

# Formative vs Summative Assessment: What's the Difference?

Two foundational approaches – formative assessment and summative assessment – are important for teachers to know and understand to best support student learning. Although these approaches are foundational to assessment, a varied and inconsistent understanding of them and their application in schools currently exists.

To clarify these approaches, this resource:

- ▶ defines and describes both approaches and their related methods and
- ▶ describes how to use them in a physical and health education setting.

## Formative Assessment:

### A Brief Overview

Formative assessment is ideally used **during** the learning process. Formative assessment is monitoring student learning and providing ongoing descriptive feedback to enhance learning, based on areas of strength and need.

Formative assessment can also help teachers improve their instruction by using the collected information to consider the effectiveness of their teaching strategies and to make informed decisions on the next steps for both teaching and learning. To facilitate the gathering of this information, two types of formative assessment can be used: assessment for learning and assessment as learning.

## ASSESSMENT FOR LEARNING

This approach to assessment involves the teacher gathering assessment information to better understand where students are in their learning and to make informed teaching decisions for how to best help them improve. Ideally, this is an ongoing approach embedded into the learning process where students are exploring, making mistakes, and adjusting as needed. As such, assessment for learning information should not be used for evaluation or grading purposes (unless mandated by jurisdictional policies).

## ASSESSMENT AS LEARNING

This approach involves students – not teachers – monitoring and gathering information about their own learning through self and/or peer-assessments to help understand how they are progressing in their learning, and what, if anything, they can do to improve. Students gather evidence of learning and compare it with pre-established success criteria to better understand area(s) of strength and identify areas of improvement.



Both assessment for learning and assessment as learning gather evidence of learning to understand how students are progressing, as well as the next steps in their learning. The difference between these two types of formative assessment is who the assessor is, who uses the information, and for what purposes.

### ASSESSMENT FOR LEARNING

Teacher assesses and uses the information to make informed teaching decisions



### ASSESSMENT AS LEARNING

Student assesses and uses the information to set goals and plans to improve learning

### Formative Assessment

# Summative Assessment:

## A Brief Overview



Summative assessment should be used at the end of a learning period (e.g., unit, term, semester) to gather evidence of student learning achievement. It is also known as **assessment of learning**. This approach aims to measure or evaluate the degree of success a student has demonstrated with their learning. This information is commonly used for grading and reporting purposes, unless otherwise mandated by jurisdictional policies.

To compare and contrast formative and summative assessment:

### FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT

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When assessment information is used to gauge where students are in their learning and what can be done to help them improve, that is using assessment in a formative way. In other words, if the assessment information is used to inform where students are and what can help them improve, it is *formative assessment*.

### SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENT

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When assessment information is used to form a professional judgement and evaluate student learning achievement, that is using assessment in a summative way. In other words, if the assessment information is used to evaluate and *summarize* learning achievement (i.e., no more opportunities for growth), then it is *summative assessment*.



One important consideration is that no assessment is inherently formative or summative in nature. How the assessment information is used will determine which approach is being used.

When considering how these approaches to assessment can support student learning, it is important for teachers to know and understand how they can be used effectively and appropriately. Formative assessment (assessment for and as learning) will have tremendous impacts on student learning and growth in the learning process.

At some point, teachers must summarize learning achievement (e.g., grades and report cards), but not all assessment information needs to be used for that purpose (unless mandated by jurisdictional policy).

To help students embrace a growth mindset and improve through practice, it is important that teachers understand the role of both formative and summative assessment. Each should be used effectively to improve student learning and to communicate that learning.

To help visualize the differences between formative and summative assessment, consider the image below:

### USING ASSESSMENT FOR, AS, AND OF LEARNING

*(Graphic developed by Josh Ogilvie)*

