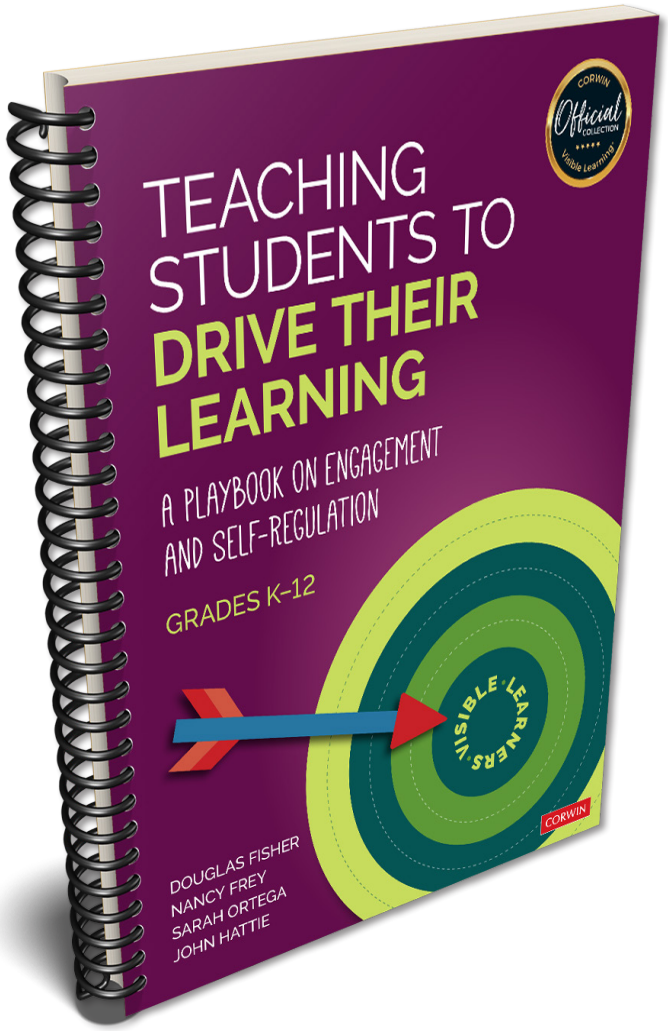

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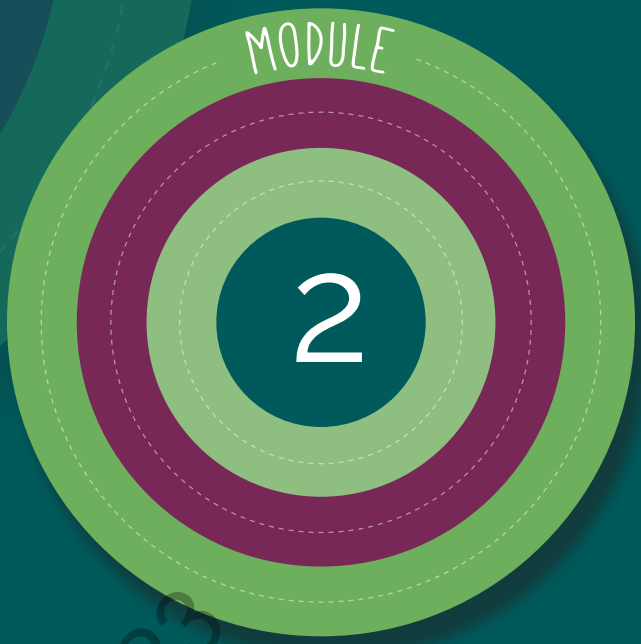


LEARNERS KNOW THEIR CURRENT LEVEL OF UNDERSTANDING

LEARNING INTENTION

We are learning how to support students as they define their current level of understanding.

SUCCESS CRITERIA

- I can determine the types of initial assessments that support student and teacher understanding of current learning.
- I can foster academic self-assessment (ASA).
- I can engage in conversations to validate and challenge students' assessment of their own performance.
- I can engage students in estimating task difficulty.

Nancy fondly remembers Sunday drives with her family. They would all pile into the car and head out. The driver (her dad) did not seem to have a specific location in mind, and they visited a variety of places each week, rarely going to the same place twice. But when it was time to return home, the driver would consult a map, and the first thing he did was to identify their current location. Perhaps the driver and navigator (mom) had discussed potential sites to visit in advance, but that was invisible to Nancy. What was clear is that you had to know where you were to be able to get home.

Of course, that's not the only driving that Nancy did with her family. On one Saturday per month, she got to go to work with her dad. On these days it was very clear where they were going, and they would generally follow the same route unless there was a need to get gas, pick up something, or drop a sibling off along the way. Again, Nancy noted that it was important to know where you were starting so that navigation could be successful.

We need to create learning environments that recognize that we are all on a journey and that as long as we are making progress toward the goals, we are learning.

Driving learning is much like driving a car—you need to know where you are if you want to arrive at a desired destination. Even when you are wandering along seemingly for pleasure, when an idea comes to mind, say to visit the swap meet, you have to know where you are if you want to successfully arrive. Although there is much more to academic learning, which we will explore further in this playbook, the basis is knowing your current level of understanding. We chose the word *understanding,* but we could have said performance, learning, competence, or skill. Irrespective of the learning goal, it's important for students to know where they are right now.

TEXT IMPRESSION

Use the following words (in any order that works for you) to create an impression about what you expect will be covered in this module.

initial assessment • self-assessment • concept map • competency • know/show • rubric • metacognition • task difficulty

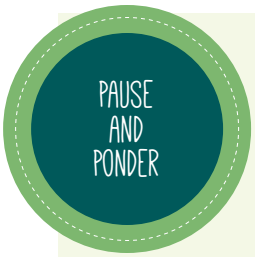
Recognizing that students in a given class may vary widely in terms of their current levels of understanding and proficiency, there has been a trend in schools to hide performance levels from students. The logic goes: We don't want to embarrass a student when they realize that some peers may be more advanced in their learning. Of course, we do not want students to be embarrassed by their current performance levels. If they are, it's a sign that the classroom climate needs attention. As we will see in Module 6, for students to drive their learning, they need to recognize mistakes as opportunities to learn. And we need to create learning environments that recognize we are all on a journey, and as long as we are making progress toward the goals, we are learning. Here are a few lessons learned from students regarding their current levels of understanding:

It's important to set aside time during class to confer with students about their current levels of understanding.

- First grader Kiana explained her writing and compared it with the writing stages used in her classroom. She said, "Some people are right here (pointing to Level 2), and I used to be right here (pointing to Level 3), but now I can put spaces between my words, and I know how to write the words with capital letters. Next, I'm going over to here (pointing to Level 5), and I will make sure that I have periods and that my sight words are right."
- Sixth grader Jordan was working through a math problem and asked a peer, "I'm still trying to remember the right way to round when we have decimals. Can you explain the rule to me again so I can try this one?"
- High school junior Asher asked, "How come no one told me before that I wasn't reading as good as I thought? I always thought that I was at least average for reading. But now I learned I am behind and need to do a lot of work to be ready for college."

Notice that these students make several interesting points. First, as Kiana implies, there is no bad place to be. And knowing where you are helps you set goals for the future. As Jordan notes, knowing what you still need to learn allows you to seek help and feedback. And Asher notes that it's not fair to hide the truth from students. Having information can be empowering and allows students to set goals for themselves. Thankfully, these students attend schools where their teachers understand the value of teaching students to drive their learning.

NOTES



Have you had an honest conversation with a student about their current level of understanding? How does that feel? Have you been taught that we hide this type of information from students and their families?

Before we discuss ways that teachers can successfully ensure that students know where they stand in learning and understanding, it's important to note that we are not suggesting that teachers create a display for the wall that announces all students' performance levels and targets. Although this may be common in sports, as is done with personal bests, it is rare to display academic information for everyone to see. Instead, teachers have several tools that they can use to ensure that students know their current level of understanding. We'll discuss three of these options: initial assessments, self-assessment, and estimating task difficulty. You don't have to use these, but we do suggest that you find a way to ensure that students know their current level of understanding.

It's important to set aside time during class to confer with students about their current levels of understanding. These do not have to be long, drawn-out conversations, but students appreciate the investment of time in them as learners, knowing that you know their current level of understanding and will help them understand what the data means.

INITIAL ASSESSMENTS

Initial assessments can also reduce the number of minutes spent on things students already know.

Assessing what students know in advance of instruction sheds light on the gap between where they are and where you want them to go. Assessment tools can also motivate students when they recognize that there are still things to learn. Interestingly, there has been some pushback on initial assessments, as they may embarrass students or divert valuable instructional minutes away from learning. But without this information, how will students know their starting point? Of course, there are assessment tools that don't yield useful information, but to throw out all initial assessments is unwise.

Parenthetically, initial assessments can also reduce the number of minutes spent teaching things students already know. Nuthall (2007) noted that, on average, about 40% (and maybe more) of instructional minutes are spent on things students already know. Not only is this boring and a waste of time, "teaching" content that some, or all, of the students know does not allow them to drive their learning. In addition, initial assessments allow teachers and students to determine the impact of their efforts. Without information about initial levels of understanding, it's hard to determine if the efforts (instructional events, studying, practice, peer support, or whatever) made a difference. In fact, teachers may take credit for teaching and students may take credit for learning something that was actually acquired long ago.

Imagine that you are teaching argument writing, and you ask your students to write a short essay in which they argue a point and provide evidence. In doing so, you can identify which areas of the standard students already have mastered and where your lessons can contribute to students' progress. You will probably not be the last teacher to focus on argument writing with your students, as it is a skill that takes years to hone. But you can contribute to your students' skill set and ensure that they are on track with the expectations for their grade level. Some students may need help with the type of evidence they provide; others with making a claim. And still others may have difficulty stringing sentences along.

NOTES

CONNECTIONS

Consider the following questions as you develop an initial assessment to identify what students already know.

Considerations	Your Response
What do I already know about my students from previous units of instruction?	
What type(s) of assessment items will help me identify areas of prior learning: ☐ **Writing sample** ☐ **Oral language or interview** ☐ **Knowledge inventory** ☐ **Other**	How will I collect this information?
How can I ensure that my initial assessments are free from bias?	

Initial assessments do not need to be particularly long or elaborate. Listed below are a few examples teachers have used, but we know that there are many more possibilities:

- Kindergarten teachers collaborated to develop a readiness inventory that included numbers, letters, sight words, colors, et cetera. They decided to administer this individually to get to know each of their students.

- Second-grade teachers provided students with a partially completed concept map illustrating the conceptual relationships between words in the content that was to be taught. The A–Z charts had spaces for students to list words they already knew about the topic they were going to study. In advance of a unit on bats, nearly every student had the terms *flying*, *wings*, and *vampire* on their charts, and others had terms such as *mammal*, *fruit*, and *insects*.

- Third-grade teachers used a writing checklist to review students' performance from the previous year. In addition, they collected writing samples each month to monitor progress and make adjustments to the learning intentions for students.

- Middle school math teachers created a tool focused on ratios and rates. They scaled the items along a continuum of complexity. For example, the first item asked the ratio of squares to circles based on an image of three squares and two circles. More complex items focused on equivalent ratios and proportions.

- High school science teachers used a vocabulary assessment to determine students' understanding of key technical terms in advance of the unit on ecology, including *biosphere, biotic, biome, habitat, niche, mutualism, carnivore, herbivore,* and *omnivore.*

Figure 2.1 on the next page provides an assessment tool developed by a first-grade team for initial assessment and monitoring of students' writing. Note that this team is focused on noticing patterns of errors so that they can appropriately group students for instruction. They also use this tool to ensure that students know where they are in the learning journey and to invite students to set writing goals, such as using ending punctuation, spelling their sight words correctly, using capital letters, and so on.

We could go on, as there are many tools that teachers can use to determine what students already know and where they are in their learning journey. Our point is that teachers need to know what their students have already learned and what they still need to learn at the start of the year and at the beginning of each major unit of instruction.

Figure 2.1 Error Analysis for First-Grade Writing

Common Errors	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	Week 6
Letter reversals						
Capital letters in the middle of a word						
Misspellings of grade-level sight words						
Misspellings of grade-level spelling patterns (cvc, cvc silent e, digraphs ch, th, sh, wh)						
Sentences do not begin with capital letters						
Sentences do not end with correct punctuation						
Improper use of pronouns						
Beginning a sentence with *And*						
Beginning of the sentence lacks variety						
Sentence doesn't make sense						

NOTE TO SELF

Take inventory of your assessment tools. Use these questions to guide your process.

Questions	Notes and Reflections
What assessments of prior student learning do I currently have access to?	
How can I gather information to determine what students already know?	
How can I collect information on student strengths to build upon?	
How can I collect information to determine what areas of learning need improvement?	
What strengths do I have in regard to data collection and analysis?	
What opportunities do I have in data collection and analysis?	
What additional information do I need to determine current student performance levels?	

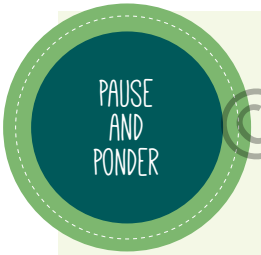
SELF-ASSESSMENT

Academic self-assessment (ASA) is the metacognitive process in which students examine their own work or abilities. This should be considered a core competency for fostering the necessary self-regulation skills that accelerate student learning (Brown & Harris, 2014, p. 27). Andrade (2019) notes, however, that while much has been written about the mechanics of self-assessment, such as the use of rubrics, self-ratings, and estimates of performance, far less has been discussed about the purpose of self-assessment. The true purpose of ASA, she asserts,

> is to generate feedback that promotes learning and improvements in performance. This learning-oriented purpose of self-assessment implies that it should be formative: If there is no opportunity for adjustment and correction, self-assessment is almost pointless. (p. 2)

Self-assessment is at the heart of Visible Learning. Students who can self-assess "exhibit the self-regulatory attributes that seem most desirable for learners (self-monitoring, self-evaluation, self-assessment, self-teaching)" (Hattie, 2012, p. 14).

Many assessment tools are useful in helping students identify their current level of understanding. Of course, these tools can also be used for students to monitor their progress, as we will see in Module 5. For now, we'll focus on the use of self-assessment as a tool to identify current levels of understanding.



Have you ever had the opportunity to self-assess your own learning? How did it feel? What did you do with the results? And how might you use self-assessments for students to infer their current level of understanding?

One example is a know/show chart, which is an open-ended way for students to assess their own understanding. The tool itself is a fairly simple graphic organizer that invites students to identify what they know, based on the expected learning and how they can show what they know. For example, Figure 2.2 was submitted by a student in her U.S. history class. The teacher reviewed the students' "know" column to identify concepts that students reported they understood, which concepts might be confusing, and if there were misconceptions.

Figure 2.2 Know/Show Chart

What I Know	How Can I Show It?
I know what the American Dream is and different perspectives of it.	I can explain my understanding of the American Dream and my perception of it.
I know about the preamble and the purpose of it.	I can delineate in CER form what the preamble portrays and the importance of it in the Constitution.
I learned about the amendment and the freedoms they include, as well as the Bill of Rights.	I can list the 5 freedoms of expression guaranteed in the First Amendment as well as the first 10 amendments (Bill of Rights). I can also list the 6 basic principles of the Constitution and why the Constitution is a living document.
I know about the three branches of the government and how they function.	I can elucidate the three branches of government, their jobs, powers, and who they work for. I can also break down the process of adding an amendment to the Constitution.

Popularized by the Cult of Pedagogy (Gonzalez, 2014), single-point rubrics contain a list of performance or learning expectations. Unlike analytic rubrics, single-point rubrics describe only the criteria for proficiency rather than all the ways in which students could miss the mark or exceed expectations. Originally, these were used by educators to provide students feedback that they could more easily understand, given that there was a lot less language on the tool. But they can be used for students to assess their own understanding at the outset of the lessons.

For example, fourth graders were learning to retell content that they had read, recording their retellings on video for submission to their teacher. Students were provided with the following single-point rubric. Note that students were asked to identify opportunities to grow and where they glow.

	Grows	Success Criteria	Glows
Main Ideas		I tell about the main ideas. I give examples of them.	
Supporting Details		My details are linked to the main ideas.	
Sequence		I retell information in the same order as the author.	
Accuracy		I use accurate facts.	
Inferences		I make connections within the text. I can take what the text says and add my background knowledge to make a theory.	

Madlyn, a student in the class, recorded her retelling of *Henry's Freedom Box* (Levine, 2007). After listening to her retelling, Madlyn completed the self-assessment, noting glows on main ideas and details and accuracy. She noted grow opportunities on the other categories. She wrote herself a note about inferences and said that she didn't have a theory. Her teacher reviewed Madlyn's self-assessment and agreed with her glow areas. The teacher also scheduled a time to talk with Madlyn about inferencing. During their conference, Madlyn said, "I don't have a theory. I don't think that the master was good to Henry like the book says. How can you be good when you can give a person away and make them move where they don't want to live?" Their discussion continued about inferences and how Madlyn knew the text well and was allowed to question the author and make her own decisions.

CONNECTIONS

Find an analytic rubric, and identify the column for proficiency. If the rubric you have selected has five levels of proficiency, it's probably the column that is a four. Which of the items from this column could be used to create a single-point rubric? How might you need to modify the statements to ensure students can use them to self-assess?

Self-assessments can also be used repeatedly as students acquire additional understanding.

Self-assessments can also be used repeatedly as students acquire additional understanding. For example, the students in Grace Kao's sixth-grade English class assessed their own writing to identify areas of strength and need. Students assessed their writing at the start of the year, and then they continued to use their self-assessment tool to monitor their progress (see Figure 2.3). If properly taught and implemented, the relative accuracy of peer assessments is comparable to that of teacher assessments (Sanchez et al., 2017). And teachers can have powerful conversations with their students in which they validate and challenge students' assessment of their own performance.

Metacognition (thinking about one's thinking) isn't solely about knowing when you know something. It is also the ability to recognize when you don't know something. The ability to think metacognitively helps students make decisions about their own learning. Learners who are metacognitively aware are accurately able to articulate their own strengths and plan for the use of other strategies, including help seeking, that will help them get "unstuck." As John likes to say, "It's knowing what to do when you don't know what to do." Figure 2.4 provides some direction for students who are unsure of what to do.

Figure 2.3 Comparative Self-Assessment for Informational Writing in Sixth Grade

Title and Date of First Essay	Title and Date of Second Essay
Organization/Purpose	
Topic is introduced clearly to preview what is to follow 4 3 2 1	Topic is introduced clearly to preview what is to follow 4 3 2 1
Ideas and concepts are organized using definition, classification, or compare/contrast 4 3 2 1	Ideas and concepts are organized using definition, classification, or compare/contrast 4 3 2 1
Transitions create cohesion and show relationships among ideas 4 3 2 1	Transitions create cohesion and show relationships among ideas 4 3 2 1
A concluding statement supports the explanation given 4 3 2 1	A concluding statement supports the explanation given 4 3 2 1
Task, purpose, and audience are aligned to prompt 4 3 2 1	Task, purpose, and audience are aligned to prompt 4 3 2 1
Evidence/Elaboration	
Topic is developed with relevant facts, definitions, details, and examples 4 3 2 1	Topic is developed with relevant facts, definitions, details, and examples 4 3 2 1
Follows a standard format for citations 4 3 2 1	Follows a standard format for citations 4 3 2 1
Skillfully quotes and paraphrases 4 3 2 1	Skillfully quotes and paraphrases 4 3 2 1
Uses relevant information from multiple sources 4 3 2 1	Uses relevant information from multiple sources 4 3 2 1
Effective and appropriate style enhances content 4 3 2 1	Effective and appropriate style enhances content 4 3 2 1
Conventions	
Demonstrates grade-level grammar, usage, and conventions 4 3 2 1	Demonstrates grade-level grammar, usage, and conventions 4 3 2 1

Source: Fisher, Frey, Bustamante, and Hattie (2021).

Available for download at **resources.corwin.com/teachingstudentstodrivetheirlearning**

Figure 2.4 Getting Unstuck

I Can't Get Started in My Learning	
What can I do on my own?	☐ I reread the direction to make sure I didn't miss something. ☐ I reviewed the success criteria. ☐ I reviewed any examples and/or resources provided for my task. ☐ I looked online for examples of others' work.
What can I do with a peer?	☐ I asked my peer to clarify the task. ☐ I asked my peer to walk me through the question and/or problem. ☐ I asked my peer how they knew how to get started. ☐ I asked my peer to support me in getting the task started.
What can I do with the teacher?	☐ I clarified what the task is asking for. ☐ I walked through an example/exemplar with the teacher. ☐ I asked the teacher to support me in getting the task started.

I Got Started, But I'm Not Sure Where to Go Next in My Learning	
What can I do on my own?	☐ I reviewed the success criteria. ☐ I reviewed any examples and/or resources provided for my task. ☐ I tried to determine where I need to go next, based on what I got started. ☐ I determined what I got right so far and why.
What can I do with a peer?	☐ I clarified what the task was asking for. ☐ I showed my work to my peer and asked for help in identifying my next step. ☐ I asked my peer to ask me questions about what I got started on my task. ☐ I asked my peer what they felt I had gotten right so far and why.
What can I do with my teacher?	☐ I clarified what the task is asking for. ☐ I asked for support in identifying my next step. ☐ I asked the teacher to model the portion of the task I misunderstood.

I Finished With My Learning	
What can I do on my own?	☐ I self-assessed my work against the success criteria. ☐ I reviewed my work against the exemplar, if applicable. ☐ I identified where I have strengths in my work to get even stronger. ☐ I identified opportunities in my work to determine what my next learning step is.

(Continued)

(Continued)

I Finished With My Learning	
What can I do with a peer?	☐ I asked my peer if they agree that I met the success criteria. ☐ I asked my peer to identify strengths in my work. ☐ I asked my peer to identify an opportunity in my work.
What can I do with my teacher?	☐ I asked my teacher if they agree that I met the success criteria. ☐ I asked the teacher to identify a strength in my current work. ☐ I asked the teacher to identify an opportunity in my current work.

Source: Fisher et al. (2018).

ESTIMATING TASK DIFFICULTY

Asking students to estimate the task difficulty can foster their ability to accurately assess their current level of understanding. For example, a teacher may ask students to review an upcoming task and answer four questions about the assignment:

- What will be the easiest part of this assignment?
- What will be the most difficult?
- How much time do I expect it will take me?
- Can I envisage what a successful assignment would look like?

Learners who are metacognitively aware are accurately able to articulate their own strengths and plan for the use of other strategies, including help seeking, that will help them get "unstuck."

In estimating difficulty, students must consider what they know and can do as well as what they expect will be difficult for them. They may not be totally accurate in their estimation, but the *process* of estimating task difficulty helps students understand where they are in the learning journey.

Most instructional materials (textbooks and other resources) include a list of major outcomes or objectives for each unit or chapter. But how often do we share those with our students? To help students grasp their current level of understanding, teachers can use these lists in advance of instruction by inviting them to rank the objectives according to perceived difficulty. For example, fifth-grade teacher Karin Escartin lists standards from state curriculum units and asks students to rank them in order of perceived difficulty. Before a unit titled "The Legacy for Us Today," Ms. Escartin shared these grade-level expectations and asked each student to rank them:

- I understand that significant historical events in the United States have implications for current decisions and influence the future.
- I can evaluate how a public issue relates to constitutional rights and the common good.
- I understand that civic participation involves being informed about how public issues are related to rights and responsibilities.

- I can research multiple perspectives to take a position on a public or historical issue in a paper or presentation.
- I can evaluate the relevance of facts used in forming a position on an issue or event.
- I can engage others in discussions that attempt to clarify and address multiple viewpoints on public issues based on key ideals.
- I can prepare a list of sources—including the title, author, type of source, date published, and publisher for each source—and arrange the sources alphabetically.

As Ms. Escartin notes,

> I review the "I can" statements with the class and then have them put them in rank order from most difficult to least difficult using the survey tool in our school's learning management system. I get the results, which help me to target instruction and supports and to differentiate a bit more precisely. But it also has a great effect on students, too. They are actively thinking about their current knowledge and skills and making a plan for where they will need to devote more time and effort. I also have them revisit their rankings as we get nearer to the end of the unit, so they can decide how accurate they have been in predicting their current status and what it took to be successful.

Of course, there are other ways for students to estimate task difficulty, such as these:

- Second grader Hamza looked at his spelling list, which focused on *r*-controlled vowels, and noted that he could already spell *stork*, *storm*, *market*, *partner*, and *artist*.
- Seventh grader Ariel completed a checklist about his knowledge and experiences in advance of a unit on the history of the theater, noting for each of the terms one of the following:
  - I have seen a play on TV or at a movie theater.
  - I have seen a live production.
  - I have been in a production.
  - This will be a new experience for me.
- In their high school government class, students brainstormed a list of technical vocabulary and then ranked themselves on their knowledge of each of the terms. As Harper noted, "I knew someone in the class knew the word, but none of us knew them all, so it was easy for me to show which ones I didn't know or only knew a little."

TEACHER ACTIONS

Consider the following actions that reinforce or derail efforts to ensure that students know their current level of understanding. We have included blank lines for you to add your ideas.

Teacher Actions That Reinforce Students' Recognition of Their Current Level of Understanding	Teacher Actions That Derail Students' Recognition of Their Current Level of Understanding
• Conferencing with students about the data • Devoting time to student self-assessment or initial assessments • Identifying success criteria and inviting students to identify which of these will be difficult for them • Creating a climate of risk taking and understanding that learning occurs across a continuum (and there are no bad places to be)	• Choosing not to share student's data with them • Creating experiences that shame or humiliate students based on their current level of understanding • Short-changing the amount of time required for students to self-assess • Publicly comparing students based on their current levels of understanding

CONCLUSION

It's not enough for teachers to know their students' current performance levels. Students must understand, and use, this information as well. We don't, however, want to minimize the value of teachers knowing their students' current levels of understanding. Using this information allows teachers to plan lessons and move learning forward. Without clear knowledge of students' current knowledge and skill development, teachers run the risk of wasting a lot of time teaching things that students already know and can do. Equipped with good information about students' current performance levels, teachers can establish appropriate learning intentions and success criteria, which are the focus of the next module.

Equipped with good information about students' current performance levels, teachers can establish appropriate learning intentions and success criteria.

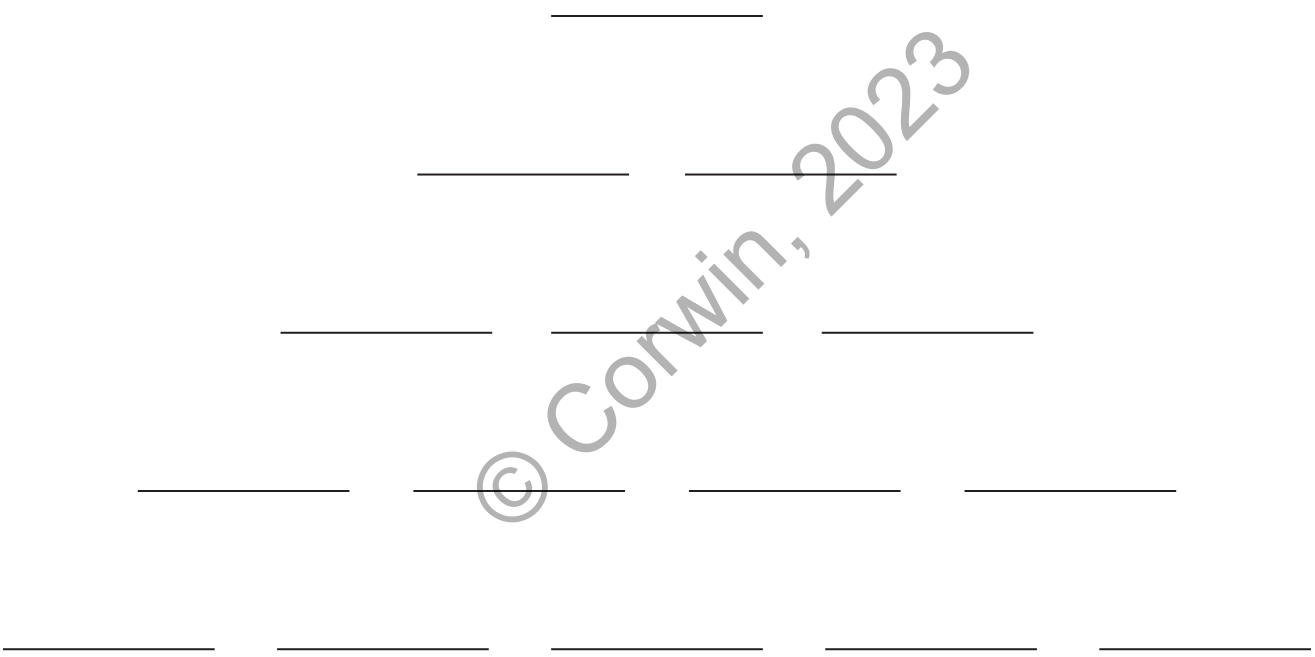
In addition to understanding their current level of understanding, students who drive their learning have to be comfortable sharing their learning progression with others, including their peers and teachers. When their teachers foster habits of seeking out and knowing one's current status and future direction, students can ultimately answer these questions: *Where am I now? Where am I going?* In doing so, students assume increased responsibility for their learning, become their own teachers, and drive their learning, which is the ultimate goal of schooling. Our hopes are not that we create adult-dependent learners, but rather independent learners who continue to seek out information, generate ideas, and influence the world around them.

NOTES

RETELLING PYRAMID

Create a pyramid of words, using the following prompts, that provides summarizing information. You're more likely to remember this information if you share with a peer.

1. One word that conveys an important topic in this module
2. Two words for a type of assessment discussed in this module
3. Three words for actions you can take based on this module
4. Four words that are key to your understanding
5. Five words that convey a goal you have based on this module



Revisit the Text Impression summary you developed at the beginning of this module and compare it to your current level of understanding. Where did your learning deepen?

Using the traffic light scale, with red being not confident, yellow being somewhat confident, and green indicating very confident, how confident are you in your ability to

- Determine the types of initial assessments that support student and teacher understanding of current learning?

- Foster academic self-assessment (ASA)?

- Engage in conversations to validate and challenge students' assessment of their own performance?

- Engage students in estimating task difficulty?