

Summative & Formative Assessment

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The following is an abbreviated summary of assessment, providing you with salient tips for you to consider in the process. If you do not find the information you are looking for in this tip sheet, please remember that CELT has a lending library with several volumes on assessment.

Uses of Assessment

There typically are two uses for assessment in educational settings:

Summative assessment ("Assessment of Learning") is generally carried out at the end of a course or project. In an educational setting, summative assessments are typically used to assign students a course grade, and often a scaled grading system enabling the teacher to differentiate students will be used.

Formative assessment ("Assessment for Learning") is generally carried out throughout a course or project. It is used to aid learning in that it helps the student and teacher to find out what the student knows so that the teacher can address any areas of weakness or misconceptions in subsequent lessons. The purpose of formative assessment is to see if students have mastered a given concept and can typically be assigned a pass/fail grade (if used for grading purposes at all).

Whatever the use, you should keep in mind your learning objectives for the course when constructing assessments. Questions should directly be linked to a learning outcome.

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Ideas for Conducting Summative Assessment

Ease the load of assessing large groups of students.

Assessment in large classes is challenging, yet the process can be quite manageable without compromising the quality of student learning:

- On occasion, use self- and peer-assessment as one form of assessment to create a learning experience. Both can promote self-awareness and reflection.
- A group-based assessment will reduce the marking load provided that a group turns in a single piece of work to be assessed.
- Consider on-line testing as an option though security is questionable.
- Have a writing assignment be optional or for extra credit.
- Break up lengthy papers into subparts due throughout the semester.
- Stagger paper due dates using random assignment or encourage some students to hand in papers early for extra credit.
- Consider the option that if a student misses an exam, there is no make-up, however, the final exam is weighed more heavily.
- Allow a student's lowest grade to be dropped. If satisfied with their grade, they can use the final as their dropped grade and choose not to take the exam.
- Prepare spreadsheets for recording homework and grades to facilitate computation of final grades.
- Each class, collect homework from randomly assigned recitation groups.
- When returning exams, place them on a table in alphabetical order. To prevent students from looking at others' grades or from taking exams of those with higher grades, place a grade sheet with comments inside the exam.
- Provide students with answer keys when they exit the examination room or post answers on a course Web page.

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Strategies to consider when grading essays

If the class is large, and teaching assistants (TAs) are involved in grading, the instructor should provide them with the criteria for grading the essays. Ideally, have two TAs grade each essay or have the TAs grade papers together in the same room. Then, they can compare their grades for "A" and "F" essays and come up with a consensus. The instructor should be available for a time in order to offer clarification if the TAs have questions. Some other ideas for effective grading are to:

- Grade essays anonymously. In order to avoid a "halo effect," by which your scoring is influenced by a student's prior performance, request students to put their identifying information (e.g., name or student ID number) on the back of their exams so accidental identification is not made while grading.
- Grade each question separately. If students were asked to respond to several short answer to essay prompts, grade the responses to each prompt separately to avoid student performance on one question to influence your scoring of that student's answer to another prompt, and to make it easier for the grader to keep in mind one answer key at a time. This also will help prevent a possible tendency for the grader to assign lower scores to later exams if the grader becomes bored or tired.
- Provide students an explanation for their grade. Students deserve to know the reasons for receiving a particular grade. Provide comments on the student's paper by indicating elements that may have been omitted and the number of points lost.
- Provide an explanation for how you are weighting the assignment with respect to quality of writing and the assignment's content.
- Include a rubric with the assignment to provide grading guidelines to the student and a checklist to ensure that the assignment has properly been completed. Do not make it so specific that students merely follow the checklist and do not integrate their ideas into a structure that is discovered more organically.
- Before formally grading the essays, skim over several essays to see if the rubric requires modification.

Ideas for Conducting Formative Assessment

If you use these assessment formats for formative assessment to get ongoing feedback and information about student learning and teaching effectiveness, it is best to ask students to respond anonymously. Incorporate feedback into your subsequent classes so that students know that you value their input and take their comments seriously.

Minute Paper: Set aside two-to-five minutes of class time to ask students to respond to two questions: “What is the most important thing you learned? And “What important question(s) remain unanswered?” If your focus is on prior homework, ask the questions at the beginning of class. If it concerns the day’s lecture, reserve the assignment for the conclusion of class. Specify whether you want responses to be in phrases, short sentences, etc.

Muddiest Point

- Replies to the question “What is the muddiest point in ...?” provides valuable information with little time and energy required.
- Be explicit about what you want feedback on (e.g. a specific segment of the lecture or homework.)
- A few minutes before the end of class, pass out slips of paper or index cards for the students to write their responses on. Let them know how much time to spend on the assignment and either stand by the door and have them hand their cards to you on their way out or leave a “muddy point” collection box by the door and have them drop it in on their way out. Address students’ feedback during the next class.

One-Sentence Summary

- Ask students to answer “Who does what to whom, when, where, how, and why?” (WDWWWHW) about a specific topic covered in class and have them put the information into a summary sentence.
- Practice the exercise first and note how long it takes you to complete it. Assign it to the students with clear instructions and allow them twice as much time to complete it.

Directed Paraphrase

- Ask students to take a few minutes and describe a concept for a lay audience and hand in their response at the end of class.

Concept Map: Provide students with a brief explanation of concept mapping (nodes represent concepts and lines represent relationships) and ask students to draw a concept map exhibiting the relationship between concepts covered in a specific class.