Workshop objectives

By the end of this workshop we will have discussed:

- Why formative assessment is used in ISIS online facilitated writing courses

- How instructors do online formative assessment and benchmarking

- How to identify potential problems with learners who want an easy fix for a higher benchmark

- How to help online learners achieve their objective

Please type your questions in the chat box at any time.

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Background of ISIS online courses

How our online courses are offered:

- Facilitated language courses on Moodle; Adobe Connect
- Language courses are free for eligible learners

The online language courses we offer:

- Writing courses for completed CLB 5 to 7 (benchmarked)
- Listening-Speaking course for completed CLB 6 or 7 (benchmarked)
- Pronunciation course; Language Learning Strategies course
- Cultural Communication course

Who can take our online language courses:

- Clients of ISIS; pre-arrival clients coming to Nova Scotia

Why participants want to take our online courses:

- To improve their language skills
- To improve their benchmarks

Purpose of online writing

- The purpose of the Introduction to Writing course is for the learner to advance from a CLB 5 in writing to a completed CLB 6 in eight weeks.

- Learners are motivated to succeed because they want the higher benchmark, want to learn better writing skills, or want to practice English in any way available.

- Formative assessment is given with detailed feedback on 28 assignments throughout 8 weeks.

Definitions

In the *CLB Guide to Implementation* (5), formative assessment is defined as "ongoing diagnostic assessment providing information to guide instruction and improve student performance". (p 182)

Summative assessment is defined as "culminating assessment for a unit or course providing a status report on mastery or degree of proficiency according to identified learning outcomes". (p 186)

The *Theoretical Framework for the CLB (2013)* (3): Formative assessment consists in 'assessing students in the process of 'forming' their competencies and skills in order to help them continue that growth process'.

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Why formative assessment?

- Learners show they can do what they've been learning to do: write at a CLB 6 level.

- They demonstrate their forming skills throughout the 8 weeks.

- They receive ongoing assessment with meaningful feedback throughout the 28 assignments.

- Osika (8) says that online classrooms need to keep students activity engaged "by requiring frequent, small assessments that will require the student to access the course two or three times a week." Our learners are engaged this way.

- Learners are not stressed about summative tests; they can relax and experiment with their writing.

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Encouraging learner learning

Formative assessment checks what the learner has learned.

Content is designed to follow the practice of PPP:

- **Presentatio**n in a lesson that the learner reads
- **Practice** in the quizzes following the lesson
  - *Check that learners have learned from the lesson.*
- **Production** in assignments that follow the quizzes
  - *Check that learners are writing or starting to write at CLB 6.*

It's the learners' responsibility to spend enough time on each component.

Example of one week's contents

Coordinating: and, or...

5.0 Discussion - language for linking ideas

5.1 Lesson - about conjunctions and linking

5.2 Quiz - choose the conjunction

5.3 Assignment - linking correctly (1)

Grammar: Subject-verb agreement

5.9 Lesson - about subject-verb agreement

5.10 Assignment - correct subject-verb agreement

Subordinate: since, because, although . . .

5.4 Lesson - about subordinate conjunctions

5.5 Quiz - vocabulary preparation 5

5.6 Quiz - using subordinate conjunctions

5.7 Assignment - linking correctly (2)

5.8 Assignment - describe a chart

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5.3 Assignment : linking correctly (1)

You have probably travelled by train in the past. Pretend that you took this picture one day in the past when you were commuting to work by train. On that day your train was late, and you were worried about getting to work on time.

Write two paragraphs of 6 or 7 sentences each describing your experience at the train station that day.

You could include a few of these ideas:

- observations about the clothes people were wearing and what people were doing
- it was hot and people were irritable
- you were meeting someone at the station, but you couldn't find him/her
- your cell phone was dead and you couldn't contact your office or the person you were meeting

Be sure your writing includes:

- at least five different conjunctions, used correctly
- good sentence structure
- a variety of sentence types
- correct verb tenses for past
- correct spelling and punctuation
- correct paragraph form
- good parallel structure
- correct relative clauses

public domain picture: morguefile

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Questions . . .

Some questions to think about regarding formative assessment:

1. How many hours does the learner need to spend on language learning in order to increase a benchmark?

2. How many samples of language are needed to give an indication of benchmark improvement?

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Feedback and grading

A Michigan State University study (7): good assessment "results in meaningful feedback to the learner and is itself a learning experience".

- How timely is the feedback?
- How long does it take the instructor?
- Is each assignment benchmarked?

We grade and assess each two-paragraph assignment.

1 = Needs improvement (0%)
2 = Good: meets some CLB 6 requirements (CLB 5) (33.3%)
3 = Very Good: meets most CLB 6 requirements (66.6%)
4 = Excellent: meets all CLB 6 requirements (CLB 6) (100%)

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Rubric

Writing Assessment: Introduction to Writing				
1 = Needs improvement 2 = Good: meets some CLB 6 requirements (CLB 5) 3 = Very Good: meets most CLB 6 requirements 4 = Excellent: meets all CLB 6 requirements (CLB 6) N/A = not relevant to the assignment	Note: *learners must write their own work; if writing is plagiarized, an evaluation will not be made*			
Skills	1	2	3	4
Content and language are appropriate and relevant to the situation and audience				
Communicates an increasing range of moderately complex messages				
Addresses the purpose of the task				
Provides accurate descriptions, comparisons or accounts of events in a clear sequence				
Adequate paragraph structure; clearly expressed main ideas; some supporting ideas				
Appropriate use of connective words and phrases				
Developing control of complex structures				
Good control of simple structures; some awkward phrases and word combinations				
Good range of vocabulary for simple everyday texts				
Adequate control of punctuation, spelling and format				
Comments:				

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Feedback example

Writing sample with feedback and correction.

Second, the age of these attendants ~~are~~ is (1) too old. Last, there are two women who look like secretaries who are (2) sitting behind a desk along the wall with windows, ~~who look like secretaries~~.

Notes:

(1) The subject is "age". Therefore the verb has to be singular.

(2) The relative clause about secretaries needs to be closer to the noun "women". Then it's a good idea to repeat the relative pronoun instead of shortening the "sitting behind" clause. It's tricky to balance two relative clauses, but it makes a lovely sentence.

Other checks of writing skill

- Pre-course writing assignment is compared to learner's writing at the end of the course
- Timed assignments are graded and assessed using the rubric; detailed feedback is provided
- Discussion forum participation is required
- The discussions, pre-course writing assignment, and timed assignments provide writing samples under different conditions than the weekly assignments, and help the instructor check for consistency.

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Performance

Learners' performance may be erratic due to:

- Illness or fatigue
- Work schedules
- Family needs
- Stress felt during the three timed assignments
- Poor time management, poor computer skills, poor typing skills
- Disinterest in some of the writing assignment topics
- Boredom because they know the content of the lessons already

Learners who are not fully committed from the beginning, or who are overwhelmed by the online format, the content, or the time requirement, often don't achieve their goal.
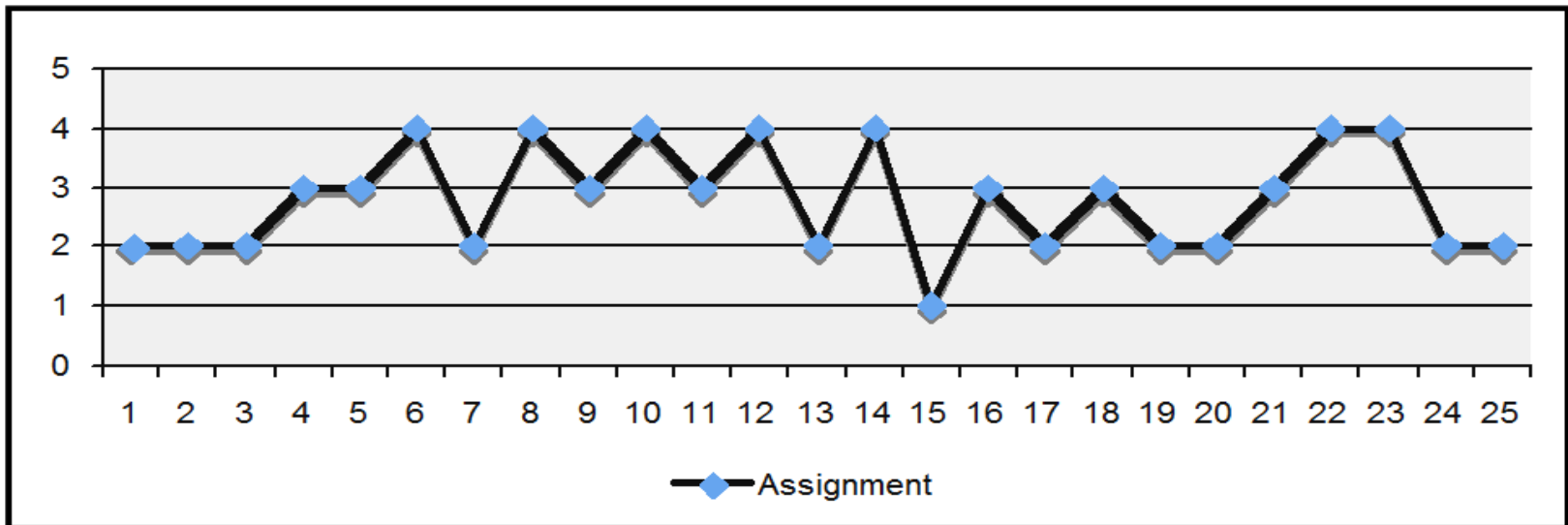
Grade pattern of one learner

25 assignments in 8 weeks.

1 = CLB lower than 5

2 = remains at a CLB 5

3 = showing progress, but not yet a CLB 6

4 = CLB 6 level writing

Questions. . .

What problems might you expect of your learners in an online writing course when they:

1. Commit to spending 8 – 10 hours a week for 8 weeks on course work, but have a busy life
2. Take the course for free and do it at home where they have family and friends
3. Must write 2 – 4 two-paragraph assignments each week
4. Yearn desperately for their benchmark to improve from CLB 5 in writing to CLB 6

Learner integrity

These questions appear in much of the literature on online learning: (*Assessing the Online Learner, p 4*)

- "Is the student who enrolled in the course the student who is participating, taking exams and quizzes, writing papers, and so on?"

- "How can I know that students won't cheat on exams or other assessments in my online course?"

- "How can I deal with plagiarism online?"

In short, is the learner really who she says she is?

Know your learners

Osika (8) says that "using frequent assessment points also allows the instructor to get to know students' work and personalities, making the identification of dishonest work easier".

Arend (1) mentions that "online instructors in general report that they know their students better than they would in a larger on-campus class".

Tread carefully

Once you suspect learners aren't writing their own work, you need to do something. This is the difficult part.

Story 1: phrases borrowed from the internet; response: anger

Story 2: copying the cell phone manual isn't using the internet; response: incredulity

Story 3: a female writer referring to "my wife"; response: denial

Story 4: her daughter edited her writing; response: justified

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Example 1 of a learner's writing

Pre-course task: Write one paragraph of 6 or 7 sentences comparing surfing to skiing (pictures provided).

Skiig and surfing both of them are sport and recreational activety ,but ther are many defernces between of them; surfing is a summer sport and the rider needs   waves to do it , waves can redden with board or without board by bellies, knees or feet of rider…

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Examples 2 & 3 of her writing

In a discussion: Paragraghs can orgnize ideas by sentences which support the topic to make the reader under stand what are you talking about in a clear way , using the conjections and punctuations make the reader more interested and the comunication between the writer and reader is understandable.

Part of a week 1 writing assignment: After two month my hasband was overseas,and he wanted us to travel to him;therefore,I went to the bank to pike up the passports, out of sudden the employee told me ,sorry it seems to me that you cann't reach the box , because no one can open the box just your husband.

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Example 4 of her writing

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An email task about recycling, Week 8: I am emailing you to let you know that I think it's a really good idea to start recycling at each work area. Our company has been very late to set up a recycling system. In my opinion, recycling would make the image of our company better and attract more customers. Many customers like to do business only with companies which are environmentally friendly. On the other hand, recycling improves employees' morale . . . .

Compared to this writing at the beginning of the course:

Skiig and surfing both of them are sport and recreational activety ,but ther are many defernces between of them*;*

What to say?

- Remind all learners that plagiarism is unacceptable. Remind them where to find the course information about it. Re-define it.

- Hint that the learner's writing tone has changed a lot recently.

- Hint that the learner's grammar and vocabulary have suddenly improved significantly and that it's unusual for a benchmark to improve three levels or more so quickly.

- State that you've found the same words and phrases, or content, on the internet. Cite the website. Define plagiarism and remind them not to do this again.

- Remind the learner to work step-by-step and not do all assignments at one time.

What to do?

- Keep good records on each learner's performance.

- Always check that a learner's writing is consistent; get to know style and capabilities

- Take time to understand the learners and their idiosyncrasies. Check in with learners; get to know the learner.

- Identify the problem early

- Compare the learner's writing on the pre-course writing assignment, discussions, emails, timed assignments and regular assignments.

- Research when a learner's writing was last benchmarked, and what the learner is doing now. If the learner is working in an English environment, or an academic environment, likely language is improving.

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Questions?

Your presenter

Ellen Pilon has been teaching EAL full-time for more than thirteen years, including developing online courses and teaching online over the past six years at ISIS. She is a member of CCLB's Registry of CLB Experts, and she's the author of the ISIS publication <u>Handbook for Volunteer ESL Tutors,</u> which is available on Tutela. Before joining ISIS she was an EAP instructor and IELTS examiner. She has a Master of Education in TESL, a Master of Arts in English, a Master of Library Science, a CELTA, and a certificate in Adult Education. Her career interests include assessment, standardized testing, curriculum development, and English language teaching of all kinds.

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Thank you!

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Resources

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