

DRA CHALLENGES AND POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

An Important and Evidence-Based Timesaver!

In March of 2018, MN STAR Leadership Team found strong observation evidence that vocabulary is mostly to always a need for our MN STAR students at Low/High Intermediate ABE and Advanced ESL Levels. Therefore, MN STAR programs and teachers may choose to assume STAR students' vocabulary needs rather than assess with the *Word Meaning Test*.

Challenges	Possible Solutions
How do TABE or CASAS grade level equivalents (GLE or GE) relate to diagnostic reading assessment (DRA)?	TABE or CASAS Reading GE 'open the door' to DRA. ABE or ESL students with GE between 4.0 and 8.0/8.9 are <u>eligible for DRA</u> . Mastery and Instructional Levels at 4-8 support <u>placement in STAR class or instruction</u> .
Sometimes when I use the Alphabetics Mastery Level as the starting point for fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension, I end up presenting so many word lists or passages. It takes lots of time!	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Use the Alphabetics Mastery Level OR the TABE Reading GLE - <u>whichever is lower</u> - as the starting point for all other tests. 2. Hold off on comprehension assessment for students with Alphabetics, Fluency, and Vocabulary Mastery Levels of 4-6 (or less).
How do we maintain consistency in DRA processes and results?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Be sure that all testers have participated in DRA training AND observed several assessments from beginning to end. 2. Consider specialization: one tester <i>always</i> administers alphabetics; another <i>always</i> administers fluency, etc. 3. Bring up DRA questions or challenges at your STAR team meetings. Decide how you will ensure consistency and efficiency among testers. 4. Review the new STAR Online Training modules (available in December of 2018) covering assessment of all four reading components. 5. Accept there are gray areas in DRA; however, Mastery and Instructional Levels provide highly valuable evidence about students' reading strengths and needs that should be used to inform reading instruction. 6. If Mastery or Instructional Levels are off, it is usually only by 1-2 levels. STAR teachers have the privilege and responsibility to make adjustments in their STAR classrooms or groups.

<p>What if a student appears reluctant or anxious about individualized testing?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Most students respond very positively to DRA. They appreciate the 1:1 teacher or volunteer time that identifies their strengths and needs. 2. Tell students you are acting like a “reading doctor,” who will examine their skills and decide what needs to be “treated” through instruction and practice. 3. Explain the purpose and process of each test and how each component is related to the ultimate goal of reading: comprehension of text. 4. Because alphabetic is <u>always</u> the first test (and students may be nervous), start at least one GE lower to build test comfort or success. It won’t add too much time!
<p>Is alphabetic assessment about word reading or pronunciation?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The WRT and BADER word lists are meant for testing quick and correct (or automatic) word recognition – <i>not</i> perfect pronunciation. 2. Ask yourself: Does the student seem to recognize or know the word (even if not perfectly pronounced)? 3. As a STAR team, discuss your ELLs’ different accents, dialects, or pronunciation challenges and how they may affect scoring. 4. Remember the purpose of alphabetic assessment is to determine who will benefit from explicit beginning (phonics/sight words) or intermediate/advanced (compounds/syllables/affixes/roots) alphabetic instruction.
<p>Students read the leveled word lists too fast. How can I control their pace to keep up with scoring and recording of errors?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Explain that this is a different kind of reading task; the word lists are read slower than usual, so you (the tester) can keep up with scoring. 2. If necessary, use a blank note card or note card with a window to pace the reading of each word. 3. Write the word lists on individual note cards. Consider color-coding the levels.
<p>If a student has phonics needs, should he/she be in STAR class?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Yes, if his/her other DRA levels are within GE 4-8. Consider teaching phonics skills before or after STAR class, with a volunteer, or on the computer with sequential and systematic phonics software.

	<p>2. No, if his/her other DRA levels are below GE 4. However, addressing phonics and fluency needs is crucial for Beginning ABE and Beginning/Intermediate ESL readers.</p>
<p>What if I don't clearly hear a student read or pronounce a word?</p>	<p>Simply tell the student YOU did not hear a word (because of background noise) and ask them to re-read it.</p>
<p>I don't feel comfortable teaching phonics skills; how do I teach the unknown patterns identified by phonics assessment?</p>	<p>Go to http://atlasabe.org/resources/ebri/ebri-alphabetics and you will find many FREE resources for teaching phonics (for mostly one-syllable words) and multi-syllable decoding.</p>
<p>There is so much subjectivity in the fluency scale!</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Using a more objective measure such as words correct per minute (WCPM) is not recommended for adults. There are no adult norms for scoring and adults tend to get stressed and rushed by timed readings. 2. Scoring with the fluency scale does get easier. You will become more familiar with the passages and can concentrate on judging overall fluency. 3. A fluency rating of 3 means that accuracy, rate, and prosody are good; a rating of 2 means that accuracy is good, but rate and prosody are breaking down; and a rating of 1 means that accuracy, rate, and prosody have all broken down. 4. Close your eyes while students read passages aloud. Imagine they are telling you a story: Does it flow? Can you follow it? Do you (and they) understand it? 5. Review the rubric and audios available on the STAR Toolkit as many times as needed. 6. Record students' oral reading of fluency passages and score with another trained tester.
<p>How do I distinguish between a fluency scale score of 2 and 3? There seems to be a fine difference.</p>	<p>A score of 3 means read orally with 90-95%+ accuracy (or few word errors), smoothly at a good rate, in meaningful phrases, and <i>possibly</i> with some expression.</p> <p>A score of 2 means read orally with less than 90% accuracy (or some word errors), at an uneven rate, with some awkward phrasing and little to no expression.</p>

<p>Some BADER higher-level passages seem easier than lower-level passages.</p> <p>Sometimes a student's fluency seems related to his/her familiarity or prior knowledge of the passage content.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Fluency performance can be affected by students' prior knowledge or familiarity with passage content. Therefore, try to select passages less known to them. <u>Do not</u> administer the same passage for fluency and comprehension. 2. Some BADER passages are fiction and others are non-fiction. Typically, our students are more familiar with fiction, so non-fiction might be harder to read.
<p>Some of my students are uncomfortable reading aloud.</p>	<p>Explain to them that the only way for you to figure out if they need help reading text accurately and smoothly is for them to read aloud.</p>
<p>I get very confused by the purposes for Fluency Mastery Level, Instructional Level for Rate/Prosody, and Instructional Level for Accuracy-in-Context.</p>	<p>The Fluency Mastery Level determines <u>who</u> needs to participate in fluency instruction (all students scoring below Level 8+).</p> <p>The Instructional Level for Rate/Prosody determines <u>who</u> needs to improve speed and phrasing and at <u>what</u> level of material. The students will know most of the words; rate and prosody are modeled by the teacher.</p> <p>The Instructional Level for Accuracy determines <u>who</u> needs to improve alphabets-in-context and at <u>what</u> level of material. The students will not know all of the words; accuracy is modeled by the teacher.</p>
<p>How much should prosody be considered when assessing fluency?</p>	<p>A lot! Reading in meaningful chunks or phrases is highly related to <u>text understanding</u>. As is speaking in meaningful phrases highly related to <u>oral understanding</u>.</p>
<p>The fluency assessment takes so much time!</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Save the fluency assessment for last. You have to give alphabets first, but the other assessments can be given in any order. 2. If possible, have the same tester always give the fluency assessment. Practice does not make perfect, but may make it more efficient. 3. Another MN STAR Timesaver! Do not seek a fluency scale score 0 (labored or painful) because it does not further inform fluency instruction or grouping.

<p>Sometimes students read higher-level passages better than lower-level passages.</p>	<p>Students may be very nervous or anxious about reading the first passage(s) aloud. As they gain comfort with the fluency assessment process, they relax and oral reading naturally improves.</p>
<p>Is the vocabulary test a receptive or expressive assessment?</p>	<p>From Mary Beth Curtis, Project STAR subject matter expert: "... [What] we're trying to figure out is whether learners have any familiarity with a word's meaning. It is true that we are requiring 'expression' ... But we're not scoring the quality of that expression (other than to make a Y/N decision), making the WMT closer to a receptive than an expressive assessment."</p>
<p>What if a student asks me to show or spell the word?</p> <p>What if a student asks me for the part of speech?</p>	<p>Apologize. Smile. Tell them no (you can't) because the <i>Word Meaning Test</i> is an oral test ONLY. It allows for a small set of prompts and does not allow for visual cues or verbal hints. If provided, this changes the purpose and process (and possibly outcome) of the test.</p>
<p>Some of my students use the test word in their definition.</p>	<p>Try using other prompts: "Tell me more." "Can you use other words?" "Can you use ___ in a sentence?" Students' definitions do not have to be dictionary quality, but do establish familiarity with the word's meaning.</p>
<p>Some of my students use the words in sentences.</p>	<p>Acceptable responses do include sentences as long as they demonstrate familiarity with the word's meaning. However, not all of the acceptable responses from the Teacher Copy include sentence examples.</p>
<p>What if a student does not hear a vocabulary word correctly (for example, hears "fans" for "fence")?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The <i>Word Meaning Test</i> directions allow you to repeat the word. 2. If the student still does not hear the word, have them look at your mouth as you repeat the word again. 3. Assess the testing space or environment: Are there interfering background noises? 4. Note that there were frequent requests for word repetitions or difficulties with hearing or discriminating word pronunciations.

<p>Can students look back at the passages during comprehension assessment? Are we assessing comprehension or short-term memory?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Students can look back at the passages for details that require short-term memory (names, dates, places, lists). Make sure they are skimming or scanning, <u>not rereading</u>. 2. If a student persists with rereading, turn the passage over or cover it up after one reading.
<p>Some ELLs have difficulty orally articulating their answers to the questions.</p>	<p>Most, if not all, of the BADER questions have been revised to be text-dependent. According to the CCR Reading Standards, all ABE and ESL students need to learn how to read text closely to determine key details, main topics or ideas, themes, purposes, and cite evidence in speaking and writing.</p>
<p>I have trouble judging students' comprehension answers as correct or incorrect according to the answer key.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Students' answers do not have to be "by the BADER," but should indicate understanding of the passage. 2. If you are struggling to score question by question, ask yourself: "Are they able to answer <u>most of the questions</u> (>75% = mastery) or just <u>some of the questions</u> (<75% = not mastery) at this level?"
<p>How do I score partial or incomplete answers that are difficult to judge as correct or incorrect?</p>	<p>Generally, mark those answers as incorrect and use the suggestions from above to determine mastery levels.</p>
<p>Can I begin with the comprehension interview rather than end with it?</p>	<p>Certainly! Beginning with a friendly interview may relieve some of the anxiety that testing naturally triggers.</p>
<p>Students tend to tell me comprehension interview answers they think I want to hear.</p>	<p>Encourage them to be honest; there are no right or wrong comprehension interview answers. Their honesty will help you plan better reading instruction and practice!</p>
<p>Some students are unfamiliar with the 1-5 ratings and their descriptors.</p> <p>Some students are confused by the small rating print on the page.</p>	<p>Make index cards for each rating number and description. Lay them out on the table or desk. Ask students to point or pick up the rating card they choose.</p>