

GRADES

PreK-8

The Fountas & Pinnell
Literacy
Continuum

A Tool for Assessment, Planning, and Teaching

SECOND EDITION

HEINEMANN
Portsmouth, NH

Heinemann

145 Maplewood Avenue, Suite 300

Portsmouth, NH 03801-3912

www.heinemann.com

Offices and agents throughout the world

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Acknowledgments for borrowed material begin on page 667.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Fountas, Irene C., author. | Pinnell, Gay Su, author.

Title: The Fountas & Pinnell literacy continuum : a tool for assessment, planning, and teaching / Irene C. Fountas and Gay Su Pinnell.

Other titles: Fountas and Pinnell literacy continuum

Description: Expanded edition. | Portsmouth, NH : Heinemann, 2016. | Includes bibliographical references.

Identifiers: LCCN 2016014033 | ISBN 9780325060781 (pbk. : alk. paper)

Subjects: LCSH: Language arts (Elementary)—Handbooks, manuals, etc. |

Language arts (Middle school)—Handbooks, manuals, etc. | Reading

(Elementary)—Handbooks, manuals, etc. | Reading (Middle

school)—Handbooks, manuals, etc. | Creative writing (Elementary

education)—Handbooks, manuals, etc. | Creative writing (Middle

school)—Handbooks, manuals, etc.

Classification: LCC LB1576 .F663 2016 | DDC 372.6—dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2016014033>

ISBN: 978-0-325-13628-8

Previously published under: 978-0-325-06078-1

Editorial: David Pence, Ruth La Croix, Cindy Nguyen-Pham, Betsy Sawyer*Production:* Angel Lepore*Cover design:* Monica Ann Cohen, Suzanne Heiser, Ellery Harvey*Interior design:* Monica Ann Cohen*Typesetter:* Technologies 'N Typography, Inc.*Manufacturing:* Jaime Spaulding

Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper

1 2 3 4 5 QG 26 25 24 23 22

January 2022 Printing

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INTRODUCTION

SYNOPSIS

SAMPLE

INTRODUCTION

This second edition of *The Fountas & Pinnell Literacy Continuum* retains the basic descriptions of text characteristics and behaviors and understandings to notice, teach, and support that appear in the previous publications. After all, reading, writing, and oral language are still the processes we have worked with for many years. But the descriptions are more precise. Our intention was to create a document that holds these precise details in a way that serves as a reference for teaching. In this way it serves as a curriculum guide to use in observation, planning, teaching, and reflecting, always asking, “What are my students showing that they know and can do?”

The continuum describes text characteristics and behavioral goals for prekindergarten through middle school, across the areas pertinent to the language arts. Taken together, the eight continua present a broad picture of the learning that takes place during the important years of school. The progress of learners across these continua, or even within each of them, is not an even, step-by-step process. Students learn as they have opportunities and give attention in different ways. A learner might make tremendous gains in one area while seeming to almost “stand still” in another. It’s our job to provide these learning opportunities and guide their attention so that learning in one area informs and supports learning in others. Looking across the continua, we can see patterns of progress over time. Learners progress in their individual ways, but they ultimately reach the same goal—a complex and flexible literacy processing system.

In creating and now refining the continuum, we have consulted current research on the reading process, learning literacy, and English language learners. We have examined many sets of standards to determine how policy makers are looking at progress at the district, state, and national levels. You are probably working toward a set of standards that your district or school has adopted; we are confident that this continuum will not only be consistent with language and literacy standards but also will present descriptions of learning that are more detailed. We have attempted to describe the evidence of literacy learning that you will see in your students’ behavior.

In this edition, you will notice organization within categories as well as a **red bullet** to show new text characteristics or new behaviors that you expect to see evidence of at this grade or this level. You will also notice that behaviors evidencing “thinking within the text” are identified with a round bullet, behaviors evidencing “thinking beyond the text” with a diamond bullet, and behaviors evidencing “thinking about the text” with a square bullet.

Content of the Continuum

Across the eight continua included in this volume, several principles are important to consider:

- ▶ ***Students learn by talking.*** Talking represents the student’s thinking. We engage students in conversation that is grounded in a variety of texts—those that students read, hear read aloud, or write—and that expands their ability to comprehend ideas and use language to share thinking.
- ▶ ***Students need to process a large amount of written language.*** A dynamic language and literacy curriculum provides many daily opportunities for students to read books of their choice independently, to read more challenging instructional material with teacher guidance, and to hear teacher-selected and grade-appropriate texts read aloud.
- ▶ ***The ability to read and comprehend texts is expanded through talking and writing.*** Students need to acquire a wide range of ways to write about their reading and also to talk about texts with the teacher and other students.
- ▶ ***Learning deepens when students engage in reading, talking, and writing about texts across many different instructional contexts.*** Each mode of communication provides a new way to process the ideas learned from oral and written texts and from each other.

This continuum provides a way to look for specific evidence of learning from prekindergarten through grade eight, and across eight curricular areas. To create it, we examined a wide range of research on language and literacy learning, and we asked teachers and researchers for feedback. We also examined the curriculum standards of many states. Some guiding principles were:

- ▶ Learning does not occur in stages but is a continually evolving process.
- ▶ The same concepts are acquired and then elaborated over time.
- ▶ Many complex literacy understandings take years to develop.
- ▶ Students learn by applying what they know to the reading and writing of increasingly complex texts.
- ▶ Learning does not automatically happen; most students need expert teaching to develop high levels of reading and writing expertise.
- ▶ Learning is different but interrelated across different kinds of language and literacy activities; one kind of learning enhances and reinforces others.

In this volume, we include eight different learning continua (see Figure I–1). Each of these continua focuses on a different aspect of our language and literacy instructional framework (*Guided Reading: Responsive Teaching Across the Grades*, Fountas and Pinnell 2017); and each contributes substantially, in different but complementary ways, to students’ development of reading, writing, and language processes. Each of the continua is described in more detail in a separate introduction, but we briefly introduce them here.

FIGURE I-1 *The Fountas & Pinnell Literacy Continuum*

	INSTRUCTIONAL CONTEXT	BRIEF DEFINITION	DESCRIPTION OF THE CONTINUUM
1	Interactive Read-Aloud and Literature Discussion	Students engage in discussion with one another about a text that they have heard read aloud or one they have read independently.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Year by year, grades PreK-8 • Genres appropriate to grades PreK-8 • Specific behaviors and understandings that are evidence of thinking within, beyond, and about the text
2	Shared and Performance Reading	Students read together or take roles in reading a shared text. They reflect the meaning of the text with their voices.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Year by year, grades PreK-8 • Genres appropriate to grades PreK-8 • Specific behaviors and understandings that are evidence of thinking within, beyond, and about the text
3	Writing About Reading	Students extend their understanding of a text through a variety of writing genres and sometimes with illustrations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Year by year, grades PreK-8 • Genres/forms for writing about reading appropriate to grades PreK-8 • Specific evidence in the writing that reflects thinking within, beyond, and about the text
4	Writing	Students compose and write their own examples of a variety of genres, written for varying purposes and audiences.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Year by year, grades PreK-8 • Genres/forms for writing appropriate to grades PreK-8 • Aspects of craft, conventions, and process that are evident in students' writing, grades PreK-8
5	Oral and Visual Communication	Students present their ideas through oral discussion and presentation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Year by year, grades PreK-8 • Specific behaviors and understandings related to listening and speaking, presentation
6	Digital Communication	Students learn effective ways of communicating and searching for information using digital tools; they learn to think critically about information and sources.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Year by year, grades PreK-8 • Specific behaviors and understandings related to effective and ethical uses of digital tools
7	Phonics, Spelling, and Word Study	Students learn about the relationships of letters to sounds as well as the structure and meaning of words to help them in reading and spelling.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Year by year, grades PreK-8 • Specific behaviors and understandings related to nine areas of understanding related to sounds, letters, and words, and how they work in reading and spelling
8	Guided Reading	Students read a teacher-selected text in a small group; the teacher provides explicit teaching and support for reading increasingly challenging texts.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Level by level, A to Z • Genres appropriate to grades K-8 • Specific behaviors and understandings that are evidence of thinking within, beyond, and about the text • Specific suggestions for word work (drawn from the Phonics, Spelling, and Word Study continuum)

Reading Process: Systems of Strategic Actions

Four of the continua specifically address reading: interactive read-aloud and literature discussion, shared and performance reading, guided reading, and writing about reading. Here we focus on strategic actions for thinking:

- *Within the text* (literal understanding achieved through searching for and using information, monitoring and self-correcting, solving words, maintaining fluency, adjusting, and summarizing for purposes and genre of text)
- *Beyond the text* (predicting; making connections with personal experience, content knowledge, and other texts; synthesizing new information; and inferring what is implied but not stated)
- *About the text* (analyzing or critiquing the text)

You can refer to the Systems of Strategic Actions chart on the inside front cover. Notice that readers are expected to engage in all systems simultaneously as they process texts. You can gain evidence of their control of the behaviors and understandings through observing oral reading, talk, or writing about reading.

Interactive read-aloud and literature discussion offer students an opportunity to extend their understandings through talk. In interactive read-aloud you have the opportunity to engage students with texts that are usually more complex than they can read for themselves. You can take strategic moments to stop for quick discussion during the reading and continue talking after the end. Students' talk provides evidence of their thinking.

Shared and performance reading offer an authentic reason for reading aloud. As they read in unison or read parts in readers' theater, students need to read in phrases, notice punctuation and dialogue, and think about the meaning of the text. All of these actions provide evidence that they are understanding the text and processing it effectively. On these familiar texts, you have the opportunity to support and extend students' understandings.

Guided reading offers small-group support and explicit teaching to help students take on more challenging texts. As they read texts that are organized along a gradient of difficulty, students expand their systems of strategic actions by meeting the demands of increasingly complex texts. They provide evidence of their thinking through oral reading and talk, and they extend understanding through writing. The Guided Reading continuum is related to text reading levels rather than grade levels because we envision continuous progress along these levels. In the introduction to the Guided Reading continuum, you will find a chart indicating a range of levels that approximately correlates with goals for each grade level.

In addition to specific evidence of thinking within, beyond, and about a text, each of these three continua lists genres of texts that are appropriate for use at each grade level or text level.

Writing about reading, which often includes drawing, is another way for students to extend their understanding and provide evidence of thinking. Writing about reading may be used in connection with interactive read-aloud and literature discussion or guided reading.

As you work with the continua related to reading, you will see a gradual increase in the complexity of the kinds of thinking that readers do. Most of the principles of learning cannot be pinpointed at one point in time or even one year. You will usually see the same kind of principle (behavior or understanding) repeated across grades or across levels of text; each time remember that the learner is applying the principle in a more complex way to read harder texts.

Oral and Visual, Digital, and Written Communication

Writing is a way of experimenting with and deepening understanding of genres students have read. Although writing about reading is an excellent approach to help students extend their thinking and support discussion, it does not take the place of specific instruction devoted to helping students develop as writers. Through the writing workshop, teachers help writers continually expand their learning of the craft, conventions, and process of writing to communicate meaning to an audience. The Writing continuum in this book lists specific understandings for each grade level related to craft, conventions, and process. It also suggests purposes and genres for students to consider and choose as they write at each grade level. You can refer to the chart, A Processing System for Writing, on the inside back cover to notice the complex dimensions in a processing system for writing.

Oral and visual communication are integral to all literacy processes; you'll see their presence in all other continua. This continuum singles out particular behaviors and understandings for intentional instruction.

Digital communication is essential for citizens of today's society. This continuum describes specific goals for helping students find effective ways to use digital tools effectively for learning, communication, and research. With the burgeoning role of digital tools in all of the contexts for communication, students need to build complex ways of thinking that will allow them to think critically about digital tools and to use them in effective and ethical ways.

Phonics, Spelling, and Word Study

As the eighth continuum, we include phonics, spelling, and word study. This grade-by-grade continuum is drawn from the longer continuum published in *The Fountas & Pinnell Comprehensive Phonics, Spelling, and Word Study Guide, Second Edition* (2022). For each grade, you will find specific principles related to the nine areas of learning that are important for grades PreK–8: early literacy concepts, phonological awareness, letter knowledge, letter-sound relationships, spelling patterns, high-frequency words, word meaning/vocabulary, word structure, and word-solving actions. Here you will find specific understandings related to spelling, which interface with the section on conventions provided in the Writing continuum.

Some Cautions

In preparing these continua we considered a range of students that can be found in PreK through grade eight classrooms. We also consulted teachers about their expectations and vision as to appropriate instruction at each grade level. We examined the district and state standards. We need to have a vision of expected levels of learning because it helps in making effective instructional decisions; and even more important, it helps us to identify students who need intervention.

At the same time, we would not want to apply these expectations in an inflexible way. We need to recognize that students vary widely in their progress—sometimes moving quickly and sometimes getting bogged down. They may make faster progress in one area than another. The continua should help you intervene in more precise ways to help students. But it is also important to remember that learners may not necessarily meet *every* expectation at all points in time. Nor should any one of the understandings and behaviors included in this document be used as criteria for promotion to the next grade. Educators can look thoughtfully across the full range of grade-level expectations as they make decisions about individual students.

It is also important to recognize that just because grade-level expectations exist, not all teaching will be pitched at that level. Through assessment, you may learn that your class only partially matches the behaviors and understandings on the continuum. Almost all teachers find that they need to consult the material at lower and higher levels (one reason that the Guided Reading continuum is not graded).

Ways to Use the Continuum

We see many different uses for this continuum, including the following.

Foundation for Teaching

As you think about, plan for, and reflect on the effectiveness of providing individual, small-group, and whole-group instruction, you may consult different areas of the continuum. For example, if you are working with students in guided reading at a particular level, use the lists of behaviors and understandings to plan text introductions, guide observations and interactions with individuals, and shape teaching decisions. The Word Work section gives you specific suggestions for principles to explore at the end of the guided reading lessons. You can plan specific teaching moves as you examine the section on interactive read-aloud and literature discussion. The interactive read-aloud as well as the Writing continuum and the Phonics, Spelling, and Word Study continuum will be useful in planning explicit minilessons. When you and your colleagues teach for the same behaviors and understandings, your students will benefit from the coherence.

Guide for Curriculum Planning

The continuum can also be used by a grade-level team or school staff to plan the language and literacy curriculum. It offers a starting point for thinking very specifically about goals and expectations. Your team may adapt the continuum to meet your own goals and district expectations.

Linking Assessment to Instruction

Sometimes assessment is administered and the results recorded, but then the process stops. Teachers are unsure what to do with the data or where to go next in their teaching. This continuum can be used as a bridge between assessment data and the specific teaching that students need. With assessment, you learn what students know; the continuum will help you think about what they need to know next.

Evaluation and Grading

The continuum can also serve as a guide for evaluating student progress over time. You can evaluate whether students are meeting grade-level standards. Remember that no student would be expected to demonstrate every single competency to be considered on grade level. *Grade level* is always a term that encompasses a range of levels of understanding at any given time.

Reporting to Parents and Caregivers

We would not recommend that you show parents such an overwhelming document as this continuum. It would get in the way of good conversation. However, you can use the continuum as a resource for the kind of specific information you need to provide to parents, but shape it into easy-to-understand language.

Guide to Intervention

Many students will need extra support in order to achieve the school's goals for learning. Assessment and observation will help you identify the specific areas in which students need help. Use the continuum to find the specific understandings that can guide intervention.

Organization of the Continuum

Eight continua are included in this book. They are arranged in the following way.

Grade-by-Grade

Seven of the continua are organized by grade level. Within each grade, you will find the continua for: (1) interactive read-aloud and literature discussion; (2) shared and performance reading; (3) writing about reading; (4) writing; (5) oral and visual communication; (6) digital communication; and (7) phonics, spelling, and word study. These seven continua are presented at each grade level, PreK through grade eight. You can turn to the section for your grade level and find all seven. If you have many students working below grade level, you can consult the next lower grade continuum in the area of interest; if you have students working above grade level, you can consult the continuum for the grade above for ideas.

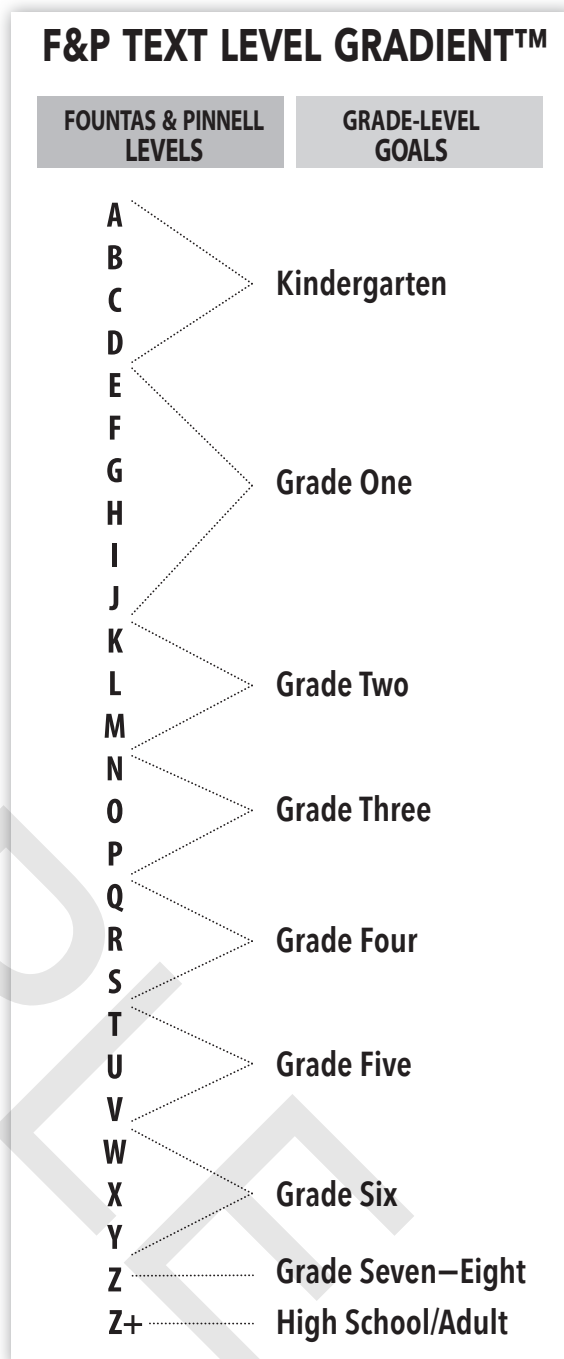
Level-by-Level

The Guided Reading continuum is organized according to the Fountas & Pinnell text gradient levels A to Z (see Figure I-2). These levels typically correlate to grades K–8, but students may vary along them in their instructional levels. It is important for all students to receive guided reading instruction at a level that allows them to process texts successfully with teacher support.

Additional Resources

As an appendix for your reference, we have included a chart detailing standard “rules” for grammar and usage. This chart provides behaviors, principles, and examples that, in general, describe the kind of “standard” English that is often expected in formal communication. As a speaker of this kind of English, sometimes called “media English,” you follow almost all of these rules in your workplace without being able to state them explicitly, and that is how it should be. Language users have internalized these rules, and so they use them in an unconscious way, giving direct attention only when unsure. You will want to immerse students in language through hearing written language read aloud and through talk that is grounded in texts. Because you will be presenting them daily with many models of formal language and will also be creating a safe talking place for students, you may need to refer to this chart from time to time. We include it not so you can “correct” students or spend a great deal of time engaging them in exercises related to grammar; those actions don’t really work. But as you observe students as they talk and write over time, you will want to look for evidence that they are expanding their ability to use formal English. More information is provided at the beginning of the appendix.

FIGURE I-2 F&P Text Level Gradient™



Ways Administrators or Staff Developers Can Use the Continuum

As a staff developer or an administrator, this document will give you a comprehensive view of language and literacy learning and how it changes and develops over time. The continuum is intended to provide teachers with a conceptual tool that they can use to

think constructively about their work. We want to support them in crafting instruction that will link their observations and deep knowledge of their own students with learning over time. Administrators and staff developers are the key to teachers' support systems as they grow in conceptual understanding of their work.

Foundation for Setting School and/or District Goals

Since this continuum is a detailed description of every aspect of the language arts, you may want to adopt the continuum as your goals for instruction. Alternatively, you may want to review the document to select goals for your school or district. Remember, too, that these grade-level expectations are consistent with state and national standards in general. Depending on local priorities, you may want to adjust them lower or higher.

Link to State and National Standards

This continuum was checked against numerous examples of state and national standards to assure consistency and comprehensiveness. In general, you will find *The Fountas & Pinnell Literacy Continuum* to be much more detailed and in many cases more rigorous than state standards; so, it offers a way to make your state goals more specific as a basis for instruction. What really matters is for educators in each school to take ownership of the goals, share them with colleagues, and make them an integral part of teaching.

Helping Administrators and Teachers Achieve a Common Vision

Examining the continuum together, administrators and teachers can discuss their common expectations for students' achievement in each curriculum area, grade by grade. They can compare current expectations with the document and focus on goals that they want their students to achieve. For example, a principal and teachers in an elementary school or middle school can work together over a few weeks or months. In grade-level groups they can examine one instructional area at a time and then share their perspectives with teachers of other grades. Looking across the grades will help them to understand a long continuum of learning, as well as to work more effectively with students who are below or above their own grade levels. Working intensively with the continuum at their own grade levels (and perhaps the level below), they can make specific plans for instruction in the particular area.

A Basis for Instructional Coaching

An instructional coach (often called a literacy coach) can use the continuum as a foundation for coaching conversations. It will be useful for coaches to help teachers become able to access information quickly in their copies of the continuum as part of their reflection on lessons they have taught and on their planning. In other words, the coach can help teachers really get to know the continuum as a tool so that they can access information easily on their own. Typically, the coach and teacher would use the continuum as a reference before, during, and after the observation of a lesson. The continuum enables the coach to focus the conversation on critical areas of teaching and learning—behaviors to notice, teach, and support to help students read, write, and talk proficiently. It is also an excellent tool for discussing and analyzing texts in a variety of genres and at

a variety of levels. The continuum will add specificity to the conversation that will extend teachers' understandings of learning processes and development over time.

Pre-Observation Conference

- ▶ The coach and teacher think about and analyze students' strengths, as well as their learning needs, referring to the continuum as appropriate.
- ▶ They may examine data from student assessment or the teacher's ongoing observation, again, using the continuum expectations as a reference.
- ▶ They may look at lesson artifacts—texts they are using or student writing—and consider them in the light of text characteristics for the particular area, thinking about the learning opportunities for students.

Observation of Lessons

- ▶ The continuum is not designed to be used as a checklist. Rather it is a foundation for discussing critical areas of development.
- ▶ The continuum offers a way of sharpening observation. During observation, coaches can keep in mind the evidence of student understanding and shifts in learning. This foundational knowledge will help the coach gather specific evidence of student learning that can be discussed later with the teacher.

Post-Observation Conference

- ▶ The continuum will provide a guide as to the appropriateness of texts or tasks in terms of students' current understandings and what they need to learn next.
- ▶ The coach and teacher can use the continuum to analyze the teaching and its effectiveness in meeting the goals discussed in the pre-observation conference.
- ▶ They can discuss examples of behaviors that provide evidence of student understanding or lack of understanding.
- ▶ They can also discuss teaching interactions that supported or extended student understanding, as well as potential interactions for working with the students in the next lesson.
- ▶ Together the coach and teacher can use the continuum to help set new learning goals for the students and to begin to plan for teaching.

The ultimate goals of every coaching interaction are to help the teacher expand knowledge of language and literacy learning and to analyze the effectiveness of the teaching. By talking about the ideas in the continuum and observing students carefully, teachers will come to understand more about the processes of learning language, reading, writing, and technology. The continuum serves as a guide that becomes internalized through its consistent use. Teachers who use it over time find that the understandings recorded in the continuum become part of their thinking and their teaching decisions.