

Unit Three

Summative Assessment

In this unit, our attention turns from formative assessment to summative assessment. This unit is divided into two parts: Part 1 deals with the characteristics of summative assessment, the primary considerations for designing and using summative assessment tasks as well as the criteria for evaluating learners' performance on these tasks; Part 2 includes four sets of summative assessment tasks which have been designed specifically for KS3 to illustrate how summative assessment tasks could be developed and used.

Part 1 Designing and Using Summative Assessment

3.1 Characteristics of summative assessment

Review the definition of summative assessment in Unit One (section 1.6.4) and complete the following reflection task.

Reflect

In designing summative assessment tasks, which of the following will be different from those used in formative assessment?

- *task type*
- *assessment criteria*
- *feedback*

In Unit One, we described summative assessment as:

- occurring typically at the end of a course or module of work; and
- intended to provide information to learners and other major stakeholders such as parents and schools.

In task-based assessment, there is no reason for the type of task used for summative assessment to differ from that used in formative assessment. All assessment tasks should reflect specific learning targets and objectives. Thus, performance-type tasks are equally applicable to summative as to formative assessment. Where the two types of assessment differ is in the breadth of material covered. Since summative assessment occurs at the end of a course, term or school year, it will include only a selection of the material covered (a point we return to in section 3.2 below).

Summative assessment measures attainment and allows for the recording of the learning progress. It usually takes the form of tests and examinations, though it is becoming increasingly common for summative assessment to include other tasks such as a project completed during the school year. This move away from assessments based on a single test / examination gives learners the opportunity to perform to the best of their ability. Not all learners perform well under examination pressure.

Furthermore, tests / examinations do not always lend themselves to eliciting the range of language structures and uses that have been the objective of teaching.

The results of summative assessment allow us to determine the degree to which learners have attained specific learning objectives such as those identified for KS3. If we are satisfied that a group of learners have reached the standard required for KS3, the decision will be made for the learners to progress to KS4. Such a decision may have an important consequence on learners' future prospects. It is therefore crucial that not only is the assessment valid, but that the results obtained are reliable. Validity, as we saw in Unit Two, relates to whether the assessment tasks assess what they intend to assess. Reliability, on the other hand, refers to the results obtained and whether these would be the same if the same learners took the assessment on another occasion provided that no further learning had taken place and regardless of who marked the assessment if more than one person was involved in the process.

Whether summative assessment is norm- or criterion-referenced will be determined by the purpose of the assessment. If we need to select the best candidates to, for example, continue with their education, then norm-referencing would be appropriate. However, if we are interested in whether candidates have mastered certain skills, then we would not get the required information through norm-referencing. For example, when assessing airline pilots we are interested in whether they can fly a plane safely to a very high level of proficiency. Knowing which trainees were the best would not suffice since it is possible that no trainee of a given group would have reached the required standard to safely fly a plane.

Reflect

Within the school context, should summative assessment be norm- or criterion-referenced?

If we are to track learners' learning progress and to provide meaningful information about learners to their parents, criterion-referencing would be more informative. Therefore, criterion-referenced assessment is often carried out within the school, regardless of whether it is formative or summative.

It should be noted that summative assessment may be internal and thus set, administered and assessed by the teachers within a school, or external, that is, designed and assessed by an examination body such as the HKEAA. Internal assessments are considered to be of lower stakes than external assessments, since the decisions taken based on the results of the former usually carry less consequence than those of the latter. For example, the end of school year assessment may determine whether a learner is promoted to the next class, while a public examination such as Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination will be a factor in determining whether a learner may continue with his / her education in the sixth form and beyond. Although here we are more concerned with internal assessments with which you as a teacher will be directly involved, it is a good idea to be aware of the processes involved in external assessments as well.

Reflect

How does formative assessment compare to summative assessment on the stakes continuum?

Formative assessment is of lower stakes than summative assessment. However, the former is important for learners to succeed in summative assessment.

Reflect

What are the similarities and differences between formative and summative assessment?

3.2 Considerations in designing summative assessment tasks

As with any assessment, when designing summative assessment tasks, it is necessary to consider the purpose of the assessment. The questions you must ask yourself include:

- Why am I giving this assessment?
- What will I do with the results of the assessment?
- How will I give feedback to the stakeholders involved?

Once you have established a clear purpose, then you need to scrutinize the learning / teaching programme to select the elements of language that you want to assess and determine the task types you will use to assess these. The process of selection is a difficult one as it often turns out to be a balancing act. You need to ensure adequate coverage of material without undue emphasis being placed on those elements of language which are easier to assess. At the same time you need to make the assessment practical in terms of length of the time it will take to devise and complete, the resources required to complete it and the effort involved in marking it and providing relevant feedback, etc.

Reflect

The following points were identified as considerations when developing formative assessment tasks. Indicate which you consider are similar when developing summative assessment tasks. For those you consider different, say how and why they are different.

- *identify the specific learning tasks and objectives you want to assess*
- *set specific aims, i.e. decide what the aims of the task are*
- *consider the type of assessment task appropriate to your aims*
- *design / modify a task to meet your assessment aims*
- *identify criteria by which the task will be judged*
- *develop a feedback mechanism to use for the assessment*