

Formative and Summative Assessment

Assessments are activities students accomplish to show what they know and/or can do. Evaluation is a judgment about the success the student has in doing the assessment activity.

All assessment activities must begin or arise from clear learning goals. Formative assessments are the steps along the way to summative assessment (and help to identify and scaffold the learning required to be successful in the summative assessment) OR they may ADD UP to all the learning required by the learning goals and no summative assessment is necessary when all the formative assessments are considered and evaluated as a body of evidence of student learning. The difference between formative and summative assessment is in how they are used.

Formative Assessment: Is assessment FOR learning. Its purpose is to support—not merely monitor—student learning. It should build students' confidence that they are on the right track to reach the larger learning goal—or if not, an individual student still has time to re-group and get on the right track. Formative assessment should provide that information to the student. In simple terms it should help a student know, "I'm on the right track and heading for the goal," or "Okay, I'm off track but now I know what to do to fix it." Formative assessment activities include evaluation information from a teacher or peers that allows the student to right wrongs or continue working knowing they are heading for success.

Formative assessment activities may be seen as gatekeepers—points at which the teacher says, "I can't let you go any further until I see (or hear) that you know what you are doing and will be successful as you continue to down the path to meeting the larger learning goal."

Teachers may need to stop the learning process and intervene if it is apparent that a number of students have been unsuccessful in a formative assessment activities—and are not ready to go on. In that way formative assessment activities provide information for the teacher's instructional decisions as well as information to the student about how he or she is doing at a given point in the learning process. Formative assessment makes the assumption that there is more coming in terms of learning. (Stiggins talks about using formative assessments that encourage and motivate students—but that's a discussion for another day. Right now we're just working on getting them aligned to our learning goals and providing useful feedback to improve student achievement.)

Summative Assessment: Is assessment OF learning. It says to a student, "This is the end of the line. We're not going to take anymore time (right now) for learning so here's how successful you've been at meeting the learning goal." It is still an activity that a student does—and the result should still be useful information for the student about what s/he knows and can do. It is still a directly aligned to or arises from clear learning goals based on standard benchmark(s).

Research shows that:

- **the number of formative assessments is in direct correlation to the level of student achievement (Marzano 2006)**
- **In terms of improving student achievement use of formative assessment is equal to one on one tutoring (Doug Reeves 2007)**