



What is summative assessment and how can it be used in the classroom?

What is Classroom Summative Assessment?

Summative assessment, sometimes referred to as assessment of learning, is assessment used at the conclusion of some period of learning. These assessments are used to summarize student achievement when no further instruction on a set of skills and concepts is planned or will be provided. They allow teachers to see what students know and able to do.

The key identifying characteristic of classroom summative assessments is their goal of describing how much each student has achieved by the end of the period of instruction, followed by a move to the next instructional unit, in either the current or subsequent school year.

Summative assessment is one part of a balanced assessment

approach in the classroom. The other, more important, part is assessment for learning, or the formative assessment process. (See “To learn more” next page.)

Examples and uses of summative assessment in the classroom

The label “summative assessment” is often associated with the two types of assessment required by federal or state law, or chosen by school districts: 1) annual statewide summative assessments, and 2) interim or benchmark assessments. While these assessments are administered in classroom settings, they serve district and state purposes. Classroom-level summative assessments primarily serve the purposes of teachers, students, and families. Some examples of classroom assessments and their uses are described in Table 1.

Table 1: Types of Classroom Summative Assessments

| Assessment | Description | Potential Uses of the Results |
|------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Start-of-year summative assessment | Administered when students return to school in the fall | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gauge what students know and can do Determine what has not been retained Plan upcoming instruction |
| End-of-year summative assessment | Administered at the end of the school year | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gauge what students know and can do at the conclusion of the school year Map the school’s curriculum within and across grades/courses in each area assessed and determine changes needed to develop a horizontally and vertically aligned instructional program Plan instructional program enhancements |
| Periodic interim summative assessment | Instructionally-related; given to students two or more times per school year | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Help determine student learning growth over the school year Identify students who require additional learning supports “Enforce” instructional pacing |
| End-of-instructional unit/end-of-chapter tests | Assessments related to the instructional unit or chapter in the textbook that students have just completed | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Grade students Provide remedial assistance on material not mastered |
| Quizzes | “Mini-tests” used on a regular basis, or only occasionally | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gauge what students still need to learn Grade students Emphasize to students the need to study harder |
| Project-based performance assessments | Substantial performance assessment tasks that students may engage in over days or weeks. | Permits students to demonstrate their learning via a product, presentation, or performance. They are typically judged on one or more dimensions. If work continues over time, growth in student learning might also be judged. |
| Capstone project | A more substantial performance assessment activity carried out by a student at the conclusion of a period of instruction | Permits students to apply their knowledge and skills in contemplating a project that illustrates their achievement. They are judged in a similar manner as project-based performance assessments. High achievement might result in a certification or commendation. |
| Portfolio | A body of evidence of student work selected over time | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Illustrates the best performance of the student (showcase portfolio) Reveals growth in student learning (improvement portfolio) Determine current learning status |

To learn more

Learning Point: What constitutes a high-quality, comprehensive, balanced assessment system? (MAC 2016) <https://tinyurl.com/yap8f3x4>

Learning Point: What do we mean by formative assessment? (MAC 2018) <https://tinyurl.com/yad5w4an>

Think Point: Addressing Assessment Issues: Value of using a two-component accountability assessment system, by **Stuart Kahl, Ph.D.** (MAC 2019) <https://tinyurl.com/y5fet8km>

How can classroom summative assessment data be used?

Since summative assessments might cover skills taught weeks earlier and take time to grade, they are unlikely to provide the type of instructionally-relevant information available through the daily use of the formative assessment process. Nevertheless, classroom summative assessments do have instructional value and meet several instructional purposes:

Curriculum mapping and instructional improvement – Classroom summative assessments provide a snapshot of student performance at a point of time, such as at the end of the school year. If we don't like what we see in that picture, the data provided can be used by educators to review and modify their instructional programs, and make changes so as to improve future instruction to increase the likelihood that future groups of students do better.

Instructional planning – If the classroom summative assessment occurred at the conclusion of a unit of instruction, results might help teachers determine if every student is ready to move on to the next instructional unit. If not, teachers should identify the skills students have missed but will need to succeed in the next unit of

instruction, and determine how to address them as new instruction gets under way.

Flagging student needs – Classroom summative assessment may also have some utility with students in another way. The performance of a few students may be so concerning that the teacher or parents/guardians may wish to ascertain whether the student has a learning disability or other challenges. While these would not address low achievement on the summative assessment, per se, this use of classroom summative assessment results could have a substantial benefit to these students.

How do classroom summative assessments fit in a balanced assessment system?

Classroom summative assessments are an important part of a balanced assessment system. The formative assessment process, used effectively and often, can provide ongoing feedback needed by teachers and students to guide instruction and learning. Classroom summative assessments answer key questions (and what we ultimately want to know):

- How much did students learn?
- Did students miss some important concept or understanding, so we can



make sure to cover those topics more effectively the next time we teach these concepts?

- Are students ready to move on to the next unit of instruction (or on to the next school year)?
- What additional assistance is needed by some students?
- How do we report students' levels of achievement to those who want to know – the students who were assessed, their parents or guardians, teachers, school administrators, and (for accountability) the public.

Who uses the information that classroom summative assessment provides?

Classroom summative assessment data can be used by different individuals to answer several key questions.

| Users | Uses | Key Questions |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Students and their families | Standards-based grading | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Has the student achieved all important learning outcomes? ■ Is the student keeping up? |
| | Normative grading | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ How well did the student do relative to other students? |
| Educators | Improved student performance | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Have I improved the instruction I provided this year? ■ Did students in my class achieve more than any students did last year? |
| | Student growth in learning | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Did I provide more effective instruction this year? ■ How much more did students improve in my class this year? |
| Administrators, school boards, and the public (as necessary) | School accountability for level of performance | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ What proportion of students are proficient or above? ■ Is student performance improving? Why or why not? ■ Are changes needed in curricula or instructional programs? |

The Michigan Assessment Consortium's Assessment Learning Network (ALN) is a professional learning community consisting of members from MI's professional education organizations; the goal of the ALN is to increase the assessment literacy of all of Michigan's professional educators.