

# Checking for Understanding Formative Assessment Techniques for Your Classroom

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Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development Alexandria, Virginia USA, 2007, 158 Pages,  
ISBN: 978-1-4166-0569-0

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This book, *Checking for Understanding: Formative Assessment Techniques for Your Classroom*, underscores the premise that the greater the reflection fostered by both teachers and learners, the more profound and valuable the processes of understanding and learning for both parties. It is primarily aimed at educators who aspire to enhance their teaching practices and those committed to cultivating a more profound and authentic learning environment. The analysis of student understanding provides teachers with critical insights into the learners' cognitive processes throughout the curriculum. As emphasized by the authors, teachers undergo an ongoing process of becoming increasingly aware of both their students' comprehension and their own pedagogical approaches. The central objective of this work is to empower educators with a systematic framework for assessing understanding through a variety of efficient techniques for formative assessment, which serve to inform instructional decisions and guide pedagogical practices. In addition to elucidating the advantages of monitoring understanding from the teacher's perspective, the book provides a reflective note-taking guide to assist educators in documenting their professional knowledge and growth. The authors present over thirty distinct practices for evaluating understanding before, during, and after class, offering strategies to engage students in activities that reinforce their knowledge and competencies.

The themes explored in the book, such as learning processes, formative assessment, checking for understanding, measurement, and evaluation, are central to educational research. The work of Black and Wiliam on formative assessment, for instance, provides a seminal framework that underscores the importance of ongoing, formative assessments in improving student outcomes. Their research highlights how formative assessment practices can enhance learning by providing feedback that informs both teaching and learning, a core theme reflected in this book's approach.

Additionally, comparing the book's approaches to the works of leading educational theorists can further strengthen the review. Theories on learning processes, such as those proposed by Piaget and Vygotsky, emphasize the role of active engagement and reflection in the learning process, both of which are central to the book's strategies. Furthermore, examining how the book's formative assessment techniques align with current theories in measurement and evaluation would provide a richer context. For

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**Geliş Tarihi/Received:** 18.01.2025

**Kabul Tarihi/Accepted:** 09.05.2025

**Ç. Yayınlanma Tarihi/Online Published:** 31.05.2025

example, constructivist theories advocate for assessment methods that focus on understanding and reasoning, rather than simple rote memorization.

Incorporating research from Turkish educational literature, such as studies on formative assessment practices in Turkish classrooms or the role of teacher reflection in pedagogical development, could add depth and relevance to the review. By synthesizing these sources, a more comprehensive perspective on formative assessment and its application in diverse educational contexts can be offered. The book provides a comprehensive and practical guide for teachers to assess and monitor student understanding. By drawing on key theoretical frameworks and comparing the book's strategies with existing research, the review will not only provide a thorough analysis of the book's contributions but also situate its approaches within the broader discourse on formative assessment and learning processes.

Moreover, the book includes a comprehensive online study guide for teachers and educational institutions, accessible at [www.ascd.org/studyguides](http://www.ascd.org/studyguides). It would be convenient to briefly give some information about the publication. ASCD, the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, is a non-profit international organization founded in 1943. ASCD is where educators come to learn about new instructional strategies, grow as individuals and progress as professionals. (<https://www.ascd.org>)

The book belongs to the department of educational measurement and evaluation, and department of curriculum and instruction. Its value in these departments is through the guidance for assessing the learners' understanding and teaching effectiveness. The context of the book has a harmony between theory and the practice of applicable strategies. The book contains seven chapters along with the part of afterword, references, index and about the author. It is evident that the authors' organization of this book is to reflect from the student's point of view in each chapter.

In the first chapter titled "Why Check for Understanding?" the researchers define what checking for understanding is and is not. They also enable the comparison of formative and summative assessments from the aspects of their purpose, when to administer, how the teachers and learners use the results. The authors state the inevitable situations of checking in the lectures we use as teachers by highlighting "*Checking by understanding permeates the teaching world.*" (p.1). Upon considering our lectures, we could realize that common prompts such as "Any questions?" "Did you all get that?" "Does it make sense?" or "Am I clear?" to check understanding. Personally, I receive positive feedback from my students as I use the final prompt expression more during the classroom. As my students understand, they become more active and engage more. In addition, Fisher and Frey discuss some of the research on the importance of checking for understanding in promoting learning. They conclude this chapter with guiding and inspiring questions below (p.14) which could be applied during our practices:

- Do I know what misconceptions or naive assumptions my students possess?
- How do I know what they understand?
- What evidence will I accept for this understanding?
- How will I use their understandings to plan future instruction?

One of the strengths of this chapter is how the authors provide a clear distinction between formative and summative assessments. By defining these terms and their respective roles in the classroom, the authors help teachers gain a deeper understanding of the different assessment types and when to appropriately use them. Formative assessments, which are conducted throughout the lesson to evaluate ongoing student understanding, contrast with summative assessments, which measure learning at the end of a unit. This distinction is important for teachers as it helps them make informed decisions about when and how to assess their students to maximize learning opportunities. The chapter's discussion on the common prompts used in classrooms to check understanding, such as "Any questions?" "Did you all get that?" and "Does it make sense?" offers a relatable reflection for educators. These prompts are frequently used in real classroom settings, and the authors highlight that, while they are common, they may not always be effective in deeply assessing student understanding. Personally, I have found that the final prompt, "Am I clear?" elicits positive feedback from students, promoting more active engagement and participation. This aligns with the chapter's emphasis on encouraging students to think more critically about their own understanding and fosters an interactive classroom environment.

Additionally, Fisher and Frey incorporate research that underscores the importance of checking for understanding as a means of promoting learning. By grounding their argument in empirical findings, they bolster the validity of their claims, providing teachers with evidence-based reasoning for why such practices should be integral to their teaching routines. However, while the chapter provides a strong theoretical foundation, it could benefit from more practical examples of how to move beyond basic prompts like “Any questions?” to more effective strategies for checking for understanding. For instance, while the authors mention common prompts, they do not explore in-depth alternative methods for checking understanding that might lead to more meaningful feedback from students. More concrete suggestions, such as peer assessments, think-pair-share activities, or interactive technology tools, could provide teachers with a wider range of strategies to engage students in reflecting on their own learning. Another area that could be explored further is the challenge of identifying misconceptions and naive assumptions among students. While the chapter prompts teachers to consider the misconceptions their students may have, it does not fully address how teachers can systematically identify and address these misconceptions. Further discussion on formative assessment techniques that help uncover such misunderstandings—such as concept mapping or targeted questioning techniques—would be valuable.

In the second chapter “Using Oral Language to Check for Understanding” emphasizes the stages of early oral language development and goals for speaking and listening by grade levels in the light of other research. The authors share applicable strategies (p. 23-34) for checking for understanding through oral language by highlighting the importance of attention and practice to speak effectively:

- Accountable Talk
- Noticing Nonverbal Cues
- Value Lineups
- Retellings
- Think-Pair-Share
- Misconception Analysis
- Whip Around

The chapter presents a clear, research-based framework for understanding oral language development, which helps teachers align their practices with grade-level expectations. The inclusion of specific, actionable strategies like “Accountable Talk” and “Think-Pair-Share” provides teachers with concrete tools that can be implemented in the classroom immediately. The strategies emphasize student engagement, ensuring that learners not only participate but also demonstrate their understanding effectively.

While the chapter introduces a variety of strategies, it may lack in-depth exploration of how to adapt these techniques for diverse learners or specific contexts, leaving some teachers seeking more detailed guidance. The chapter could have provided more detailed ways to assess the effectiveness of these oral language strategies, giving teachers clearer tools for evaluating their own practice and student outcomes.

In the third chapter “Using Questions to Check for Understanding” points out the importance and necessity of using questioning to check for understanding. The researchers share efficient questioning techniques (p. 37-45) with instructional practices (p. 45-55) to increase active learning environment in the classroom in company with various researchers:

- Constructing Effective Questions
- Providing Nonverbal Support
- Developing Authentic Questions
- Response Cards
- Hand Signals

- Audience Response Systems
- ReQuest (Reciprocal Questioning)
- Socratic Seminar

The chapter offers a wide array of questioning strategies that cater to different learning environments, such as “Audience Response Systems” for technology-driven classrooms and “Socratic Seminar” for fostering deep discussion. By incorporating techniques like “Response Cards” and “Hand Signals,” the chapter emphasizes active participation, which helps keep students engaged and facilitates ongoing formative assessment. The strategies are grounded in research, ensuring that teachers can trust the methods as effective means for checking understanding.

The chapter presents a broad spectrum of questioning techniques, which could overwhelm educators, especially those new to using questioning as an assessment tool. A more focused selection of techniques may help teachers implement them more effectively. While the strategies are described, the chapter could benefit from more detailed examples of how to implement these techniques in real classroom settings, particularly for teachers with varying levels of experience.

In the fourth chapter “Using Writing to Check for Understanding” Fisher and Frey deal with an analysis of writing as another way students demonstrate what they know. This chapter focuses solely on writing as an assessment tool, rather than as a method for teaching writing skills. The readers could find out the reason of usage of writing as an assessment tool in the book. As in the other chapters, this part also includes problematic behaviors during the assessment like a warning. A number of strategies is also shared in this part to check for understanding (p. 61-67):

- Interactive Writing
- Read-Write-Pair-Share
- Summary Writing
- RAFT (Role, Audience, Format, Topic)

The chapter provides a targeted exploration of writing as an assessment tool, making it clear that the goal is to measure student understanding rather than focusing solely on writing skills. A variety of writing techniques, such as “RAFT” and “Summary Writing,” offer flexibility in how teachers can use writing to evaluate understanding, catering to different student needs and classroom contexts. By warning about common challenges associated with using writing as an assessment tool, the authors equip educators with a more realistic view of the process, helping them anticipate and mitigate potential issues.

While the chapter acknowledges potential challenges, it may not provide enough detailed strategies or solutions for overcoming these issues, leaving some teachers without sufficient guidance on how to handle specific problems that may arise during assessment. The chapter could benefit from more concrete examples or case studies demonstrating how these strategies can be effectively implemented in the classroom, especially for teachers with limited experience using writing as an assessment tool.

At the end of this chapter, the authors underline the importance of practice and experience to improve writing-to-learn prompts beneficially. In the fifth chapter “Using Projects and Performances to Check for Understanding,” Fisher and Frey examine how project – and problem-based learning which are applied rarely in typical classroom environment enables the learners’ understanding. The researchers notice the necessity of homeschool relationship and communication when assigning and evaluating projects not to check the parents’ understanding but the learners’. Besides pointing out the requirement for designing principles to advance the presumably effect of project – and problem-based learning on the learners’ understanding, the authors share beneficial techniques using projects and performances (p. 80-96) with the sample applications:

- Readers’ Theatre
- Multimedia Presentations

- Electronic and Paper Portfolios
- Visual Displays of Information
- Public Performances

Integrated performances into the real life empowers the creativity of the learners and enrich them from divergent perspectives. The influence of the projects and performances are a critical and meaningful way of learning as the authors express. The chapter effectively highlights the importance of project – and problem-based learning as tools for enhancing student comprehension. The inclusion of specific techniques and sample applications is practical and offers valuable guidance for educators. Additionally, the focus on fostering creativity and engaging students with real-world experiences is a strong point, as it supports deeper and more meaningful learning. One limitation of the chapter is that, while it discusses the benefits of these techniques, it does not sufficiently address the challenges educators might face in implementing them. For example, the time and resources required for projects may be difficult for some classrooms to accommodate. Furthermore, the chapter could benefit from more detailed evidence on how these methods directly improve student outcomes, as well as strategies for overcoming potential obstacles like limited resources or the need for teacher training.

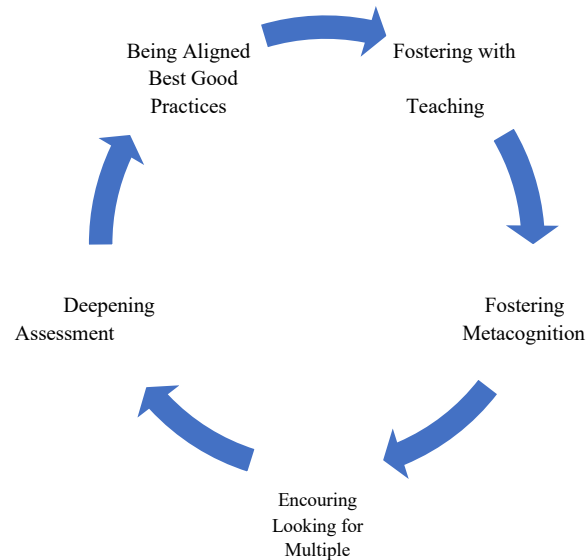
In the sixth chapter “Using Tests to Check for Understanding” is a comprehensive account of test development and analysis to check for understanding. Helping the learners understand the core and aim of testing is essential for the benefit. Some common types for testing such as multiple choice, short answer, dichotomous choices, and essays are mentioned in this chapter with the effective and practicable tools. The final chapter “Using Common Assessments and Consensus Scoring to Check for Understanding” examines the reason and the way of necessity of the consensus scoring for professional learning community in order to expand the teachers’ expectation, harmonize the curriculum and make the instructions productive. After using some protocols for common assessments in action with teachers, Fisher and Frey analyze their point of views and fundamental parts to improve the learners’ achievements (p.132):

- Understanding the content standards
- Gaining a greater understanding of students’ thinking
- Intervening of the teachers in case of not understanding content information by the students

Both chapters provide valuable insights into effective assessment strategies. The sixth chapter on testing emphasizes a clear connection between various test types and their practical use in the classroom. It equips teachers with tools to design and implement assessments that can more accurately gauge student understanding. The final chapter offers a compelling case for consensus scoring and common assessments, providing teachers with structured frameworks to improve collaboration and alignment within the educational community. These strategies not only promote consistency but also encourage deeper insights into student progress and needs.

While both chapters present valuable techniques and tools, they could benefit from a deeper exploration of the potential challenges in implementing these strategies. For instance, the authors could address the time and resource constraints that teachers may face when developing and using common assessments or consensus scoring. Additionally, there could be more focus on the varying effectiveness of different test types across diverse student populations and subject areas. Without such considerations, the suggestions may seem idealistic for teachers working in resource-limited environments.

The concluding emphasis in this chapter is the requirement of supporting collaboratively of the teachers with their peers and administrators and professional development units for great performances in the school atmosphere and the process of checking for understanding. Afterwards, the authors summarize the benefits of checking for understanding as in the cycle.



This model is structured to guide educators through a process of continual improvement. The benefits of this cycle are highlighted through a series of interconnected practices that serve to enhance both teaching and learning:

**1. Being Aligned Best Good Practices:** Alignment is foundational because it ensures that everything in the educational process—teaching methods, activities, assessments, and even the environment—is working toward the same goal. If a teacher is not aligned with best practices or educational standards, students may not receive the most relevant or effective instruction, and learning goals may be less achievable. In the context of the book, the idea of “best good practices” refers to adopting research-supported strategies that have been shown to promote student engagement and deep learning.

**2. Fostering with Teaching:** Fostering effective teaching is at the heart of student success. In the book’s philosophy, effective teaching doesn’t just follow a script; it’s dynamic and responsive to students’ needs. This step emphasizes the importance of choosing appropriate teaching methods that align with students’ learning styles and needs. In addition, fostering teaching means continuously improving one’s teaching practice, incorporating feedback from students, and being open to adopting new methods to enhance learning.

**3. Fostering Metacognition:** Fostering metacognition empowers students to become more independent learners. By encouraging them to reflect on their learning process, teachers help students build critical thinking and problem-solving skills that are essential for lifelong learning. Metacognition also allows students to recognize areas of difficulty and seek solutions, promoting a deeper level of understanding. In the book’s context, this step emphasizes the need for teachers to guide students in becoming reflective, self-aware learners.

**4. Encouraging Looking for Multiple Perspectives:** Encouraging multiple perspectives enhances critical thinking and creativity. It helps students develop the ability to analyze situations from different angles, leading to a more well-rounded understanding. In a classroom, this approach also helps create an inclusive and respectful learning environment where diverse ideas are discussed and valued. For teachers, looking for multiple perspectives helps in addressing the different needs and backgrounds of students. In the book’s framework, this is seen as a critical way to engage students in deeper, more thoughtful learning.

**5. Deepening Assessment:** Deep assessment allows for a more comprehensive understanding of student progress. It helps teachers adjust instruction based on real-time feedback, which ultimately improves teaching effectiveness and student outcomes. The book emphasizes the need for ongoing, dynamic assessments that provide a holistic view of learning, rather than relying solely on traditional tests or one-time evaluations. Deepening assessment also supports the development of students’ metacognitive skills by encouraging them to reflect on their own learning and assess their progress.



In summary, this chapter effectively ties together the importance of collaboration among educators and continuous professional development to improve the process of checking for understanding. By emphasizing the cyclical nature of assessment, reflection, and refinement, Fisher and Frey provide a compelling argument for the necessity of ongoing growth for both teachers and students in the pursuit of educational excellence.

Ayşe Sıdika (1871-1903), an educator and author of the first modern educational science book in Türkiye, said, “The happiness and wealth of a nation are measured by the degree of perfection of its intellectual education.” I would like to suggest that if the teacher understands himself/herself and reflect about his/her own teaching while providing qualified feedback to his/her students, the checking for understanding process progresses more efficiently. Moreover, the quality and horizon of a learning environment is enhanced by the degree of perfection of the intertwining of both the teachers and the learners’ study, experience, and life. A formal education process might not be enough for a human life to fully comprehend and understand the truth of main things, but the seeds of these qualities are sown by teachers and all stakeholders of education in that process, and if the curiosity and love of learning is achieved, they could contribute to the lifelong effort and process of understanding. Learning for understanding undoubtedly makes us free since it requires flexible and multiple perspectives and standing. This needs only to be the highest educational mission and philosophy that an education system including the assessment process could have in general (Kenan, 2022).

Throughout the book, it is noteworthy that Fisher and Frey show how to increase students’ understanding with the help of creative formative assessments which could associate with the real life authentically. This book is grounded in research and reflects Doug and Nancy’s real-life experiences, shaped by their work in their respective departments and their shared interests. This book is highly recommended for those interested in exploring a variety of engaging activities that check and improve understanding. The authors have meticulously provided valuable insights through its well-chosen practical examples. The clarity and the flow of the study enhance the practicability and readability of the book. One of the standout features of the book is the authors’ use of language. They make complex ideas accessible and their writing is concise. This clarity enables the reader’s understanding and keeps them engaged throughout the text. Moreover, I need to mention that the authors could explore how technology can enhance learning experiences and provide real-time feedback and help the educator to assess the learners’ strenghts, and weaknesses.

Although the existing data maintains its value, considerable changes in the education system have taken place since the book was published, implying a need for an update, particularly in relation to different milieus and standards. There is also a notable absence of theoretical frameworks that might guide the selection and application of different formative assessment techniques. While Fisher and Frey provide a variety of strategies for different classroom contexts, they do not deeply contract how these strategies may need to be adapted to accommodate students with varying needs, backgrounds, or learning styles. Since *Checking for Understanding* was published in 2007, significant shifts in the educational landscape—such as the rise of competency-based education, social-emotional learning (SEL), and the increasing focus on metacognition and self-regulation—are not addressed. the book could have explored how formative assessments can support students’ self-regulation skills or contribute to the development of social-emotional competencies. These areas are highly relevant today, particularly as education systems focus more on progressing the whole child rather than simply academic achievement. A more critical evaluation of how their practices could evolve to meet these contemporary demands would have enriched the theoretical depth of the book. While *Checking for Understanding* is an incredibly practical resource that provides teachers with concrete techniques to assess student learning, its combination of theory and practice could be more nuanced. In my opinion, there is no doubt that the readers will find the approaches complementary with its clarity to understand the nature and spirit of the learners’ point of view and with its contribution to the field as assessing understanding is a research-based method that employs real-time evaluations of learners’ learning to provide teachers with insights into their progress.

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## Araştırma etik izni

Çalışma etik kurul izni gerektirmemektedir.

**Bu makaleye atıf yapmak için / To cite this article:**

Tekin, Ş. (2025). Checking for Understanding Formative Assessment Techniques for Your Classroom. *Temel Eğitim Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 5 (1): 131-138. doi: 10.55008/te-ad.1622621