

Formative assessment in a nutshell

What?

Formative assessment is an ongoing method of assessment that evaluates students' knowledge and monitors their progress with the goal of providing future-oriented feedback as they learn.

It makes evidence of learning and its barriers visible. With the results, you can see students' current level to make decisions on your teaching and how to support them in their learning.

1. low stakes

low or no grade attached

2. continual

works best when you assess regularly throughout your course

3. inclusive

creates more opportunities for all students to actively engage and interact

Why?

For instructors

Maximizes teaching performance.

With formative assessments, you can see where your students are at now and make informed decisions around:

- how you can best support them
- adjustments you can make to your teaching

Leads to more effective guidance.

Using digital tools allows you to give more timely, frequent, and personalized feedback while saving you time in the long run.

Fosters connections.

Regular opportunities to interact with your students and open up a dialogue around feedback can be motivating and build trust.

For students

Maximizes learning.

Quizzes, polling, and small group discussions are only a few ways (of many) where students can test their understanding over time and progressively deepen their learning.

Develops relevant skills.

Formative assessment can play a critical role in helping students develop essential skills like self-regulation and collaboration that will serve them in future courses and their professional lives.

Fosters classroom community and student motivation.

Actively involving students in low-stakes assessment can create a collaborative environment where students can learn from one another, feel valued for their contributions, and ask for support when they're struggling.

When?

Key moments

What do your students know/understand now?

Beginning	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Poll to reactivate and assess previous knowledge• Clickable image question to practice and apply knowledge• (One-)minute paper to reflect on the lesson and an opportunity to develop metacognitive skills
End of class	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Poll to assess (increased) level of competency or knowledge

Over the semester

How have your students progressed in achieving specific learning outcomes?

How does their current performance compare to the beginning of term or to a previous submission?

Beginning	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Weekly quizzes to track student progress on specific learning outcomes and opportunities to build their knowledge progressively
End of term	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reflection journal assignments to monitor student development and promote metacognitive skills

Looking for more ideas?



Take a look at our guide on enhancing learning through formative assessment and feedback.

What does good feedback look like?

Frequent.

Consistent feedback delivered often guides students in their learning. It tells them where they're falling short (focus on task or performance) and what they can focus on to do better.

Timely.

Feedback is at its most useful when it's given as soon as possible so that students can connect it to learning moments.

Balanced.

A mix of positive and corrective feedback is important to highlight what students did well and how they might build on these strengths to work towards improving their final performance.

Specific.

Good feedback should be actionable. Can the student realistically act on this feedback?

(Adapted from Fiock and Garcia 2019 with additions by the authors)

Ways to give varied feedback

- audio
- video
- digital rubric
- self-assessment
- peer review