

# LITERACY ASSESSMENTS OVERVIEW

## DIBELS (8<sup>TH</sup> ED)

### OVERVIEW

- The DIBELS is a **free** assessment of literacy skills which is **widely used in research** and has sound psychometric properties (i.e. has been well designed and tested).
- **The DIBELS 8<sup>th</sup> ed. assesses decoding and decoding related skills including:**
  - Phonemic awareness (oral segmenting)
  - Letter name knowledge
  - Word level decoding: Nonsense and real word reading
  - Text level decoding and basic comprehension

*A note on what is not covered: Phoneme blending and letter sound knowledge is not assessed in this tool. There are other tools available for this purpose, including the DDM. Word level spelling is also not assessed in this tool. There are other tools available for this purpose, including the MOTIF.*
- **Pre-Primary – year 8** (different subtests for different ages)
- Materials for both **benchmarking and progress tracking**
  - *Benchmarking: Determining where a student sits in relation to other students*
  - *Progress monitoring: Used for tracking progress – can be administered regularly*
- **Uses:**
  - ✓ Tier 1
  - ✓ Tier 2
  - ✓ Tier 3
  - ✓ Screening for difficulties
  - ✓ Benchmarking/identifying students possibly falling behind
  - ✓ Pre-post progress monitoring
  - ✓ Longitudinal data collection (across years)
  - ✓ Goal setting
  - ✓ Planning
  - ✓ Frequent progress monitoring

#### ADMINISTRATION:

- Can be administered by **teachers and specialist staff** (can't be administered by EAs)
- **Approx. 1-3 min. per subtest** = approx. 5-10 min administration time if doing all subtests + approx. 5-10mins scoring time (once practised at tool use)
- Administer most measures with **students individually** (MAZE can be administered as a group)
- Can be administered in person or remotely

#### SCORING

- Score **in the moment** with the student in person
- **Internet based scoring, analysis & progress tracking available** for a cost through the UO DIBELS Data System, a web-based application called **Amplify mClass**.

#### OVERVIEW OF SKILLS ASSESSED ACROSS YEAR GROUPS

Skills	DIBELS Measures	Years assessed in					
		US K (Aust. PP)	Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4 -6	Y7- 8
<b>PA</b>	Phonemic Segmentation Fluency (PSF)	✓	✓				
<b>Letter knowledge</b>	Letter Naming Fluency (LNF)	✓	✓				
<b>Word level decoding</b>	Nonsense Word Fluency (NWF)	✓	✓	✓	✓		
	Word Reading Fluency (WRF)	✓	✓	✓	✓		
<b>Text level decoding &amp; comp.</b>	Oral reading Fluency (ORF)		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Maze			✓	✓	✓	✓

*Individual sub-tests / measures can be administered **independently from each other**  
See page 5-6 for examples of subtest prioritisation to save time.*

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### IMPORTANT NOTES

- **US assessment:**
  - WA Pre Primary = US “Kindergarten”
  - WA years 1, 2, 3 etc. = US grade 1, 2, 3 etc.
- **Tests and benchmark interpretations are categorised by part of the schooling year:**
  - **Beginning of year (BOY): Term 1 Week 1 - T2W2** (beginning = months 1-3 of schooling; usually Feb – 1<sup>st</sup> week of May)
  - **Middle of year (MOY): T2W3 – T3W4** (middle = months 4-6 of schooling, usually 2<sup>nd</sup> week of May - 2<sup>nd</sup> week of Aug)
  - **End of year (EOY): T3W5 – end of year** (end = months 7-10 of schooling, usually 3<sup>rd</sup> week of Aug –Dec)
- **Data spreadsheets** for entering and analysing data available [here](#), as well as on a range of DIBELS community Facebook groups.
- **Information and training videos** available at: <https://dibels.uoregon.edu/training/webinar/> and [https://www.youtube.com/@Project\\_EXPERT](https://www.youtube.com/@Project_EXPERT)
- The DIBELS assessment has **discontinue rules** – read the instructions carefully to test efficiently.
- **Versions and alternate names:**
  - The **Australasian version** of the DIBELS 8<sup>th</sup> is recommended to be used by Australian schools. This is the same as the broader 8<sup>th</sup> edition (including norms), however some of the vocabulary in test items has been substituted for more culturally relevant vocabulary e.g. ‘shops’ instead of ‘mall’
  - The DIBELS 8<sup>th</sup> edition is the most up to date, comprehensive version of the DIBELS assessment. The DIBELS 7<sup>th</sup> edition also goes by the name “DIBELS: Next”.
- **“Acadience”** is a different assessment which is very similar to the DIBELS.
  - The main difference between the assessments are slight differences in subtests and multiple rounds as assessing that takes place in Acadience (e.g. 3 readings to get a reading fluency score vs one reading in the DIBELS).
  - A comparison of the two assessments can be accessed [here](#).

### ACCESSING THE ASSESSMENT

- Free information and downloads from <https://dibels.uoregon.edu/>  
Key downloads:
  - **Testing materials:** click ‘Testing Materials’ and then ‘Download Testing Materials’
  - **Administration and scoring guide:** In ‘Testing Materials’
  - **Benchmark goals:** In testing materials, scroll down to ‘Testing resources’ → ‘DIBELS 8th Edition benchmark goals’
  - **Composite score calculation guide:** In testing materials, scroll down to ‘Testing resources’ → ‘DIBELS 8th Edition Composite Score Calculation Guide Supplement’
- Access Amplify mClass (web-based scoring, data analysis & reporting) from <https://dibels.uoregon.edu/> (paid subscription)



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### OVERVIEW OF TESTING & SCORING

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#### ■ **Testing:**

- Most measures are collected with students **individually**, except for the MAZE which can be collected with students in a group/as a whole class.
- **Individual sub-tests / measures** can be administered independently from each other
- **All measures** (except Maze) are contained in each year group's **scoring booklet and student booklets**. Maze measure have separate booklets for each year group.
  - 'Scoring' booklets are for test administrator to use and record student data
  - 'Student' booklets contain any stimuli students need to use to complete the task (e.g. letters to look at, words to read etc.)

#### ■ **Scoring:**

- 5 scores can be obtained from the test (*see pages 88 of the administration and scoring guide for more information*). The most commonly used scores are:
  - **Raw scores:** generally the number correct. **These are used in the benchmark goals table** and can be used to **track progress**.
  - **Composite scores:** used to compare performance across multiple subtests simultaneously.

### TEST & SCORING 'QUIRKS' TO BE AWARE OF

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- **Oral Reading Fluency passages** generally get longer/harder in the end of year (EOY) assessments compared to the beginning of year (BOY) and middle of year (MOY) assessments. Consequently, in some instances students may score more poorly in the end of year assessment than earlier in the year. Anecdotally this seems to particularly be the case in **year 4** where there are a few awkwardly worded sentences in the ORF stimuli which may slow students down. Regardless, the DIBELS is still a valid, reliable assessment overall. As with any assessment, a single measure at a single point in time will not always capture a students' abilities fully.
  - If students perform more poorly on a benchmarked the end of year assessment than earlier in the year, consider administering a **progress monitoring assessment** to see how their results compare between assessments.

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### SKILLS ASSESSED & DIBELS MEASURES OVERVIEW

#### ✓ **Phonemic awareness:**

- **Segmenting words into phonemes - ‘Phonemic Segmentation Fluency’ measure (PSF)**

*Students have 1 minute to break words into their sounds*

*Note, if you want a measure of phoneme blending and manipulation, use alternate assessment subtests to supplement the DIBELS e.g. the ‘Phoneme Blending’ part of the Phonemic Awareness subtest in the [Dynamic Decoding Measures \(DDM\)](#)*

#### ✓ **Sound/letter knowledge:**

- **Letter naming - ‘Letter Naming Fluency’ measure (LNF)**

*Students have 1 minute to say the names of given letters (mixed upper & lower case)*

*Note, if you want a measure of letter sound knowledge, use alternate assessment subtests to supplement the DIBELS e.g. the ‘Letter Sounds’ part of the Word Identification subtest in the DDM*

#### ✓ **Decoding & reading fluency**

- **Reading nonsense words– ‘Nonsense Word Fluency’ measure (NWF)**

*Students have 1 minute to **read nonsense words** (CVCe, CVC, CCVCy, 2 syllable words). Students are scored for the **number of sounds** correctly sounded out (‘correct letter sounds’ - CLS) and for their **ability to decode the whole word** (‘words read correctly’ - WRC)*

***One of the strongest measures for capturing growth over time***

- **Single real word reading fluency – ‘Word Reading Fluency’ measure (WRF)**

*Students have 1 minute to **read as many real words as they can** (including some high frequency words).*

*Students get one point per word correctly decoded, (even if the student sounded the word out, as long as they then blended the sounds together to say the entire word).*

- **Text level oral reading fluency- ‘Oral Reading Fluency’ measure (ORF)**

*Students have 1 minute to **read out loud as far through a passage as they can**. Students are given a % accuracy score.*

***One of the strongest measures for capturing growth over time***

#### ✓ **Reading comprehension** (and fluency indirectly)

- **‘MAZE’ subtest** (can be administered as a group)

*Students have 3 minutes to **silently read a passage and choose the best multiple-choice answer for missing words**.*

*Note:*

- *Comprehension doesn’t change quickly, so administering once per year (at most twice) to track comprehension is recommended. More frequent administration maybe be warranted if the aim is to capture changes in students’ fluency as well (which impacts reading comprehension).*
- *This subtest is less useful for planning instruction, however is very useful for identifying students with potential difficulties and for tracking students across years.*

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### SUBTEST PRIORITISATION

Though a range of subtests are available which assess different skills, educators are encouraged to triage assessment administration so that students are not over assessed. Doing so saves valuable instructional time.

**Pages 40-43 of the DIBELS manual contains gating and discontinue rules that assist in this.**

*Page 95-96 of the manual contains guidance for progress monitoring assessment selection.*

The principle underpinning streamlining assessment is that if a student demonstrates strengths in the ultimate end goals of instruction such decoding fluency and reading comprehension, there is less need to assess the subskills which contribute to these end goal skills. This is because students have already shown that they can use these subskills adequately by showing strength in the end goal skills.

The following are examples of how schools might streamline DIBELS testing in conjunction with other assessment tools which cover skills not assessed / assessed as thoroughly in the DIBELS (grey text):

#### Year 1+

Area tested → Who ↓	Decoding	Language
<b>Tier 1</b> (all students)	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Oral Reading Fluency [ORF]</b> subtest (assesses decoding proficiency which = PA + phonics proficiency)	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Y2+: DIBELS MAZE</b> (assesses reading comprehension which = decoding fluency + oral language) Or <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Y1+: Narrative Language Measures-Reading</b> (part of the CUBED assessment)
<b>Tier 2</b> (only do with students who do poorly on tier 1 assessment)	~~Identify if the breakdown is at a passage level (fluency issue) or at a word level ('mechanics of decoding' i.e. PA/phonics issue)~~  <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Nonsense Word Fluency [NFW]</b> subtest (assess students' ability to purely use PA & phonic skills at a word level)  OPTIONAL: <b>Word Reading Fluency [WRF]</b> subtest (assesses students' ability to read real words which may have been previously learned)	~~Identify if the breakdown is language, decoding or both...~~  <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Decoding:</b> If not already administered, assess decoding fluency using Oral Reading Fluency [ORF]  <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Language:</b> Narrative Language Measures-Reading (assesses decoding fluency + oral language more comprehensively)
<b>Tier 3</b> (only do with students who do poorly on tier 2 assessment)	~~ Assess PA & phonics skills to identify specific breakdowns~~  <u>Normed options for up to Y3:</u> <input type="checkbox"/> <b>CUBED Dynamic Decoding Measures:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>PA:</b> Phoneme Awareness &amp; Phoneme Manipulation Subtests</li> <li>- <b>Phonics:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Orthographic Mapping + Letter Sounds subtests</li> <li>○ Decoding Inventory subtests</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <u>Non-normed options for Y2+:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>PA:</b> DIBELS Grade 1 Phonemic Segmentation Fluency [PSF] subtest (PA)</li> <li>- <b>Phonics:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ School phonics program assessment to identify specific gaps</li> <li>○ + DIBELS Grade 1 Letter Naming Fluency [LNF]</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	~~Teach oral language skills~~  Only assess for specific targets if absolutely necessary e.g. using Narrative Language Measures-Listening (part of the CUBED assessment) or look for language skills in written/oral samples e.g. BrightPath, story retell etc.  Speech pathology services may be warranted to investigate students' language skills further.

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PP-Y1

Area → Who ↓	Decoding	Language
<b>Tier 1</b> (all students)	<p><input type="checkbox"/> <b>PP: Word Reading Fluency [WRF] subtest</b> (assesses students' ability to read real words which may have been previously learned)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Year 1s: Oral Reading Fluency [ORF] subtest</b> (assesses decoding proficiency which = PA + phonics proficiency)</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Narrative Language Measures-Listening</b> (part of the CUBED assessment – assessed story retell, comprehension and vocabulary)</p>
<b>Tier 2</b> (only do with students who do poorly on tier 1 assessment)	<p>~~Identify if the breakdown is at a passage level (fluency issue) or at a word level ('mechanics of decoding' i.e. PA/phonics issue)~~</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Nonsense Word Fluency [NFW] subtest</b> (assess students' ability to purely use PA &amp; phonic skills at a word level)</p> <p><i>OPTIONAL for Y1s: Word Reading Fluency [WRF] subtest</i> (assesses students' ability to read real words which may have been previously learned)</p>	<p>~~Teach oral language~~</p> <p>~~Assess responsiveness to instruction~~ e.g. using Narrative Language Measures-Listening progress monitoring assessments</p>
<b>Tier 3</b> (only do with students who do poorly on tier 2 assessment)	<p>~~ Assess PA &amp; Phonics skills to identify specific breakdowns~~</p> <p><b>Brief information:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>PA:</b> <input type="checkbox"/> DIBELS Grade 1 Phonemic Segmentation Fluency [PSF] subtest (PA)</li> <li>- <b>Phonics:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o <input type="checkbox"/> <i>OPTIONAL: DIBELS Letter Naming Fluency [LNF]</i></li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p>More comprehensive data:</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> <b>CUBED Dynamic Decoding Measures:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>PA:</b> Phoneme Awareness &amp; Phoneme Manipulation Subtests</li> <li>- <b>Phonics:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Orthographic Mapping, Letter Sounds subtest</li> <li>o Decoding Inventory subtests</li> <li style="padding-left: 20px;">or</li> <li>o School phonics program assessment to identify specific gaps</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p>Only assess for specific targets if absolutely necessary e.g. other language samples / screens.</p> <p>Speech pathology services may be warranted to investigate students' language skills further.</p>

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### USEFUL PAGES IN THE MANUAL

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#### ADMINISTRATION & SCORING GUIDE (2023)

- p9: Skill overview & administration time per year group
- **p9 - 12: Overview of individual measures**
  
- **p39 – 41 & p46: General administration guidelines**
- **p40 – 43: Recommended order of assessments** and discontinue rules overview
  
- **Detailed administration & scoring instructions:**
  - p53-56: Letter Naming Fluency (LNF)
  - p57-64: Phonemic Segmentation Fluency (PSF)
  - p65-72: Nonsense Word Fluency (NWF)
  - p71-75: Word Reading Fluency (WRF)
  - p76-80: Oral Reading Fluency (ORF)
  - p81-87: Maze
  
- **p83 - 93: Interpreting the DIBELS & score type overviews**
- **p91: Using DIBELS for dyslexia screening**
  
- p94 - 98: Progress monitoring
  - **p95: Decision tree for choosing a progress monitoring subtest.**
  - p95-96: Recommended Progress Monitoring Frequency
  - **p97-98: Off grade progress monitoring instructions**
  
- p105-116: Maze and oral reading fluency task benchmark passage length, lexile and narrativity scores
- p118 –123: Administration checklists
  
- **p124 - 125: Benchmark cut scores** ([also a separate download](#))
  
- p128 – 143: Composite score calculation guide