

Guidance for the Phonics International baseline assessments.

Why are baseline assessments so important?

baseline = a 'starting point' assessment:

- to find out the level of learners' knowledge and skills immediately prior to using a programme of study
- to decide upon a possible access point to a programme of study
- to enable measurement of learners' progress after following a unit of study or a whole programme
- to enable comparison with learners' levels from previous year groups in the same school
- to enable comparison with effectiveness of teaching from previous years in the same school
- to enable comparison with effectiveness of teaching across different schools and other contexts

Baseline assessments are important because they are specifically '**the starting point**'. They help teachers discover what learners can or can't do at the outset of a programme of study, and they help schools to understand whether their teaching and/or the selected programme is truly effective and doesn't just amount to 'busy work' with little or no impact on real standards.

Total Beginners:

Teachers in pre-school and school settings might want to assess learners' existing knowledge of **letters and sounds** to measure future progress (learners may also know some or all of the **names** of letter shapes learnt at home or in other settings) - a simple **alphabet letters assessment** is all that is needed as a **baseline for beginners**. Teachers may also want to note if the children can form some letter shapes and hold a pencil with the tripod hold. If young learners **already know** some letters and sounds, it may still be better to start the core **Phonics International Sounds Book Activity Sheets** - or the **Early Years Starter Package Activity Sheets** - from the very **beginning** with 's'. If young children can already read and write, then in some cases it may be appropriate to use some of the earlier units' assessment sheets **A** and **B** (see below).

Intermediate:

Select one of the **Say the Sounds Posters** (no. 13, 14 or 15) of **unit 5** to assess letter/s-sound correspondences (as taught in **units 1 to 5**) as part of the baseline assessment for **STAGE ONE** of the **Phonics International** programme. Ensure that learners are reasonably secure in Alphabetic Code knowledge in **units 1 to 5** before continuing with **STAGE TWO** from **unit 6** onwards.

Nonsense word assessments:

The **nonsense word assessments** (for units **1 to 6** and units **7 to 12**) highlight learners' general **alphabetic code knowledge** and **blending** ability. These can be used for baseline and re-testing.

Text level reading, spelling and writing assessments:

Teachers can select any of the **I CAN READ** text level material which is available via the webpages of every unit **1 to 12** to assess the learners' reading levels, and spelling and writing levels (through dictation). For reading, provide the learner with a selected copy of the **I CAN READ** text to read from, and then **annotate a further copy for record-keeping purposes**.

Baseline and post-unit progress assessments A and B:

Your **Phonics International** **baseline and post-unit progress** assessments **A** and **B** are intended to provide teachers with a flexible assessment resource to be used as appropriate for various needs. When **Phonics International** is used as a **beginners'** programme to teach reading and spelling, teachers need to start at **unit 1**. Some beginners may be able to read some of the words for the unit 1 assessment. When **Phonics International** is to be used as a **spelling programme** for older learners, the **A** or **B** sheets may be useful to help decide an access point into the programme's units.

For **reading** purposes, teachers can start with the simpler or more complex words and may choose to **fold** the columns vertically to isolate the chosen word lists from which the learners can read. The teacher can then **annotate a further copy** of the word lists (named and dated) for **record-keeping**. [Teachers may wish to indicate with an asterix (*) words for which learners request the meaning.] At a later date, the **same** lists can be given to the learner to read and the teacher can **annotate the original record with a different coloured pen** (dated) - to note reading progress as a direct comparison with the baseline information.

For **spelling** purposes, teachers can select the appropriate level of word complexity to slowly read aloud the words for learners to spell - preferably by saying the word, then saying the word in the context of a simple sentence, then saying the word again. **Proformas with writing lines** are provided for writing the spellings of the words of each unit (as selected appropriately by the teacher). Teachers can indicate where they wish learners to write down the words they spell. The assessment sheets can be marked, scored if required, and teachers can study and note the type of errors that learners are making. Errors, for example, may include **confusion** between the sounds of the spoken words and spellings; or may indicate **gaps** in Alphabetic Code knowledge; or inability to spell longer words; or a **lack of knowledge of word banks** with **specific** graphemes (in other words, confusion as to **which spelling alternative** to use to represent the various sounds in the words).

[Some older students may already be able to **read** a wide variety of words 'by sight'. Such students (with a mainly previous 'whole word' learning experience) may still benefit from being taught or introduced to the skill of **applying Alphabetic Code knowledge** for sounding out and **blending** all-through-the-PRINTED-words for reading - then **applying the blending skill** to vocabulary which might be **new** in some of the **STAGE TWO** units. This is likely to improve their reading ability.]

Continuous Assessment:

The **Phonics International** programme is designed for assessment **to take place routinely** - involving all parties including the learners themselves and learners' parents where possible. For example, many teaching and learning routines include '**saying the sounds**' of a selection of graphemes (individually, in a group or a whole class); '**pointing to the graphemes**' on hearing a sound; writing graphemes or words provided by the teacher; reading and writing words and sentences independently. **These are simply the daily teaching and learning processes!** Teachers can **annotate any and/or all of the learners' work as appropriate** to keep informal records of learning and to note any areas of strength or weakness. The cumulative **Say the Sounds Posters** make particularly useful ongoing letter/s-sound correspondence assessment sheets and they are available throughout the programme in **units 1 to 12**.

Wherever possible, engage learners with their own assessment as a natural and positive approach to teaching and learning.