# ****Definition of Terms****

1. **Observation**- This word has several meanings and interpretations, but my favorite is based on Random House’s Unabridged Dictionary (2006):Observation is an act or instance of:Observation is an act or instance of:

--noticing or perceiving.  
--regarding attentively or watching.  
-- viewing or noting a fact or occurrence for a special purpose, such as for a scientific experiment.  
--the information or record secured by such an act.

The main goal of this entire course is for you to develop the outlook and habits of a skilled observer.  The most important of all observation definitions for our purpose is:

**Observation is the faculty or habit of observing or noticing.**

**ASSESSMENT** refers to the systematic process of gathering information from various sources (such as observations and tests) to evaluate the characteristics of a program or individual.  Simply put, assessment is a general term referring to any type of methodical appraisal and measurement.    
**Synonyms —**When assessment is used as a verb, it has the same meaning as these two terms: **interpretation** (analyzing conclusions that observers reach as a result of observations and **evaluation** (judging the quality of programs, teachers, or children’s development and skills).

There are many kinds of assessment, but most can be grouped into two main categories.

**\*STANDARD-BASED ASSESSMENTS** measure and interpret knowledge based on learning or content standards. Most states are now requiring these assessments, which are administered and evaluated in specific ways, as part of the current educational reform movement. When based on standardized tests or “pencil-and-paper” or “table-top” approaches, they are considered inappropriate for young children for many reasons.

* + ACHIEVEMENT ASSESSMENTS are the most widely used standardized tests; they allow us to judge how well children are meeting educational objectives.
  + SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENTS,like achievement tests, measure how well students are learning content. Most standardized tests are summative assessments and are conducted at the end of the school year to summarize skills.

\***PERFORMANCE-BASED ASSESSMENTS** are considered authentic assessment since children’s abilities and attitudes are evaluated in natural settings. These assessments, which consider the whole child in his/her normal context, are alternatives to standardized testing.

>OBSERVATIONAL ASSESSMENTS are conducted by observing and recording in a planned and organized way in to appraise children’s development or skills. Methods such as checklists, narratives, and other formats can be employed.  The recording technique is less important than that the observation be performance-based.

>FORMATIVE ASSESSMENTS appraise learning through a continuous process of observation and feedback in order to improve the quality of teaching.  One of the common forms is diagnostic assessment,which measures children’s learning so that the program can be individualized appropriately.  Unlike summative assessment, formative assessment is ongoing, and evaluations are linked to curriculum and instruction.

**BENCHMARKS**are also known as performance standards, early learning standards (ELS)and content standards.These are clearly stated skill and knowledge expectations for specific ages or grades.  In other words, they describe what young children should be learning in all areas of development and subjects.  Benchmarks are increasingly used to measure program quality.

**DEVELOPMENTALLY APPPROPRIATE** means that early learning practices are both: >Age-appropriate-- meaning that expectations and approaches are based on what is typical for this developmental stage.

>Individually appropriate-- or rooted in knowledge about the particular child’s interests, strengths, and needs, as well as thee social and cultural context of their families (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997).

**DIAGNOSTIC ASSSESSMENT/TESTING – usually occurs following screening to further assess the suspected condition. For example, when a school age child “fails” the eye exam at school, s/he is then referred to an eye doctor for a detailed test. A preschooler who isn’t reaching milestones should be seen by an appropriate professional for diagnosis.**

**DOCUMENTATION**is the process of recording, organizing, and reporting children’s (or program) experiences and development.  It is a way to preserve and track evidence to make learning visible (Curtis & Carter, 2012) by sharing information with others.  Methods range from posting children’s art with quotes to gathering detailed individual portfolios.

**EVIDENCE-BASED is sometimes called data-based or scientifically-based, and refers to** a practice or strategy founded on objective evidence such on reliable research (replicable, valid, peer-reviewed, etc.).

**NORM-REFERENCED** means that a standardized test is interpreted by comparing the student’s results with those of a previously tested group of peers (or “norming” group).

**READINESS TEST**measures skills thought to predict later school success.  The most familiar to early childhood educators are tests that evaluate preschoolers’ probable success in kindergarten.  Such tests are controversial, since both their effectiveness and their appropriateness are questionable.

**RELIABILITY** refers to how consistent and accurate an assessment tool is. In research, reliability is a figure between .00 and 1.0—the higher the number, or the closer to 1.0, the better the reliability.

**SCREENING**is a quick way to check a large number of children to discern who may need more detailed assessment.  A good example of this is the vision screening that typically takes place in public schools.  All the children are briefly checked to see whether they need to be referred to have their sight professionally evaluated.

**VALIDITY** refers to how well an assessment tool measures what it is supposed to measure.  This is also represented by a figure between .00 and 1.0, with higher numbers indicating greater validity.