



Assign Greater Weight to More Recent and Summative Evidence of Mastery

Summative assessments typically take place at the end of a unit, module, or course and are designed to determine if 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 are designed to give students practice and the teacher feedback on student progress toward mastery. If we include grades from formative assessments, we are including “information while the student is in the midst of learning, including their mistakes” (Feldman, 2018 p. 142). The most accurate information about a student’s mastery of course content is the summative assessments that occur after students have had the opportunity to practice and learn from their mistakes. “Equitable grading that is accurate and biased-resistant includes nothing other than a student’s summative assessment results” (Feldman, 2018, p. 142).

Homework as Formative Assessments

In many classes, homework is scored and included as a significant part of the grade. The purpose of homework is to provide students with the opportunity to practice meeting course outcomes while receiving feedback on that practice. Grading homework and including those grades in the student’s final grade can be especially damaging to struggling students who may initially make more mistakes and need more practice. It is better to reduce the stakes and encourage students to take risks and learn from those risks (O’Connor, 2010).

Use More Recent Evidence

Using more recent evidence of students’ learning also helps to decrease the bias in traditional grading. When students initially struggle with content but master it by the end of the course, the averaged performance will inevitably be lower than their actual achievement, and the final grade will misrepresent the students’ true level of content mastery (Feldman, 2019). This can be rectified by replacing earlier evidence of mastery with more recent evidence when calculating a final grade.

Low-Stakes Assignments

Consider using low-stakes assignments that are not as heavily weighted as summative assessments. The purpose of low-stakes assignments or assessments is to provide students with an opportunity to practice meeting course outcomes. Low-stakes assignments work best when students are able to receive feedback on their progress toward mastering course outcomes as well as an idea of the steps they should take to ultimately succeed in class (Warnock, 2013).

Types of low-stakes assignments include:

- **Quizzes:** Online quizzes that allow multiple attempts and provide immediate feedback are especially useful for students who might struggle.
- **Discussions:** Provide an opportunity for students to share and refine their current understanding of course concepts.
- **Breaking down larger assignments:** When assigning students a writing or research project, break down the elements of the project and assess one or more with a low-stakes assignment. Requiring students to submit their work-in-progress so they can receive early feedback and may be given a grade of low weight or even a grade that consists of a check or check-minus offers them an opportunity to learn from their mistakes before completing the larger assignment.



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Sources

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