



Transcript: Standard 5: The Purposes and Benefits of Assessment: A Brief Explanation

Welcome. In this short video, we will describe the purposes and benefits of several kinds of assessment used in the ESOL classroom of adult learners. For each type of assessment, we will focus on a guiding question and identify several key considerations for you to keep in mind as you create your assessments for your students.

As we move forward in this video and throughout our course on assessment, always keep in mind that the overarching goal of any kind of language assessment is to gather information so that useful and appropriate decisions can be made about how to make instruction even more effective for learners. Assessments also benefit students. When they see that they're progressing, it has a motivating effect. When they see they are not progressing, it encourages them to do something different, ask for help, or use different strategies.

The first kind of assessment teachers should conduct is a student needs assessment. Needs assessments are conducted to answer this most important question: Who are my students and what are their learning needs? Needs assessments are conducted usually as part of the enrollment and placement process to help determine appropriate instructional decisions and student placement. Teachers may also use this information to adjust curriculum materials so that they are tailoring their instruction to be relevant, accessible, and engaging for students. This is a way to involve learners in their own learning.

Several key considerations must be taken into account when creating a needs assessment. For example: the culture and identity of your students—where are they from and how are they identifying themselves; prior knowledge—where have they worked, careers, experiences, previous educational background, formal or informal job training, college, do they have any formal education at all; goals and interests—why are they in class, what brings them, are there specific goals they hope to accomplish (college, career, or a host of other options), what are their interests, hobbies, and passions; work and family responsibilities—if they're currently working, what kind of job, what kinds of hours, children or additional family responsibilities that might impact their lives; and also digital literacy level—what are their skills and knowledge in terms of digital literacy. All of this information will inform how and what you include in your instructional planning and materials so that they are relevant, accessible, and engaging for your learners.

Formative assessment is conducted on a regular basis throughout learning activities. These types of assessments are diagnostic tools that help the teacher to evaluate the degree to which students are learning skills and concepts. Formative assessments are considered assessments for learning. By conducting regular formative assessments, teachers are able to modify instruction to provide additional support, like slowing down, reviewing something, or showing visuals, giving students additional practice opportunities, and differentiating instruction as needed. When lesson planning, think about when you will conduct formative assessment.

Formal assessments in particular take a bit more planning, whereas informal assessments can be more spur-of-the-moment based upon your classroom observations. Whether to use an informal or formal assessment: a formative assessment may be informal, such as observing student interactions or noting pronunciation issues when a student reads aloud, or more explicit, such as assigning an exit ticket, knowledge check, or homework assignment at the end of an activity to check specific skills. And of course, once you conduct your assessment, how do these results impact your instruction?

Classroom-based summative assessments are used to measure student success at the end of a learning cycle, and they are considered an assessment of learning. Although some types of assessment strategies may overlap between formative and summative assessments, the main difference between them is how the teacher uses the results. Again, summative assessment

conducted at the end of a learning unit and includes a culminating activity, providing an opportunity for students to demonstrate their learning. It is also an opportunity for students to synthesize the many elements they have been learning and practicing in a project, presentation, or product similar to what they may encounter outside of class. Summative assessment is primarily evaluative of the student's ability to demonstrate newly learned language and content. Because it is evaluative, the assessment should be based on clear criteria.

Key considerations for summative assessment include determining what your summative assessment will include: roleplay of real-life situations, written work to someone other than the teacher, or actually filling out an online application. Discuss with students what type of assessment would be most valuable—a group project, individual presentation, or portfolio derived from assignments throughout the unit. How would they like to be evaluated? It's valuable to engage students in defining what success looks like, contributing to the creation of a checklist or rubric that will be used to measure learning. This step helps to ensure transparent expectations, promotes student understanding of the sequence of lessons and activities, and supports their ownership of learning.

Finally, use the same language for assessment as in the learning objectives. For example, students will demonstrate learning by roleplaying a conversation with a landlord, boss, doctor, or RMV clerk.

Standardized testing is another form of summative assessment, used with a different purpose. Results from standardized assessments help to determine level of placement and progression to subsequent class levels, and they're an objective measure of program effectiveness. Teachers should familiarize students with the testing process and help them to understand these tests as an opportunity to receive valuable feedback on their learning progress. Effective ESOL teachers work to reduce test anxiety and build student familiarity with low-stakes assessments.

As you work with students in preparation for program standardized testing, it is helpful to be familiar with the tests that students will be taking. Clarify with students the significance of the test results and their importance in providing information and feedback to the program, which will ultimately improve student learning outcomes. Finally, it is useful for teachers, if possible, to take the necessary steps to become certified test administrators.

Finally, learner self-assessment is an essential learning tool in which the assessment itself is actually a learning experience. Research in cognitive science has demonstrated the value of including frequent self-testing with low-stakes recall activities that help students consolidate learning, identify gaps, and improve memory. These types of activities also encourage self-directed learning and instruction, which heightens student engagement in the material.

When considering the importance of learner self-assessment, you should value the self-assessment as learning, provide various opportunities for self-testing, and build a space for learner reflection. You'll also provide opportunities for retrieval and recall activities and be mindful of metacognitive development. More formal self-assessment activities can occur at the end of lessons or units when students have the opportunity to reflect on learning and evaluate their skills, knowledge, or reasoning ability through checklists, learning logs, or group discussion.

In summary, it is important that teachers involve learners in the assessment process by talking with them about how and why their progress is being measured, explaining assessment results, and providing opportunities to self-assess. Frequent progress reports are valuable to students to help them see their own learning. In planning assessment, focus on the fact that assessment may not look like other tests students are familiar with. Many cultures use more formal testing, while we try to measure communicative ability. Because there are many types of assessment, participation and effort are both important—the more a student tries, the more feedback they will get.

Students should have a clear understanding of different strategies the teacher uses to assess learning, including what is assessed and why, as well as how it relates to their everyday life activities. It's also important to cultivate students' ability to reflect on their own learning and to empower them to ask for help.

Thank you.