

Benchmark Assessment System and the New Alberta Curriculum and Assessment Guidelines

Benchmark Assessments are administered as one-on-one, student-teacher assessment conferences. For about 20-30 minutes, the student reads aloud and talks about a Benchmark book while the teacher observes, codes reading behaviours, and makes notes on the conversation. Using established scoring conventions and procedures for analysis, the teacher not only determines optimal learning levels, but also gathers information about the student's processing strategies, fluency, and comprehension—all of which help them focus their teaching. Optional diagnostic assessments that focus on phonics, word analysis, and vocabulary provide even more data to inform high-quality instruction.



The following chart summaries how, when, and why you conduct a Benchmark Assessment System.

	How is it administered?	What insight is gained?	What areas of the curriculum does it inform?
Part 1: Oral Reading	The teacher listens to the student read aloud one of the <i>Benchmark Assessment</i> books and records the student's errors on the Recording Form (available as linemasters in the <i>Assessment Forms</i> book or as digital file in the <i>Online Resources</i>). A scoring section on the form help you summarize the oral reading including accuracy, self-correction ratio, fluency, and reading rate.	Learning level: independent, instructional, and hard texts Strengths and areas for growth in decoding, high frequency word knowledge, fluency, and self-monitoring	<p>ORGANIZING IDEA Phonics: Foundational literacy is supported by understanding relationships between sounds in oral language and the letters that represent them. <i>The Oral Reading part of the Benchmark Assessment highlights which sources of information students are using to read words (meaning, syntax, visual information).</i></p> <p>ORGANIZING IDEA Fluency: Comprehension and literary appreciation are improved by the ability to read a range of texts accurately, automatically, and with expression. <i>Listening to students read and conducting a reading record provides information on how efficiently students are decoding words, how many high-frequency words they know, and to what extent their word recognition is automatic.</i></p>

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<p>Part 2: Comprehension Conversation</p>	<p>Immediately after the oral reading, and before the scoring is complete, you will engage the reader in a comprehension conversation about the Benchmark Assessment book. The Recording forms provide detailed instructions for how to conduct the conversation.</p>	<p>Learning Level: independent, instructional, and hard texts</p> <p>Strengths & areas for growth in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – retelling – summarizing – predicting – inferencing – making connections – synthesizing – critiquing – using background knowledge 	<p>ORGANIZING IDEA Comprehension: Text comprehension is supported by applying varied strategies and processes and by considering both particular contexts and universal themes.</p> <p><i>Through conversation, the teacher learns how well the student understands what they just read. Additionally, the teacher and student talk about the comprehension strategies that were used.</i></p> <p>ORGANIZING IDEA Text Forms and Structures: Identifying and applying text forms and structures improves understanding of content, literary style, and our rich language traditions.</p> <p><i>Your Benchmark Assessment System includes one fiction and one nonfiction title for each level. Across the levels, they are a variety of text forms and structures represented.</i></p> <p>ORGANIZING IDEA Oral Language: Listening and speaking form the foundation for literacy development and improve communication, collaboration, and respectful mutual understanding.</p> <p><i>A Benchmark Assessment conference engages students in dialogue with their teacher. It gives teachers an authentic view into the student’s oral language development. It gives students opportunity to develop their listening and speaking skills through discussion.</i></p>
<p>Part 3: Writing About Reading</p>	<p>After you have finished administering a student’s <i>Benchmark Assessment</i>, you may want to have them write a response using a prompt provided on the Recording Form. This writing activity is an optional part of the assessment.</p>	<p>Evidence of the student’s comprehension</p> <p>Understanding of which strategies the student is using and how well they are applying those strategies</p> <p>Concrete samples of student thinking</p>	<p>ORGANIZING IDEA Comprehension: Text comprehension is supported by applying varied strategies and processes and by considering both particular contexts and universal themes.</p> <p><i>By asking students to complete the writing about reading assessment, you are collecting additional evidence of text comprehension.</i></p> <p>ORGANIZING IDEA Writing: Ideas and information can be articulated accurately and imaginatively through the use of writing processes and an understanding of the author’s craft.</p> <p><i>While this is not designed as a writing assessment, teacher will gain some insight into the student’s use of writing process and their understanding of the author’s craft.</i></p>

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<p>Optional Assessments</p>	<p>The extensive information gathered through the <i>Benchmark Assessment</i> conference provides a solid direction for instruction, but you may also want more diagnostic evidence about a particular student's literacy knowledge.</p> <p>For that purpose, the <i>Benchmark Assessment System</i> includes a series of optional assessments. Information gathered from these assessments can be used in planning targeted minilessons.</p>	<p>These optional assessments provide information about the learner's knowledge in specific areas of literacy:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Phonological Awareness – Phonics – Fluency – Vocabulary 	<p>ORGANIZING IDEA Vocabulary: Communication and comprehension are improved by understanding word meaning and structures.</p> <p><i>The following optional assessments provide insights into the student's vocabulary development:</i></p> <table border="0"> <tr> <td><i>Concept Words</i></td> <td><i>Antonyms</i></td> </tr> <tr> <td><i>Concept Words in Isolation</i></td> <td><i>Homophones</i></td> </tr> <tr> <td><i>Concept Words in Sentences</i></td> <td><i>Synonyms</i></td> </tr> </table> <p><i>Vocabulary in Context: Children use context to correctly identify the meaning of words from a Benchmark Assessment Book at their Instructional Level or Independent Level.</i></p> <p>ORGANIZING IDEA Phonological Awareness: Foundational literacy is supported by the ability to identify and manipulate sounds in oral language.</p> <p><i>The following optional assessments provide insights into the student's phonological awareness:</i></p> <table border="0"> <tr> <td><i>Blending Words</i></td> <td><i>Initial Sounds</i></td> </tr> <tr> <td><i>Rhyming</i></td> <td><i>Segmenting Words</i></td> </tr> </table> <p>ORGANIZING IDEA Phonics: Foundational literacy is supported by understanding relationships between sounds in oral language and the letters that represent them.</p> <p><i>The following optional assessments provide insights into the student's phonics skills:</i></p> <table border="0"> <tr> <td><i>Syllables in Longer Words</i></td> <td><i>Vowel Clusters</i></td> </tr> <tr> <td><i>Word Writing</i></td> <td><i>Writing Picture Names</i></td> </tr> <tr> <td><i>Compound Words</i></td> <td><i>Consonant Blends</i></td> </tr> <tr> <td><i>Early Literacy Behaviors</i></td> <td><i>Word Features Test - Grades 1-3</i></td> </tr> <tr> <td><i>Letter Recognition</i></td> <td><i>One- and Two-Syllable Words</i></td> </tr> <tr> <td><i>Phonograms</i></td> <td><i>Suffixes</i></td> </tr> </table> <p>ORGANIZING IDEA Fluency: Comprehension and literary appreciation are improved by the ability to read a range of texts accurately, automatically, and with expression.</p> <p><i>The Six Dimensions Fluency Rubric helps you notice and think about the dimensions of oral reading that a student controls and needs to develop.</i></p> <p><i>There are also assessments that tell you the extent of students' knowledge of high-frequency words (25/50/100/200 words).</i></p>	<i>Concept Words</i>	<i>Antonyms</i>	<i>Concept Words in Isolation</i>	<i>Homophones</i>	<i>Concept Words in Sentences</i>	<i>Synonyms</i>	<i>Blending Words</i>	<i>Initial Sounds</i>	<i>Rhyming</i>	<i>Segmenting Words</i>	<i>Syllables in Longer Words</i>	<i>Vowel Clusters</i>	<i>Word Writing</i>	<i>Writing Picture Names</i>	<i>Compound Words</i>	<i>Consonant Blends</i>	<i>Early Literacy Behaviors</i>	<i>Word Features Test - Grades 1-3</i>	<i>Letter Recognition</i>	<i>One- and Two-Syllable Words</i>	<i>Phonograms</i>	<i>Suffixes</i>
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