What is Assessment?

Welcome to the Illinois State University Writing Program learning outcome tutorial series. In this brief lesson we'll be talking about assessment. What is assessment?

The form of assessment you're probably most familiar with is the grade you've earned on a paper or a test or the final grade for a class you see it but after the semester is over. However that's not the only form of assessment. Any feedback that allows you to see the extent of your learning is a form of assessment. Even something is low-key as a professor saying hey good work today as you walk out of the class is a form of assessment. Note that your particular instructor may not actually be a cat. We might think of professor kitty cats encouraging words after class as and for as a form of informal assessment while the grade on your paper or test is more formal.

Another way of classifying assessment is into the categories formative and summative. Formative assessment attempts to measure learning as it is forming as it is happening. You've probably been in a classroom where after a long complex lecture or demonstration the teacher looks out at the students and says any questions. That's actually a crude example of formative assessment technique. Your instructor is trying to verify if any learning has happened if you say nothing under these circumstances many instructors will assume that they have succeeded in their learning outcome for the lesson. Asking questions about the parts you didn't understand or that went by too fast actually signals to the instructor I happened to better impact your learning.

Summative assessment attempts to sum up learning that has already happened. Chapter, unit, and final tests are typical examples of formal summative assessments. Wide open essay questions that don't have an answer that can be easily memorized are an example of an instructor trying to do a formative assessment of your understanding of conceptual or procedural material. The blank space after the question is the place where you make your learning visible to the instructor.

Looking at all four possible combinations we've got example for two of them but these aren't the only possibilities. There are other methods of formal of informal rather informal formative assessment and formal summative assessment. Informal summative assessment can take the form of a chat with the instructor one on one or the entire class after the conclusion of a unit or project. An instructor asking you to converse about the course content is a low-key manner of trying to gauge the extent of your learning to see if they need to revisit prior material or if your class can move on to new stuff. Or an instructor might teach you something then immediately quiz you on it. The point here is to gather data immediately learning on whether learning is happening.

These four examples don't represent anywhere near the entire range of assessment techniques nor do all assessments feature the instructor assessing students as you will see in future videos in this series. Whether assessment techniques are used at whatever assessment takes around whatever assessment techniques are used in your classes try to keep in mind that they aren't just a way of seeing if you pass the class or get the a you need to bring up your GPA, rather your instructor uses assessment as a diagnostic tool to ensure that learning is happening in the classroom. Thank you for joining us.