Explain the characteristics of assessment for learning
The phrase 'assessment for learning' is not just a clever way to say 'exam', or 'evaluation'. It is the name of an approach used in teaching and education. Assessment for learning is the process of looking for, and interpreting evidence to be used by teachers and pupils to work out where the pupils are in their learning, where they need to be, and how best to get them there.

Assessment for learning has some particular characteristics or features that underpin its aims.

Assessment for learning characteristics

- **Open-ended questioning**
- **All responses have value**
- **Promote confidence**
- **Constructive feedback**
- **Clarity of goals**
- **Reflection and self-monitoring**
- **Time to absorb learning**

Assessment for learning.

**Assessment for learning characteristics**
The most important thing to remember throughout any assessment or teaching practice is that every task and activity in teaching and learning should provide the opportunity for assessment.

**Clarity of goals and success criteria**
One of the main features of assessment for learning is that staff should be very clear about the goals of the activity or task, and they should clearly explain the success criteria. Success criteria are the way in which pupils' learning will be judged, so it would be very unfair to set them off on a task without telling them how it will be marked. Part of that clarity is to do with using language that pupils understand. Talking over their heads, using jargon, unfamiliar acronyms, or any other language that makes it harder for them to understand is not acceptable and is patently a pointless exercise.
The right style of questioning

Questioning techniques, such as using open ended questions, and asking about what they know in a way that is designed to get relevant answers, are also key features of assessment for learning. The right types of questions will provide staff with assessment opportunities; the wrong kind will make it quite hard to work out what each child knows.

Constructive feedback that helps them

The constructive, highly specific feedback that comes with assessment for learning is also a very important feature. The feedback will help them improve, and should also motivate them, especially in showing them the way they need to go to get better.

Time to absorb learning

Part of assessment for learning is found in the opportunity to give them time to allow what they have learned to sink in. Absorption of learning is an important part of ensuring that it sticks in their minds, and if they are to retain the information, they need time to let that happen.

Reflection and self-monitoring

Reflection in education is as important for pupils as it is for staff. By encouraging pupils to reflect on the things they have learned, what they could do better, and why they did something wrong or right, especially through their own self-assessment, and occasionally through peer assessment, they will be better equipped to be self-motivated. This becomes very important later on when they will be asked to carry out exams and other more standardised work.

All responses have value

One of the best characteristics of assessment for learning is in the way it demonstrates to pupils that every answer is valid; every response they give to a query about what they are doing, has value. Whether it is their opinion, or something they know, even mistakes are valued, because they are all teaching opportunities.

Promoting confidence

In encouraging pupils to explain their reasoning or explain the way that they have chosen to do an activity - in a safe environment where no one is going to tell them they have done it wrong - their self-esteem and confidence get a chance to grow and improve. The small steps-big results identification process, where they are shown what to do in order to make improvements to their own work, also helps to build confidence; people who know what to do are generally confident in their ability to do so.