

## Assessing Literacy Difficulties

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### Reading

There are many ways of testing reading, including word reading, sentence completion and cloze exercises. Word reading tests, by their nature are individually administered, while group tests, used at screening, usually depend on some element of comprehension. Teachers should be aware that some students can perform well on a reading comprehension task, but still have significant difficulty with reading accuracy and fluency.

When teachers are using tests to measure progress, it is best to use the same test before and after intervention. Ideally, tests that have two versions (such as the WRAT4, Micra-T, Neale Analysis, TOWRE and Group Reading Tests) should be used as they allow retesting using the same criteria, but eliminate the risk of 'practice effects', where the student does better because the test has become familiar.

In the post-primary years, the importance of measuring progress has implications for the appropriate selection of tests in first or second year. It is important that the tests used on entry to post-primary education are age appropriate and will continue to be appropriate if used for subsequent re-testing.

The DES provides a comprehensive list of approved tests for post-primary schools and this can be accessed on <http://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Information/Supports-for-Pupils-with-Special-Needs/>

**We strongly advocate that teachers conduct their own assessment for learning and make use of non-standardised assessment, such as reading records, as an integral part of their teaching. See the NCCA for further information on assessment for learning.**

[www.ncca.ie/uploadedfiles/Publications/Afleaflet2.pdf](http://www.ncca.ie/uploadedfiles/Publications/Afleaflet2.pdf)

## **Group Administered Tests**

### **Micra-T Group Reading Tests (2004)**

Standardised on Irish population, in 2002-2003, with total of 10,000 pupils. Has four levels, spanning first to sixth class. Published by CJ Fallon.

### **Drumcondra Primary Reading Test- revised (2007)**

Re-standardised in 2006. Tests both reading vocabulary and reading comprehension, with six levels corresponding to first to sixth class. Published by the Education Research Centre.

### **New Group Reading Test, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, (2010)**

There are four tests, covering different age bands, with standardisation from 5 years to 17 years. Both word reading and reading comprehension are tested. Group administration. Published by gl-assessments.

### **Cloze Reading Test 1, 2 & 3, D Young, (2002) Revised norms.**

Published by Hodder & Stoughton Age range 7:6 to 12:7, a group test of reading comprehension.

### **The Gray Silent Reading Test (2000)**

This is produced by PRO-ED, Inc. The GSRT is a norm-referenced test of silent reading comprehension that is appropriate for individuals ages 7 years through 25 years 11 months. It has two parallel forms, Form A and Form B. THE GSRT can be administered individually, to small groups or to entire classes.

## **Individual and Diagnostic Tests**

**The Adult Reading Test (2004)** is suitable for the age range 16 – 55 years. It is a test that needs to be individually administered. It has UK norms and is published by the Psychological Corporation.

**The Wide Range Achievement Tests (WRAT 4 2006)\*** includes word reading, reading comprehension and spelling tests. It is suitable for the complete age range and uses US norms. This individually administered test also includes a maths assessment. Published by PAR.

**The Neale Analysis of Reading Ability (NARA II 1997)** has been widely used, but is of limited utility in secondary schools as it is only standardised up to the age of 12 years, 11 months. It offers a comprehensive assessment of reading rate, accuracy and comprehension. This test uses British norms. Published by gl-assessment.

The **Diagnostic Reading Analysis (2006)** published by Hodder covers the age range 7 to 16 years and is particularly suitable for testing less able students. It is individually administered and covers reading accuracy, comprehension, fluency and rate of reading.

**Woodcock-Johnson III\*, Tests of Achievement, Form C / Brief Battery, (2007)** is a battery of 9 subtests of letter-word identification, reading fluency, passage

comprehension, spelling, writing fluency, writing samples, calculation, applied problems and maths fluency. It is suitable for the age range 2 to 80 years plus. Published by Riverside Publishing.

There is also a **Woodcock-Johnson III\*, Diagnostic Reading Battery (2004)** which measures dimensions of phonological awareness, phonics knowledge, reading achievement, and related oral language abilities. This again, can be used across the age range. Published by Riverside Publishing.

### **Test of Word Reading Efficiency–Second Edition (TOWRE–2, 2011)**

This test measures an individual's ability to pronounce printed words (Sight Word Efficiency) and phonemically regular non-words (Phonemic Decoding Efficiency) accurately and fluently. Because it can be administered very quickly, the test provides an efficient means of monitoring the growth of two kinds of word reading skill that are critical in the development of overall reading ability. The age range for use is 6 to 24 years. It uses US norms and is published by Pearson.

**York Assessment of Reading Comprehension (YARC), (2011, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition).** It is suitable for the age range 4-11 years. It focuses on not just decoding and sight reading but also on reading comprehension. In addition to passages for pupils 5-11, YARC also includes four short tests (letter-sound knowledge, sound deletion, sound isolation and early word recognition) specifically designed for five and six year olds. It uses UK norms and is published by gl-Assessment.

**York Assessment of Reading Comprehension (YARC) Passage Reading Secondary, (2010).** It is suitable for the age range 12-16 years. The assessment comprises of a series of prose passages that assesses a student's reading comprehension and fluency in a systematic way across the secondary school years. It also assesses reading rate, reading accuracy and reading fluency. It uses UK norms and is published by gl-Assessment.

Finally, there is also Wechsler Individual Achievement Test for use by teachers. This **WIAT for Teachers II (2006)** can be used from 4 years to 16 years, 11 months and has both US and UK norms. It is an individual assessment which covers the following areas: word reading, reading comprehension, reading speed, reading rate and spelling. Published by Pearson.

*\* Some of these tests have restricted access for teachers, depending on the qualifications of the teacher administering and scoring them. Your educational supplier can advise further.*

## **Spelling**

Standardised tests of spelling skills can be very helpful in identifying those who have marked difficulty with spelling. Weekly class spelling tests, where child learn off lists of spellings, can be misleading. This is because some children can manage to memorise spellings in the short-term, but do not retain spellings learnt (and often lack fundamental phonological skills to work out unfamiliar words). Dictation and free writing activities give a better indicator of a child's spelling ability, than a test of weekly spellings.

**The Drumcondra Primary Spelling Test (2003)** can be used from first to sixth class in primary school. There are two forms. It can be group administered in about 45 minutes.

**The Single Word Spelling Test, (SWST 2001)** gl-assessment (standardised from age 6 to 14) has been popular with some schools.

**The British Spelling Test Series, (2<sup>nd</sup> edition 2009)**, published by gl-assessment, is standardised from ages 5 to 15 years, 11 months and can be group or individually administered. It takes 30-40 minutes and uses UK norms.

**Vernon Graded Word Spelling Test, third edition, (2006)**

This is published by Hodder and is standardised for ages 5 to 18 plus.

**Also, see WRAT, WIAT and Woodcock Johnson tests listed above, as they include spelling tests.**

## **Other Tests of Literacy / Writing**

### **Informal Dictation**

It may be helpful to ask students to complete a short piece of dictation. Such a test can yield useful information about a range of skills, including: rate of writing, handwriting legibility, listening skills and spelling skills. While standardised results are not available, an experienced teacher should be able to identify students who have weaker skills in key areas. These students may need further diagnostic testing.

The **Detailed Assessment of Speed of Handwriting Test (DASH 2007, Harcourt Assessment)** can be group administered and is standardised from ages 9 to 16 years, 11 months. It takes 30 minutes and involves five short subtests, including a 10 minute free writing activity.

Other tests of writing speed included one developed by professional association of teachers of students with specific learning difficulties <http://www.patoss-dyslexia.org/> Click on the 'Handwriting Speed Assessment' link in the left hand column.

The Hedderly Sentence Completion Test is another alternative and it can be downloaded for free. Google 'Hedderly Sentence Completion' and open the pdf file in [www.dyslexiaaction.com](http://www.dyslexiaaction.com) which contains the test itself, as well as instructions for scoring.

**The Irish Adaptation of the Handwriting Speed Test** by Hazel Killeen, Mairead Dempsey and Paul O'Mahony. Produced by The Association of Occupational Therapists of Ireland (AOTI), Suite 2.20 Smithfield Business Centre, The Distiller's Building, Smithfield, Dublin 7 01 8748136

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