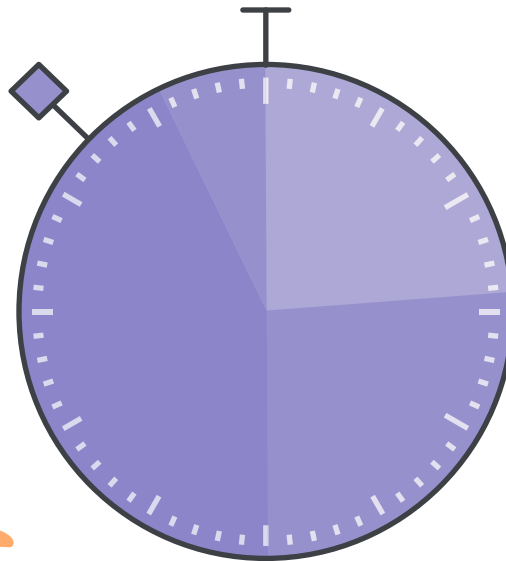
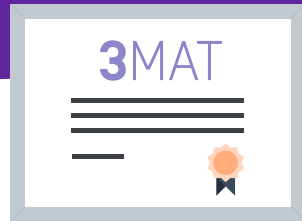


3-Minute Assessment Talk

The Differences Between Formative & Summative Assessment

BY MATTHEW GULLIFORD



Introducing the 3-Minute Assessment Talk (3MAT) Series

Are you able to explain an assessment topic and engage an audience with limited knowledge or experience in under 3 minutes? *Pardon, me?!*

Yes, 3 minutes is kind of a big deal in Australia. Originating at the University of Queensland, the **Three Minute Thesis (3MT)** is an annual competition (now held in over 350 institutions worldwide) for Ph.D. students from any discipline. The rules: Participants must explain their research in under 3 minutes to an audience presumed to have no background or expertise in their field of research. Being able to explain a complex topic both succinctly and persuasively to an audience with limited time, knowledge, or even interest, is a tremendous skill to have at your disposal.

This got me thinking...What a great tool this would be for assessment coordinators! While managing the assessment of student learning for a college in NYC, I was frequently asked, “How is summative assessment different from grading?” or “What is the difference between assessment *for* learning and assessment *of* learning?” Often, I only had a few minutes to answer such questions and no fancy PowerPoint to save me!

So I decided to create a series of 3-Minute Assessment Talks (3MATs) as a resource for quickly summarizing key assessment topics that can be challenging to present expeditiously. You only need 3 minutes, I promise!

The Differences Between Formative & Summative Assessment

After **introducing my new 3MAT series** in a recent blog post, the first eBook of the series [**The Differences Between Course Grades and Learning Outcomes Assessment**] soon followed.

This second installment focuses on the differences between formative and summative assessment, or what many call “assessment *for* learning” and “assessment *of* learning.”

Formative and summative assessment should always be viewed as complementary activities which work together to support and improve teaching and learning. Both play very specific roles, and a truly systematic assessment process incorporates both methods. However, this is not always achievable or sustainable across an entire institution; the time commitment and resources needed to practice both can be quite overwhelming.



From the volumes of information and abundance of best practice advice around both approaches, understanding the two methods can become confusing. So, this eBook focuses on some key differences to help delineate the two. But don't forget to keep this common denominator in mind: At the heart of both practices is the aim to improve teaching and learning.

This eBook isn't intended as a script to be learned verbatim, but rather, a quick guide with useful pointers to save time and ease conversation! You can also share this eBook directly with your community, or use it as part of a presentation for an assessment workshop.

The 5 key points below should take no more than 30 seconds to present each, which adds up to 3 minutes total!

Start the clock!





1 PERSPECTIVE

Formative assessment *monitors the current progress of student learning*, observed from a “**process**-oriented” point of view.

Summative assessment *evaluates what students have learned*, measured from a “**product**-oriented” point of view.



2 SCOPE

Formative assessment usually focuses on **individual** student learning at the **course level**.



Summative assessment typically evaluates students **collectively** at the **course, program, and institution levels**.

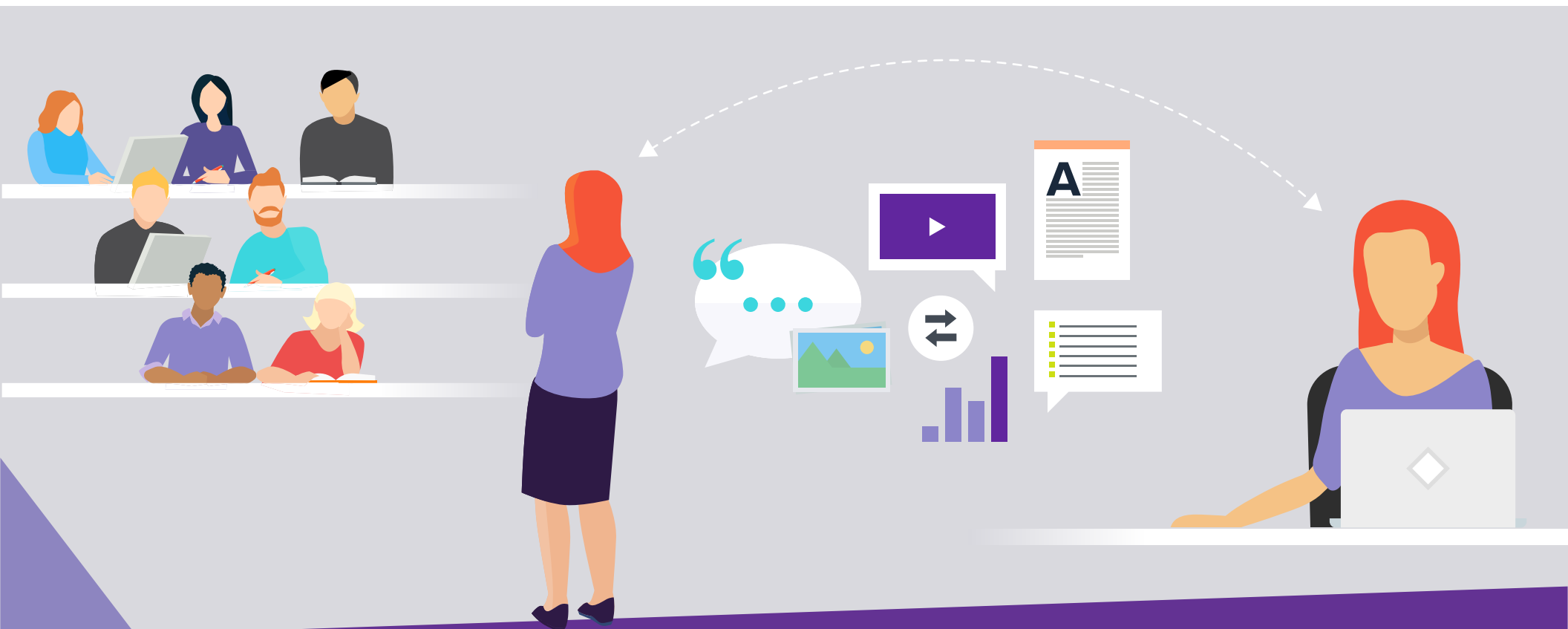


3 TIMING

Formative assessment typically involves collecting information on student learning *prior to and/or during teaching*. It measures and supports student learning on an ongoing basis, helping instructors evaluate and modify teaching and learning strategies in **real time**.



Summative assessment usually involves collecting information on student learning *upon completion of a course or program*. It measures and reflects on student learning cumulatively, informing pedagogical and curricular changes **going forward**.



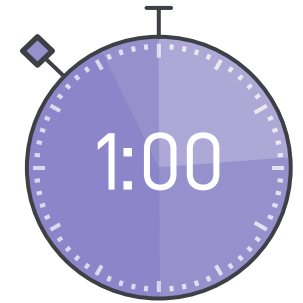
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FORMALITY

Formative assessment is very much “student facing,” actively involving students in the process. Feedback between student and instructor is shared regularly through “low-stake” and **informal** assessments, such as self-reflection journals, class assignments, oral presentations, group discussion, self-evaluation, quizzes, and the like—allowing students to control their learning incrementally along the way.



Summative assessment is largely “non-student facing,” indirectly involving students through the submission of assignments that are later evaluated and analyzed at the individual [final course grades] or aggregate [course and programmatic assessment] levels. Typically “high-stakes” and **formal**, summative assessment incorporates final papers, capstone projects, standardized tests, exams, and the like as evidence of student learning and the degree to which students have achieved the course/program outcomes or core competencies. Although students are less actively involved in this approach, best practices encourage communication with students regarding the purpose, process, and value of summative assessment—as well as transparency of the results [especially for course and program level assessment initiatives].



5 VISIBILITY

Formative assessment results or information is usually only shared with the **individual** student and the instructor. Sometimes, formative assessments may be shared *internally* with a group of students or the entire class cohort.

Summative assessment results are almost always reported at the **aggregate** level and shared across the course, program, and institution—and most certainly with *external* stakeholders, such as accreditation organizations.



*Now, doesn't
that feel a little bit*



BETTER?

Be sure to **sign up** for my next installment in the 3MAT series, which will focus on the differences between course- and program-level assessment. Feel free to email me with any specific areas of assessment you'd like future 3MATs to focus on!

Meet Matt

Hello there!

Explaining different assessment-related topics to colleagues who may have limited time, knowledge, or even interest, is not a simple task. I decided to create this series of 3 Minute Assessment Talks (3MATs) to support you with key areas of assessment that can sometimes be challenging to present, particularly if you only have a short amount of time to capture your audience.

I would love to hear about your experiences with the 3MATs and any requests for topics you would like future editions to focus on.

You can email at mgulliford@watermarkinsights.com.

Best,



Matthew Gulliford is on the Account Management team at Watermark. He works closely with institutions to understand their assessment needs and goals in order to determine how Watermark can help advance meaningful assessment practices on their campuses. Before joining Watermark in 2015, Matthew worked at Baruch College, City University of New York (CUNY), where he managed the assessment of student learning for the Marxe School of Public and International Affairs and was a member of the CUNY Assessment Council. Matthew is currently pursuing his Doctorate in Education Research, with a specific focus on learning outcomes assessment and supporting technology.

About Watermark™

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