

Formative Or Summative

Education

The difference is not the test, but what happens to the result afterwards.

Formative

- Purpose: to change what happens next
- Information used by teacher and pupil
- Frequent, cheap, often informal
- Needs no marks at all
- Worthless if nothing changes

Summative

- Purpose: to record what was achieved
- Information used for reporting or selection
- Occasional, costly, standardised
- Needs comparability and fairness
- Worthless if it does not measure the construct

THE DIFFERENCE THAT MATTERS

The same test can be either. What makes it formative is the action taken, not the label on the cover sheet.

Educational reference. A test used for both purposes usually serves neither well: reporting pressure distorts the diagnostic signal.