

## The Purpose of Assessment

Teachers of pupils in the early stages of reading should hear pupils read individually, regularly and frequently. This informal activity when accompanied by the recording and analysis of errors will suggest ways of helping pupils and allow the teacher to evaluate interventions informally.

In addition to this activity, there are now numerous tests with a variety of functions available for use in schools. Generally, standardised tests have been designed to discriminate between pupils and their norms are established on a specified group.

### Remember:

- Assessment is an integral part of good teaching.
- Assessment involves identifying the strengths and weaknesses of a pupil.
- Testing is only one component of the assessment process
- Teaching is associated with putting information *in*; assessment with drawing evidence of skills *out* of pupils. There is an ongoing, reciprocal relationship.
- The results of assessments, including tests, should inform teaching.

### Three Types of Evaluation

1. **Diagnostic evaluation** has a placement function and so takes place *before instruction*. It may be used to determine the presence of prerequisite skills, to determine the pupil's prior level of mastery or to classify the pupil according to various characteristics related to instruction. Diagnostic evaluation may also be used to determine underlying causes of learning difficulties. Diagnostic evaluation may include administration of standardised achievement tests, standardised diagnostic tests, teacher-made tests, observation and checklists. Scoring and interpretation can be normative (based on norms) or criterion-referenced. Results are usually shown as an individual profile of sub-skills.

2. **Formative evaluation** takes place *during instruction*. It provides a check for the teacher, and the pupil, on progress in relation to what has been taught. It can locate errors in terms of a teaching unit so that alternative remedial instruction techniques can be prescribed. The scoring and interpretation reflect a criterion-referenced perspective.

3. **Summative evaluation** is a review process which takes place *after instruction*. It is designed to provide measures of achievement up to the time of assessment for purposes of accountability or selection. Group-administered, standardised tests administered at the end of a course have a

summative purpose, as do final examinations at the end of a course.

**Assessment can serve a range of functions including the following:**

1. Screening – identifying pupils who may require a more comprehensive examination or early intervention
2. Referral – using observation and current performance as a basis of seeking more formal assessment
3. Classification – using the results of tests to determine eligibility to access services based on predetermined criteria
4. Instructional planning – information from tests, usually diagnostic or criterion-referenced tests, is used to develop an individual learning plan
5. Monitoring progress – tests (formal and informal) are used to review a pupils' current level of achievement and progress and to compare with previous records of achievement
6. Checking mastery - criterion-referenced tests give information on whether pupils have mastered specific curriculum content
7. Developing understanding - lead to an understanding and acceptance of the learning difference for teachers, parents & pupil
8. Therapeutic – to remove self-doubts and negative thinking and facilitate initial counselling
9. Empowering the pupil – enables the pupil to develop strategies and to self-manage problems

**Two principles for testing reading:**

- 1) Reading skills should always be retested on the same instrument. Different measures may correlate well, but not perfectly, with each other.
- 2) Composites scores which are based on combined scores from different subtests are more stable and reliable than subtest scores on their own.

**Three guidelines for testing reading:**

- 1) A pupil receiving intensive teaching over a long period should at least annually receive a full-passage reading test of the kind that integrates the many concurrent operations of reading (including word accuracy, composition, speed and fluency).
- 2) At least two different measures of reading should be used, for instance word recognition and passage reading.
- 3) Progress should be estimated every term or at least once every six month.

**Identification at Post-primary**

While many pupils with learning difficulties will be identified before entry to post-primary level, a school can ensure the identification of incoming pupils with learning difficulties by proactively:

- liaising directly with feeder primary schools
- encouraging and providing a positive procedure for parents to inform the school of the pupil's learning history
- administering screening tests (including tests of ability and achievement) to all incoming pupils prior to entry or at entry
- developing an internal and external referral policy

---

**Source URL:** <http://www.sess.ie/node/848>