

Decoding Reading Assessments



Helpful Terms to Know

NORM-REFERENCED

A norm-referenced test reports the performance of an individual student, school, district (or other unit) in comparison to others, often as percentile rank. If a student scores in the 80th percentile, they are scoring higher than 80% of students who took that test.

CRITERION-REFERENCED

A criterion-referenced test is designed to measure student performance against a set of knowledge and skills (e.g. grade-level standards) and often reports student performance in relation to meeting or not meeting a cut score.

RELIABILITY

How consistent and dependable the results of the assessment are. If a test is reliable, that means a student will score similarly regardless of test administrator or time of day, or if they take the test multiple times. Reliability is typically measured as a correlation coefficient, typically with values between 0 and 1. (Higher = more reliable.)

VALIDITY

How well the assessment measures what it intends to measure. If a test has high validity, that means that it is measuring the skills or knowledge that it was designed to measure. Variability is typically measured as a correlation coefficient, typically with values between 0 and 1. (Higher = more valid.)

SENSITIVITY

How well a screener can identify a student at risk for reading difficulties. A high-quality screener can have a sensitivity rate of 85-90%, meaning it correctly identifies 85-90% of students who are at risk.

SPECIFICITY

How well an assessment can exclude students who are not at risk for difficulties. A high-quality screener can have a specificity rate of 80-90%, meaning that it accurately identifies 80-90% of students who do not require intervention.

Types of Reading Assessments

IDENTIFY

Screening Tests

Also known as: universal screeners, early reading screening tests

Designed to be quick, efficient, and predictive, screening tests sample reading skills like phonemic awareness, oral reading fluency, or alphabetic knowledge to predict how well students will perform in the future without additional screening or support.



3x/
year



All
students



Determine which students might be “at risk” for reading difficulties and who may need further evaluation.

Diagnostics

Delivered after a screener

In-depth and often lengthy assessments that drill down to specific reading skills to identify what students know and can already do as well as areas for additional support and remediation.



As
needed



Students identified for
extra reading support



Pinpoint precisely where a student is struggling to target instruction and support.



MONITOR

Progress Monitoring

As part of a Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS), progress monitoring assessments measure the skills students are practicing in additional support time or intervention.



As needed,
based on
intensity of
intervention



Students
identified for
extra reading
support



Measure student progress in response to intervention to identify next steps and adjust instruction.

Formative Assessment

Includes: Exit tickets, checks for understanding, target tasks

The process of gathering data during instruction to help monitor and guide student learning. High quality curricular materials have opportunities for formative assessment built into daily lessons and sprinkled throughout unit materials.



Daily,
ongoing



All
students



Inform instruction in
real time, day to day.



EVALUATE

Summative

Also known as: outcome assessments

Given at the middle and/or end of the school year, summative or outcome assessments measure student performance on a set of content standards. In literacy, these tests are often reading comprehension tests that include multiple text genres (and often include multiple choice and written response items).



1-2x/
year



All
students



Understand overall student performance and growth. Measure overall school and system health.



Want to dig deeper? See our complete bibliography on the reverse side.



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Bibliography

At Lit, we’re nerds about reading and reading research. We consulted the following resources to finalize the key terminology and descriptions in this infographic.

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Need help designing and implementing your reading assessment strategy?

Every week, we work with leaders to help them translate the science of reading into practice at scale. That includes assessments.

During our Lit Quality Review, we evaluate a school or system’s current assessment strategy as part of the larger reading ecosystem. In our Learn & Design modules, we help leaders understand the “what” and “why” of reading assessments as they design an efficient, research-based strategy. During Implementation Coaching & Support, we work alongside your team to analyze and take action from all the data in your ecosystem.

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