

Reading Individual Checklist: Name: _____		Date	Comments
Before Reading:			
Chooses reading as a free-time activity			
Has book ready during reading workshop			
Chooses appropriate reading material			
Previews text before reading			
During Reading:			
Connects background knowledge to information in the text			
Predicts and confirms or revises predictions			
Discusses explicit and implied information			
Stops and reviews reading with longer texts			
Reads familiar material with clarity, using punctuation appropriately			
When confronting unfamiliar words: Cross-checks one cue with another (phonics, language structure, and meaning)			
Rereads			
Uses chunks within multisyllable words to read			
Skips, reads on, and goes back to check word			
Asks another person for help			
Self-corrects to preserve meaning			
Uses features of informational text to aid comprehension			
Uses the context to determine meaning of new or unfamiliar vocabulary			
After Reading:			
Retells, including important information or events			
Relates what is read to personal knowledge			
Makes comparisons			
Categorizes and classifies appropriately			
Summarizes			
Draws conclusions based on reading			
Shows understanding using graphic organizer			
Uses information in the book to justify a response, confirm a prediction, or discuss elements of fiction or important information			
Written response shows evidence of critical thinking and a reflective stance towards reading			
Evaluates use of author's craft			

FIGURE 11.7. Fairfax County Public Schools' individual checklist for evaluating the use of reading strategies before, during, and after reading. Reprinted with permission of Fairfax County Public Schools.

Portfolios

Portfolios come in a variety of forms, and each serves a different purpose. One of the most popular types of portfolios is a *best-pieces* portfolio, which contains examples of work that students (sometimes with help from the teacher) consider to be their best efforts. Best-pieces portfolios are popular because they encourage students to become more reflective about and involved in their own learning. Indeed, a number of writers argue that what makes a portfolio a portfolio is that these collections include “student participation in selecting contents, the criteria for selection, the criteria for judging merit, and evidence of student self-evaluation” (Paulson, Paulson, & Meyer, 1991, p. 60). Tierney et al. (1991) also stress

Reading Group Checklist:	Names					
Before Reading:	Dates→					
Chooses reading as a free time activity						
Has book ready during reading workshop						
Chooses appropriate reading material						
Uses text structure to preview						
Connects background knowledge to information in the text						
During Reading:						
Predicts and confirms, or revises predictions						
Stops and reviews reading with longer texts						
Reads familiar material with clarity, using punctuation appropriately						
When confronting unfamiliar words: Cross-checks one cue with another (phonics, language structure, and meaning)						
Hereads						
Uses chunks within multisyllable words to read						
Skips, reads on, and goes back to check word						
Asks another person						
Self-corrects to preserve meaning						
Uses features of informational text to aid comprehension						
Uses the context to determine the meaning of new or unfamiliar vocabulary						
After Reading:						
Retells, including important information or events						
Relates what is read to personal knowledge						
Makes comparisons						
Categorizes and classifies appropriately						
Discusses explicit and implied information						
Summarizes						
Draws conclusions based on reading						
Shows understanding using graphic organizer						
Uses information in the book to justify a response, confirm a prediction, or discuss elements of fiction or important information						
Written response shows evidence of critical thinking and a reflective stance towards reading						
Evaluates use of author's craft						

FIGURE 11.8. Fairfax County Public Schools’ group checklist for evaluating the use of reading strategies before, during, and after reading. Reprinted with permission of Fairfax County Public Schools.

that portfolios are not objects; rather, they represent the students’ abilities to engage in the processes of selecting, comparing, self-evaluating, sharing, and goal setting.

Setting the criteria for selection, setting the criteria for judging merit, and showing evidence of student self-evaluation are perhaps the most important aspects of best-pieces portfolios. One of the most powerful strategies in the teacher’s repertoire for developing these crucial self-assessment skills in students is pairing portfolios with rubrics such as those described in the previous section.

The following is a step-by-step introduction to using best-pieces portfolios and rubrics in your classroom:

- Start by identifying some of your most effective instructional activities in literacy. Do you teach the students the writing process; have them develop neat stories; engage them in literature-response groups, oral presentations, sustained silent reading, literary analyses, and the other best practices in literacy instruction? Pick one instructional strategy that really works well for you and your students.

- After students have gained some experience with this particular instructional activity, begin to discuss what make a good piece of work in this context. For example, after students have written some stories, ask, “What makes a good story?” After making presentations, ask them, “What makes a good presentation?” Other key questions include “What makes someone a good writer?” or “What makes someone a good reader?”

- During these discussions, the teacher and the students develop a set of criteria for what makes a good piece of work. These criteria should be recorded on charts on the wall or other public places and used as the basis for rubrics that students will use (and revise) to help them internalize standards of quality.

After the students have become comfortable with discussions about what makes a good piece of work, move on to the next set of steps:

- Introduce the concept of portfolios to the students. Discuss with students why they are creating portfolios—so that the students, their teachers, and their parents can see how they have grown as readers and writers.

- Work with the students to identify what kinds of work samples should be included in the portfolios, and how those materials will be stored. Student work samples that might be included in portfolios include literature response logs, writing samples, story retellings, drawings, and so forth. Ways of storing these samples include large envelopes, notebooks, folders, boxes, or baskets.

- Develop some simple forms for helping students evaluate the pieces of work they include in their portfolios. Many teachers produce a simple form that asks students the following questions:

- What does your portfolio show that you can do?
- What is your favorite piece in your portfolio? Why?
- Which pieces show that you have made improvement?
- What changes would you like to see in your portfolio?

This is also a good time to have students develop a table of contents for the portfolio.

- Work with students to set up a regular schedule for making additions to their portfolio. Make sure there are regular times in class when students can select the work samples, evaluate, and record why they have been chosen as best pieces, and update their portfolios.

- Use the portfolios regularly to inform classroom discussions about what makes a good piece of work. Take time for students to compare their earlier work samples with later ones in order to reflect on how they have grown as readers and writers.

- Use the portfolios for student–teacher conferences, as well as for student–parent–teacher conferences. Enjoy!

Helping children reflect on their own work forms the crucial interplay between assessment and instruction. Consider this example from an experienced first-grade elementary school teacher who had her class come up with ideas of what they thought makes a piece of writing a “best piece.” Her students generated the following list:

- Uses imagination.
- The words make good pictures in your mind.
- Uses things that happen in your own life.
- Uses writing rules such as periods and capitals.
- Has spaces between words.
- Makes you want to keep on reading.

The teacher reported, “After writing down these ideas, the children were able to evaluate the work in their portfolios with some focus. The audience for this best piece was their own classmates. When they realized that their best pieces would truly circulate among their friends, they became very self-motivated and diligent in their efforts to present their best pieces to their friends in the best possible light. Now, when students read their best piece in the classroom, the authors aren’t satisfied unless they are getting laughs, gasps, or smiles from the audience. We now choose a best piece about once every 2 months, which has added a lot of enthusiasm to our writing workshops.”

Experienced teachers understand that the ability to engage in self-reflection does not just appear fully developed in children. They need to see teachers and other students modeling self-assessment. Students also need support and structure as they learn to evaluate themselves as learners.

Student–Teacher Conferences

Conferences between teachers and students are another powerful tool in the repertoires of teachers adept at authentic assessment. Conferences

can be quick and informal or a bit more structured and systematic. Informal conferences may last from 3 to 4 minutes and may focus on something interesting that the teacher has seen or overheard. More structured conferences may take a bit longer and follow a predictable pattern in which students have a good idea of what is expected of them. For example, if the conference is about books read or papers written, then students are familiar with the kinds of questions that will be asked. The important point with conferences of all sorts is that they should be conducted in a safe and comfortable manner, so that students feel encouraged to take risks and share their ideas.

Student–teacher conferences are an important method of authentic assessment, because they provide information about the following:

- What the student is learning.
- The student’s understanding about reading, writing, mathematics, and other aspects of the primary program curriculum.
- The student’s interests.
- Areas where the student needs help.
- What things the teacher is doing that the student feels are particularly helpful.
- What things the student would like to learn next.

Conferences are often centered around something specific—a book being read, a paper being written, a performance task being developed, a project being completed. Here are some examples of different kinds of conferences and the kinds of information that teachers can learn.

Reading Conferences

The teacher can listen to the student read, discuss a book that has been previously read, or talk about the student’s book log. These activities enable a teacher to learn about

- The strategies that the student uses
- Whether the student reads for meaning
- Whether the student is developing fluency
- The student’s interests
- Whether the student selects reading materials of appropriate difficulty
- Whether the student is reading a variety of genres
- The student’s progress in comprehending and retelling what has been read
- The student’s ability to justify an opinion about what has been read

Writing Conferences

The teacher can help the student brainstorm topics to write about, discuss early drafts, listen to a student read a paper, or talk about which piece of work the student considers his or her best work and should be included in the best-pieces portfolio. These activities enable teachers to learn

- How the student is progressing in the use of the writing process
- What the student knows about organization, topic development, mechanics, and spelling
- Whether the student can effectively verbalize opinions, ideas, and feelings
- Whether the student can write for a variety of purposes
- Whether the student can edit drafts to a point that others can understand them

Clearly, conferencing can be a useful form of assessment in any aspect of the curriculum. As students talk about mathematics, social studies, art, and other activities and projects, then teachers can learn

- What students need to learn next
- Whether students can communicate what has been learned
- Whether students can use appropriate terminology
- Whether students can use strategies to solve real-life situations
- Whether students can provide reasonable explanations for solutions and strategies

Paris (1995) suggests a very useful framework that works well with reading and writing conferences, as well as conferences that take place around portfolios. He suggests that teachers ask questions about performance, processes, and perceptions. Performance questions focus on the actual work the student has completed. Process questions focus on reading and writing strategies. Perception questions focus on the students' motivational and affective perceptions about literacy and include the dimensions of effort, confidence, independence, and self-evaluation.

Sample performance questions

- What do you like about this paper?
- Tell me why you included this piece in your portfolio?
- What books did you read this last month?
- Did you meet your writing (reading, learning) goals this month?

Sample process questions

- How did you get the idea for writing this?
- What do you do when you read something you don't understand?
- How did you change your writing as you made drafts?

Sample perception questions

- What is the hardest part about reading (writing) for you?
- Who are your favorite authors?
- What kinds of books do you read at home?
- What is the best part of your writing?
- What makes you a good reader? A good writer?
- What should we work on this year to make you a better reader (or writer)?

Paris (1995) also reminds us of the key guidelines to keep in mind about conferences. Do not ask too many questions; let the student do most of the talking. Be interested, enthusiastic, and brief. Celebrate the student's strengths and be constructive about areas of growth. Record pertinent comments that will be useful information for later review. Remember that the goal of the conference is student self-reflection.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

When we identify any practice as a "best practice," we run the risk of assuming that the particular practice has reached the peak of its development. Nowhere is this risk more dangerous than in the area of assessment. Although we have made major progress in terms of improving assessment, we have so much farther to go (e.g., Darling-Hammond, 1994; Linn, 1994; Winograd, 1994; Worthen, 1993). The following are some questions that face educators interested in continually improving the assessment of literacy:

- How do we ensure that literacy assessments are viewed as an integral part of a systemic approach to educational reform rather than as a panacea to cure all of education's ills?
- How do we ensure that literacy assessments meet rigorous standards of validity, reliability, authenticity, relevance, responsiveness, and flexibility?
- How do we ensure that literacy assessments meet rigorous standards for fairness, particularly for those students with diverse language or cultural backgrounds?

- How do we ensure that the consequences of literacy assessments are positive for all students?
- How do we set standards of student performance that are clear, fair, and achievable, and then ensure that assessment and instruction are integrated in constructive ways that improve teaching and learning?
- How do we ensure that all teachers receive adequate initial preparation and continued professional development in the ethical, technical, and instructional uses of educational assessments?
- How do we involve parents, school board members, legislators, and other stakeholders in the process of changing assessments from a process of ranking and sorting students to one of helping all students reach their full potential?

Given American education's love-hate relationship with testing in general, the long history of literacy assessment in particular, the large number of approaches for literacy assessment, the broad range of functions these assessments serve, and the number of issues to be solved, it is important to ask, "What is the future of literacy assessments?"

We believe that the future of literacy assessments can be positive, and we are cautiously optimistic. Educators, researchers, and policy makers interested in literacy have shown a willingness to explore new forms of assessment, because we do recognize the limitations and problems inherent in our traditional and current approaches. We are making a genuine effort to reconceptualize the purpose of assessment from a process of classifying children into winners and losers, to a process for providing students with opportunities to gain ownership of and insight about their own learning, and providing teachers with a rich basis for making professional judgments about instruction. Many of the forms of literacy assessment that have been developed recently do have the capacity to provide rich, descriptive evidence of students' literacy understandings and growth, and the potential to provide educators with ways to engage in linguistically and culturally appropriate evaluation and instruction, particularly for students whose knowledge is poorly reflected in traditional, standardized testing.

But we must be realistic. The overuse and misuse of testing and evaluation is still a major problem, and the current national emphasis on accountability is likely to exacerbate the problem. This situation is not going to change until Americans have more trust and confidence in teachers and in public schools.

In summary, our current practices in literacy assessment have the potential to strengthen or weaken the ways we teach reading and writing in schools. Whether the effects of literacy assessment will be positive or

negative depends on our ability and willingness to ask the right questions about our priorities, our schools, our teachers, our students, and ourselves.

DISCUSSION AND ACTIVITIES

1. Work with another teacher as a partner and use the Home survey. Complete the general community and classroom survey for your students. Survey each other's classroom interaction with the Classroom Interaction Worksheet. Work together to identify possible themes or patterns.
2. Use different kinds of literature, including multiethnic stories, with the same assessment strategies (e.g., reading conference) to learn how the same student performs differently depending on the kind of literature.
3. What kinds of long-term, ongoing literate activities (i.e., journal writing, etc.) in which your students are engaged will provide a rich record of student growth over time?
4. What are the different perspectives about testing and assessment voiced by school administrators, school board members, legislators, parents, and teachers? What are the areas of agreement? Of disagreement? What kinds of evidence (other than just test scores) can a teacher gather to help these other groups feel confident about how students are progressing?

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