



Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills

THE PRACTICAL MANUAL

*Answers to Questions About
Administering, Scoring, and
Interpreting DIBELS®*

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DIBELS Overview

Dynamic
Indicators of
Basic
Early
Literacy
Skills

BRIEF HISTORY

DIBELS is a scientifically validated assessment instrument used to assess early reading skills. DIBELS was first developed as a tool that would help identify children as early as possible who were not likely to read at grade level by the end of third grade (as measured by high-stakes test of reading comprehension^{1,2}). As DIBELS was developed, the researchers considered it important to correlate DIBELS scores to other state-mandated high-stakes reading tests. In the more than 15 years of research conducted with DIBELS, the instrument has been found to be highly correlated with a wide range of measures of reading readiness and achievement. DIBELS has also been found to be predictive of success on high-stakes reading tests in many states (Barger, 2003; Buck & Torgesen, 2003; DIBELS Web site, 2004; Good et al., 2001; Shaw & Shaw, 2002).

DIBELS' widest uses are as screening, outcome, and progress monitoring assessments for Grades K–3. However, DIBELS recently added benchmark assessments and progress monitoring assessments for Grades 4–6 and benchmark assessments in a Spanish language version for Grades K–3. Wireless Generation, Inc., has worked with the DIBELS team to offer the ability to administer and score DIBELS using a handheld computer. These DIBELS “extras” are discussed in more detail in Chapter 2.

DIBELS was developed by a team of professors and graduate students at the University of Oregon. Drs. Roland Good and Ruth Kaminski, who lead the team of DIBELS researchers, supported their research with several grants from the U.S. Department of Education. One grant, titled Early Childhood Research Institute (ECRI), was awarded to three universities whose investigators were charged with identifying and developing Individual Growth and Development Indicators (IGDIs³) for children from birth to age 8. The IGDIs were intended to address language and literacy development, social and emotional skill development, and motor development. DIBELS resulted from the University of Oregon's study on developing IGDIs for children in Grades K–3. Two other universities are developing IGDIs for children from birth to age 3 and from age 3 until they enter

¹ DIBELS ORF is based on a program of research and development of Curriculum-Based Measurements of Reading (CBM-R), which was developed by Stan Deno and colleagues at the University of Minnesota (Deno et al., 1982).

² The importance of developing a valid early reading assessment was based on numerous longitudinal research studies that found third grade reading outcomes to be strongly related to middle and high school reading achievement.

³ Pronounced “ig’-dees.”

kindergarten. The University of Kansas developed a set of measures designed and validated for use by practitioners and interventionists for children from birth to age 3. The Web site is <http://www.lsi.ku.edu/jgprojects/igdi>. The University of Minnesota has assessments for children age 3 until they enter kindergarten that are called Get It, Got It, Go on its Web site: <http://ggg.umn.edu/>. The studies these researchers conducted and continue to conduct are adding to the growing body of research detailing the importance of early literacy and language skills in achieving later reading outcomes.

SUMMARY DESCRIPTION

All DIBELS measures
emphasize both
accuracy and fluency.

DIBELS includes seven measures, six of which correspond to one of the five essential components of reading⁴ as established by the National Reading Panel (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000). The DIBELS assessments all have been approved by the National Reading First Assessment Committee, as described in the committee's report, which is available at <http://idea.uoregon.edu/assessment/index.html>. Within that review, Word Use Fluency and Retell Fluency are not addressed. However, since the initial publishing of the review, the committee has approved Word Use Fluency and Retell Fluency for assessing vocabulary and comprehension, respectively.

DIBELS benchmark assessments and progress monitoring assessments are given individually to each student. DIBELS benchmark assessments are given three times a year: at the beginning, middle, and end of the school year.⁵ The set of measures given varies from grade to grade, and the set of measures also varies within every grade except third grade, which has the same measures for all three benchmarks. All seven DIBELS measures emphasize both accuracy and fluency and are powerful indicators of the early skills that predict reading success. Each of the measures is described briefly in *Table 1-1* and in detail in Chapters 10–16.

DIBELS is an acronym for Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills. Each word is a partial description of the assessment. The **D** stands for *Dynamic*, which describes three aspects of DIBELS. First, *dynamic* means that the assessments are sensitive to small changes in early literacy skills, and they show how students are changing, not just where they stand at a specific point in time. Second, *dynamic* means that specific measures given at benchmark assessment periods change over time, depending on their utility for predicting reading outcomes. Third, *dynamic* means that DIBELS scores provide information about how students are changing, not just where they are at a certain point in time.

⁴ The five essential components are phonemic awareness, the alphabetic principle (phonics), fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. Each is described in the Glossary.

⁵ There are a few exceptions, notably Florida, that have elected to give DIBELS assessments to all children four times each school year. For those schools, the middle-year set of benchmark assessments is repeated. Benchmark and target scores for four assessment periods in a school year are available on the DIBELS Web site.

Description of Seven DIBELS Measures

Table 1-1

DIBELS Measure	Essential Component of Reading Measured	Description
Initial Sound Fluency (ISF)	Phonemic awareness	Students identify pictures with a target initial sound and they articulate the first sound or sounds in a word.
Phoneme Segmentation Fluency (PSF)	Phonemic awareness	Students break words with two to five sounds into parts, with the highest score for each word being the number of phonemes in the word.
Nonsense Word Fluency (NWF)	Alphabetic principle (phonics)	Students read nonsense words spelled with two and three letters or they name the letter sounds. All nonsense words are spelled with a consonant–vowel–consonant (CVC) or vowel–consonant (VC) pattern.
Oral Reading Fluency (ORF)	Fluency	Students orally read a grade-level passage.
Retell Fluency (RTF)	Comprehension	Students retell the passage they read in Oral Reading Fluency.
Word Use Fluency (WUF)	Vocabulary	Students give an oral response using a target word in a sentence, definition, or description.
Letter Naming Fluency (LNF)	None—contributes as a risk factor (LNF as a risk factor is explained later in this chapter and in Chapter 10).	Students name uppercase and lowercase letters presented in random order.

The **I** in DIBELS stands for *Indicators*, which means that the measures don't tell us everything about a child's early literacy skills. Rather, the few specific measures given at each benchmark period have been shown through research to be highly predictive of skills that lead to early reading success, and they are strong indicators of current emerging literacy skills. Students who score below benchmark scores⁶ may need further focused diagnostic assessment to determine which specific skills they are missing and, therefore, how intervention instruction should be designed.

The letters **B**, **E**, **L**, and **S** in DIBELS stand for *Basic Early Literacy Skills*. This means that DIBELS measures a small, selected set of the student's emerging and early reading skills chosen specifically to predict later reading achievement at the end of third grade. Phonemic awareness, decoding, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension are measured by DIBELS. These skills are predictive of early literacy development only. Sophisticated vocabulary knowledge and higher-order thinking skills, such as prediction and inference, are not measured by DIBELS.

All DIBELS benchmark assessments are standardized assessments. That means that directions are given exactly as written and that the measures are scored consistently by all examiners in order for the comparative scores to be valid.

OPTIONAL MEASURES: RTF AND ORF

Two of the measures, Retell Fluency and Word Use Fluency, are labeled as "optional." WUF is optional because this is a newer measure and DIBELS researchers have yet to identify nationally normed benchmarks and risk categories

⁶ See Chapter 5 for an explanation of the term "benchmark scores."

for WUF. However, indications are that Word Use Fluency is a good predictor of vocabulary knowledge. When Word Use Fluency scores are submitted to the University of Oregon data system, local norms are provided on the reports from the DIBELS Data System. Districts and schools that elect to use Word Use Fluency as part of the benchmark assessment measures and do not use the DIBELS Data System determine their own risk categories. (See Chapter 16 for how to develop risk categories for Word Use Fluency.)

Retell Fluency is the other optional DIBELS measure. RTF used in conjunction with ORF is a stronger predictor of comprehension skills than the ORF score without RTF. For most children, the ORF score alone will give a good indication of whether or not the student comprehends what he or she reads. However, occasionally a student reads text accurately and fluently but does not retain or understand the content. In that case, the ORF score alone may not indicate comprehension difficulties. An RTF score in the At Risk range will identify this student. For this reason, administering ORF and RTF is especially important to identify children who may decode well but have difficulty with comprehension. (Students with an ORF score of 40 or higher and an RTF score lower than 25% of their ORF score are considered to be at risk for comprehension difficulties. Unlike other measures, there is no Some Risk category for RTF scores.) The schedule for giving the measures for benchmark assessments is shown in *Table 1-2*.

Table 1-2 Schedule of Individual Measures Administered at Each Assessment Period

DIBELS Measure	Kindergarten			First Grade			Second Grade			Third Grade		
	B	M	E	B	M	E	B	M	E	B	M	E
Initial Sound Fluency	x	x										
Letter Naming Fluency	x	x	x	x								
Phoneme Segmentation Fluency		x	x	x	x	x						
Nonsense Word Fluency		x	x	x	x	x	x					
Oral Reading Fluency					x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x

Optional Measures:

Retell Fluency					x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Word Use Fluency	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x

Note: The letters **B**, **M**, and **E** stand for beginning, middle, and end of the school year.

TIME REQUIRED TO ADMINISTER DIBELS BENCHMARK ASSESSMENTS

The time it takes to give DIBELS benchmark assessments varies because the combination of measures given is different, depending on the grade and time of year. The time to administer DIBELS at each benchmark assessment period will be shorter for schools that elect not to give the two optional measures: Retell Fluency

and Word Use Fluency. Time also is dependent on the efficiency with which the examiners can administer DIBELS, and such efficiency is largely based on how often they give the assessment, how long it has been since they last gave DIBELS, and the time allocated to “chatting” with the student. (Examiners quickly learn that minimizing chat time—without losing rapport with the student—can greatly decrease the time it takes to administer DIBELS to a class!)

Table 1–3 shows approximate times for administering DIBELS benchmark assessments at the beginning, middle, and end of each school year. The table shows times for administering DIBELS to 1 student at each benchmark period and for a team of five examiners to administer DIBELS to a classroom of 25 students at each benchmark period. The times are based on averages for examiners who have given DIBELS at several benchmark assessments. The times shown in Table 1–3 include the following assumptions: (1) 30 seconds between students; (2) minimal chat time of 30 seconds for the examiner to greet each student and to conclude the student’s assessment session; (3) 90 seconds for the examiner to calculate the score for each measure and record the score on the Summary of Scores Page; and (4) time to administer and score each measure given during the specific benchmark the assessment is based on. (Table 6–3 in Chapter 6 shows in detail the time it takes to administer and score each measure.)

Time for One Examiner to Administer and Score Benchmark Assessments for an Individual Student and for Five Examiners to Administer DIBELS to a Classroom of 25 Students **Table 1-3**

DIBELS Measure	Kindergarten			First Grade			Second Grade			Third Grade		
	B	M	E	B	M	E	B	M	E	B	M	E
Including Retell and Word Use Fluency												
Individual Student (time in minutes, rounded up to nearest minute)	8.5	13	10	10	15.25	15.25	13.25	10.75	10.75	10.75	10.75	10.75
Classroom of 25 Students With Five Examiners (time in minutes, rounded up to nearest five minutes)	45	65	50	50	80	80	70	55	55	55	55	55
Without Retell and Word Use Fluency												
Individual Student (time in minutes)	7	11.5	8.5	8.5	11.75	11.75	9.75	7.25	7.25	7.25	7.25	7.25
Classroom of 25 Students With Five Examiners (time in minutes, rounded up to nearest five minutes)	35	60	45	45	60	60	50	40	40	40	40	40

For schools that give all seven measures, Table 1–3 shows that the shortest amount of time needed to administer DIBELS to an individual student is 8.5 minutes per student at the beginning of kindergarten, and the longest time is 15.25 minutes per student at the middle and end of first grade. The table also shows that

the shortest time for five examiners to administer all benchmark assessments to a classroom of 25 students is 45 minutes at the beginning of kindergarten. The longest time is 80 minutes at the middle and end of first grade.

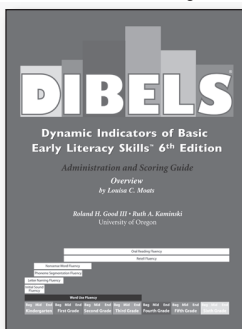
If schools or districts elect not to give the two optional measures, the shortest time it takes is 7 minutes per student in second and third grades and the longest time is 11.75 minutes at the middle of kindergarten. The shortest time for five examiners to administer the benchmark assessment to a classroom with 25 students is approximately 35 minutes at the beginning of kindergarten, and the longest time is 60 minutes at the middle of kindergarten and at the middle and end of first grade.

SUMMARY DESCRIPTION OF PRINT MATERIALS

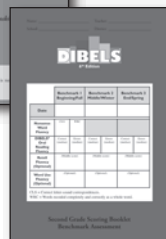
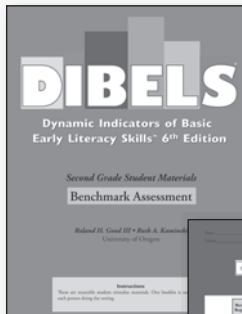
DIBELS print materials consist of the following, all of which can be purchased from Sopris West (<http://www.sopriswest.com>) or downloaded from the DIBELS Web site (<http://dibels.uoregon.edu>).

- This manual (available only from Sopris West)
- *DIBELS Administration and Scoring Guide*
- Benchmark Assessment Student Materials (the larger booklets)
- Benchmark Assessment Scoring Booklets (the smaller booklets, about half the size of the Student Materials Booklets)
- Progress Monitoring Student Materials (the larger booklets)
- Progress Monitoring Scoring Booklets (the smaller booklets, about half the size of the Student Materials)

Administration and Scoring Guide



Student Materials Benchmark Assessment



Scoring Booklet
Benchmark Assessment

DIBELS Administration and Scoring Guide

The guide contains technical, administration, and scoring information about DIBELS. The guide also includes a list of Approved Accommodations available for use with individual students and technical reports that explain some of the validation research and how DIBELS determines instructional recommendations. Virtually all of the information contained in the *DIBELS Administration and Scoring Guide* is discussed in this manual, with the exception of the technical reports.

Benchmark Assessment Materials

Benchmark assessment materials are different for each grade. They include all of the print materials necessary to administer the benchmark assessments three times a year. These materials consist of Scoring Booklets and Student Materials for each measure

Scoring Booklets—One Benchmark Assessment Scoring Booklet is needed for each student. Examiners use the Scoring Booklets to mark student responses and record the scores for each measure. The scoring pages for all the benchmark assessments for an entire year are included in the

Scoring Booklet. Most schools put labels on the front page of the Scoring Booklets that have the student name, teacher, school, and other identifying information such as the student number.

The first page of the Scoring Booklet is called the Summary of Scores Page in this manual (see Figure 1-1). The examiner records the scores for each measure given during the benchmark assessment on the Summary of Scores Pages. This is also where the examiner would note whether an Approved Accommodation was used for any measure and would provide other comments. When this page is completed, it offers a summary of the student’s benchmark assessment scores. The Summary of Scores Page makes data input easy and allows the teacher a one-page overview of the student’s scores, including how the scores change as the year progresses.

Summary of Scores Pages, Kindergarten–Grade 3

Figure 1-1

Kindergarten

Name: _____ Teacher: _____
 School: _____ District: _____

	Benchmark 1 Beginning/Fall	Benchmark 2 Middle/Winter	Benchmark 3 End/Spring
Date			
Initial Sound Fluency			
Letter Naming Fluency			
Phoneme Segmentation Fluency			
Nonsense Word Fluency		CLS WRC	CLS WRC
Word Use Fluency (Optional)	(Optional)	(Optional)	(Optional)

CLS = Correct letter-sound correspondences.
 WRC = Words recoded completely and correctly as a whole word.

Second Grade

Name: _____ Teacher: _____
 School: _____ District: _____

	Benchmark 1 Beginning/Fall	Benchmark 2 Middle/Winter	Benchmark 3 End/Spring
Date			
Nonsense Word Fluency	CLS WRC		
DIBELS® Oral Reading Fluency	Correct (median) Errors (median)	Correct (median) Errors (median)	Correct (median) Errors (median)
Retell Fluency (Optional)	(Middle score)	(Middle score)	(Middle score)
Word Use Fluency (Optional)	(Optional)	(Optional)	(Optional)

CLS = Correct letter-sound correspondences.
 WRC = Words recoded completely and correctly as a whole word.

First Grade

Name: _____ Teacher: _____
 School: _____ District: _____

	Benchmark 1 Beginning/Fall	Benchmark 2 Middle/Winter	Benchmark 3 End/Spring
Date			
Letter Naming Fluency			
Phoneme Segmentation Fluency			
Nonsense Word Fluency	CLS WRC	CLS WRC	CLS WRC
DIBELS® Oral Reading Fluency		Correct (median) Errors (median)	Correct (median) Errors (median)
Retell Fluency (Optional)		(Middle score)	(Middle score)
Word Use Fluency (Optional)	(Optional)	(Optional)	(Optional)

CLS = Correct letter-sound correspondences.
 WRC = Words recoded completely and correctly as a whole word.

Third Grade

Name: _____ Teacher: _____
 School: _____ District: _____

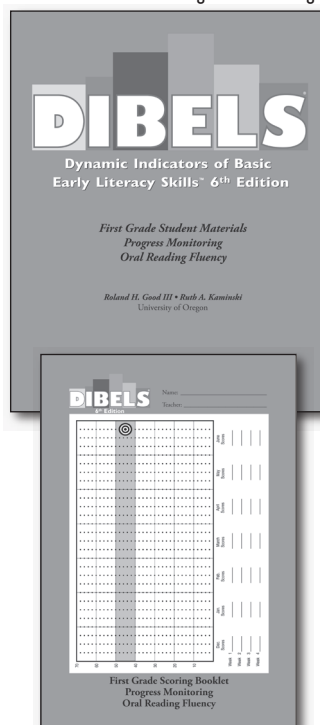
	Benchmark 1 Beginning/Fall	Benchmark 2 Middle/Winter	Benchmark 3 End/Spring
Date			
DIBELS® Oral Reading Fluency	Correct (median) Errors (median)	Correct (median) Errors (median)	Correct (median) Errors (median)
Retell Fluency (Optional)	(Middle score)	(Middle score)	(Middle score)
Word Use Fluency (Optional)	(Optional)	(Optional)	(Optional)

Student Materials - NWF



Scoring Booklet - NWF

Student Materials Progress Monitoring



Scoring Booklet Progress Monitoring

Student Materials—Each examiner needs one set of Student Materials for each grade being assessed. The Student Materials contain all the pages with pictures, letters, nonsense words, and passages that students need to look at or read during the benchmark assessments. Student Materials booklets are larger than Scoring Booklets and contain all of the materials students read or look at during each benchmark assessment. (There are no pages in the Student Materials booklets for PSF, RTF, and WUF because these measures are oral and do not require the student to look at anything.)

With the exception of the look of the cover page, the Sopris West and downloaded versions of the Student Materials booklets are identical if the downloaded ISF pictures are printed in color. (Although it is acceptable to print the ISF booklets in black and white, our informal observation is that students respond better to color pictures. Therefore, we recommend printing the ISF pictures in color, if at all possible.)

Progress Monitoring Materials

Materials used for DIBELS progress monitoring differ from those used for benchmark assessments because they are organized to include materials for only one measure. Progress monitoring materials for ISF, PSF, NWF, ORF, and WUF are available from Sopris West and in downloadable form on the DIBELS Web site.

Sopris West and the DIBELS Web site do not offer progress monitoring materials for LNF. This is because the creators of DIBELS view letter naming as a skill that is not one of the five essential components of reading. Therefore, they believe letter naming practice should not be a focus of intervention lessons. (See Chapter 10 for more discussion of the purpose of the DIBELS LNF measure.)

RTF is another measure for which there are no progress monitoring materials. Teachers who want to track a student’s progress in RTF can write the number of words and the RTF–ORF percentage on the page with the progress monitoring chart for ORF. Some teachers make their own charts for progress monitoring RTF and staple them to the ORF booklet.

Progress monitoring materials include a Scoring Booklet for each measure listed above and Student Materials books for ORF, NWF, and ISF. There are no Student Materials for PSF, RTF, or WUF progress monitoring because students do not look at anything during these assessments.

All Progress Monitoring Materials contain 20 or more different forms of the same measure. Intervention teachers use the first page of the Progress Monitoring Scoring Booklet to draw a goal line (also called an “aim line”) and plot the student’s scores over time. (This procedure is described in greater detail in Chapter 4.) Completed progress monitoring charts are available for each student electronically through the DIBELS Data System after the progress monitoring scores are entered.

The DIBELS creators decided to label the PSF progress monitoring materials as “Kindergarten” because it is in kindergarten when children are expected to reach the PSF benchmark score to be on track for reading success. Similarly, NWF progress monitoring materials are labeled as “First Grade” because children are expected to reach the NWF benchmark score in first grade. The grade-level label for these materials is somewhat misleading because both PSF and NWF progress monitoring materials can be used with students in *any* grade, regardless of the stated grade designation on the cover page. (Many teachers cover the grade-level designations on PSF and NWF progress monitoring materials so that older students are not offended by working with materials that appear to be for students below their grade level.)

USES FOR DIBELS SCORES

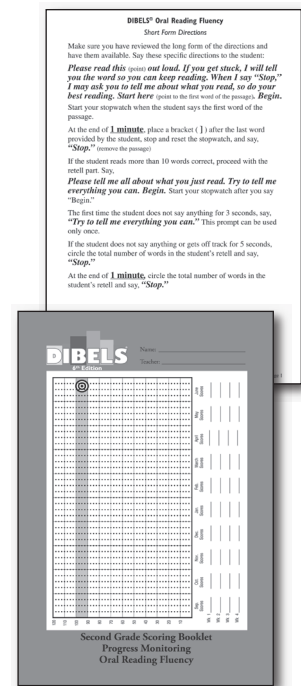
The use of DIBELS as a K–3 early reading skills assessment has greatly expanded since it was first developed at the University of Oregon. Because of the increased emphasis on effective early reading instruction, DIBELS is now used in thousands of schools nationwide. Schools use DIBELS for three primary purposes: a screening instrument, a progress monitoring instrument, and an outcome assessment tool. The use of DIBELS for each assessment purpose is briefly described below and discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.

Early Literacy Screening Instrument

When DIBELS is used as a screening instrument, all children in Grades K–3 are given DIBELS benchmark assessments three times a year.⁷ No children are omitted from the screening, even if they had very high DIBELS scores previously or have been tested with other assessments that show high reading scores.

The purpose of screening is to identify any children who have not met established and scientifically validated benchmarks for early literacy skills. Children who do not reach benchmark scores for certain measures are identified as at risk for experiencing reading difficulties. These children may need additional instructional support (above and beyond the time devoted to core reading program instruction) focused on the skill or skills they are missing if they are to meet future early literacy benchmarks.

When a student meets early successive literacy benchmarks measured by DIBELS, there is assurance the student will read at or above grade level by the end of third grade.



Schools use DIBELS for three primary purposes: a screening instrument, a progress monitoring instrument, and an outcome assessment tool.

⁷ DIBELS can also be used to screen students in Grades 4–6, as discussed in Chapter 2.

Progress Monitoring Instrument

Progress monitoring scores demonstrate student progress on one skill over time. The progress monitoring charts help teachers and reading assessment teams determine whether the student is “on track” to meet the benchmark score by a specified time. DIBELS progress monitoring assessments are given only to students who are at risk for reading difficulties, and they are generally given every one to four weeks, depending on how low the student’s skills are and on the intensity of the intervention. DIBELS progress monitoring assessments serve as frequent checkups on whether students are making enough progress with intervention instruction to meet the end-of-year benchmark score for the skill or skills that need to be improved.

Some schools cannot provide intervention instruction to all students who score below benchmark scores. In these cases, schools may decide to monitor the progress of students who are not receiving intervention but have scores below benchmark. This allows the school to keep track of how these students are doing and to provide them with intervention if they fall further behind. For example, one school decided it had resources to provide intervention only to children with At Risk and Deficit scores. They gave progress monitoring every four weeks to children with Some Risk and Emerging scores. If the scores for any of these children fell into a predefined At Risk or Deficit category, those children were moved into intervention.

In general, intervention students are given the DIBELS progress monitoring assessment for the skill that is the primary focus of intervention group instruction. However, some schools give progress monitoring for higher-level skills that are not the primary focus of instruction because those skills, too, must be mastered. Still, they would give progress monitoring for the higher-level skills less often, perhaps once every month instead of once every one or two weeks, for the skill that is the primary focus. An example of this would be a student in the middle of first grade who has Deficit PSF, Deficit NWF, and At Risk ORF scores. The lesson plan for this student’s intervention group may focus on phonemic awareness for a portion of the lesson and phonics for a portion of the lesson. Progress monitoring may be given weekly for PSF and NWF because phonemic awareness and phonics are the primary focus of intervention instruction. Monthly progress monitoring may be given for ORF to determine whether intervention instruction is transferring to the higher-level skills measured by ORF, which has a benchmark score that needs to be achieved by the end of the year.

Outcome Measurement Instrument

Outcome assessments are given for two purposes: (1) to determine whether individual students or groups of students have learned important early literacy skills predictive of later reading success; and (2) to evaluate the overall effectiveness of a reading program for all children. DIBELS end-of-year benchmark measures are used for outcome measurement. The scores show not only whether each student

but also whether a class or school or district as a whole has met critical early literacy goals at the end of the school year.

DIBELS scores can be used to measure whether children in kindergarten to Grade 3 are learning the skills that lead to becoming successful readers by the end of third grade. The students' aggregate scores will indicate whether the reading curriculum provides instruction that effectively teaches students the skills necessary to become good readers. If DIBELS scores are consistently low across a school system, the decision can be made to change the reading curriculum, to give the teachers additional professional development, to supplement the curriculum with additional materials and instruction, or to provide some combination of the three changes.

DIBELS RISK CATEGORIES

DIBELS research has established levels of performance for each measure that predict success for the subsequent level of performance.

Benchmark scores are the minimum scores that indicate the student has the ability to apply a basic reading skill. In the DIBELS Benchmark Scores Table in the Appendix, benchmark scores are any scores that are equal to or higher than the cut points for the risk levels labeled Established or Low Risk.

Risk levels are labeled Established, Emerging, and Deficit for some measures at certain benchmark periods, and they are labeled Low Risk, Some Risk, and At Risk at other benchmark periods. For example, in *Table 1-4*, (next page), the scores for ISF are labeled Low Risk, Some Risk, and At Risk at the beginning of the year and Established, Emerging, and Deficit at the middle of the year.

Once scores and cut points are labeled Established, Emerging, and Deficit, they never change. That is because the score to achieve the Established level is the score that shows a student of any age has mastered the skill being measured. These scores are 35 for PSF and 50 for NWF. The established score for PSF is always 35 after it is first on the DIBELS Benchmark Scores Table at the end of kindergarten. The established score for NWF is always 50 after it is first on the same table at the middle of first grade.

The first time the risk categories Established, Emerging, and Deficit appear on the DIBELS Benchmark Scores Table is the time when students are expected to have facility with the skill being measured. For example, students should be able to blend and segment phonemes in one-syllable words (i.e., have phonemic awareness) by the end of kindergarten, which is when the risk categories Established, Emerging, and Deficit first appear for PSF. Similarly, students should be able to demonstrate knowledge of the alphabetic principle (phonics) by the middle of first grade, which is when the categories Established, Emerging, and Deficit first appear for NWF. Meeting the PSF and NWF scores by the time they should be established puts students on track to be successful readers at the end of first grade.

Risk categories Low Risk, Some Risk, and At Risk are used before students are expected to have mastered the skill measured by DIBELS, and the cut points for these scores change from one benchmark period to another because they are provided as steps toward reaching an Established benchmark score.

Table 1-4 Benchmark and Target Scores for Kindergarten and First Grade

	Beginning of Year		Middle of Year		End of Year	
	Score	Status	Score	Status	Score	Status
Kindergarten						
Initial Sound Fluency	0–3	At Risk	0–9	Deficit		
	4–7	Some Risk	10–24	Emerging		
	8+	Low Risk	25+	Established		
Letter Naming Fluency	0–1	At Risk	0–14	At Risk	0–28	At Risk
	2–7	Some Risk	15–26	Some Risk	29–39	Some Risk
	8+	Low Risk	27+	Low Risk	40+	Low Risk
Phoneme Segmentation Fluency			0–6	At Risk	0–9	Deficit
			7–17	Some Risk	10–34	Emerging
			18+	Low Risk	35+	Established
Nonsense Word Fluency			0–4	At Risk	0–14	At Risk
			5–12	Some Risk	15–24	Some Risk
			13+	Low Risk	25+	Low Risk
First Grade						
Letter Naming Fluency	0–24	At Risk				
	25–36	Some Risk				
	37+	Low Risk				
Phoneme Segmentation Fluency	0–9	Deficit	0–9	Deficit	0–9	Deficit
	10–34	Emerging	10–34	Emerging	10–34	Emerging
	35+	Established	35+	Established	35+	Established
Nonsense Word Fluency	0–12	At Risk	0–29	Deficit	0–29	Deficit
	13–23	Some Risk	30–49	Emerging	30–49	Emerging
	24+	Low Risk	50+*	Established	50+*	Established
Oral Reading Fluency			0–7	At Risk	0–19	At Risk
			8–19	Some Risk	20–39	Some Risk
			20+	Low Risk	40+	Low Risk

*Students in the middle of first grade should be reading at least 15 words as whole words and not simply giving letter sounds.

Reaching a Low Risk score for a DIBELS measure indicates a high probability (approximately 80% or higher) of reaching the next score for that measure if the student has appropriate reading instruction. For example, reaching the ISF Low Risk score of 8 at the beginning of kindergarten indicates a high probability of reaching the ISF Established score of 25 by the middle of kindergarten (with appropriate reading instruction). Reaching an Established score indicates a high probability (approximately 80% or higher) of reaching the next Established score for a different measure, with continued reading instruction (Good & Kaminski, 2003). For example, reaching the PSF Established score of 35 at the end of

kindergarten indicates a high probability of reaching the NWF Established score of 50 in the middle of first grade (with appropriate instruction).

In essence, when a student achieves a score in the Low Risk or Established category, he or she demonstrates a facility with a foundational reading skill that is expected for students who are on target to become proficient readers by third grade. Scores below the Some Risk or Emerging categories indicate the student is less likely to achieve reading proficiency with existing instruction. Scores in the At Risk or Deficit categories indicate a child is highly unlikely to become a proficient reader without significant additional reading instruction targeted toward areas of weakness in early reading skills.

DIBELS benchmark scores indicate the minimum acceptable scores and should not be used as the goal for any student. Goals should be higher than the minimum acceptable score.

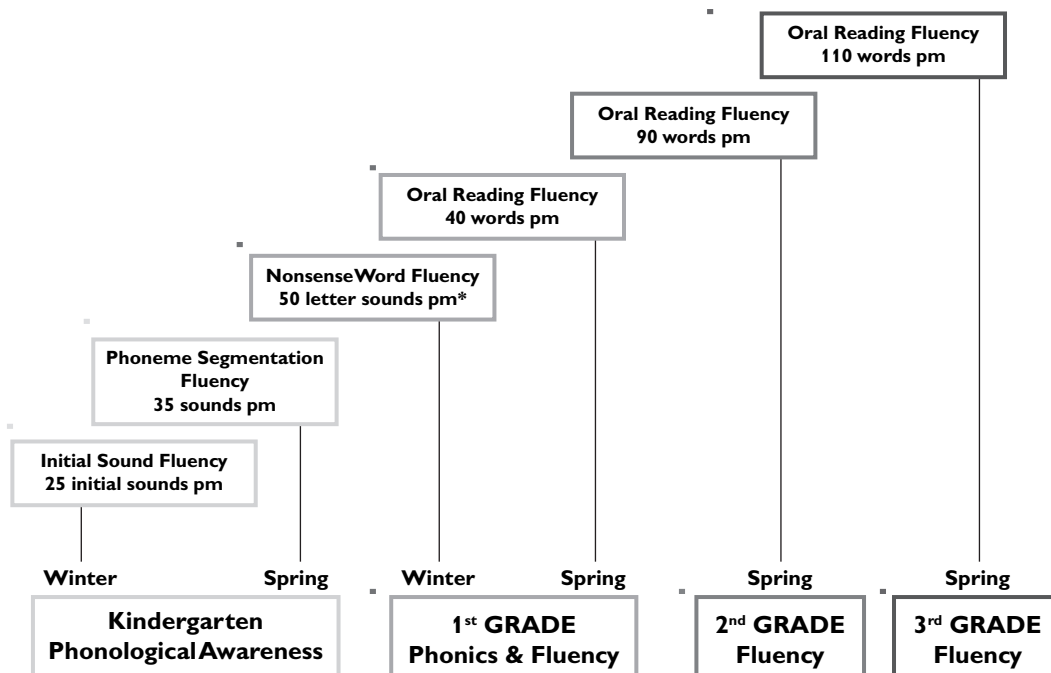
DIBELS MILEPOST SCORES

Figure 1-2 shows the major mileposts for DIBELS for kindergarten through third grade.

Major Mileposts in DIBELS

Figure 1-2

DIBELS Measures: Learning-to-Read Continuum



*Students in the middle of first grade should be reading at least 15 words as whole words and not simply giving letter sounds.

ISF, PSF, and NWF scores are benchmark scores. All ORF scores are target scores.

Used with permission from Susan L. Hall. From *I've DIBEL'd, Now What?: Designing Interventions With DIBELS Data* (2006).

The exhibit shows the progression of skills students must make to become proficient readers. Meeting the benchmark score of 25 for ISF by the middle of kindergarten is the first major milestone in developing solid early literacy skills. Students who achieve this score are demonstrating solid early phonemic awareness skills by accurately and fluently identifying initial sounds in words. Students who meet this early phonemic awareness milestone are well on their way to meeting the next major milestone, which is demonstrating full phonemic awareness, evidenced by a score of 35 on PSF by the end of kindergarten. The next major milestone is a score of 50 on NWF by the middle of first grade, which demonstrates mastery of early phonics skill. Finally, the major milestones become ORF benchmark scores at the end of first, second, and third grades. When students meet the ORF milestones, they are demonstrating grade-appropriate early reading skills that will enable them to become proficient readers by the end of third grade.

Strong reading skills don't just happen overnight. Rather, a solid foundation is laid as students gain the basic skills for reading through instruction and practice. *Figure 1–2* makes clear that meeting the benchmark score for each measure at each benchmark assessment period will help to predict and ensure successful reading outcomes.

Achievement of each milestone is based on achieving a prior milestone. Achieving the benchmark score for a milestone provides a probability of approximately 80% or higher that the student will achieve the next benchmark score for the next milestone. For example, the student who achieves the ORF milestone score of 40 by the end of first grade, assuming he or she met benchmark scores for PSF and NWF, is on track to achieve the ORF milestone score in second grade. Once the second grade ORF milestone score is met, the student is on track to achieve the ORF milestone score in third grade. Students achieving the end of third grade milestone score for ORF would be likely to score at or above grade level on a standardized test of reading comprehension at that time.

It is critical to understand that the DIBELS benchmark scores indicate the *minimum* level of skill students need for teachers to achieve confidence that their students are on track to read at grade level. Schools establishing fluency goals for core reading materials often do not use DIBELS ORF benchmark scores for three reasons. First, DIBELS fluency goals are minimum acceptable fluency levels, and they should never be considered “goals” because the goal would be for each student to be above the minimum level. Second, DIBELS ORF benchmark scores are based on the DIBELS ORF passages, which all have an end of grade readability level and not a readability level based on the time of the benchmark assessment. Therefore, even beginning and middle-of-year minimums would not transfer to easier text being used for instruction earlier in the school year. Third, core reading programs often provide fluency goals that the teacher can use for material related to those programs.

OBTAINING DIBELS REPORTS

The University of Oregon offers a variety of reports over the Internet. The reports display DIBELS scores in a number of ways on virtually any level, including individual students, classrooms, schools, districts, and states. To access these reports, DIBELS users establish an account with the DIBELS Data System by paying an annual fee of \$1 per student (price at the time of this publication). After DIBELS scores are submitted via the Internet, reports generally are immediately available. The annual fee of \$1 per student covers all reporting for all students, including screening (benchmark assessments) and progress monitoring, and all aggregate reports for students in the database for one year.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT DIBELS AS AN ASSESSMENT TOOL

1. Can I use DIBELS with children who have speech or language impairments that delay oral responses? For example, can I use DIBELS with a child who stutters?

DIBELS can be used to measure reading accuracy for a child who stutters or has another language impairment that delays oral responses. However, because the child's language impairment is likely to affect his fluency, the established risk categories would not be valid for this student. If a child who has this type of language impairment has DIBELS scores below benchmark, consult with a speech and language expert to determine other means to identify the child's stage of reading development.

2. Is it permissible to laminate the Student Materials pages and put them in a binder so that I can “flip” the pages as I show them to the students?

Yes. Many examiners laminate the Student Materials and put them in a binder as a practical way to make the materials last longer and to help make administering DIBELS more efficient.

3. How were words, passages, pictures, etc., selected for DIBELS?

Lists of words were selected from materials commonly used in typical K–3 materials, as found in *The Educator's Word Frequency Guide* (Zeno, 1995), which was used to identify words for some DIBELS measures (Good & Kaminski, 2002). Over the more than 15 years that DIBELS has been researched, the words have been validated with regard to their predictive value for foundational reading skills. The words determined to be most predictive were put into a database, and then words were randomly selected for each of the measures. For example, the words used in ISF are from typical first and second grade reading materials.

The ORF passages have a grade-level difficulty determined by various reading formulas. The passages for any grade level are selected to represent readability for the end of the grade. (The exception is First Grade ORF, which has readability levels at the beginning of Second Grade.) This means ORF passages have the same difficulty level throughout the year. The passage difficulty may vary only *slightly*, according to the readability formulas. When the passages do show slight variations in difficulty, the first passage is the easiest, the second passage has the middle level of difficulty, and the third passage is the most difficult, based on the readability formulas.

Pictures for ISF are selected from early literacy materials to match the words generated from the database. In other words, first the words were generated. After the word lists were compiled, a picture was chosen to represent each word.

4. Do the stories, words, etc., get progressively more difficult from grade to grade?

It depends on the measure. ORF passages within a grade level are of almost equal difficulty throughout each grade, and they represent end-of-grade reading expectations. Each ISF, LNF, PSF, and NWF probe is of equal difficulty. (For example, no PSF probe contains significantly more difficult words than any other PSF probe.) WUF, however, changes in difficulty. WUF lists used in kindergarten and first grade are of equal difficulty, whereas those used in second and third grades contain more difficult words than K–1 lists but are consistent within lists for Grades 2–3.

5. How can reading words or passages for only one minute give a good indication of the child’s true reading abilities?

When ORF was originally developed in the late 1970s and initially researched in the 1980s, researchers administered oral reading assessments for different periods of time, including times longer than one minute. These researchers found that the information gained in one minute was just as reliable, valid, and indicative of student skill as information obtained in multi-minute samples. The reliability of ORF is increased when three passages are administered instead of just one.

6. DIBELS scoring seems to assume that accurate word reading predicts comprehension. Is this an accurate statement?

Accurate reading and fluency are important in ORF. Comprehension is obviously impeded when students read words inaccurately. When students are fluent, they are able to read words automatically without conscious attention to decoding words, thereby minimizing their attention to decoding and maximizing their attention to comprehending what they are reading.

ORF measures both accuracy and fluency. The RTF score also adds to the predictive power of ORF for comprehension.

7. Can teachers practice the directions for DIBELS benchmark assessments with their students, since the directions are so difficult for so many children to understand?

The creators of DIBELS spent many years developing, testing, and revising directions. They are confident that the existing standardized directions work for most children. Roland Good and Ruth Kaminski told the authors that their “research as well as experience suggests that 95%–98% of children do fine with current directions administered by a trained, skilled examiner. If an examiner feels that a child’s performance is not valid because the child did not understand what he or she was supposed to do, the option is available to reassess any measure” (personal communication, fall, 2004).

In a very few cases, an examiner or teacher may determine that a student performed poorly on any DIBELS assessment or on DIBELS in general because the student did not understand the directions. In that case, it may be appropriate to retest the student. Before giving the retest, the teacher or examiner could explain to the student how the test works and teach that student explicitly how to follow DIBELS directions. For students who seem to have difficulty with the skills and the directions, the teacher should design lesson plans that include activities to build the missing skills and to follow the DIBELS directions. This can be done using directions similar to those for the DIBELS measure. *However, in no case should teachers intentionally provide instruction on the specific content, questions, words, or pictures included in any DIBELS measure.* For example, practicing actual DIBELS passages in class or sending them home would be irresponsible because the benchmark assessment or progress monitoring assessment materials given would have been read before, invalidating the DIBELS score. Additionally, posting charts full of DIBELS or other nonsense words would also be irresponsible because this could encourage students to memorize make-believe words instead of teaching them letter sounds and sound-blending skills they can generalize to connected text. An important part of the validity of DIBELS scoring is that the student responds to word lists and passages that he or she is seeing for the first time. This is true for both benchmark assessment materials and progress monitoring materials.

8. Why aren’t the benchmarks shown on the scoring booklet so we can know how well the student did immediately as we record scores on the Summary of Scores Page?

Benchmarks and risk levels change from time to time. Therefore, the developers of DIBELS decided not to include risk-level cut points on the Scoring Booklets. Some schools that download materials for copying put the benchmarks and risk levels on the first page of the student booklets before making copies. This helps examiners and teachers to immediately and easily see how well the student performed. Examiners and teachers also can use the

DIBELS Benchmark Scores table from the Appendix to immediately analyze DIBELS scores if they have it handy when administering the assessments.

9. Are DIBELS benchmarks normed?

Yes. DIBELS benchmark raw scores are norm referenced, in that percentiles are given on reports from the DIBELS Data System. The cut points that separate the DIBELS risk categories are criterion referenced. The criterion-referenced cut points are more valuable and are emphasized because they are scientifically valid predictors of reading competence at the end of third grade regardless of the student's percentile ranking. The cut points were established to predict reading success or failure by identifying the risk associated with others in the normative group who scored the same, not by establishing the percentile ranking of the student's score. (See Chapter 3 for a more detailed discussion of the difference between a norm-referenced assessment and one that uses scientifically validated criterion-referenced benchmarks.) Norm-referenced student rankings are provided on the Class List Report, but these are provided for information only and are not the basis for establishing risk categories. The criterion-referenced cut points that define risk levels are the basis for DIBELS intervention recommendations, not the norm-referenced student rankings.

10. Can DIBELS be used as a diagnostic tool?

DIBELS is not considered to be a formal diagnostic tool; however, it can provide some diagnostic information because teachers can look for error patterns in DIBELS Scoring Booklets to guide further assessment. Teachers can also use DIBELS scores and error patterns from the Scoring Booklet to group students for intervention and to identify areas of weakness that will be the focus of intervention instruction for a group. (Teachers should not expect information gained from the DIBELS Scoring Booklets to be exhaustive.)

11. Why isn't DIBELS called a diagnostic tool?

DIBELS does not meet the National Reading First Assessment Committee's guidelines for qualification as a diagnostic tool, partly because DIBELS does not measure multiple skills within any of the five essential components of reading (phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension). DIBELS measures are indicators, and they don't measure multiple subskills within an essential component as most diagnostic assessments do.

12. How long has DIBELS been in use?

At the time this manual was published, DIBELS had been used as an assessment tool in schools for more than 15 years. Oral Reading Fluency (ORF) has been in use for over 25 years. Over those years, the measures have been changed and refined in response to research findings. From school year 1992–1993 to school year 2001–2002, the DIBELS assessment included five measures. Retell Fluency and Word Use Fluency were added as optional measures in school year 2002–2003.

13. Does the annual fee of \$1 per student cover only screening (benchmark assessment) reports or both screening and progress monitoring reports?

The annual fee of \$1 per student covers all reporting for that student, including screening and progress monitoring. All other available reports, some of which are described in Chapter 9, are also available when a school or district uses the DIBELS Data System.

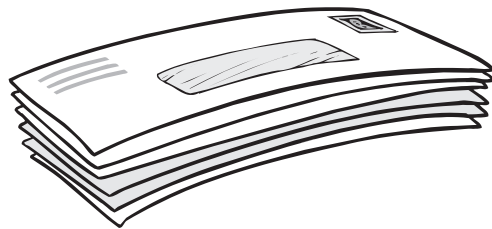
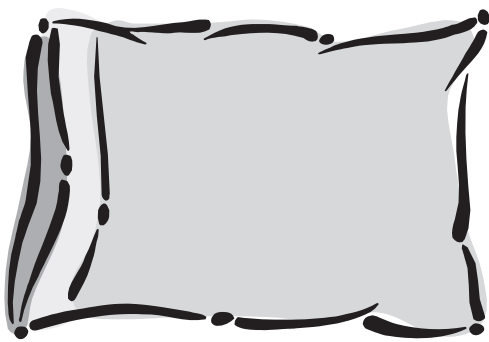
14. Why don't the DIBELS materials purchased from Sopris West always match the DIBELS materials downloaded from the Internet?

DIBELS materials are changed from time to time. The changes are often reflected first in the materials available to be downloaded from the DIBELS Web site. Because Sopris West materials are printed in advance, changes are not reflected until a new printing of the materials occurs, and printings are often months apart.

Some schools have found that when they download student booklets from the Internet, the student booklets do not match the Student Materials they purchased from Sopris West or downloaded from the Internet at an earlier date. Unfortunately, these schools sometimes discover the mismatch only when examiners begin giving the benchmark assessments. To avoid this problem, we recommend that schools either: (1) download Student Materials and Scoring Booklets at the same time; or (2) check to make sure that student booklets downloaded from the Internet or purchased from Sopris West match the scoring materials in hand.

Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills™ 6th Ed.

Kindergarten—Initial Sound Fluency



fap ap zib jop vid

vop tiz bup ib yom

vad tup zug rog pob

nud mab lep kib lud

jad hig nop fut dap

bem nug yad zod ug

vit toz bab sem lod

dod pud rad tet fug

tep vip yug vap dag

pum rog san rab nin

Bobcats

The bobcat has a short tail. It is named bobcat because “bob” means cut off. The bobcat’s tail looks like it has been cut off or “bobbed”. Sometimes a bobcat is also called a wildcat because it likes to run free and is not a good pet.

Like most other cats, bobcats like to sleep in the day. Bobcats are like other cats because they see very well at night. They wander around at night to look for birds and small animals to eat. Because they see so well, hunting at night gives them an advantage over other animals.

Bobcats are not much larger than a common housecat. Bobcats are 25 to 30 inches long, while common housecats are 15 to 20 inches long. Bobcats weigh from 15 to 35 pounds, while common housecats weigh from 7 to 20 pounds.

Bobcats are brown with black spots and a white belly. The bobcat’s tail is black at the end. The bobcat’s coloring helps it hide from other animals because it can blend in with dirt and trees.

We call the bobcat’s home a “den.” Bobcats make their dens in hollow logs and caves. They love to sun themselves on top of flat rocks. They often run along the top of hills.

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