

Formative Assessment: Transforming Education in the Library

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What is formative assessment?

Formative assessment is a planned process in which assessment-elicited evidence of students' learning is used by instructors to adjust their instructional methods. Formative assessment is not a single assessment; rather, formative assessment involves a series of activities in which instructors use assessment-based evidence of students' learning to adjust their teaching during an ongoing instruction session.

Data from assessments conducted as part of the formative assessment process are used to make adjustments to instruction that is in progress. In-class assessment is the first part of the formative assessment process, and the second part of this process is the instructor's use of assessment results to adjust ongoing instruction activities.



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Formative assessment transforms instruction into a two-way communication process between instructors and students.

Formative assessment and clickers

Formative assessment was accomplished through three in-class assessment questions, which were administered to the class using an audience response system. These questions provided the instructor with evidence of students' mastery of information literacy concepts, and allowed the instructor to adjust the content of the session accordingly.



Assessment for learning

Closely related to the concept of formative assessment is "assessment for learning" theory, which suggests that assessment benefits the learner by reinforcing the material that is the subject of the assessment, and that assessment can be a primary means of learning (Oakleaf, 2009).

Prior to each instruction session, each student completed a pre-assessment exercise that was designed to provide the instructor with evidence of students' information literacy skills. This evidence was used to inform the content of the instruction session. The pre-assessment exercise required students to complete a search and to reflect on the effectiveness of their research strategies; in this way, the pre-assessment exercise was also a learning activity.

How can formative assessment improve students' learning and information literacy?

- Formative assessment can be used to acknowledge students' widely varying abilities
- Formative assessment allows instructors to tailor curriculum design for each one-shot information literacy instruction session
- Formative assessment can also be used by students, to adjust their current learning tactics
- Makes one-shot sessions more practical
- Engages students in the process of creating instruction that responds to their individual learning needs
- Helps academic librarians to improve their teaching abilities and become better information literacy instructors

References

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