



Ensure That Formative Assessments and Assignments Align to Learning Objectives and Prepare Students to Master Course Outcomes

While summative assessments typically take place at the end of a unit, module, or course and are designed to determine whether the student has learned the content or mastered the skills addressed in the unit, module, or course, formative assessments and assignments serve to help students learn and develop skills while also providing feedback to the instructor and student regarding where students are meeting with success and where they may benefit from reteaching, additional resources, or further practice.

Formative assessments and assignments are usually low stakes or ungraded, offering students multiple opportunities to recall and demonstrate their knowledge of concepts and skills, stressing learning rather than final performance (Bain, 2004). In this way, assessments and assignments can serve as a form of communication between instructors and learners (Bain, 2004).

Use the Following Steps to Design Formative Assessments and Assignments

Step One: Identify the cognitive level of your outcome or objective.

This can be done most easily by locating the action verb in your course outcome or objective using a chart titled “Types of Assessments and Assignments by Cognitive Level,” which you can view or download on the Implementation Resources page.

In instances where the action verb appears in more than one cognitive level on the chart, you will need to consider the specific intent of that outcome or objective. For example, the verb “describe” appears in both the Remember and Understand cognitive levels. To determine which level to use in order to identify the appropriate assessment or assignment type, ask yourself if you want students to recall a description that has been shared with them previously. If that is the case, then the outcome would be classified at the cognitive level Remember because you are simply asking students to recall a description. However, if you want students to create a new description, they would have to have an understanding of the concept to formulate a description; therefore this outcome would be classified at the Understand cognitive level.

Step Two: Select a formative assessment or assignment type that aligns with the outcome or objective cognitive level.

Using the same chart, review the examples of assessment and assignment types associated with the cognitive level you identified in step one and select the type that best represents the content and skills you are assessing and best meets the needs of your students.

Step Three: Ensure that your students are appropriately prepared for success.

Once you have created an aligned formative assignment or assessment, or if you are using an existing resource, take steps to ensure that this assessment will effectively prepare students to meet with success on the summative assignment or assessment by considering the following questions:

1. Is the type of thinking that students will be engaged in at the same cognitive level of the outcome or objective, **or** does it prepare them to engage at the same level?
 - For example, for students to successfully apply new content, they must first understand that content. In this case, your formative assessment may check their understanding of content to ensure that they are ready to successfully apply it.



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2. Will this formative assessment provide both the student and you with information on their mastery of course content and skills?

Source

Bain, K. (2004). *What the best college teachers do*. Harvard University Press.