Selecting a Standardized Pre-K Language and Literacy Assessment

Pre-K is a critical time for children to develop the language and literacy skills they need to become successful readers. Assessment, along with a high-quality curriculum and effective instructional practices, is a key component of a Pre-K language and literacy program. National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) recommends that Pre-K educators use multiple assessment methods to gather data that allow them to make informed decisions to enhance the instruction and support they provide to students[1].

Pre-K language and literacy assessments may be informal or standardized. Standardized assessments directly assess students' language and literacy skills, use standardized administration and scoring procedures, and have evidence of reliability and validity. These assessments are typically not part of a curriculum and focus exclusively on language and literacy skills, unlike developmental screeners that assess students' functioning across multiple developmental domains.

This resource provides guiding questions and considerations that your team can use when selecting a standardized Pre-K language and literacy assessment.

Question 1: What are your goals for using data from the assessment?

Step 1 is to identify your priorities and goals so that you can select a standardized assessment that aligns with these goals. Possible uses of Pre-K language and literacy assessments are shown below.

Possible Uses of Pre-K Language and Literacy Assessments

- Evaluate the effectiveness of language and literacy instruction.
- Identify students who would benefit from additional language and literacy support.
- Determine instructional groups and adjust instruction to match students' needs.
- Compare students' literacy skills to national benchmarks.
- Communicate with families about students' language and literacy development.

[1] DAP: Observing, Documenting, and Assessing Children's Development and Learning | NAEYC

Question 2: What type of assessment best fits your goals?

Step 2 is to determine what type of standardized assessment will best meet your goals. Three types of assessments that you might consider are shown below.

Type of assessment	Purpose	Focus	Time frame
Screener	Identify students who need additional support, and provide an indicator of the effectiveness of instruction.	All students	Two to three times per year (i.e., fall, winter, spring)
Diagnostic	Provide specific information about a student's strengths and needs.	Students identified as needing extra support	Before making a change to instruction or intervention
Progress monitoring	Monitor students' learning to provide ongoing feedback to inform instruction.	Students identified as needing extra support	At regular intervals (e.g., every 3 weeks) based on student need

Question 3: Does the assessment provide information on the skills that predict reading success?

Step 3 is to review the assessment to understand which skills the assessment measures. Pre-K language and literacy assessments should provide information about the key skills that predict reading success.

Alphabet knowledge	Phonological awareness	Print awareness	Oral language	Rapid automatic naming of colors or objects and/or letters or digits

Question 4: Is there evidence that the assessment accurately measures students' skills?

Step 4 is to consider whether the assessment accurately measures your students' skills.

Is the assessment right for your students?	Is there evidence supporting key features of the assessment?
The assessment was developed with students of similar: • Age ranges • Individual characteristics (e.g., race/ethnicity, languages spoken)	• **Reliability:** consistently provides accurate results • **Validity:** the interpretation and use of assessment scores works well for the intended purpose • **Classification accuracy (for screeners and diagnostic assessments):** correctly identifies students who do or do not need extra support to meet literacy goals

Question 5: How practical and relevant is the assessment based on your context?

Step 5 is to consider whether the assessment is practical and relevant based on your context. Assessments should pass the FAIR test: **F**easible**, A**cceptable**, I**mpactful**,** and **R**elevant.[2]

Feasible	Can educators use the assessment as intended? Consider: • Training requirements and availability • Technology requirements • Staff availability to administer the assessment[3] • Time to review and discuss results • Resources available (e.g., curricular materials, staff time) to act on the results
Acceptable	Is the assessment acceptable for your educators, families, and students? Consider: • Time required to administer the assessment • Level of student independence required • Usefulness of the results in enhancing literacy instruction
Impactful	Is the assessment impactful? Consider: • Benchmarks included that promote data-based decisions about students' progress • User-friendly reports for educators and families • Specific actions to support instructional decisions recommended based on assessment results • Information provided helps educators form instructional groups based on students' skill needs
Relevant	Does the assessment provide information that aligns with the goals and priorities of educators and families? Consider: • Alignment with instructional goals and curriculum standards • Relevance to the developmental and cultural context of your students • Support for program-level decision making and continuous improvement • Utility for informing family engagement and communication

[2] Adapted from McGuire, A., Peterson, A., & Kuchle, L. (2021). *Guiding questions: The FAIR test*. https://ncsi.wested.org/resource/guiding-questions-the-fair-test/

[3] Note that many assessments for Pre-K students require individual administration as opposed to group administration.