

Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS)

Uses of Assessment:

The DIBELS measures were specifically designed to assess the Big Ideas of early literacy: **Phonological Awareness, Alphabetic Principle, Fluency with Connected Text, Vocabulary, and Comprehension**. The measures are linked to one another, both psychometrically and theoretically, and have been found to be predictive of later reading proficiency. Combined, the measures form an assessment system of early literacy development that allows educators to readily and reliably determine student progress. DIBELS focuses on measuring students skills early on to help prevent students from falling further and further behind.

Grade levels:

Three times a year students in Kindergarten through sixth grade have the test administered to them.

Conditions under which reading assessment would be used:

This assessment is part of No Child Left Behind, so many schools are using it to show growth in reading fluency. This test should be administered in a quiet location, since students have to read out loud and they have to be able to hear you. This test could be used to determine reading fluency for older grades.

The children who would be given the test (whole class, certain individuals, small groups):

The whole class is given the test, but on a one-on-one setting. Then from the results teachers may decide if they would like to intervene and assess with progress monitoring.

Strengths of the assessment:

The program provides materials that are based on state standards and benchmarks and are adaptable for all learners. The DIBELS program allows for professional development opportunities so that reading teachers can align their lessons better to the DIBELS data and assessment. Leadership within the DIBELS program allows teachers to interact and share ideas with the use of the program. Students that score low are marked as intensive intervention and then evaluated frequently. From administering the test, interventions can start at a very young age. This test is efficient and economical, and easy to score. The results are immediate, with a screening process, progress monitoring in place and diagnostic tools available. The administration of this test also allows for early intervention in young grades.

Weaknesses of assessment:

Once students begin learning the blends and graphemes, they struggle with the nonsense word portion of the test. Students also that can read fluently may score extremely high, but are unable to retell the story. The retelling component of the test may be subjective

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since it is based on the number of words they say about the story in a minute. “It turns reading into a set of abstract decontextualized tasks that can be measured in one minute. It makes little children race with a stop watch. It values speed over thoughtful responses. It takes over the curriculum leaving no time for science, social studies, writing, not to mention art music and play. It ignores and even penalizes children for the knowledge and reading ability they may have already achieved.” (Goodman, 2005)

Type of assessment:

This assessment is individually given as a standardized test.

Statistical information about reliability and validity:

Table 1: Psychometric Characteristics of DIBELS

	Alternate Form Reliability	Criterion related validity	
		Concurrent Validity	Predictive Validity
Letter Name Fluency	.88	WJ: .70	.65-.71
Initial Sound Fluency	.72	DPSF: .48 WJ Readiness: .36	CBM: .45 WJ Reading: .36
Phoneme Segmentation Fluency	.79	WJ Readiness: .54	DNWF: .62 WJ Reading: .68
Nonsense Word Fluency	.83	WJ Readiness: .59	CBM: .60-.82 WJ Reading: .66
Oral Reading Fluency	.89-.94*	.52-.91*	
Retell Fluency	.59 ORF*		

KEY:

WJ — Woodcock-Johnson

CBM — Curriculum-Based Measures

DPSF — DIBELS Phonemic Segmentation Fluency

DNWF — DIBELS Nonsense Word Fluency

*The estimates for the reliability and validity of the ORF approach are based upon older studies documenting the general approach of Curriculum-Based Measures (Good & Jefferson, 1998; Tindal, Marston, & Deno, 1983) as cited on the DIBELS website (Good & Kaminski, 2002), not on the specific passages included in DIBELS.

If a test is **valid** it means that the assessment measures what it is supposed to measure. For example, the DIBELS measure of Initial Sounds Fluency assesses a child's knowledge of the beginning sound(s) in words.

Test **reliability** refers to the consistency of the assessment score. The test is administered and scored the same way for all students who take the test.

After looking at the variety of tests administered and compared in the above chart one can see that they tend to be reliable and valid. The above data shows that the validity of

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these tests are similar to other tests of reading and verbal ability. If you are wanting to look more specifically at the validity and reliability of the Dibels, one can visit <https://dibels.uoregon.edu/techreports/index.php> to view the break down of each specific subtest given.

What the assessment evaluates:

DIBELS are comprised of seven measures to function as indicators of phonemic awareness, alphabetic principle, accuracy and fluency with connected text, reading comprehension, and vocabulary. They are designed to be short (one minute) fluency measures used to regularly monitor the development of early literacy and early reading skills.

How to use the results:

After the test is administered the data is entered into the computer and results are immediate. From that point the computer generates the student's score and determines what level they are in charts and graphs. The students will fall into specific categories based upon their test scores, they are: strategic, intensive, basic, average, and above. From these scores teachers can identify which students are needing support immediately.

Who sees the results:

Results can be shared with teachers, administrators, and parents. The test is not secretive, it is available to help the student succeed and receive intervention early on in their grade school experience.

How to use results to structure reading instruction:

After evaluating areas of concerns for students and whole classes, interventions can be designed. If, as a whole class your students lack oral reading fluency, then as a class the teacher will want to administer a reading fluency intervention for the entire class. This could be done through peer tutoring, book buddies, etc. If a student is lacking phonics, then that student should receive extra support working on phonics for a short time and then be assessed again. DIBELS offers a progress monitoring program that can be administered to help students improve in their area of concern.

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Work Cited:

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