

Course Topic: Language Assessment**Course Instructor:**

Julia Williams has been in the English language education sector for over 20 years. She has taught at universities, colleges and secondary schools in Ontario and is currently the director of English Language Studies and Coordinator of Applied Language Studies at Renison University College, University of Waterloo. She is the author of both the first and second editions of *Learning English for Academic Purposes: Reading and writing*; as well as books 3 and 4 in the *Academic Connections* series of textbooks published by Pearson. Julia has presented nationally and internationally on language assessment, English for Academic Purposes, occupation-specific language training and the effective use of textbooks.

Course Synopsis:

This course examines the different types of tests and assessments that you, as a teacher, might develop or that students might encounter in their path toward greater English proficiency. Due to the wide variety of different test types, it is helpful to develop a vocabulary to better understand the various characteristics of test types. This course will discuss standardized, placement, and diagnostic assessments. It will identify the difference between formative and summative tests and assessments and conclude with a discussion of dynamic assessment.

Course Agenda:

1. Types of Tests and Assessments and Their Uses
2. Formative vs. Summative Assessment
3. Characteristics of Formative Assessment
4. Dynamic Assessment

1. Types of Tests and Assessments and Their Uses

There are a number of different types of tests and assessments that you, as the teacher, may use or develop and that students may encounter throughout their academic journey. The most common of these are:

- Standardized tests
- Placement tests
- Diagnostic tests
- Formative assessments/tests
- Summative/achievement tests

Standardized tests are commonly used to assess a student's proficiency in English across a variety of skills such as reading, writing, listening and speaking within various contexts. Students receive a final score that is then forwarded to the relevant institution or organization for which the student is requesting admittance. Students may be required to take a standardized test to be admitted into an academic institution, as part of the hiring process for an employer or in order to be licensed in a particular field of work. The most common standardized tests are TOEFL, IELTS, TOEIC, and the Cambridge exams but there are also many alternative standardized tests in use.

Placement tests are usually administered by academic institutions to determine a student's level of English aptitude in order to place them in the appropriate language class within the program. Like standardized tests, these tests also typically assess the four language skills - reading, writing, listening and speaking. The test results are then used by the program administrator to place the student into a class with students of a similar level of ability.

Diagnostic tests are used at the start of a class to determine a student's proficiency level in a particular language skill. The teacher will use this type of test to narrow in on the student's strengths and weaknesses within that skill and start to develop an idea of what areas to focus on in order to meet the language needs of the student over the course of the term. A diagnostic test may also be used to group students within the class according to their strengths and weaknesses.

Formative assessments/tests are used throughout the course of a class to provide feedback to a student so that they can become aware of their strengths and weaknesses and improve on their own learning moving forward. Formative tests are so named because they are intended to help *form* the student's proficiency in a particular skill.

Summative/achievement tests are used at the end of a term to measure how much a student has learned throughout the course of the term. These tests provide a snapshot of a student's proficiency level at the culmination of study.

2. Formative vs. Summative Assessments

Formative

- End user of the results is the student
- Goal is to improve student proficiency
- Low-stakes
- Inputs can vary to optimize student performance
- Also known as *Assessment for Learning* (AFL)

Summative

- End user of the results is an administrator
- Goal is to determine student proficiency
- High Stakes
- Inputs are standardized to achieve equity
- Also known as *Assessment of Learning* (AOL)

3. Characteristics of Formative Assessment

- High interaction between teacher and student
- Consistent with process approach to learning and supports students through multiple drafts of an assessment or test
- Consistent with use of self and peer evaluation
- Designed to encourage student autonomy and to motivate students to learn more.

4. Dynamic Assessment

Dynamic assessment is a type of formative assessment in which the teacher will vary the inputs to a student during the course of a test in order to get a more accurate snapshot of the student's proficiency. For example, if a teacher is trying to elicit a particular verb tense from a student during a test and the student does not give the desired response, the teacher may reformulate the question or try a different question altogether to see if the student has the capability to correctly form the verb tense when prompted in another way. So while the test itself may vary somewhat from student to student, the results will give the teacher a much more precise idea of each student's individual language abilities.

Thanks for participating!

www.aceducation.ca