

## **PALS 1-3 Frequently Asked Questions**

### **Word Recognition**

*What do I do if the list is too difficult for the student?*

If the student misses three out of the first five words, you may open up the list and ask the student to identify any words that s/he knows. It is important to note that the Entry Level word list must be given since this score is part of the Entry Level Summed Score.

*Do I stop administration after I give the Entry Level word list?*

It is likely that you will need to administer more word lists as a result of the student's score on the entry-level word list. The goal is to find the highest word list from which the student can correctly read 15 words. Students' scores on the word recognition lists indicate the appropriate level to begin passage reading.

### **Level A: Oral Reading in Context**

#### ***Oral Reading Passages***

*My student had two oral reading scores at the independent level, but was instructional on the word list. Why isn't his reading level independent, based on the oral reading scores?*

The definition of the independent level in reading is that level on which a student functions with speed and accuracy guaranteed. If a student is truly independent at a given level, he or she should be equally accurate in or out of context.

*What is the difference between a student who is independent at a grade level and a student who is listed as instructional between two grade levels?*

A student who is listed as instructional between two grade levels (i.e. between 1st and 2nd) is instructional at both the 1st and 2nd grade levels, but not independent at the lower level (1st grade). For students who were assigned an independent level, there was not enough information to determine an instructional level.

*Why is a student listed as a 2nd grade reader when his 2nd grade Word Recognition in Isolation (WRI) score was 15-17 but his 2nd grade Oral Reading in Context Score (ORC) was below 90%?*

This is a highly unlikely scenario and happened only 1.4% of the time in statewide administration of PALS 1-3 in Fall 2001. Ninety-nine percent of the time, if a student scored an instructional-level score on the 2nd grade WRI (15-17 words correct), the student scored an instructional or independent ORC score at the end of 2nd grade level as well. For students who achieved a WRI instructional level at the 1st grade level, 96% of them scored at an instructional or independent level on the 1st grade ORC. For those who scored an instructional level on the 3rd grade level 99% also scored at an instructional or independent level on the 3rd grade ORC. So, we feel pretty safe in saying that with a WRI

score at the instructional level, in most cases, the ORC is either at an instructional (90-97% accuracy) or independent (98-100% accuracy) level as well. In a few instances where these two scores conflict, the WRI score is the default since this task predicts overall reading level better than any other measure.

*I have determined the student's instructional level. How do I find books at this level?*

Refer to our Leveled Book List for numerous titles, ranging from Readiness to Fourth grade level. The titles are organized by Basal Level, Guided Reading Level, Reading Recovery Level, and DRA Level. Also included are author/series and publisher information, as well as links to help you purchase the books.

*The PALS passages end at sixth grade. What do I do about students who read above the sixth grade?*

To determine the reading level of a student reading above the sixth grade, we recommend using passages from the Qualitative Reading Inventory-III (QRI-III).

*Do the Oral Reading passages represent beginning, middle, or end-of-the-year text?*

The first, second and third grade passages represent end-of-the-year text. The primer passage is typical of beginning first grade material.

*Can I redirect a child if they skip an entire line when reading?*

Yes, if the child skips an entire line of text when reading, stop the child and redirect him or her to the correct place. Do not count this as an error.

## **Comprehension**

*Why are the comprehension questions optional?*

Students vary in terms of prior knowledge, background experience, motivation, etc. It is difficult to establish benchmarks for comprehension because there are many factors that contribute to successful comprehension.

*Why is reading comprehension not included in the reading level calculation?*

The purpose of reading is to comprehend, and most agree that comprehension is not possible if the words are not decoded or understood. Because word recognition and decoding enable comprehension, these two components of learning to read process are emphasized in the primary grades (Paris & Paris, 2003). Basic word recognition and decoding competence are precursors to any measurable reading achievement and research has repeatedly demonstrated that automated decoding skills enable better comprehension with increasing age and proficiency. Reading comprehension requires the kind of intellectual reasoning that is possible only after decoding skills have become automated, thus freeing cognitive resources for understanding (LaBerge & Samuels, 1974) If students can read words accurately and fluently, the necessary condition for reading comprehension has been satisfied. Without instruction, however,

accurate and effortless word recognition may not be sufficient for good reading comprehension. Clearly there are other factors that can influence understanding. Background knowledge, engagement, vocabulary knowledge, application of metacognitive strategies, cognitive capacity, practice, motivation, general language skill, and personality can influence reading comprehension even if the words are easily identified. Thus it might be said that word recognition and decoding are necessary but not sufficient to ensure reading comprehension.

What else is necessary to ensure reading comprehension? Researchers have suggested that language comprehension may be a key missing variable. According to Gough (1996), when difficulties with reading comprehension are observed, there are invariably deficits in language comprehension or decoding skills, and often in both. Gough's (1996) "simple view" of reading suggests that if we know a student's capacity for decoding and word recognition, and we know their capacity for understanding spoken language, we can predict the student's reading comprehension quite reliably. According to the simple view, reading comprehension (R) is the product of decoding (D) and spoken language comprehension (C), such that  $R = D \times C$ . Consider a student who has excellent decoding skills (a score of 1) but very poor language comprehension (a score of 0). The simple view would predict that this student's reading comprehension would be very poor ( $R = 1 \times 0$ ). The same would be true for a student with poor decoding skills (a score of 0) but outstanding language comprehension (a score of 1) ( $R = 0 \times 1$ ). To truly assess student's reading comprehension then, we need a measure of their general language comprehension independent of print.

PALS does not consider reading comprehension scores in calculating functional reading levels because students' reading comprehension should be commensurate with their ability to comprehend spoken language. Since we do not have access to students' general comprehension of spoken language, we can not be certain why a student may have done poorly on the comprehension questions following each passage. Unless a student's general understanding of spoken language is lower than the level at which he or she can decode and recognize printed words, there is no reason to move their instructional reading level down. Instead, teachers should teach background knowledge, vocabulary, comprehension strategies, and the like, at each child's instructional level as determined by their ability to read and decode words. To do otherwise might unfairly hold students back and impede progress. A brief overview of the simple view of reading espoused by Gough (1996) is available at:

<http://www.balancedreading.com/simple.html>

## **Level B: Alphabets**

## **Alphabet Recognition**

*Why does PALS only assess lowercase alphabet recognition? What about uppercase letters?*

Based on research of over 50,000 kindergarten and first grade children, a ceiling effect was found on upper-case letter recognition (very few errors were made). A ceiling effect was not found for lower-case letter recognition. Therefore, lowercase letter recognition is a better indicator of a child's alphabet knowledge.

## **Letter Sounds**

*Can I tell the child the name of the letter when giving the Letter Sound task? For instance, can I say what sound does "M" make?*

You should not tell the student the letter name when administering the Letter Sound task. Many letter names sound similar to the sounds they represent. Therefore, providing such assistance would not yield an accurate measure of the child's letter sound knowledge.

*Why are uppercase letters used for the Letter Sound task?*

Many lower-case letters have geometrically similar shapes and are easily confused by young children (i.e. b/d, p/q). Upper-case letters are less confusing in this aspect, and will provide a more accurate measure of the child's letter sound knowledge.

## **Level C: Phonemic Awareness**

### **Blending**

*What is the rationale for Level C tasks?*

Research has shown that a student's performance on blending tasks predicts how well he will read several years later. Research has also shown that difficulty with sound-to-letter, or segmenting, tasks is related to difficulty with alphabetic retrieval and might inhibit written word learning.

*I have students who were not required to take the Level B tasks, but I suspect they might have a problem with phonemic awareness. What can I do?*

Please feel free to give Level B to any of your students. Although you will not be asked to report these scores to the PALS website, you can use this information for instructional purposes.

### **Other**

*Should I screen students in Special Education with PALS 1-3? What about students for whom English is not the first language?*

Since PALS is a school-wide screening instrument for all children in grades K-3, all students, including students with disabilities, unless the IEP exempts the student from participation, should be screened. Teachers should check with the special education teacher assigned to the student for clarification.

When it comes to screening English language learners (ELL), school divisions should apply the same policies and practices to ELL students that they do with all students.

*What is the criteria for the High Benchmark Designation?*

The high benchmark designation exempts students reading well above grade level from future PALS screenings. The High Benchmark Designation is indicated with an up arrow next to a student's name. Students are eligible for the High Benchmark Designation in the spring of first grade or the fall of second grade. In the spring of first grade students must read 18 or more words correctly on the second grade word list, read the second grade passage (or higher) with 98% accuracy or better, and receive a fluency rating of three on that passage. In the fall of second grade students must read 18 or more words correctly on the third grade word list, read the third grade passage (or higher) with 98% accuracy or better, and receive a fluency rating of three on that passage.

*How were the benchmarks established for PALS 1-3 tasks?*

Benchmarks for some of the PALS 1-3 tasks were based on research collected from three years of PALS data. In addition, PALS 1-3 was pilot tested with over six hundred elementary students in the Spring of 2000. Data from the 2002-2003 school year was analyzed to revise benchmarks. New materials were pilot tested in Spring 2001 with over two thousand students in the state of Virginia.

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