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A NEW GRADED WORD LIST FOR A QUICK ESTIMATE OF READING ABILITY

by Jerry L. Johns

Several years ago, LaPray and Ross (1969) offered teachers thirteen graded word lists for determining a child's reading level and detecting miscues in word analysis. The word lists ranged from the pre-primer level to the eleventh-grade level.

The sources for their graded word lists were basal reader glossaries and Thorndike's list. The words were randomly selected and assigned levels according to these two sources (some shifting was done on the basis of students' responses).

There is, according to the authors, little doubt that this graded word list is remarkably accurate; however, a recently compiled word list may also be extremely useful for helping place students in basal reading materials. Harris and Jacobson (1972) have compiled a core list of words from the pre-primer through the sixth-grade level. The basic criterion for including a word in the core list was a word's presence in three or more of the six widely used basal reading series in 1970. Harris and Jacobson suggested several ways in which the vocabulary list might be used. They also stated that it "... may be put to uses which its compilers are unable to anticipate" (p. 4). It seems highly desirable to use the core list as a basis for graded word lists. Toward this end, a random sample of ten words at each level was selected. Teachers can use the lists to estimate a student's reading level and get some idea of his/her strengths and weaknesses in word attack.

To administer the graded word lists, the teacher should first type each list of words on a separate sheet of paper or on an index card. The teacher can then begin to administer the test by

selecting the card that is at least two years below the student's present grade level and asking the student to say the words aloud. As the student says the words, the teacher notes all incorrect responses. If the student misreads any words, drop to easier lists until the student successfully reads all words. At that point, proceed to increasingly difficult lists until the student misses at least three words.

To interpret the results, the following guidelines are suggested:

Independent level — The student misses no more than one of the ten words at this level.

Instructional level — The student misses no more than two of the ten words at this level.

Frustration level — The student misses three or more of the ten words at this level.

The teacher, by noting and carefully examining the student's miscues, may be able to formulate some tentative hypotheses regarding the child's strengths and weaknesses in word attack. Caution should be used since it has been demonstrated (Goodman, 1965) that students decode much more readily when words appear in context than they do when words appear in lists. Also, Page (1971) has warned teachers about basing assessment solely upon a word recognition test using an isolated word list.

With the above precautions in mind, the graded word lists accompanying the article should be useful to teachers and diagnosticians who desire a relatively quick estimate of a student's reading level. This information can then be supplemented by other tests and observations.

If teachers allow this brief graded word list to dominate their professional knowledge and experience, the intent of the list has been lost. Don't allow this to happen! Use the graded word list as one piece of information for

placing students in appropriate reading materials and determining their strengths and weaknesses in word attack. Remember — only you can prevent misuse of the graded word list.

GRADED WORD LISTS

Pre-primer	Primer	1	2
to	father	had	meet
in	house	brown	winter
ran	pet	baby	through
can	some	picture	silver
help	word	thing	such
work	car	bee	chase
stop	one	or	ten
said	thank	way	wag
green	goat	does	done
did	should	morning	feed
3	4	5	6
drew	sleeve	severe	riot
mamma	cot	public	blister
fault	factory	soothing	mammoth
customer	moccasin	constitution	civilization
history	choice	mask	shrunk
surround	hunger	sullen	contribute
buckskin	distant	nightmare	technician
gaze	tend	petal	overlook
valley	receive	celebration	gallery
tight	gym	astound	fanatical

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