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[General Portfolio Instructions p. 42](#)

Analyzing Student Work

Activity 1: Observation and Description

Choose one of your class assignments that you thought elicited considerable information about your students' understandings. Choose three student responses to the assignment. Be sure to choose students who each pose a different instructional challenge to you as a teacher. Select student responses that are substantial enough to support the level of analysis required in the Written Commentary. Unless otherwise specified in the certificate-specific Portfolio Instructions and Scoring Rubric for the component, these are to be each student's individual response, not a response completed as part of a group activity. Look carefully at the assignment that elicited the three student responses. Answer the following questions with specific details about the assignment (the word "assignment" is used here generically to mean an occasion, a prompt, or another device for eliciting substantive student response):

What was the goal of this assignment?	
Why is this an important goal for student learning of the subject?	
How was this assignment connected to other activities, in or out of class?	
What subject-specific concepts did students need to know in order to complete this assignment successfully?	
What misconceptions would you predict might appear in student responses to this assignment?	
In what ways did you intend for this assignment to extend students' thinking about the topic?	

Activity 2: Interpretation

What does each student's response tell you? Using the same three student responses, jot down answers to the following questions for each student. Here the emphasis is on your interpretation of what you see.

	Student 1	Student 2	Student 3
What did each student do correctly and/or incorrectly?			
What was the most striking feature of each response?			
What were the patterns in each response?			
What misconceptions does each response reveal?			
What insights (if any) does each response reveal?			
What feedback did you give each student?			
How can you interpret the response from each student?			
What frame of reference is available to you to aid in that interpretation?			
What are the cues the student and the work give you?			
Using what you know about the connections that need to be made in order to understand ideas in particular domains appropriate to the content area, what does each student's response tell you?			
How can your colleagues assist you in your interpretive work?			

	Student 1	Student 2	Student 3
What is each student's most essential misunderstanding or difficulty?			
How does each student's response fit into what you already know about this student's understandings and performance? Be specific.			
In two sentences for each student, describe what each learned from this assignment, judging from the responses.			
What does each student need to do next to move his or her understandings forward?			

Activity 3: How Does Each Student's Response Illuminate Your Practice?

In this activity, use what you have observed of each student's work—and how you have interpreted those observations—to illuminate your goals and your strategies for reaching those goals. The focus of this analysis is the degree to which the student's work shows that your goals for the assignment, and for your instruction prior to the assignment, were met.

	Student 1	Student 2	Student 3
For each of the three students, write a brief but very specific diagnosis of the degree to which this student work shows that your goals for the assignment were met.			
Explain briefly how your instruction prior to the assignment was designed to prepare these students to complete this assignment successfully.			
For each of the three students, give your best diagnosis of the performance they have exhibited on this assignment. What parts of your instruction and/or preparation for this assignment do you think need reteaching or reinforcement for each student?			
Given each student's performance on this assignment, what goals should you set for each of these students in the immediate future and, also, in the more distant future?			
What was your feedback strategy for each of these students?			
Why did you choose that strategy for these particular students?			

Activity 4

Reflection

The final stage in analyzing student responses is to reflect on your practice. It is in this final stage that you ask yourself this: in light of what the student responses have told you about the students' understandings, difficulties, misconceptions, and gaps, what might you do next (and/or differently or additionally) for these students? It is the habit of reflecting on decisions made in the midst of the teaching day that distinguishes the analytical teacher. And it is reflective practice that moves accomplished practitioners constantly forward; as you become your own observer and coach, you can recognize your accomplishments in making choices that advance student learning in effective ways. You can also encourage yourself to try yet another strategy when you are not satisfied with students' progress. The following questions are designed to help you reflect on your practice with the three students who have been the focus of these activities. However, these questions could be asked at the end of every teaching day about each class you teach. Once you begin to think in these terms, you need not write down the answers. You will find that the habit of reflection generates so many new ideas and strategies that you are hardly able to find the time to try them all. Look back at the three student responses to your assignment. Briefly answer each of these questions about these students, their responses, and your own sense of your practice:

	Student 1	Student 2	Student 3
What did each student learn from this assignment and the instruction that preceded it? Be specific.			
What did you learn from each student's response?			
What would you do differently in light of the student responses to this assignment?			
In light of your analysis, reevaluate your feedback strategies. Would you alter them in any way? If so, how and why? If not, why not?			
Would you give the same assignment again? If so, would you prepare students for it differently? If so, how? If not, what assignment would you give in its place and why?			