

Assessment Strategies

MJK Educators | Quick assessment approaches and portfolio ideas to track growth without overwhelm

A concise guide for parents and teachers. General guidance for everyday home and small-group learning; for national exams, always confirm current requirements and access arrangements with KNEC. Updated October 2026.

1. Assessment, simplified

Assessment is simply finding out what a learner can do now so you can decide what to do next. Think of three jobs: **quick checks** during learning (to adjust your teaching), **periodic snapshots** such as a short quiz, project or rubric score (to see progress), and a **portfolio** (a growing record of work that shows change over time). The guiding rule is **less, simpler and more often**: a few minutes of well-chosen checking beats hours of marking.

2. What the research says

- **Quick, regular checks help, modestly.** A meta-analysis of 118 studies (258 effect sizes) found formative assessment improves achievement, with an average effect of about 0.25 standard deviations. The effect was similar for self-assessment, peer assessment and different subjects, and larger in studies outside North America and Western Europe. A separate review of reading found a smaller effect (0.19). It is worth doing, but it is not a magic fix, and the quality of feedback matters.
- **Learners should take part in the feedback.** A meta-analysis of 32 studies found larger gains when learners initiated or shared in feedback than when only adults gave it. Ask learners to judge their own work, not just receive a mark.
- **Low-stakes quizzing works and need not cause anxiety.** A review of 222 classroom studies with nearly 48,500 students found that quizzing raised achievement by about half a standard deviation, helping factual, conceptual and problem-solving learning. Reviews suggest low-stakes quizzes tend to reduce test anxiety, though some highly anxious learners avoid self-testing, so keep quizzes short, private and ungraded.
- **Portfolios support self-regulation, but must stay manageable.** Reviews report that portfolios can strengthen motivation, self-regulation and performance, and a meta-analysis of 19 studies found a large effect on self-regulation. However, scoring portfolios consistently is time-consuming, and the benefits are easily lost when one portfolio serves too many purposes. Keep yours for showing growth.
- **Kenya context.** Under the Competency-Based Curriculum, assessment is meant to be continuous and learner-centred, using observation, projects, portfolios, and self and peer assessment alongside summative tests. Home learners benefit from the same mix.

3. A light weekly rhythm

How often	What to do	Time
Each lesson or day	One quick formative check (section 4). Choose one or two tools for the week rather than using them all	30 seconds to 5 minutes
Weekly	One or two dated observation notes, a short low-stakes quiz, and one work sample chosen for the portfolio	10 to 15 minutes
Each term	Review the portfolio with the learner, score one task on the summative rubric, and file a termly progress summary	1 to 2 hours

How often	What to do	Time
Each year	A summative task or exam practice to check readiness for your chosen pathway	As needed

4. Quick formative checks

Formative checks are for learning, so they do not need a grade. Use what you learn to change the next lesson. These tools are in our [Formative and Summative Assessment Tools](#) toolkit:

Tool	How it works	Time	Inclusive twist
Exit ticket	1 to 3 quick questions at the end of a lesson	2 to 5 min	Accept spoken, drawn or written answers
Thumbs up / down / sideways	Non-verbal confidence check	30 sec	A quiet way to answer; no one is put on the spot
Traffic light cards	Green = got it, yellow = almost, red = stuck	1 min	Builds self-assessment; model it first
Think-pair-share	Learner thinks, talks to a parent or educator, then shares	5 to 10 min	Helps learners who find writing hard; allow the home language
One-minute paper	Summarise the key point in 60 seconds	2 min	Allow drawing or speaking instead of writing
KWL chart	Know, want to know, learned	5 min	Use pictures for younger learners
Concept map	Visual connections between ideas	10 to 15 min	Reduces the writing load
Learning journal	Ongoing written or drawn reflections	10 to 15 min	Offer drawing or voice notes

Three more easy options: a **teach-back** (the learner explains an idea to a parent, sibling or toy), a **mini quiz** of three to five questions that includes one from an earlier week, and a **three-minute conference** about one piece of work ("What was tricky? What would you change?").

5. Observation: evidence tests miss

Short, dated observations capture skills a test cannot, such as problem-solving, creativity, focus, collaboration, independence and curiosity. Aim for one or two a week and write them factually: say what you saw and heard, not just a judgement. Note the setting (lesson, free play, project work, reading time), the skills shown, areas for growth and a follow-up plan. Our [Parent / Educator Observation Record](#) gives you a ready layout.

6. Making assessment inclusive

- **Keep the goal fixed and the format flexible.** Let learners show the same skill by speaking, drawing, building or writing.
- **Remove barriers that are not the skill being tested.** Do not let heavy reading load hide a learner's maths, or handwriting hide their ideas.
- **Share the success criteria first**, using simple "I can" statements.
- **Adjust time, place and support.** Offer extra time, a quiet space, read-aloud, breaks, or large print where they help.
- **Measure growth against the learner's own past work**, not against siblings or other children.
- **Keep results private and praise strategies**, such as persistence and checking work, not just scores.
- **For formal exams, plan early.** Ask KNEC about access arrangements for candidates with disabilities or special needs.

7. Scoring growth with a rubric

At the end of a unit, term or project, use the Universal Summative Rubric in our [Formative and Summative Assessment Tools](#). Score five criteria: **Knowledge, Application, Communication, Thinking / Inquiry and Independence**. Each is scored from 4 to 1; add the scores, divide by five and round for an overall level. Then record strengths, areas for growth and a next step, and have the adult and learner sign. The same sheet can be completed by a parent, mentor, the learner or a peer.

Score	Level	What it looks like
4	Exceeding	Deep understanding; applies skills independently in new situations; self-directed
3	Meeting	Solid understanding of core ideas; applies skills with minimal support
2	Approaching	Partial understanding with some gaps; needs significant support
1	Beginning	Limited understanding; struggles even with support, so revisit the basics in smaller steps

These bands line up with the four performance levels used in Kenya's CBC and in our Record Keeping Template, so results are easy to explain and record. Adapt the wording to your curriculum and the learner's age.

8. Portfolio ideas

A portfolio is not a folder of everything your child has ever done. It is a curated collection of evidence that shows growth over time. **Choose, do not collect everything:** keep three to five dated samples per subject each term, choose work that shows progress and not only the best work, and add a short note saying what each sample shows.

What to include

- Dated work samples from the start and end of the term, so growth is visible.
- Photos of projects and activities, with a one-line caption.
- Learner self-reflections, using our [Student Rubric Template](#), a sheet with sentence starters such as "Today I learned...", "I am proud of...", "I found tricky..." and "Next time I want to...". Younger learners can draw instead of writing.
- Parent observation notes, rubric scores and checklists, reading logs, maths and problem-solving samples, and creative work.
- A termly progress summary.

Three simple formats

Format	Best for	Low-cost way
Growth folder	Showing progress over a term or year	A paper file or box folder with a divider for each subject; date each item
Digital album	Practical work, projects and clips	A phone photo album or a computer folder, named by subject and month
Showcase book	Motivation and sharing with family	The learner chooses their best work, decorates a book and presents it once a term

Keep it from becoming a burden: spend ten minutes a month filing, label each item with the date and the goal, and let the learner pick one favourite piece each week. Our [Portfolio Template](#) includes a checklist of what to keep, notes on curating, and guidance for CBC-style evidence, termly reviews and school or college applications. Check current Ministry of Education or exam-body requirements for anything you must submit.

9. A five-step term review

1. **Collect.** Gather the portfolio items, quiz results and observation notes for the term.
2. **Choose.** Keep the strongest and most telling pieces; the rest can be stored or recycled.
3. **Reflect.** Ask the learner to say what has improved and what is still hard.
4. **Rate.** Score one main task on the rubric and note the evidence for each rating.
5. **Plan.** Pick one or two goals for next term and decide what support or change of approach will help.

10. Using what you learn

- **Adjust teaching quickly:** if most checks show a gap, reteach in a new way before moving on.
- **Celebrate specific progress** and name the strategy that worked.
- **Keep a short termly summary** for your records, alongside samples (see the Record Keeping Template in our Legal Guides).
- **Seek help** if a learner keeps struggling after several weeks of adjusted teaching (see our Differentiated Instruction Guide).

11. Our assessment tools

Free, adaptable tools from MJK Educators, all on our [Assessment Tools](#) page:

- [Formative and Summative Assessment Tools](#): a toolkit of eight quick formative checks and a universal summative rubric.
- [Parent / Educator Observation Record](#): a one-page layout for short, dated observations.
- [Student Rubric Template](#): a learner self-reflection sheet for the portfolio.
- [Portfolio Template](#): a checklist and curating guide for termly portfolio reviews.

12. This week's starter checklist

1. Choose one subject and write one learning goal as an "I can" statement.
2. Pick one or two formative tools and use one each day.
3. Write one or two short, factual observation notes.
4. Add one work sample or photo to the portfolio, with the date and a one-line learner reflection.
5. Ask the learner what helped them most, then plan one small change.

Sources

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