

# Assessment for Learning

**Definition:** Assessment for Learning (AfL) can be defined as a process of gathering evidence on a learner's progress which is then used to help both the learner and the teacher to recognise where the learner is in their learning, where they need to go and how best to get there.

**Description:** The term Assessment for Learning was popularised by Black and William (1998) in their work relating to the importance of student and teacher feedback in the learning process. It involves personalising learning through the inclusion of self-assessment by the learner in both formative and summative assessment activities. In classrooms where assessment for learning is practised, students are encouraged to be more active in their learning and associated assessment. The ultimate purpose of assessment for learning is to create self-regulated learners who can leave education able and confident to continue learning throughout their lives.

**Benefits:** Assessment for Learning (AfL) is an essential part of a learner's education as it defines whether or not the objectives of teaching are being met. Assessment affects decisions about grades, educational needs of learners and in some cases funding. AfL is a significant way to raise a learner's academic achievement and is centred on the belief that in order for learners to progress then they must understand the purpose of their learning, where they are in relation to that purpose and how they can achieve their goals. AfL helps a learner reflect on their own development which in turn helps them to recognise and appreciate their own strengths as well as developing an insight into themselves as a learner. If a



learner is given the opportunity to discuss their learning either with a teacher or one of their peers then they will develop a deeper understanding of their learning which can build confidence and motivate them as students. Effective AfL identifies individual educational needs as well as informing the learner about their specific performance and achievements, allowing teachers to utilise approaches that are personalised to the needs of learners. AfL can be used not only to measure learning but also to promote learning by teaching learners how to ask questions as well as answering them, by emphasising to a learner that it is acceptable to 'Have a go' and that giving the wrong answer it is still learning.

**Challenges:** The main challenge associated with AfL is that teachers and leaders often need to value the change in philosophy and pedagogy and the effort required to effectively embed the approach. It is a shift in the balance of teachers' skills and requires planning which does not depend on a fixed scheme of work and standardised testing. The learning has to flex and bend to meet the needs of the learners where there is no 'one size fits all'. In addition, time must be given for reflection, which means less 'coverage' but deeper learning. Learners themselves often find the transition to AfL difficult as the urge to ask "What grade did I get?" is so strong and deeply set in their minds.

**Applied to entrepreneurial education:** Assessment for learning is suitable in entrepreneurial learning as it recognises and values the development of learning and skills outside of the core subject area. It provides learners with the opportunity to discuss strategy, to define goals, to talk about strengths and weaknesses and then, following the learning experience, to analyse what went well and what went not so well and to be open about the failures in order to learn. These learning conversations help to nudge the learner back on course, to change habits, to think about things differently (metacognitive conflict) and to focus on making the small

learning behaviour changes that can have a huge impact.