



15 Informal Assessment Examples

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Informal assessment is when a teacher evaluates student learning in ways that do not involve standard grading procedures and generally don't contribute to a final grade.

Teachers often use informal assessment to gauge how well students are learning the material during the learning process rather than at the end (we call this [formative assessment](#)).

It is such a common part of teaching that most teachers practice informal assessment naturally. It just becomes an automatic part of their teaching to gather mid-lesson feedback.

Unlike [formal assessments](#), this type of assessment doesn't become part of the students' grades, but allows the teacher to monitor the class's progress during instruction.

If students seem to be understanding the material, then the teacher knows they can continue to the next step in the lesson. However, if students seem confused, this gives the teacher an opportunity to go over that step in the lesson again or offer other examples.

Definition Of Formal Assessment

Informal assessment is usually defined in comparison to formal assessment. A formal evaluation is usually well planned-out, leads to a grade, and often used to compare students. By contrast, informal assessment is a low-stakes diagnostics tool that helps improve learning and teaching.

For example, Barker (2004, p. 9) defines formal and informal assessment like this:

“In a formal assessment some kind of structure is emphasized. Usually, this has been planned and studied carefully, usually through research.”
“In an informal assessment the information is collected by less structured, perhaps even haphazard, methods.”

Informal Assessment Examples



- **Spot quiz:** During a lecture on the attachment theory, the professor asks questions about key concepts to make sure students are listening.
- **Exit slips:** At the end of a unit on the impact of the industrial revolution, the teacher distributes [exit slips](#) so students can write down their thoughts on the unit or identify 3 things they learned.
- **Scanning the classroom:** While third-grade students are writing a short argumentative essay, the teacher walks around the classroom and glances at the students' work, occasionally pointing out spelling or grammatical errors.
- **Quick questionnaires:** Students are given a questionnaire that [assesses their self-confidence](#) so the teacher can understand a component of her students' social-emotional characteristics.
- **Gathering oral feedback:** A debate teacher has his students participate in an oral discussion of various topics to gauge how well they can present an argument and support their point of view.
- **Online feedback:** Google classroom is used by a teacher to periodically ask students questions about a lesson or gather their opinions on various issues.
- **Whole group feedback:** Periodically during a lecture, the teacher asks the class a question with 3 possible answers. Then she asks for a show of hands of those that think option A, B, or C is correct.
- **Prior knowledge assessment:** On the first day of class, a math teacher administers a quiz to get a handle on what the students know and don't know about geometry. The quiz is not used in the calculation of grades, but still manages to induce anxiety in a majority of the class.
- **In-class questioning:** During a group project about the butterfly life cycle, the teacher sits with the children and asks them questions about the subject in a type of [ongoing informal assessment](#).
- **One minute check-ins:** The teacher makes an effort to check-in with all 24 of her students for one minute each throughout the day to gather some information about how they are going.

Some Detailed Scenarios

1. Student Portfolios

Portfolios are a collection of a student's work throughout the term. It can consist of sample papers, artwork, tests, photos of their work in group projects or project-based learning assignments.



Basically, any learning activity the student has participated in can be included in a portfolio. It's a great way for a teacher, a student, or parents to see what has been accomplished over the academic term.

Portfolios are often not graded. They are simply used to demonstrate the student's progress. A lot of teachers allow their students to choose what goes into their portfolio, which gives them a sense of ownership.

Parents of kindergarten students love to see portfolios. It gives them a chance to see what their child has been doing at school and what progress has been made over time.

2. Self-Assessment Worksheets

Self-assessment is when students take a few moments to think about a learning unit by themselves. Sometimes a worksheet will be provided as a guide so that students will center their thinking around key concepts.

A self-assessment activity can serve multiple purposes. For students, it can help them solidify their understanding or identify areas they don't completely grasp.

For teachers, it serves the purpose of creating a spot-check of student comprehension, without creating the stress of formal assessment. By examining the worksheets, a teacher can ascertain what the students are understanding and what they are not.

This will give the teacher an opportunity to go over some concepts again or clarify some common misunderstandings.

3. The Idea Wave

The idea wave creates an opportunity for each student to share their ideas regarding a subject in class. It also gives the teacher an opportunity to assess how the students are comprehending the lesson's material.



The teacher gives the class a few minutes to write down 2-3 of their thoughts about a given subject covered in the unit. Then, the teacher selects the student seated in the center of the classroom. That student shares one of their ideas with the rest of the class.

The “wave” then spreads outward from the first student to others sitting next to them. Each student takes a turn until the wave has reached the students sitting at the edges.

Students that are seated in the corners can go at the end or the teacher can assign them to come to the front of the class and write common ideas on the board.

4. Video Documentation Of Skills Progression

Parents want to know if their child is making progress at school. Final grade reports at the end of each term can inform parents regarding their child’s overall progress, but that only comes once a term.

This is where informal assessments can be a valuable resource for teachers. Taking short videos of each student reading or working on a project is a great way for parents to see their child learning on a more frequent basis.

It also allows them to see progress over a period of time. For example, a child that starts the term with reading difficulties, may show progress over the subsequent months. If the teacher can take a short video during that time period, the parents can actually witness their child’s development from time 1 to time 12.

Of course, that does require a lot of work for a teacher. If the school provides a teaching assistant, then a lot of that effort can be shared and free-up the teacher’s time for other responsibilities.

5. Sight Word Checklist

A checklist is a form that contains short descriptors of learning outcomes. When a child has accomplished a specific outcome, the teacher simply places a check next to that descriptor.



The checklist is not factored in a student's grade. However, it does give the teacher a clear picture regarding each student's progress.

When used in a reading class, a checklist of sight words can inform the teacher which students have learned to read specific words and which words they need more practice on.

It can be difficult for a teacher to remember which words each student can and cannot read for a class of 20 to 30 students. A checklist can be read at a glance and immediately tells the teacher which words each student needs help with.

Conclusion

Informal assessment is a procedure that teachers apply so that they can determine if the students are understanding the material in class. The students' responses during the informal assessment will not be graded or figured into their final scores.

There are many different ways teachers conduct informal assessment. For example, students can create their own portfolios to show samples of the work they have accomplished throughout the term.

Some teachers like to ask questions to the class periodically during a lesson to see if the students understand key concepts. Other techniques allow each student to share their thoughts regarding a subject or provide an opportunity to determine if students are following along appropriately.

At the end of the learning process, teachers might move to formal assessment for the final exam, which we often also call the [summative assessment task](#).

References

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