

ADMIN :: My Approach to Assessment



The goal of assessment is to evaluate what you have learned in the course and it allows both students and the instructor to monitor progress towards the completion of learning objectives. This point of view stands in contrast to the common student misconception that assessment should be viewed as a currency earned for work completed. In this course, formative assessments such as quizzes, reflections, homework and lab reports, are designed to prepare you for the summative assessments of the midterm and final exams.

Formative assessment refers to tools used to identify challenges, misconceptions, and learning gaps throughout the course. The goal of formative assessment is about learning and not necessarily raising student grades. When students understand this it helps them to take ownership of their learning. (Trumbull and Lash, 2013). In a college setting we often give formative assessments some value in the final mark as an incentive to engage the assignment more deeply. This is particularly true in CS courses where the homework assignments are often programming assignments. However, the point value of all formative assessments should be low so that if you make major mistakes, the feedback will give you an opportunity to develop your understanding prior to the summative assessments. ***In other words, most of the workload for this course will have low point value in your final grade.***

Since formative assessments are designed to prepare you for the exams, it is important that you solve the problems in the assessments on your own. Office hours also serves as a form of formative assessment and I will often use that time to help you engage the material by asking you questions. In other words, if you are unable to make progress then I will engage you regarding what you have learned and help you see a pathway to acquiring any missing knowledge. Sometimes this can be accomplished quickly by simply helping you to discover connections that you have not yet made. Other times, however, it may require you to review material outside of office hours before you are prepared to make such connections. Often students view office hours as an opportunity to have the lecture repeated or to obtain the answers to homework problems. Those approaches are not an effective formative assessment and you should not expect such approaches in my course.

Summative assessment is given at the conclusion of the course or module. In a college setting the primary summative assessment often comes from midterm and final exams. Summative assessments typically carry high weight in the course grading distribution and are usually formally graded. Summative assessment should align with the formative assessment. That is, formative assessments should prepare the student for the summative assessment.

| Formative (Low weight in marks) | Summative (High weight in marks) |
|--|---|
| In-class/office hours discussions | Instructor-created exams |
| Clicker questions | Standardized tests |
| Low-stakes group work | Final group projects |
| Lab reports | Final individual projects |
| Weekly quizzes | Final essays |
| Short reflection writing assignments | Final presentations |
| Homework assignments | Final reports |
| Surveys | Final Grades |

Table 1. Examples of Formative and Summative Assessments

References

Nicol, D.J. and Macfarlane-Dick, D. (2006) Formative assessment and self-regulated learning: a model and seven principles of good feedback practice. *Studies in Higher Education* 31(2): 2-19.

Trumbull, E., & Lash, A. (2013). *Understanding formative assessment: Insights from learning theory and measurement theory*. San Francisco: WestEd.