

# Types of assessment

## WHAT IS THIS RESOURCE?

This resource describes different categories of assessments and provides common examples of each. It also discusses the various roles assessment can play in teaching and learning, including options for providing feedback to students. The terms assessment and assignment may be used interchangeably.

## HOW DO I USE IT?

Assessments help instructors monitor and measure students' learning by providing evidence of their progress in skill development. The types of assessments we select for a course directly align to course learning objectives. When planning or revising your course, decide which types of assessment would provide the best means to monitor student progress towards learning goals, and the clearest demonstration of a student’s skills or knowledge for a given learning objective. Consult [CET](https://cet.usc.edu/contact-us/) for to discuss options for assessment.

### The roles of assessment in courses

#### The value of assessment for instructors and students

Assessments and assignments serve a dual purpose.

* Assessment by an instructor, peer, or the student themself can be used to evaluate whether learning objectives have been met. These assessments can be used to provide feedback for improvement, or to measure learning in order to assign grades.
* The results of assessments can also provide instructors with information and feedback on their instructional effectiveness.

#### Categories of assessment by instructional purpose

**Diagnostic assessments** can be used to evaluate students prior knowledge before beginning a course or unit. For example, placement tests for new students enrolling in introductory math or language courses. Results of diagnostic assessments can be used to place students in courses, design cohort-specific instruction, or provide resources for students who need additional support. Diagnostic assessments can be used to provide feedback but should not be included in course grades.

**Formative assessments** encompass a variety of learning tasks and approaches that are used to *monitor* student learning and progress towards learning objectives. Formative assessment should include a mechanism for student feedback and focus on growth and improvement towards future assessments or other goals. Formative assessments are generally lower-stakes or ungraded. They can be assigned to whole classes, small groups, or individual students.

Examples include:

* Quizzes,
* Polls,
* Fact sheets or summaries,
* Written or oral responses to short answer questions,
* Exit tickets (e.g., confidence checks, short written responses or diagrams),
* Visual representations such as diagrams or infographics,
* Data analysis, graphs, or code,
* Interviews,
* Oral reports or short presentations,
* Role plays,
* Case studies,
* Critiques,
* Demonstrations,
* Discussions,
* Debates,
* Problem sets,
* Student-designed assessments (with solutions),
* Blogs or journal entries,
* Splash pages (e.g., curated collections of images or other media relevant to a topic),
* Free writes or brainstorms,
* Drafts or portions of summative assignments,
* including papers, other written compositions, music, or artistic sketches.

**Summative assessments** are used to evaluate student learning in light of course or program objectives at the end of a unit or course. They are also used to assign grades. Summative assessments can and should be used to provide students with feedback, but are often higher-stakes. Summative assessments can be done in groups but are more commonly assigned to individual students.

Examples include:

* Research, position, or creative writing assignments
* Compositions or designs,
* Performance juries,
* Written tests and exams,
* Practical exams,
* Presentations,
* Research projects,
* Portfolios.

#### Sources of feedback on student assessments

**Self-assessment:** Individual students can reflect on or assess their own performance against models, rubrics, their own expectations, or other criteria.

**Peer assessment:** Students can evaluate and provide feedback on peers’ work as a form of formative assessment. This can be done in pairs or small groups, during class or outside of class, synchronously or asynchronously. Peer feedback can be made more effective when instructors provide clear guidance on expectations around interaction (e.g., with community agreements), and around the assignment criteria (e.g., with a rubric or model). Students should understand what they should do with feedback from peers. For example, students could be asked to reflect on the feedback they received and write about how they incorporated it or how it affected their process when submitting subsequent assignments. Peer assessment should not be directly used to establish a student’s grade.

**Assessment by instructors:**

* Whole-class feedback: Instructors can review student performance during class activities, or on more formal assessments, and provide formative feedback to the whole class. This can be an efficient way of communicating with students about progress and can be motivating for students, as it normalizes the idea that students may struggle and need more practice to meet course goals.
* Small group feedback and assessment: Instructors can improve the impact of group learning activities by providing ongoing feedback during the task. This can motivate students to engage and adjust their work to better meet expectations. Group feedback can be more efficient than individual assessment, especially for formative tasks. Additionally, group feedback or grades can be provided formally in writing after submission of group work.
* Individual student feedback and assessment: Instructors should provide individual feedback to students in order to support progress towards learning objectives. Summative assessment and final grades should reflect individual student performance. Consider ways to differentiate feedback to address individual students’ unique academic needs and encourage persistence through challenging tasks.

### CET resources

[Selecting assignments](https://cet.usc.edu/teaching-resources/selecting-assessments/)

[Effective instructor feedback](https://cet.usc.edu/teaching-resources/effective-instructor-feedback/)

[Effective group work](https://cet.usc.edu/teaching-resources/effective-groupwork/)

### References

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