

Fountas & Pinnell Benchmark Assessment

Frequently Asked Questions

How often do we benchmark? Kindergarten through fifth grades will administer the benchmark assessment no more than four times each year. Refer to the MCPS Minimum Assessment Framework for your grade for guidance.

Should we alternate between fiction and nonfiction test when assessing students? Alternate fiction and nonfiction directly from one book to the next as you move up the levels. The fiction and nonfiction books are equivalent at each level.

What do I do if the student is above grade level? To build background knowledge and vocabulary for students while deepening comprehension strategies using age appropriate materials you may want to consider stopping the benchmark assessment at one year above the student's current grade according to the *Fountas & Pinnell Benchmark Assessment Instructional Level Chart for Expectations in Reading* http://mcps.ss7.sharpschool.com/UserFiles/Servers/Server_92164/File/General_1/InstructionalLevelExpectations.pdf. Each school can decide how far to take such students above grade level. When a student is above grade level, teaching can continue to broaden the student's knowledge and understanding of all the genres (both in reading and writing) so s/he will be reading age appropriate texts.

What if I have a student who reads far above grade level (for example, a first grader who reads level O)? Look carefully at the comprehension. Chances are, the student has literal comprehension, but lacks rich understanding. Another factor to consider is stamina. The student may be able to read and even have minimal understanding of a high level text; however, it may not be a good experience for him or her to plow through long chapter books on a regular basis. In general, students enjoy age-appropriate material, so you can extend this student by providing texts just one or two grade levels above his or her present one. There are always a few students who are truly exceptional, and for those readers you have to make individual decisions.

If a student scores one text level according to their accuracy and a different level on the comprehension section how do we determine a student's reading level? An accurate measure of a student's instructional reading level is determined by a student's ability to both decode and make meaning of the selection. F & P have created a table to help provide consistency when identifying the appropriate text level for the reader. It is found on page 46 in the System 1 Assessment Guide and page 45 in the System 2 Assessment Guide.

Why do we all have to use the same codes when administering the Benchmark? We will be using the "Coding and Scoring Errors at a Glance" found inside the back cover of the Assessment Guide. When students move from grade to grade and across the district, their Benchmark Assessments should follow them. In order to use the same language, increase reliability and consistent analysis/interpretation, it is necessary for us to all use the same codes.

What is the value in analyzing the student's errors, the M, S, V part? By looking closely at errors, and hypothesizing which sources of information (Meaning, Structure, or Visual) the student is relying on, teachers can gather essential information to determine next steps for instruction. This information can then be compared to the different reading behaviors listed under "Monitoring/Correcting and Searching for/Using Information" in the *F & P Continuum for Literacy Learning*, as well as, the "Word Work" section. It is not necessary to analyze a record for MSV when it is determined to be too hard for the student.

The comprehension section asks for a "conversation", how does that differ from questioning? On the DVD in each Benchmark Kit, there are several sample Comprehension Conversations to guide you with this part of the assessment. The conversation should be a relaxed flow of ideas the student gets from the text, it gives the teacher insight into what reading behaviors the student is employing while making meaning of the text. Be sure to rephrase the questions until the child understands it. The questions are organized by "Within, Beyond, and About the Text", so after analyzing the student's responses, teachers can go to those specific sections in the *F & P Continuum of Literacy Learning* for instructional implications.

Teachers should underline key understandings that the student offers and jot down any understandings. Scripting as much of the conversation as possible is essential for others to be able to understand and interpret the assessment. If the reader does not mention some of the key understandings independently, use the prompts to probe further. Teachers should not score student's response lower because prompting was needed. Refer to page 28 in System 1 and System 2 Benchmark Assessment Guides.

Can students look in the text during the Comprehension Conversation? It is acceptable for readers to search back in the written text for answers to prompts and questions if they initiate the action. Teachers should leave the book in front of the reader, but don't make the suggestion. Looking back in the text will not affect the comprehension score.

Can we move students up a text level without administering the Benchmark? Fountas and Pinnell state that a student does not have to be given a Benchmark assessment to read books at the next text level. Informal running records can be given often to monitor and assess student's reading behaviors. As you become more familiar with the characteristics of text levels and student behaviors, you will recognize when a student is ready to read more challenging texts.

If the student is reading a text that is very hard, is it necessary for him or her to finish the text so I can determine accuracy level? No, you can stop the reading early. You might say "This is a tricky story. You can stop there." As a teacher, you have gathered the data you need and can discontinue the assessment. There is no need to have the student continue to read if the accuracy rate has gone well below 90%.

When I am assessing and the first book the student reads is too hard, what should I do? You should judge how hard the book is and move down one or several levels so you can find the instructional level.

When I am assessing a student, can I skip levels? Yes. Your goal is to have the student read the fewest number of books that will give you the data you need. If you find a text is very easy, you may want to skip a level or more to get to one that is closer to instructional level.

The directions sometimes indicate the student should continue to read the text silently; wouldn't it be better if I listened to the student read the whole book? No. It is important to give the student the opportunity to process the text without the oral reinforcement. The oral reading also slows the reader down. You may want to use this time to analyze what the reader has done thus far on the Recording Form.

Do I have to calculate the oral reading rate? It is recommended to calculate reading rate at levels J and above. (The expected oral reading rate range for Levels J and K is roughly 75-100 words per minute; for Levels L-N, about 90-120 WPM). There is a formula for calculating reading rate on the Recording Form or you can use the F & P Calculator/Stopwatch provided with the assessment system to get a quick and accurate score. However, reading rate is only one indicator of fluency. It is important that the reader is putting groups of words together in processing the text (phrasing). When a reader is reading one word at a time the reading gets bogged down and the reader is not likely to be able to attend to the meaning of the text.

What if I have a student who reads a level with accuracy and understanding but is not at all fluent? Should I go down a level for instruction? You might want to go down a level, but that is not always the answer. Some students have developed a habit of reading dysfluently and might do so even at easy levels. You'll want to look in greater depth at the student's reading. It is suggested that you use the Six Dimensions of Fluency Rubric in the Assessment Forms book and CD-ROM so that you can decide with more precision what to teach the student. Sometimes, if accuracy and understanding are there, you can teach intensively for fluency and get a shift in a short time.