
Third Grade Reading Competencies

Word Identification

Knows sounds for a wide range of suffixes and prefixes (e.g., -able, -tion, -ment; and ex-, re-)

Uses letter-sound correspondence and structural analysis to decode multisyllable words

Recognizes many common words automatically

Uses context to read accurately words with more than one pronunciation (e.g., an object vs. to object)

Has well-developed, generally accurate and increasingly automatic word-identification skills

Fluent And Accurate Word Identification In Context

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- *competencies for the end of each grade*
 - *for use as a guide in planning instruction, not a checklist for evaluating individual children*
 - *many different instructional activities can be used in reaching each competency*

Applies known decoding skills while reading in context

Monitors comprehension and accuracy while reading in context and self-corrects errors

Reads longer, more complex text and chapter books independently and silently

Reads aloud with accuracy, fluency and expression any text appropriately designed for third grade

Meets end-of-third-grade standard for accuracy on the state-approved informal reading assessment

Comprehension

Answers literal and inferential questions about grade-appropriate books read aloud by the teacher and about own reading in context (at instructional level)

Explains grade-appropriate vocabulary

Explains common homophones (e.g., fair/fare or maid/made) and homographs (e.g., a lead weight vs. to lead the way)

Infers word meanings from taught roots, prefixes and suffixes

Infers word meanings from context

Recognizes pronoun referents in a text

Applies comprehension strategies, such as summarization and prediction, to grade-appropriate stories read aloud by the teacher and to own reading in context (at instructional level)

Clearly identifies specific words or phrases that are causing comprehension difficulties

Interprets fiction by discussing underlying theme or message and by making connections to background knowledge and other text

Interprets nonfiction by distinguishing cause and effect, fact and opinion, main idea and supporting details

Summarizes major points from both fiction and nonfiction texts

Cites evidence from texts to support conclusions

Selects, synthesizes and/or uses relevant information from a text to include in an extension or response to the text

Uses a glossary or index to locate information in a text

Interprets graphic information in a text, such as charts, tables, diagrams, etc.

Recognizes values, ethics and beliefs included in a text

Reads aloud and silently with comprehension any text appropriately designed for third grade

Meets end-of-third-grade standard for comprehension on the state-approved informal reading assessment

Spelling

Spells correctly words taught as part of third grade spelling curriculum

Spells words involving previously studied generalizations and word patterns correctly

Spells many common homophones (e.g., to, two, too; there, their, they're) correctly

Uses knowledge about morphology and structural analysis as an aid to spelling words

Writing

Uses the following basic mechanics of writing correctly:

- Apostrophe to show possession; quotation marks
- Capital letters in titles and quotations
- Indentation in paragraphing
- Applies knowledge of spelling in everyday writing activities

Writes in complete and varied sentences

Shows increasing use of formal language patterns in place of informal or conversational language patterns in own writing (e.g., literary language forms such as figurative language)

Shows sensitivity to text structure in writing as well as in reading (e.g., recognizes that a report is organized differently from a story)

With some guidance, uses all aspects of a writing process in producing own compositions and reports, including independent editing of spelling and mechanics

Presents and discusses own writing with other students and responds helpfully to other students' compositions

Fully elaborates written work with specific details

Demonstrates a strong organizational strategy and/or sequencing in written work

Writes a fully developed narrative in which all key characters and events are expanded upon

Produces a variety of written work (e.g., literature response, reports, "published" books)

Using Assessment To Guide Instruction

The Importance Of Ongoing Assessment

Ongoing assessment is essential to helping children achieve the competencies specified in the previous section. Assessment can assist the teacher in planning flexible groups and in determining which children need more instruction—or, conversely, a greater level of challenge—in a particular competency or set of competencies. Because individual children will acquire various competencies at different rates, ongoing assessment is necessary for re-evaluating children's needs and reconstituting flexible groups on a regular basis. Addressing children's instructional needs in a prompt fashion is critical to preventing long-term failure in reading.

Teachers already are using many forms of assessment that are useful in guiding instruction. These include state-approved informal measures such as the *Developmental Reading Assessment*, off-year Connecticut Mastery Test in third grade, portfolios of children's work, various teacher-designed checklists and tests and, in some districts, standardized tests. In addition, ongoing, daily teacher observation of individual children is extremely important.

However, schools and classroom teachers deal with large groups of children, and all children have instructional needs that must be addressed. To manage instruction of a large group of children effectively, it is important to determine, in consultation with specialists, which children's needs are especially urgent. Toward this end, certain indicators can be very useful in deciding which children are most in need of immediate attention from the classroom teacher.

Critical Indicators For Teacher Intervention

Indicators for teacher intervention involve specific difficulties that are particularly predictive of reading problems, based on current scientific evidence about reading (see Section I). There is not a one-to-one correspondence between the indicators and the items listed under competencies for each grade. However, a given indicator for intervention, such as lack of knowledge of letter sounds or difficulties in learning to decode words, typically will relate to a much broader array of reading difficulties. For example, children who are lagging in learning to decode individual words also will usually have reading comprehension problems, as will those who have listening comprehension or vocabulary weaknesses.

Ongoing assessment is necessary for re-evaluating children's needs and reconstituting flexible groups on a regular basis.

Addressing children's instructional needs in a prompt fashion is critical to preventing long-term failure in reading.

The presence of an indicator is a clear signal that the child requires additional instructional help; the presence of multiple indicators signals the need for even more intensive intervention.

The presence of these indicators cannot be used to draw inferences about the cause of a child's difficulties. For example, difficulties in learning to decode words can result from many different causes, including a lack of early literacy experiences, inappropriate instruction, insufficient opportunities to practice word decoding, poor eyesight or hearing, or an intrinsic learning disability. Nor does the absence of these intervention indicators provide a guarantee that a child will read well. However, the presence of an indicator is a clear signal that a child requires additional instructional help; the presence of multiple indicators signals the need for even more intensive intervention.

Whether or not children need extra help from a teacher, an instructional curriculum should be built upon the competencies specified in the tables for each grade, not only upon the indicators for intervention specified in this section. For example, a kindergartner who has poor phonemic awareness and knowledge of letters needs a comprehensive program of instruction that addresses a broad range of abilities in reading, not one that emphasizes learning letters and developing phonemic awareness to the exclusion of everything else. However, teachers should have heightened concern about this youngster because he or she is demonstrating difficulties that research suggests are especially predictive of future reading problems (National Academy of Education, 1985; National Research Council, 1998; Torgesen, 1998). This child needs substantial help in learning letters and in developing phonemic awareness as part of a more comprehensive instructional curriculum.

Similarly, consider a first grader who is lagging significantly in acquiring out-of-context word-decoding skills. This kind of youngster might read better in context than in isolation, because in context he or she can rely on other cues for reading words besides decoding knowledge. At this early grade level, the child's reading comprehension might even appear adequate, because the texts that are used may not place high demands on reading comprehension. Nevertheless, teachers should recognize that poor out-of-context word decoding is considerable cause for concern (e.g., Shankweiler et al., 1999), because without accurate word decoding, a child will have increasing difficulty as the texts used in school become more demanding. Such a youngster does not require a relentless focus on phonics instruction that ignores all other aspects of reading, but certainly needs substantial help in learning how to decode words.

Each table of critical indicators for teacher intervention (see pages 62-67) includes a column of examples of children's performance difficulties. The examples are included for the sake of clarity, as well as to provide suggestions for possible ways to assess an area. However, other types of

tasks certainly might be used in assessment. Specialists may be particularly helpful in suggesting assessment tasks for classroom teachers to use, in assisting teachers with carrying out the assessments, or in providing ideas for how to help children who need intervention. For example, a reading specialist or special educator may be a very useful resource on how to assess and develop children's word-decoding competencies; a speech and language pathologist may provide extremely helpful ideas on how to assess and develop various oral-language competencies, such as vocabulary and phonemic awareness. And all of these specialists may serve as resources of knowledge about useful comprehension strategies.

Two groups of youngsters warrant particularly close monitoring in the early stages of learning to read. These are children with a history of language impairments in the preschool years, and children with a strong family history of reading difficulties (Scarborough, 1998). As noted in Section I, studies suggest that 40 to 75 percent of children with a history of early language impairment will develop reading problems, even if they appear to have grade-appropriate oral-language competencies upon entering kindergarten. Careful monitoring of the progress of these youngsters, high-quality classroom reading instruction and early intervention, if necessary, can help to prevent or ameliorate the development of reading difficulties.

The indicators for teacher intervention involve teacher-administered screening and diagnostic measures. Although these measures can be developed by teachers, there also are good ones already available (see, e.g., Torgesen, 1998). As previously suggested, screening and diagnostic measures should be part of a broader assessment plan that addresses **all** of the areas in a comprehensive curriculum of reading instruction.

Children with a history of language impairments and those with a strong family history of reading difficulties warrant particularly close monitoring.

NOTE: Examples of indicators for teacher intervention should be observed over time, in various contexts and by more than one individual.

Critical Indicators For Teacher Intervention In Kindergarten

Examples

- Knowledge of letter names and/or sounds
 - When shown a printed letter, such as s, the child has difficulty giving the name and/or sound
- Phonological awareness (rhyming, initial sounds, final sounds and/or blending)
 - The child has difficulty naming a word that rhymes with a word spoken by the teacher (e.g., "cat")
 - Has difficulty matching pictures of words that begin with the same initial sound (e.g., pictures of a box and a boy)
 - Has difficulty matching pictures of words that end with the same sound (e.g., a hat and a kite)
 - Has difficulty blending orally presented sounds to form a word, even when pictures are used (e.g., cannot point to a picture of the moon when the teacher says "Show me /m/ /oo/ /n/")
- Listening comprehension in English
 - Has difficulty answering literal and inferential questions about a grade-appropriate story that has been read aloud, even when he or she has heard the story more than once
- Vocabulary knowledge and language development in English
 - Does not understand the meaning of words that would typically be known by children in his or her grade
- Basic print concepts
 - Does not recognize that print conveys meaning
 - Does not understand the concept of a "word"

NOTE: Examples of indicators for teacher intervention should be observed over time, in various contexts and by more than one individual.

Critical Indicators For Teacher Intervention In First Grade

Examples

- **Word decoding**
When given a list of out-of-context words (unfamiliar real words or nonsense words), the child has difficulty decoding them
- **Knowledge of letter names and/or sounds**
When shown a printed letter, such as s, the child has difficulty giving the name and/or sound
- **Phonemic awareness (phoneme segmentation and/or blending)**
Has difficulty blending orally presented phonemes to form a one-syllable word (e.g., "What is this word: /f/ /l/ /a/ /g/?")

Has difficulty segmenting spoken one-syllable words into phonemes (e.g., "Say the sounds in 'smooth' one at a time.")
- **Listening comprehension in English**
Has difficulty answering literal and inferential questions about a grade-appropriate story that has been read aloud
- **Vocabulary knowledge and language development in English**
Does not understand the meaning of words that would typically be known by children in his or her grade
- **Basic print concepts**
Does not use one-to-one match of printed and spoken words during oral reading

Does not consistently use appropriate directionality during reading (left to right and top to bottom on a page)

NOTE: Examples of indicators for teacher intervention should be observed over time, in various contexts and by more than one individual.

Critical Indicators For Teacher Intervention In Second Grade

Examples

- Fluency of oral reading
When reading grade-appropriate text, the child's reading is slow, labored or expressionless; the child may have poor reading comprehension for text that would be easily understood if it were read aloud to him or her
- Automatic word identification
When given a list of grade-appropriate words, the child labors to decode many words that he or she should recognize automatically
- Spelling
The child's invented spelling is difficult to decipher because many words are not spelled phonetically

When dictated grade-appropriate words to spell, the child has very limited ability to spell conventionally
- Word decoding
When given a list of out-of-context words (unfamiliar real words or nonsense words), the child has difficulty decoding them
- Phonemic awareness (phoneme segmentation and/or blending)
Has difficulty blending orally presented phonemes to form a one-syllable word (e.g., "What is this word: /f/ /l/ /a/ /g/?")

Has difficulty segmenting spoken one-syllable words into phonemes (e.g., "Say the sounds in 'smooth' one at a time.")
- Listening comprehension in English
Has difficulty answering literal and inferential questions about a grade-appropriate story that has been read aloud

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- Vocabulary knowledge and language language development in English

Does not understand the meaning of words that would typically be known by children in his or her grade

- Basic print concepts

Does not use one-to-one match of printed and spoken words during oral reading

Does not consistently use appropriate directionality during reading (left to right and top to bottom on a page)

NOTE: Examples of indicators for teacher intervention should be observed over time, in various contexts and by more than one individual.

Critical Indicators For Teacher Intervention In Third Grade

Examples

- Rate of reading (silent or oral)

The child's rate of reading is slow relative to grade expectations; the child has difficulty sustaining comprehension in long or complex text
- Fluency of oral reading

When reading grade-appropriate text, the child's reading is slow, labored or expressionless; the child may have poor reading comprehension for text that would be easily understood if it were read aloud to him or her
- Automatic word identification

When given a list of grade-appropriate words, the child labors to decode many words that he or she should recognize automatically
- Spelling

May show excessive reliance on invented (phonetic) spelling to spell words instead of having knowledge of word patterns and word-specific knowledge

Has poor knowledge of conventional spelling for grade-appropriate words
- Word decoding

Has difficulty decoding out of context un-
familiar real words or nonsense words

May be able to decode one-syllable words but have difficulty primarily with multisyllable words

May have particular difficulty with inflectional endings

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- Phonemic awareness (phoneme segmentation and/or blending)

Has difficulty blending orally presented phonemes to form a one-syllable word (e.g., "What is this word: /f/ /l/ /a/ /g/?")

Has difficulty segmenting spoken one-syllable words into phonemes (e.g., "Say the sounds in 'smooth' one at a time.")

- Listening comprehension in English

Has difficulty answering literal and inferential questions about a grade-appropriate story that has been read aloud

- Vocabulary knowledge and language development in English

Does not understand the meaning of words that would typically be known by children in his or her grade

- Basic print concepts

Does not use one-to-one match of printed and spoken words during oral reading

Does not consistently use appropriate directionality during reading (left to right and top to bottom on a page)