



List

9 conversation starters for before and after administering assessments

Successful teachers remember the primary objective of assessment: understanding where a student is on their learning journey. High-quality assessment provides educators with the critical information they need to make adjustments to instructional strategies to maximize learning and motivate students to set updated, achievable goals.

Yet, there are many more days before and after the assessment than test days themselves! What conversations are we having in *those* stretches? How can we use conversations to plan new finish lines, updated as our learners grow?

Here are nine conversation starters for educators to initiate—with students, families, caregivers, and other stakeholders—before and after administering assessments.

Prior to the assessment with students:

1. Starter: “Let’s talk about the purpose of assessment.”

Goal: (Re)familiarize students with the assessment and its purpose.

Whether students are veteran or first-time assessment takers, ensure students understand the purpose of the test: giving educators information they need to better meet students where they are. It’s a cycle, not a finish line!

Reminding students of the *why* behind assessment recasts learning as a journey rather than a destination and emphasizes a [growth mindset](#). Instead of being viewed as summative, help frame for students that their results can drive conversations about opportunities for their growth. After a few cycles of this—testing, planning, achieving, testing—students will value the assessment score *less* and the process of learning *more*.

Read our 10 do’s and don’ts of student test preparation [here](#).

2. Starter: “Let’s take a look at how this test looks and feels!”

Goal: Explicitly revisit the format of the test.

What’s old hat for teachers may not feel such to students. Avoid assuming students remember the testing process, understand its purpose, or approach tests like you did. Take the opportunity to [preview the test](#) with students, including any test-taking tools like calculators and highlighters.

It can even be tempting to underplay the test itself so students don’t get nervous. Just as classroom tests aren’t the time for new material, helping students avoid surprises on test day empowers them to provide the most reliable results.

3. Starter: “Do any of you have advice or encouragement to offer each other from the last time we took this assessment?”

Goal: Reframe the test in student-friendly language and invite students to share.

Use metaphors and build time for conversations around how students see the test. Some ideas include:

- Explain the goal of maintaining a healthy and caring classroom culture, even during test times. Ask students to share in what ways assessment is both a team sport and a solo sport!
- Ask students in what other ways we see *growth* as the marker of success, rather than the *score*. Do any students want to share how they are growing in a hobby or extracurricular activity?
- Invoke the wisdom of students who have taken the test. Does anyone want to share their experience?
- Build an advice and encouragement wall, from one student to another.

Prior to the assessment with families:

4. Starter: “Here are some ways to support your test-taker.”

Goal: De-stress caregivers and equip them to be the best support system.

We all took tests in school, and family members may share their own fears and anxieties surrounding testing experiences with their children. Whether you send home a newsletter or you have a digital bulletin board, helping families understand the assessment is as vital as helping students.

[Articles written for families are helpful](#) and can emphasize that this test isn’t about “aceing” or “failing”—it’s about helping teachers update their instruction with reliable data. Reiterate that students won’t be punished or rewarded based on their score; rather, teachers will have more information to make the best instructional decisions possible.

We were all students once, with very different test-taking experiences. Remember that families just want to help, so [point them to actionable tips to do so](#).

Prior to the assessment with fellow teachers, school leaders, and instructional coaches:

5. Starter: “What date and time will we be sitting down to discuss results?”

Goal: Proactively plan ahead for a data sit-down.

Schools are busy places, and it’s easy to lose track of time. Before you know it, weeks or months have passed before you and your team have examined your assessment results and made plans for the future. This can lead the teaching team to feel as though all the effort put into test administration was for naught.

Before this season’s test is administered, get a date on the calendar to discuss the data. Deciding to conduct analysis on assessment data before it arrives ensures proactivity, rather than a last-minute meeting if results are less than glowing. When growth is at the forefront, all kinds of results are valuable opportunities to understand which students might be ready for accelerated content and which students may need additional support or interventions.

Reinforce the wins even as you take extra care to examine opportunities for improvement. Getting into a habit of data analysis, no matter the results, keeps data at the forefront and avoids emotional reactions.

For schools administering the [MAP® Growth™](#) assessment, NWEA® offers multiple [professional learning](#) experiences, facilitated online and in person, to allow teachers and school leaders to gain insight and make instructional plans using their MAP Growth data.



After the assessment with students:

6. Starter: “Your latest score is just the most recent chapter—what happened before that? What will happen next?”

Goal: Help students develop a long-term mindset.

A student’s assessment score is just that: *current*. Students will begin learning more the day after taking the test, culminating in a new score in just a few months. Help students get unstuck from “now” and instead widen their time horizon. Zooming out invites a sense of beginning!

A test score is simply a snapshot in time of where a student is on their learning journey. Pivot away from the number and instead focus on where they’ve been and where they’re going, what challenged them most, the subsequent learning ahead—and how far they’ve come in a matter of months!

Placing a score as a moment in time requires the student to recall the learning before the assessment and imagine the learning to come after. This “temporal intelligence” helps students have long-term mindset—essential for those long-term goals.

7. Starter: “Now that we know where you are, let’s plan where you want to go.”

Goal: Establish goals and make plans!

Assessment is all about [where we go next](#), and [involving students in those plans](#) is essential. Consider one-on-one goal-setting conversations with students and encourage them to log their learning celebrations and goals in a journal.

Remember to [set goals not just for the next assessment](#) but for the next week and month of learning. Students (especially in younger grades) can have trouble projecting eleven or twelve weeks in advance. A short-term goal helps students stay motivated and connects what they’re learning today to their eventually improved assessment score.

If a student needs more work with informational text, combine a passion of theirs (one of our favorite examples is a student who was a burgeoning frog expert) with related nonfiction articles. Does your class need bolstering with numbers and operations? Plan to spend more time on that than on geometry this month!*

After the assessment with caregivers:

8. Starter: “Check out these supplemental math resources.”

Goal: Provide tools for caregivers to support their learner.

Many families may feel intimidated by the idea of helping their student with math. Help families understand that simply demonstrating a [math growth mindset](#) is a great starting place (including not announcing they “aren’t a math person”). Encourage families to find ways to incorporate math in their daily life (scroll to the math section in [this blog post](#)), and point them toward finding a [supplemental math practice tool](#) if they wish.

Much as reading at home can reinforce essential skills in literacy, regular exposure to math at home can help students understand why we learn math and give them extra opportunities to practice and work toward mastery.

After the assessment with fellow teachers, school leaders, and instructional coaches:

9. Starter: “Can we share tips regarding student goal-setting?”

Goal: Invoke the expertise of colleagues and see what works for them.

Talking with fellow teachers, school leaders, and instructional coaches is more than simply discussing data. Knowledge-sharing around strategies of student goal-setting gets at the real purpose of the assessment: how we empower our students to take the next steps on their journey.

Consider watching this [webinar](#) with your PLC team, and brainstorm ways to bring students into frequent, informal goal-setting conversations.

A few strategies to try with students might include:

- Sharing ways you’ve used goals in your own life to achieve important things. Ask them how they might track their goals.
- Asking students to track what they’re learning through a self-assessment journal. Use this as a jumping off point for them to set goals for the month or for the week.
- Inviting students to share with their families how they’re practicing academic skills in school and what their goals are.
- Having conversations with students that connect academic skills to future colleges and career opportunities or to other long-term objectives that they care about.

** For those administering the MAP Growth assessment, make [math differentiation](#) both personalized and easy with [MAP Accelerator™](#), which offers Khan Academy learning pathways in response to students’ MAP Growth progress. Educators who are using MAP Accelerator in the classroom will see new, updated MAP scores and associated suggested pathways for immediate, differentiated math instruction.*



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