October 2012 | Volume **70** | Number **2** Robert J. Marzano

**Students Who Challenge Us** Pages 80-81

**Art and Science of Teaching/The Many Uses of Exit Slips**

Exit slips are one of the easiest ways to obtain information about students' current levels of understanding.

Effective lessons commonly end with an activity in which students reflect on their experience of the lesson.[1](http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/oct12/vol70/num02/The-Many-Uses-of-Exit-Slips.aspx%22%20%5Cl%20%22fn1)  Over the last few years, exit slips have become a popular vehicle to this end.

In its simplest form, an exit slip is an index card or piece of paper on which individual students respond to a prompt from the teacher. Assume a teacher has provided the following prompt: "What are you most confused about regarding what we discussed today?" The teacher then models a few sample responses. For example, after a lesson on the types of changes that can be made to two-dimensional shapes, an 8th grade mathematics teacher might say, "You could be confused about how rotations are different from flips and turns." As students leave class, they deposit their slips face down in a box placed at the doorway.

**Four Kinds of Prompts**

There are at least four types of prompts that teachers can use with exit slips, each having a different intended outcome.

**Prompts That Provide Formative Assessment Data**

Exit slips are one of the easiest ways to obtain information about students' current levels of understanding. When used this way, exit slips are a type of formative feedback. For example, a teacher might give students the following prompt:

How would you rate your current level of understanding of what we did today? Score yourself a 3 if you understand everything we did and can even think of ways to use this learning. Score yourself a 2 if you understand everything we did but can't think of how you would use this information right now. Score yourself a 1 if you understand some of what we did today but are confused about some important parts. Put a 0 if you understand very little of what we did today or are completely lost.

Although the prompt itself is long, student responses are short and easy to tally. The teacher can obtain a quick perspective on how well students understood the content of the lesson.

More specifically, the teacher might ask, "What are you most confused about regarding what we did in class today?" Answers can provide the teacher with clear guidance for future instruction. If the majority of the class identified a specific topic as an area of confusion, the teacher might reteach that content the following day. For example, a mathematics teacher might find it necessary to reteach the general concept of transformations so that students better understand the various types. If different students identified different topics, the teacher might offer small-group instruction that targets specific concepts and provide activities for each group to help clear up students' confusions. Students who understood the content of the lesson well might be assigned to each group as topic-specific experts.

**Prompts That Stimulate Student Self-Analysis**

Teachers might also give prompts that ask students to think about their effort or their use of learning strategies. For example, the following prompt asks students to examine their level of effort: "How hard did you work today? Explain why you think you worked at the level you did." Although this type of prompt doesn't address content per se, it gets at a necessary condition for learning content—student effort.

On the basis of the responses the teacher receives, he or she might decide to devote one or more classes to the importance of effort and students' responsibilities in monitoring their effort. The teacher might also devise ways to routinely monitor the class's level of energy and effort in view of adjusting instruction.

Another self-analytic prompt might be, "What could you have done today to help yourself learn better?" One student might determine that she should have taken notes, whereas another student might realize that he shouldn't have been reading e-mails on his cell phone. An analysis of student responses might cue the teacher to present students with specific learning strategies or remind them of behaviors that can impede their learning.

**Prompts That Focus on Instructional Strategies**

These types of prompts require students to reflect on the effectiveness of various instructional strategies as well as on their own behavior during the execution of the strategy. For example, a teacher might ask, "How did the group work today help you understand the content? What are some things you'd like to see during group work in the future?"

A teacher might select one instructional strategy each week on which to receive student feedback. If a majority of students say that a given strategy didn't enhance their learning, the teacher might try out alternate ways to execute the strategy.

**Prompts That Are Open Communications to the Teacher**

This is the least common type of prompt. For example, a teacher might ask students, "What is something I should be doing to improve your understanding of the content?" Of course, such prompts invite criticism and therefore require a fair amount of courage to employ. However, the risk might be worth the potential rewards.

Teachers have told me that this kind of prompt sends a powerful message to students—that everyone is a learner, even the teacher—and that there's no shame in admitting you're not doing well at something and seeking help.

**A Handy Tool**

Exit slips are easy to use and take little time away from instruction. Many teachers use them routinely—even daily—and attest to their positive influence on student achievement.

**Endnote**

[1](http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/oct12/vol70/num02/The-Many-Uses-of-Exit-Slips.aspx%22%20%5Cl%20%22ref1)  Cross, K. P. (1998). Classroom research: Implementing the scholarship of teaching. In T. Angelo (Ed.), *Classroom assessment and research: An update on uses, approaches, and research findings* (pp. 5–12). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass; and Ross, J. A., Hogaboam-Gray, A., & Rolheiser, C. (2002). Student self-evaluation in grade 5–6 mathematics: Effects on problem-solving achievement. *Educational Assessment, 8*(1), 43–59.

<http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/oct12/vol70/num02/The-Many-Uses-of-Exit-Slips.aspx>