

Measuring Reading Progress with the 600 Most Frequently Occurring Words

Special Education teachers will soon be required to base students' continued eligibility for services on how they respond to instruction. Teachers will also be required to document the progress that students make toward reaching goals in their areas of eligibility. For example, students who are eligible under the category of Specific Learning Disability in the area of Basic Reading Skills will need to have specific goals related to word recognition and decoding skills. These materials are provided as one way to set goals and measure progress in the area of Basic Reading Skills.

This list of the 600 most frequently occurring words in written text has been borrowed from The Educator's Word Frequency Guide. The words are listed in order of the frequency with which they occur in thousands of text samples spanning kindergarten through college reading levels. Since about 80% of written language consists of sight vocabulary words (or words that students should be able to read without having to use decoding skills), achieving mastery of this list can greatly improve not only reading efficiency, but reading comprehension as well.

The 600-word list has been broken down into six pages, with each page containing 100 words. Each of those pages has been broken down into four sets, with each set containing 25 words. The sets are numbered 1-24.

How to use this list:

1. Make flash cards using the large word tables provided with these materials.
2. Begin assessing your student's word knowledge by administering the first one hundred words on flash cards, and keep track of words read correctly and words read incorrectly. Continue assessing word knowledge one set of words at a time (25 words in each set) until you reach a set that the student has not mastered.

3. *It is very important that the student is able to read the word quickly and without having to sound it out.* If he/she takes more than a few seconds to read the word, consider it incorrect.
4. Use the box at the bottom of each column to record the number of correct and incorrect responses, and calculate the percentage of correct responses by dividing the number of correct responses by 25 (or the number of words in the set).
5. Students should achieve 100% mastery of the entire list by around the end of the third grade. If your student has not done this, break the lists down into sets of 25 words and spend some amount of time each day practicing with the flash cards. A student with a higher word recognition level can “quiz” students with a lower word recognition level.
6. Measure progress weekly or every other week by charting performance on each set of 25 words. Charts are provided for this purpose. When one set of words has been mastered, move on to the next set. A student could be working on two sets simultaneously, so that when one set has been mastered, it would be discontinued and another set added to the daily practice session. In this way a student would always be working to master two sets of words (or a total of 50 words).
7. Work with each student to set reasonable goals. For example, you might work to master Set 15 (words 351-375) within a two week period. Each goal should be set according to the student’s strengths and weaknesses. Research has shown that involving students in the goal-setting process increases the probability that they will be willing to put their best effort into reaching the goal. Goals can always be adjusted if they prove to be too low or too high given the specified period of time.
8. Once a month or so, review the word lists that the student has already mastered to ensure retention.
9. When Annual Review staffings are scheduled, bring your documentation to the staffing so that the information can be used to determine ongoing eligibility, and can be used to write measurable IEP goals.