

Using the A to Z Method

Pre- and post-assessments of learning are an excellent tool for tracking student knowledge and understanding before, during, and after a lesson or unit. There are many fun, nonthreatening ways to employ pre- and post-assessments. One way is through the use of the A to Z method. This exercise, when conducted as a pre- and post-assessment, provides you a snapshot of the students' learning within a unit or topic.

Preassessment

Begin by sharing with the class the topic for the exercise. It is best to provide a “large” topic such as early Church. If the topic is too narrow or entirely new to the majority of your students (e.g., Council of Jerusalem), they will be unable to provide responses.

Beginning with the student closest to you, assign each student a letter of the alphabet beginning with A and continuing in order of the alphabet. You may choose to omit letters such as Q, X, Y, and Z, which could be more challenging for students. If you have less than twenty-six students, assign the letters as directed and then allow the class to provide responses for the remaining letters. If you have more than twenty-six students, repeat letters for students.

Going in alphabetical order, ask the students to share something they know about the assigned topic that begins with their assigned letter. The students should provide a brief explanation of what they shared. For example, if the topic is the early Church:

- A:** Ashes (In the early Church, catechumens received ashes on Ash Wednesday in preparation for their Baptism.)
- B:** Baptism (In the early Church, catechumens were welcomed into the Church at the Easter Vigil and received all three Sacraments of Christian Initiation at the same time.)
- C:** Catacombs (In the early Church, Christians hid in catacombs to avoid being martyred for their faith.)

If a student struggles to come up with a word for his or her letter, allow the class to offer suggestions. You may also choose to allow the students to identify additional words that begin with an assigned letter after they have provided the first word.

After receiving this input from the students, you will gain an understanding as to the level of knowledge the students possess, and what information still needs to be covered, unpacked, or explained.

Post-Assessment

Conducting another assessment exercise at the end of a unit or lesson is equally important so as to track the learning that has taken place and to help the students to grow in confidence and competence. By repeating this exercise, you will gain immediate insight into the learning that has or has not happened over the course of the unit or lesson. It is important to remember that teaching does not guarantee learning. Frequent, creative assessment of student learning informs the instructor of the learning that is taking place.

