



Six Stages of Reading Development: A Skills Checklist

What to do: Use this checklist to assess students' current stage of reading development.

Why it matters: Knowing a student's current stage of reading development can help you provide reading activities and materials that are challenging but accessible. Meeting students "where they are" and building on current knowledge and skills builds their confidence and helps them advance to the next stage.

Student's Name:	Skill Check Date:
Stage 1: Visual Cue Word Recognition Children play with oral language, learn about the world around them, and develop skills they'll later apply when learning to read.	
	Pretends to read books
	Labels objects in books
	Comments on characters in books
	Listens to stories
	Recognizes print in the environment (for example, company logos)
	Knows that it's the print that is read in stories, not the pictures
	Understands and follows oral directions
	Notices some sequences of events in stories
	May begin to attend to rhyming words
	May identify a few letters, especially those from their own name
	May begin to attend to beginning sounds of words
Stage 2: Phonetic Cue Word Recognition Children generate rhyming words and sentences with alliteration, separate the beginning sound of a small word from the rest of the word, and use letter and sound relationships to recognize words.	
	Knows the parts of a book and their functions
	Begins to track print when listening to text being read
	Recognizes and can name all uppercase and lowercase letters
	Understands the relationship between the sounds in a spoken word and the sequence of letters in the word when it's written down



	Learns most one-to-one letter-sound correspondences
	Recognizes some words by sight, especially very common ones (e.g., a, the, I, my, you, is, are)
	Notices when simple sentences fail to make sense
	Makes predictions based on illustrations
	Can hear a word and separate it into its distinct sounds (mat = /m/-/a/-/t/)
	Given spoken sets like “dan, dan, den” can identify the first two as being the same and the third as being different
	Given spoken sets like “dak, pat, sen” can identify the first two as sharing the same middle sound
	Can merge spoken word parts into whole words (cow + boy = cowboy)
	Given a spoken word, can produce a rhyming word
Stage 3: Controlled Word Recognition Children acquire accurate word-recognition skills, which means they’re able to make use of all the letter information in a word.	
	Reads aloud with accuracy and comprehension any grade-appropriate text
	Uses letter-sound correspondence knowledge to sound out unknown words when reading text
	Recognizes common sight words (e.g., have, said, where, two)
	Monitors own reading and self-corrects when an incorrectly identified word doesn’t fit with the surrounding words
	Reads and comprehends both fiction and nonfiction that’s grade appropriate
	Discusses similarities in characters and events across grade-appropriate stories
	Reads and understands simple written instructions
	Predicts and justifies what will happen next in stories
	Discusses prior knowledge of topics in texts designed to inform or instruct the reader
	Describes new information gained from texts in their own words



Stage 4: Automatic Word Recognition Children can recognize words accurately and with relatively little effort. This stage of reading development is all about the reader gaining control of reading processes.	
	Reads aloud with fluency any grade-appropriate text
	Reads and comprehends both fiction and nonfiction text that's grade appropriate
	Uses letter-sound correspondence knowledge and structural analysis to decode unknown words
	Reads longer selections and beginning chapter books independently
	Can point to or clearly identify specific words or wordings that are causing comprehension difficulties
	Summarizes major points from text
	Distinguishes between cause and effect, fact and opinion, and main idea and supporting details
	Asks how, why, and what-if questions in interpreting nonfiction texts
	Uses prior knowledge and context clues to aid comprehension
	Begins to learn from independent reading
	May exhibit stronger listening comprehension than reading comprehension
	Recognizes most words that are in their personal spoken vocabularies
Stage 5: Strategic Reading Word recognition skills are automatic, and children routinely use reading comprehension strategies, including basic "fix-up" strategies when they fail to understand something they read.	
	Demonstrates automatic word recognition and fluent reading
	Reads aloud with fluency any text that's grade appropriate
	Regularly uses strategies to aid comprehension
	Selects the appropriate strategy to fit the need
	Responds to increased demands of text
	May demonstrate better reading comprehension than listening comprehension
	Reads a wide variety of texts
	Understands more than one point of view
	Deals with more than one set of facts and theories, though integration may still be at a beginning level



Stage 6: Proficient Adult Reading

The defining feature of this stage of reading development is highly developed comprehension abilities, which depend on highly skilled word recognition. Proficient readers are insightful, analytical, and reflective.

	Is highly skilled at word recognition
	Demonstrates highly developed reading comprehension (may be domain- or subject-specific)
	Can make higher-order connections within and across texts
	Integrates knowledge from a wide variety of sources
	Selects text to match need
	Constructs new ideas and knowledge from reading
	Grapples successfully with difficult text
	Handles increasingly complex vocabulary

Comments:

Oh, magic hour, when a child first knows she can read printed words!

— Betty Smith, *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*

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