



Testing and Evaluation: What's the Difference?

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Evaluation and testing form a single Critical Success Factor category of good teaching. Familiarity with both concepts is crucial to becoming an accomplished instructor.

So what is the difference between evaluation and testing? Thinking about the common process of buying a car illustrates the differences.

Evaluation

First, you use evaluation to narrow your choices from an incredible array of possibilities: pickups, SUVs, coupes, vans, sedans, pickups, crossovers, convertibles, hybrids, etc.

To organize, clarify, and finally focus on the top five vehicles, define your needs and preferences by asking yourself a set of detailed questions.

For example, "How many passengers, how much cargo, fuel consumption, monthly operating costs, and what kind of cargo or pets do you transport on a regular basis?" Additionally, you might ask, "How much towing capacity is required to pull your camping trailer? Do you desire four-wheel drive for off road or for driving in snow and ice? What's your budget?"



Testing vs Evaluation



From your answers, draw up a range of vehicle requirements such as horsepower, braking, transmission type, color, seating, load capacity, towing capacity, fuel economy, etc. Having now completed the initial evaluation phase, compare this hand-picked group of vehicles to determine your top three or four choices.

Another evaluation strategy might be researching *Consumer Reports* and search online for other publications that provide recommendations based on cost of ownership, reliability factors, etc. Finally, there are the trips to the dealer or private seller to do a walk around to get definitive answers to your final questions.

Of course, any good car salesperson is going to try to get you to test-drive the car you're considering. The moment you open the door, sit down, turn on the ignition and start the car you have moved to the testing phase.

Testing

Testing occurs when you encounter the vehicle and begin to physically, mentally and emotionally interact with it—for example, taking it for a test drive. You close the door and your senses of sound, sight, smell, and feel record the results of your first impression. (Oh, yes!, that new-car smell.) Then, you start the car and drive away recording how it responds to your control inputs.

By putting the car through its paces, you're testing its performance under a variety of conditions. The tougher and more comprehensive your tests, the more valid and reliable will be your decision.

Application

Learn to evaluate your teaching often by asking weekly, if not daily questions such as, "What did I do right?" "What could I improve on next time." In addition, routinely test your students' achievement. Limiting testing to a midterm and a final is usually a mistake. Many excellent instructors insert a quiz question after each main point they teach to ensure students are getting it.



The two most commonly used evaluation strategies are formative evaluation and summative evaluation. Formative means forming an opinion over time using a number of evaluative questions. Summative evaluations come at the end of a process and take the shape of lengthy, formal tests designed to measure each student's mastery of the course's student learning objectives (SLOs).