

Formal and informal Assessment

Assessment is used in various venues: in schools from birth throughout post-graduate work, in the workplace, and from agencies granting licenses. Assessments can be either informal or formal with each form having different uses, goals, and benefits. By looking at each form of assessment one can ascertain the best type to choose in each situation.

Informal assessment is defined as a procedure for obtaining information that can be used to make judgments about a student's progress and understanding using means other than standardized formats. Examples of informal assessment include projects, presentations, experiments, demonstrations or performances. Other informal assessments can include portfolios, asking questions during class, or through informal observations of interaction.

Formal assessment typically means using a test that involves standardized administration. Examples of formal assessment include standardized tests or end of chapter tests. This type of assessment has a specific right or wrong answer based on a set of predetermined criteria and has been used on other students.

Formal assessments are used to assess overall achievement, to compare a student's performance with others at their age or grade, or to identify comparable strengths and weaknesses with peers. Informal assessments are used to craft lesson plans and decide on instruction. One good example of an informal assessment that is commonly used is a portfolio assessment. Teachers and students select and collect examples of work throughout the year to show progress over time. Another that is used in the local school district is the tri-fold assessment. It assesses letters, sounds,

numbers, shapes and counting and sight words and is used monthly. The Tri-fold assessment involves students folding a large piece of construction paper into 3 parts and following directions to write or draw something in each of the six spots. The students write letters, numbers, words, colors, shapes, their name, and draw a picture of themselves. Observation is another form of informal assessment.

Each type of assessment has its own benefits. Many students get nervous while taking formal assessments and may not perform as well, while other students may be excellent test takers and may excel even without mastering the knowledge. Younger students do best at informal assessments as they do not have the ability to sit and take formal assessments, let alone hold a pencil. Being able to compare a student to his or her peers is an advantage of formal assessments. Another advantage is that formal assessments are relatively easy to give, with frequently just paper and pencil needed. Since it is given the same way at each school, students and teachers can rely on the reliability of results.

Some further disadvantages of formal assessments include the reliance on multiple-choice questions. With this form, students are never required to come up with their own answers, but to select the best from a list. It cannot measure the depth of a student's knowledge. Additionally, students taking norm-reference tests do not receive feedback on how well they mastered material, but how well they did compared to others. If one student answers 50% of the material correctly, but everyone else only answers 40% correctly, the original student will still receive a 99%. Even criterion-referenced tests have a weakness, as there is no gray area for partial credit. However, this weakness is also a strength. It eliminates the possibility for teacher favoritism or

other things that could affect a grade.

Informal assessments can provide quick feedback to a teacher through the use of questioning. One example, writing samples, allow students to apply what they have learned in class to complete the assessment. With this task multiple concepts can be assessed. Limits include time constraints and students ability to put thoughts on paper. Experiments allow a student to apply concepts learned by doing. A successful experiment shows that students understand and apply the knowledge learned. Limits include time and the possibility that a student may get a different result and be able to justify it.

Both formal and informal assessments have their place in classrooms. Choosing an assessment involves looking at the goals, uses and benefits of each type of assessment. Generally, a mix of each type will provide the best picture of a student's achievement, which is important to truly assess meeting standards, teaching, and understanding.

Informal Assessment Strategies

Activity	Description
Quick Write	Student writes for 2-3 minutes about what he heard from a lecture or explanation/read/learned. Could be an open ended question from teacher
12 Word Summary	In 12 words or less, have students summarize important aspects of a particular chunk of instruction or reading.
3-2-1	Students jot down 3 ideas, concepts, or issues presented. Students jot down 2 examples or uses of idea or concept. Students write down 1 unresolved question or a possible confusion.
Muddiest Point	Students are asked to write down the muddiest point in the lesson (up to that point, what was unclear)
Quick class check	Give students paper plates, index cards, whiteboard, or large sheets of paper when they enter. When asking a question have ALL students write the answer and at your signal, have ALL students hold up the plate (or whatever) so that you can see who/ how many got the answer. Discussion to elaborate can follow.
Class vote	Present several possible answers or solutions to a question or problem and have students vote on what they think is best.
Idea Wave	Each student lists 3-5 ideas about the assigned topic. One volunteer begins the "idea wave" by sharing his idea. The student to the right of the volunteer shares one idea; the next student to rights shares one idea. Teacher directs the idea wave until several different ideas have been shared. At the end of the formal idea wave, a few volunteers who were not included may contribute.
Tickets to enter and exit	Teacher asks students a specific question about the lesson. Students then respond on the ticket and gives to teacher, either on their way out or on their way in the next day. Teacher can then evaluate the need to re-teach or questions that need to be answered.
Four Corners	Teacher posts questions, concepts, or vocabulary words in each of the corners of the room. Each student is assigned a corner. Once in the corner, the students discuss the focus of the lesson in relation to the question, concept, or words. Students may report out or move to another corner and repeat. After students have moved, as a writing assignment they should be encouraged to reflect on changes in opinion or what they have learned.

Give One/Get One	Students are given papers and asked to list 3-5 ideas about the learning. Students draw a line after their last idea to separate his/her ideas from classmate's lists. Students get up and interact with one classmate at a time. Exchange papers, read your partner's list, and then ask questions about new or confusing ideas.
Concept Mapping	Explain/ model a concept map. After lecture, explanation, or reading, have students fill in concept map (partner or individually). Report out.
Flash Cards	After 10 minutes into a lecture or concept presentation, have students create a flash card that contains the key concept or idea. Toward the end of the class, have students work in pairs to exchange ideas and review the material.
Learning Cell	Students develop questions and answers on their own (possibly using the Q-Matrix). Working in pairs the first student asks a question and the partner answers and vice versa. Each student can correct the other until a satisfactory answer is reached. (Good way to encourage students to go back to the text book).
One Minute Paper	Teacher decides what the focus of the paper should be. Ask students "What was the most important thing you learned? What important question remains unanswered? Set aside 5-10 minutes of next class to discuss the results. May be used in the middle of a class also.
Signal Cards/thumbs up-thumbs down	Create cards to check for understanding. green means "I got it", yellow means "I'm not sure, Maybe", and blue means "I'm lost. I have questions"
Transfer and Apply	Students list what they have learned and how they might apply it to their real lives. Students list interesting ideas, strategies, concepts learned in class or chunk of class. They then write some possible way to apply this learning in their lives, another class, or in their community.
Circular check	Students in groups are given a problem with a definite answer (good for math & science). First students completes first step without contribution from others in group and passes it to the next student. Second student corrects any mistakes and completes next step, again with out input from the group. Problem gets passed to next student and the process continues until the group has the correct answer.

Formal Assessment Strategies

Activity	Description
Tests	To evaluate the appropriateness of teaching programs and teaching strategies
Grades	To evaluate a child's progress
Standardized Tests	Developmental assessment tests (normative standardization) with high reliability and predictive validity. Used for determining classification and placement.