

ASSESSMENT DEFINITIONS

Formative assessment is a general term given to a variety of ongoing processes and activities used to gather evidence of learning and to plan the next steps in instruction to meet student needs. These assessments *for* learning check for understanding while learning is still underway, may be informal or formal, and may be used for different purposes (see types of assessments below). **It is not the instrument that is formative; it is the use of the information gathered that makes an assessment formative.**

Formative assessments:

- Occur before and during instruction
- Are linked to instructional activities
- Provide feedback to enhance learning
- Are not used for formal evaluation and do not impact final grades
- Examine a few selected learning targets in greater depth
- Have student involvement as a key component (self or peer assessment)
- Are particularly effective for low performing students
- Provide feedback and guidance on learning in progress.

Screening assessments are used for early identification of student strengths and weaknesses for the purposes of classification, placement, eligibility, or intervention. They are designed to be a rapid identifier and have less depth of content (they focus on a narrow range of skills, knowledge, or performance), and they occur before in-depth instruction or placement occur. Screeners inform decisions about whether or not a diagnostic assessment is necessary.

Diagnostic assessments are designed specifically to identify the causes of a student's learning challenge once a possible deficiency is identified. The results guide or modify instruction to meet a student's unique needs. A good diagnostic assessment provides specific and detailed information that can be used to modify instruction so an intervention can be planned and implemented.

Progress monitoring is an assessment that occurs after an intervention has taken place. It is characterized by frequent and repeated assessments for individual students or groups of students. It is used in combination with specific instructional interventions and helps determine whether or not a student is showing adequate progress or needs additional methods of instruction.

Interim assessments occur at a few strategic times of the year to measure a student's general progress toward proficiency of the knowledge and skills that will be measured by a summative assessment. The content may cover material that has not been taught. They sometimes provide sub-scores related to specific content and skills. They do not provide enough details to diagnose why a problem exists.

Summative assessments are planned culminating processes or activities that measure the extent a student has learned a specific set of content or skills. These assessments *of* learning occur at or near the end of an instructional period and provide a final evaluation (e.g., end-of-unit exams, final grades, state tests of proficiency, measures of attainment). They evaluate a student's performance in a particular point in time and are often used to determine grades, eligibility, graduation, or significant other decisions. They can include broader measures, such as samples of what students have learned or portfolios. Summative assessments are often used for program evaluation and may guide curriculum changes and school improvement planning.