



# Considerations for Screening English Learners for Reading Difficulties in English

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Literacy screening offers invaluable data to identify student strengths and opportunities to grow, but there are multiple considerations that must be factored into the literacy screening process for English Learners in English.

This document offers educators guidance through all stages of screening English Learners in English, providing a comprehensive list of answers to frequently asked questions and considerations for support in this process. It is important to clarify that the recommendations in this document apply specifically to the screening for risk of reading difficulties, and not to assessments intended to collect data for instructional purposes. This guidance aims to address common concerns and ensure the unique linguistic and cultural strengths of English Learners are recognized and supported in achieving academic success.

## Overview

English Learners currently represent more than 10% of the Grades K–12 student population in the US and represent one of the fastest-growing segments of this population. English Learners come from diverse linguistic backgrounds, with the majority (i.e., 75%) speaking Spanish at home. However, they also include students whose families speak languages such as Arabic, Chinese, Vietnamese, Somali, Russian, Portuguese, Haitian Creole, and Hmong, among many others (National Center for Education Statistics, 2021). The prevalence of these home languages varies significantly across different regions, states, districts, and even individual schools. Ensuring English Learners achieve academic success with rigorous, grade-level content is a priority at Curriculum Associates. Literacy screening can offer invaluable data to identify students that may display reading difficulties. However, there are multiple considerations that must be factored into the literacy screening process for English Learners in English. Recognizing that numerous questions often arise during this screening process, this document aims to provide guidance for educators administering literacy screening in English to the students within this growing English Learner population.

## Before Screening

### How do I determine if an English Learner is ready to be screened in English?

Educators should use all information available to them when determining if an English screening approach should be used with an English Learner. One way to assess readiness is by evaluating a student's WIDA score. Curriculum Associates has not conducted research into the statistical relationship between screening in English using *i-Ready* and WIDA ACCESS but has reviewed WIDA's Proficiency-Level Descriptors for each of WIDA ACCESS's performance levels. The level of knowledge and skill defined by WIDA ACCESS's Level 4: Expanding may signal that an English Learner can engage with English screeners, such as the *i-Ready Diagnostic* for Reading and the *i-Ready Literacy Tasks*. If an English Learner has not been administered a WIDA assessment, educators can use evidence from existing data to determine if a student demonstrates the level

National Center for Education Statistics. (2024). *English learners in public schools. Condition of Education*. US Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences. Retrieved from <https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/cgf>.

of knowledge and skill defined by WIDA ACCESS's Level 4: Expanding. An English Learner who demonstrates the level of knowledge and skill defined by WIDA ACCESS's Level 4: Expanding can process the following at grade level:

- Connected discourse with a variety of sentences
- Expanded related ideas characteristic of particular content areas
- Complex grammatical structures
- A broad range of sentence patterns characteristic of particular content areas
- Specific and some technical content-area language
- Words or expressions with multiple meanings across content areas

### **What other factors should I consider when deciding whether to screen English Learners in English?**

When deciding to screen an English Learner in English, educators should factor in:

- State or district requirements for reporting and/or tracking growth
- District and school goals/priorities
- Existing assessments and data already available for each student (e.g., WIDA), including if the data they have provides sufficient instructional recommendations for educators

### **Which *i-Ready* tools should I use to screen English Learner students in English?**

The *i-Ready Assessment* suite has multiple tools that educators can use for screening purposes. The *i-Ready* literacy screening approach can entail the use of the *i-Ready Diagnostic* for Reading and/or multiple *i-Ready Literacy Tasks*, which provide educators with a comprehensive snapshot of a student's overall reading performance. Depending on a student's grade level, the various components of the *i-Ready Assessment* suite can be used for universal literacy, dyslexia risk, and reading difficulty screening. For a recommended approach of how to administer screening in English using *i-Ready*, visit [Using \*i-Ready\* for Universal Literacy Screening in Grades K–8](#). If your state has specific guidance or requirements for screening students, see the [State Guidance for Early Literacy, Universal, and Dyslexia Screening](#).

### **When should English Learners be screened during the year?**

Some states have screening window requirements, in which cases all students (English Learner or not) must be screened within the required screening windows. In states where there are not screening window requirements, educators may choose to hold off on formal assessment or progress monitoring for English Learners until they have had some time to receive formal instruction in foundational literacy skills in English. Curriculum Associates recommends that educators use their best judgement and any existing data pieces to determine the most appropriate time to screen English Learners.

## During Screening

### **What can I do prior to testing to support English Learners before administering literacy screening in English?**

Early experience with assessments can set up how students interact with future assessments. Consider exposing students to similar, no-stakes, non-assessment review content to set the stage for students to try their best and engage with an assessment with reduced anxiety. For example, the *i-Ready Literacy Tasks* for foundational literacy skills provide practice content to review before assessment. The Passage Reading Fluency Administration Packet recommends providing time for the student to read a familiar text aloud before reading the assessment passages.

### **For the *i-Ready Literacy Tasks*, can English Learners respond in their home language during the assessment?**

In general, no. Because these tasks were developed in English and we do not have research to support the use of these tasks in other languages, allowing students to respond in their home language can alter the task and will impact the validity of the findings. Discrepancies that may impact validity include phonemic and orthographic features that are specific to a given language and the length of spoken letters or words varying by language.

One exception, as noted in the Passage Reading Fluency Administration Packet, is to allow students to retell the passage in their home language if they prefer and if there is an examiner available who understands the language.

### **With the *i-Ready Literacy Tasks*, is translating directions from English to an English Learner's home language allowed?**

Translation of directions for English Literacy Tasks into an English Learner's home language is permitted. However, translation of stimuli (e.g., the words a student must read for the Word Recognition Fluency Task or the text a student must read for the Passage Reading Fluency Task) would impact the validity of screening results.

### **What should I do if an English Learner is unable to interact with an *i-Ready Literacy Task* during screening?**

In cases in which a student cannot engage with some or all of the tasks during the screening process, educators are encouraged to enter data into the system that reflects the student's actual performance. For example, if a student taking Passage Reading Fluency attempted to read 10 words but got all 10 incorrect, an educator should input 10 for Total Words Read and 10 for Errors. Similarly, if a student is fully unable to engage with the task, an educator should enter 0 for Total Words Read and 0 for Errors.

### **Can I administer a different task if an English Learner is unable to interact with a Literacy Task within *i-Ready's* screening guidance?**

All students must be administered the exact Literacy Tasks outlined in *i-Ready's* screening guidance in order to gain a valid screening result, even if the student needs support in engaging with the task. However, if educators wish to administer a different task to gain additional information on student progress, they can consider administering a task that measures a preceding skill. Educators can find recommended tasks that should be administered if a student cannot engage in the suggested task in our [Assessment Plans Overview](#).

**For the Passage Reading Fluency Tasks, what is the role of students' background knowledge? For example, is it OK to provide a photo of a duck and an otter to support English Learners if those animals are featured in the passage?**

Providing background information is not recommended when the student is being formally assessed on their reading fluency (like they usually are with the Benchmark and Progress Monitoring Tasks). Task cut scores and percentile ranges are based on the assumption that students are not provided with additional information during the test administration other than the passages themselves.

**If an English Learner is being administered the *i-Ready Literacy Task* for Passage Reading Fluency and is unable to read the grade-level benchmark passage, can I stop the student after the one-minute mark to reduce frustration? If so, how would the retell work if the student didn't read the whole passage?**

If the student is unable to read the benchmark passage, it is OK to stop at the one-minute mark. The educator can ask the student to retell what the student recalls from the portion of the passage read, and while scoring based on the rubric, keep in mind that the student did not read the full passage. So, for instance, where the rubric notes "significantly less than half," the educator would want to consider what that means in light of the portion of the passage the student read. If the student is finding the passage so challenging that they need support at the individual word level, their comprehension will likely be low, and you may decide to skip the retell measure. This student would likely benefit from fluency practice at the word level.

## After Screening

**What should I do after a student is screened to support them?**

After screening, educators should continue to monitor student progress to informally screen students in between screening windows. Educators can do so by regularly collecting summative classroom data and by administering progress monitoring assessments such as the *i-Ready Literacy Tasks* for Progress Monitoring. To support student growth after screening, *i-Ready Personalized Instruction* (in English or in Spanish) can be used to help students meet their grade-level goals with tailored online instruction, and *i-Ready Tools for Instruction* lessons (in English or in Spanish) can be used to support off-grade level skills or to preview upcoming grade-level content.

**If an English Learner is identified as at risk for a reading difficulty after being screened in English, how do you determine if it is because of language acquisition reasons or if the cause is a reading difficulty?**

Educators should use all existing pieces of data in combination with an English Learner's at-risk identification in order to determine if the true cause of an at-risk identification after screening in English is a reading difficulty or language acquisition. One potential next step in making this distinction is to administer a second, parallel screening assessment in the student's home language and compare the results of both screeners (i.e., English screener and home language screener) to collect additional data to identify the source of an English Learner's at-risk identification.