

Assessing Against Learning Outcomes, Module 1

1.1 Learning Outcomes & Assessment

Why do learning outcomes matter? Learning outcomes highlight and foster transparency. It is clear what is expected from both teachers and learners. The use of learning outcomes promotes and represents a shift from teacher-centred to learner-centred teaching and learning. And finally, the use of learning outcomes promotes efficient assessment practices ensuring that assessment is matched and mapped to curriculum.

Let's leave learning outcomes for now and examine assessment.

Assessment is the process of collecting evidence and making judgements on whether learning outcomes or competencies have been achieved.

Assessment should not be random. It is a purposeful and meaningful activity used to make effective decisions about future courses of action which affect your student's study journey.

In English language centres we commonly use assessments to make decisions about where to place our students, to measure the achievements or progress they have made and to measure the students' language proficiency.

Assessments are also used as a diagnostic tool to measure base-line knowledge and skills which helps teachers to plan their classes. They are a popular motivational tool used by teachers to encourage students to study and learn and, both in Australia and internationally, assessments are used by a range of organisations and institutions as well as governments as a gatekeeper – for example, entry into higher levels of study or for migration applications.

As teachers, we all use assessments for summative and formative purposes. Formative assessments inform teachers and learners about the teaching and learning process, providing explicit feedback to adjust the teaching process and help students understand their strengths and weaknesses. Summative assessments measure the outcomes at the end of the study period. They are often much more high stakes than formative assessments in that they determine whether the students can move on through their study journey.

Whether your assessment is a formative or summative assessment depends on your purpose. The same assessment can be used for either or both.

In our next module, we will explore the relationship between learning outcomes and assessment more closely.