

Deciding on the purpose behind your assessment

You will have come across the terms 'formative' and 'summative' assessment during your initial teacher training.

The concept of formative assessment was made popular by Dylan Wiliam and Paul Black, who defined formative assessment as when teachers '*use evidence of student learning to adapt teaching and learning, and instruction, to meet a student's needs*' (Inside the Black Box, 1998). As such, it is generally used to inform future learning or teaching. In some instances, formative feedback can be immediate, and pupils are able to act on it instantly.

'Summative' assessment is a term usually used to describe assessment carried out at the end of a period of learning, as a way of 'summing-up' what a pupil knows. Results of a summative assessment may often be shared as a grade or level description (e.g. Emerging), and generally offer a shared meaning on pupil performance.

Watch the following video of Mick Walker, Chair of the Advisory Board at Evidence Based Education, as he explores the use of formative and summative assessment, along with the need for a clear purpose to your assessments, and clarity, regarding what it is you are wanting to find out.



Direct Link: [Formative and summative assessment - Mick Walker](#)

Transcript: [Formative and summative assessment - Mick Walker](#)

[\(this link opens in a new window/tab\)](#)

As highlighted by Mick, effective assessment has a purpose, and before using any assessment, teachers should be clear about the decision that the results will be used to support, and able to justify its use. When deciding on which assessment to use, consider the following questions to help you select which method is going to be most effective:

- What are you trying to assess?
- Why are you trying to assess this?
- What are you going to do with the information?
- How are you going to feed back the information to pupils?

When considering what is effective in assessment, Mick highlights the possibility of using summative assessments in a formative way (for example, working on a single exam question during a lesson), or use information you have gathered in your formative assessment in your summative judgments. However, as Mick emphasises, what is most important is for **teachers to focus on the purpose for the assessment** and to be clear on the decision it will be used to support.