

PROCEDURE FOR LOOKING AT STUDENT WORK

Definition: Decomposers are organisms that break down dead plants, algae, animals, and other organic matter into simpler forms of matter, nutrients that become part of soil, the air, or large bodies of water. Decomposers play the role in ecosystems of breaking down things into forms of matter that plants and algae can use to build and grow.

Student writing prompt: Are humans decomposers? Why or why not?

Expected student response: The goal of this prompt is to learn what students understand and don't understand about decomposers, in order to guide further instruction. Write an expected student response you would reasonably expect from your students, based on what was taught in the activity.

Step 1. Observations. Describe observations about responses (8–10 minutes):

The facilitator asks:

What do you observe in the responses?

- During this step, the group gathers as much information as possible from evidence in student work (e.g., Five students said “x,” and six students said “y,” noting common patterns in responses.).
- Group members describe what they observe in the student’s work, **sticking to evidence and avoiding judgments** about quality or interpretations of what the student meant or intended.
- If judgments or explanations come up, the facilitator should ask the person to refocus discussion on the evidence from observations.
- List the group’s observations on chart paper.

Step 2. What does it mean about learning and teaching? (8–10 minutes):

The facilitator asks:

How can this evidence be used to figure out what students do and don’t understand?

What are some possible explanations for what students wrote? What is it about the learning experiences that could have contributed to their responses?

- During this step, the group tries to make sense of what students wrote and why they wrote it.
- The group also tries to figure out what kinds of instructional (and other) experiences may have led to what students wrote.
- From the evidence gathered in Step 1, try to figure out about the student or students:
 - What they were thinking?
 - What do they understand and don’t understand about which parts of the response are accurate and inaccurate?
 - On What ideas you think they are building?
 - What experiences do they need to further build their understanding?
 - What were they most interested in?
 - How did they interpreted the prompt?
- The group should try to come up with different explanations for each observation and then evaluate them against the evidence.

- Think broadly and creatively. Assume that the work, no matter how confusing, probably makes sense to the student. Your job is to see what the student sees.
- As you listen to one another's explanations, ask questions that help you better understand one another's perspectives.

Step 3. What can we do about it? Brainstorm Next Steps for Teaching (8–10 minutes):

The facilitator asks:

What changes can make the teaching or the lesson itself more effective?

What could the instructor do to move thinking forward?

- Based on the group's observations and reflections, discuss implications this might have for teaching. In particular, consider the following questions:
 - What steps could the instructor do next with these students?
 - What teaching strategies might be most effective?
 - What else would you like to see in students' work? What kinds of activities or prompts could give you this information?
 - How might you change the learning experience or activity the next time you teach it?
 - How might you modify the prompt to improve the assessment?
 - What does this conversation make you think about in terms of your own practice?
 - How does this conversation make you think about teaching and learning in general?