

# Sharing Strategy: Clarification

(See Teacher Summary Card)

**T**he **Clarification Strategy** is perhaps not as distinctive a strategy as some others, but it is worth mentioning, as it can be particularly useful when learning intentions or success criteria contain academic or mathematical language that you want students to understand and get accustomed to using. It involves highlighting particular words in the learning intention or success criteria that may have other ordinary-use meanings that differ from the academic or mathematical meaning, such as *behavior* (as in the *behavior* of a function), *even* or *odd* (as with numbers), or *regular* (as with shapes).

In this strategy, those words are discussed and directly compared and contrasted with their ordinary-use meanings, to draw whatever parallels exist between the two meanings or to clarify distinctions between the two meanings.

## Particular Advantages

- Builds academic or mathematical language comprehension and use
- Supports students with language-related difficulties

## How Does the Strategy Work?

1. Post the learning intention and success criteria for students to see and read them aloud to the students.
2. Point out particular academic or mathematical words and elicit students' descriptions of what the word means in ordinary usage.
3. Builds on and uses the students' descriptions of ordinary meanings to describe the academic or mathematical meaning, relating it in some way to the students' current understanding of the word(s).

For example, a teacher is trying to describe the meaning of *behavior* in the following learning intention for an eighth-grade Algebra class: *Understanding the behavior of the output values allows us to classify and write an equation for the data set.* When his students tell him that *behavior* means how you act, he uses that definition to explain that today's focus is not on the behavior of people as we ordinarily think but rather in the behavior of output values in the table. He goes on to explain what *behavior of output values* could mean, and he provides an example to clarify.

To view a brief video of a teacher using this strategy, go to [CreightonMathFormative Assessment](#).

4. Finally, ask students either to talk with a partner about, or write down for themselves and then share out, their own paraphrased version of the learning intention or success criteria that has the specialized language.

---

Retrieved from the companion website for *Bringing Math Students Into the Formative Assessment Equation: Tools and Strategies for the Middle Grades* by Susan Janssen Creighton, Cheryl Rose Tobey, Eric Karnowski, and Emily R. Fagan. Copyright © 2015 by Corwin. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin, [www.corwin.com](http://www.corwin.com)

## How Does the Strategy Support Formative Assessment?

### Learning intentions and success criteria

- This strategy focuses students' attention on specific language in the learning intention and success criteria that is important for them to learn and eventually to use.

### Eliciting and interpreting evidence

- This strategy provides the teacher with useful information about how students might be (correctly or incorrectly) trying to make sense of the learning intention and success criteria.

### Environment

- This strategy underscores the message that students are expected to take responsibility to understand the learning intention and success criteria for the lesson.