



Fundations® Assessments

Fundations' assessments efficiently and effectively determine what students know and what they need to know by incorporating data points from several assessment types as noted below.

Assessment-based steps are clearly outlined in each Fundations Teacher Manual with recommendations to provide any student scoring below 80% with targeted instruction.

The assessment-based instruction is also outlined in detail on the Fundations Online Learning Community. Additional Support Activities with specific instructions for targeted lessons at each Level of Fundations are also available on the online community. Furthermore, students placed in this group will have progress monitoring with steps further outlined.

Formative Assessment/Performance assessment aligned to Fundations' scope and sequence

Performance assessment occurs daily as an integrated part of each lesson's learning activities. This critical, informal formative assessment occurs daily as teachers assess a student's progress while teaching in real time. It becomes visibly clear to the teacher during the activities which students have mastered a skill and which students are struggling. The teacher can see which students can tap a particular word, correctly form a letter, accurately manipulate tiles to spell, etc. This informs the development of diagnostically planned lessons, and any further support for students in need.

The following are just some of the tasks that occur during informal, formal assessment in Fundations.

- Students build words and respond to dictation activities.
- Students "mark" concepts within words during dictation activities to show understanding.
- Teachers use questioning techniques from the suggestions in the Teacher's Manual and modify them as needed to check for understanding. For example, they might call on individuals or small groups to respond during choral reading or when asking questions for reinforcement.
- Teachers check in with students to see who understands the concept/information (e.g., "Thumbs up if you think this is a closed syllable").
- Teachers circulate among students as a foundational piece of checking for understanding and responding to questions.

Assessments that teachers are already using in the classroom can be a source of valid data for informing student mastery of foundational skills. Formal, external progress monitoring assessments such as DIBELS, TPRI, AIMSweb, and others were already being used by schools across the country, Fundations was designed to avoid added duplicative testing of the same skills and instead incorporated dictation & spelling assessments to gather deeper data of where students may be struggling.

Formal formative assessment via the Fundations Progress Monitoring Tool (K-2)

The nature of the Fundations program includes additional assessment and practice for students who have demonstrated the need during informal and formal formative assessment during the standard lesson. For those needing additional support, the Progress Monitoring Tool is utilized to pull apart and assesses skills more explicitly to be able to effectively target instruction for struggling students. This tool is available for free to all teachers via the online Wilson Academy Fundations Learning Community and is an integral part of the full implementation of Fundations. Given the nature of the Fundations



program, which includes additional assessment and practice for students *who have demonstrated the need* during informal and formal formative assessment during the standard lesson.

Summative Assessment via Foundations Unit tests and Check-Up

The Foundations Unit tests and Check-Up assess the most complex skill of encoding, efficiently identifying students who have mastered the targeted phonics skills and those who need additional support. Encoding is a targeted indicator of many skills at once and allow teachers to make a supported decision about whether or not to have students do additional targeted instruction. The Foundations' Unit tests follow a timeline recommended by Student Achievement Partners which states, "Additionally, every 4-6 weeks use a more thorough unit assessment...with time for responding to data with remediation or enrichment built into the scope and sequence. This systematic approach to assessment ensures students don't fall far behind in learning the foundations of reading."

As noted above, assessment-based steps are clearly outlined with recommendations to provide any student scoring below 80% with targeted instruction.

Foundations Fluency Kits

For those needing additional support in Levels 1 & 2, the Foundations Fluency Kits are utilized. These provide practice with sounds, words, phrases, and stories, and offer as assessment component in which teacher track progress on the Recording Form. The Fluency Kits are available for free as part of the teacher's kit for Levels 1 and 2) and are an integral part of the full implementation of Foundations.

Other: The *Wilson Fluency®/Basic Kit*, provided separately through Wilson Language Training, is an optional supplement that may be helpful for students in need of additional support or in intervention groups. It is designed to provide explicit fluency instruction and reading practice to develop the application of skills with connected text. In addition to the Fluency Readers, also included are laminated tally sheets for teachers to track errors as students read, help teachers calculate scores for the drill, and check students' prosody rate and comprehension of passages read.

Framework for data-based decision making

During the learning process (i.e., daily Learning Activities), informal formative assessment lets teachers know how well their students are learning. "Show me" is a phrase Foundations teachers use with clear instructional objectives. It requires learners to do intellectual work and demonstrate their thinking and understanding through performance activities such as Dictation, Echo/Find Words, and Storytime. Teachers provide immediate feedback to students.

Students' achievement is assessed by examining their progress from multiple perspectives, including direct observation of daily work and independent application of skills. For example, teachers might ask students to explain their thinking when determining unknown words or when attempting to spell a word in their independent writing. Even if the words are incorrect, are students able to correct them with

guiding questions? Teachers observe whether students are beginning to self-monitor their responses and use problem-solving strategies to complete decoding or spelling tasks.

As stated above, formal assessment is completed via Unit Tests in which each student is assessed individually, and 80% of the class should be at benchmark (scoring 80% on each subtest) before moving to the next Unit. Students receiving Tier 2 intervention with Foundations are also assessed using the Progress Monitoring Tool.

Differentiating instruction is a product of diagnostic teaching, and Foundations teachers utilize strategies to meet the needs of all their students. Once needs are determined through assessments, classwork is tailored accordingly. Differentiation guidelines for students who need extra support (ELLs and those who perform below grade level) or greater challenges (advanced students) can be found in the manual's Learning Activity Overview and in each Unit's introduction. The Foundations Online Learning Community offers Lesson Support Activities for targeted instruction and supplements for advanced work.

Materials support teachers in further assessment of students in need of remediation by providing an expected score that students should be achieving on Unit tests and by explicitly describing the importance of informal formative assessment during daily lessons. When teachers, using these tools, determine that a student is in need of more extensive support, that student should be moved into a small group intervention where their skills can be further targeted, honed and assessed via the progress monitoring tool.

Using spelling/dictation activities to assess component skills

Foundations assesses many foundational skills concepts through **Dictation Activities** and **Unit Tests** (which are dictation-based assessments) because dictation is a retrieval and production exercise, and a real-world application of these skills. This occurs in the following ways:

Print concepts, letter recognition, and letter formation/printing letters

Sentence dictation (K: beginning in Unit 5; grade 1: beginning in Unit 2) assesses students' understanding of many skills, including:

- letter formatting/printing letters (requiring retrieval and production of letter-recognition skills)
- a sentence boundary with capitalization and punctuation,
- punctuation and left-to-right orientation, and differences between letters and words.

Phonological and phonemic awareness

The use of spelling (as required in Foundations' dictation activities and in Unit Tests) to assess phonological awareness is supported by research indicating that:

- "Spelling is a linguistic task that requires knowledge of sounds and letter patterns" (Joshi, et al., 2008-9, p7-8).
- Spelling "requires separating out the individual sounds in a spoken word..." (International Dyslexia Association website, <https://dyslexiaida.org/testing-and-evaluation/>).
- "The relation between phonological awareness, (or the ability to hear and manipulate sounds in speech), alphabetic knowledge and spelling is well-established" (Foorman & Francis, 1994; Moats 2005, 2006; National Reading Panel 2000; Santoro et al., 2006).

- “Knowledge of speech sounds and their spellings, and fluent use of this knowledge, are necessary for both word reading and spelling” (Joshi, et al., 2008-9, p.9).
- Good spellers “demonstrate a good sense of the sounds in words...” (Joshi, et al., 2008-9, p.9).
- “...memory for spelling patterns relies on and is facilitated by an understanding of linguistic concepts, including speech sounds, sound-letter correspondences, word origins, and meaningful parts of words” (Joshi, et al., 2008-9, p.16).

Spelling is a retrieval and production exercise that draws on an individual’s phonological and phonemic awareness skills (among other skills), thus providing an efficient way to assess the individual across multiple skills at once. Foundations’ use of a weekly Dictation Activity and end-of-Unit tests (which are spelling assessments) systematically and regularly offer extensive assessment opportunities that measure student progress in phonological and phonemic awareness. The Unit tests provide spelling assessments which are a targeted indicator of many skills at once and allow teachers to make a supported decision about whether or not to have students do additional targeted assessment and instruction.

The rationale of using dictation/spelling activities to assess students’ phonological and phonemic awareness is that students need to hear and identify initial, medial, and final sounds in CVC words in order to successfully spell them. Foundations **Echo/Find Words** and **Dictation/Words** activities require students to hear and segment sounds in words. Students are given a word orally first, and they segment without the letters using the Wilson tapping technique. This requires the student to identify the initial, medial, and final sound.

When students use the tapping method during dictation, they are both counting and segmenting all the sounds within a word. The segmentation of these sounds is a higher-level skill than that of onset and rhyme. If a student is not able to spell, further assessment is necessary to determine the gaps in their foundational skills set. This is integrated into the full implementation of the Foundations program through the Progress Monitoring Tool.

After this, they either find the corresponding letter tiles or they write the letters. The scope of these activities on the most important skill of segmenting individual sounds in the word is significant. This skill is taught in an integrated manner with other activities to maximize learning and mastery.

The structure of the Foundations program acknowledges the critical nature of “frequent, ongoing, informal assessment (that) takes place on a regular basis.” It is understood that “(teachers) need to know whether students are mastering taught skills in phonics and phonemic/phonological awareness. Students should be assessed weekly on the current skill(s) of focus, so that immediate re-teaching and support can be provided if needed. These assessments can be simple and routinized.” In Foundations, this assessment technique is adhered to through weekly Dictation activities that assess spelling.

Phonics

As noted above, spelling (as required in Foundations' dictation activities and in Unit tests) can be used to measure component skills, including phonics. Extensive research validates this approach.

- “Studies have found that effective spelling instruction explicitly teaches students sound-spelling patterns and therefore, an **assessment of students' spelling skills can understand students' grasp of sound-spelling patterns.**” (Joshi, et al., 2008-9, p.8).
- Spelling is a linguistic task that requires knowledge of sounds and letter patterns” and that “spelling words and decoding them tap similar underlying abilities” (Joshi, et al., 2008-9, p.9).
- “Good spellers are almost always good readers. We generally cannot accurately spell words we cannot read” (Joshi, et al., 2008-9, p.9).
- “Memory for spelling patterns relies on and is facilitated by an understanding of linguistic concepts, including speech sounds, sound-letter correspondences, word origins, and meaningful parts of words” (Joshi, et al., 2008-9, p.16).
- “Spelling is the opposite of word attack, but it is even more difficult. It requires the separating of sounds in a spoken word, remembering the different ways each sound might be spelled, choosing one way, writing the letters for that sound, and doing the same, again, for the next sound in the word. Spelling is complicated by the ease or difficulty the child has in writing the letters, legibly and in the proper order” (International Dyslexia Association website, <https://dyslexiaida.org/testing-and-evaluation/>).
- “In alphabetic spelling, students learn to match individual letters to sounds in a left-to-right fashion... these students made significantly greater gains on measures of phonemic decoding, fluency, and encoding,
- “... a meta-analysis conducted by Graham and Hebert (2010) summarizing the effects of instructional practices in writing on reading outcomes found that teaching **spelling had a strong effect on** reading fluency among students in grades one to seven (effect size = 0.79) and **word reading skills** in grades one to five (effect size = 0.68).” (*Why Teach Spelling?*, <https://www.centeroninstruction.org/files/Why%20Teach%20Spelling.pdf>, p.5)

It is also a recommended practice by Student Achievement Partners, which recommends the use of dictation to assess phonics skills. In its section on “Systematic Phonics Assessment,” it states, “Give a brief weekly phonics assessment... This consists of... carefully selected words and one sentence, given as a dictation... This will give teachers frequent data and allow for quick, effective remediation without delay” (*Foundational Skills Guidance Documents: Grades K-2*, p.15).

These targeted difficulties, or trouble spots, are identified through the errors students make on assessments.

High frequency irregular words, word recognition, and analysis skills

Fundations assesses high frequency irregular words (or “Trick Words” in Fundations) through spelling during all Dictation activities and Unit tests. Spelling is a useful assessment of irregular high frequency words because “recognition of words ‘by sight’ is facilitated by knowing the details of sound-letter correspondence in the spelling system. Good spellers are also familiar with the patterns and constraints of English spelling and use that knowledge to help them remember specific letters in specific words. On the other hand, general ‘visual’ cues, such as the configuration or outside contour of a word in print, are not very helpful for either recognizing or recalling printed words” (Joshi, et al., 2008-9, p.7).

As noted in above, spelling (as required in Fundations’ dictation activities and in Unit tests) can be used to measure component skills, including high frequency irregular words, word recognition and analysis skills. This is supported by the following:

- “Good spellers are almost always good readers. Spelling, however, is more difficult than reading. We generally cannot accurately spell words we cannot read. On the other hand, since most of us
- spend much more time reading than writing, we typically read many more words than we spell... If we do learn to spell a word, the mental representation of all the letters in that word are fully specified in memory, and recall is likely to be fluent and accurate.” (Joshi, et al., 2008-9, p. 9)
- “... a meta-analysis conducted by Graham and Hebert (2010) summarizing the effects of instructional practices in writing on reading outcomes found that teaching **spelling had a strong effect on** reading fluency among students in grades one to seven (effect size = 0.79) and **word reading skills** in grades one to five (effect size = 0.68).” (*Why Teach Spelling?*, <https://www.centeroninstruction.org/files/Why%20Teach%20Spelling.pdf>, p.5)
- The real importance of spelling for reading is because: “Spelling and reading build and rely on the same mental representation of a word. Knowing the spelling of a word makes the representation of it sturdy and accessible for fluent reading” (Catherine Snow et al., cited in Reading Rockets: <http://www.idonline.org/article/8845/>).
- “...research has shown that learning to spell and learning to read rely on much of the same underlying knowledge — such as the relationships between letters and sounds — and, not surprisingly, that spelling instruction can be designed to help children better understand that key knowledge, resulting in better reading (Moats, <https://www.aft.org/sites/default/files/periodicals/Moats.pdf>, p12).
- “In fact, Ehri and Snowling found that the ability to read words ‘by sight’ (i.e. automatically) rests on the ability to map letters and letter combinations to sounds...Learning to spell requires instruction and gradual integration of information about print, speech sounds, and meaning — these, in turn, support memory for whole words, which is used in both spelling and sight reading. (Reading Rockets: <http://www.idonline.org/article/8845/>).

Fluency

Assessment of fluency skills in Foundations occurs in several ways. First, the Dictation Activities, which are aligned to the Foundations scope and sequence, offer insight into a student’s fluency skill. Because spelling requires one to integrate and apply multiple skills at once, including print concepts, phonological awareness, phonics, and word recognition and analysis, one’s performance on spelling measures (as in Foundations’ Dictation Activity) can be used to make an *initial* determination of which students are likely to need support in fluency.

The rationale for using spelling as an initial determinate for a student’s fluency skills is based on:

- “... a meta-analysis conducted by Graham and Hebert (2010) summarizing the effects of instructional practices in writing on reading outcomes found that **teaching spelling had a strong effect on reading fluency** among students in grades one to seven (effect size = 0.79) and word reading skills in grades one to five (effect size = 0.68)” (*Why Teach Spelling?*, <https://www.centeroninstruction.org/files/Why%20Teach%20Spelling.pdf>, p.5) and
- “In fact, Ehri and Snowling found that the ability to read words ‘by sight’ (i.e. automatically) rests on the ability to map letters and letter combinations to sounds...Learning to spell requires instruction and gradual integration of information about print, speech sounds, and meaning — these, in turn, support memory for whole words, which is used in both spelling and sight reading. (Reading Rockets: <http://www.idonline.org/article/8845/>).

The Unit tests, which assess spelling (see rationale above), are a targeted indicator of many skills at once, allowing teachers to make informed decisions about which students need additional practice or even intervention lessons. In the Unit tests, if a student scores below 80%, they would receive additional support. In some case, it would be indicated to provide intervention. Students who perform below benchmark are identified to receive targeted intervention.

As part of the intervention, they receive instruction with the **Fluency Kit**, which is part of the full implementation of Foundations. It is important to recognize that the Fluency Kit is not used with all students because advanced students are not likely to require this extra practice, given that they are also likely to be reading and practicing fluency in their core ELA program. However, for students who need the added practice with fluency, the use of the Fluency Kit provides an opportunity for both practice and assessment of fluency skills tracked on the Recording Form (see the Fluency Kit Instructions for details). Each page of the Fluency Kit identifies its alignment to the content taught in a specific Foundations unit.

Fluency is also assessed through the Progress Monitoring tool, which pulls apart and assesses skills more explicitly to be able to effectively target instruction for struggling students. In grades 1 and 2, students are assessed on Nonsense Word Fluency and Oral Reading Fluency. The Section 1: Getting Started page of the Progress Monitoring tool’s Teachers’ Guide outlines the measures and benchmarks. Foundations intentionally does not direct teachers to use the progress monitoring tool to assess all students, although it specifically states that it *can* be used with all students (see p2 of the Progress Monitoring tool’s Teacher’s Guide). The intentional targeting of only those students who need further support is due to the reasons described in WLT’s general explanation of its assessment framework.

Finally, since Foundations is a supplemental foundational skills program, other progress monitoring tools are likely to be utilized in the classroom (DIBELS, AIMSweb, etc.). As a result, Foundations takes advantage of these assessments as further data points to guide decision-making.