



# Formal and Informal methods of Assessments

**Formal assessments** are the systematic, pre-planned data-based tests that measure what and how well the students have learned. Formal assessments determine the students' proficiency or mastery of the content, and can be used for comparisons against certain standards.

Examples:

- standardized tests
- criterion referenced tests
- observation schedules
- video recordings
- norm referenced test
- achievement tests
- aptitude tests

**Informal assessments** are those spontaneous forms of assessment that can easily be incorporated in the day-to-day classroom activities and that measure the students' performance and progress. Informal assessments are content and performance driven.

Examples:

- checklist
- participant observation
- portfolio
- Talking
- rating scale
- Taking notes
- time sampling
- event sampling
- anecdotal record

## Characteristics of good formal assessment:

- should be able to answer the questions: *What does the student know? How competent is the student based on the targeted learning outcome? How much knowledge and skills has the student attained and retained from studying a specific lesson/course?*
- should be **valid** (should measure what it's supposed to measure) ;
- should be able to measure the student's knowledge of the intended content
- should be able to provide strong evidence if the student has achieved the learning objectives/outcomes; should be aligned with the objectives and outcomes
- should be **reliable** (should provide consistent results)
- should be **well-timed** (should give students ample time to answer the test and demonstrate what they know)
- should be **comprehensive** (should cover all areas/topics taught)
- should be **easy to administer**
- should be **apt for the intended purpose and target audience**
- should be able to **provide information that can be used for comparisons** (comparing student's performance against national standards like in **standardized tests**; comparing students against other students like in **norm referenced tests** or comparing students against pre-determined criteria like in **criterion referenced tests**)

## Characteristics of good informal assessment:

- should be **valid** and **reliable**
- should be **fair** (should give students with diverse backgrounds equal opportunity to do well in the assessment; should have clear procedures for scoring and interpretation ; should make use of set criteria and rubrics)
- should be **relevant** (should be pertinent to the content as well as applicable to real life)
- should be **appropriate** to target population
- should be **practical and appreciated by students**; should be able to **motivate students**
- should be able to **provide feedback** (to improve student's performance; to modify instruction and teaching styles; to re-teach if necessary; to apply necessary interventions and accommodations)
- should be **constructive** (should be able to point out strengths and weaknesses of students; to provide direction for improvement)
- should be **clear** (should manifest true purpose of assessment; identify target behaviour/skill)
- should be **unbiased** (should maintain objectivity; record only what is actually observed and heard without missing the minute details)

- should preferably be **interactive** (should elicit response and interaction from and among students)
- should be **timely**

**Informal assessment** cannot completely replace the **formal assessment**. We need both, as one complements the other, in depicting accurate pictures of our students. We can use either type (depending on the intended purpose) to improve teaching and learning. The type of assessment we should use should match the intended purpose of the assessment. For example, if we want to assess the students' academic achievement and compare it with other students, then we can use the formal assessment. If we want to use assessment to monitor students' progress and help them maximize their own learning, or use assessment to improve instruction, then we can use the informal assessment.