Reading Assessment Syllabus with Suggested Readings

This is a sample outline for a semester-long course on reading assessment. While there will be content appropriate for all grade levels, the intended audience is pre-service elementary teachers. Suggested student readings for each week are in ***blue.*** *Advanced students and/or instructors who are interested in further reading will find additional articles listed in* ***orange.***

Week 1: *Cognitive foundations of reading and their connection to assessment (cont'd)*

- Key ideas:
    - Language is the foundation of reading; as such, early language screening is essential
    - Written language incorporates structures and vocabulary that are uncommon in oral language, and may need to be assessed as they are taught
    - English learners will need to develop both their language and word recognition skills
- Suggested readings:

Cunningham, A. E., & Stanovich, K. E. (2001). What reading does for the mind. *Journal of direct instruction*, *1*(2), 137-149.

Willingham, D. (2017). *The Reading Mind: A Cognitive Approach to Understanding How the Mind Reads*, Jossey-Bass. (Specifically Chapters 1-3, pages 1-75)

MacDonald, M. (2025). Book language: What it is, how children can 'get it.' *Perspectives on Language and Literacy*, *51*(2), 16-19.

Korochkina, M., & Rastle, K. (2025). Morphology in children's books, and what it means for learning. *npj Science of Learning*, *10*(1), 22.

Snowling, M. J., & Hulme, C. (2025). The Reading Is Language Model: A Theoretical Framework for Language and Reading Development and Intervention. *Annual Review of Developmental Psychology*, *7*. 1

Week 2: *Cognitive foundations of reading and their connection to assessment (cont'd)*

- Key ideas:
    - Early learners must understand how their language's orthography maps onto oral language
    - Reading comprehension relies on accurate, fluent, and automatic word recognition, which must be taught and assessed
    - Developmental sequences of reading are remarkably similar across orthographies, allowing us to design evidence-based scopes and sequences in our assessment plans
- Suggested readings:

Ehri, L. C. (2005). Learning to read words: Theory, findings, and issues. *Scientific Studies of reading*, 9(2), 167-188.

Tunmer, W. E., & Hoover, W. A. (2019). The cognitive foundations of learning to read: a framework for preventing and remediating reading difficulties. *Australian Journal of Learning Difficulties*, 24(1), 75–93. https://doi.org/10.1080/19404158.2019.1614081

Dehaene, S., & Cohen, L. (2011). The unique role of the visual word form area in reading. *Trends in cognitive sciences*, 15(6), 254–262. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tics.2011.04.003

Kim, Y.-S. G., Quinn, J. M., & Petscher, Y. (2021). What is text reading fluency and is it a predictor or an outcome of reading comprehension? A longitudinal investigation. *Developmental Psychology*, 57(5), 718–732. https://doi.org/10.1037/dev0001167

Share, D. L. (2025). Blueprint for a universal theory of learning to read: The combinatorial model. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 60(2), e603.

Week 3: *Data visualization and interpretation*

- Key ideas:
    - Bar graphs can compare groups or time periods
    - Line graphs can show continuous change over time
    - Scatterplots can show how two constructs are correlated
    - If something is "statistically significant," that means the observed difference/effect is unlikely to be the result of sampling variation alone
- Suggested reading:

    Explore different types of graphs on www.storytellingwithdata.com/chart-guide

    Article by NAEP on statistical significance: https://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/guides/statsig.aspx

    Toste, J. R., Filderman, M. J., Clemens, N. H., & Fry, E. (2025). Graph Out Loud: Pre-Service Teachers' Data Decisions and Interpretations of CBM Progress Graphs. *Journal of learning disabilities*, 58(1), 33–45. https://doi.org/10.1177/00222194241231768

Week 4: *Psychometric principles of educational assessment*

- Key ideas:
    - "Construct validity" refers to how well an assessment measures what we believe it measures, and "predictive validity" estimates how well we can use data from an assessment to predict a future outcome
    - "Reliability" describes how consistent measurements from the same assessment are across time or versions
    - "Efficiency" means how quickly and accurately we gather data
    - These constructs can be quantified, and high-quality assessments share these data in their technical manuals
- Suggested reading:

    Brief article from The Center on Standards & Assessment Implementation: https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED588476.pdf

    One-pagers on classification accuracy, validity, reliability, statistical bias, and sample representativeness from the National Center on Intensive Intervention: https://intensiveintervention.org/resource/screening-standards-overviews?_ga=2.143563829.1058142404.1769559482-171844831.1768573634

    Barrett, C. A., Johnson, L. J., Truckenmiller, A. J., & VanDerHeyden, A. M. (2024). Comparing the cost–accuracy ratios of multiple approaches to reading screening in elementary schools. *Remedial and Special Education, 45*(2), 71-84.

Week 5: *Assessment structures within an MTSS framework*

- Key ideas:
    - Screeners should efficiently identify students in need of additional instruction, and measure overall effectiveness of a school's curriculum and instruction
    - Progress monitoring tools tell us if our intervention is working
    - Diagnostics help us know what to teach
    - Outcome assessments help us plan next year's learning
- Suggested reading:

Toste, J. R., Espinas, D., Oslund, E., Elleman, A., & Biancarosa, G. (2026). Measuring what matters: Understanding what reading assessments really tell us. *The Reading League Journal*, 7(1), 5-15.

Truckenmiller, A. J., Cho, E., Bourgeois, S., & Friedman, E. (2024). Uses and Misuses of Commercial Reading Assessment: An Applied Framework for Decision Making in Grades K through 6. *The Reading Teacher*, 77(5), 609-623.

Gibbons, K., Brown, S., & Niebling, B. (2018). *Effective Universal Instruction: An Action-Oriented Approach to Improving Tier 1*. Guilford Press. (Specifically Chapter 3, "Universal Tier Assessments").

Leonard, K. M., Coyne, M. D., Oldham, A. C., Burns, D., & Gillis, M. B. (2019). Implementing MTSS in Beginning Reading: Tools and Systems to Support Schools and Teachers. *Learning Disabilities Research & Practice*, 34(2), 110-117. https://doi.org/10.1111/ldrp.12192 (Original work published 2019)

Reutzel, D. R., Brandt, L., Fawson, P. C., & Jones, C. D. (2014). Exploration of the consortium on reading excellence phonics survey: An instrument for assessing primary-grade students' phonics knowledge. *The Elementary School Journal, 115*(1), 49-72.

Week 6: *Screeners*

- Key ideas:
    - "Classification accuracy" describes how accurately an assessment correctly identifies struggling readers (sensitivity) without making too many false positives (specificity)
    - These often include curriculum-based measures (CBMs) or computer-adaptive testing (CATs)
- Suggested reading:

    Pages 11-16 in Gersten, R., Compton, D., Connor, C. M., Dimino, J., Santoro, L., Linan-Thompson, S., & Tilly, W. D. (2008). *Assisting students struggling with reading: Response to Intervention and multi-tier intervention for reading in the primary grades. A practice guide.(NCEE 2009-4045). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Institute of Education Sciences, US Department of Education.*

    Petscher, Y., & Suhr, M. (2022). Considerations for choosing and using screeners for students with disabilities. In *Handbook of Special Education Research, Volume II* (pp. 83-96). Routledge.

Week 7: *Progress monitoring*

- Key ideas:
    - These assessments need to be efficient enough that we can administer them frequently
    - Reliability is key; we may need multiple measurements to make a confident estimate
    - General outcome measures (e.g. CBMs) and mastery measures (e.g. curriculum-embedded assessments) are both part of an evidence-based progress monitoring plan
- Suggested reading:

    Deno, S. L. (2003). Curriculum-based measures: Development and perspectives. *Assessment for effective intervention*, 28(3-4), 3-12.

    Fuchs, L. S., & Fuchs, D. (2011). Using CBM for progress monitoring in reading. *National Center on Student Progress Monitoring*.

Week 8: *Diagnostics*

- Key ideas:
    - Some constructs are easier to measure than others, e.g. letter sounds vs. "vocabulary"
    - Diagnostics should be granular and actionable
    - Not all students need to take a diagnostic assessment
- Suggested reading:

    Review AIM's Quick Guide for Reading Assessment: https://www.education.ne.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/AIM-Quick-Guide-to-Reading-Assessment.pdf

    Reutzel, D. R., Brandt, L., Fawson, P. C., & Jones, C. D. (2014). Exploration of the consortium on reading excellence phonics survey: An instrument for assessing primary-grade students' phonics knowledge. *The Elementary School Journal*, *115*(1), 49-72.

Week 9: *CBMs*

- Key ideas:
    - Can be used as both screeners and progress monitoring tools
    - CBMs are fluency measures, requiring students to be accurate and automatic, and some are highly correlated with reading comprehension
    - Common early literacy CBMs include letter naming, phoneme segmentation, letter sound fluency, nonsense word fluency, word reading fluency, oral reading fluency
- Suggested reading:

Deno, S. L. (2003). Developments in curriculum-based measurement. *The journal of special education*, 37(3), 184-192.

Jenkins, J. R., & Fuchs, L. S. (2012). Curriculum-based measurement: The paradigm, history, and legacy. *A measure of success: The influence of curriculum-based measurement on education*, 7-23.

Explore DIBELS materials and training videos for free at https://dibels.uoregon.edu/resources

Reschly, A. L., Busch, T. W., Betts, J., Deno, S. L., & Long, J. D. (2009). Curriculum-based measurement oral reading as an indicator of reading achievement: A meta-analysis of the correlational evidence. *Journal of school psychology*, *47*(6), 427-469.

Shinn, M. R., Knutson, N., Good III, R. H., Tilly III, W. D., & Collins, V. L. (1992). Curriculum-based measurement of oral reading fluency: A confirmatory analysis of its relation to reading. *School Psychology Review*, *21*(3), 459-479.

Week 10: *CBMs*

- Key ideas:
    - Later measures: oral reading fluency and maze
    - Writing CBMs are somewhat less common in today's schools, but also provide valuable, efficient data
    - Special considerations for English learners
- Suggested reading:

Hosp, M. K., Hosp, J. L., & Howell, K. W. (2016). *The ABCs of CBM: A practical guide to curriculum-based measurement*. Guilford Publications.

Good, R. H. III, Simmons, D. C., & Kame'enui, E. J. (2001). The importance and decision-making utility of a continuum of fluency-based indicators of foundational reading skills for third-grade high-stakes outcomes. *Scientific Studies of Reading*, 5(3), 257–288. https://doi.org/10.1207/S1532799XSSR0503_4

Kim, J. S., Vanderwood, M. L., & Lee, C. Y. (2016). Predictive validity of curriculum-based measures for English learners at varying English proficiency levels. *Educational Assessment*, 21(1), 1–18. https://doi.org/10.1080/10627197.2015.1127750

Newell, K. W., Codding, R. S., & Fortune, T. W. (2020). Oral reading fluency as a screening tool with English learners: A systematic review. *Psychology in the Schools*, 57(8), 1208-1239.

Truckenmiller, A. J., McKindles, J. V., Petscher, Y., Eckert, T. L., & Tock, J. (2020). Expanding curriculum-based measurement in written expression for middle school. *The Journal of Special Education*, 54(3), 133-145.

Valentine, K. A., & Truckenmiller, A. J. (2025). Assessing Writing Across Levels of Language to Identify Instructional Needs. *Intervention in School and Clinic*, 60(3), 141-149.

Week 11: *Language assessment*

- Key ideas:
    - Language is an expansive domain, and it can be difficult to assess "language proficiency" with the same level of reliability and granular detail as a closed skill such as decoding
    - In the general education classroom, language assessment is often more informal, though standardized assessments exist and are often administered by speech-language pathologists or school psychologists
    - Teachers should be particularly aware of developmental language disorder and its warning signs, particularly given that many schools do not provide universal language screening for DLD in K-2
- Suggested reading:

    Review one or more of the screeners identified by Bao, Komesidou, & Hogan (complete citation below); for example, the CUBED-NLM is available for free online here: https://languagedynamicsgroup.com/cubed-nlm/

    Explore WIDA's interpretive guide for ACCESS for ELLs: https://wida.wisc.edu/sites/default/files/resource/Interpretive-Guide.pdf

    McGregor K. K. (2020). How We Fail Children With Developmental Language Disorder. *Language, speech, and hearing services in schools*, *51*(4), 981–992. https://doi.org/10.1044/2020_LSHSS-20-00003

    Bao, X., Komesidou, R., & Hogan, T. P. (2024). A review of screeners to identify risk of developmental language disorder. *American Journal of speech-language pathology*, 33(3), 1548-1571.

    Dougherty Stahl, K. A., & Bravo, M. A. (2010). Contemporary classroom vocabulary assessment for content areas. *The Reading Teacher*, 63(7), 566-578.

Week 12: *Comprehension assessment*

- Key ideas:
    - Reading comprehension is a highly dynamic task, dependent on a multitude of factors including word recognition ability, vocabulary, relevant background knowledge, working memory, and more
    - Standards-based reading assessments are a bit of a misnomer, as reading comprehension does not consist of discrete skills such as "finding the main idea" or "identifying the theme"
    - Students who score poorly on comprehension assessments may vary greatly in their instructional needs, and should be given diagnostic assessments in order to identify actionable learning targets
- Suggested reading:

Chapter 2 (pages 11-22) of the ACT's *Reading Between the Lines Report*, found here: https://www.act.org/content/dam/act/unsecured/documents/reading_report.pdf

Farrall, M. L., & Ashby, J. (2019). The role of assessment in structured literacy. *Perspectives on Language and Literacy*, *45*(3), 31-35.

Willingham, D. T. (2006). The usefulness of brief instruction in reading comprehension strategies. *American Educator*, *30*(4), 39-50.

Francis, D. J., Fletcher, J. M., Catts, H. W., & Tomblin, J. B. (2005). Dimensions affecting the assessment of reading comprehension. In *Children's reading comprehension and assessment* (pp. 387-412). Routledge.

Week 13: *History and misconceptions surrounding assessment*

- Key ideas:
    - Running records remain prevalent in many elementary schools and teacher training programs, but are grounded in flawed ideas about reading (i.e. the three-cueing system) and consistently demonstrate less-than-adequate psychometric properties
    - Many assessment platforms report subscores based on curricular standards, but these may not represent true instructional needs
- Suggested reading:

Castles, A., Rastle, K., & Nation, K. (2018). Ending the reading wars: Reading acquisition from novice to expert. *Psychological science in the public interest*, *19*(1), 5-51.

Unger, A., Serry, T., Snow, P. C., & Weadman, T. (2025). The Road to Running Records: A Narrative Review of Their History and a Systematic Narrative Review of the Evidence for Their Use. *Review of Educational Research*, 00346543251348258.

Parker, D. C., Zaslofsky, A. F., Burns, M. K., Kanive, R., Hodgson, J., Scholin, S. E., & Klingbeil, D. A. (2015). A brief report of the diagnostic accuracy of oral reading fluency and reading inventory levels for reading failure risk among second-and third-grade students. *Reading & Writing Quarterly*, *31*(1), 56-67.

Week 14: *Final project presentations*

- Potential project ideas:
    - Each student could be given a dataset including CBM, language, and diagnostic data, and asked to write/present about their instructional plan for that student
    - Students could develop a template letter to share with caregivers explaining the assessments used at a particular grade level and how caregivers should interpret their child's scores
    - Students could rely on Truckenmiller et al.'s (2024) question framework to write about how the assessments in use at their practicum site either answer or fail to answer each of the key questions, making suggestions for areas where additional assessments are needed or where current assessments might be redundant
    - Students could complete an assessment profile of one or more children at their practicum site, personally administering grade-appropriate CBMs and language assessments