



Why does summative assessment take a backseat to formative assessment?

First, let's revisit what the term assessment actually means. Simply put, assessment is the gathering and interpretation of data to inform instruction. In other words, good assessment drives good instruction. No matter which features an assessment may include, the implications for student learning should always be its main focus. Any assessment procedure that does not contribute positively to teaching and learning provides little to no value to the teacher.

Formative assessment consists of ongoing tests, reviews, and observations that take place in the classroom. Examples of formative tests found in the Sourcebook include the Cloze Story Word Test, the Skill Test, and the Sentence Dictation Test, as well as selected pieces of students' writing evaluated for spelling and proofreading. Formative assessments are intended to help target a learning plan for students in the Sourcebook, the formative assessment results in the differentiation of students' spelling words.

Summative assessments are typically used to evaluate the effectiveness of instructional programs at the end of an academic year or at a predetermined time. They tend to be comprehensive in nature and are used to assess cumulative learning. In customary spelling programs, the Friday test is summative—no further instruction is carried out. Students are given a grade, and regardless of the results, the teacher moves on to a new spelling list the following week.

In the end, the extent of student improvement determines the value of an assessment. Most educators would agree that any assessment procedure that does not contribute positively to teaching and learning should not be used.