



Evaluation & Assessment for Classroom Teachers

Dr. Julia Harper, a professor of education at Azusa Pacific University shares what she has learned about evaluation and assessment through her many years of teaching in the classroom, as well as her doctoral studies and graduate level instruction. Her wisdom in this area is experienced, practical, and eminently usable.

Evaluation, at the heart, is judgment, making decisions based on values. It is our decision-making about student performance and about appropriate teaching strategies.

Assessment is an integral part of the teaching-learning connection. Teachers should make it very clear for students how their work will be assessed. And, when students are allowed to be creative in the process, it means you as a teacher must be prepared to think through even more clearly how that should be assessed. Otherwise, students will be inhibited in what they do or create. As you think about the evaluation process, there are two types of assessments to think through—formative and summative.

Formative evaluations are measurements that help teachers understand what students are learning and how they can adjust the teaching and learning environment to meet student needs. The purpose of formative evaluations is twofold: improving instructional practices and monitoring learning. As a type of ongoing evaluation, formative assessments also give students feedback on how they are doing.

Summative evaluations are measurements that show what students have learned over time. They can also be used to help determine the effectiveness of a program. The research and reporting project could be your summative assessment for a unit of study, but it is also a performance assessment.

You want both formative and summative assessments throughout the course of study. As you think about the various options that students take to learn material, your assessments should be identified as either formative or summative, depending on how you are using the assigned tasks. For instance, as a formative assessment for Unit 1—Napoleon & Early Missions—you could observe a student's participation in the class discussion or the recap activity to let the teacher know what the students are learning. As a summative assessment for Unit 1—Napoleon & Early Missions—along with the research report, you could develop a test to assess the Key Concepts to measure their basic knowledge and understanding for that Unit. The research report would allow for maximum divergence among students, even as they comply with a specific protocol of

completeness which would be expressed in a rubric. Other activity choices accomplished within that Unit may serve as formative assessments of how students are learning the Key Concepts for that Unit. These Key Concepts will finally be measured in an objective test at the end of the Unit. The objective test is a summative assessment that lets you as a teacher know how well the students are learning. The formative tasks let them learn in a way that is most meaningful for them.

That is why it is so important to think formative and summative as you plan your assessment process. Formative allows you to assess your students and then make changes in what YOU do so the student can learn better; you can make course corrections based on your formative assessments. If you learn to read and interpret your formative then students should not find summative evaluations difficult either, because they will know what they know and will know what they don't know realistically.

A scenario comes to mind when I think of this principle.

In a rural part of the country where there was a high rate of poverty and low achievement, I got a job as the Title I teacher (5th and 6th grade). My training had been as a Talented and Gifted teacher, so I knew how to individualize with students, and how important it was to get them engaged in the learning. I devised *formative assessments* based on the individual learners and worked with them as individuals because their problems were not the same. As they were charting their learning in folders that contained their goals for learning, they began to see that they could make measurable change by using their own thinking, while learning new skills with me as the teacher. These students began to recognize what they needed to learn and take responsibility for themselves. But everybody took the same summative exam for the different content areas that I taught. It was really fun and exciting. I was able to see, through sustained gains testing when they were in high school, that they were scoring in the 80–90% on our standardized test. We had four elementary schools and one middle school and high school. When the State Department came down to our town, they discovered that the students scoring in the 80–90% came from one elementary and from one particular teacher—my class. These students, who had been marginal learners, were now thriving in their learning and outperforming the norm.

Formative and summative assessments can be developed with objective kinds of assessments or performance types of assessments. Creating a quiz or multiple choice test would be considered more objective. They can be used in either formative or summative evaluations. Performance



assessments are used when there are different ways of demonstrating learning. Developing criteria for how a project is assessed gives the learner more freedom in the process. Rubrics are tools to give form and structure to more creative or performance types of learning.

Rubrics*: As you let students make decisions on types of projects to demonstrate their learning, you may want to set up a rubric to help the student identify performance expectations. These rubrics will also assist you in the assessing of these different types of projects. Creative projects can be very risky for students when they don't understand how the grading will be worked out. Remember too, creativity is at the top of the critical thinking structure. Creativity requires a transformational action which allows them to go from what has been learned, apply it in a creative process, and end with a new product. This is also where students make meaningful and personal connections to the learning, and it is very exciting and motivating. So there is a need for flexibility within the process but also a need for form that helps guide the process. Here is a link to a website for you as a teacher to use for developing rubrics for many kinds of projects that students may come up with. It also lets you develop the criteria and the different elements that you may want to put into that project: http://teach-nology.com/web_tools/rubrics/general/.

The chart shown on the last page is another rubric maker that you can use to develop performance assessments for creative projects.

Remember assessment and evaluation should be a *celebration* of what students know and *demonstration* of what they have learned. If we keep those two elements in mind students will gladly participate in the process and be proud to show what they know.

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In addition to Dr. Harper's comments, I would like to encourage teachers to recognize that there are several areas in which students can be evaluated and grades assigned:

- Participation in class discussion and the recap activity in Phase One
- Effort in Research and Reporting Project and participation in the Vocabulary & Timeline exercises in Phase Two
- Participation in the Hands-On Activities in Phase Three
- Effort in the Creative Expression in Phase Four

Each of these could have their own rubric to determine

*Rubrics set available for History Revealed curriculum visit www.dianawaring.com/store

point values. These point values would be used to determine letter grades.

In addition, teachers might choose to create a final summative assessment. For instance, they might give a final essay test on the Key Concepts, giving students the opportunity to each choose one concept and relate what they have learned and how this knowledge is applicable to their lives. Or, a teacher might choose to give an open-ended essay test, allowing students to pick two of the most important people or events of the Unit and describe their significance; or they could choose to compare and contrast some aspect of what has been studied (for instance, comparing and contrasting two men named Charles: Charles Darwin & Charles Spurgeon); or look at how some events or people of the past Unit influenced events or people of this Unit. A teacher might also choose to include identifications, listing several names or events from the Unit and asking the students to select two or three to identify. These are the types of tests that allow students to show what they know rather than what they don't know, so teachers need to clearly express the required length of response, the extent of the information, and the nature of the content a student is expected to present in order to attain a certain grade.

As you are creating your system, please keep in mind that this curriculum encourages students to select areas of research, projects, and creative expressions that are interesting to them, which results in students learning dissimilar areas of information—all within the overarching framework of a particular period in history. It is all legitimate history, and the expression of what has been learned will be legitimate, though perhaps slightly unorthodox. Also, since we approach history with the knowledge that it is a vast, nearly limitless subject, we would be unreasonable to demand that every student know every aspect of what every other student learns. **Therefore, a standard history test of names, dates, and places will not be adequate for this curriculum, nor will it display the particulars and the depth of what each student has learned.** For this reason, we have created questions in the Unit tests, which allow the student to choose areas with which he or she is familiar. Teachers may also want to create their own systems of formative and summative assessments, based on the needs and structures of their own classrooms.

—Diana Waring