

Overview of Assessment in Education

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Designed as a quick-reference guide for teachers, students, and education professionals.

1. What Is Assessment?

Aspect	Definition
Purpose	Collect evidence of learning to inform decisions about instruction, curriculum, and student progress.
Scope	Encompasses all activities that gather information about knowledge, skills, attitudes, and competencies.
Key Question	<i>What do we know about what learners can do, and how can that information improve teaching and learning?</i>

2. Main Types of Assessment

Type	Timing	Primary Goal	Typical Examples
Formative	Ongoing, during instruction	Diagnose learning gaps, guide immediate instructional adjustments.	Exit tickets, think-pair-share, quick quizzes, observation checklists, draft submissions.
Summative	End of a unit, term, or course	Evaluate overall achievement against standards or objectives.	Final exams, end-of-unit tests, major projects, standardized tests.
Diagnostic	Before instruction begins	Identify prior knowledge, strengths, and misconceptions.	Pre-tests, skill inventories, learning style questionnaires.
Ipsative	Throughout learning	Compare a learner's current performance with their own previous performance.	Portfolio growth logs, reflective journals, self-rating rubrics.
Benchmark	At set intervals (e.g., quarterly)	Measure progress toward long-term goals and compare against cohort norms.	State-wide assessments, district benchmark tests.

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3. Core Principles of Effective Assessment

Principle	What It Means	Practical Tips
Validity	The assessment measures what it claims to measure.	Align items with learning objectives; use content experts to review.
Reliability	Results are consistent across occasions, raters, and forms.	Provide clear scoring rubrics; use multiple items to reduce random error.
Fairness	All learners have an equal opportunity to demonstrate knowledge.	Offer accommodations, use culturally responsive items, avoid bias.
Transparency	Learners understand criteria and expectations.	Share rubrics and exemplars before the task; discuss grading standards.
Actionability	Results lead to concrete next steps.	Pair scores with feedback that tells <i>what</i> to improve and <i>how</i> .
Alignment	Assessment, instruction, and curriculum are coherent.	Map assessments to standards and instructional activities.

4. Assessment Formats

Format	Strengths	Considerations
Multiple-Choice / Selected-Response	Easy to score; good for large samples; measures recall & basic application.	May not capture higher-order thinking; risk of guessing.
Constructed-Response	Shows reasoning, synthesis, and communication skills.	Requires more time to grade; needs clear rubrics for reliability.
Performance Tasks	Authentic, integrates multiple skills; high relevance.	Complex logistics; needs clear success criteria.
Portfolios	Demonstrates growth over time; supports reflective practice.	Requires systematic collection and organization; assessment can be subjective.

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Format	Strengths	Considerations
Observations & Checklists	Captures real-time behavior and skills; useful for hands-on activities.	Dependent on observer training; may need multiple observations for reliability.
Digital / Adaptive Tests	Immediate feedback; can adjust difficulty to learner level.	Requires technology infrastructure; algorithm transparency is essential.

5. Designing an Assessment Plan

1. Define Learning Objectives

- Use