

how to assess
**ORAL
READING
FLUENCY**

*...and what to do with
the results!*

by Anna Geiger, M.Ed. The logo for 'the measured mom' features a stylized orange apple outline with a green leaf on top. The text 'the measured mom' is written in a lowercase, sans-serif font, with 'the' and 'mom' on the top line and 'measured' on the bottom line, all contained within the apple's outline.

What is reading fluency?

According to Hasbrouck & Glaser (2019), fluency is “reasonably accurate reading, at an appropriate rate, with suitable expression, that leads to accurate and deep comprehension and motivation to read” (p. 10).

Reading fluency is not just about speed!

Reading fluency isn't just about rate. In Hasbrouck and Glaser's definition, ACCURACY is first and foremost, because the ultimate purpose of reading is comprehension. If students can't correctly identify words, comprehension will suffer.

EXPRESSION (also called *prosody*) is another important component of fluency. Expression includes pitch, tone, volume, emphasis, and rhythm (Hasbrouck & Glaser, 2019). Some research has shown that when students read with more expression, they better understand what they read.

Reading fluency isn't just about speed, but RATE is still important. If students read too slowly, comprehension will lag. The same is true if they read too quickly!

What is an appropriate reading rate?

Norms for oral reading fluency (ORF) are measured in words correct per minute (WCPM). Researchers typically agree that when students perform at the 50th percentile or higher, they are reading at an appropriate rate.

This is important: While research shows that it's important for students to have a WCPM rate minimally at the 50th percentile, research does *not* suggest that pushing students to read faster will benefit them long-term.

In other words, having WCPM rates at the 50th percentile is just fine. “Students who read in the average range of ORF norms are on target to become effective readers; they are doing just fine. *Fast reading is not the same as fluent reading!*” (Hasbrouck & Glaser, 2019, p. 16)

Why measure student reading rate (also called Oral Reading Fluency, or ORF)?

If a student is reading at a low rate (more than 10 words below the 50th percentile), this is a sign that we need to dig deeper to find out why. More on that later!

Hasbrouck-Tindal oral reading fluency chart*

Grade	Percentile	Fall WCPM	Winter WCPM	Spring WCPM	Average weekly improvement
1	90	-	97	116	1.2
	75	-	59	91	2.0
	50	-	29	60	1.9
	25	-	16	34	1.1
	10	-	9	18	0.5
2	90	111	131	148	1.2
	75	84	109	124	1.3
	50	50	84	100	1.6
	25	36	59	72	1.1
	10	23	35	43	0.6
3	90	134	161	166	1.0
	75	104	137	139	1.1
	50	83	97	112	0.9
	25	59	79	91	1.0
	10	40	62	63	0.7
4	90	153	168	184	1.0
	75	125	143	160	1.1
	50	94	120	133	1.2
	25	75	95	105	0.9
	10	60	71	83	0.7
5	90	179	183	195	0.5
	75	153	160	169	0.5
	50	121	133	146	0.8
	25	87	109	119	1.0
	10	64	84	102	1.9
6	90	185	195	204	0.6
	75	159	166	173	0.4
	50	132	145	146	0.3
	25	112	116	122	0.3
	10	89	91	91	0.1

*This 2017 chart shows oral reading fluency norms for students as determined by data collected by Jan Hasbrouck and Gerald Tindal.

Let's practice using the ORF chart to evaluate reading rate.

Note: Students who score 10 or more words below the 50th percentile need intervention.

Example 1

It is spring. Jack, a first grader, is reading 55 words per minute.

According to the chart, 60 wpm is the 50th percentile for first graders in spring. Jack is within ten words of that target, so we can conclude that Jack is reading at an appropriate rate.

Example 2

It is winter. Mia, a second grader, is reading 45 words per minute.

According to the chart, 84 wpm is the 50th percentile for second graders in winter. Mia needs fluency intervention.

Example 3

It is fall. Juan, a third grader, is reading 85 words per minute.

According to the chart, 83 wpm is the 50th percentile for third graders in the fall. Juan is reading at an appropriate rate.

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How do you find a child's WCPM (words correct per minute) score?

It's not as simple as having a child read from any old book on the shelf. I recommend using the free Oral Reading Fluency materials from Acadience Reading.

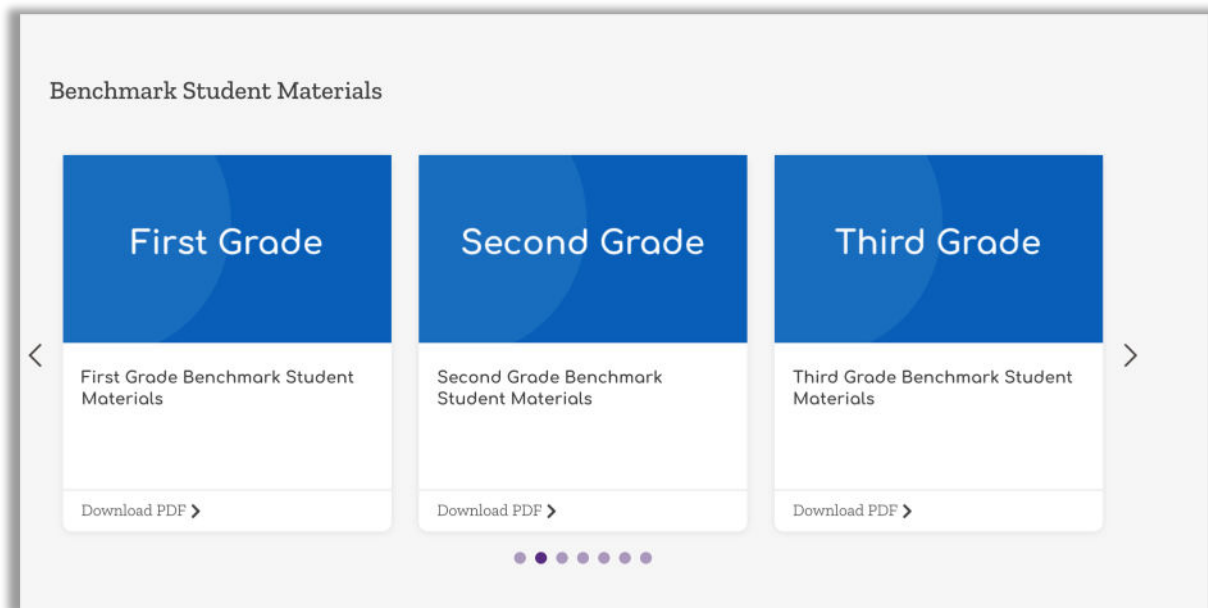
How to use the ORF assessment from Acadience Reading

(The information below is accurate as of November 2022).

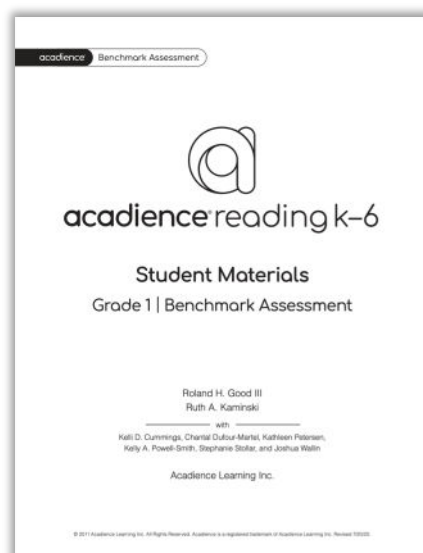
1 – Head to this link.

<https://acadiencelearning.org/acadience-reading-materials-download/>

2 – Scroll down to “Benchmark Student Materials.” Click on the appropriate grade level. Note: The ORF assessment should be given beginning in the middle of first grade. Therefore, you will not find it in the Kindergarten Benchmark Student Materials.



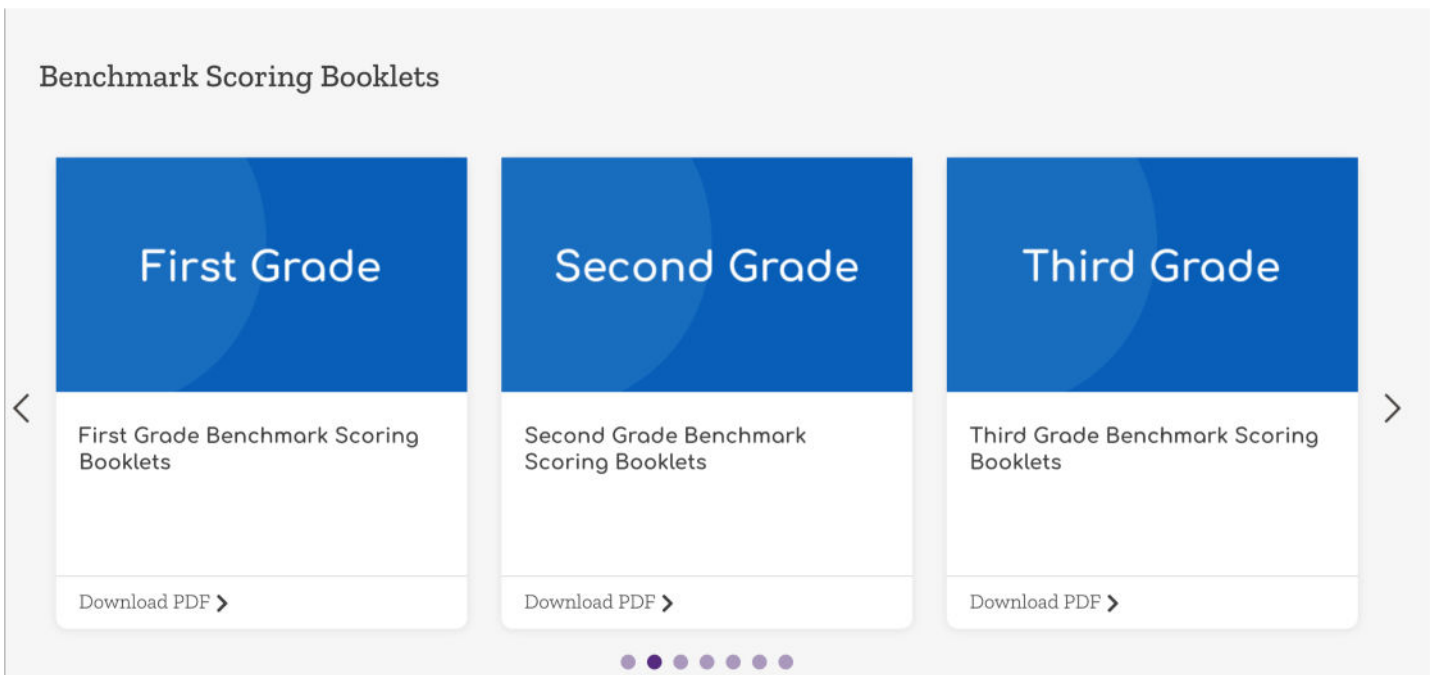
3 – Click on “Download PDF.” The first page of the file will look something like this:



4 – Scroll through the file until you find the reading passages. Print all three.

5 – You will also need a scoring booklet for each student. The scoring booklet includes scoring pages for the other Acadience measures, but in this guide we will focus only on the ORF assessment.

Scroll back up to “Benchmark Scoring Booklets” and download what you need for your grade level. (Again, there will be nothing for this particular assessment until mid-year first grade.)



6. Click “Download PDF.” The first page of the file will look something like this:

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grade 2

acadience reading k-6

Name: _____
Student ID: _____ School Year: _____
Teacher: _____
School: _____

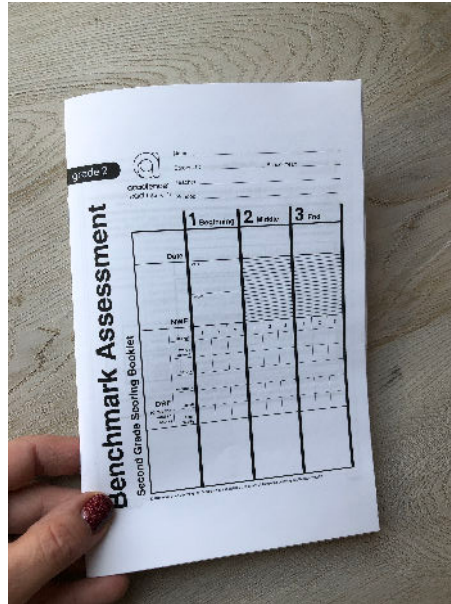
Benchmark Assessment
Second Grade Scoring Booklet

	1 Beginning	2 Middle	3 End
Date			
CLS			
WRF			
NWF			
Passage	1 2 3	1 2 3	1 2 3
Words Correct			
Errors			
Accuracy			
ORF (Oral Reading Fluency)			
Read			
Read			
Quality			

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7 – Print the pages **front to back**, flipping on the short side. Then fold the booklet and staple in the middle with a long-armed stapler (I used regular-sized paper, but legal paper is better if you have it).

You will end up with a booklet like this one for each student:



8 – Make sure you read the pages in the Acadience Reading K-6 Assessment Manual so you know how to score the assessment.

You can find that manual for free here:

https://acadiencelarning.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/AcadienceReading_AssessmentManual.pdf

Read pages 89-110 to learn how to score ORF. These pages will show you what to do when a student misreads a word, skips a word, etc.

9 – Now you're ready to give the assessment! Sit down with a student.

- a. Set a 1-minute timer. Have the student read the first passage until the timer beeps and then give a 1-minute retelling. Score both according to the directions in the manual.
- b. Repeat for the second passage.
- c. Repeat for the third passage.

10 – Record the student’s score for each passage on the front of the booklet. Circle the MEDIAN score.

11 – If you’ve done the rest of the Acadience measures, you should find the Reading Composite Score for each student. However, this guide is only about the ORF assessment. All you need to do now is compare the student’s Words Correct to the chart on page 3 of this guide.

You gave the ORF! Now what?

It’s important to note that the ORF assessment can’t diagnose reading problems. It’s like a thermometer. If you take your temperature and you have a fever, you know something is wrong. But you don’t know what.

The same is true of the ORF. If a child is reading at a rate below benchmark, there’s a problem. But the ORF won’t tell us *what* the problem is. It’s time to dig deeper.



Here’s how you know a child is likely on track with reading development:

All of the following must be true:

- ✓ The ORF assessment was administered according to the Acadience Assessment Manual.
- ✓ The child was within 10 words correct of the 50th percentile WCPM.
- ✓ The student’s accuracy was at least 95%,
- ✓ The student could provide a reasonable retell.
- ✓ There are no other red flags in reading, writing, spelling, parent concerns, or other assessment results.

(Hasbrouck & Glaser, 2019)

However, if the student is reading at least 10 words below benchmark WCPM, or you see another issue, then ...

It’s time to begin diagnostic assessment. Diagnostic assessments help us pinpoint the problem.

What assessments should you give?

Your job is to find out what is keeping this student from reading at an appropriate rate.

- Read aloud to the student. Can the student answer simple questions and talk about it? If not, teach strategies to help attend to text when reading. Discuss with a language specialist.
- Assess phoneme segmentation and phoneme blending using the PAST Test. <https://thepasttest.com/>. Based on the results, teach segmentation and blending as needed.
- Give a phonics assessment, testing on grade-level phonics skills. You can find my free phonics assessment here: <https://www.themeasuredmom.com/free-phonics-assessment/>

If the problem is with phonemic awareness and/or phonics, give extra instruction to this student in the areas of weakness.

For students whose accuracy is good but whose rate is poor, the problem is likely not with phonemic awareness or phonics. These students will benefit from guided repeated oral reading and other strategies mentioned in the workshop.

Reference

Hasbrouck, J. & Glaser, D. (2019). Reading fluency. Benchmark Education.