**3 Assessing Word Recognition and Reading Fluency**

Carol works as a third‐grade teacher in a school with high student turnover. “We are always getting students coming in and leaving the school. In my classroom alone last year I had 10 students leave and 13 new ones come in.” When new students enter her classroom Carol needs to assess where they are in reading: “Rather than try some standardized test, I use some of the informal instruments I have learned about over the years. I ask students to read for me for a few minutes from a grade‐level book. From that reading I can get a sense for their ability to decode words, I can estimate their reading efficiency or reading fluency, and by the students’ recall of what they read, I can get a pretty good sense for how well they understand what they read.”

Not only does Carol’s informal assessment provide her with a starting point for how to work with new children, it also gives her data that she can use as a baseline against which to determine how well children are responding to instruction and progressing in reading. Actually, Carol’s assessments aren’t just for new students who come to her classroom during the school year. She observes: “I assess everyone in my classroom during the first week of school, and I do a quick assessment for all my children about every two or three months throughout the school year. The information from these quick assessments truly helps me see if I am doing my job and guides me in planning instruction that meets the needs of all my students.”

No book on word recognition and reading fluency would be complete without providing guidance about assessment. In this chapter, then, we provide several approaches for assessing students’ word recognition and fluency. We divide our discussion of assessment into three portions: initial assessment, measuring continuous progress and making initial diagnoses, and diagnostic assessment. There is considerable overlap among these areas. Diagnostic assessment, for example, should include information about students’ initial assessments as well as progress‐monitoring information gathered periodically. Moreover, the diagnostic assessments can also be used to measure students’ progress.

**3.1 Initial Assessment**

Before beginning instruction in phonics, word recognition, and vocabulary with young students, it is important to know just where students are in terms of some basic understandings with print and how it works. Fortunately, it’s fairly easy to obtain this information.

**Phonemic Awareness**

Phonemic awareness, an important predictor of early and continual success in reading, is discussed in Chapter 6. There we present an adaptation of the Yopp‐Singer Test of Phonemic Awareness. This test of 22 items, which can be administered in minutes, provides teachers with a good understanding of individual students’ ability to perceive and manipulate speech sounds in words.

**Letter‐Name Knowledge**

Letter‐name knowledge is important in early reading instruction simply because teachers make reference to letters using their names. If students do not know letter names, they have a much greater chance of experiencing difficulty in word recognition instruction. Letter‐name knowledge is easily assessed by printing the letters, uppercase and lowercase, on index cards, shuffling the deck, and asking students individually to name the letters.

**Letter‐Sound Knowledge**

Letter‐sound knowledge is also an important part of early word recognition instruction. Phonics instruction usually begins with the sounds associated with individual letters. As with letter names, letter sounds can be assessed by presenting individual children with letter cards (primarily consonants) and asking them to identify the sounds associated with the letters.

Another way to assess students’ knowledge of letters and sounds is to examine their unaided writing or writing from dictation. Especially when students invent spellings for words, we can see much about their letter‐sound knowledge in their efforts.

For any of the preceding assessments, if a child has little or no knowledge of the concepts being tested, halt the assessment. If a child misses several items in a row, you can safely conclude that those concepts need to be taught. It’s important to limit the child’s frustration. You do not need to go through every letter name to conclude that letter‐name knowledge is largely present or absent.

**Word Meanings—​Vocabulary**

Readers who can decode words but who do not know their meanings are often referred to as word callers; they are seldom successful comprehenders. Therefore, you need to get a sense of students’ vocabulary or knowledge of word meanings.

A simple way to do this is to select 10 representative words from your grade‐level textbooks. Then present the words individually to each student, orally and in print, and ask the students to give the meaning of the word or use it appropriately in a sentence. Give full credit for words that are thoroughly defined or described, half credit for words that are partially defined or described, and no credit for words for which students have minimal or no understanding. A score of 9 or better indicates a strong vocabulary. A score of 5 or below indicates that vocabulary may hinder the student’s reading development, so he or she will need additional support and instruction in vocabulary.

**Basic Print Concepts**

Basic print concepts refer to ideas that are essential to reading and reading instruction. They are the stuff around which reading instruction revolves. Ideas such as letter, word, sentence, beginning, and end are concepts that can easily be assessed in individual students.

To begin an assessment of basic print concepts, have individual students dictate a brief story (two to four sentences) to you. The story could simply be about what the child did earlier in the day or the previous day. Print the story verbatim on a blank sheet of paper as it is dictated. Then, read it back to the student, pointing to individual words as they are read. Now ask the student questions about basic print concepts:

* Point to the beginning of the story or line of text.
* Point to the end of the story or line of text.
* Point to the top of the story.
* Point to the bottom of the story.
* Circle one letter in the story. Circle two letters together in the story.
* Circle a capital or uppercase letter in the story.
* Circle one word in the story. Circle two words together in the story.
* Point to a period; ask the child if she or he knows its name and purpose.
* Ask the child to point to and say any words he or she may know in the story.

If the child is not reading conventionally yet, you may also want to check the child’s knowledge of one‐to‐one correspondence between words spoken and written as well as his or her ability to learn words on sight. Rewrite the first sentence from the story and read it several times to the child with the child looking at the text. Point to the words as you read. After reading the sentence several times slowly, invite the child to read the text to you, pointing to the words as they are read. Does the child make a one‐to‐one match between the written and spoken words? Ask him or her to find certain words from the sentence. Is the child able to do so? Does the child find the words by immediate recognition or by rereading the sentence from the beginning? Write one of the words from the sentence on a card or another sheet of paper. Ask the child to identify the word. If the child is unable to do so, can she or he match it with the same word in the sentence? If the child can match the written word in isolation with the word in context, can he or she then say the word?



You will find these procedures helpful for English language learner (ELL) students as well as those whose first language is English. In case studies of twelve 4‐ and 5‐year‐old biliterate (Spanish/English) children, [Reyes and Azuara (2008)](https://content.ashford.edu/books/AUEDU371.16.1/sections/p7000478611000000000000000000ccb#P7000478611000000000000000000CD6) found that children developed metalinguistic knowledge and knowledge about print in both languages. They observed: “We learned that young bilingual children are beginning to understand that Spanish and English are written in distinct ways” (p. 390).

**Book Awareness**

Since so much of reading and other content area instruction centers on books, it is critical that even young students have some basic understandings about books and how they work. An easy way to assess book knowledge is to have a child examine a picture book and answer specific questions about it. For example, hand the picture book to the child so that the child receives it with the back cover facing up and the spine facing the child. The child’s responses to the following directives and questions should provide you with a good idea of book awareness:

* Show me the front of the book.
* Open the book up to where you start to read.
* (With the book open) On what page should you start to read?
* (Looking at one page) Where do you start reading on this page?
* What do you do when you come to the end of each line?
* What do you do when you come to the end of the page?
* (After looking at both pages of an open book) Now where do you go next in this book?

Although complete mastery is not necessary, some knowledge of letter names, letter sounds, sound segmentation and manipulation, and basic print concepts will surely facilitate students’ word recognition learning. Those students who experience severe difficulty in these assessments may need some extra help, in the classroom and at home, in these important early stages of reading and word recognition. These quick assessments may also be administered periodically to those individual students who have difficulty in order to chart their progress.

**3.2 Measuring Continuous Progress and Making Initial Diagnoses**

Instruction benefits students at different rates and in different ways. In this age of increased accountability, teachers must document students’ progress periodically throughout the school year. This provides evidence of student progress and clear and quick indications of children who may need more or different instruction.

A simple way to document progress and make preliminary diagnoses of reading problems in word recognition and fluency is to take periodic samples of students’ oral reading of authentic reading from trade books or textbooks. This approach, called curriculum‐based assessment ([Deno 1985](https://content.ashford.edu/books/AUEDU371.16.1/sections/p7000478611000000000000000000ccb%22%20%5Cl%20%22P7000478611000000000000000000CCE%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank); [Deno, Mirkin, and Chiang 1982](https://content.ashford.edu/books/AUEDU371.16.1/sections/p7000478611000000000000000000ccb#P7000478611000000000000000000CCF); [Salvia and Hughes 1990](https://content.ashford.edu/books/AUEDU371.16.1/sections/p7000478611000000000000000000ccb#P7000478611000000000000000000CD8)), is a valid, effective, and efficient way to monitor progress and identify potential trouble spots in students’ reading.

We have developed a simple and quick approach for measuring students’ progress in word recognition that is based on curriculum‐based assessment and on more traditional but time‐consuming informal reading inventories. We call it Three Minute Reading Assessments ([Rasinski and Padak 2005a](https://content.ashford.edu/books/AUEDU371.16.1/sections/p7000478611000000000000000000ccb%22%20%5Cl%20%22P7000478611000000000000000000CD4%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank), [2005b](https://content.ashford.edu/books/AUEDU371.16.1/sections/p7000478611000000000000000000ccb#P7000478611000000000000000000CD5)). Although Three Minute Reading Assessments is available commercially, teachers can easily create their own version of the assessment using their own materials. Here is how it works:

* Find several grade‐level passages of about 200 to 400 words from textbooks or trade books appropriate to your assigned grade level.
* Ask individual students to read one passage in their best voice and at their normal reading rate. Remind them that you will be asking them to recall what they have read after reading the passage.
* As each individual student reads, keep a copy of the passage in front of you and mark any uncorrected errors he or she makes. Also mark where the student is at the end of one minute.
* When the student has read the passage, remove it from his or her sight and ask the child to retell what he or she read. If the child is unable to provide any summary or response to the passage, you may wish to offer prompts. At this point the assessment is finished. It should take approximately three to five minutes to complete.
* Do this assessment at the beginning of the school year to get baseline data and then monthly or quarterly to determine whether students are responding well to your instruction and are making progress over the course of the school year.

You may wish to record each student’s reading to document and analyze his or her performance. You can also document students’ reading errors, one‐minute reading location, and comprehension while they are reading and recalling what they have read. Here is how you can use students’ performance to measure word recognition, fluency, and comprehension.

**Word Recognition**

Determine the percentage of words students read correctly. This can be done by dividing the number of words read correctly by the total number of words read in the passage. For example, if the passage had 210 words and a student mispronounced 6 of the words, he or she would have read 204 words correctly. Divide 204 by 210 to get a percentage of words read correctly: 97 percent. In other words, this student read 97 percent of the words correctly in the passage.

A score of 98 percent or better indicates that the student has strong word recognition skills for material at his or her grade level. Scores between 93 and 97 percent are indicative of adequate word recognition, and scores at 92 percent or below indicate marginal or weak word recognition skills.

Used as a measure of continuous progress, this portion of the Three Minute Reading Assessment can help you to track a student’s word recognition skills; in this case, you will want the percentage of words a student reads correctly to increase as the school year progresses. Used diagnostically, it will enable you to determine which students need additional focused instruction in phonics and word recognition; in this case, you will want to identify those students who score at the 92 percent or below level and then to provide them with additional assessments (see the next major section in this chapter) to verify their difficulty in word recognition.

**Fluency**

Fluency has two components: automaticity in word recognition and prosody, or expressiveness while reading. Automaticity refers to the ability to recognize words with minimal cognitive effort. This is significant because readers who minimize the amount of cognitive energy needed for word recognition can employ that energy for the more important goal in reading—​comprehension.

**Figure 3.1 Target Reading Rates for Automaticity by Grade Level**

| **Grade** | **Fall** | **Winter** | **Spring** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 1  | 0–​10 wcpm  | 10–​50 wcpm  | 30–​90 wcpm  |
| 2  | 20–​80  | 40–​100  | 60–​130  |
| 3  | 60–​110  | 70–​120  | 80–​140  |
| 4  | 70–​120  | 80–​130  | 90–​150  |
| 5  | 80–​130  | 90–​140  | 100–​160  |
| 6  | 90–​140  | 100–​150  | 110–​170  |
| 7  | 100–​150  | 110–​160  | 120–​180  |
| 8  | 110–​160  | 120–​180  | 130–​190  |

Automaticity is very easy to assess using the curriculum‐based assessment/Three Minute Reading Assessment format. The number of words students read correctly in the initial minute of reading (wcpm) is the measure of automaticity in word recognition. When you use this format as a measure of continuous progress, you will want to see students’ reading rates increase over the course of the school year. When you use it diagnostically, compare students’ performance against the reading rates for the appropriate grade level and time of year (see [Figure 3.1](https://content.ashford.edu/books/AUEDU371.16.1/sections/p7000478611000000000000000000ca4#P7000478611000000000000000000CA9)). Students who score near the low end of the grade‐level range or below may need additional instruction and support in fluency automaticity.

Prosodic, expressive reading involves readers using their voices (whether reading orally or silently [internal voices]) to add meaning to the words. Meaning can be expressed through phrasing, emphasis, pausing, volume, rate, and pitch, as well as the words. So when readers read with expression, they are reading with meaning. In our Three Minute Reading Assessments, expressive reading is assessed by simply listening to students read and asking ourselves if the reading sounds like real language—​Is the student reading with good phrasing, appropriate volume, and pace? Does it sound smooth or does it tend to be choppy? A scoring rubric (see [Figure 3.2](https://content.ashford.edu/books/AUEDU371.16.1/sections/p7000478611000000000000000000ca4#P7000478611000000000000000000CAC)), adapted from [Zutell and Rasinski (1991)](https://content.ashford.edu/books/AUEDU371.16.1/sections/p7000478611000000000000000000ccb#P7000478611000000000000000000CD9), is divided into four distinct aspects of expressive reading. Simply listen to students read and score them for each of the four dimensions of fluency.

**Figure 3.2 Multidimensional Fluency Scale**

| **Score** | **Expression & Volume** | **Phrasing** | **Smoothness** | **Pace** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 1.  | Reads words as if simply to get them out. Little sense of trying to make text sound like natural language. Tends to read in a quiet voice.  | Reads in monotone with little sense of phrase boundaries; frequently reads word‐by‐word.  | Makes frequent extended pauses, hesitations, false starts, sound‐outs, repetitions, and/or multiple attempts.  | Reads slowly and laboriously.  |
| 2.  | Begins to use voice to make text sound like natural language in some areas but not in others. Focus remains largely on pronouncing the words. Still reads in a quiet voice.  | Frequently reads in two‐ and three‐word phrases, giving the impression of choppy reading; improper stress and intonation; fails to mark ends of sentences and clauses.  | Experiences several “rough spots” in text where extended pauses or hesitations are more frequent and disruptive.  | Reads moderately slowly.  |
| 3.  | Makes text sound like natural language throughout the better part of the passage. Occasionally slips into expressionless reading. Voice volume is generally appropriate throughout the text.  | Reads with a mixture of run‐ons, midsentence pauses for breath, and some choppiness; reasonable stress and intonation.  | Occasionally breaks smooth rhythm because of difficulties with specific words and/or structures.  | Reads with an uneven mixture of fast and slow pace.  |
| 4.  | Reads with good expression and enthusiasm throughout the text. Varies expression and volume to match his or her interpretation of the passage.  | Generally reads with good phrasing, mostly in clause and sentence units, with adequate attention to expression.  | Generally reads smoothly with some breaks, but resolves word and structure difficulties quickly, usually through self‐correction.  | Consistently reads at conversational pace; appropriate rate throughout reading.  |

Source: Adapted from Zutell and Rasinski (1991).

Over the course of a school year you should see continual improvement in students’ expressive reading. Diagnostically, students whose total score is 8 or below on grade‐level texts demonstrate inadequate expressiveness in their reading, which may be related to difficulty in comprehension. These students may need additional and focused instruction on reading with appropriate expression and meaning.

**Comprehension**

Comprehension is the goal of reading. Although comprehension is not the main focus of this book , we need to realize that we teach word recognition and fluency so that students can comprehend what they read. When it is possible to gain information about students’ comprehension, we need to take advantage of it.

The Three Minute Reading Assessments, or an adaptation you may wish to develop for your own use, allows you to assess students’ global reading comprehension using the retelling they provide after they have finished reading. Rate the retelling according to the rubric presented in [Figure 3.3](https://content.ashford.edu/books/AUEDU371.16.1/sections/p7000478611000000000000000000ca4#P7000478611000000000000000000CB1). When you use this rubric as a measure of ongoing progress in reading comprehension, you will want to see higher scores and more elaborate retellings over the course of the school year. As a diagnostic tool, scores that fall in the lower half of the rubric may suggest the need for further assessment and direct instruction in comprehension skills and strategies.

**Figure 3.3 Comprehension Rubric**

1. The student has no recall or minimal recall of only a fact or two from the passage.
2. The student recalls a number of unrelated facts of varied importance.
3. The student recalls the main idea of the passage with a few supporting details.
4. The student recalls the main idea along with a fairly robust set of supporting details, although not necessarily organized logically or sequentially as presented in the passage.
5. The student’s recall is a comprehensive summary of the passage, presented in a logical order, with a robust set of details, and includes a statement of main idea.
6. The student’s recall is a comprehensive summary of the passage, presented in a logical order, with a robust set of details, and includes a statement of main idea. The student also makes reasonable connections beyond the text to his or her own personal life, another text.

As the name implies, this assessment procedure takes only a matter of minutes per student to administer and score. When your students’ reading is sampled in this way every month or so and charted (see [Figure 3.4](https://content.ashford.edu/books/AUEDU371.16.1/sections/p7000478611000000000000000000ca4#P7000478611000000000000000000CB3)), you should get a good picture of each student’s progress in several important reading competencies over time. As you analyze the trends in your students’ reading development, it will become evident—​either through the initial assessment or over time—​which students are experiencing difficulty in word recognition, fluency, or comprehension. These students may require more detailed and diagnostic analyses of their reading in order to identify specific areas for corrective instruction.

**Figure 3.4 Student Reading Progress Chart**

| **Date** | **Text Source and Grade Level** | **Percentage of Words Read Correctly** | **Reading Rate (wcpm)** | **Prosody: 4–​16** | **Comprehension: 1–​6** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  | \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  | \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  | \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  | \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  | \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  |
| \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  | \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  | \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  | \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  | \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  | \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  |
| \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  | \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  | \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  | \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  | \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  | \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  |
| \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  | \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  | \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  | \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  | \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  | \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  |
| \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  | \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  | \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  | \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  | \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  | \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  |
| \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  | \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  | \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  | \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  | \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  | \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  |
| \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  | \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  | \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  | \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  | \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  | \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  |
| \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  | \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  | \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  | \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  | \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  | \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  |
| \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  | \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  | \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  | \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  | \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  | \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  |
| \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  | \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  | \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  | \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  | \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  | \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  |
| \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  | \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  | \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  | \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  | \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  | \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  |
| \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  | \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  | \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  | \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  | \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  | \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  |
| \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  | \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  | \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  | \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  | \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  | \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  |
| \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  | \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  | \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  | \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  | \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  | \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  |

[Previous section](https://content.ashford.edu/books/AUEDU371.16.1/sections/p7000478611000000000000000000ca4)

[Next section](https://content.ashford.edu/books/AUEDU371.16.1/sections/p7000478611000000000000000000cc3)

**3.3 Diagnostic Assessment**

**Word Recognition**

Diagnostic assessment provides further information about individual students’ word recognition and fluency so teachers can tailor needs‐based instruction. Moreover, these assessments can also be used to measure ongoing progress in these areas.

Sight vocabulary words are words that readers recognize instantly and automatically. One way to measure growth in this area is to keep a running tally of the contents of students’ word banks (see [Chapter 11](https://content.ashford.edu/books/AUEDU371.16.1/sections/p7000478611000000000000000000e66#P7000478611000000000000000000E66)). As we mentioned earlier, the best words to have in one’s sight vocabulary are those that appear with the greatest frequency in reading. The Fry Instant Words are high‐frequency words that are good candidates for any reader’s sight vocabulary. The first 300 of these words make up approximately two‐thirds of all the words elementary school readers will encounter.

High‐frequency words can also be used diagnostically. We have created a diagnostic sight word assessment by identifying words that should be learned by sight in grades 1 through 4 (see [Figure 3.5](https://content.ashford.edu/books/AUEDU371.16.1/sections/p7000478611000000000000000000cb6#P7000478611000000000000000000CB9)). Put these words on index cards, one per card, and present them to individual students. Students should read the words accurately and quickly in order to be given credit. Since this assessment measures sight vocabulary, accurate but slow recognition should not be counted correct. First‐grade students should have the first group of 20 mastered (90 percent immediate accuracy, or 18 of 20) by the end of first grade; second‐graders should have the first two groups of 20 mastered by the end of second grade; third‐grade students should have the first three groups mastered as sight words by the end of third grade; and fourth‐graders and above should have all four groups of 20 mastered by the end of grade four. Students who fall below these thresholds can benefit from sight vocabulary instruction of high‐frequency and other common words.

**Phonograms, Word Families, and Rimes**

In [Chapter 7](https://content.ashford.edu/books/AUEDU371.16.1/sections/p7000478611000000000000000000d9e#P7000478611000000000000000000D9E) we note that word patterns, particularly rimes or phonograms, are an excellent focus for teaching phonics. In addition, we share the 38 most common rimes (Fry 1998) that should be initially taught. In order to assess students’ mastery of the most common rimes, we have developed an informal word list test (see [Figure 3.6](https://content.ashford.edu/books/AUEDU371.16.1/sections/p7000478611000000000000000000cb6#P7000478611000000000000000000CBD)) that contains the 38 rimes in one‐syllable and multi-syllable words. Asking students to read the words in the lists should provide an indication of students who have mastered these rimes and those who are still in the process of learning and may need more thorough instruction on particular rimes.

**Figure 3.5 High‐Frequency and Common Words for Sight Word Assessment**

| **Group 1** | **Group 2** | **Group 3** | **Group 4** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Students should have, by the end of first grade, automatic mastery (instant recognition of 90 percent or more) of Group 1 words, automatic mastery of Group 2 words by the end of second grade, automatic mastery of Group 3 words by the end of third grade, and automatic mastery of Group 4 words by the end of fourth grade. |
| some  | bread  | city  | bicycle  |
| have  | sound  | country  | remember  |
| was  | work  | earth  | certain  |
| you  | sentence  | laugh  | transport  |
| they  | know  | thought  | encourage  |
| were  | where  | few  | covered  |
| your  | through  | group  | measure  |
| their  | around  | might  | midnight  |
| each  | follow  | always  | carefully  |
| said  | apple  | important  | language  |
| would  | another  | children  | government  |
| about  | large  | myself  | thousands  |
| them  | because  | river  | attraction  |
| time  | went  | carry  | understand  |
| write  | please  | second  | building  |
| people  | picture  | enough  | machine  |
| water  | play  | birthday  | weather  |
| yellow  | animal  | mountain  | rearrange  |
| down  | mother  | young  | instruments  |
| over  | America  | family  | continuing  |

Source: Based on Fry (1998).

**Figure 3.6 Rasinski–​Padak Common Phonogram Assessment**

| **Ask students to pronounce each of the following words in Groups 1 and 2. Make note of any errors or patterns of errors that occur.** |
| --- |
| **Group 1** | **Group 2** | **Group 1** | **Group 2** |
| say  | playmate  | bug  | dugout  |
| spill  | willful  | stop  | popcorn  |
| ship  | skipping  | chin  | tinsel  |
| bat  | satisfy  | Stan  | flannel  |
| slam  | hamster  | nest  | Chester  |
| brag  | shaggy  | think  | trinket  |
| stack  | packer  | grow  | snowplow  |
| crank  | blanket  | chew  | newest  |
| quick  | cricket  | score  | adore  |
| yell  | shellfish  | red  | bedtime  |
| got  | hotcake  | crab  | dabble  |
| king  | stacking  | knob  | robber  |
| clap  | kidnap  | block  | jockey  |
| junk  | bunker  | brake  | remake  |
| nail  | railroad  | shine  | porcupine  |
| chain  | mainstay  | light  | sighted  |
| weed  | seedling  | brim  | swimming  |
| try  | myself  | stuck  | truckload  |
| spout  | without  | chum  | drummer  |

The Common Phonogram Assessment provides information on the phonograms or rimes students know and may not yet have mastered; however, neither it nor the Fry Instant Word List Sample provides information on students’ developmental level in word recognition or their mastery of some of the more traditional phonics concepts.

The cloze procedure can assess students’ use of meaningful context to decode words in text. Cloze assessments are created with a few more rules than cloze texts for instruction, as described in [Chapter 12](https://content.ashford.edu/books/AUEDU371.16.1/sections/p7000478611000000000000000000e8b#P7000478611000000000000000000E8B) . To create one, find a text of at least 150 words from students’ reading curriculum. Retype the passage leaving the first sentence intact. Then delete every fifth word, leaving a blank space where the word was deleted. After at least 25 deletions, add a final sentence with no deletions. Then ask students to write in the words they believe fit the deletions. If students find the text too difficult to read on their own, you may wish to read it to them, making sure you don’t read the deleted words.

An alternative (and easier) construction involves making a copy of the target passage, deleting every appropriate word by lining through it with a marker, and numbering each deletion by hand. Then make sufficient copies for use. Provide students with the cloze text and a numbered answer sheet on which to write the deleted words.

Scoring is fairly simple. Any word that closely fits the context should be counted correct. A score in the range of 40 to 60 percent correct indicates that the text will be useful for instruction. Less than 40 percent correct may suggest that the student has difficulty in using context to determine unknown words.

**Reading Fluency**

Fluency is the ability to read expressively, meaningfully, with appropriate phrasing, and with appropriate speed. Given that assessing expressiveness, meaningfulness, and phrasing may involve a bit of a judgment call, assessing fluency may seem somewhat enigmatic. Nevertheless, since it is an important part of reading, we need ways to assess it.

Perhaps the easiest way of assessing the automatic word recognition component of fluency is through reading rate. Although this may seem a rather gross measure, several studies have indicated that rate is a predictor of overall reading proficiency. At the very least, reading rates provide some indication of the degree to which students can decode words by sight or at least through efficient analysis. As you may recall from earlier in this chapter, we built reading rate into our Three Minute Reading Assessments. If the reading rate from the Three Minute Reading Assessments appears to demonstrate a concern with word recognition automaticity, you can verify this determination by having students orally read additional passages at or slightly below their assigned grade level. When students read in order to measure rate, be sure to ask them to read in their normal manner. You should probably make several rate calculations over a couple of days to determine each student’s average reading rate.

Students’ average reading rates can be compared to grade and time‐of‐year norm ranges (see [Figure 3.1](https://content.ashford.edu/books/AUEDU371.16.1/sections/p7000478611000000000000000000ca4#P7000478611000000000000000000CA9)). Students scoring below or at the lower end of the norm range may require more intensive and targeted instruction.



A second method for assessing fluency involves listening to students read a text at their instructional levels and rating the expressiveness of their oral performance against some standards. Several studies ([Daane et al. 2005](https://content.ashford.edu/books/AUEDU371.16.1/sections/p7000478611000000000000000000ccb%22%20%5Cl%20%22P7000478611000000000000000000CCD%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank); [Pinnell et al. 1995](https://content.ashford.edu/books/AUEDU371.16.1/sections/p7000478611000000000000000000ccb#P7000478611000000000000000000CD2); [Rasinski 1985](https://content.ashford.edu/books/AUEDU371.16.1/sections/p7000478611000000000000000000ccb#P7000478611000000000000000000CD3)) have found a robust relationship between elementary students’ expressiveness in their oral reading and their silent reading comprehension and overall reading proficiency.

A procedure and rubric for measuring expressiveness in our Three Minute Reading Assessments is presented earlier in this chapter. If this assessment indicates concerns, gather several additional samples by asking the student to read several other grade‐appropriate passages from trade books and textbooks and rating their performance using the rubric in [Figure 3.2](https://content.ashford.edu/books/AUEDU371.16.1/sections/p7000478611000000000000000000ca4#P7000478611000000000000000000CAC). When listening to students read for expressiveness, don’t read the text. Rather attend to their oral expressiveness (phrasing, volume, pitch, stress, rate, etc.). Students who consistently score on the lower half of the rubric (10 or below) likely need corrective instruction on reading with appropriate expression and meaning.

Some method of summarizing results and keeping track of students’ growth over time is desirable. Many teachers we know use continuum or summary forms like those depicted in [Figure 3.7](https://content.ashford.edu/books/AUEDU371.16.1/sections/p7000478611000000000000000000cc3#P7000478611000000000000000000CC4) and [Figure 3.8](https://content.ashford.edu/books/AUEDU371.16.1/sections/p7000478611000000000000000000cc3#P7000478611000000000000000000CC7). Periodically, say every month or grading period, evaluate the accumulated assessment information and mark each child’s progress on a copy of the continuum or summary form. Assessment data regularly recorded on a continuum or summary form provides an easy and understandable way to track progress over time. The forms are useful for conferences with students and parents as well.

**In Conclusion**

Assessment should provide us with measures of students’ progress as well as directions for further instruction. Certainly other measures of word recognition and reading fluency are available; if you find some that work especially well for you and your students, we recommend that you use them.

However, we urge caution. A recent large‐scale study compared results from two commonly used assessments, the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) and the Observation Survey (OS) ([Clay 2006](https://content.ashford.edu/books/AUEDU371.16.1/sections/p7000478611000000000000000000ccb#P7000478611000000000000000000CCC)). [Doyle et al. (2008)](https://content.ashford.edu/books/AUEDU371.16.1/sections/p7000478611000000000000000000ccb#P7000478611000000000000000000CD0) compared scores on these two assessments for more than 6,000 first‐graders. They found that the assessments yielded similar results for letter identification, phonemic awareness, the alphabetic principle, and oral reading. “A problematic finding was the divergence in the identification of learner at‐riskness revealed by the alternative measures. Specifically, applying the DIBELS criteria to the sample studied resulted in identification of a substantially reduced number of at‐risk learners.” The authors speculate that this discrepancy is due to differing theories about reading: “While DIBELS appears to assume that the acquisition of discrete skills causes later success, the OS is constructed to allow assessment of the complexity of literacy behaviors” (p. 157). As we mention throughout this book, use your professional judgment to interpret the results of any assessment, the ones we have described or any other.

**Figure 3.7 Continuum for Word Recognition and Fluency Assessment**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Child’s Name\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_School Year\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ | Teacher’s Name\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ |
|  | **No Evidence**  | **In Process**  | **Well Developed**  |
| Letter‐Name Knowledge  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |
| Letter‐Sound Knowledge  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |
| Basic Print Concepts  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |
| One‐to‐One Correspondence  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |
| Word Recognition  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |
| Sight Vocabulary  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |
| Phonograms  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |
| Context (Cloze)  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |
| Fluency  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |

**Figure 3.8 Student Reading Summary**

| **Date** | **Sight Vocab.** | **Phonograms** | **Word Rec.** | **Cloze** | **Text Read** | **Fluency Rating** | **Fluency Rate (wcpm)** | **Comprehension** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Student Name:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ | Grade:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ | School Year:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ |  |  |  |  |  |  |
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The assessment instruments and approaches in this chapter provide you with some of the measures we have found useful in our own practice for determining progress and identifying areas for further instruction. For the most part, the assessments are quick, informal, easy to learn and administer, controlled and informed by the teacher or examiner (not some disembodied test manual), and can be analyzed in a variety of ways to get a better understanding of readers’ word recognition and fluency. This combination of attributes provides you with an assessment foundation that will help you better understand your students’ word recognition and fluency and design instruction that most effectively meets their needs.