# Learning as a Journey: Early, Low-stakes Assignments

Should we be giving students more tests? Well, yes, and no.  In order for assessments of learning to be effective, they must be “frequent, early, and formative” (Tinto, 2012). Offering opportunities for students to practice and receive critical feedback right from the start helps to guide their learning. Given that early, low-stakes assignments influence future performance, rather than past, we can understand where our students are before and during their learning. This in turn helps us in creating opportunities to further grow their self-efficacy by identifying misconceptions and gaps. This approach has many benefits to both instructor and student.

## Benefits for Students

* Motivates and increases class attendance
* Opportunity for active and reflective evaluation and control of their own learning (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006)
* Opportunity to translate prior knowledge/experiences to course topics (Kift, 2009)
* Increases engagement, specifically for those who might be at risk for failure or withdrawal
* Builds skills and confidence with specific, timely, feedback that empower them to make adjustments (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt, 2010)
* Increases opportunity for practice, recall, and retention of information
* Increases self-efficacy
* Opens communication with the instructor that can lead to more meaningful conversations and connections
* Fosters deep learning (Bain, 2014; Nilsen, 2010)

## Benefits for Faculty

* Personalizes the learning experience by modifying instruction based on students’ learning
* Opens communication with your students that can lead to more meaningful conversations and connections
* Connects to bigger course concepts to help student scaffold their learning
* Identifies students who may need additional support, e.g., students on academic probation, students not attending class, students who would benefit from other support such as writing, etc.
* Referral support using an early alert system
* Directs students to additional resources if needed
* Contributes towards helping students not only be successful in their courses, but also make significant progress toward their degrees

## Examples of Low-stakes Assignments

* Drafts
* Peer review
* Group work
* Quiz
* Discussion
* Self-assessment
* Quick Write
* Muddiest Point
* Journal/reflection

## References

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