

Introduction

In this unit, we explain why assessments in Higher Education is so important and will ask you to reflect on the purposes of the assessments. Assessment is a very important aspect of teaching and learning. In this unit, we will introduce you to a variety of different assessment strategies you will or already have encountered at university. Our particular interest is to explain the difference between formative and summative assessments, so that you can understand what a specific assessment demands from you. Some assessments are in themselves opportunities for learning, while others take stock of what you have learnt in a module or course.

Learning Content

Different disciplines assess students differently. The decision on the part of your lecturer or assessor is based on the knowledge and skills you need to demonstrate for the purposes of your qualification. In other words, assessments serve various purposes. Some of the most common purposes of the different kinds of assessment include:

- **Testing knowledge assimilation and recollection:** assessments enable lecturers to test students' ability to retain and recall/reproduce knowledge/information
- **Communication:** student communicates learning to lecturer who provides feedback/comments
- **Evaluation:** assessments enable lecturers to evaluate students' knowledge and skills.
- **Evaluating the curriculum:** assessments signal to students the content deemed valuable/important by lecturers
- **Reporting:** assessments enable faculties to report students' progress to relevant stakeholders
- **Classification:** assessment grading enables the -- problematic -- classification of students into strong, average and weak
- **Application:** assessments test students' ability to apply their knowledge and skills
- **Demonstration of skills and abilities:** assessments create opportunities for students to demonstrate their skills and ability to argue, analyse, synthesise and use information

Often your assessment will be stimulated by a document or a set of documents that accompany the essay question, assignment brief or research question. The documents used to evaluate your typically includes what we call a Rubric, which serves to give you some insight into what you need to achieve in an assessment to pass, achieve a distinction and so on. The rubric:

- Tells you what yours assessors expect and will be looking for when grading assessment
- Informs and guides you towards attaining what is considered exemplary performance.
- Indicates the extent to which you are able to satisfy the requirements (feedback): achievements, limitations and suggestions for improvement.

Finally, there are many types of assessment, but they can be classified into two main categories identified and differentiated as follows:

- Formative assessment: These are learning opportunities themselves. They focus on the teaching-and-learning process through the provision of constructive feedback/comments and does not involve marks. It may involve multiple attempts: rewrites and resubmissions.
- Summative assessment: These are estimations of your abilities and knowledge. They focus on grading, involves marks and is a single-attempt.

Resources

Resource	Format	Time needed	Link
The Four Purposes of Assessment	Article	10 mins	https://drive.google.com/open?id=1rtfrewFzwFd3leHJnKoOfNe8ey4JuabB
Examining the purposes of assessments	Article	15 mins	https://drive.google.com/open?id=1a2dUmrpnvrbfK5k0a9gu5CTe9aLK6qSf
Assessments for Learning	PowerPoint	5 mins	https://drive.google.com/open?id=1-24McGOTqP2eh99lZLnvQZwTIWW6JaiH

Summary

In this unit, you learnt about the purposes of assessments, the marking rubric and its role, and the difference between formative assessment and summative assessment. The next unit will cover the different types of assessment and students' experience of those that are relevant to their field of study.