

**Frequently Asked Questions  
Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA)  
Revised January 2011**

**How do I determine which level to use when assessing with the DRA?**

As a general rule, a student should be assessed using one level higher than the one on which he/she tested “adequate” or “independent” in the previous testing period. However, occasionally students may not seem to meet the level previously recorded. The classroom teacher must then use professional judgment and knowledge of the student based on the past trimester’s performance to adjust the level, taking care not to place any student in a frustration level during testing.

Students are not independent if they do not meet the comprehension benchmark.

K-3 17-19  
Gr4-5 19+

The DRA is designed to be given ONCE at each sitting unless the student scored LITTLE comprehension (K-3) or INTERVENTION (4-8). Students scoring in this range must be retested on another day

*Students are not to be tested beyond the trimester level benchmark unless specifically requested by the parent in writing. Send any such requests to the K-12 Instructional Leader for reading to arrange testing.*

**What role should lack of fluency play in determining a student’s independent reading level?**

Fluency is a crucial skill in a student’s ability to comprehend text. However, a student may be able to comprehend text he/she cannot yet fluently decode.

Fluency should become an instructional focus rather than lowering the expectation for instruction, so long as comprehension is where it needs to be.

Extra practice recalling appropriately leveled text independently should be provided.

**How do I decide whether to use a fiction or non-fiction text for the assessment?**

It is best practice to alternate between fiction and non-fiction whenever possible, as this practice provides additional information about individual literacy strengths and needs.

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### **What level of support is appropriate during test administration?**

For Levels 20-28: determine the level of support to provide during the assessment before the assessment is administered. Some students will dictate all responses, whereas others will dictate some of their responses.

For Levels 30-38: after a 5-7 minute student/teacher conference, the student writes all responses in the student booklet (unless an I.E.P. or 504 Plan determines that this is not the appropriate way to assess the student)

After Level 38, students should not be supported in this manner unless specifically indicated in an IEP or 504 Plan.

### **If the student makes the same error in oral reading (e.g. *could* for *can*), does the error count as ONE error or does it count as an error EACH time?**

As stated in the DRA2 manual, a repeated substitution is counted as an error EACH time, except in the case of proper nouns (e.g. *Mary* for *Molly*).

### **When is “*Appeal by Student*” counted as an error and when is it not?**

If the student appeals, but then gets the word on his/her own, it is not counted as an error. For example: If the student pauses during reading, asks for the word, but reads the word without being told, this is not counted as an error. This is true even when the attempt is encouraged by the teacher, so long as no clues are provided.

If the student is unable to continue, the teacher should provide the word for the student. An appeal is only counted as an error once the teacher responds by providing the word for the student. The error must be marked as told on the test record.

### **Do prompts have to be given exactly as stated in the DRA Observation Guide? How do you score the DRA when you give students these prompts?**

Teachers only need to ask prompts if they are needed. When needed, they should be asked as written. Teachers are also free to ask any questions that are necessary, as long as those questions asked do not provide students with information.

There is a space on the Observation Guide labeled Record Any Other Questions Asked for teachers to use for any of their own questions.

Score the retell as you would without the prompts. A second grade child who needs 4 or 5 prompts, but still receives a score of 17 on the rubric, comprehends the story. The child has the information in his or her head, but needs to be taught an effective way of retrieving it. Look at the Focus for Instruction for strategies to help in instruction.

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### How can you create flexible instruction to suit individual learners?

The premise of Guided Reading is based on Leo Vygotsky's theory of the Zone of Proximal Development – find out where a child is on the learning continuum and teach just a little beyond that point, guiding the child through. To that end, DRA results allow us to group students in two ways:

By reading level for comprehension  
By instructional need (particular strategies)

Both types of grouping should be used.

### How does the DRA help determine what reading level to teach?

Students MUST score ADEQUATE (K-3) or INDEPENDENT (4-8) comprehension to be considered INDEPENDENT. The instructional level is the NEXT LEVEL UP.

If the student scores SOME comprehension (K-3) or INSTRUCTIONAL (4-8) instruction should occur on THE SAME LEVEL TESTED. Teachers can ASSUME the level immediately below is the independent level.

If the student scores LITTLE comprehension (K-3) or INTERVENTION (4-8) the student must be further assessed with a second DRA on another day.

*If students are consistently scoring LITTLE comprehension (K-3) or INTERVENTION (4-8), the student is most likely being assessed inappropriately. Please be judicious in your choice of assessment level. Use what you know about each student to determine the best level for testing.*

### How do I use DRA to guide instruction for students who read on and above grade level?

Students reading above grade level should certainly use material within their independent and instructional reading levels. Teachers should provide a myriad of opportunities for breadth and depth of reading by encouraging the student to read from a variety of authors and genres, including non-fiction books, magazines, and newspapers.

Teachers should provide further instruction and more opportunities for students to participate in analytical and interpretive reading through a variety of literature at their independent level – discussion groups, literature circles, genre study, author study, comparative study, and other critical thinking activities. These practices are far more productive and effective than having students read works intended for an audience significantly above their chronological age group.

All students should be assessed with CLASSROOM ASSESSMENTS (e.g. running records, reading response journals) on an ONGOING basis to ensure progress is being made.

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### **Should beginning ELLs be assessed using DRA?**

Entering and Beginning level ELLs should be assessed for reading by the ESL teacher. Teachers can begin with the lowest level assessment and work through the levels – never going to levels where students are frustrated.

The assessment should be used to determine if the student uses knowledge of sound/symbol correspondence to decode, uses picture cues to help identify words or concepts, is able to retell any part of the story in the native language? (This can be written or oral as appropriate. A peer can be used to translate.) This information can then be used to more effectively plan instruction appropriate to student needs.

### **Is it developmentally appropriate to assess reading with a DRA in Kindergarten?**

Current standards require Kindergarten students to be on level of C by the end of the Kindergarten year. In order to achieve that, Kindergarten students must be reading level A by December. While some students will not yet have an instructional level others will.

### **If a student cannot successfully complete even LEVEL A of the DRA, what is his/her INDEPENDENT level? What is his/her INSTRUCTIONAL level? What do I report on the progress report?**

If a student cannot successfully complete Level A, the student is at a PRE-READING stage instructionally and HAS NO INDEPENDENCE for reading.

Both INDEPENDENT and INSTRUCTIONAL level on the report card should receive a (---). Teachers should further explain the situation (e.g. if the student can identify letters, sounds, letter/sound correspondence, can rhyme, can blend sounds to form words, has any sight words) in the comments section.

A student in grades 1-5 who cannot successfully complete Level A of the DRA is experiencing significant difficulty learning to read and should be brought to RtI in order to receive additional support, excluding entering ELLs (e.g. TIME teacher and/or reading specialist in Grade 1).