

Common Formative Assessments: A Summary

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What Are Common Formative Assessments?

- Periodic or interim assessments collaboratively designed by grade-level or course teams of teachers
- Designed as matching *pre-* and *post-*assessments to ensure same-assessment to same-assessment comparison of student growth
- Similar in design and format to district and state assessments
- Items should represent essential (Power) standards *only*
- A *blend* of item types, including selected-response (multiple choice, true/false, matching, fill-in) *and* constructed-response (short- or extended)
- Administered to all students in grade level or course several times during the semester, trimester, or entire school year
- Student results analyzed in Data Teams to guide instructional planning and delivery

What Are the Guidelines for Designing Common Formative Assessments?

1. Identify and vertically align Power Standards in content areas for each grade level and course, Pre-K–12.
2. Determine important topic to assess with common formative assessment; locate the Power Standards that match that topic.
3. “Unwrap” the Power Standards for that topic in order to pinpoint important concepts and skills students need to know and be able to do.
4. Determine Big Ideas from those “unwrapped” Power Standards that represent the integrated understanding students need to gain.
5. Write Essential Questions—matched to the Big Ideas—to focus instruction and assessment.
6. Collaboratively design common formative pre- and post-assessments—aligned to one another—that assess student understanding of the “unwrapped” Power Standards’ concepts, skills, and Big Ideas.
7. Include a *blend* of both selected-response and constructed-response items.
8. Create the scoring instruments (answer key and scoring guides).
9. Review items to determine if student assessment results will provide *evidence of proficiency* regarding Power Standards in focus; modify items as needed.
10. Administer and score common formative *pre-*assessments.
11. Analyze results in Data Teams following five-step Data Team process.
12. Use results to differentiate instruction for all students, including those needing intervention and those needing acceleration.
13. Administer and score common formative *post-*assessments.

14. Analyze results in Data Teams following five-step Data Team process.
15. Critique assessment items for quality using specific guidelines for well-written items; revise assessment items as needed.
16. Repeat entire process with next focus topic and corresponding Power Standards.

What Are the Benefits of Using Common Formative Assessments?

- *Regular and timely feedback* regarding student attainment of most critical standards in order to better meet diverse learning needs of all students
- *Multiple-measure assessments* that allow students to demonstrate their understanding in a *variety of formats*
- *Ongoing collaboration* opportunities for grade-level, course, and department teachers
- *Consistent expectations* within a grade level, course, and department regarding standards, instruction, and assessment priorities
- *Agreed-upon criteria for proficiency* to be met within each individual classroom, grade level, school, and district
- *Deliberate alignment* of classroom, school, district, and state assessments to better prepare students for success on state assessments
- Results provide *predictive value* as to how students are likely to do on each succeeding assessment *in time to make instructional modifications*

Source: Larry Ainsworth and Donald Viegut, *Common Formative Assessments: How to Connect Standards-based Instruction and Assessment*, Corwin Press, 2006.