



Student Inventory

Learn More About Your Students

Student Inventory

Kick off the school year or quarter by learning more about your students.

DESCRIPTION

Student inventories are a time-tested way to quickly gather insights about your students, their cultural backgrounds, interests outside of school, personal goals, and more. The information you collect can serve as a foundation for building strong relationships with them.

PREP TIME

5 minutes

ACTIVITY TIME

10 minutes

MATERIALS

Student inventory

Implementation Guidance

Before Administering the Inventory

1. **Clarify your focus.** Consider what kind of insights you want to gather. Will a general profile touching on students' interests, learning preferences, and challenges be most helpful, or would a subject-specific check-in provide more targeted support for your classroom? Feel free to *adjust or combine with any inventories you've used in the past*.
2. **Choose a format that fits your context.** Think about how students will complete the inventory and how you'll use the information. Whether it's a Google Form or a paper-based activity, choose a method that works well for your routines and helps you make meaning of the responses.
3. **Tailor your questions.** Select 5-10 questions. Keeping it concise makes it easier for students' cognitive load and for you to review. You can also make this a routine— ask 5-10 questions every quarter. This can go a long way to consistently show students that you care about them.

Administering the Inventory

1. **Aim to give it early.** Many teachers find that the first couple of weeks of the quarter is an ideal time to gather this kind of information. If it feels too late for this quarter, use the opportunity to plan ahead for the start of the next one.
2. **Set a student-centred tone.** A brief, reassuring introduction can help students engage honestly. You might say: *“This is a short survey to help me get to know you better as a learner and as a person. There are no wrong answers. Your responses will help me teach in ways that support you best. You can skip any question you’re not comfortable with.”*

After the Inventory

1. **Review responses.** Look for trends or early indicators of shared challenges or students who might appreciate a one-on-one check-in. Some responses may also surface strengths or interests you can draw on right away. Use the Inventory Reflection Guide to support your meaning making.
2. **Revisit and apply the data.** Use what you learn to adjust classroom strategies including seating, grouping, routines or to connect personally with students. Referencing a student’s goal or interest later in the semester (both in casual conversations or formal check-ins) can be a powerful way to show your listening. Some teachers even revisit the inventory mid-quarter to check in on growth or shifting needs.

Tips

- To create buy-in among students, consider sharing your own “teacher inventory” or a short introduction to help students get to know you on a more personal level.
- Use the inventory data to better understand accommodations and learning needs of students with IEPs and 504 plans. Coordinate with IEP teams to align inventory findings with student goals, accommodations, or behavioral supports.
- If a student is struggling to complete the inventory or leaves most of it blank, follow up with the student to see if they are willing to share some of their responses verbally. You can also encourage students to express themselves through drawing or turn the inventory into an online form for students who prefer to type.
- Building relationships with students is important for every subject! For subjects that students might come in carrying certain stereotypes and misconceptions (e.g., “I am not a math person”, “science is a cold subject”), it might be

particularly helpful to emphasize why you want to get to know them on a personal level.

- While it's valuable for every teacher to complete a student inventory to better understand each of their students, this can be time-consuming and feel repetitive to high school students who have multiple teachers. Consider a collaborative approach. Is it possible to have one teacher administer a more general inventory or share key insights in a grade-level or department meeting? Consider which subset of questions may be particularly valuable for your specific classroom or subject.

Student Information & Interests

Inventory (open-ended version)

This form is your opportunity to tell me more about who you are, how you learn, and what you need to succeed this year. There are no right or wrong answers, just be honest and yourself!

Instructions

- Please take your time to answer each question thoughtfully.
- You can skip questions you're not comfortable answering.
- Your answers will be used to help me better support your learning.

Personal and Family Information

1. Full Name: _____
2. Preferred Name/Nickname: _____
3. Preferred Pronouns: _____
4. Birthday: _____
5. What languages do you speak or hear at home? _____
6. What are some traditions or holidays that are important to you? _____

Academic Background

1. What subjects do you enjoy the most? Why? _____

2. What subjects do you find the most challenging? Why? _____

3. Are there any learning strategies or tools that help you? _____

4. Do you receive any services or accommodations? (IEP, 504, ELL support) _____

Learning Background

1. How do you learn best? (visual, hands-on, group work, lectures, online tools) _____

2. Do you prefer working alone, in pairs, or groups? _____

3. Are you comfortable speaking in class? If not, what would make it easier? _____

4. What's one thing teachers can do to support your learning? _____

Interests & Goals

1. What do you enjoy doing outside of school? _____

2. Are you involved in any clubs, sports, or activities? _____

3. What's a personal goal you have this year? This can be academic or non-academic. _____

4. What do you want to do after high school? (college, trade, work, military, unsure) _____

General Check-In

1. On a scale from 1-10 (1= not at all excited and 10 = very excited), how excited are you about this school year? Why? _____

2. When you feel upset or stressed, what helps you feel better? _____

Student Information & Interests

Inventory (fill-in-the-blank version)

This form is your opportunity to tell me more about who you are, how you learn, and what you need to succeed this year. There are no right or wrong answers, just be honest and yourself!

Instructions

- Please take your time to answer each question thoughtfully.
- You can skip questions you're not comfortable answering.
- Your answers will be used to help me better support your learning.

Personal and Family Information

1. Full Name: _____
2. Preferred Name/Nickname: _____
3. Preferred Pronouns: _____
4. Birthday: _____
5. What languages do you speak or hear at home? _____
6. What are some traditions or holidays that are important to you? _____

Academic Background

1. What subjects do you enjoy the most? I like _____ the most because _____
2. What subjects do you find the most challenging? I find _____ the most challenging because _____
3. Are there any learning strategies or tools that help you? What really helps me to learn is _____
4. Do you receive any services or accommodations (IEP, 504, ELL support)? No, or Yes, I get _____, which helps me to _____.

Learning Background

1. How do you learn best? I think I learn best when (e.g., (visual, hands-on, group work, lectures, online tools) _____
2. Do you prefer working alone, in pairs, or groups? _____
3. I feel comfortable speaking in class when _____
4. One thing that I wish my teacher does to support your learning is _____

Interests & Goals

1. Outside of school, I enjoy _____
2. Are you involved in any clubs, sports, or activities? I am in _____ and I like it because _____
3. What's a personal goal you have this year? (This can be related to school or not.) This year, I want to _____
4. After high school, I want to go to (e.g., college, trade, work, military, unsure) _____ because _____

General Check-In

1. On a scale from 1-10 (1= not at all excited and 10 = very excited), I am ____ excited about this school year because _____
2. When I am upset, what helps me feel not as stressed is _____

Subject-Specific Questions

1. In the past, something I have enjoyed about this subject is _____.
_____. Something that has been challenging about this subject for me is _____.
2. One thing that helps me learn best in this subject is (clear instructions, working in groups, visuals, etc.) _____
3. One thing I'd like me to know about how I work in class is (I like quiet work time, I'm nervous about speaking up, I work better when I can move, etc.) _____

4. One thing I am hoping to get better at in this class this year is (could be academic, study skills, or confidence) _____

5. Something a teacher can do to help me feel understood or supported is _____

6. One question or worry I have about this class is: _____

Inventory Reflection Tool

Use this tool after reviewing your student inventory responses. You can jot quick notes or discuss with a coach or team.

What Did You Notice?

Common interests or passions	
Recurring challenges or concerns	
Any students who need early support or encouragement	
Surprises or new insights	

How Will You Use This?

Ways to build relationships with students	
Ideas to shape your instruction or routines	
Ways to use the data in grouping, feedback, or seating	
Any follow-up conversations to have with students, families, or other staff	

When Will You Revisit This?

- Mid-semester (Oct/Feb)
- After parent-teacher conferences
- After first major project or test
- Before report cards
- Ongoing (weekly check-ins or notes)
- Other: _____

Additional Tips

Below are some tips that some teachers have used to help them reflect on findings from the student inventories.

Color-coding or tagging system. Some teachers may sort data into categories like academic support, SEL needs, cultural insights, or student interests.

Category	Tag Example	Color-Coding	Purpose
Academic support	#Accoms	Orange	Highlight students with identified academic challenges or accommodations
SEL Needs	#Testanxiety	Yellow	Track emotional regulation, confidence, or participation barriers
Communication Preferences	#Needsthinktime	Green	Supports differentiated participation strategies
Student Interest	#Art	Blue	Build relationships and personalize instruction

Visual tools. Some teachers like using seating charts or sticky notes with inventory insights to guide classroom decisions.

- Add small sticky notes to a printed class roster or seating chart
- Use colors or symbols that reflect student needs or preferences (e.g., blue dot for group work preference, yellow for quiet work time)

Make time for collaborative meaning-making. Some grade level or department teams might share trends and brainstorm how to respond collectively. Consider the following discussion questions:

- Are we noticing trends by student groups?
- How might we address common SEL needs in homeroom or advisory?
- Which student insights can we use to plan cross-curricular connections?

Use Inventory Data to Support Students with 504 Plans or Receiving Special Education Services

Students with 504 plans or receiving special education services often bring unique strengths, insights, and needs into the classroom. The student inventory process is an opportunity to understand and support them more holistically—**not just through their IEP or 504 plans**. Here are a few ways to make the most of their responses:

Center Student Voice

- Look for clues in how students describe their learning preferences, goals, or concerns. These can offer context beyond formal plans.
- Use the inventory to invite self-advocacy: “What’s something that helps you learn best?” or “What do you wish teachers knew?”

Notice Strengths and Motivators

- Highlight student-identified strengths in class: “You mentioned you’re great at hands-on projects—I’m excited to see you lead in that.”
- Use their interests to build engagement in lessons, groupings, or independent tasks.

Bridge Inventory Insights with IEP Supports

- If a student shares a learning preference or challenge that aligns with their IEP or accommodations on their 504 plan, look for ways to reinforce it in your instruction.
- Not sure how to connect the dots? Loop in the case manager or special education teacher for a quick chat or co-reflection.

Respect Privacy, Build Trust

- Keep any sensitive responses (related to disability, family, or mental health) confidential.
- Acknowledge student contributions privately when appropriate: “Thanks for letting me know what helps you feel calm. That’s really helpful for me to understand.”

Use What You Learn—Even in Small Ways

- Adjust seating, offer quiet options, or build breaks based on what students say works.
- Just one moment of connection—“Hey, I remembered you like music. This unit involves sound design!”—can build trust and inclusion.



About Search Institute

We collaborate with schools, youth-serving organizations, programs, and communities to conduct applied research, co-design solutions, and build the relational infrastructure every young person needs to thrive. Through professional learning experiences, surveys, measurement tools, and support for continuous improvement, we help partners turn knowledge into action and create the conditions where young people can truly learn, grow, contribute, and thrive.

Search Institute

800.888.7828

info@searchinstitute.org
searchinstitute.org

Special thanks to the educators who shared their time, wisdom and lived experiences to co-design this resource.