

## Summative and Formative Assessments Overview

### Video Script

Hi I'm Carol Subiño Sullivan assistant director of faculty teaching and learning initiatives at the Center for Teaching and Learning.

In this video we're going to talk about formative and summative assessments. The goal of this video is for you to be able to use the information to explain the purpose of including both formative and summative assessments in your course and to identify the appropriate formative assessments to support student success in the major assessments of your course.

Some of that assessment focuses on traditional high stakes assessment. For example exams or major projects provide evidence of student learning. These provide evidence of student learning at key points in the semester, like at the very end of the course or a mid-term.

On the other hand, formative assessment focuses on frequent low stakes assessment that provide opportunity for frequent feedback. So they might be low stakes quizzes, for example, that you do most weeks of your course.

The best assessment practice is really to have both formative and summative assessment in your courses.

In this slide 4, you'll see some comparisons between formative and summative assessments.

In formative assessments you see that the purpose is really improvement. Can you find out early on where students are having trouble and make some adjustments to your teaching and learning strategies in order to address them? These are informal and they're ongoing. You might even do formative assessments before you've taught. For example if students have watched a video or done some reading before your class meeting and you want to know where are they at in their understanding.

Formative assessments are low stakes. They might be worth a couple points or sometimes not even worth any points at all yet they can be rigorous (though there is a range from low to high rigor) Really what you want to know is

- What is working for the students?
- What needs to be improved?
- How can it be improved

On the other hand summative assessment is an evaluation of the final learning outcomes. Sometimes those summative evaluations are used for making decisions about what comes next. So for example placement or promotion decisions for students these are usually quite formal like an exam or formal project that have certain expectations for what they look like.

Summative evaluations tend to be cumulative and happen after the instruction and a lot of practice and feedback. And they're high stakes. Summative assessments are the major determinants of a student's grade in the course. Because of this, they are intended to be rigorous: a moderate to high level of

psychometric rigor. As the instructor you want to know: has the students achieved mastery of the material and are they prepared to go on to the next level of activity?

While formative and summative assessments are quite different from each other, they are complimentary. Formative assessments are meant to step students along as they prepare to demonstrate mastery in the summative assessments. The formative assessments are assessment for learning not just a measure of learning. That's why we're saying it's really important to have both and of course.

### **Benefits of Formative Assessment**

There are some big benefits to including formative assessments in your course. They do provide students realistic idea of their performance and the earlier that you start doing this the better. If students need to do some extra work beyond what the course is designed to prepare them for, it gives them time to find additional resources. And it gives you the instructor time to spot any problems early to help students get the help they need. These sorts of formative assessments also increase interactions between the instructors and learners. You don't have to wonder if students are getting it you can just actually see it happen in real time.

Also it helps learners develop their own awareness of their learning process, to evaluate how well they are doing, and to know for themselves if they need to seek additional help. There is some evidence that getting this kind of frequent feedback reduces the learner anxiety, and it can help students persist in a difficult course. The simplified tasks can be aligned with the summative assessments in order to help students be prepared for them. In fact I definitely recommend that they are aligned.

As an example, in an undergraduate anthropology course I taught previously, students needed to be able to interpret performances in order to identify how cultural values and dynamics were represented in them. The major assessment was for them to write an analysis paper based on their performance of their choice. However I knew that few students had any experiences viewing performance as anything other than entertainment. In order to prepare them to interpret performances like a cultural anthropologist, I set up multiple practice opportunities. In these practice sessions, the class would watch a segment of a video recorded performance and then write a short interpretation. I provided criteria and feedback in whole class discussions and on individual work. In this way students gradually honed their analytical skills, and by the time they had to write the major analysis paper they had a pretty solid understanding of what I expected.

Slide 6 includes some other examples of formative assessments.

- You might do online discussion posts where students answer some targeted questions.
- You could do some weekly quizzes.
- You might have students write some very short reflections and submit them right away.
- You could break up a larger assignments into smaller pieces so that you can give them some feedback on their early work.
- You could do weekly reflection journals or blogs covering the course concepts
- Homework exercises are great formative assessments.
- You could do Socratic dialogue so the formative assessment is actually happening during a live session

- You could have students do some self-evaluation of their own progress in the learning goals.

You can use the table on slide 7, to align your formative and summative assessments. Write the major assessment (summative assessment) in the last column, and then think about what you have students do both in class and out of class to practice in preparation.

The other thing that this table allows you to do is to think about the timing of those assessments I've broken up the course in thirds, which could be a good approach for your course, but you might divide your course differently. Basically you'll want to think about: is there adequate time for the students to get enough practice so that they're ready for the major assessment?

In this video you got a chance to compare the important forms of assessments and think about how formative and summative assessments play complementary roles in supporting the student learning in your course. And you heard some examples of both formative and summative assessments so that you can plan to include both in your course.