**What is Assessment for Learning?**

Assessment for Learning (AFL) is a process by which teachers gather information which they will use to make instructional decisions. In this regard, Assessment for Learning is a modality of constant assessment that enables teachers to adjust their practice so that every student succeeds. Simply put, AFL allows teachers to find out, quickly which students are and are not making progress, and to devise ways to help those in need so they become successful learners.

**How is AFL Different from Traditional Assessment?**

Traditionally, assessment is the last stage of a process. After exposure to and/or study of the target lessons, students are tested to verify the degree to which they have mastered the material. Students receive a grade and are promoted or demoted according to their test performance. This is Assessment of Learning.

This sequence inevitably produces groups of overachieving, achieving, and underachieving students. As instructors, we know how difficult it is to break free from the underachieving group. You, the reader of this article, are very likely to have been in one of the first two groups ever since your kindergarten years. You “did fine” throughout the various stages of education, all the way through university. But many of your classmates did not make it past a certain stage; they gave up at some point.
Why does this happen? Why are we so likely to remain in the group in which tests placed us from the very beginning?

Success sets the stage for more success (Stiggins 2006). A student who receives good grades and is advanced develops a “can do” attitude that leads to success in future tests. The opposite also holds true: Failure leads students to stop trying.

Assessment for Learning is different from Assessment of Learning in the sense that we do not assess at the end of the process. Instead, we propose a circular set of stages, with each having an effect on the others:

The outcome of this process is that teachers will be able to use the information from assessment to help every student succeed. Assessment for Learning will allow us to diagnose problems early in the process and, most importantly, it will allow us to do something about the students who are falling behind.

Assessment of Learning is a unidirectional process with little room for retrofitting.

Assessment for Learning is an instrument that helps teachers keep students away from the failing spiral.
Assessment for Learning in Big English

Big English author Mario Herrera has built a career as a teacher and student advocate. Mario’s number one goal when authoring instructional material is to put something in teachers’ hands that will enable every student to shine, to succeed, to achieve.

In Big English, Mario implements the principles of Assessment for Learning in the Student Book, the Teacher’s Edition, the Workbook, and the digital components.

Assessment for Learning in Big English Student Book

There is a Checkpoint lesson after every three units in Big English. Unlike the traditional Review Units so common in English Learning textbooks, the Checkpoints present an innovative progression, implemented over four pages.

Notice that this sequence follows the reverse order seen in most review units. In Big English, reflection and self-assessment precedes practice.

Self-Assessment

- Students are asked to rate how well they have learned each language component.
- Teacher guides students in discussions that enable students to put vocabulary and structures into practice.
- Students assess themselves.
- There are clear references if students need further review.

I Can Do It!

- Three steps involved in this section: Get Ready, Get Set, Go!
- Helps teachers evaluate whether there are areas that need review before proceeding to consolidation.
• Sequence of steps to prepare students for consolidation (Go!) section.

• Students actually do the activity.
• There is an outcome that can be acted out, presented or read.

All About Me
• Portfolio-type activities
• Additional review of target language
• Snapshot of each student at this point
According to Stiggins (2006) and Stiggins et al (2012), AFL requires an element of learner awareness of the process. Students may be made aware and active parts of the assessment process through an explicit reflection on learning goals.

These are the steps:

1) State and share learning goals: What do we need to learn?
2) Verify progress: Do I know the material? Can I show it?
3) Adjust practice: What can be done to get everyone on board?

The instructional design in the Big English Teacher’s Edition encompasses the four steps in the chart on page 6. For each step, Big English makes specific recommendations on how to achieve the Involve, Assess, Assist, Challenge goals outlined on page 6. He does so for every activity in every unit in every level. The result? The circular sequence illustrated on page 2 is implemented by default.
Assessment for Learning in *Big English Workbook*

The *Big English* Workbook is strictly aligned with the Student Book so students always know what’s expected of them. The Workbook is also designed as a self-paced environment that allows students to take ownership of their learning process.

Just like the Student Book, at the end of each section students are given an opportunity for self-reflection—the awareness requirement in AFL. Students themselves must decide whether they “know this,” “need more practice,” or “don’t know this.”

**References**


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**Involve**
Set clear learning goals. Make sure students are engaged in what they will be expected to learn.

**Assess**
Provide instruction that elicits feedback, so the teacher can determine how well students are learning. This is the point in the process where teachers ascertain specific student needs.

**Assist**
Adjust instruction based on feedback to help students attain the learning goal.

**Challenge**
Provide students with more opportunities to demonstrate what they know and can do.