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BACK TO SCHOOL

Where Do I Begin?

By Adine Sibley

Our responsibility for reading instruction begins the first day our students walk into our classrooms. Along with that instruction is assessment, so we can be aware of what our students know and what is appropriate for us to teach. Gathering data is like putting the pieces of a puzzle together, watching as the big picture comes together.

But, where do we begin? We must begin with strong assessments. Reading assessments include concepts about print, letter knowledge, understanding of the alphabetic principle, phoneme awareness, lexical knowledge, cipher knowledge, syntax, semantics, phonology, linguistic knowledge, background knowledge, decoding, language comprehension, and reading comprehension. Assessments are generally given to provide more effective instruction and to evaluate achievement or learning. Usually, we know which assessments to give students, but we don't always know when.

Screening tests provide information about the knowledge and skill base of the student. They are useful for determining the most appropriate starting point for instruction and for planning instructional groups. Screening tests usually include formal and informal measures with clear mastery targets (*Teaching Reading Sourcebook*).

Formative assessments are ongoing and include teacher observations, informal or formal tests, and curriculum tasks. They are often referred to as *curriculum-based assessments* because they are used during the instructional process. Formative assessments serve to further define the specific focus of instruction.

Summative assessments are often used at the end of major units of instruction and at year's end. They provide data about exiting accomplishments and are useful for planning instruction for individual students. Here, final judgments about a student's strengths and weaknesses are made.



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READING ASSESSMENTS

Types and Frequency of Effective Assessment Systems

Grade	Screening	Formative Assessment	Summative Assessment
Kindergarten	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Midyear and year-end • Can be same tools used for summative 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frequent, to direct ongoing modification of the curriculum • Informal curriculum-based assessments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At end of a major instructional sequence • Can be same tools used for screening and formative
Grade 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two or three times yearly • Can be same tools used for summative 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frequent, to direct ongoing modification of the curriculum • Informal curriculum-based assessments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At end of a major instructional sequence • Can be same tools used for screening and formative
Grade 2 and 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two or three times yearly • Can be same tools used for summative 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frequent, to direct ongoing modification of the curriculum • Informal curriculum-based assessments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At end of a major instructional sequence • Can be same tools used for screening and formative
Grades 4 through 8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beginning of year • Can be same tools used for summative 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frequent, for monitoring formal and informal measures, including assignments as part of regular curriculum 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At end of a major instructional sequence • Can be same tools used for screening and formative

(Teaching Reading Sourcebook)

Once we have conducted our assessments, we can begin to use them for what is most important, guiding our instruction. Whether we have the luxury of planning one-on-one instruction or we are responsible for delivering some of our material to the whole class, students' needs and abilities are always the driving force. And, as we teach reading, we must, through our example, help students understand that all reading is making meaning. Therefore, our lessons must therefore be meaningful and not just based on skills in isolation (*Strickland*). We learn to read by reading, so all reading instruction must be conducted within the process of authentic reading situations. Practice is important, so we must make sure we give students all of the opportunities possible in order to be successful. Appropriate assessments used to guide authentic instruction will certainly fill in all the missing pieces to the puzzle!

