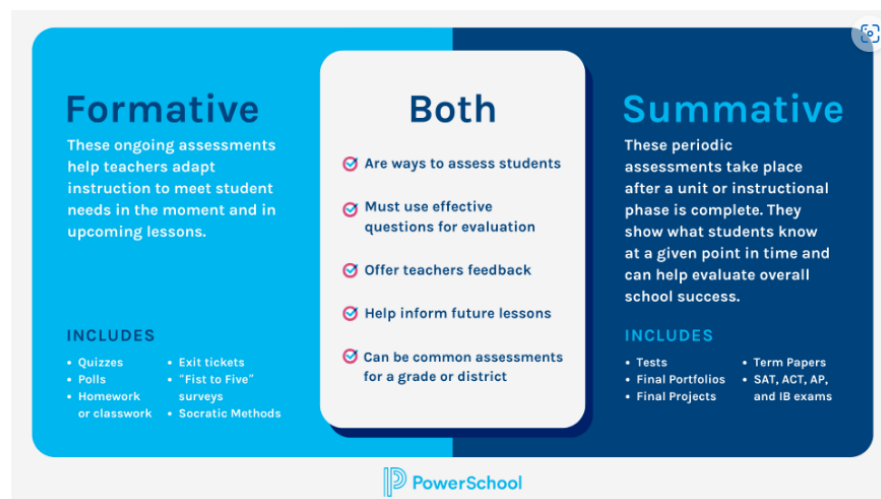


Common Formative Assessments: A Comprehensive Guide



Assessment in schools is invaluable. When a teacher asks their class a quick question to check understanding, takes a poll, plays a review game, or assigns a final paper, they are assessing learning. Assessments give instructors feedback on adjustments they could make for future lessons. Common formative assessments have become **especially critical** as a way to gauge student growth in light of post-pandemic learning losses.

This guide covers formative and summative assessments, as well as common formative and summative assessments.

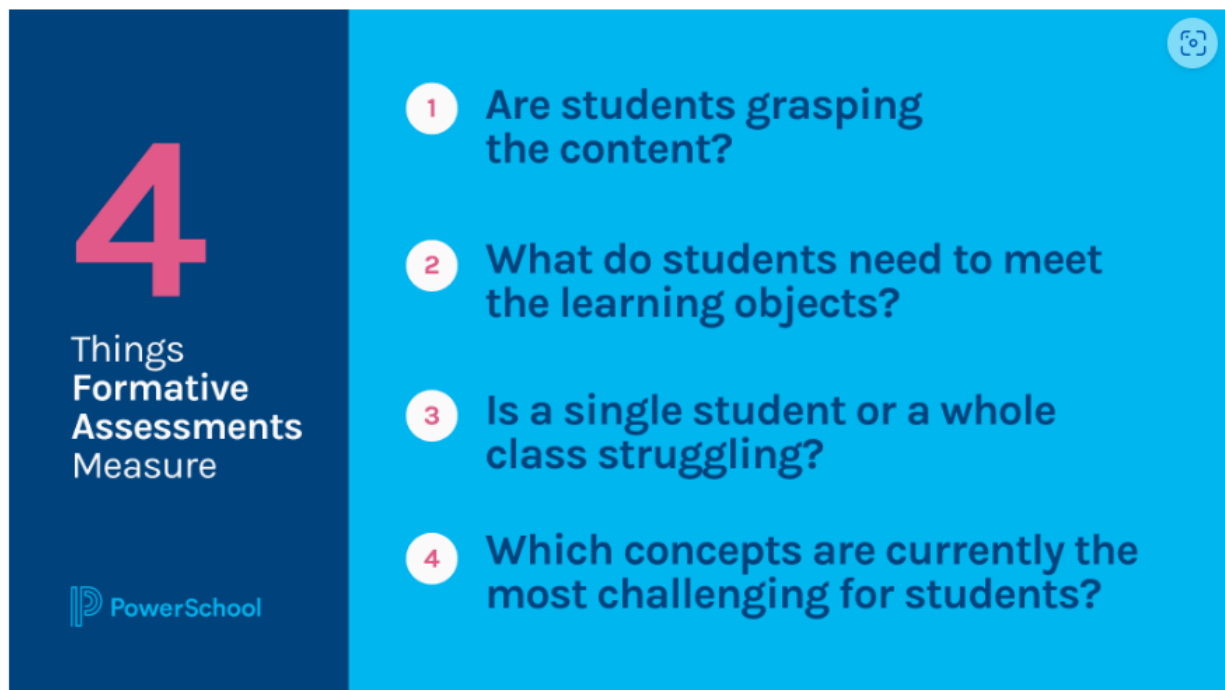


Defining Common, Formative, and Summative Assessment

Teachers can collect data across the span of a unit by using common, formative, or summative assessment types—but it can be confusing to choose which type best suits your needs. Here are some practical definitions to help you get started:

Common Formative Assessments

Formative assessments are frequent, daily or weekly, learning checks that **guide both the teacher and the student** on two areas: where a student has achieved mastery and where a student needs additional support.



The infographic is a rectangular graphic with a dark blue left half and a light blue right half. On the left, a large pink number '4' is positioned above the text 'Things Formative Assessments Measure' in white. Below this is the PowerSchool logo. On the right, four numbered points are listed in white text, each preceded by a small white circle containing a pink number. A small square icon with a camera symbol is in the top right corner.

- 1 Are students grasping the content?
- 2 What do students need to meet the learning objects?
- 3 Is a single student or a whole class struggling?
- 4 Which concepts are currently the most challenging for students?

Common formative assessments are formative assessments created and agreed upon by an entire group of subject-area or grade-level teachers. A common assessment example is all the seventh-grade biology teachers in a district collaborating to construct the same formative assessments based on the standards and curriculum.

What do common formative assessments measure?

Formative assessments measure a student's knowledge in the moment. They help teachers gauge which students are growing their understanding on a topic and which students may be struggling mid-lesson. By adding a common component to formative assessments, you can gain even more information. Common formative assessments are used to measure students' ongoing progress in relation to last year's students, students in the same subject, or current students in the same grade level. An advantage to formative assessments is that they give teachers instant feedback on a lesson. The key is to use and adjust a lesson based on the data a teacher receives when asking comprehension questions, requiring exit tickets, or walking around a room to evaluate independent work.

Common formative assessments streamline checking for student understanding

Teachers have a large workload: creating lesson plans, collecting data, maintaining parent communication, documenting behavioral issues, and the list goes on. But in the end, they're still responsible for making sure their students master the given standards per grade. With so much at stake, it's in the best interest of both new and experienced teachers to use common formative assessments.

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Reasons to Use
Common
Formative
Assessments



- 1 Regular and timely feedback
- 2 Multiple-measure assessments
- 3 Ongoing collaboration
- 4 Results that have predictive value
- 5 Consistent expectations
- 6 Agreed-upon criteria for proficiency
- 7 Deliberate alignment

7 Reasons You Should Use Common Formative Assessments

Teachers spend countless hours planning lessons, contacting parents, grading, and ensuring they have accurate data. The thought of also creating formative assessments from scratch can feel daunting. Sharing the task of building formative assessments with other educators can build community in a school while simultaneously saving time.

For new and veteran teachers, another benefit of using common formative assessments is the consistency of the educational experience. Think about it: the sheer amount of brainpower that goes into crafting your own formative assessment is huge when you could have the entire seventh-grade-teacher troupe at your disposal.

Let's take a look at some of the other benefits:

- 1 **Regular and timely feedback** regarding student attainment of the most critical standards allows teachers to modify instruction to better meet the diverse learning needs of all students
- 2 **Multiple-measure assessments** can allow students to demonstrate their understanding in a variety of formats
- 3 **Ongoing collaboration** takes place among grade-level, course, and department teachers
- 4 **Consistent expectations** are set within a grade level, course, and department regarding standards, instruction, and assessment priorities
- 5 **Agreed-upon criteria for proficiency** can be met within each classroom, grade level, school, and district
- 6 **Deliberate alignment** of the classroom, school, district, and state assessments can better prepare students for success on state assessments
- 7 **Results that have predictive value**, like how students may perform on each succeeding assessment, will help teachers make instructional modifications

How to Build Common Formative Assessments

Essentially, common formative assessments are created when course- or grade-level teachers get together, unpack the standards, and then **create assessment items** that will make up their formative assessments or “learning checks.” Of course, there should also be a period of reflection and revision built into this process. After administering these assessments, teachers can determine if the formative assessment strategies were effective—and whether there are areas in which they can improve.

Here are the nine essential steps to follow to build common formative assessments:

Deconstruct the standards together

As many educators know, standards are often written as complex, overarching statements that are interpreted in any number of ways. Therefore, the first step is to unpack the standards so that teachers can identify the desired learning outcomes. For example, three educators teaching the same grade level at the same school may interpret the learning outcomes for a standard in three very different ways. Specifying learning outcomes also helps ensure that the assessment is tightly aligned to the standards and the taught curriculum.

Focus on learning outcomes

After unpacking the standards together, teachers should collaboratively determine how students are expected to demonstrate mastery of the content. Providing rubrics can help clarify the scoring and grading aspects of how students will be held accountable for their learning.

Decide on the number of items in your assessment

Next, it’s important to decide together on the number of items and the levels of cognitive complexity required to adequately assess the identified learning outcomes. For this step, remember to only include the bare minimum number of questions to determine mastery of the skill. For example, if it only takes ten items on long division for the teacher to adequately determine mastery, then don’t include thirty items. Those additional items will only serve as practice for a skill.

Choose the appropriate item types for content assessment

Certain item types will best suit the content the teacher is assessing. For example, it's probably helpful to give students a drag-and-match option to correctly label a map for geography class. As a result of Step 1 above (deconstructing the standards), teachers will have a deep and shared understanding of the standards being assessed, making it easy to select items that will best meet the learning targets described in the standard.

Arrange items from easy to difficult while creating assessments

When you begin your workout routine, you always start with a warmup. The same concept is recommended for arranging your assessments: start with the easiest and place the most challenging items toward the end. In their book **Assessment of Student Achievement**, C. Keith Waugh and Norman E. Gronlund suggest that arranging test items in order of increasing difficulty is motivational to students. It can prevent them from becoming overwhelmed by difficult items at the beginning of an assessment.

Make assessments rigorous for all learners

The concept of stretch is to incorporate items that assess all levels of student mastery of the content: from gifted to struggling students. Creating an assessment that can challenge and engage all learners is important to produce learning data for all students along the spectrum.

Make the duration realistic

Assessments that students can complete within the allotted class time are much more reliable than tests that span hours or days. Teachers will be much more likely to get a true picture of what their students know if they can complete an assessment in less than 50 minutes. Younger students will likely need shorter assessments lasting around 20 minutes or less.

Provide clear directions

If a student is unclear about how to answer the assessment questions properly, the results may not accurately reflect his or her knowledge. Providing clear directions along with guiding examples will ensure that all students are starting on even footing.

Reflect and revise

Collaborative reflection after administering your common formative assessments will help you and your teams continuously improve them. Although assessments may not be perfect the first, second, or even third time after being administered, with practice, assessments will improve, and your quality of data will grow. The point is to focus on incremental improvements, as formative assessment is an iterative process.

6 Examples of Common Formative Assessments

Throughout a lesson or unit, teachers use formative assessments to gather in-the-moment data that they can apply to the next lesson or the same unit. These could include:

Quizzes

Self-Graded Quizzes can simulate the “testing effect,” and an online quiz—using programs like **Quizziz** or **Socrative**—can show live results that motivate students to do their best. If you offer them multiple attempts and show overall class results on your projector, students can correct their own misunderstandings during the competition and in the future. Another option is to assign a quick paper-based quiz or an electronic quiz in your **student information system** (SIS) at the end of a lesson. Students can easily grade and correct these on their own before submitting them.

Polls

There are numerous polling tools that teachers can use to interact with students online and learn about their thinking. Some use their SIS discussion boards to start this process, or you can use **Poll Everywhere**, **Kahoot!**, or **Pear Deck**. Other teachers like to take a poll by asking multiple-choice questions that students answer simultaneously on small whiteboards or notebook paper.

Classwork or Homework

A time-tested example of formative assessment, independent classwork, or homework provides teachers with a chance to ask students questions based on their current lesson. While students are doing independent work, teachers can circulate the room to confirm a student’s understanding or to ask them questions to help them arrive at a solution. With homework, the grading load is increased, but offering students answers at the beginning of the next class can help them do their own grading and understand their own progress.

Exit Tickets

These are very common formative assessments where teachers ask students a short series of 1-2 questions on a piece of paper that they submit as they leave the classroom. Teachers can quickly scan and review student answers on exit tickets to determine if the day's objectives were achieved, and for whom.



“Fist to Five” Surveys

These easy formative assessments ask students to show their level of understanding of a topic by indicating 1-5 on their fingers. Teachers can even ask students to keep their fingers close to their chest if they are shy to respond. “Fist to Five” gives teachers an instant visual cue about whether a class is ready to move on. You can also use this quick survey to help you form student work groups as needed.

Socratic Methods

Socratic Methods can take the form of Socratic Circles, Fishbowl discussions, or Hotseat discussions. These discussion methods all engage the class in a conversation where a teacher should pay careful attention. Socratic Methods can touch upon a student's ability to explain and examine a concept, which reaches higher on **Bloom's Taxonomy** level. They can help teachers gauge the depth of student comprehension individually and across a class or grade level.