

Definitions of Common Assessment Words and Phrases

*Prepared by the College-Wide Assessment Committee, Salem State College
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Assessment: Assessment of student learning is the systematic collection of information about student learning to inform decisions about how to improve learning. Assessment can happen at the course or program level and is focused on the student learning goals and objectives articulated for a course or program. (Walvoord, *Assessment Clear and Simple*, 2–3)

Formative Assessment: Formative assessment focuses on improving student attainment of the learning objectives of a course or program. Information from formative assessment is used, either during the semester or in designing the next iteration of the course, to guide course design, use of pedagogical techniques, use of student learning activities, in order to improve student learning. (Allen, *Assessing General Education Programs*, 16)

Summative Assessment: Summative assessment is an overall assessment of the effectiveness of assessed course or program. It is a final assessment of the degree to which students have demonstrated mastery of the stated learning objectives of a course or program. (Allen, *Assessing General Education Programs*, 16)

Rubric: An educational rubric is a matrix that explicitly states the criteria and standards for student work, identifying the traits that are important and describing levels of performance within each trait. Rubrics used in assessment list traits that are, or closely align with, learning objectives. The scoring of a rubric constitutes an assessment of student learning. (Walvoord, *Assessment Clear and Simple*, 81)

Direct Measures: Direct measures directly evaluate student work. Direct measures include exams, papers, project, art works, musical performances and the like.

Indirect Measures: Indirect measures include students and alumni self-reports of how well they thought they learned, graduate and professional school acceptances, job placement rates, etc. (Walvoord, *Assessment Clear and Simple*, 3)

Evidence: Assessment of student learning includes both qualitative and quantitative evidence. (Walvoord, *Assessment Clear and Simple*, 3)

Normative assessment: In broad terms, normative assessment seeks to ensure that a grade in one section of a course is comparable to the same grade in a different section of the same course. Normative assessment seeks to compare samples of work from a common assignment that have been gathered from a variety of sections offered during a common time frame to establish criteria by which evaluation criteria can be applied across sections. Normative assessment can also be applied within a section of a course.

Evaluation: Evaluation is the process of determining whether learning outcomes are being met in a course. It does not prescribe particular methodologies nor proscribe others.

Goal: A course goal provides the overarching or guiding principle of the course. Examples include: to develop a more cosmopolitan outlook in participants, to learn how to differentiate science from pseudoscience, to create more environmental awareness.... Goals can be assessed with survey-type instruments, but not with grades.

Objective: Also called Learning Outcomes, objectives are specific skill or topic related criteria determined by the instructor of a course. Some examples include: ability to read a graph, ability to write a persuasive essay, ability to determine the identity of a mineral based on optical properties, ability to read and summarize a technical article, ability to give a presentation on an assigned topic.... Objectives are often evaluated with rubrics and are directly related to grades.

Note – The effective difference between a goal and an objective is that an objective can be evaluated or assessed with a summative assessment.