



Center for the Enhancement of Teaching & Learning

Formative & Summative Classroom Assessment

What is Formative Assessment?

Formative assessment evaluates students' abilities while they are still learning in the course. For students, formative assessment is important because it helps them identify strengths and areas for improvement during the course, and can help them guide their own learning. For faculty, formative assessment is important because it helps them recognize where students are struggling with course content. This provides the opportunity for faculty to adjust the course accordingly.

What is Summative Assessment?

Summative assessment evaluates students' abilities as they are about to complete a course (or at the end of a unit). We expect summative results to indicate more complete mastery of learning outcomes than formative assessment.

Why should I use both formative and summative assessment in my classroom?

Formative and summative assessment are both important for understand the learning happening in our classrooms. The following scenario illustrates the importance of using both types of assessment. In this scenario, the faculty member used summative assessment only to assess student learning in a course unit.

At the end of a unit, students are assessed on their ability to distinguish between concept A and concept B. The assessment shows that 50% of students can correctly distinguish the two concepts.

- What do we know about student learning?
- What don't we know?

Here we know that 50% of students can determine the differences between Concept A and Concept B. However, we don't know why. The reason for that could be because students didn't do assigned reading, it could be because the concepts are at a more advanced level than where students are at, it could be because 50% of students took the current class before they took another class that would have better prepared them (and so on).

If we had done formative assessment of the concepts during the unit, instead of at the end of the unit, we may have figured out earlier why only 50% of students could distinguish the two concepts. Then, perhaps, our summative assessment results would have been better.

How do I develop formative and summative assessments?

Generally, faculty are adept at creating summative assessments, which include midterm and final exams, final projects, papers, and recitals. Other forms of more interactive summative assessments are lightening talks and poster presentations. If you have questions about creating effective summative assessments, contact the CETL.

Formative assessments can come in the form of Classroom Assessment Techniques (CATs). While typically used for formative assessment, CATs can also be used for summative assessment. Information on using CATs for formative and summative assessment is provided in the CETL Teaching Toolkit.

The most cited resource on CATs is: Angelo, T. A., & Cross, K. P. (1993). *Classroom assessment techniques: A handbook for college teachers* (2nd ed.). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

You can find this book in Michener Library. There are two copies for check-out (3rd floor) and one copy in the reference collection (1st floor). The call number is LB2822.75 .A54 1993.

If you have questions about classroom assessment please contact Lyda McCartin (lyda.mccartin@unco.edu), Senior Faculty Assessment Fellow, Office of Assessment

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