

GUIDE

Using Lexile measures to improve reading instruction



There's a much-debated metaphor about people standing behind a wall, trying to see over the top to watch a ball game in progress. The tall people have a clear line of sight and those on the shorter side have no view at all. To ensure everyone has equal access to the game, each one could be given a crate on which to stand. The problem with that? The shortest people may still be blocked by the wall while the crate is wasted on the tallest folks who can see just fine without one.

A more equitable approach would be to give the shortest people two crates and the tallest ones no crates. In the broadest sense, reading levels should work the same way.

Equity ensures resources are distributed based on the needs of the recipient for a shared outcome. In the example above, that means everyone has the opportunity to enjoy the game. For students learning to read, equity means having the personalized support they need to succeed.

What this metaphor overlooks is why some people can't see over the wall. Instead of focusing on the spectators' heights, the focus should be on the wall. For students struggling with reading, it's the same. They may be having a hard time because of the dearth of opportunities they have been afforded—including equitable access to challenging grade-level texts—or because of specific reading difficulties like dyslexia.

The Lexile® Framework for Reading and the Lexile® Framework for Oral Reading give educators better insight into a kid's reading skills—comprehension and oral reading—and what kind of scaffolding they need to provide their students to level the playing field.

In this guide, we'll explore the difference between the two Lexile measures and how you can use them to improve targeted reading instruction in the classroom.

The problem with leveled reading

On the surface, leveled reading may seem logical. Match kids to books they can read comfortably so they want to keep reading and don't get frustrated. The problem is that [there's no evidence showing this approach works](#). In fact, leveled reading may cost students opportunities to grow and become independent readers.

[Studies](#) show that exposure to challenging texts helps boost comprehension and reading proficiency. Kids learn words when they're introduced to new ones. They learn to figure out complex sentences by engaging with these kinds of structures in written text. Young learners need experience with written language at increasingly higher levels of difficulty, which is why text complexity is a priority as academic standards advance across grade levels.

Let's say assessment data indicates that some kids have an instructional reading level below grade-level expectations. A leveled reading approach would lower the proverbial wall—or, in this case, reading-level expectations—for those students. A better option would be to use assessment data based on Lexile Frameworks to help identify where the problems are and design the scaffolding needed to help those kids take on the more challenging texts.

The Lexile Framework for Reading

The traditional Lexile reading measure is all about comprehension. It provides a scientific approach to measure text difficulty and a student's reading ability.

With this reading gauge, you can match students with appropriate texts and track their reading comprehension skills over time using a common scale. You also have a shared language you can use when communicating with parents, other teachers, and administrators about where kids are in their learning, where gaps exist and why, and what steps to take to move them forward.

Here's how to use it:

- **Establish a baseline:** Find out where your students stand with comprehension. For example, a text may be full of small words but big ideas. Are they grasping the big ideas?
- **Unpack the score:** For some students with traditional Lexile scores below typical grade-level expectations, the Lexile Framework for Oral Reading may help get to root cause issues like decoding. We'll go into more detail below.
- **Set growth targets:** Having a baseline is helpful, but it needs to be taken in context of that day. A student may be having an off day or struggling to concentrate at the particular time they were tested. You may also have students who have high Lexile measures and need more of a challenge. Focus on where each child is going by setting growth targets and tracking performance over time.
- **Find appropriate reading material:** Challenge and engage kids with texts they want to read and that will help them grow. Use the [Lexile® Find a Book site](#) to find books by grade or Lexile measure. You could also bring in a mix of books on the same theme, some at levels appropriate for independent reading, and other more challenging books that will require scaffolding or support. Importantly, all kids need the chance to access challenging content on or above grade level.

The Lexile Framework for Oral Reading

The newer Lexile measure supplements the traditional measure by reporting decoding and oral reading fluency levels. This measure reflects a student's ability to accurately and automatically read a text at a particular decodability level and gives you a more complete picture of student literacy than reading comprehension scores alone can provide. When students read out loud, you get a view into their decoding fluency. For example, are more and more words becoming automatic?

Like its traditional counterpart, this framework measures both a student's ability and the readability of the text—only on an oral scale. The measurement places three components of oral reading onto a unified scale, which lets you see growth regardless of whether students are increasing their rate, their accuracy, or the text complexity they can handle.

Here's how to use it:

- **Test your students:** You may have scores from the traditional Lexile reading measure and want to dig in deeper. Or you may want to get a sense of where your students stand relative to your instructional practice. Newer fluency assessments leverage the power of speech recognition technology and can assess an entire class on oral reading fluency in about 20 minutes. That's a significant time savings over traditional 1:1 assessments.
- **Dig in:** By being able to parse a student's oral reading measure, you can see where they truly need more support. Let's say you have a student who's reading quickly and accurately, putting their Lexile oral reading score at or above grade level. When you look into their traditional Lexile score, you see that their reading comprehension is lower than typical compared to grade-level expectations. So, the student is reading out loud quickly but not reading with comprehension.
- **Differentiate instruction:** With data from the oral reading framework, you have actionable insight. For example, if you're trying to figure out if you taught your class to decode well enough for them to move into fluent reading, you'll know.

In the example above, it's clear that reading aloud with accuracy and pace doesn't tell the whole story. What you really want to target is meaningful growth. Giving this student opportunities to build vocabulary and meaning-making strategies will help them grow toward the ultimate goal: to be able to read a variety of texts with understanding.



Hand in hand

Using both Lexile reading measures in tandem yields the most complete picture of your students' literacy levels and where you can differentiate and scaffold instruction.

Assume you have a student whose Lexile oral reading measure is lower than their Lexile traditional reading measure. They probably have strong language comprehension and know how to slow down their rate to understand the meaning in a text. They may struggle with speed and accurate oral reading when they're first given a book or passage. This student likely needs additional work on fluency skills like decoding.

When you know where the gaps are, you can design appropriate supports for your student so they get access to the same challenging text.

Support your young readers

Frederick Douglass said, "If there is no struggle, there is no progress." Learning to read isn't easy. Students won't learn and progress if the texts they're exposed to are easy for them to read on the first pass. Instead, they should be able to reach higher, supported by the scaffolding—that boost over the wall—to help them succeed. The Lexile Frameworks give you the insight needed to ensure all your kids have equitable access to the challenging grade-level texts that will help them grow.



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