PURPOSES OF ASSESSMENT

INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

By the end of this module, you should be able to identify the different purposes of assessment and understand how to use the assessment blueprint to document the primary purpose of an assessment.

KEY CONCEPTS

Purposes of Assessment

We use assessments for four primary purposes: diagnostic, formative, interim and summative. If you've been in the classroom for a while, you're probably familiar with all four and how you can use them to inform your instruction and help your students.

Diagnostic Assessment

We use *diagnostic* assessments to determine our students' knowledge and skills before a unit of instruction. For example, pre-tests serve a diagnostic purpose, although there are many other formal and informal ways to gather baseline information. These include individual or group discussions with students, work completed by students before the unit of instruction and coursework from other related classes, among others.[1]

Formative Assessment

We use *formative* assessments to monitor student learning and adjust ongoing instruction. For example, checks for understanding and quizzes usually serve a formative purpose.[2]
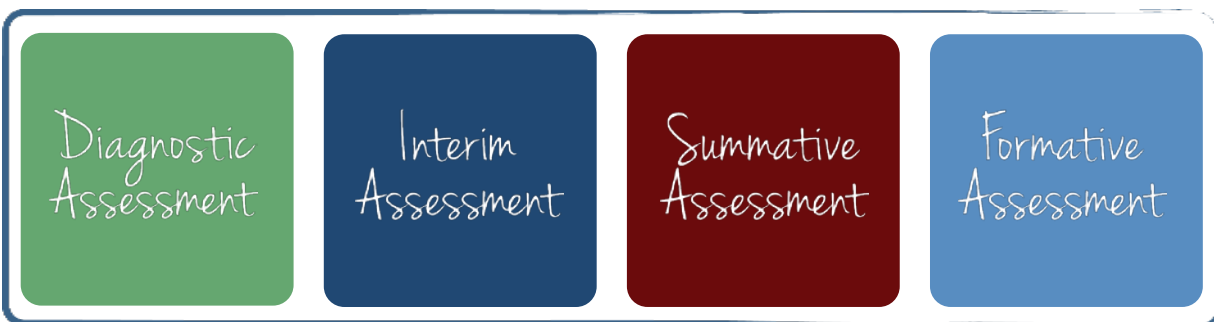
Summative Assessment

We use *summative* assessments to measure student mastery of standards at the end of a unit of instruction. For example, end-of-unit or term tests usually serve a summative purpose. Many State departments of education also administer annual summative assessments known as "State tests."[3]

Interim Assessment

Interim assessments fall somewhere between formative and summative. They measure students' knowledge and skills on a specific set of academic goals, typically within a particular time frame. We use interim assessments—such as district-wide benchmark assessments—for a *formative* purpose to adjust our instruction. School and district leaders also often use these assessments for a *summative* purpose to inform program or policy decisions.[4]

An assessment can serve multiple purposes, depending on how you use it. For example, in the middle of a unit, you could ask your students to write an essay about the root causes of the Civil War to monitor their progress and inform your instruction. Or, instead, you could use the essay prompt at the end of a unit to assess your student's mastery of standards. In the former case, the assessment would be formative. In the latter case, the assessment could be both summative and formative if you use the student work to inform how you plan your next instructional unit. The key takeaway is to determine the purpose of your assessment at the start of the design process.

CHECK FOR UNDERSTANDING

Assessment Items

1. Match each assessment in column A to its purpose in column B.

Column A: Assessment	Column B: Purpose
Summative	To gauge students' knowledge and skills before a unit of instruction
Interim	To monitor student learning and adjust ongoing instruction
Diagnostic	To measure student mastery of standards at the end of a unit of instruction
Formative	To measure student progress relative to an academic goal

2. Describe a scenario in which a single assessment might serve multiple purposes.

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Answers

1. Match each assessment in column A to its purpose in column B.

Column A: Assessment	Column B: Purpose
Diagnostic ⟶	To gauge students' knowledge and skills before a unit of instruction
Formative ⟶	To monitor student learning and adjust ongoing instruction
Summative ⟶	To measure student mastery of standards at the end of a unit of instruction
Interim ⟶	To measure student progress relative to an academic goal

2. Describe a scenario in which a single assessment might serve multiple purposes.

   I could ask my students to write an essay at the end of a unit to assess their mastery of standards. In this case, the primary purpose of the assessment would be summative. Because I could also use the results from the essay to inform how I plan my next instructional unit, a secondary purpose of the assessment would be formative.

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[1] Education First, *A Primer on Common Core-Aligned Assessments* (2013).
[2] Ibid.
[3] Ibid.
[4] Ibid.