

## Testing Tips

### *What Now?*

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As mentioned in the October 2012 newsletter, Testing Tips columns focus on questions from newsletter readers. To submit a question for a future **Ask a Tester** column, send an email to [opat@cal.org](mailto:opat@cal.org) with the subject line Ask a Tester.

As I write this article, it's mid-November, 2013 – roughly the middle of fall semester, just after the end of the first marking period in many schools. One teacher wrote in to ask what he should be doing at this point regarding assessment in his Chinese language class. Despite his lofty ambitions, he wasn't able to set up an assessment plan for the year during the summer. His question: Is it too late to start now?

In a word: no. It's never too late to think about, plan for, and implement assessment intentionally in your classroom. Sure, we all could be better at planning in advance, but even if you missed your chance to make a new (school) year's resolution, today can still be the first day of the rest of your thoughtfully assessed life.



You may feel that you are up to your ears in standardized tests, or you may feel like you're stuck in the hinterlands of your school's "non-core" subject areas. Regardless, you can still use assessment to further both you and your students' goals – and this might be the perfect time to do so. At this point in the school year, you and your students have had a chance to get used to each other and the curriculum. You know what you've covered so far, and what you have left to tackle. And you and your students have some impressions and feedback on how it's going so far. Now's the time to convert that into an articulated assessment plan.

First, sit down and think about your goals for the year.

- What kinds of standards do your school, state, and national organizations have for the teaching of your language?
- What do you want your students to be able to do and say with that language at the end of the year, and how do those goals connect to your standards?
- How can students show you what they can do?
- How can you help them get there, and when and how should you check on progress along the way?

These are the principles of backward design, and they are your friends. They can be used to great effect if you sit down with a calendar of the remaining months of the year – marking periods, holidays, and breaks included – and figure out how to map these goals to the time remaining.



Then sit down with your students and go through the same process with them. Share the standards (in ways that are appropriate for their age) and explain your goals for them for the year. Talk about the process of setting goals, of why and how you do it, and the importance of setting interim goals and checkpoints along the way to gather data. Ask each student to create his or her own goals for the year, and to write them down in a journal or notebook, as well as to post them on your class walls. You should post your goals for the class as well, and you can track progress as you go.

You never assess simply for the sake of assessment; you assess to get meaningful information that you can use to make decisions. Assessments shouldn't be scary – they should help you and your students check in on the progress being made (or that has been made at the end of the year) and identify what's been accomplished and what should be worked on next. And it's never too late for that!