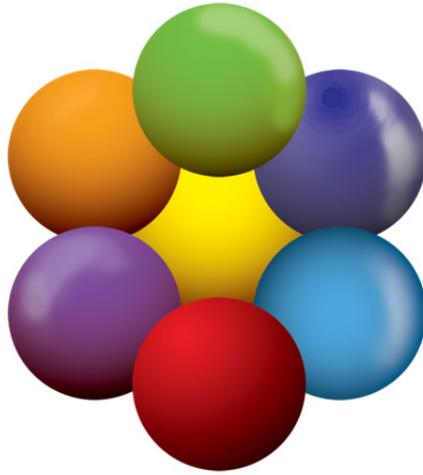


Just ASK's

**Making Assessment
a
Learning Experience**

Bruce Oliver and Paula Rutherford



About Just ASK

The Essential Question of Just ASK's Work

What do schools and classrooms look like when they are organized around a commitment to the achievement of high standards by all students?

Just ASK Publications & Professional Development (Just ASK) is based in Alexandria, Virginia, USA. Established in 1989, Just ASK provides products and services for educators in formats that facilitate a shared understanding and the use of best practice in teaching, learning, and leading in 21st century classrooms, schools, and districts.

Driven by the essential question displayed above, the publications and products developed and distributed by Just ASK are used by Just ASK consultants in their long-term multifaceted work with schools and districts, stand alone for use in professional development initiatives led by district personnel, and are often used as texts for college courses. These comprehensive resources use a common language and concept system that makes the standards come alive. Because they are cross-referenced, administrators, teacher leaders, veteran teachers, mentors, coaches, and new teachers can all be on the same page!

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"Chris" Test

The teacher designs a multiple choice test similar to the state or district test format. Then the teacher, acting as a fictional student named "Chris," takes the test and distributes copies of the test that "Chris" took to the students. Working in pairs, the students go through the test, question by question, and determine if Chris has answered each question correctly. In short, each pair of students grades the test. As they work together, they discuss content as well as test-taking skills. This practice serves as a review of the content that the teacher has taught. The teacher administers almost the same test to the students the next day.

Brian Mandell, Fairfax County, VA

Red Dot Practice

The teacher administers a test. As the teacher grades the test, he or she places a red dot next to any question that was answered incorrectly. The teacher returns the tests to the students and gives students a chance to make any corrections and resubmit the test for a final grade.

Frances Roberts, Fairfax County, VA

Knowledge Wall

Throughout a unit of study, students place sticky-notes or index cards with any information they feel is important on the Knowledge Wall which is a designated place in the classroom. Periodically the teacher reviews the sticky-notes or index cards and makes any corrections in misinformation for the class. During a test, a student can go to the Knowledge Wall. When they go to the wall, they may not take anything to write with or anything to write on. They must commit to memory any information on the wall and then return to their seat. They can return multiple times to the Knowledge Wall during the test setting.

Spence Rogers, Evergreen, CO
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Two-Minute Warning

Two minutes or so before the end of the period while students are taking a test, the teacher announces that the students may consult any materials they have with them to look up that nugget of information they need to support an argument or clarify an answer. The students not only look up information but they improve in their ability to organize their notes. Unlike an open book test, they have only two minutes so they have to be truly organized to be successful.

David Baker, Longmont, CO

Reprinted from *Instruction for All Students*

Extra Inning

The teacher collects the test papers at the end of the period and then tells the students they will have an extra inning when they next meet to add or revise anything on the test. The students go home and study whatever they could not remember during the test. The next day, students have ten minutes to add to or revise their tests. They receive full credit for the revised test they submit.

David Brinkley, Longmont, CO

Reprinted from *Instruction for All Students*

Give 'Em the Answer

This strategy can be used either as a formative or summative assessment. The teacher prepares a multiple-choice assessment and circles the correct answer for each question. The teacher then distributes copies of the assessment with the correct answers indicated. The students must explain (either in writing or orally) why the answer is correct. An extension of this idea is to have the students also explain why other possible answers are incorrect. This practice requires additional reasoning on the part of students instead of having them simply choose an answer.



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Free Throw

The teacher prepares a test using the short answer/multiple-choice format. The teacher also indicates on the test the point value of each section and/or question. At the end of the assessment, the student may choose to write a paragraph about something he or she learned that was not included on the test (the “free throw”). The student places next to the paragraph the point value she feels the response deserves. If the teacher feels that the student answer is appropriate, he can decide the point value of the answer. These points can substitute for missed questions or points on the test.

The Most....

Prior to the students taking an assessment, the teacher informs students that the assessment will not be in the traditional format. Instead the students must be prepared to respond to a series of open-ended statements about the content of the unit under study. The teacher tells the students what the open-ended statements are ahead of time so they can be prepared to write when they arrive in class.

Examples of sentence beginnings may include....

- The most interesting thing I'll remember.....
- The most important idea I learned....
- The most useful information was....
- The most unusual thing I learned....
- The most surprising piece of information....
- The most unforgettable class was...

The students should also be able to defend their choices for the completion of each statement.

Dump Your Brain

Prior to taking an assessment, students are asked to quickly write down all the information they can remember from their studying. They are able to use what they write down as they complete the assessment.



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Blue Light Special

The teacher prepares a test using the multiple-choice/short answer format. While students are taking their assessment, the teacher periodically offers a blue light special. The teacher goes to a whiteboard, bulletin board, or wall and unveils a new question that the students can use as a substitute for an existing test question. The blue light special serves as an extra bargain for the students. The blue light special questions must address the essential understandings of the unit. Each student identifies the question) for which they wish to substitute a blue light special question.

Tell Me More

When students take a multiple-choice assessment, it is difficult to know whether their answers reflect actual knowledge or good guesses. In order to better determine whether a student's answer shows an understanding of the content, the teacher can select 4 or 5 specific questions that represent the most important essential understandings from the content being assessed. For those items, in addition to the a,b,c,d, choice for answers, the teacher includes blank lines on which the student must explain his reason for choosing the answer. The justification for the answer will show a more in-depth understanding of the content which the question is measuring.

No Grade Second Chance

Some students when they receive a test back look at the grade and do not take the time to review mistakes or feedback. A different approach has proven to elicit a different response, especially from underachieving students. The teacher corrects the test and provides feedback. There is no grade on the top of the test. Students have the opportunity to make corrections and resubmit the test. Students who do not generally do well will take the time to make the corrections because they are not shut down by seeing the low grade.



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Resident Expert

Either before the students take a test or the day after they have taken a test, the teacher identifies students who have mastered the material that has been or will be tested. The teacher designates these students as “resident experts.” Students may move around the room and interact with the resident experts (armed with questions or review sheets) in order to learn the content. When the resident expert approach is used after a test, students take the test again after they have interacted with the resident expert.

David Kozlowski, Fairfax County, VA

Success Guaranteed

The teacher prepares a study guide for an upcoming unit test that requires the students to fill in information as they review for the upcoming test. The study guide is comprehensive and contains all the essential knowledge students were to have learned during the unit. After handing out the study guide to the students, the teacher explains that anyone who successfully completes the study guide and turns it in will be guaranteed no grade lower than a B on the upcoming test. For some students, the testing scenario is anxiety producing. By completing the study guide, the students are learning (or relearning) the unit's content without the accompanying anxious feeling.

Ray Leonard, Fairfax County, VA

Try-Angle

Each student is given a figure of a triangle with each side approximately five inches in length. Each student is able to write inside the triangle important information that he or she wishes to remember for an upcoming test. The student is able to bring his or her “try-angle” to the testing situation and use the information as he completes the test.

Sharon Boudreau, Fairfax County, VA



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Test Rebuttal Day

The teacher grades and returns the test to the students. After the teacher reviews the test with the class, the students have the opportunity to discuss why they answered certain questions the way they did. Some students struggle with the wording of test questions. If the teacher determines that a question or questions were worded poorly, the teacher agrees to throw out the question and award full points to everyone. In addition, students who wish to receive credit for other questions they missed follow two steps:

1. Identify their answer and explain what they were thinking when they answered it incorrectly
2. Identify the correct answer and locate the source of this information in their textbook or notes

Gina Pin, Ridgefield, CT

How Am I Doing?

It is important for students to stop periodically and reflect on the progress they are making with their learning. For some students, it can be the most important part of the assessment process. By providing students with regular, uninterrupted time to think about their learning, they are able to determine what they have learned and set goals for future learning. The focused questions below can support students as they self-assess their learning.

1. What did I learn today?
2. What did I do best?
3. What caused me some confusion or difficulty?
4. What do I need some help with?
5. What would I like to know more about?
6. What do I want to work on next?



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Let's Talk

Classroom assessments can be divided into four categories:

1. Selected Response
2. Constructed Response/Essay
3. Performance Assessment
4. Personal Communication

Most teachers use the first three types of assessment to determine a grade. The fourth approach is to engage students in conversation about the content. With guidance and correction from the teacher, the student explains verbally his or her understanding of the curriculum content. In the real world, adults do not take tests or quizzes in isolation. They talk to one another, give each other feedback, problem solve, and learn what needs to be learned. Students deserve the same treatment.

Michael Moody and Jason Strickler, Sherman Oaks, CA

Listen Up!

Teachers occasionally ask their students to make oral presentations to their classmates. In establishing the guidelines for the presentations, it is important for the teacher to emphasize that the presentations must address the essential understandings or key concepts under study in the unit. In order for these oral presentations to be the best use of the teacher's time and a productive learning experience for students, the teacher asks the class members to take notes during each student's presentation. Prior to the presentations, the teacher informs the students that they will be able to use any notes they take on the follow-up assessment/test which will occur. The class members will likely listen more intently and take appropriate notes during each presentation, resulting in greater overall learning.

Mike Rutherford, ISB, Bangkok



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Lifeline

An old television show, “Who Wants To Be A Millionaire” popularized the concept of calling on a lifeline for assistance. Some students become quickly discouraged when they first see an assessment because they feel they will not do well. To offer them some encouragement, a teacher might implement the “lifeline” strategy. After the assessment is distributed, the teacher announces that every student will have access to one lifeline they can use on the assessment. The lifeline in this case is the teacher. In short, every student may ask the teacher for one correct answer on the assessment. The teacher should make sure that the students carefully determine the question they will use as their lifeline since an answer to one question may help the student answer other questions successfully. The use of the strategy may have a variety of effects on students including getting them more motivated to do well on the assessment and letting them know that the teacher is interested in their success in the class.

