Minnesota Humanities Center

Criteria for High-Quality Summative Tasks

Summative tasks provide an opportunity for students to demonstrate what they know and can do at the end of a unit. In inquiry-based social studies, they should give students an opportunity to respond to the compelling question and demonstrate the knowledge, skills, and disciplinary reasoning developed throughout the unit.

Measure What Was Taught

High-quality summative assessments in social studies directly measure what was taught.

Educators should ask:

- Does the task align with the relevant standards and benchmarks addressed in the unit?
- Does it ask students to return directly to the compelling question?
- Does it build on the content knowledge, sources, and disciplinary skills developed through the unit's formative tasks?
- Does scoring criteria reflect the intended learning, including the quality of students' reasoning and use of evidence?
- Does the assessment measure students' content knowledge and disciplinary skills, rather than unrelated qualities such as format, creativity, or visual design?

Measure meaningful social studies learning

High-quality summative assessments assess meaningful disciplinary learning.

Educators should ask:

- Does the task require students to use social studies knowledge to demonstrate the disciplinary skills required by the standards and benchmarks?
- Does the assessment require students to demonstrate understanding of relevant concepts, systems, ideas or issues relevant to the disciplines?
- Does the task elicit meaningful disciplinary thinking rather than primarily recall or generic reading comprehension?

Elicit reasoning and use of evidence

High-quality summative assessments ask students to engage in disciplinary reasoning and use evidence to support their responses.

Educators should ask:

- Do students use relevant disciplinary sources and information to develop and support their responses?
- Does the task elicit the disciplinary reasoning targeted by the supporting questions?
- Do students draw on their understanding of sources and content to develop a response to the compelling question?

Produce valid evidence of standards-aligned learning

High-quality summative assessments provide sufficient valid evidence of disciplinary learning.

Educators should ask:

- Does the task clearly elicit evidence of both the knowledge and skills identified in the relevant benchmarks?
- Is there sufficient evidence of student learning to evaluate the intended knowledge and skills?
- Do the task and scoring criteria align with the knowledge and skills identified in the benchmarks, without extending beyond what the assessment actually measures?

Use formats that make student thinking visible

High-quality summative assessments use formats that surface student thinking.

Educators should ask:

- Does the selected format allow students to demonstrate the targeted learning?
- Does the format elicit students' reasoning, not simply their final answers or completed products?
- Can educators readily identify student reasoning in the responses students produce?
- Are students provided appropriate formats, supports, and response options to access the task and demonstrate their learning without unrelated barriers?