

Formative and Summative Assessments

Formative Assessments

The essential purpose of formative assessments is to move students' learning forward while their learning is still in the process of developing. It operates as a feedback loop in which both teachers and students can play active roles in enabling learning by consistently working to build and consolidate student understanding and skills during the course of a lesson.

The Teacher's Role

Formative assessment is only effective when teachers are clear about the intended learning goals for a lesson. They have to focus on what students will learn, as opposed to what they will do.

To achieve this, teachers share the learning goal and communicate the indicators of progress toward the learning goal or determine them in collaboration with the students. With clarity about the goal and indicators, teachers can then decide how they will gather evidence of emergent learning.

Teachers may gather evidence through interactions with students or observations of their tasks and activities. Furthermore, evidence collection is a systematic process and needs to be planned so that teachers have a constant stream of information that ties to indicators of progress.



Feedback

Feedback is a crucial component of formative assessment, and has two aspects:

- First, feedback obtained from planned or spontaneous evidence is an essential resource for teachers to shape new learning through adjustments in their instruction.
- Second, feedback that the teacher provides to students is also an essential resource so the

Formative assessments are often said to be for learning, while summative assessments are of learning. Or as assessment expert Paul Black put it, "When the cook tastes the soup, that's formative assessment. When the customer tastes the soup, that's summative assessment."

students can take active steps to advance their own learning. Teacher feedback is most beneficial when it assists students to understand their current learning status and provides hints or suggestions for them to act on.

The Students' Role

It begins when they have a clear conception of the learning target. Students start collecting evidence in relation to the goal through self-assessment, a separate, but complementary feedback process.

In self-assessment students engage in a metacognitive activity that involves students in thinking about their own learning while they are learning.

The students' role ideally also includes peer-assessment, where students give feedback to their classmates that is intended to be constructive and help them make progress toward the lesson goal.

Finally, the most important role for the students to actually use the feedback. It is important that students have to both reflect on their learning and use the feedback to advance learning. Overall, the feedback loop is fueled by three convergent sources of feedback: from teachers, peers, and the students themselves.

Summative Assessments

Summative assessments are used to evaluate student learning, skill acquisition, and academic achievement at the conclusion of a defined instructional period.

Generally speaking, summative assessments are defined by three major criteria:

- The tests, assignments, or projects are used to determine whether students have learned what they were expected to learn.
- They are given at the conclusion of a specific instructional period, and therefore they are generally evaluative, rather than diagnostic.
- Summative-assessment results are often recorded as scores or grades that are then factored into a student's permanent academic record.

While most summative assessments are given at the conclusion of an instructional period, some summative assessments can still be used diagnostically.

For example, the growing availability of student data, made possible by online grading systems and databases, can give teachers access to assessment results from previous years or other courses. By reviewing this data, teachers may be able to identify students more likely to struggle academically in certain subject areas or with certain concepts.



In addition, students may be allowed to take some summative tests multiple times, and teachers might use the results to help prepare students for future administrations of the test.

Some educators consider interim tests to be formative, since they are often used diagnostically to inform instructional modifications, but others may consider them to be summative.

Reform

While educators have arguably been using “summative assessments” in various forms since the invention of schools and teaching, summative assessments have in recent decades become components of larger school-improvement efforts. As they always have, summative assessments can help teachers determine whether students are making adequate academic progress or meeting expected learning standards, and results may be used to inform modifications to instructional techniques, lesson designs, or teaching materials the next time a course, unit, or lesson is taught.

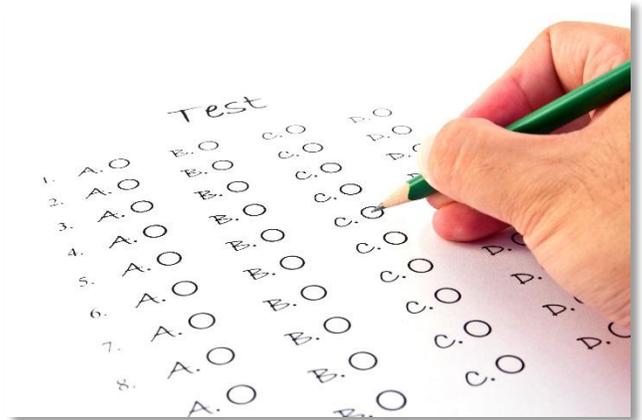
Debate

While there is little disagreement among educators about the need for or utility of summative assessments, debates and disagreements tend to center on issues of fairness and effectiveness, especially when summative-assessment results are used for high-stakes purposes. In these cases, educators, experts, reformers, policy makers, and others may debate whether assessments are being designed and used appropriately, or whether high-stakes tests are either beneficial or harmful to the educational process.

Summative Vs Formative Assessments

The goal of formative assessment is to monitor student learning to provide ongoing feedback that can be used by instructors to improve their teaching and by students to improve their learning. In contrast, the goal of summative assessment is to evaluate student learning at the end of an instructional unit by comparing it against some standard or benchmark.

Formative assessments help students identify their strengths and weaknesses and target areas that need work. They also help faculty recognize where students are struggling and address problems immediately. On the other hand, information from summative assessments can be used formatively when students or faculty use it to guide their efforts and activities in subsequent courses.



The following charts includes some examples and compares formative vs summative assessments:

Formative	Summative
<i>Low stakes, which means that they have low or no point value.</i>	<i>High stakes, which means that they have a high point value.</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• draw a concept map in class to represent their understanding of a topic• submit one or two sentences identifying the main point of a lecture• turn in a research proposal for early feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• a midterm exam• a final project• a paper• a senior recital

Conclusion

Formative and summative assessments are both important and necessary in the development of any course. Formative assessment is not a test, nor an instrument, but rather an approach to teaching and learning that uses feedback as its centerpiece in a supportive classroom context. On the other hand, summative assessments are used to evaluate student learning, skill acquisition, and academic achievement at the conclusion of a defined instructional period and are generally evaluative, rather than diagnostic.

Resources

"Formative vs Summative Assessment - Teaching Excellence & Educational Innovation - Carnegie Mellon University." Formative vs Summative Assessment - Teaching Excellence & Educational Innovation - Carnegie Mellon University. Carnegie Mellon, n.d. Web. 02 Nov. 2014.

Heritage, Margaret. "Formative Assessment: An Enabler of Learning." Assessment - Enabling Learning, n.d. Web. 3 Nov. 2014.

"Summative Assessment." The Glossary of Education Reform. Great Schools Partnership, 29 Aug. 2013. Web. 03 Nov. 2014.