Chapter 11

Assessment of Phonological Awareness:
The Phonological Awareness Screening Test (PAST)

It is a rather simple matter to assess phonological awareness. The *Equipped for Reading Success* program provides three ways to evaluate these skills, two informal and one formal.

1) The simplest way to evaluate phonological awareness is to take note of the level at which the student is working. Is he or she able to do Level E3? Level H? Level K? This informal assessment tells you how far along in the program a student has progressed. It is important to notice a student's *speed* when doing *One-Minute Activities* to see if he or she is at the Knowledge Stage or Automatic Stage.

2) If you want a quick assessment of a student's skill, you simply can give half of a *One-Minute Activity* (i.e., five items) from any given level. How well the student does helps you know how well he or she is progressing. Also make note of speed.

3) Use the formalized *Phonological Awareness Screening Test* (PAST) in Appendix C. Detailed instructions for administering the PAST are included in this chapter. The PAST is best used with students as part of a formal reading assessment to determine a student's level of phonological awareness (i.e., syllable, onset-rime, or phoneme) and their degree of proficiency (i.e., multisensory, knowledge or automatic). A comprehensive reading assessment should include tests of working memory, rapid automatized naming, as well as phonological awareness and oral blending.[1] All of these lower level linguistic skills are assessed on the *Comprehensive Test of Phonological Processing* (CTOPP), which I've mentioned previously. That test was under revision when this manual was being completed. I strongly recommend it. I describe a few tips for using it in Appendix J. The CTOPP should be used alongside the PAST. I have found the PAST and the *Elision* subtest (the CTOPP's phonological awareness test) tend to yield similar results. However, in the cases where they differ, the PAST is usually (but not always) more consistent with a student's reading skill.

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[1] These tests would be, of course, in addition to tests of context-free word identification, nonsense word reading, reading comprehension, and listening comprehension.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE
PHONOLOGICAL AWARENESS SCREENING TEST (PAST)

The *Phonological Awareness Screening Test* (PAST) can be found in Appendix C. There are 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.

There is a "history" behind the title "PAST." First, PAST stands for Phonological Awareness Screening Test. Second, the acronym functions to acknowledge the work of others in the *past*. This type of test originated with Rosner & Simon (*Journal of Learning Disabilities,* 1971). A similar version was used for three decades by Dr. Philip J. McInnis under the title *Language Processing Test* and then the *Phonological Processing Test*. Since 1999, I have used a modified form of the test.[2] So, while this is my "version" of the test, it is based upon the work of my predecessors (hence, the "PAST"*).*

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. If you are experienced using the *One Minute Activities,* the PAST will be easy to learn. 3) Read and practice the pronunciation guidelines in Chapter 12 and Appendix E. *Proper pronunciation of sounds in isolation will be essential for children to understand what phoneme you are asking them to manipulate.*

Use of sample. 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. 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 brackets (i.e., /A/). These long vowel sounds match the letter name (e.g., the *a* in words like *cake, tame,* or *made*).

Also, don't add an "uh" sound when you pronounce consonants in isolation (e.g., /m/ is pronounced *mmm,* not *muh*). For help with pronunciation, see Chapter 12 and Appendix E.

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 stop watch 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 an "X" in the blank next to the word to indicate an automatic response. However, if the student answers correctly,

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[2]Among other details, my "version" 1) adds a timing element to assess automaticity; 2) adds or modifies levels to make smoother transitions (see Appendix B for program comparisons); and 3) adds the element of providing corrective feedback for *every* incorrect item.

but after that two second count, mark a "1" next to that item. See Figure 11.2 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 (i.e., a "1"). *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. 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 below on providing feedback).

If you mis-speak a word, excuse yourself, skip the item, and go on to the next one, so 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.

Occasionally, a student will respond to the previous item. For example, you have the student go from *sit* to *sat* (Level J). On the next item, you ask the student to go from *hid* to *had*, but instead of *had*, the student says *sad,* accidentally carrying over sounds from the previous item. This may not be the result of a phonological awareness problem, but may result from confusion or a working memory issue. If you judge that a student has carried something over from the previous example, re-administer the item. However, the student cannot receive an automatic score on a re-administered item, only correct (1) or incorrect (0).

	Correct	Automatic

LEVEL J "Say *sit*. Now say *sit* again but this time instead of /i/ say /a/."
I. (use *sound* of vowel) s/i/t /a/ → sat ___   h/i/d /a/ → had ___   f/i/x /o/ → fox _X_
II. (use *name* of vowel) l/a/ne /i/ → line _X_   ph/o/ne /i/ → fine _X_

$\underline{5}$ /5 A:$\underline{3}$ /5

LEVEL K (Note that K1 involves phoneme *deletion*, K2 involves phoneme *substitution*)
K1 "Say *plan*. Now say *plan* again but this time don't say of /l/."
p/l/an → pan _O_   s/n/eak → seek _|_
K2 "Say *sweep*. Now say *sweep* again but this time instead of /w/ say /l/."
s/w/eep → s/l/eep _|_   g/l/ow → g/r/ow _|_   f/l/ute → f/r/uit _X_

$\underline{4}$ /5 A: $\underline{1}$ /5

FIGURE 11.1
SAMPLE SCORING

Automatic responding typically takes one second or less, so a count of two is generous. Therefore, only give automatic credit if students complete their response (or is making a response) when you have mentally said *two* while you silently count "one thousand *two*."

Repeating an item. If a student seems confused, or seems to lapse in attention, it is okay to repeat an item. However, when you repeat an item, that item cannot be scored as automatic. Students can only receive a 1 if the response was correct or a 0 if it was incorrect.

Pacing. One important reason to be thoroughly familiar with the administration procedures and to have practiced the test beforehand is *pacing*. It is important to administer the PAST at a good pace to keep things moving. A moderately quick pacing prevents lapses of attention,

boredom, or prevents you from unnecessarily taxing a student's working memory.

Providing feedback. A unique feature of the PAST is the examiner provides corrective feedback for every incorrect item. Feedback on the PAST is based on the assumption that a student is not going to develop phonological awareness skills in the 6-8 minutes it takes to administer this test. Give feedback for *every* incorrect response. The standard correction is: "The answer is *tall*. When you say *ball,* and change the /b/ to /t/ you get *tall*. *Ball–tall*. See how that works?" No further demonstration or explanation is permitted (especially, no visual cues). Also, you must *never* refer to the location of the sound within the word. Correct every incorrect item, even if it is the last one at a level. It's also okay to acknowledge that the student got an item correct, especially if he or she responds tentatively, but correctly.

HOWEVER:

1) Do NOT teach any item or level. This is a test, not a teaching session. Ample oral feedback is provided, but no teaching, manipulatives, or explanations are allowed.

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.

Routing procedure to speed administration. Rarely (or never) would a student be administered all 50 items on the PAST. For younger students, many of the later items are too difficult, so there is a discontinue rule described below. For more skilled students, it can get tedious if all the easy items are given. To keep the test a reasonable length, there is a routing procedure, which works differently at each of the *syllable, onset-rime,* and *phoneme* levels.

Syllable Levels (D1 to E3)

•Start *all* students at Level D1. Explain to students that this "word game" starts out very easy. The easy ones help students understand the nature of the task without ever having to explain the nature of the task (there are no explanations when administering this test).

•If the first item of D1 is done automatically (i.e., 2 seconds or less), skip down to the first item of D2. If that is automatic, skip to first item of E2, then E3. When you score later, if the first D1 through E3 items are automatic, score any un-administered items at those levels as automatic (thus a 5/5 at that level).

•However, if any item is either 1) incorrect, or 2) correct but not automatic (i.e., correct response after 2 seconds), administer all items at that level and score normally.

Onset-Rime Levels (F & G)

•If the first three F or G items are automatic, skip the final two items at that level and score them as automatic.

•If any of the first three F or G items are incorrect, or correct but not automatic, administer all five items at that specific level (i.e., F or G) and score normally.

Phoneme Levels (H to M)

•For Levels H through M, give *all* items at each level. Continue administering until the discontinue rule is reached or you come to the end of the test.

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, 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 un-administered 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 3 out of 5 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 their correct score but not with their automatic score. These differences are preserved for the total scoring (see Figure 11.2 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 = 1)
3) Automatic. i.e., the student responds in two seconds or less (Score = X)

At each level, count every score of 1 and X and put the total in the "correct" column on the right. Scores of 1 or X are both scored as "correct" items. In the "automatic" column, only include the number of Xs for that level (see Figure 11.1 above for an illustration).

RESULTS:

	Correct	Automatic	Highest Correct Level:	J
			(Levels not passed below the highest correct level)	—
Basic Syllable	10 /10	8 /10		
Onset-Rime	10 /10	10 /10		
Basic Phoneme	8 /10	4 /10		I
Advanced Phoneme	6 /20	2 /20	Highest Automatic Level:	
Test Total	34 /50	24 /50	(Non automatic levels below highest automatic level)	E, H

FIGURE 11.2

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 4 out of 5 at that level are correct. A level is considered automatic if at least 4 out of 5 items were automatic. Thus, for most children, the highest correct level will be higher than his or her highest automatic level (see Figure 11.2 for an illustration). 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 11 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[3]	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 kids 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, 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 this ability to focus.

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[3]Note Level M is excluded. I added this level a few years ago. There has not been sufficient field-testing or research to include information on Level M at this time. Suffice it to say for most kids, it is the most difficult level.