

## Chapter 11

### Assessment of Phonological Awareness: The Phonological Awareness Screening Test (PAST)

The *Equipped for Reading Success* program provides three ways to evaluate phonological awareness skills, two informal and one formal.

1) The simplest way to evaluate phonological awareness is to note the level at which a student is working in the program. Is he or she able to do Level E3? Level H? Level K? This informal assessment tells you how far along in the program a student has progressed. It is important to notice a student's *speed* when doing One Minute Activities to see if he or she is at the knowledge stage or the automatic stage.

2) If you want a quick assessment of a student's skill, you can simply give half of a One Minute Activity (i.e., five items) from any given level. How well the student does lets you know how well he or she is progressing. Also pay close attention to speed of response.

3) Use the formalized *Phonological Awareness Screening Test* (PAST) in Appendix C. This chapter provides detailed instructions for administering the PAST. The PAST is best used with students as part of a whole class screening in K-2 or a formal reading assessment. A comprehensive reading assessment should include tests of working memory, rapid automatized naming, as well as phonological awareness and oral blending.<sup>2</sup> All of these lower-level linguistic skills are assessed on the *Comprehensive Test of Phonological Processing-Second Edition* (CTOPP-2),<sup>3</sup> which I strongly recommend. The CTOPP-2 should be used alongside the PAST. I have found the PAST and the *Elision* subtest, which is the CTOPP-2's phonological awareness test, tend to yield similar results. However, in the cases where they differ, the PAST is usually (but not always) more consistent with a student's reading skill (i.e., weak PAST, weak reading, strong PAST, better reading).

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<sup>2</sup>An Internet search will turn up another test that uses the acronym PAST called the *Phonological Awareness Skills Test*. This test samples from the various classical tasks like rhyming, segmentation, etc. Like most other phonological awareness tests, it does not provide a timing element.

<sup>3</sup>These tests would be, of course, in addition to tests of context-free word identification, nonsense word reading, and perhaps reading comprehension and language/listening comprehension.

<sup>4</sup>As mentioned in an earlier chapter, blending may be average in weak readers with poor phonemic analysis skills. Thus, the CTOPP-2's *Blending Words* subtest must be interpreted with caution. If it is average, it does not rule out phonological awareness difficulties. The *Blending Words*, *Elision* (manipulation/deletion) and *Phoneme Isolation* subtests all are combined on the CTOPP-2 for an overall Phonological Awareness Composite. Be wary of that composite score if Blending Words is average and the Elision and/or Phoneme Isolation are weak.

## Instructions for the Phonological Awareness Screening Test (PAST)

The *Phonological Awareness Screening Test* (PAST) can be found in Appendix C. There are four forms; A, B, C, and D. This allows teachers to do a formal assessment a few times a year to track a student's progress.

There is a “history” behind the title “PAST.” First, PAST stands for Phonological Awareness Screening Test. Second, the acronym acknowledges the work of others in the *past*. The PAST originated as the *Auditory Analysis Test* (AAT) of Rosner & Simon (*Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 1971). Dr. Philip J. McInnis revised the AAT by adding substitution items (the AAT only used deletion items) and adding levels to make it more developmentally appropriate. His version was first called the *Language Processing Assessment* (LPA) and then the *Phonological Processing Test* (PPT). Since 2003, I have used a modified, updated version of this time-tested assessment.<sup>4</sup> Thus, while the PAST is my “version” of the test, it is based upon the work of my predecessors (hence, the “PAST”).

### General Principles of Administration

Do not administer the PAST unless you have 1) carefully read the directions in this chapter; 2) read the section in Chapter 12 that covers pronouncing phonemes in isolation; and 3) practiced on someone, preferably with feedback before testing a student, preferably feedback from a school psychologist or speech pathologist. Those professions receive formal training in individualized testing.

#### No Practice Items

There are no practice items. Feedback is given for every incorrect item (see below), so incorrect items function like practice items. Follow the sample line at the beginning of each level. All items at a given level are administered the same way. *Delete or substitute the sound represented by the letter or letters in the parentheses.* With *cow(boy)*, “boy” gets deleted.

#### Proper Pronunciation of Sounds

When giving directions for Levels F through M, use letter *sounds*, not letter names. When you say “change /a/ to /i/,” you say the *sound* made by the letter, not the name of the letter. The exception is with the “long” vowel sounds in Level J. Long vowel sounds are represented by uppercase letters in brackets (i.e., /A/). These long vowel sounds match the letter name (e.g., the *a* in words like *cake*, *tame*, or *made*).

*Do not* add an “uh” sound when pronouncing consonants (e.g., /m/ is pronounced *mmm*, not *muh*). *Proper pronunciation of sounds in isolation is essential for children to understand*

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<sup>4</sup>My version 1) adds a timing element to assess automaticity; 2) adds or modifies levels to make smoother transitions (see Appendix B for program comparisons); 3) provides corrective feedback for *every* incorrect item, and 4) for Forms A, B, C, and D in Appendix C, most items are “orthographically inconsistent” to decrease the possibility of correctly responding to test items via a mental spelling strategy rather than by phonological awareness. For example, going from *gave* to *game* by exchanging an /m/ for a /v/ can occur via mental spelling while going from *both* to *boat* by exchanging a /t/ for a /th/ does not as easily yield to a mental spelling strategy.

which phoneme you are asking them to manipulate. For help with pronunciation when administering the PAST, see Chapter 12 and Appendix E.

**The Assessment of Automaticity**

All items are timed. When administering an item, immediately upon finishing speaking, count in your head “one thousand *one*, one thousand *two*.” Use a stop watch or sweep second hand at first to be sure your counting really represents two seconds. If the student responds correctly before you get to the word *two* in the phrase “one thousand two,” he or she receives credit for an automatic response. Put an “X” in the blank next to the word to indicate the response was automatic. If the student answers correctly, but after the two second count, mark a “1” next to that item. Incorrect items are marked with a zero (0). See Figure 11.1 below.

When doing the mental count, continue counting until the student responds. If you reach “one thousand five” and the student has not responded, repeat the same item and resume the mental counting, starting with “one thousand one.” If the student responds correctly within five seconds of this second chance, score the item as correct (i.e., a “1”). However, *an automatic score can only occur within the first two seconds of the first try*. A second chance is given because students sometimes forget what you asked. Also, if a student asks you to repeat the item, do so, but repeated items cannot be scored as automatic, only as correct or incorrect. If the student does not respond after the second five-second count, score the item as incorrect and demonstrate the correct response for that item (see below on providing feedback).

If you mis-speak a word, excuse yourself, skip the item, and go on to the next one, so long as it was not the last item at that level. Go back to the item you spoiled before going on to the next level and score normally (i.e., they can receive an automatic score if they respond in less than two seconds). If this occurs on the last item of a level, repeat that item immediately and use your best judgment about scoring.

Occasionally, a student will respond to the previous item. For example, you have the student go from *sit* to *sat* (Level J). On the next item, you ask the student to go from *hid* to *had*, but instead of *had*, the student says *sad*, accidentally carrying over sounds from the previous item. This may not be the result of a phonological awareness problem, but may result from an attentional lapse. If you judge that a student has carried something over from the previous example, re-administer the item. However, the student cannot receive an automatic score on a re-administered item, only correct (1) or incorrect (0).

	Correct	Automatic
<p><b>LEVEL J</b> “Say <i>sit</i>. Now say <i>sit</i> again but this time instead of /i/ say /a/.”</p> <p>I. (use <i>sound</i> of vowel) s/i/t /a/ → sat <u>1</u>    h/i/d /a/ → had <u>1</u>    f/i/x /o/ → fox <u>X</u></p> <p>II. (use <i>name</i> of vowel) l/a/ne /i/ → line <u>X</u>    ph/o/ne /i/ → fine <u>X</u></p>	5	3
<p><b>LEVEL K</b> (Note that K1 involves phoneme <i>deletion</i>, K2 involves phoneme <i>substitution</i>)</p> <p>K1 “Say <i>plan</i>. Now say <i>plan</i> again but this time don’t say of /l/.”</p> <p>p/l/an → pan <u>0</u>    s/n/eak → seek <u>1</u></p> <p>K2 “Say <i>sweep</i>. Now say <i>sweep</i> again but this time instead of /w/ say /l/.”</p> <p>s/w/cep → s/l/cep <u>1</u>    g/l/ow → g/r/ow <u>1</u>    f/l/ute → f/r/uit <u>X</u></p>	4	1

**FIGURE 11.1**  
SAMPLE SCORING

Automatic responding typically takes about a second or less, so a two second count is generous. Therefore, only give automatic credit if students have begun a correct response by the time you have mentally said *two* in the silently phrase “one thousand *two*.”

### **Repeating an Item**

If a student seems confused, or seems to have a lapse in attention, it is okay to repeat an item. However, when you repeat an item, that item cannot be scored as automatic. Students can only receive a score of correct (1) or incorrect (0).

### **Pacing**

One important reason to be thoroughly familiar with the administration procedures and to be well practiced with the test beforehand is *pacing*. It is important to administer the PAST at a good pace to keep things moving. A moderately quick pacing prevents lapses of attention, boredom, or prevents you from unnecessarily burdening a student’s working memory.

### **Providing Feedback**

A unique feature of the PAST is that students receive corrective feedback for every incorrect item. Students are not going to develop phonological awareness skills in the 4 to 8 minutes it takes to administer this test. Yet they may get items incorrect because they are confused about the task expectations given that phonological awareness tests are unusual for most students. Thus, give feedback for *every* incorrect response. That lets them know precisely what you want.

The standard correction is provided on the test form for each level. No further demonstration or explanation is permitted (especially, no visual cues). Correct every incorrect item, even if it is the last item at a given level. Positive feedback is permitted (“that’s right!”), especially if a child responds tentatively. *However*,

1) Do *not* teach any item or level. This is a test, not a teaching session. Although spoken feedback is provided, no teaching, manipulatives, or explanations are allowed.

2) *Never* say anything about the *position* of the sound within the word because this is a big part of what you are testing. For example, never say anything like “see how I switched the /b/ to a /t/ at the beginning of the word?” An important part of phonological awareness is being able to determine where a sound is located within a word. Saying anything about the position of the sound is like giving the student the correct answer.

### **Routing Procedure to Speed Administration**

Students are not administered all 52 PAST items. For younger students, many of the later items are too difficult and there is a discontinue rule (described below). For more skilled students, it would be unnecessarily tedious to administer all of the easy items. To keep the test a reasonable length, there is a routing procedure, which works differently at each of the *syllable*, *onset-rime*, and *phoneme* levels.

*Syllable Levels (D1 to E3)*

- *Everyone* who is administered the PAST, including older students and adults, start at Level D1. Explain to students that this “word game” starts out very easy. The easy ones help students understand the nature of the task without ever having to explain the nature of the task. There are no explanations or practice items when administering the PAST.
- For kindergarteners and potentially at-risk beginning first graders, give every item at levels D and E and follow the discontinue rule, below.
- For most first graders and all students beyond first grade, if the first item of D1 is responded to automatically (i.e., 2 seconds or less), skip down to the first item of D2. If that is automatic, skip to first item of E2, then E3. When you score later, if the first D1 through E3 items are automatic, score any un-administered items at those levels as automatic (thus a 3/3 at that level).
- However, if any item is either 1) incorrect, or 2) correct but not automatic (i.e., correct response after 2 seconds), administer *all* items at that level and score normally. For example, if the first D2 item is correct but not automatic, administer the other D2 items. However, the routing procedure resumes with E2. If the first item in E2 is automatic, do not administer the other E2 items and score those un-administered items as automatic.<sup>3</sup>

*Onset-Rime Levels (F & G)*

*For kindergarten to second grade:*

- If the first three F or G items are automatic, skip the final two items at that level and score them as automatic.
- If any of the first three F or G items are incorrect, or correct but not automatic, administer all five items at that specific level (i.e., F or G) and score normally.

*For third grade through adults:*

- Use the same general procedure as with the kindergarten through second graders except only the first *two* items need to be automatic before skipping on to the next level.

*Phoneme Levels (H to M)*

- For Levels H through M, give *all* items at each level. Continue administering until the discontinue rule is reached or you come to the end of the test.

**Discontinue Rule**

If the combined “correct” score on two levels in a row is 0, 1 or 2 out of 10, discontinue the test. Consider all items in the levels beyond the discontinue level as incorrect. For example, if a student gets only two items at Level I and none at level J (thus 2/10 across the two levels), discontinue the test. Do not administer K, L, or M. All un-administered levels are scored 0.

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<sup>3</sup>The reasoning is that if students can do a higher syllable level (E2 or E3), they likely can do the easier ones, but were incorrect or not automatic due to the novelty of the task or lapse in attention rather than a lack of phonological awareness. It is not unusual for a student to get one of these earlier items incorrect or correct but not automatically and then go on and display automatic responding at higher levels. In such cases, administering all subsequent syllable-level items after an early error or slow response is unnecessarily tedious. If they have an automatic response to the first item at any given syllable level, do not administer any more at that level and score unadministered items as automatic, even if they had an incorrect or slow response on an easier syllable level.

## Scoring the PAST

### Passing a Level

A level is considered passed if either all items or all items except one are correct (e.g., 4 out of 5, or 2 out of 3 for the syllable levels). A level is considered automatic if all or all but one of the items at that level were responded to automatically. Levels with 3 out of 5 or fewer are not considered passed and represent a level that should receive instructional attention. Keep in mind, each level yields two scores, a correct score and an automatic score. Students commonly pass a level with their correct score but not with their automatic score. These differences are preserved for the total scoring (see Figure 11.2 and *The Total Scores* section below). Only levels passed at the automatic level do not require instructional attention.

### Item Scoring

It should be clear by now that items are scored in one of three ways:

- 1) Incorrect (Score = 0)
- 2) Correct but not automatic (Score = 1). The student responds in more than two seconds.
- 3) Automatic (Score = X) The student responds in two seconds or less.

At each level, count every score of 1 and X and put the total in the “correct” column on the right. In the “automatic” column, only include the items with Xs for that level (see Figure 11.1 above for an illustration).

### The Total Scores

As mentioned, students receive two scores at each level, a correct score and an automatic score. Transfer the totals from the right hand columns to the top of the first page of the test. There are two sides to this. First, the student receives a score that indicates how many were correct and how many were automatic at the *syllable*, *onset-rime*, and *phoneme* levels. Second, the other side gives the highest level passed. Remember that a level is passed as *correct* if at least 4 out of 5 at that level are correct. The exception to this are the syllable levels which require at least 2 out of 3 to be considered passing. A level is considered *automatic* if at least 4 out of 5 items were automatic (or all 3 out of 3 for the syllable levels). Thus, for most children, the highest correct level will be higher than his or her highest automatic level (see Figure 11.2 for an illustration). It is also important to note any levels not passed that were below the highest level passed.

RESULTS:	Correct	Automatic	Highest Correct Level:	<u>J</u>
Basic Syllable	<u>12</u> / 12	<u>10</u> / 12	(Levels not passed below the highest correct level)	<u>—</u>
Onset-Rime	<u>10</u> / 10	<u>10</u> / 10		
Basic Phoneme	<u>8</u> / 10	<u>4</u> / 10		
Advanced Phoneme	<u>6</u> / 20	<u>2</u> / 20	Highest Automatic Level:	<u>I</u>
<b>Test Total</b>	<u>34</u> / 52	<u>26</u> / 52	(Non-automatic levels below highest automatic level)	<u>E, H</u>

**FIGURE 11.2**

SAMPLE OF SCORING RESULTS

### Interpreting the PAST

The PAST correlates powerfully with reading but is not a normed test. However, the following is a guide to interpreting the results of the PAST based on 1) several studies that did not use the PAST that show when children developmentally can do specific phonological manipulations; 2) Dr. Philip McInnis' 35 years using very similar levels on his LPA/PPT; 3) my 14 years working with the PAST; and 4) several studies I have directly done on the PAST.

<i>Grade Level</i>	<i>Typically Achieving Readers</i>	<i>Low Achieving Readers</i>
Mid Kindergarten	D1-E2 sometimes higher	none correct or D1-D2
Late Kindergarten	D1-E2, F, G, sometimes higher	D1-D2; E2 or lower
Mid First Grade	E3, F, G, I or higher	E2, F, G or lower
Late First Grade	F, G, H, I, J	F, G, I, or lower
Mid Second Grade	H, I, J or higher	F, G, H, I, or lower
Late Second/Early Third Grade	H to M mostly automatic	H, I, maybe J or lower
Mid Third Grade	All levels, mostly automatic	Many levels 'correct,' I to M mostly not 'automatic'
Fourth Grade to Adulthood	All levels automatic	Most levels 'correct,' but J to M not all 'automatic'

**TABLE 11.1**

APPROXIMATE DEVELOPMENTAL LEVELS

If a student's performance matches the shaded *Low Achieving Readers* column, it suggests that phonological awareness may be a concern. If a student's level is lower than is listed in that column, then a phonological awareness problem is very likely. In either case, those students will require training beyond what they may be receiving in whole-class instruction.

Notice in Table 11.1 how small the differences can be, especially early on (i.e., K-1). Except for obvious cases of very low performance, the differences may be very slight. This is why all kids should get whole class or small group phonological awareness training in kindergarten and first grade. Next, note that over time, typical students start to pull away from those with reading difficulties. Automaticity becomes a bigger factor with time, especially after second grade. After third grade, lack of automaticity at any level may indicate that a phonological awareness difficulty may be present.

Do not be surprised by inconsistent performance across some levels. A student may struggle with an easier level, and pass a higher level. This is because different levels involve different types of manipulations. For example, H and K involve splitting initial blends. If a student struggles with awareness of sounds in blends, he may not pass H, but may pass J, which does not involve blends. Students who struggle with awareness of ending sounds may do poorly with Level I and L but do well with H, J, and K. While based upon group data I've gathered, the leveling system is quite accurately laid out, for any given student there may be some inconsistencies. For anyone interested in the actual data gathered on the PAST, they can e-mail me at [kilpatrickd@cortland.edu](mailto:kilpatrickd@cortland.edu). A website devoted to the PAST will have this data available.

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Below is a table showing the average score out of five attained on each level of the PAST from among three first grade classes and two second grade classes from a lower middle class elementary school. The first graders were tested in December to January and the second graders from February to March. You can see there is an increasing degree of difficulty based upon a smaller average number of correct items as the test progresses. Also, with time, the gap between automatic and non automatic responses widens.

Grade Level:		Grade 1		Grade 2	
Scoring Approach:		Correct	Automatic	Correct	Automatic
Highest possible score:		5/5	5/5	5/5	5/5
Syllable	D	4.3	3.9	4.9	4.7
Levels	E	3.6	3.2	4.6	4.1
Onset-Rime	F	4.9	4.8	5.0	4.8
Levels	G	4.5	4.2	4.9	4.4
Phoneme	H	2.6	2.0	3.7	2.8
Levels	I	2.9	1.5	4.2	2.4
	J	1.6	1.0	3.8	2.1
	K	1.7	0.7	2.7	1.0
	L	2.0	0.9	2.9	1.0
	M	1.3	0.4	2.4	0.6

Note: All raw scores reported above are out of a possible 5 points. The current version of the PAST uses different scoring at the syllable levels than when these data were collected.

**Table 11.2**  
AVERAGE RAW SCORES ON EACH LEVEL OF THE PAST