



20 Formative Assessment Examples To Use In Your College Classroom

Informal assessments are an easy way to stay connected with your students and understand their progress in your course

Formative assessments are where students are quizzed periodically throughout a learning unit. Unlike traditional assessments, these insights provide you with regular and reliable feedback on student progress. Whether it's polls, discussions, debates or reflections, frequent, low-stakes assessments let students apply what they have learned thus far. At a time when students place increased value on **frequent feedback** from their educators, facilitating regular assessments is essential. Below, we share:

- What formative assessments are
- The tools you'll need to run formative assessments
- What the differences are between formative and summative assessments
- 20 formative assessment examples for any course or discipline

What are formative assessments?

Formative assessments involve monitoring student progress regularly throughout a course so that educators can better gauge learning gaps and address those early on. Basic formative assessment strategies may include concept maps, responses posted to a discussion board and an ungraded quiz or poll.

Watch this video to learn how formative assessments in the classroom can benefit both educators and students. You'll also get assessment ideas that Leslie Sprunger, Associate Dean for Professional Programs in the Faculty of Integrative Physiology and Neuroscience at Washington State University, uses in her own courses.

Tools you'll need to run formative assessments

Depending on what type of assessment you're looking to run—whether a quiz or group discussion—the technology required will vary. Different disciplines, such as STEM or Humanities courses, may

also require different platforms in order to run simulations or lab activities.

That said, plenty of the 20 formative assessment strategies we share later in this post can also be facilitated with pen and paper or simple tech tools. If you're looking to use ed tech to run your formative assessments, here are some platforms you may want to consider.

- Quizzes: [Kahoot!](#), [Quizlet](#), [Socrative](#), [Top Hat](#)
- Video-based assessment: [Animoto](#), [Flipgrid](#), [PlayPosit](#)
- Discussions: [Backchannel Chat](#), [Discord](#), [Top Hat](#) (with anonymous discussion capabilities)
- Whiteboard or note taking tools: [Dotstorming](#), [Padlet](#), [Limnu](#)
- Tools for STEM classes: [BeyondLabz](#), [Labster](#), [Top Hat Labs](#)
- Tools for Humanities classes: [Annotation Studio](#), [Audacity](#), [Canva](#), [Top Hat](#)

What are the differences between formative and summative assessments?

Formative and summative assessments can easily be confused. Elements of the formative assessment process identify misconceptions or learning gaps throughout a course. But summative assessments evaluate student learning and measure success at the very end of a course or unit of study. Summative assessments are also generally high-stakes, meaning that they have a high point, percentage or grade value associated. We share the key differences between formative and summative assessments in the table below.

Formative assessments	Summative assessments
Monitor student learning throughout the course	Evaluate student learning at the end of an instructional unit
Are low-stakes or have no point value attached	Are high-stakes and are often cumulative
Offer more flexibility in how to assess students (examples of formative assessment may include think-pair-share activities or hands-on learning)	Aren't as flexible in assessment type (papers or essays are commonly used)
Are used to determine where to adjust lessons and remaining instruction	Are used to determine subject mastery

20 formative assessment examples for any course or discipline

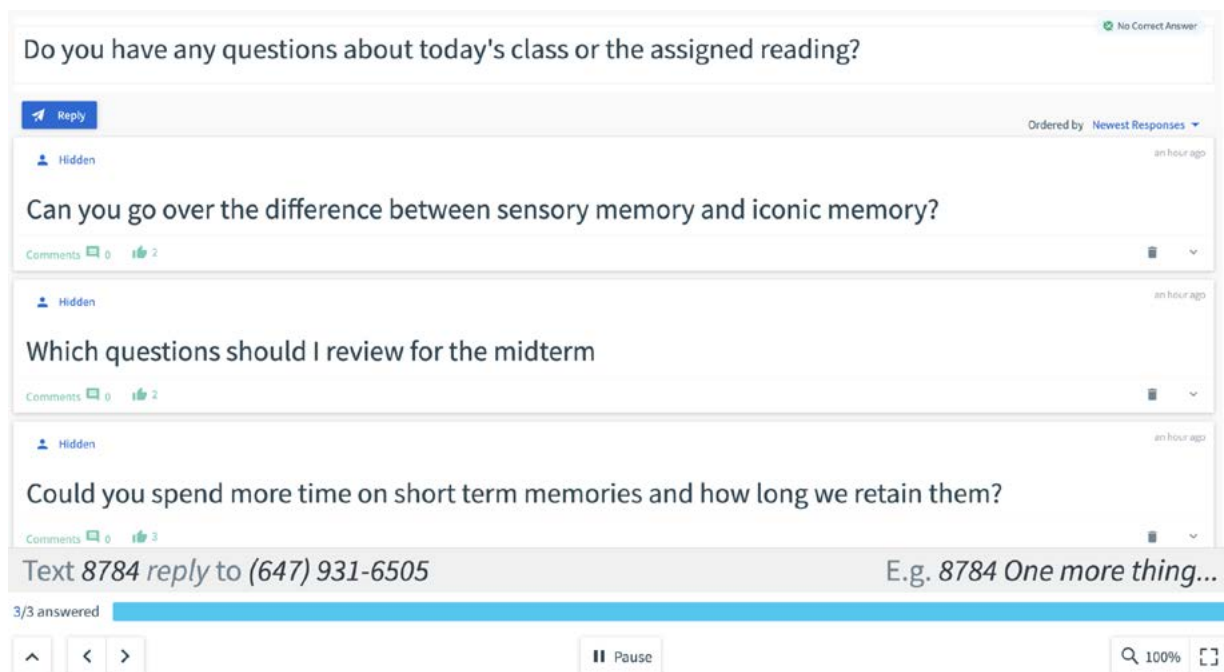
ASSESSING COURSE-RELATED SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE

These formative assessment examples help evaluate learning of a given subject's content by assessing student understanding and information recall from previous courses. Assessing this knowledge is especially important for instructors at the beginning of the term, in order to provide a clearer understanding of how to proceed with course material.

1. **Exit tickets/exit slips:** Students use [exit tickets](#) to answer one or more questions at the end of a class period or online course module to demonstrate how well they've absorbed that particular lesson. Each question should focus on a single concept or skill taught in that lesson. Download your [free exit ticket template](#) for your next course.
2. **One-minute paper:** In this informal assessment example, students are prompted to write a short response answering two questions related to a given week's course content. Responses to [one-minute papers](#) can also be posted in online discussion forums to spur conversation between students. Questions can

be as simple as: What was the most valuable, important or useful thing you learned in the lesson? What key questions, problems or issues remain unresolved?

Are you looking to further assess students in and out of your classroom? Top Hat's **formative assessment capabilities** can help. Facilitate the one-minute paper exercise in-app using an interactive discussion board. Platforms like Kahoot! and Socrative can also be used for running polls and discussions as a quick formative assessment example.



DEVELOPING CRITICAL THINKING AND ANALYSIS SKILLS

Consider structuring formative assessment examples around the development of **higher-order thinking skills** that rely on metacognition. Various modes of analysis, including the ability to break down information, problems and questions help develop students' critical thinking skills. Students who think critically become instinctual problem solvers in class, engineering creative solutions to solve complex real-world case studies.

3. **Think-pair-share:** Students work together in pairs or small groups to answer a question or solve a problem related to an assigned reading. These groups can use dedicated chat channels built into active learning platforms to communicate and discuss their ideas. First, the instructor asks a question regarding the text for students to think about. Next, students pair up with one or more fellow students to discuss the question and their thoughts on the possible answers. Finally, each pair or group shares their conclusions with the rest of the class.
4. **Defining features matrix:** Students categorize concepts based on whether or not they contain certain defining features. This is particularly useful for assessing how fully students understand certain factors distinguishing various concepts from one another and how well they can analyze whether a particular concept fits a certain category.



5. **Socratic seminar:** Students help one another apply the ideas, issues and values reflected in a course text through a group discussion. Ask students to annotate the text in advance of class in order to familiarize themselves with the key themes and ideas discussed. Pose a general question and encourage students to share their responses with the group. Another student then responds to the last thought that was shared.

ENCOURAGING STUDENTS TO THINK CREATIVELY

Quick formative assessments can involve creative expression. The following examples of formative assessments are used to understand student abilities when synthesizing information. By instructing students to express themselves creatively, students have the opportunity to think outside the box.

- 6. Word journal:** This assessment is conducted in two parts. In the first part, the student summarizes an entire lesson in a single word. In the second part, the student composes a short statement of one or two paragraphs explaining why they chose that particular word to summarize the lesson. These can then be submitted to the instructor for feedback directly through content delivery platforms or your learning management system (LMS).
- 7. Invented dialogue:** This strategy is particularly useful for demonstrating how well students have synthesized various historical or literary personalities, settings or themes. In this assessment, students compose a fictional dialogue between two real or fictitious personalities that demonstrate the students' understanding of the topic. Teachers can opt to instruct students to incorporate actual quotes from primary sources into the dialogue or to simply invent plausible quotes of their own based on their comprehension of the content.

ENHANCING PROBLEM-SOLVING SKILLS

These formative assessment examples assess students' problem-solving abilities, including their ability to recognize the various types of problems and any causes and appropriate techniques to solve them. Learners can also use the time to draw similarities between various features of different problems, reflect upon them and adjust strategies for solving them accordingly.

8. **Documented problem solutions:** Similar to a show-and-tell exercise or a how-to article, students write down each step they went through in solving a particular problem. This helps instructors understand how a student goes about thinking through problems and may highlight student obstacles when efficiently solving different types of problems. A variation of this is to document the student's problem-solving process through an audio-video recording of the student demonstrating their process.
9. **Problem-and-solution type recognition:** Effectively solving any problem requires the ability to identify the type of problem and, subsequently, the most appropriate methods of solving it. Students are given a problem and must identify its type, such as routine or non-routine, well-defined or ill-defined, and the most likely type of solution to apply to it, such as algorithm, heuristics or trial and error. Students can answer these problems through a short-answer question and the results can be shown to the class using a word cloud display.



ASSESSING STUDENT PERFORMANCE AND APPLICATION ABILITIES

These formative assessment examples assess students' understanding of how to apply the knowledge they've learned to specific situations. These informal assessment examples can stand alone as "temperature checks" or can be a part of a longer assessment, such as a scheduled test or quiz.

10. **Directed paraphrasing:** Students take a lesson and paraphrase it with a particular audience in mind. This not only helps to assess a student's understanding of the topic, it also helps to assess their ability to reframe it in a way that people in a different context and setting can likewise understand and apply it.

11. **Student-generated test questions:** As a form of role-reversal, students devise test questions and sample appropriate answers that demonstrate their ability to comprehend concepts that underlie assigned readings. Rather than simply requiring students to recall what they've read, it asks them to hone in on the key elements that would indicate to them another person's full comprehension of the concepts.

UNDERSTANDING STUDENT SELF-AWARENESS, ATTITUDES AND VALUES

These formative assessment examples engage students and motivate them to develop their own attitudes, values, opinions and self-awareness through course-related activities. The three quick formative assessments below can be used as an exercise to generate **discussion** amongst students and ensure learning continues once class is over.

12. **Opinion polls:** Students indicate how much they agree or disagree with a particular prompt or statement. This can help educators see how comfortable students are with regard to key objectives of learning activities and with specific course content in particular.

13. **Profiles of admirable individuals:** This assessment in the classroom involves asking students to write a brief biography of a real person involved in a relevant field that highlights the

admirable characteristics making them a role model. Instructors can use polling features for students to vote on which expert in the field they would like to research.

14. **Everyday ethical dilemma:** Students answer how they would go about solving a common everyday ethical dilemma related to the course or their discipline.

ACTIVITIES THAT HELP DEVELOP INDIVIDUAL AWARENESS OF SELF AS A LEARNER

These formative assessment examples help students clarify and express their self-concept and personal goals in ways that connect to the course content.

15. **Focused autobiographical sketch:** Students write a brief memoir-style essay describing a moment or episode of their lives during the course in which they felt like they successfully reached a learning outcome.
16. **Goal-ranking:** Students list three to five goals of their own that serve as their learning goals of the course, then rank them in order of priority. At the end of the course, instructors can go back to this exercise and have students evaluate their rankings and/or assess how well they did achieving each goal they set. Using Top Hat's heat map question functionality, instructors can show how the class performed as a group.



UNDERSTANDING STUDENT LEARNING BEHAVIORS, STRATEGIES AND SKILLS

These formative assessment examples help instructors assess students' learning habits. They can help create a more tailored learning experience.

17. **Productive study-time log:** Students keep a log of all the time they spent learning and studying for a given course and, alongside each entry, the quality of that time. This acts as a form of self-assessment because it helps both students and educators see how effectively students are making use of their study time.

18. **Punctuated lectures:** After listening to a lecture, students reflect (in writing) on how well they were concentrating on the material and, by contrast, how often they became distracted. They may also note how they brought their attention back to the material, if at all, so they can arm themselves with these tools in future lectures. They can even add how the lecture met their expectations and how they connected the lecture to knowledge they already possess. This can be submitted through the class's live chat while lectures are occurring, so students are able to view their peers' thoughts and opinions.

ASSESSING STUDENT REACTIONS TO LEARNING

These formative assessment examples help instructors assess how well students can identify the key points and learning outcomes of a given lesson. These formative assessment ideas will let students thoughtfully reflect on a given reading or artifact.

19. **Feedback forms:** There are several ways to solicit weekly feedback from students after a lesson. Educators can pose a series of questions, or even a single question, about the lesson's effectiveness. These can be multiple-choice, true/false, yes/no or open-ended questions.
20. **RSQC2:** Students compose a brief statement regarding a particular lesson written in the following format: Recall,

Summarize, Question, Connect, Comment. This can also take place in a discussion forum, so students can comment on each other's questions and ideas.

Resources:

Formative and Summative Assessments. (n.d.). Yale Poorvu Center for Teaching and Learning. <https://poorvucenter.yale.edu/Formative-Summative-Assessments>

What is the difference between formative and summative assessment? (n.d.). Eberly Center at Carnegie Mellon University. <https://www.cmu.edu/teaching/assessment/basics/formative-summative.html>

50 CATS by Angelo and Cross. (n.d.). University of California, San Diego. https://vcsa.ucsd.edu/_files/assessment/resources/50_cats.pdf

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unleash their potential. [Learn more](#) about the
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