

Suggestions for Assessing a Learner

When you start working with a new learner, you need to find out about his or her strengths and areas of challenge. This will help you to individualize your lessons to the learner's needs. It also gives you a baseline against which you can measure progress.

If the learner has a formal "ivchun" (assessment report) by a professional tester, and the learner's parents agree, you may be able to read the relevant sections, or review the results with the professionals already working with the child. (Note: These reports are highly confidential and require the strictest respect for privacy.)

Following are some assessment exercises that you can perform with the learner to get an idea of where they are. You can use the assessment document on this site, or you can make up your own exercises more suited to the learner's level. Assure the learner that this is not a grade or a test, you just want to get an idea of what they already know and what's hard for them, so you can help them progress. If you see that a learner is completely lost and discouraged, skip activities or discontinue the assessment, and make a note to that effect.

Instructions for using the Assessment document that follows on this site (suitable for a beginning learner):

1. Print out one copy of pages 1-7 for each learner you assess (you and the learner write on these pages). Write or have the learner write their name, class and date.
2. Print out one copy of pages 8-11 and keep them (you and the learner read from these pages).
3. Instructions for each task are printed on the pages. The following are general guidelines for performing the assessment tasks.

Individual Letters: These two tasks test the learner's knowledge of the names and sounds of the letters.

Give the learner page 1 (I. Alphabet). Tell the learner in their L1, "Please write the letters of the English alphabet in alphabetical order, both capital and small." Give the learner a reasonable amount of time. Observe how they recall and form the letters. If it seems that they are having trouble recalling further letters, move on to the next task.

- Although our emphasis will not be on writing the alphabet in alphabetical order, and we will not learn the letters in this order, this is one task that the world uses as a standard measure of English knowledge.
- After this task, put away the learner's list.
- Afterward, analyze and note: which letters does the learner know easily, and which not? Is their recall in alphabetical order, and do they know both capital and lower case forms? How correctly or clearly does the learner write the letters?

Give the learner pages 8 and 9 (II. List of Letters for Student to Read From) and you write on page 2 (II. Letter Names and Sounds, Sheet for Assessor):

- This list of the individual letters is not in alphabetical order, but in the Hickey learning order. This way you can repeat the assessment after you have progressed, to measure progress.
- Ask the learner to name each letter and note the responses on your own copy of the prepared list (page 2). If they say the name of the letter correctly, put a check mark in the "Name of Letter" column. If they give an incorrect answer, write what they say.
- For each letter, ask what sound(s) the letter makes, and anything else they know about the letter, and note these responses in the "Sounds & Rules" column. (If correct - just a check mark; if partial or incorrect, which sound they say and what else they say, e.g. "it's a vowel.")
- Later, compare the learner's responses to the correct answers and note discrepancies. There are typical patterns of mistakes - even for learners who know most letters uncommon letters are often unknown (q, j), and there is often confusion about letters for which the name and sound don't match (y, u, w, h).

Sound and word dictation: To assess the "auditory/phonemic intake and encoding in written symbols" channel, and optionally, vocabulary.

- Give the learner page 3, III. Dictation: Writing Sounds and Words, to write on. You read from page 10, III. Dictation: Sounds and Words (sheet for assessor). This includes a list of sounds, such as those you would dictate from the blue cards (including sounds that can be spelled in multiple ways), and a list of common English words containing a broad range of sounds and spellings.
- From page 10, dictate the sounds, one by one. Ask the learner to write all the ways s/he knows to spell each sound next to its number on page 3.
- For the lower half of the page, dictate the words to the learner, one by one, and ask him or her to write down each word. (To test vocabulary knowledge, ask the learner to write the definition of the word beside it, in Hebrew.)
- Later, compare the learner's responses to the correct spellings (and definitions) and note discrepancies.

Miscue Analysis: This is a technique to assess reading.

- You need two copies of a text at the class level of the learner (one photocopy on which you will write, and one from which the learner will read). The text provided in the assessment may be too difficult for the learner (or too easy, for older learners)
- Give the learner page 11, IV. Ned and Fred, to read from. You write on page 4, IV. Reading: Miscue Analysis.
- Ask the reader to read you the passage. Each time the reader makes a reading mistake or has trouble reading a given word, note the mispronunciation (use phonetic notation) on

your copy, above the word that was misread. For example, if the reader is supposed to read, "take" and pronounces it "tack," "tacky," or "cat" instead, write "cat," "tacky" or "tack" above the word "take" on your copy of the text.

- Time the reading of the passage and note how long it took the reader to get through the reading itself.
- When the reader finishes the entire passage, ask some basic comprehension questions about what has just been read (Who was this about? What happened? Where and when did it take place? etc.), and record the reader's answers. (This will give you insight into the learner's reading comprehension.)
- Analyzing the mistakes: Later, analyze the reading errors and try to identify any patterns. Does the reading mistake change the meaning? The purpose is to identify the letters and combinations of letters that the reader does not know how to properly decode, and what you need to emphasize in your teaching.

Writing and speaking – for more advanced learners: The assessor uses the questions on page 5 (V: Listening Comprehension, Conversational and Speaking Ability) as a guide and writes on this page. If you think the learner is able to do so, ask him or her to answer the questions in English. If they don't understand the questions, ask them in the learner's L1 - it's a good opportunity to find out about the learner. Record their answers, in whatever language. Note your impressions of conversational or speaking ability (passive and active).

Page 5, section VI: Write a Word, Sentence, or Paragraph: You can ask the learner to write what they are able. For more advanced learners, suggest a subject involving simple vocabulary (my family, class, school, vacation, etc.) according to their level and ability. Assess written response for spelling, vocabulary, and grammar.

Letter Direction and visual discrimination: This task checks the learner's ability to identify and distinguish the direction and various forms of a letter:

- On page 6, activity VII: Identify Directional Reading Issues, ask the learner to circle all the other examples on the line of the first letter in the line. The top table is all in the same font and all in lower case letters; the lower table also includes capital letters and various fonts.

(To check this issue further, prepare a sheet containing a line for each letter. Place the letter to locate at the beginning of each line and, on the rest of the same line, lots of different letters, some the same as the first letter and some different, but with some similar characteristics, except for direction.)

- Prepare an answer key with the right answers circled in color.
- Give the learner the answer key and a different color pen, and ask him/her to check and correct the first answers.

- Evaluate a) whether the learner initially circled the correct answers, and what type of mistakes they made b) how well they were able to check and correct their work, and what types of mistakes they made.

Determining the position of a given sound in a word (B,M,E): This is a technique to assess the learner's phonemic awareness (aural/hearing) channel and ability to distinguish sounds within words.

- Give the learner page 7, **VIII. Differentiation of Sounds: "BME" Exercise, Target sound (s)**. This is a numbered list of words (12) that all contain the same sound (here (s)) at some spot in each word, either at the beginning, middle, or end. Explain that the letters " B M E" in each line signify "Beginning Middle End" for each word.
- Read the words from your list (on the list provided, the words are at the top.) For each word, say the number and make sure the learner is noting the answer for the right word, then read the word, pronouncing it clearly. You can repeat the word, if necessary. The learner should listen to each word, then circle B if the sound is at the beginning of the word, M if it's in the middle, and E if it's at the end.
- Later, compare the learner's answer to your answer key.

Additional assessment tools:

The ABLE kit https://meyda.education.gov.il/files/Rama/ABLE_Conceptual_Guide.pdf is a comprehensive diagnostic tool developed by the Israel Ministry of Education English Department.

The introduction states:

This kit, which is entitled "Assessment of Basic Literacy in English" (hereafter, ABLE), comprises two tests: a whole-class administered Screening Test and an individually administered Diagnostic Test. The aim of the Screening Test is to identify the pupils who might have trouble acquiring literacy in English as a foreign language. The aim of the Diagnostic Test is to identify the specific literacy skills with which these pupils are having difficulty. The ABLE kit includes the actual tests to be used for test administration as well as a teacher's copy of the test with the corresponding scoring sheets. The tests have been prepared in two versions: one for Arabic-speaking pupils and another for Hebrew-speaking pupils.

Performing the assessments in the ABLE kit will provide more detailed information about letter combinations with which the learner is not familiar. Thus this assessment is suited to more advanced learners.