



Changing Learning &

Formative and Summative Assessments

The terms "formative" and "summative" do not have to be difficult, yet the definitions have become confusing in the past few years. This is especially true for formative assessment. In a balanced assessment system, both summative and formative assessments are an integral part of information gathering.

Formative assessment focuses both on the processes and products of learning. Formative assessment is continuous, frequent and is meant to inform the student and the teacher of the student's progress toward the curriculum objectives. This type of assessment provides information upon which instructional decisions and adaptations can be made and provides students with directions for future learning.

The success of formative assessment depends not only on the effectiveness of the teaching/learning activities that have taken place but also on the clarity with which the teacher communicates the following: the learning objectives, the performance criteria and what a successful performance looks like. Formative assessment allows the students to predict what the teacher is expecting as an outcome as well as helping the student to understand a particular teacher's approach to testing for the summative assessment. Involvement in constructing their own assessment instruments or in adapting ones the teacher has made permits students to focus on what they are trying to achieve, develops their thinking skills, and helps them to become reflective learners. As well, peer assessment is a useful formative assessment technique. For peer assessment to be successful, students must be provided with assistance and the opportunity to observe a model peer assessment session.

Summative assessment occurs most often at the end of a unit of instruction and at the end of the semester when students are ready to demonstrate achievement of curriculum objectives. A unit of instruction can be as small as the mastery of ten definitions or as large as the mastery of a large segment of the course or of the whole course. The main purposes are to determine knowledge, skills, abilities, and attitudes that have developed over a given period of time; to summarize student progress; and to report this progress to students, teachers and others. Summative assessments are based upon criteria derived from curriculum objectives. By sharing these objectives with the students, teachers enable students to understand and internalize the criteria by which their progress will be determined.

The key is to think of summative assessment as a means to gauge, at a particular point in time, student learning relative to content standards. Although the information that is gleaned from this type of assessment is important, it can only help in evaluating certain aspects of the learning process. Because they are spread out and occur *after* instruction every few weeks, months, or once a year, summative assessments are tools to help evaluate the effectiveness of programs, school improvement goals, alignment of curriculum, or student placement in specific programs.

This text is an adaptation of articles found at
<http://www.sasked.gov.sk.ca> and
<http://www.nmsa.org/Publications/WebExclusive/Assessment>



Assessment Practices the Seine River Way