out at least one previous lesson topic this goal is related to. In whole-class discussion, the pairs share and discuss their answers and come to a class consensus for the three questions (*What are you going to learn? Why is it important? What previous lesson topic is this goal related to?*). The purpose of the third question is to explicitly help students see that they are building knowledge and skill and to activate relevant prior knowledge that they can then use as they work.

Moss, Connie M., and Susan M. Brookhart. "Chapter 2. Leveling the Playing Field: Sharing Learning Targets and Criteria for Success." *Advancing Formative Assessment in Every Classroom: a Guide for Instructional Leaders*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2009. Print.

Planning and Envisioning

For some learning targets, having students envision what they know and what they will know (or do) can be a good way to give them a picture of what their learning will be about. The *K* and *W* columns ("know" and "want to know") of a KWL chart are classic examples of this strategy for clarifying learning targets.

For younger students, teachers can use actual pictures that are images for "what we will do" or "what we will need" (for example, a crystal ball might represent what they think an assignment will be about, and a tool box might represent the supplies they think they will need). Dictated or student-written words can be added to the pictures in appropriate places. Colored pictures can be used as cover sheets for folders of work, as appropriate.

For older students doing project work, planning charts for individual or group work can help clarify the learning target. Students must identify what needs to be done before they can plan how to do it. Such planning charts help more with the logistical aspects of the work than with understanding concepts, but they can be important steps along the way.

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Using Examples

Giving students examples of work to review and describe helps them discover and develop conceptions of the learning target and criteria for good work by induction. If possible, teachers can use real examples from previous years from anonymous students. If no real examples from previous students are available, teachers can construct examples to illustrate the range of possible performance. If a teacher is using a rubric, it should include at least one example per level; two is better at the common levels of performance. For learning targets involving higher-order thinking, the teacher should try to have these represent levels of quality rather than quantity, so students will have to explain characteristics of the work rather than just say things like "You wanted three sources, and this paper only has two."

Students can discuss the qualities of the examples and arrive at a description of what good work looks like. If the teacher gave students a rubric, students can come to consensus on where each example would fall on the rubric, and why.

If the teacher has not given students a rubric, students can sort the examples into piles, come up with a description of each pile, and thus develop their own draft rubrics. For example, students can sort examples of work into "Good," "OK," and "Not Good" piles and then describe the characteristics of each. Teachers can use the student-generated rubrics as is or edit them as necessary.

Sharing only good examples helps students envision a target. Sharing a range of examples, from good to poor, allows students to develop a conceptual understanding of the criteria.

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Using Rubrics

The strategy of using examples often involves rubrics—either ones the teacher has provided or ones the students generate from the examples. Even if examples are not available, however, rubrics can help clarify learning targets in students' minds and help them understand the criteria for success. In some cases, student translations of teacher rubrics into what is sometimes called "kid-friendly" language can be helpful as well.

Teachers can also use rubrics to clarify learning targets through opportunities for revision, if appropriate. Students can review their own work against rubrics, decide what needs to be revised for improvement, and then do that before they turn in the work. Alternatively, the teacher can allow "not acceptable" papers or projects to be redone, although it is usually better for students to revise work before they turn it in for a grade. That makes them, and not the teacher, the arbiters of their revisions. Some teachers have students do peer review and revision. We advise that even if teachers incorporate peer review into their students' work time, they also allow for self-assessment. Peers can make helpful suggestions, but it is the students' own decisions about their work that lead to learning.

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