

What role does formative assessment play in the classroom?

- Formative assessments are administered to gather information that can guide student learning.
- Unlike their summative counterparts, formative assessments typically serve no official evaluation purpose: grades are not assigned and assessment outcomes are not used for accountability purposes.
- Both students and educators work collaboratively to identify learning goals, monitor progress, and incorporate feedback throughout a unit of instruction.
- Strategies for formative assessment can vary from one classroom to the next.

What does formative assessment do for teachers and students?

- defines clear learning goals using rubrics and grading criteria that are developed and shared with students.
- develops a plan for meeting those learning goals that is specific to how each student learns.
- provides feedback opportunities for students to set goals, self-monitor and reflect on their learning progress.
- contains frequent assessment activities that are embedded within instruction.
- helps teachers to guide the student learning process rather than measure student performance.

How can educators effectively implement formative assessment strategies?

- Provide feedback that is timely, specific and clearly connected to a learning goal.
- Encourage students to track their learning with journals, notebooks, and other self-monitoring tools.
- Develop students as an assessment resource for their peers.
- Incorporate formal assessment activities (like journaling) alongside informal assessment activities like immediate feedback.
- Use information gathered by formative assessment activities to make adjustments to day-to-day instructional practices.

What are interim assessments and how are they different from formative assessments?

Interim assessments are common assessments that are administered to students throughout the school year to monitor growth and achievement according to specific learning goals and academic standards. Typically, these assessments cover some or all of the learning standards that students are required to learn during the school year. Unlike formative assessments, students are frequently assigned grades based on interim assessment outcomes. Emphasis shifts away from the collaborative student-educator partnership and toward a more traditional measurement of learning and grading.

When used effectively, interim assessments can measure student growth, quantify the effectiveness of instructional practices, and provide predictive evidence for how students will perform on end-of-years tests. Interim assessments can still be used “formatively”—that is, to refine instructional practices and give students the opportunity to reflect on their learning—but their formal nature and comparatively infrequent administration make them poorly suited for the spontaneous and timely corrections to the learning process.

What role does summative assessment play in the classroom?

Both formative and interim assessments are *prospective*—they look toward the future of student learning and classroom instruction. Lessons learned are best applied throughout the instructional unit in which they are contained. With data from these forms of assessment, classroom strategies can be revised, gaps in learning can be identified, and instruction can change to better benefit students' unique needs.

Conversely, summative assessments occur at the end of an instructional cycle and function to certify mastery of student learning. Outcomes on summative assessments are used to determine whether students are prepared to move on to the next unit of instruction in a sequence. They can occur at the end of a larger instructional cycle (e.g., a semester or quarter) or after a project, quiz, or test at the end of a section. They are typically less sensitive to changes in instructional strategy than formative and interim assessments, and their use for guiding classroom practices should take that into account.

State summative assessments, like Ohio's State Tests, are commonly "standardized"—administration protocols, assessment items (or banks of items), and scoring criteria are identical for all the students taking an assessment. These standardized summative assessments are not purposefully individualized like formative assessments can be. Oftentimes, policy makers use data from summative assessments to measure student growth across a state's entire student body. Districts may even use summative assessment data when reviewing or planning curricula. Summative data may also help teachers discover options for adjusting their instructional strategies, informing and strengthening learning and skills in various content areas, and helping to inform assessment practices in the classroom.

When using state summative assessments to evaluate classroom strategy, educators are best served by including the data as a part of a larger ensemble of assessment strategies that include both formative and interim methods.

Roles of Different Kinds of Assessments in the Classroom

Formative Assessment

Drives Instruction and Guides Student Learning

Interim Assessment

Guides Student Learning and Monitors Growth

Summative Assessment

Certifies Student Learning and Content Mastery