

1. Must every student be given the Basic Reading Inventory?

Many teachers use the inventory with all their students so they can differentiate instruction. Other teachers use the inventory with those students they believe need further assessment in reading: students who score very high or very low on state tests, other standardized reading tests, or students who need assessment of their word identification, fluency, or comprehension skills. The Basic Reading Inventory has also been used in response to intervention programs to help assess progress. It is also useful with students who have transferred into your school system. Remember that the basic assessment strategy described in this manual can be used with instructional materials in your classroom (such as trade books, literature-based readers, and language experience stories) to help make your instruction more responsive to students' needs.

2. Why do first graders sometimes have difficulty with the pre-primer and primer passages?

Generally, students at the early stages of reading, especially those taught with intensive phonic programs, literature-based readers, or trade books, are most familiar with the vocabulary used in such books. Because the Basic Reading Inventory is not designed for use with specific reading materials, differences in vocabulary may exist, particularly in the pre-primer, primer, and first-grade passages. You should take this information into consideration when you assess reading and determine the student's three levels. You may also find the Early Literacy Assessments (ELA) in Part 3 to be especially helpful with emergent readers. Take a moment to look over these assessments (see page ???). You may find the following Early Literacy Assessments especially helpful with emergent and beginning readers: Literacy, Knowledge, Caption Reading, and Wordless Picture Reading.

3. How should I assess the reading of students who are unable to read the easiest word lists and passages?

Remember that emergent readers and older students experiencing difficulty in reading may find the easiest word lists and pre-primer passages difficult. When this situation occurs, the language experience approach (LEA) is recommended. A concrete object, photograph, or experience is used to engage the student in discussion. Then the teacher writes down the student's dictation and has the student read the LEA story. This strategy can be used to probe what students have learned about how the reading process works. Walker (2004, pp. 266–67), Gillet, Temple, and Crawford (2004, pp. 413–15), McCormick (2006, pp. 162–63), and Lipson and Wixson (2003, pp. 488–91) offer some concise assistance for launching, maintaining, and using dictated stories.

Part 3 of this manual contains a variety of Early Literacy Assessments. Included are informal ways to assess literacy knowledge, phoneme segmentation awareness, auditory discrimination, alphabet knowledge, picture reading, and so on. The informal assessment devices will be especially useful for students who are unable to read the easiest word lists and passages. Additional assessments and teaching strategies for the early stages of reading can be found in Elish-Piper, Johns, and Lenski (2006). You may want to use Wordless Picture Reading in Part 3 (page ???) as the stimulus for a language experience story.

4. Why do illustrations accompany only the pre-primer passages of the reading inventory?

Illustrations can make reading material attractive. They can also capture the interest of a student. Pictures, however, sometimes provide clues to help the student understand the passage. Because the Basic Reading Inventory is designed to assess how a student uses language cues to construct meaning from print, illustrations are restricted to the pre-primer passages. For passages with illustrations at grade levels one and two, consult Elish-Piper, Johns, and Lenski (2006). Additional passages at grade levels one through eight with illustrations can be found in Johns and Berglund (2006).

5. Why are some passages narrative and others expository (informational)?

Narrative passages generally tell a story. Expository or informational passages inform by presenting information. Both types of literature are commonly found in schools, and students need to be able to read both types of texts. In recent years, informational books have become much more common in the primary grades.

Forms A, B, and LN of the Basic Reading Inventory contain narrative passages. Form C contains mostly narrative passages. Form D, starting in grade two, contains expository passages. Form A is designed for oral reading, and you can assess the student's ability to deal with narrative discourse. Form LN contains longer narrative passages (250 words) than Form A (100 words). You can use Form LN for oral or silent reading.

In the upper grades, the content areas become more important, so Forms D and LE contain expository passages at and above the second-grade level. Form E contains all expository passages. Because students often read their content area texts silently, Form D assesses silent reading with expository materials. Form LE contains longer expository passages and may be used for oral or silent reading. With these various forms, you have the resources to help you gain a more complete picture of the student's reading. Both teachers and research have found that expository passages can cause students greater difficulty. McCormick (1999) notes that expository text structures are commonly more difficult to comprehend than the story structures of narrative materials. One reason such a situation exists may be a student's lack of experience with expository materials. Another reason may be the differences in structure between the two types of literature. If, for example, a student has difficulty with the expository passages, you may have gained valuable knowledge to use in your instructional program.

6. Should I help students with words they don't know?

Every time a student is told an unknown word is one less opportunity to gain insights into the student's reading. There will probably be some instances where you tell a student a word; nevertheless, the recommended procedure is to remain silent or to say, "Do the best you can." Then you can note the strategies (or lack of them) that the student uses frequently, occasionally, or not at all. There is some evidence (McNaughton, 1981) that students were less accurate and self-corrected a smaller proportion of their miscues when they received immediate, as compared with delayed, correction. You may, therefore, want to be very selective about telling students unknown words.

7. What should I do when the student mispronounces proper nouns?

First, do not include multiple mispronunciations of the same word in counting miscues. Count only one miscue. Second, encourage the student to use strategies to pronounce the word by saying, "Just do the best you can." Third, use the student's pronunciation if the word appears in a question. Finally, in some instances you may pronounce the word for the student because of the frustration that is evident. Be sure you make a note about the student's behavior (for example, "unable to go on until I pronounced the word"; "tried several pronunciations"; "is aware that the word is mispronounced but seems to have the basic meaning").

8. What are miscues and what's the difference between total miscues and significant miscues?

Miscues occur when a student's oral reading of the passage results in a version that differs from the printed passage. Common miscues include substitutions, omissions, and insertions. A miscue can be as minor as substituting *a* for *the* in the following sentence: I saw the squirrel run up *the* tree. Other miscues can be significant: substituting *horse* for *house* in the sentence, Dad parked the car in the garage and walked into the *house*. It is important to remember that miscues are a natural part of the reading process.

The number of miscues a student makes can merely be counted; this procedure is called quantitative analysis or total miscues. Such analysis does not take into account the quality of the student's miscues; therefore, all miscues are given equal weight.

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A qualitative analysis counts significant miscues. It is a search to gain insights into a student's reading by making judgments about the student's miscues. In a qualitative analysis, some miscues are rated of higher quality than others. To determine significant miscues, evaluate each miscue in the passage in which it occurs and judge the extent to which the meaning of the sentence or passage is altered. Generally, significant miscues change the meaning of the passage. Whether you choose to count total miscues or significant miscues is up to you. The scoring guide contains both options.

Below are some examples of miscues that teachers **considered significant** because of the change in meaning involved.

Student: Here comes a *cat*.

Text: Here comes a *car*.

Student: While gathered *above* the council fire . . .

Text: While gathered *about* the council fire . . .

Student: The summer had been a dry one, *usual* . . .

Text: The summer had been a dry one, *unusual* . . .

Student: The flower got its name from its *stage* habit . . .

Text: The flower got its name from its *strange* habit . . .

Student: They threw leaves into the *yard*.

Text: They threw leaves into the *air*.

Student: He unlocked the *bank* door.

Text: He unlocked the *back* door.

Student: He *sniffled* slowly down the street.

Text: He *shuffled* slowly down the street.

Student: Jim put the *bird* on the snow.

Text: Jim put the *bread* on the snow.

Student: Only he would know the amount in each dose.

Text: Only he would know the *correct* amount in each dose.

Here are some examples of miscues that were **not considered significant** because only a minimal change of meaning was involved.

Student: . . . sailing over the *middle* line . . .

Text: . . . sailing over the *midline* . . .

Student: . . . and scored. *The* game ended.

Text: . . . and scored *as* the game ended.

Student: *Ooh!* What fun!

Text: *Wow!* What fun!

Student: She went with her parents to the pet *store*.

Text: She went with her parents to the pet *shop*.

Student: . . . trees fell *on* the ground.

Text: . . . trees fell *to* the ground.

Student: Dale *was* the strongest player on the team *and* was up first.

Text: Dale, the strongest player on the team, was up first.

Student: The Tigers and *the* Jets were playing . . .

Text: The Tigers and Jets were playing . . .

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Finally, here are some “gray area” examples for which greater teacher judgment is needed to determine whether the miscues are significant.

Student: The *kick* went sailing . . .

Text: The *ball* went sailing . . .

Student: The children helped by *carrying* bits of wood.

Text: The children helped by *carting* bits of wood.

Student: This is *funny*.

Text: This is *fun*.

Student: . . . some would take *the* wood and start . . .

Text: . . . some would take *this* wood and start . . .

9. What guidelines should be used if I decide to count only significant miscues?

Miscues are generally significant when:

1. the meaning of the sentence or passage is significantly changed or altered, and the student does not correct the miscue.
2. a nonword is used in place of the word in the passage.
3. only a partial word is substituted for the word or phrase in the passage.
4. a word is pronounced for the student.

Miscues are generally *not* significant when:

1. the meaning of the sentence or passage undergoes no change or only minimal change.
2. they are self-corrected by the student.
3. they are acceptable in the student’s dialect (*goed home* for *went home*, *idear* for *idea*).
4. they are later read correctly in the same passage.

10. Are the answers provided with the comprehension questions the only acceptable answers?

No. You may decide that some students’ responses are both logical and reasonable even though they differ from the “answer” in the parentheses under the question. In such cases, give the student credit. The age and grade of the student should also be taken into consideration when you are scoring responses. In essence, use your knowledge of students when scoring the comprehension questions.

Some “answers” in parentheses for the comprehensive questions are separated by a semicolon. When two or more answers are separated by a semicolon, only one of the answers is necessary for full credit (unless other guidelines are specified).

11. What should I do if a student uses experience instead of information in the passage to correctly answer a factual question even though it is not the answer in parentheses?

After you acknowledge the student’s response, ask what the passage said. You might say, “That’s right, but what did it say in the passage?” In essence, the student’s answers to factual questions should be tied to information presented in the passage. If the student is unable to remember and the initial response (based on experience) was correct, you may want to give half credit.

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12. What should I do when students fail to see that they should use their experience along with information in the passage to answer an inference or evaluative question?

Gently remind students that, based on what they read, you want to know what they think. When the student says, “It didn’t say,” you might respond, “That’s right, but I want to know what you think.” Feel free to encourage students to use their experience, in conjunction with information in the passage.

13. Is it acceptable to reword questions that the student doesn’t seem to understand?

Yes. You should not, however, provide information that will help the student answer the question. In addition, if you find that many students experience difficulty with a particular question, you may want to develop a replacement question of your own.

14. May I omit some comprehension questions?

Yes, you may omit questions to shorten the administration time. It takes about ten seconds for each question to be asked and answered. Some teachers omit the vocabulary questions because they are least dependent on the passage. In other words, students are often able to use their backgrounds and experiences to give correct responses to the vocabulary questions. The evaluation and inference questions encourage students to integrate information in the passage with their background knowledge in order to give a satisfactory response. Because such responses are not based entirely on the text, some teachers may prefer to omit these questions. You can probably omit one question without changing the scoring guide at the bottom of each passage in the performance booklet.

Another alternative is replacing some of the questions with others that you believe are more important in assessing the student’s comprehension. How you conceptualize the nature of comprehension will likely influence the types of questions you ask. The author’s view is that if comprehension is assessed with questions, an effort should be made to tap the student’s ability to recall the literal information *and* to reason beyond the information given in the passages. That is why evaluation and inference questions are also included.

15. Do some comprehension questions tap the student’s background and experience?

For most of the questions in the Basic Reading Inventory, the student must recall or use information from the passage to answer the question. These types of questions are called passage dependent. Some questions, however, are not totally passage dependent. The most notable ones are the vocabulary questions. Two other types of questions (inference and evaluation) encourage students to use their knowledge, background, and experience in conjunction with the information presented in the passage to engage in what some reading authorities identify as higher-level thinking. Raphael and Au (2005) refer to such questions as author and you. Such questions invite students to make explicit connections between the ideas in the passage and their own background knowledge and experience. Teachers are generally pleased with the variety of questions contained in the Basic Reading Inventory.

16. When I ask the first comprehensive question, the student also answers other questions in his or her response. What should I do?

Just put a plus (+) next to the questions answered. There is no need to ask them again.

17. What should I do if a student mispronounces a word in the passage that happens to be the word used in the vocabulary question?

Ask the question as it is printed. You can then determine whether the student has meaning for the word even if he or she did not pronounce it correctly in the passage.

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18. What should I do if a student finds a particular passage extremely easy or difficult?

The diversity of students' experiences and backgrounds may make a particular passage easier or more difficult than its assigned readability level. You can generally note this problem when the student's reading of a particular passage is much better or worse than would be predicted from the student's performance on previous passages. When you believe that a passage is inappropriate, the recommended procedure is to substitute a passage at the same level from a different form of the reading inventory. Then use the total results from the student's reading to make your judgments about the student's reading levels.

19. How do passages in the Basic Reading Inventory and the Early Literacy Assessments relate to levels for Guided Reading and Reading Recovery?

Using criteria summarized by Reutzel and Cooter (2004) the work of Gunning (2008), and an analysis by Ferrali and Turmo (2005–2006), the chart below contains approximations of the passages in the Basic Reading Inventory and Early Literacy Assessments. These approximations should be used along with your experience and professional judgment.

Grade Level	Early Literacy Assessments	Basic Reading Inventory Passage Code	Guided Reading Level	Reading Recovery Level
Caption Reading	Caption Reading	—	A	1–3
Easy Sight Word	EE-1	AAA, BBB, CCC, DDD, EEE (6 Passages)	A–B	4–6
Pre-primer	EE-2	AA, BB, CC, DD, EE (6 Passages)	B–E	7–8
Primer	—	A, B, C, D, E (5 Passages)	F–G	9–11
1	—	A, B, C, D, E 7141 (5 Passages)	H–I	12–17
2	—	A, B, C, D, E 8224 (5 Passages)	J–M	18–28
3	—	A, B, C, D, E, LN, LE 3183 (7 Passages)	N–P	30–38
4	—	A, B, C, D, E, LN, LE 5414 (7 Passages)	Q–S	39–40
5	—	A, B, C, D, E, LN, LE 8595 (7 Passages)	T–V	41–44
6	—	A, B, C, D, E, LN, LE 6867 (7 Passages)	X–Y	
7	—	A, B, C, D, E, LN, LE 3717 (7 Passages)	Y	
8	—	A, B, C, D, E, LN, LE 8183 (7 Passages)	Z	

20. Are informal reading inventory (IRI) results appropriate additions to my students' portfolios?

Certainly. One of the guiding principles for literacy portfolios is that assessment should be a multifaceted process (Valencia, 1990). Results and insights (both yours and the student's) from an IRI can help chronicle reading development. Some teachers audio tape or make a DVD of the student's reading and responses to the comprehensive questions and include the tape or DVD in the portfolio. Teachers have used multiple indications of

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performance for many years. Continue using observations, your judgments, running records, daily work, and other informal and formal assessments. McCormick (1999) has provided an excellent discussion for beginning, maintaining, and evaluating portfolios. She has also included ideas for portfolio conferences.

21. What do I do when the student's scores within a particular level (word list, passage reading, and comprehension scores) don't indicate the same level?

McKenna and Stahl (2003) use the term *borderline results* to describe the situation and note that such results are a natural consequence of using reading inventories. The term *gray areas* also can be used to describe the situation. Basically, you have to make an overall judgment when results are in the gray areas as shown below.

Word Identification Percentages

100	99	98	97	96	95	94	93	92	91	90	<90
Ind.	Ind./Inst.			Inst.	Inst./Frust.			Frust.			
100	90	85	80	75	70	60	50	<50			

Comprehension Percentages

Section 3 contains examples of determining a student's reading levels when there are gray areas in the results. You should find that information helpful. There are also practice exercises in Section 3 that you can use to gain greater competence. The completed exercises can be found on the CD. The important point to remember is that your judgment must be used when there are gray areas. Some teachers also like to share and discuss their results with colleagues to help gather additional insights and perspectives.

A teacher in a Basic Reading Inventory workshop shared an idea you may want to use for the gray areas. When scores fall in the ind./inst. or inst./frust. areas, circle the level closest to the numerical score. If the numerical score is in the middle, circle the slash (/). This procedure will help you know at a glance the level to which the numerical score was closest and should help you make a more informed decision as you determine the student's three reading levels.

Note: In addition to the above questions, Felknor, Winterscheidt, and Benson (1999) and Paris and Carpenter (2003) provide thoughtful answers to many questions related to selecting, administering, scoring, and using informal reading inventories.

22. Can students have a range of reading levels?

Yes and no. A student's instructional level can sometimes span two or more grades. The independent and instructional levels are always designated by a single number. For example, if a student is independent at first and second grade, you would record the student's **highest** independent level. On the other hand, if the student is frustrated at the fifth and sixth grades, you would record the **lowest** grade as the student's frustration level. For this particular student, third and fourth grade could be recorded as the instructional level range. The student's three reading levels would be: independent—second grade, instructional—third and fourth grade, and frustration—fifth grade. The reading levels you record should have no gaps or missing grades.