6 Reading Assessments

- Assessing Reading Difficulties and Disabilities
- Reading Skills
- Tests That Measure Reading
- Answers to Questions About Reading Tests
- Assessing Reading: Special Factors

In this chapter, you will learn about reading difficulties and disabilities, such as dyslexia, and how reading is assessed. You will learn about reading skills, tests that are used to measure reading skills, and answers to frequently asked questions about reading tests.

Reading is the gateway skill to learning. In third grade, the focus of your child's education changes from learning to read to reading to learn. Your child will use reading skills to learn history, science, geography, literature, math, and other subjects in the curriculum.

If your child has not learned to read by the end of third grade, he will be in trouble. He will not be able to learn independently from books. He will not understand what the teachers write on the board. He will not be able to write reports and essays. He will fall further behind his classmates. If he is like most children with reading problems, he will not catch up unless he receives a well-designed, research-based intervention.

There are many reasons why children do not read fluently by third grade. If you suspect that your child has reading difficulties or a reading disability, get an evaluation now. Do not delay. A reading assessment is the first step in identifying your child's problems and developing solutions so he can improve his reading.

Children Who Are Poor Readers in 3rd Grade Do Not Catch Up

"75% of children who were poor readers in the 3rd grade remained poor readers in the 9th grade and could not read well when they became adults."

–Joseph Torgeson in *Catch Them Before They Fall*

www.aft.org/pdfs/americaneducator/springsummer1998/torgesen.pdf

Assessing Reading Difficulties and Disabilities

A comprehensive reading assessment should measure your child's decoding and receptive language skills.

The decoding part of the evaluation should include tests of:

- Alphabet
- Word identification (word recognition)
- Word attack (phonics)
- Spelling
- Fluency (rate and accuracy)
- Passage comprehension

The receptive language portion should include tests that measure listening comprehension and vocabulary. Listening comprehension tests measure how well your child understands language. These tests can alert you to receptive language problems that affect reading comprehension.

Weaknesses in phonological processing skills are the leading cause of reading disabilities. A comprehensive reading assessment should include tests that measure:

- Phonological/phonemic awareness
- Phonological memory
- Rapid naming

If your child has a history of speech and language problems or you suspect that he has

a language problem, a comprehensive reading assessment should include a speech and language assessment.[1]

Your child's hearing and vision should be checked. It is important to rule out problems with visual acuity. Most reading difficulties are not caused by vision problems and cannot be corrected by vision-related therapies.

The school wants to do an informal reading assessment on my child. What is an informal reading assessment?

An informal reading assessment may be a teacher-made test or an informal reading inventory (IRI). It can also be the end of the unit test from the reading program that is used with all the students.

Teacher-made tests are based on the curriculum and prepared by teachers. Teachers use scores to measure their students' progress.

Informal reading inventories include graded word lists, graded passages, and comprehension questions for the passages. Informal reading inventories usually classify four levels of reading skill:

1. Independent level: The child reads without assistance.
2. Instructional level: The child finds the material challenging, not too hard or too easy.
3. Frustration level: The child is frustrated when trying to understand what he reads.
4. Listening capacity or potential level: The child understands material that is read to him.

An informal reading inventory **may not be used** to determine if a child is eligible for special education or in other high-stakes education decisions.

The school wants to do a screening test of my child's reading. What is a screening test?

A screening test is a brief assessment that is intended to identify children who are at risk for educational or learning problems. Screening tests are limited and **may not** identify a child's problems that need to be evaluated. Screening tests should **never** be used in place of a comprehensive evaluation.[2]

Who can evaluate my child's reading skills?

Reading specialists, learning disability specialists, special educators, speech and language pathologists, clinical psychologists, and school psychologists evaluate reading skills.

Can you test a child for dyslexia?

Yes. Dyslexia is a specific learning disability that affects language.

A child with dyslexia will have difficulty reading accurately and fluently. Spelling will be poor. Most children with dyslexia have weaknesses in phonological processing. [3] Many also have weaknesses in rapid naming.

Most standardized, norm-referenced tests that are used to test for learning disabilities are also used to evaluate children for dyslexia.

Did You Know?
Dyslexia is listed as a specific learning disability in IDEA.

Dyslexia is listed as a specific learning disability in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and implementing regulations. See the definition of "specific learning disability" in the federal law and special education regulations.[4]

Reading Skills

No test measures all reading skills. Different tests measure different skills. Reading skills include:

Letters (LTRS): Child identifies letters names and sounds, or points to letters in response to letter names or sounds.

Phonological Awareness (PA): Phonemic awareness is an umbrella term that refers to the awareness of individual sounds in words. It includes skills at the word, syllable, and individual sound level. This skill serves as the foundation for learning to read.

In tests of phonological awareness the child rhymes words, segments sounds in words, blends sounds, and identifies sounds. The ability to perceive and manipulate individual sounds is most important.

Rapid Automatic Naming (RAN): Child names colors, objects, letters, or numbers in series. Letter naming is the most important skill for reading.

Letter &Word Identification (L/W ID): Child recognizes regular and irregular words in a list. Younger children and poor readers recognize letters.

Word Attack (WA): Child recognizes nonsense words. Nonsense words are made-up words that assess skill with phonics.

Reading Vocabulary (RV): Child provides antonyms, synonyms, or complete analogies in response to written words.

Reading Comprehension (RC): Child answers open-ended or multiple-choice questions, points to pictures, or fills in missing words. Different methods for assessing comprehension may result in different scores, depending on the child's profile.

Fluency and Automaticity (FL/AU): Child reads passages aloud while being timed. Tests of automaticity and accuracy require the child to read real words and/or nonsense words while being timed.

Listening Comprehension (LC): Child answers questions based on passages that are read to him. LC can provide important information about comprehension difficulties.

Tests That Measure Reading

Your child's reading should be assessed by tests that measure specific skills. Achievement tests can assess multiple subjects or a single subject. Frequently used multiple-subject achievement tests used to assess reading skills include:

- *Kaufman Test of Educational Achievement, Second Edition (KTEA-II)*
- *Wechsler Individual Achievement Test, Third Edition (WIAT-III)*
- *Woodcock-Johnson III Tests of Achievement (WJ III ACH)*

The *Kaufman Test of Educational Achievement, Second Edition (KTEA-II)* provides valuable information about phonological awareness, oral fluency, and reading fluency. The oral language subtests are not a substitute for a speech and language evaluation. Check Table 6-1 for the reading skills measured by the *KTEA-II*.

In addition to composite and subtest scores, the *KTEA-II* provides an error analysis that is useful in planning direct, explicit systematic instruction. Composite scores should be viewed with caution when there are large differences between subtest scores. You should always be provided with subtest scores.

The *KTEA-II* is under revision. You will find additional information and updates at www.pearsonassessments.com.

The *Wechsler Individual Achievement Test, Third Edition (WIAT-III)* measures the reading skills checked in Table 6-1. The *WIAT-III* oral language subtest results should be interpreted with caution. They are not a substitute for a comprehensive evaluation of receptive and expressive language skills.

The *WIAT-III* has an unusual way of scoring the reading comprehension test for children who read significantly below grade level. If your child is a poor reader but his score on the *WIAT-III* reading comprehension test is high, ask the evaluator whether he was dropped back to below grade-level passages. Sometimes children earn high scores because they are not actually reading grade-level text. The *WIAT-III* may be scored by computer or by hand.

Many evaluators use the *WIAT-III* together with the Wechsler tests of intelligence so they can compare ability and achievement. See Chapter 4 for information about the Wechsler and other tests of intelligence. Additional information about the Wechsler tests is available at www.psychcorp.come

The *Woodcock-Johnson III Tests of Achievement (WJ III ACH)* include a standard battery and an extended battery. See Table 6-1 for the skills measured by these batteries. The *WJ III* includes other supplemental subtests.

The *WJ III* is scored by computer and cannot be scored by hand. Because scoring tables are

not provided, it is difficult for an evaluator to verify the accuracy of scores obtained. If you have questions about the accuracy of your child's scores, ask the evaluator to double check the raw scores on the protocol and as typed into the scoring program.

The *WJ III* subtests are organized into clusters. If there are significant differences between your child's subtest scores, you should view the cluster scores with caution. Because the subtests are short, they may not provide sufficient information about what your child knows and is ready to learn.

The *WJ III* written expression subtests should always be supplemented by writing tests that require longer writing samples. The Passage Comprehension subtest should be supplemented by reading tests that use longer passages.

The *WJ III* is under revision. Updates and more information is available at www.riversidepublishing.com.

Single-subject reading tests often provide more information about your child's strengths and weaknesses. Commonly used single-subject reading tests include:

- *Comprehensive Test of Phonological Processing, Second Edition* (*CTOPP2*)
- *Test of Word Reading Efficiency, Second Edition* (*TOWRE-2*)
- *Gray Oral Reading Tests, Fifth Edition* (*GORT-5*)
- *Test of Silent Word Reading Fluency* (*TOSWRF*)

Tests That Measure Phonological Processing

The *Comprehensive Test of Phonological Processing, Second Edition (CTOPP2)* is the gold standard for phonological processing. The *CTOPP2* measures the skills that make reading and spelling possible. Assessing these skills makes it possible to understand why a child has difficulty reading and how to design his instruction.

The *CTOPP2* measures three areas of phonological processing:

Phonological memory is where speech sounds are held before they are processed. It is important for learning decoding, spelling, and vocabulary.

Phonological awareness refers to the awareness of speech sounds. It is the prerequisite skill for learning phonics. A child who has a weakness in phonological awareness is often described as having dyslexia.

Rapid naming is the ability to name objects, colors, letters, and numbers aloud quickly while being timed. This is important for reading with fluency.

Tests That Measure Reading Fluency and Comprehension

Fluency (rate and accuracy) is essential for reading comprehension. Children who read slowly take longer to complete assignments and they remember less.

The *Test of Word Reading Efficiency, Second Edition (TOWRE-2)* measures the child's ability to recognize real and nonsense

words in a list format with accuracy and automaticity. The *TOWRE-2* can help differentiate between different types of reading deficits and can be used to measure progress.

The *Test of Silent Word Reading Fluency (TOSWRF)* measures reading fluency. The child reads words printed without spaces and makes slash marks between the words while being timed. The *TOSWRF* is not designed to measure reading comprehension. This test is not appropriate for a child who has difficulty controlling his pencil.

The *Gray Oral Reading Tests, Fifth Edition (GORT-5),* measure reading fluency and comprehension. The child answers questions based on passages that he reads aloud. The *GORT-5* measures oral reading rate, accuracy, fluency, and comprehension. It also provides an Oral Reading Index, a combined measure of fluency and comprehension.

As you review the skills measured by reading tests in Table 6-1, you will see that no reading test measures all reading skills. To understand what your child's test scores mean, you need to know what skills the test measured. A test that measures many skills may not be better than a test that measures fewer skills well.

Answers to Questions About Reading Tests

My first-grader's scores on the reading subtests of the *Woodcock-Johnson III Tests of Achievement* were below average. I am concerned but his teacher says he will read when he is ready. Do reading test scores improve when a child matures?

You are right to be concerned. If your son's reading subtest scores are below average in first grade, he has a problem. Reading problems are not caused by immaturity and cannot be outgrown. The notion that children who are late bloomers in reading will catch up when they get older is a myth.[5]

You need to get a comprehensive reading assessment. Tests that measure your child's phonological processing, phonics skills, and spelling will clarify why your child is having difficulty and what skills need to be addressed.

On the *Woodcock-Johnson III*, my child scored much higher on the Letter & Word Identification subtest than on the Word Attack subtest. What do these scores mean?

Good question! The difference in these subtest scores is important. The Letter & Word Identification subtest measures your child's ability to read regular and irregular words. The Word Attack subtest measures her ability to apply the rules of phonics to unfamiliar words (nonsense words).

The differences in her subtest scores may mean that she learned to read by sight and did not learn the rules of phonics. She does not know how to break large words into syllables to sound them out.

She is likely to have trouble when she reaches third or fourth grade. Because she does not

Table 6-1. Reading Tests and the Skills They Measure

Test	LTRS	PA	RAN	L/W ID	WA	RV	RC	FL/ AU	LC
*Comprehensive Test of Phonological Processing, Second Edition (CTOPP2)***		√	√						
Gray Diagnostic Reading Tests, Second Edition (GDRT-2)		√	√	√		√	Age 8 & above		√
Gray Oral Reading Tests, Fifth Edition (GORT-5)							√	√	
Kaufman Test of Educational Achievement, Second Edition (KTEA-II)		√	√	√	√		MP & OE	√	√
Lindamood Auditory Conceptualization Test, Third Edition (LAC-3)		√							
Phonological Awareness Test, Second Edition (PAT2)		√		√	√				
Test of Phonological Awareness, Second Edition:Plus (TOPA-2+)		√		√					
Test of Reading Comprehension, Fourth Edition (TORC-4)						√	MC	√	
Test of Silent Contextual Reading Fluency, Second Edition (TOSCRF-2)								√	
Test of Silent Word Reading Fluency, Second Edition (TOSWRF-2)								√	
Test of Word Reading Efficiency, Second Edition (TOWRE2)								√	
Wechsler Individual Achievement Test, Third Edition (WIAT-III)				√	√		OE	√	√
Woodcock-Johnson III Tests of Achievement (WJ III ACH)	√	√	√	√	√	√	FB	√	√
*Woodcock Reading Mastery Test, Third Edition (WRMT-3)***		√	√	√	√	√	FB	√	√
Word Identification and Spelling Test (WIST)				√	√				

Key: Letters (LTRS), Phonological Awareness (PA), Rapid Automatic Naming (RAN), Letter Word ID (L/W ID), Word Attack (WA), Reading Vocabulary (RV), Reading Comprehension (RC), Fluency and Automaticity (FL/AU), Listening Comprehension (LC). **Formats:** OE = Open Ended. FB=Fill in blank MC= Multiple Choice ** **May give elevated scores**

know the rules of phonics, she will not have the tools she needs to recognize new words.

No research supports using sight word instruction when teaching a child to read.[6] You want your child to be an independent reader. Before she can be an independent reader, she must learn how letters represent the sounds of the English language.

My child is in second grade but he hasn't learned to read. His score on the Passage Comprehension subtest of the *Woodcock-Johnson III* was in the average range. How can he get an average score when he can't read?

Some subtests, including the Passage Comprehension subtest, include questions that use pictures as clues. Young children often use the pictures to guess the correct answers and boost their scores. Good readers do not use pictures and they do not have to guess.

Ask your son's evaluator to test his skills in word identification, word attack (nonsense words), and reading fluency. Ask the evaluator to use a reading comprehension test that does not provide pictures. Recognizing pictures is **not** a valid measure of reading comprehension.

My daughter reads slowly and inaccurately. On the *Gray Oral Reading Tests, Fifth Edition (GORT-5)*, her Comprehension score was average, but her fluency was well below average. I'm confused. Her reading skills are not average. How can she earn an average score?

Many young children use their thinking skills to answer questions on tests when they cannot read the material. For example, when asked this question, "When did Johnny eat breakfast?" most children answer the question correctly without reading the text.

Your child's ability to use thinking skills cannot compensate for her poor word recognition skills. She cannot guess her way through a biology or history text.

My son is in the first grade. He struggles to read. How can his scores on the *Standardized Reading Inventory, Second Edition* be in the average range?

Many reading tests do not accurately measure a first-grader's skills. A reading test may provide scores that overestimate the child's true ability.

If you think a test did not accurately measure your child's skills, ask the evaluator if the test had enough items to measure the skills of your young child - this is called the test floor. Ask the evaluator if your child would benefit by more in-depth diagnostic testing.

Progress monitoring tools designed to measure the performance of young children are useful in measuring the reading skills of young children. For more information about progress monitoring, see Chapter 10 about

Evaluations of Specific Learning Disabilities and Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorders (ADHD).

My child has an IQ of 75 (5th percentile). On reading tests, he earns scores in the 70s. His team says that is the best we can expect. Is this true?

No. Learning to read is not primarily a function of intelligence.[7] Some children with low IQs learn to decode text easily. Others have great difficulty. The ease or difficulty of learning to decode text depends, for the most part, on phonological awareness.

If your child has an intellectual disability, a comprehensive reading assessment can identify his strengths, weaknesses, and what he needs in an effective reading instructional program. His progress may be slow. He may need more direct, explicit instruction in vocabulary, verbal reasoning, and inferential thinking to understand what he reads.

Assessing Reading: Special Factors

My child has autism. What do we need to know about evaluating his reading?

As you know, children with autism have a broad range of skills. Some children with autism have severe communication deficits. Others struggle with social skills and pragmatics.

If your child is verbal, he should have the same skills tested as a typical child. If he has difficulty decoding, this is usually due to weaknesses in phonemic awareness and/or rapid naming so these skills need to be assessed.

Consult with your evaluator about your child's oral language skills and whether he needs additional testing in this area.

My child is nonverbal. Can his reading be assessed?

Yes. Some tests of reading do not require the child to speak. In Table 6-2, you will find a list of tests and subtests that measure reading skills in children who are nonverbal.

My daughter has a history of ear infections and language delays. She is struggling to learn the alphabet. Should I have her tested?

Yes. Language delays, ear infections, and difficulty learning the alphabet are factors that put your child at risk for reading problems. You need to begin screening and monitoring her reading skills when she is in kindergarten.

Your child may benefit from an evaluation by an Audiologist to check for a Central Auditory Processing Disorder.

Progress monitoring tools, including *AIMSweb* and *DIBELS-N* are used to monitor the development of reading skills. If reading problems are identified early, your child's teachers can make sure that she achieves and maintains grade-level reading skills.

Table 6-2. Tests That Measure Reading Skills in Nonverbal Children

Test	Subtest	Skill
Lindamood Auditory Conceptualization Test, Third Edition (LAC-3)		Phonemic Awareness
Test of Reading Comprehension, Fourth Edition (TORC-4)	Relational Vocabulary	Reading Vocabulary
Diagnostic Assessment of Reading, Second Edition (DAR-2)	DAR-2 Silent Reading Comprehension (grades 3+)	Reading Comprehension
Gray Silent Reading Tests (GSRT)		Reading Comprehension
Test of Reading Comprehension, Fourth Edition (TORC-4)	Sentence Completion, Paragraph Construction, Text Comprehension	Sentence Comprehension Sentence Comprehension & Sequencing Reading Comprehension
Test of Reading Comprehension, Fourth Edition (TORC-4)	Contextual Fluency	Reading Fluency These tests measure fluency; they do not measure accuracy.
Test of Silent Contextual Reading Fluency, Second Edition (TOSCRF-2)		
Test of Silent Reading Efficiency and Comprehension (TOSREC)		
Test of Silent Word Reading Fluency, Second Edition (TOSWRF-2)		
Woodcock-Johnson III Tests of Achievement (WJ III)	Reading Fluency	
Any test of spelling will provide information about a child's skill with phonics.		Spelling/Orthography
Test of Orthographic Competence (TOC)		Knowledge of letters, abbreviations, punctuation, and spelling

Resources

Early Warning! Why Reading by the End of Third Grade Matters. Retrieved from www.ccf.ny.gov/KidsCount/kcResources/AECFReporReadingGrade3.pdf

Dyslexia Basics Fact Sheet. Retrieved from www.interdys.org/ewebeditpro5/upload/DyslexiaBasicsREVMay2012.pdf

Is My Child Dyslexic? Common characteristics of dyslexia and related learning disorders. Retrieved from www.interdys.org/ewebeditpro5/upload/IsMyChildDyslexic.pdf

Understanding Your Dyslexia. Retrieved from www.interdys.org/ewebeditpro5/upload/UnderstandingYourDyslexia.pdf

Farrall, M. (2008) *Reading Tests: What They Measure and Don't Measure.* Retrieved from Wrightslaw at www.wrightslaw.com/info/test.read.farrall.htm

The International Dyslexia Association: www.interdys.org

The Florida Center for Reading Research:www.fcrr.org

University of Oregon DIBELS Data System: https://dibels.uoregon.edu/

In Summation

Reading is the most important skill taught in school and learned by children. Your goal is to ensure that your child learns to read independently by the end of third grade. If she does not learn to read by the end of third grade, she can learn to read later, but it will require more work.

If your child struggles with reading, get a comprehensive assessment to identify the causes of her difficulties and research-based approaches to remediation now.

In this chapter, you learned about tests and assessments that identify reasons why children struggle with reading. Writing goes hand in hand with reading.

In the next chapter, you will learn about tests of written language. You will learn about assessments used to identify written language problems, including spelling and handwriting.

Endnotes

1. Farrall, M. (2012). *Reading assessment: Linking language, literacy, and cognition*. John Wiley & Sons: Hoboken, NJ
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5. Lyon, R. (1999). *The NICHD research program in reading development, reading disorders, and reading instruction.* Retrieved from www.bartonreading.com/pages/keys99_nichd.cfm.html
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