

# INSTRUCTIONS FOR ADMINISTERING THE PHONOLOGICAL AWARENESS SCREENING TEST (PAST)

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There is a history behind the title “PAST.” First, PAST stands for Phonological Awareness Screening Test. Second, the acronym functions to acknowledge the *past* work of others. This type of test originated with Rosner & Simon (1971). A similar version was used for three decades by Dr. Philip J. McInnis, first titled the Language Processing Test and then the Phonological Processing Test. Since 1999, I have used a modified form of the test. So, while this is my version of the test, it is based upon the work of my predecessors (hence, the PAST).

The PAST has four forms: A, B, C, and D. This allows teachers to do formalized assessment a few times a year to track a student’s progress.

## GENERAL PRINCIPLES OF ADMINISTRATION

Do not use this test unless:

1. you have carefully read and understood the directions; *and*
2. you have had the chance to practice it with feedback before testing a student.

### ***Use of Sample Lines***

Follow the sample line at the beginning of each level. Administer each item at a given level the same way. *Note that you are always deleting or substituting the sound represented by the letter(s) in the parentheses (e.g., cow[boy] means boy gets deleted).*

### ***Proper Pronunciation of Sounds***

*Sounds are depicted with slash marks, called virgules.* When giving directions for Levels F through M, use letter sounds, not letter names. When you say, “Change /a/ to /i/,” you say the *sound* made by the letter, not the name of the letter. The exception is with the long vowel sounds (Level J II). Long vowel sounds are represented by uppercase letters in virgules (e.g., /A/). These long vowel sounds match the letter name (e.g., the *a* in words like *cake*, *tame*, or *made*).

### ***The Assessment of Automaticity***

All items are timed. When you administer an item, as soon as you finish speaking, immediately count in your head, “One thousand *one*, one thousand *two*.” Use a stopwatch or sweep second hand at first to be sure your counting closely approximates two seconds. If the student responds correctly before you get to the word *two* in that phrase, he or she receives credit for responding automatically. Put a “check plus” (✓+) in the blank next to the word to indicate an automatic response. However, if the student answers correctly but *after* that two-second count, mark a check (✓) next to the item. See *Figure 1* below.

When you count in your head, continue counting until you reach “one thousand *five*.” If the student gives *no response* after five seconds, repeat the item to give the student a second chance. After repeating the item, resume the mental counting. If the student responds correctly within five seconds of this second chance, score the item as correct with a ✓. *An automatic ✓+ score can only occur within the first two seconds of the first try.* The second chance is given because students sometimes forget what you asked. Also, if the student asks you to repeat the item, do so. However, repeated items cannot be scored as automatic, only as correct (✓) or incorrect (0). If the student does not respond after the second count of five, score the item as zero and provide the correct feedback on the item (see the Providing Feedback section below).

If you misspeak a word, excuse yourself, skip the item, and go on to the next one, as long as it wasn’t the last item at that level. Go back to the item you spoiled before going on to the next level and score normally (i.e., they can receive an automatic score if they answer in less than two seconds). If this occurs on the last item of a level, repeat that item immediately and use your best judgment about scoring.



2. *Never* say anything about the *position* of the sound within the word, because this is a big part of what you are testing. For example, *never* say anything like, “See how I switched the /b/ to a /t/ at the beginning of the word?” A key part of phonological awareness is being able to isolate a sound, so saying anything about position is like giving away the answer.

**Discontinue Rule.** If the combined correct score on two levels in a row is 0 or 1 out of 10, discontinue the test. Score all items above those levels as incorrect. For example, if a student got only one correct item between Levels I and J combined, discontinue the test. Do not administer K, L, or M. All items on the unadministered levels are scored 0.

## SCORING THE PAST

**Passing a Level.** A level is considered passed if at least four out of the five items are correct. A level is considered automatic if at least four out of the five items are answered automatically. Levels with three out of five, or fewer, are not considered passed.

Keep in mind, each level yields two scores: (1) a *correct score*, and (2) an *automatic score*. A student may pass the level with his or her correct score but not with the automatic score. These differences are preserved for the total scoring (see *Figure 2* and the Total Scores section below).

**Item Scoring.** By now, it should be clear that items are scored in one of three ways:

1. Incorrect (Score = 0)
2. Correct but not automatic (Score = ✓)
3. Automatic, i.e., the student responds in two seconds or less (Score = ✓+)

At each level, count every score of ✓ and ✓+ and put the total in the Correct column on the right. Scores of ✓ or ✓+ are both scored as correct items. In the Automatic column, only include the number of ✓+ for that level (see *Figure 1* above for an illustration).

RESULTS:	Correct	Automatic	Highest Correct Level:	<u>M</u>			
Basic Syllable	<u>10</u> /10	<u>10</u> /10	(Levels not passed below the highest correct level)	<u>N/A</u>			
Onset-Rime	<u>10</u> /10	<u>10</u> /10					
Basic Phoneme	<u>9</u> /10	<u>9</u> /10					
Advanced Phoneme	<u>18</u> /20	<u>15</u> /20	Highest Automatic Level:	<u>L</u>			
<b>Test Total</b>	<u>47</u> /50	<u>44</u> /50	(Non-automatic levels below highest automatic level)	<u>N/A</u>			
<b>Approximate Grade Level (Circle):</b>	PreK/K	K	late K/early 1st	1st	late 1st/early 2nd	<b>2nd</b>	late 2nd to adult

*Figure 2 Sample of Scoring Results*

**The Total Scores.** As mentioned, students receive two scores at each level. One score is the number of correct items. The other is the number of items that were answered automatically. Transfer the totals from the right-hand column to the top of the first page of the test.

There are two sides to this. First, the student receives a score that indicates how many were correct and how many were automatic at the *syllable*, *onset-rime*, and *phoneme* levels. The other side gives the highest level passed. Remember a level is passed as correct if at least four out of five at that level are correct. A level is considered automatic if at least four out of five items were automatic. Thus, for most children, the highest correct level will be higher than his or her highest automatic level (see *Figure 2*). It is also important to note any levels not passed that were below the highest level passed.

## INTEPRETING THE PAST

Even though the PAST correlates powerfully with reading, traditional normative scores have not yet been established. However, based on (1) McInnis' 35 years using these levels; (2) my eleven years working with the PAST; (3) several studies that show when children developmentally can do specific phonological manipulations; as well as (4) several studies I have done on the PAST, the following is a guide to interpreting the results:

Grade Level	Typically Achieving Readers	Low Achieving Readers
1. Late Kindergarten	D1–E2 or higher	D1–2; E2 or lower
2. Mid First Grade	E3, F, G, I, or higher	E2, F, G, or lower
3. Late First Grade	E4–5, F, G, H, I, J	F, G, I, or lower
4. Mid Second Grade	H, I, J, or higher	F, G, H, or I, or lower
5. Late Second Grade	H, I, J, K, and L, most automatic	H, I, maybe J, or lower
6. Mid Third Grade	All levels, most automatic	Many levels correct, I to M mostly not automatic
7. Fourth Grade to Adulthood	All levels automatic	Most levels correct, but J to M not all automatic

If a student's performance matches the shaded Low Achieving Readers column, it suggests that phonological awareness may be a concern. If a student's level is lower than is listed in that column, then a phonological awareness problem is almost certain. In either case, those students will require training beyond what they may be receiving in whole-class instruction.

Notice above how subtle the differences can be, especially early on (i.e., K–1). Except for obvious cases of very low performance, the differences may be very small. This is why all students should get phonological awareness training from kindergarten on. Next, note that over time, typical students start to pull away from those with difficulties. Then, automaticity becomes a big factor, especially after second grade. After third grade, lack of automaticity at any level may indicate that a phonological awareness difficulty may be present.

Do not be surprised by inconsistencies in levels. A student may struggle through an easier level, and pass a higher level. A reason for this is that different levels involve different types of manipulations. For example, Levels H and K involve splitting initial blends. If a student struggles with awareness of sounds in blends, he may not pass H, but may pass I and J, which don't involve blends. Also, students who struggle with awareness of ending sounds may do poorly with Level I and L but do fine with H, J, and K. A final example is a student who had a rough time with E2 and E3\*, but who does well with phoneme-level tasks. Most likely, that student took a while to "warm-up" with the task. That student's phonological awareness is probably fine, but you may want to check his working memory and his ability to focus.

\*Note that the E3 line does not appear on Form A.