

THE DEFINITIVE K-12 GUIDE TO

FORMATIVE

ASSESSMENT

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Whether you're already a fan of formative assessment, or you're developing your formative assessment strategy for the first time, this guide will provide you with real-world insights and tips from actual educators to help you fuel student growth.



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GET FORMATIVE

ASSESSMENT THAT DRIVES LEARNING

With so much emphasis on high-stakes testing and federal mandates like NCLB and ESSA, there has been much (and often heated) debate on the role of assessment in our public schools. So it's no wonder that the word "assessment" can carry some mighty heavy baggage for K-12 educators.

But with formative assessment making a bold move to the forefront of educational trends, the term "assessment" may be shaking part of its negative reputation. In fact, K-12 innovators are finding that assessment, when used frequently throughout the learning cycle, helps teachers improve student outcomes by giving them the insights they need for data-driven instruction, targeted interventions, and more meaningful teacher collaboration.

This comprehensive guide gives you the ins and outs of formative assessment by

- › providing an overview of formative assessment and its benefits for students and teachers
- › breaking down the difference between formative and summative assessment
- › presenting the three must-haves of good formative assessment
- › offering ideas to start using in your own classroom

WHAT IS FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT?

The process of formative assessment embeds checks for understanding into the learning cycle to provide feedback to teachers, allowing them to adjust instruction and provide personalized learning opportunities based on students' unique needs. Formative assessment also provides critical feedback to students, so they can track their progress and take greater ownership of their learning. **In short, formative assessment is assessment *for* learning.**

Unlike summative tests, which typically occur at the end of a chapter or unit, formative assessments are usually ungraded or don't carry heavily weighted points. Rather, formative assessment is a quick check for understanding to help teachers answer important questions about student growth:

- › What do my students know?
- › What do they still need to learn?
- › How should I adapt my instruction?

To help answer these questions, [solutions are now available](#) to help administrators and teachers **track student progress while learning happens** and overcome the once very time-intensive process of tracking the formative student data. With this in-the-moment data, teachers can more easily and effectively identify where students are right now and weigh that against where they need to be, then connect the data through adjusted instruction and feedback.

***Formative
assessment
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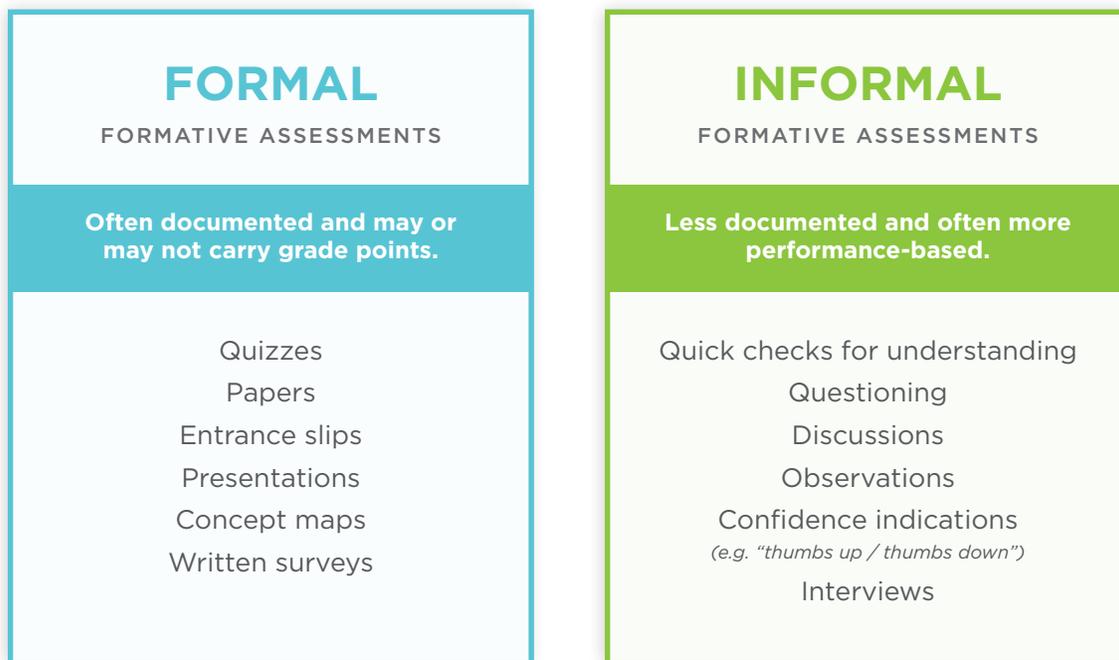


EXAMPLES OF FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT

You've probably been using some type of formative assessment since you first stepped foot in a classroom—you just may not have called it by that term. But with increasing emphasis to personalize the learning experience, educators are taking a more systematic approach to formative assessment at the classroom, school, and district level.

Formative assessment should inform teaching and learning.

Formative assessment tends to fall into two categories:



Whether they're formal or informal, formative assessments are embedded regularly into every step of the learning process, not just administered at the end of an instructional period. And every formative assessment should do one important thing: **inform teaching and learning.**



FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT VS. SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENT

At first glance, many think that it's a which-one-is-better debate when it comes to formative and summative assessment. Not so. They both have value and provide educators with critical information; they're used at different times for different purposes.

Like the term suggests, summative assessment is used to gauge the culmination of student learning at the conclusion of a specific instructional period, be it the end of a chapter, a course, a project, or a school year. The key factor in defining **summative assessment is that it's used to evaluate learning**, not to inform teaching and learning.

In most cases, these types of assessments are spread out over a specific and predetermined time period, and (when used in the classroom) are included in the grading process. Furthermore, summative assessment can be used to determine placement, as well as gauge the learning of groups for educational research and innovation.

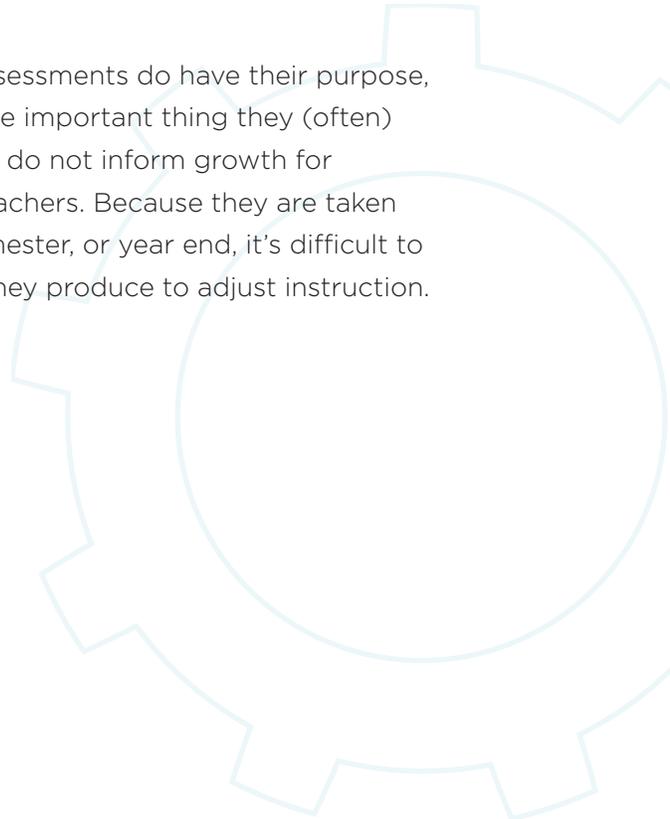
Summative assessment is assessment of learning.

EXAMPLES

OF SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENT

- State-mandated testing
- Year-end testing
- Final recital
- Unit or chapter-end tests
- District benchmarks
- Interim assessments
- Final papers
- Portfolios
- Placement tests

Summative assessments do have their purpose, but there is one important thing they (often) don't do: They do not inform growth for students or teachers. Because they are taken at quarter, semester, or year end, it's difficult to use the data they produce to adjust instruction.



THE 3 THINGS THAT MAKE FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT WORK

Although there are seemingly endless ways to formatively assess your students, the strategy has to be thoughtfully designed to give you the data you need to determine the next steps in the learning process.

There are three can't-skips, gotta-dos, must-haves for meaningful formative assessment.

1 PROPER ALIGNMENT

Formative assessment only works when you measure what you intend to measure. Correct alignment ensures continuity of instruction, instructional materials, and assessment. It also sends clear messages to students about what they know, what they need to know, and how to close that gap.

In order to align your assessments to standards, you first have to be familiar with them—which can be tricky for educators, especially those who teach elective courses.

Many informational resources exist to help you dial in on the specific standards for your subject and grade level. Check with your district for standards materials, collaborate in your PLC, or download apps specifically designed for educators (like the [MasteryConnect State Apps](#) and [Resource Pins](#).)

Once you have an assessment ready, review it for proper alignment to ensure that it will, in fact, inform both teaching and learning in your classroom.

QUESTIONS TO ASK ABOUT ASSESSMENT ALIGNMENT

- › Which standards do you want to assess?
- › Does the assessment directly align to these standards?
- › Does it measure the concepts and skills associated with the standards?
- › Is it grade-level and/or developmentally appropriate?
- › Do the questions have the right level of readability?
- › Does it include appropriate vocabulary for your students?
- › Is it free of cultural bias?
- › Will the question provide the insight you need to identify levels of understanding?

Now, you may think that we are only covering alignment for formal formative assessments, like multiple-choice or papers. Nope. As previously mentioned, the spectrum of formative assessment is wide, including both formal and informal assessment and is effective for all subjects and grade levels.

As an educator, you may use your own observations of student performance. This works well for activities like musical numbers, art pieces, or group discussions. Or a formative assessment could be as simple as students self-reporting their confidence in understanding the day's lesson.

Regardless of how you choose to assess your students (and how you gather data about that assessment), proper alignment is the first step in making sure that formative assessment is working in your classroom.

2

IN-THE-MOMENT FEEDBACK

Studies have repeatedly shown that the sooner a student receives feedback, the more likely it is to have a positive impact on learning. Summative assessments, typically administered at the end of an instructional period, often don't communicate to students about their progress until days, weeks, or even months down the road.

That's why formative assessment is so important. Its hallmark is the ability to provide students with feedback as learning happens, while there is still time to influence growth. There are many tools that can help you get immediate results back to your students, including GradeCam or the [Socrative](#) app.

Some teachers find that meeting with students for mini-sessions or dividing students into groups based on levels of understanding helps them target their feedback. Thoughtfully crafting effective feedback helps students know exactly where they are and where they need to be. This is critical for the next step: self-evaluation.

**Formative
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as learning
happens.**

CHECKLIST FOR EFFECTIVE FEEDBACK

- ✓ It's relevant
- ✓ It includes clear goals
- ✓ It addresses misconceptions
- ✓ It provides opportunity for students to advance
- ✓ It includes comments, not only grades

3

SELF-EVALUATION

Meaningful formative assessment provides the opportunity for both the student and the teacher to reflect on learning. For the teacher, this involves reflecting on what's happening in the classroom, then making appropriate changes to improve student outcomes. For the student, this means analyzing individual learning and setting goals for future growth.



TEACHER SELF-EVALUATION

As you know, part of teaching is fine-tuning your skills, taking new approaches, and adapting to the needs of students. Formative assessment gives you the opportunity to get constant feedback from your class so you can adjust instruction in the moment.

Steps for Self-Evaluating Instruction

CONSIDER THE FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT YOU ADMINISTERED

- Did it collect evidence of student learning?
- Did it provide you with helpful data to inform instruction?

ANALYZE THE ASSESSMENT DATA

- What percentage of students mastered the concept?
- What level of intervention, remediation, or enrichment will be needed?
- What other strategies or resources might you use in the future?
- Are there any supports available at your school or district?

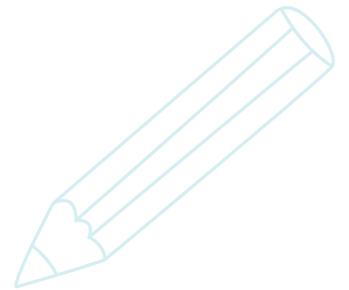
MAKE A PLAN AND EXECUTE ON IT

- How are you going to group students for further instruction?
- What resources/strategies will you use with each group?
- How and when will you reassess?

FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT IDEAS

Alright, we've covered the what and the why; now let's get to applying it in the real-world classroom. We've gathered some of our favorite formative assessment activities from real educators that you can start using in your own classroom.

1 ENTRANCE SLIPS



A modern take on the time-tested exit ticket, this formative assessment technique asks students to share their understanding at the *beginning* of class.

Have students jot down what they learned from the previous day's lesson, share how they'd apply what they learned in a real-world scenario, or ask questions they may have about the material. Use strips of paper, index cards, or an online solution like [Socrative](#) to gather student responses. Then use their responses to answer questions at the beginning of class, re-teach an important concept, modify the day's lesson, or determine if the class is ready to forge ahead.

2

OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONING

Asking questions that require more than simple yes-or-no responses encourages students to use their higher-order reasoning skills. Additionally, when students are asked questions like “Does this make sense?” or “Do you understand?”, they may answer “yes” even if they need more help.

Ask questions that make them think more deeply about the class material. You may use these questions to start students talking as a class, begin small group discussions, or utilize as a writing prompt. This will help them make the transition from memorizing to cognitively processing their response.

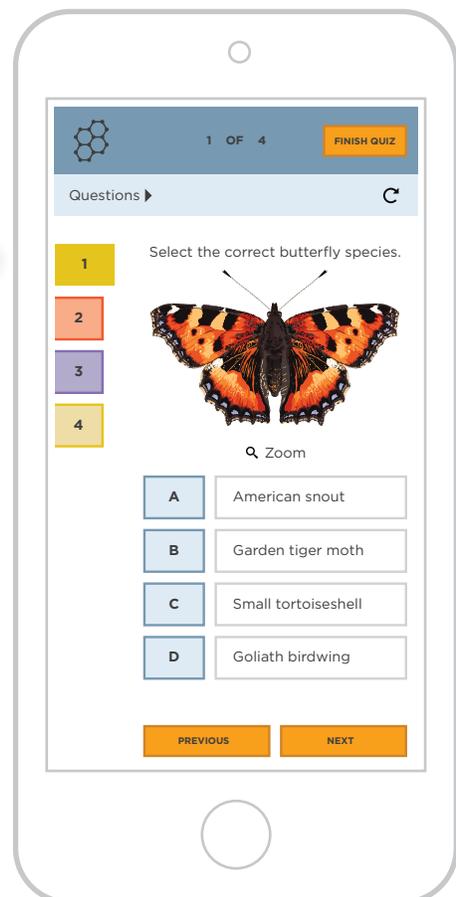


MEET SOCRATIVE

[Socrative](#) is a free, easy-to-use classroom engagement tool perfect for formative assessment. Compatible with any device or browser, you can start collecting more formative assessment more frequently with personalized content.

Get Your Free Account

www.masteryconnect.com/socrative





3

POSTCARDS

This formative assessment strategy works particularly well for history or social studies students, but can be used in other contexts like ELA or current affairs.



Ask students to take on the persona of a historical figure, a fictional character from a novel, or a person in the news to write a postcard to another individual. Students should think beyond the historical facts, such as dates or locations, and more closely consider context, causes and effects, and other social factors. You may, perhaps, choose to provide them with a series of questions to help get them writing.

4

TWO STARS AND A WISH

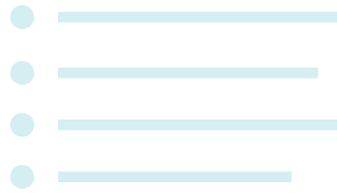


Peer review and collaboration are another way to implement formative assessment in your classroom. Allowing students to see others' work not only promotes collaboration, but may further their own understanding of the material. This K-12 assessment strategy works well for many assignment types, including oral performances, written assignments, and art pieces.

After discussion of the work, ask each student or group to write down two stars (areas where the work excelled) and a wish (an area where it may be improved) about a peer's project or essay. This formative assessment example is designed to keep things positive, while still providing each student with constructive feedback.

5

BULLET LIST



Assessing each student's level of understanding at the conclusion of class time can help you prepare for the next day's lesson or determine if you need to assign additional activities. Asking them to put their thoughts in writing will also save you from the dreaded silence that can happen when asking for their questions aloud.

At the end of a lesson, encourage students to itemize three things that he or she didn't understand about the material. Students may write down their responses or send them electronically via a classroom edtech system. After writing them down, you may also ask them to share their questions with the class to provide an opportunity for peer feedback. For younger grades, hold "carpet time" for students to sit down and go over questions as a group.

6

QUIZ BOWL

Formative assessment can be fun and games when you add in a little friendly competition. The activity not only adds a layer of excitement to learning, it promotes teamwork and collaboration among students.

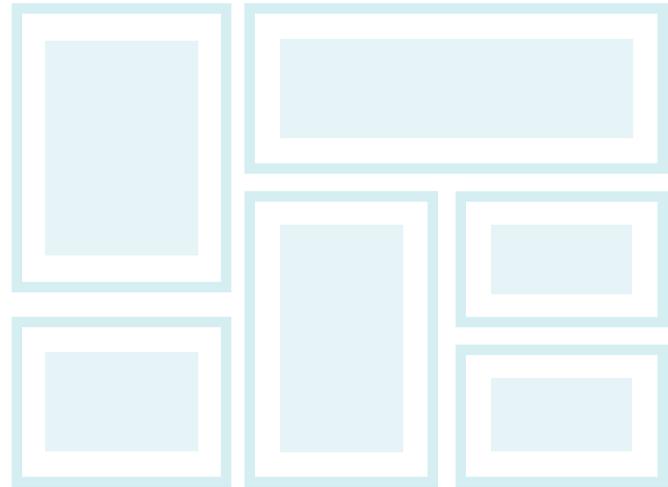
To hold a bowl of your own, separate the class into teams. Use a buzzer, bell, or raised hands for teams to answer, with each correct answer earning the team points. Our personal favorite, of course, is holding a [Socrative](#) Space Race, during which students race their icons (even unicorns!) across the screen.



7

COLLAGES

Spark creativity in your students by asking them to create collages with a mix of images they believe demonstrates their understanding of a concept. This formative assessment idea can be used in nearly every subject for any age group and can be done individually or in groups.



Ask students to present their collages to the class and explain why they chose to include each image. Allow students to ask questions or provide feedback. Or hang collages on a gallery wall where students can view others' work.

8

MINI MEETINGS

Singling out an individual can cause anxiety for the student. No student, after all, wants to hear, “See me after class.” However, when teacher-student meetings are scheduled as a standard among the entire classroom, it can promote learning while sparing any unintended embarrassment. This formative assessment activity can be particularly helpful for introverted students who may be too shy to speak up in front of a group.

Meet with each student, perhaps even for a few minutes or once per week, to discuss a specific assignment or concept. Allow them to ask questions and receive feedback. Scheduling these meetings while the rest of the class is working on a project ensures learning continues for all students.

9

THUMBS UP / THUMBS DOWN

A twist on the all-time formative assessment classic (raising hands) “fists to fives” or “thumbs up/thumbs down” allows students to communicate their level of comfort with the day’s materials with an easy visual cue.

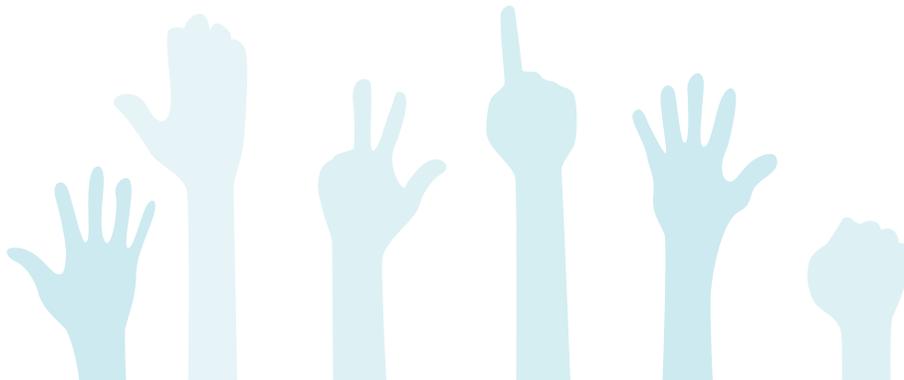
Ask your students to quickly show their understanding with a numerical rating or with a simple thumbs up or down. Or, if you have a tech solution, ask them to send in their rating anonymously from a laptop, tablet, or hand-held device.

10

A QUICK-CHECK QUIZ

Although you may already have chapter or unit-end quizzes planned, a quick-check quiz—or even a single question—will give you valuable insight into student growth before moving on. Be sure to keep it informal to alleviate pressure on students.

Ask students to answer questions that will demonstrate their mastery of material. Their responses will help you determine if it is time to move on, divide students into groups, provide more examples, or identify students that needs a little extra help.



CONCLUSION

We hope that this guide has provided you with some helpful tips to implement your formative assessment strategy, or fine-tune the process you already have in place. Formative assessment is nothing new, but educators are now turning to it in a more systematic way in order to drive student outcomes through the real-time data it provides about student learning.

Success of the formative assessment process relies on teachers' efforts to implement it thoughtfully and thoroughly—and the support from administrators to do this work. It can require a shift in perspective from more traditional assessment strategies, but it has the power to truly influence growth by helping teachers identify student levels of understanding in the moment, target students for intervention, and inform instruction.

When formative assessment is integrated regularly into the learning process, great things happen. It's one of the most important tools to help more students do better.

*Formative
assessments helps
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FUEL STUDENT GROWTH.

MasteryConnect gives you the tools to visualize student learning in the moment against any set of standards, so you can do what matters most: improve student outcomes.



Identify student levels of understanding.



Target students for intervention.



Evaluate instruction and collaborate with colleagues.

GET MORE INFO

Get a personalized demo of MasteryConnect.

<https://www.masteryconnect.com/request-a-demo.html>



MASTERY CONNECT

MasteryConnect provides formative assessment and competency-based learning solutions to educators around the world. MasteryConnect combines professional development with its web and mobile platforms, including [Socrative](#), to help teachers identify student levels of understanding in real time, target students for intervention, and use assessment data to inform instruction. We now serve over **3 million teachers** and **21 million students** in more than **85% of U.S. districts** and **170 countries**.

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