


Reading Connections Program



Identifying the Sources of
Reading Difficulties

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Purpose of Screening

A common practice among adult literacy programs is to use **functional assessments**, such as TABE: Tests of Adult Basic Education or DALA: Diagnostic Adult Literacy Assessment for Beginning Readers, to place learners in leveled instructional programs or match them with volunteer tutors. In Alberta, many adult foundational programs, the use Read Forward assessment seems to be a fairly common practice. These tests include stimulus material authentic to literacy demands experienced by adults (e.g., newspapers, advertisements, forms, documents), and thus differ from K-12 assessments that emphasize prose and expository text passage comprehension. Although functional assessments provide information about how well adults use literacy in daily life, they do not necessarily correspond with reading instruction needs (McShane, 2005; Strucker & Davidson, 2003). These needs are evident in the reading scores captured by PIAAC (Programme for International Assessment of Adult Reading Capacities, 2014) which indicate that a significant percentage of Canadian adults have very limited reading skills (4% read below Level 1 while an additional 13% read at Level 1).

In accordance with the CanLearn commitment to deliver research-informed adult learning programs, we have developed a process to determine and understand the underlying sources of reading difficulties in adults with most limited literacy and foundational skills.

It is our hope that through the intentional, explicit, and targeted instruction we can help these learners achieve successful learning outcomes and go further to access other learning opportunities that will ultimately help them overcome unemployment, poverty, and social exclusion.

Rationale of Screening

Let's think about the process of learning in simple terms. Learning is like putting a puzzle together. The same goes for the process of learning to read. The straight base of the puzzle piece is what a learner knows and is able to do and what he/she would like to be able to do. This is the foundation.

Our next question is "Where does the breakdown in the reading process occur? If we do not determine the breakdown area(s), our foundation is likely to have gaps. In other words, our instruction may give the learner a series of unconnected puzzle pieces that can severely limit learning progression prospects.

Goals of Screening

- To understand learner's strengths and weaknesses in reading
- To use this information to plan an effective instruction
- To document the outcomes of instruction

Components of Screening

The Reading Connections program develops and supports the five (5) components of reading which are at the core of the systematic, explicit and targeted reading instruction:

1. Phonological Awareness
2. Word Recognition
3. Vocabulary
4. Fluency
5. Comprehension

Step 1 - Part A: Getting to Know the Learner - Initial Interview

Name: _____

The instructor can start the interview by talking about the program and how it is different from other adult literacy programs.

The instructor should talk about how important it is to find out as much as possible about the learner so that materials and learning activities can be selected to reflect his/her needs, interests, and learning style.

The instructor should talk about how they will work together to set learning goals, choose materials and decide how to measure progress.

This leads to the question, "Can you tell me a little bit about yourself? (Create space for recording the response)

After this information sharing, it should be easy to start a discussion on the following topics:

- A. Educational History
- B. Work History
- C. Everyday Life
- D. Hopes and Dreams
- E. Learner Support Needs

A. Educational History

School Experiences:

What was school like for you?

Did you have any specific difficulties? If you did, what were they?

Did you get any special help?

How were you taught to read and write in school?

Did you miss a lot of school? If so, why?

Did you change from school to school? If so, why?

What grade did you finish? / When did you leave school?

Why did you leave?

Did you speak the same language at home and at school?

Did anyone else in your family have difficulty in school?

Questions to Ask Non-native Speakers of English

What is your first language?
What language do you speak at home?
How old were you when you learned to speak English?
When did you come to Canada?
Did you have a chance to go to school in your native country? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
If so, for how many years?
Do you read and write in your own language?

Adult Learning

Have you ever been to classes for adult learning before?
If yes, where?
If yes, when?
What was it like for you?
How do you feel about coming to this program now?

B. Work History

Do you have a job now? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
If so, what kind of work do you do?
What kind of jobs have you had?
Do you need to use reading and writing at work? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
What reading and writing do you do at work?
How are you coping with these tasks?

C. Everyday Life

How are you coping with reading and writing in everyday life?
What are some things that being able to read and write would help you to do?

D. Hopes and Dreams

Imagine that tonight as you sleep a miracle occurs in your life. You wake up and all problems you have are not there any longer. Think for a moment and tell me... how is life is going to be different now.

E. Learner Support Needs

The following statement and questions could be used to begin a discussion about the kind of supports the learner might need, it also encourages the learner to begin to think about ways that he/she could assume ownership for his/her own learning.

Sometimes, adults really want to commit to the program and improve their skills, but things get in the way. Some of the things that come up are:

- problems with transportation
- child care
- looking after other family members
- getting sick a lot
- having problems with mental health or addictions
- working long hours
- too much going on at home.

Questions

What kinds of things do you think might make it hard for you engage in this program?

What can we do to make it easier for you stay engaged in the program?

For example: help figure out a bus route, find information on child care, fill out forms, etc.

Step 1 - Part B: Informal Oral Language Assessment

The development of reading skills can be impacted by language deficits (*Snow, Scarborough & Burns, 1999*).

Oral language deficits can be evidenced through:

- Limited vocabulary
- Frequent use of non-specific words such as “like”, “stuff”, “thing”
- Limited use of complex sentences
- A little use of description or elaboration (*Adapted from Greenhalgh and Strong, 2001*)

Think about your conversation with the learner. What do you notice?

Observations:

Instructional Implications:

Step 2: Screening

Step 2 is comprised of:

- a) determining the learner's phonological awareness skills
- b) determining the learner's word recognition skills
- c) determining the learner's breadth and depth of vocabulary
- d) determining the learner's reading fluency
- e) determining the learner's reading comprehension
- f) establishing learner's reading profile

Part A: Phonological Awareness

Tool: Diagnostic Adult Literacy Assessment for Beginning Readers (DALA), Subtests #4 and #5

Beginning Sounds

- Say, 'We are going to do some work with sounds.'
- Say, the word: soup. Tell the learner, "Listen to the word: soup. I hear a /s/ sound at the beginning of soup."
- Say, "Are you ready to try one?" I will say the word: "mountain" Repeat the word after me. Mountain." After the learner repeats the word say, "Tell me the beginning sound." If the learner provides the name of the first letter instead of the sound, say, "That is the name of the letter. What sound goes with the letter?"
- "Let's begin. I will say a word. Listen to the beginning sound. Then, repeat the word and tell me the first sound."

Stimulus	Participant's Response	Score - (0 / 1)
Mountain	'm'	(Do not score)
Tattoo		
Saw		
Basket		
Mask		
Paint		
Nuts		
Rainbow		
Gorillas		
Candles		
Fire		
Dancer		
Horse		
Jewelry		
Keys		
Ladder		
Window		

Maximum Score: 16

Learner's score: _____

Ceiling: Stop after 3 incorrect responses in a row

Instructional Implications:

Rhymes

- Say, “We’re going to do some work with words that rhyme. Words that rhyme begin with different sounds, but the rest of the word sounds the same. For example, listen to these two words: fire/tire. Listen to these two words: fire/snow. Fire and snow do not rhyme.”
- Say, “Let’s try one. I will say two words. If the words rhyme, say “yes”. If the words do not rhyme, say “no”.
- Say, “meat/seat”. If the learner says “no”, ask, “Do meat and seat begin with different sounds?” Wait for the learner’s response and then ask, “Does the rest of the word sound the same?” Wait for the learner’s response. Say, “Meat and seat are rhyming words because they begin with different sounds and end with the same sound.”
- Say, “Are you ready to try another one? Listen to these two words: bread/pencil. Do these words rhyme?’ explain the definition of rhyming words if the participant says “yes”.
- “Let’s begin. I will say tow words. If the words rhyme, say “yes”. If the words do not rhyme, say “no.”

Pairs of Words	Correct Response	Learner's Response	Score (0 / 1)
Fox / Box	Yes		
Egg / Leg	Yes		
Chair / Cheese	No		
Rug / Bug	Yes		
Work / Food	No		
Store / Break	No		
Moon / Spoon	Yes		
Book / Cook	Yes		
Red / Sink	No		
Bus / Jam	No		

Maximum Score: 10

Learner's Score: _____

Ceiling: Stop after 3 incorrect responses in a row

Instructional Implications:

Part B: Word Recognition

Tools

- Instant Sight Words (10 Most Frequently Used Words in the English Language from Fry Instant Word List)
- Names Test (Cunningham, 1999, Mather, 2006)

Instant Sight Words

An instant sight word is a word that can be both read and spelled within 2 seconds.

Materials: flash cards with 11 words: the, of, and, a, to, in, is, you, that, it, stop (demonstration card)

- Say, “I am going to show you some words ask you to try and read 10 short words. We will read the words one by one. First I will show you the card and ask you to read the word. Next, I will ask you to close your eyes and try to spell it.”
- Let’s try one. Show the card with the word stop on it and read it. Then close your eyes and spell it aloud.
- Say, “Are you ready to try the first word?” Show the card with the word the on it and ask the learner to read and spell it.
- Record learner’s responses on your scoring sheet. Correct 1 for a correct response and 0 for incorrect response.
- Ceiling: Stop after 3 incorrect responses in a row

Instant Words Scoring Sheet

Instant Word	Reading	Spelling	Score - (0 / 1)
the			
of			
and			
a			
to			
in			
is			
you			
that			
it			

Maximum Score: 20

Learner's Score: _____

Ceiling: Stop after 3 incorrect responses in a row

Instructional Implications:

Names Test

This tool will assist you in assessing learner's decoding skills.

Materials:

- Names Test – Learner's Copy
 - Names Test – Scoring Sheet
 - Names Test – Scoring Matrix
-
- Provide the learner with a copy of the test.
 - You should have in front of you a copy of the Scoring Matrix.
 - Say, "I want you to pretend you are a boss and you are calling out people who work for you to find out who is at work and who is not. Some of these names may be hard but just do the best you can."
 - Record 1 for a correct response and a 0 for an incorrect response. Score both the first and last names.
 - Write incorrect responses directly above the name.
 - Use the scoring matrix to identify the need areas for the learner.

Rob Hap

Jud Lem

Ray San

Pat Ling

Tim Bop

Brad Tash

Pam Rack

Trish Mot

Fred Tig

Bab Fum

Kate Tide

Brent Lake

Flip Mar

Jet Mitt

Rand Lun

Jen Dut

Jake Bin

Sid Gold

Frank Lug

Grace Nup

Beck Daw

Dell Smush

Gus Lang

Lex Yub

Ross Quest

Dane Wong

Tom Zall

Gail Wog

Rod Blade

Tag Shick

Names Test - Scoring Sheet

Rob _____ Hap _____	Jake _____ Bin _____
Jud _____ Lem _____	Sid _____ Gold _____
Ray _____ San _____	Frank _____ Lug _____
Pat _____ Ling _____	Grace _____ Nup _____
Tim _____ Bop _____	Beck _____ Daw _____
Brad _____ Tash _____	Dell _____ Smush _____
Pam _____ Rack _____	Gus _____ Lang _____
Trish _____ Mot _____	Lex _____ Yub _____
Fred _____ Tig _____	Ross _____ Quest _____
Bab _____ Fum _____	Dane _____ Wong _____
Kate _____ Tide _____	Tom _____ Zall _____
Brent _____ Lake _____	Gail _____ Wog _____
Flip _____ Mar _____	Rod _____ Blade _____
Jet _____ Mitt _____	Tag _____ Shick _____
Rand _____ Lun _____	Sid _____ Gold _____
Jen _____ Dut _____	Frank _____ Lug _____

Total first and last names read correctly: _____

Names Test - Scoring Matrix Tables

Names Test - Scoring Matrix: Table 1

Name	Initial Consonant	Ending Consonant	Blend	Consonant Diagraph	Short Vowel	Long Vowel	Vowel Diagraph	Rime
Rob	R	-b			o			-ob
Hap	H	-p			a			-ap
Jud	J	-d			u			-ud
Lem	L	-m			e			-em
Ray	R						-ay	-ay
San	S	-n			a			-an
Pat	P	-t			a			-at
Ling	L			-ng	i			-ing
Tim	T	-m			i			-im
Bop	B	-p			o			-op
Brad		-d	Br		a			-ad
Tash	T			-sh	a			-ash
Pam	P	-m			a			-am
Rack	R			-ck	a			-ack
Trish			Tr	-sh	i			-ish
Mot	M	-t			o			-ot
Fred		-d	Fr		e			-ed
Tig	T	-g			i			-ig
Bab	B	-b			a			-ab
Furn	F	-m			u			-um
Kate	K	-t				a e		-ate
Tide	T	-d				i e		-ide
Brent			Br		e			-ent
Lake	L	-k				a e		-ake
Flip		-p	Fl		i			-ip
Mar	M							-ar
Jet	J	-t			e			-et
Milt	M	-t			i			-it
Rand	R		nd		a			-and
Lun	L	-n			u			-un
Jen	J	-n			e			-en
Dut	D	-t			u			-ut

Names Test - Scoring Matrix: Table 2

Name	Initial Consonant	Ending Consonant	Blend	Consonant Diagraph	Short Vowel	Long Vowel	Vowel Diagraph	Rhime
Jake	J	-k				a-e		-ake
Bin	B	-n			i			-in
Sid	S	-d			i			-id
Gold	G		-ld					-old
Frank			Fr		a			-ank
Lug	L	-g			u			-ug
Gracc			Gr			a-e		-ace
Nup	N	-p			u			-up
Beck	B			-ck	e			-eck
Daw	D						-aw	-aw
Dell	D	-ll			e			-ell
Smush			Sm	-sh	u			ush
Gus	G	-s			u			-us
Lang	L			-ng	a			ang
Lex	L	-x			e			-ex
Yub	Y	-b			u			-ub
Ross	R	ss			o			oss
Quest	Qu		-st		e			-est
Dane	D	-n				a-e		-ane
Wong	W			-ng	o			-ong
Tom	T	-m			o			-om
Zall	Z	-ll						-all
Gall	G	-l					-ai	-ail
Vog	V	-g			o			-og
Rod	R	-d			o			-od
Blade		-d	Bl			a-e		-ade
Tag	T	-g						-ag
Shick				Sh-	i			-ick

Part D: Fluency

We all recognize a fluent reader when we hear them. A fluent reader reads with expression, quickly recognizes most words, and appears to read effortlessly. Fluency is a bridge to comprehension and is dependent on a learner's oral language, phonological awareness, and word recognition skills. It is not a good idea to use a structured fluency screening tool (for example, measure reading for speed and accuracy) as this would likely damage their motivation and self-esteem. On the other hand, assessing fluency with learners who show strong word recognition skills but weak comprehension has its merits since it can shed some light on their areas of need. Hudson, Land and Pullen Fluency Checklist (2005), on the next page, is a good tool for this purpose as it can be beneficial in planning instruction.

**Fluency is the ability to decode
and comprehend text
simultaneously.**

Fluency Checklist

Rate the following statements on a 1–5 significance scale based on your observations.

Rating Scale: 1–Not At All; 2-Very Little; 3-Little; 4-Some; 5-A Great Deal

Fluency Indicator	Rating Scale	Word Recognition Difficulties Implications for Instruction
Learner used appropriate stress on important words.		
Learner’s voice rose and fell at appropriate points in the text.		
Learner’s inflection reflected the punctuation.		
Learner used appropriate vocal tones to represent character’s mental state.		
Learner used punctuation to pause appropriately at phrase boundaries.		
Learner used prepositional phrases to pause appropriately at phrase boundaries.		
Learner used subject-verb divisions to pause appropriately at phrase boundaries.		
Learner paused appropriately at phrase boundaries within the sentence.		

Part E: Comprehension

Comprehension is an ultimate goal of any reading activity. Ongoing methods of comprehension monitoring should be used during the instruction. These would include answers to instructor's questions, oral retelling, summarizing and paraphrasing activities as well as written responses and portfolios.

Observation Notes

Instructional Implications

Step 3: Determining a Reading Profile

The Simple View of Reading and Reading Profiles

The Simple View of Reading (SVR) offers one useful way to think about reading development. It is a formula validated by several research studies indicating that reading has two basic components: word recognition (decoding) and comprehension.

Decoding (D) x Language Comprehension (LC) = Reading Comprehension (RC)

Note: the word decoding is used to encompass all aspects of word recognition

The Simple View of Reading aims to clarify the role of word recognition in reading. Some educators believe that strong word recognition skills are not necessary to achieve reading comprehension. Beginning and struggling readers are often taught to compensate for weak word recognition skills by guessing an unfamiliar word based on the first letter or the picture, then asking themselves if the word makes sense after reading the sentence. However, strong reading comprehension cannot occur unless both decoding skills and language comprehension are strong. When learners can decode expertly, their reading comprehension capabilities equal their oral language comprehension abilities.

Struggling readers of all ages can have decoding weaknesses; explicit instruction in decoding will be necessary to improve their reading comprehension.

The Simple View of reading demonstrates that readers fall into one of the four basic reading profiles:

Profile 1: Both decoding and comprehension are strong

Profile 2: Both decoding and comprehension are weak

Profile 3: Decoding is weak but comprehension seems to be OK (this may be an LD red flag)

Profile 4: Decoding is strong but comprehension is weak

Your learner's reading profile: _____

Step 4: Summing Up Conversation with the Learner

- Present results; remember to always start with and focus on the learner's strengths.
- When explaining the weaknesses, assure the learner that everyone is capable of learning to read at the level they can speak.
- Explain that each learner has a unique starting point and an individual set of difficulties and that the instruction will be tailored to your learner's individual needs.
- Explain that the sessions will be comprised of the following two components:
 - Mini reading lesson
 - Functional lesson that will use authentic materials and help address a real-life need or issue (for example, preparing for a driver's test, reading job applications, etc.)
- Create an Individual Learning Plan (ILP)

Individual Learning Plan (ILP)

Learner Name: _____ Date: _____

Learning Objective(s)

Reading Goals	Activities	Materials/Resources

Functional Goals	Activities	Materials / Resources

Learner Comments



Instructor Notes

Suggested activity to help determine functional goals:

We all know what the word love means. Yes, we even recognize that there are many kinds of love. I love spaghetti. I love my kids. I love to laugh. I love my country. And I love to read. Just like there are different kinds of love, there are different kinds of reading. What would you like to be able to read (give examples such as a bedtime story to my child, directions on my medication bottle, bus schedules, etc.)



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