



Thank you

FOR YOUR
INTEREST IN
CORWIN

Please enjoy this complimentary excerpt from *Creating a Self-Directed Learning Environment*. In this excerpt, the author explains two types of assessments and how they see each test question as a potential way of gauging not whether a student has learned a standard at an expected level of proficiency and to identify the next step of that skill's development.

LEARN MORE about this title, including Features, Table of Contents and Reviews.

ADAPTING ASSESSMENTS

Assessments are meant to gauge how much a student has learned, but I also see assessments as opportunities to gauge what a student is capable of mastering next. Like a reflection in a window, I see every test question as a way of gauging not only that a student has learned a standard at an expected level of proficiency but can also see the next step of that skill's development.

Formative Versus Summative

In a standards-based classroom, recognizing the differences between formative and summative assessments is critical.

FORMATIVE	SUMMATIVE
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Leveled/Tiered• Independent or Pair/Group Task• As Evidence is Being Collected	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Proficient Level• Independent Assessment• After Evidence is Collected

Defining Formative

Formative Assessments occur throughout the instructional process. As a student improves in a particular skill, it is the formative assessments that gauge that improvement over time. Later in this book, I will take this idea further by incorporating the idea that formative assessments provide profound and lasting influence on a student's personal development that has a positive effect on academic success. For now, I would like to look at the three main questions I ask myself when creating and adapting both formative and summative assessments:

- What is the standard?
- What level of proficiency is expected from the standard?
- What information from the assessment can be communicated to help the student?

For example, a fifth-grade student might be expected to master the following standard:

CCSS.Math.Content.5.NBT.A.2: *Explain patterns in the number of zeros of the product when multiplying a number by powers of 10, and explain patterns in the placement of the decimal point when a decimal is multiplied or divided by a power of 10. Use whole-number exponents to denote powers of 10.*

A teacher may assign for this standard a *Level 1 Proficiency* task (or assessment) where the student is asked to identify or label the terms *base*, *power*, *exponent*, or solve a math problem involving patterns of zeroes related to multiplying a number by powers of 10, such as:

$$3.5 \times 10^4 = ?$$

If teachers have collaborated to determine that the *task complexity* of *explain* is a *Level 2 Proficiency* (though no evidence or strategic reasoning is required), then a task or assessment may require students to provide a statement (orally or in writing) describing the pattern involved in solving such a math problem.

It would then be up to the teacher to *communicate* to students the specific level of proficiency required and what this skill prepares them to do in the future. In this case, a student may consider themselves prepared to easily communicate extremely large quantities without writing an inordinate number of zeroes (e.g., stars in the sky, grains of sand, distance of the sun to each planet in miles). It is from there that the students will have the information they need to focus their efforts on the tasks specific to the standard and proficiency level.

You may want to ask yourself how many times a student must correctly respond to a Level 1 Proficiency task (such as the example above) in order to prove they are proficient at this level. How many different ways must a student be able to solve this type of math problem before a teacher considers them proficient at that particular standard or skill? This question will come up again in the following section on reporting with regard to percentages. For now, consider the design and purpose of formative and summative assessments with this question in mind.

CRITICAL POINT: Do not ignore the *task complexity* of a standard! If a student is expected to respond with understanding of a concept skill (Level 2 Proficiency), providing formative evidence that requires basic recall of information will not adequately prepare the student.

Defining Summative

Summative assessments are the proficient-based goal lines of skills or standards. These should only be provided after a student has shown success in formative tasks at developing levels of proficiency.

Summative assessments require students to independently apply their understanding of a standard in a formal assessment setting. Personally, I do rely on more traditional means of summative assessments that require students to either write or speak a response in ways that align with state testing requirements—this will not be the case for all teachers. It is important

for schools to be in agreement on how proficiency will be defined for summative assessments.

Creating summative assessments for a standard initially takes some consideration and thought but can be reused and readjusted over time with ease. It is best to begin with the standard itself and define the task and context complexity of the standard. This will ensure that your assessment is set at the proficiency level required by the standard. This also removes any subjectivity to the task—make the task clear and transparent so that the student response can be communicated with confidence.

For example, consider this fourth-grade standard:

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.4.2 *Determine a theme of a story, drama, or poem from details in the text; summarize the text.*

The *task complexity* is to not only *determine* a theme but to *summarize* the theme. The *cognitive complexity* involves not just a statement of theme but also relevant details in the text. This may be interpreted as a Level 3 Proficiency standard which tells me that, in fourth grade, one strong paragraph may be enough to show mastery of this standard. My summative assessments, therefore, may be as simple as providing a short story and a prompt. As long as the students have had opportunities to discuss themes of stories from details in the text, this summative assessment is not unreasonable. For students who have only provided more creative formative tasks such as wall art or song lyrics that describe the theme of a story (with supporting details), this summative assessment might be a stretch for them. Be careful to assess only student insight on theme and not specific formatting conventions (margins, spelling, punctuation, etc.)—as long as it is legible, you can assess their ability to analyze theme.

Assessing Proficiency

The previous fourth-grade standard for summarizing theme (RL.4.2), interpreted as a Level 3 Proficiency skill, means a student response showing a Level 3 Proficiency would consider this standard *mastered*. Depending on the grading scale used, it may be claimed the student has met 100 percent of that standard's expectations.

Students taking this same assessment that perhaps provide only a detail or two about the story and have mistaken the theme will have shown a Level 1 Proficiency, or basic recall of the story. They will not have shown an understanding of its theme (Level 2 Proficiency) enough to create an organized presentation of relevant evidence that support insight into that story's theme which would be considered a Level 3 Proficiency.

Occasionally, some students may desire to go beyond the Level 3 Proficiency expectations for a Level 3 Proficiency standard, knowing full well that Level 3

Proficiency earns them the full 100 percent credit for that standard. These students still wish to earn *extra points* and get a higher academic score.

Assigning Level 4 Proficiency

For this fourth-grade standard, a teacher may consider an additional paragraph that connects a student's theme response to another story that shares that theme or other literary elements. However, please note that this would serve only to address a different fourth-grade standard:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.9 *Compare and contrast the treatment of similar themes and topics (e.g., opposition of good and evil) and patterns of events (e.g., the quest) in stories, myths, and traditional literature from different cultures.*

A teacher may also consider a deeper analysis of the fourth-grade theme. For example, a student might include relevant evidence that is actually the fifth-grade expectation:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.2 *Determine a theme of a story, drama, or poem from details in the text, including how characters in a story or drama respond to challenges or how the speaker in a poem reflects upon a topic; summarize the text.*

It would be reasonable to reward a fourth-grade student response with a Level 4 Proficiency rating for this particular standard (RL.4.2) if their response to this standard's summative assessment is also addressing RL.4.9 or RL.5.2. Keep in mind that the other standard(s) being addressed would also need to receive a score that represents the appropriate level of proficiency (but not a Level 4 Proficiency) because the task assigned only specifically addressed RL.4.2.

It is also important to note the potential for marking multiple standards such as RL.4.2 (main idea) and RL.4.1 (text evidence). When the *task complexity* of a standard requires a Level 3 Proficiency response, such as the case for RL.4.2 and its expectation for evidence and reasoning of a theme, it is reasonable to mark both standards according to the proficiency shown in the student's response.

Assessment Retakes

It is common practice in a standards-based classroom for students to be allowed to retake assessments. Part of this SBG practice often includes limitations or provisions for student assessment retakes in order to motivate students not to skip formative tasks and simply retake summative assessments until they pass. The idea behind allowing students to retake an assessment is often analogized with a common real-life student experience: failing a driver's test. When a person fails their driving test, they will reflect on what

was missed, and go back to take that test again (perhaps after a mandatory waiting period).

Two popular questions from teachers challenging student retakes may be: (1) what happens when students know they don't have to pass an assessment because they can take it again without consequence? and (2) will students put everything off until the last minute and submit all of their assessment submissions at the end of a reporting period as a means of abusing a retake policy? I find students approach assessments with more confidence when retakes are available without academic consequence because humans have an inherent desire to succeed even if they do not show it in behaviors that we may recognize. It is a positive sign that a student cares enough about their education to try an assessment again—it is illogical and emotionally draining to choose to retake an assessment knowing failure is guaranteed.

However, when the expectation is to submit reasonable evidence of reflection (formative task) before requesting a summative assessment retake, it becomes less about expecting the academic proficiency of the student prior to a retake and more about coaching a student's habits and increasing that student's confidence in passing a summative assessment retake. It is important that this shift toward retakes in an SBG classroom be recognized because there will always be a potential for overwhelming teacher expectations if reasonable student expectations for retakes are not simple, transparent, and consistent. For this reason alone, shifting toward test retakes in this way requires as much shift from the teacher's perspective as it does the students, parents, and a school's administration.