

# DETERMINING YOUR CHILD'S READING LEVEL



What Do Reading Levels Mean?

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Frequently, parents wonder exactly what reading test scores mean in terms of everyday achievement. If a child is reading "at grade level," what does that really mean? Is he or she reading **well** at grade level? Does the child know most of the words in the school reader at sight, or are there a good many words that require thoughtful analysis? The information that follows gives some insight into the reading process.

Most children are actually taught by the teacher at their **instructional** levels. This is the level at which the teacher "stretches" the student in his thinking and reading. The **independent** level, on the other hand, is the level at which the child can read easily and with pleasure. **Reading scores on tests generally refer to instructional levels.**

- **Independent Reader:** The child's independent reading level is usually determined from books in which he/she can read with no more than one error in word recognition in each 100 words and has a comprehension score of at least 90 percent. At this level the child reads orally in a natural tone, free from tension. His/her silent reading will be faster than his/her oral reading.
- **Instructional Reader:** The instructional reading level is usually determined from books (or other material) which the child can read with no more than one word-recognition error in approximately 20 words [no more than 5 mistakes per 100 words]. The comprehension score should be 75 percent or more. At this level, the child reads orally, after silent study, without tension. Silent reading is faster than oral reading. The student is able to use word-recognition clues and techniques. He reads with teacher help and guidance. This is the "stretch" level. With the right materials and purposeful reading, s/he makes maximum progress.
- **The Frustrated Reader:** The frustration level is marked by the book in which the child obviously struggles to read. Errors are numerous. The child reads without a natural rhythm and in an unnatural voice. No child should be asked to read at his/her frustration level, but the teacher/parent needs to know that this level does exist for the student.
- **The Listening Reader:** The probable capacity reading level is shown by the highest book in a given series in which the child can understand 75 percent or more of what he **hears** when the book is read aloud to him. He should be able to answer questions and to use properly many of the special words used in the selection. He should be able to use in his own conversation or discussion some language structures comparable to those used in the selection.