

What Checking for Understanding Is Not

Checking for understanding is not the final exam of the state achievement tests. While there is evidence that checking for understanding will improve the scores students receive on these types of assessments, they are not what we mean by checking for understanding. Final exams and state standards tests are summative exams. They are designed to provide feedback on how the student performed after instruction.

Checking for understanding is a systematic approach to formative assessment. Let's explore the difference between formative and summative assessment in greater detail. Figure 1.1 provides a comparison between the two assessment systems.

Figure 1.1 Comparison of Formative and Summative Assessment		
	Formative Assessments	Summative Assessments
Purpose	To improve instruction and provide student feedback	To measure student competency
When administered	Ongoing throughout unit	End of unit or course
How students use results	To self-monitor understanding	To gauge their progress toward course or grade-level goals and benchmarks
How teachers use results	To check for understanding	For grades, promotion

Formative assessments are ongoing assessments, reviews, and observations in a classroom. Teachers use formative assessment to improve instructional methods and provide student feedback throughout the teaching and learning process. For example, if a teacher observes that some students do not grasp a concept, he or she can design a review activity to reinforce the concept or use a different instructional strategy to reteach it. Likewise, students can monitor their progress by looking at their results on periodic quizzes and performance tasks. The results of formative assessments are used to modify and validate instruction.

Summative assessments are typically used to evaluate the effectiveness of instructional programs and services at the end of an academic year or at a predetermined time. The goal of summative assessments is to judge student competency after an instructional phase is complete. For example, the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test administered to students in Florida once a year is a summative assessment of each student's ability at certain points in time. Summative evaluations are used to determine if students have mastered specific competencies and to identify instructional areas that need additional attention.

During Cluster Cycle 1, we looked at essential standards for each grade level. We also revised the grading system for evaluating these essential standards.

Why is important to have checks for understanding for essential standards?

How does the 4,3,2,1 grading system relate to this article?