

How the Lexile Framework[®] Operates

Rick R. Smith

Matching readers and books

The Lexile Framework[®] enables teachers to develop personalized instruction based on Lexile measures and Lexiled reading lists. Properly targeted readers find reading a more entertaining and educational learning experience. Teachers and administrators worry about the need for individualized instruction. With test reporting Lexile measures and Lexiled texts, teachers, students and parents can, at last, design reading enrichment programs based on hard, scientific evidence. Readers who work in a Lexile reading program improve an average of 10 Lexiles per week.

Lexiles assist teachers and parents to plan educational strategies because the measures are not based on grade levels or age but on actual reading ability. Saying there is a fifth-grade reading level is like saying there's a fifth-grade shoe. We don't measure student's feet by age or grade. Why then would we be satisfied to measure their reading ability that way?

Readers and Books on a Same Scale

Methods for determining the readability of texts have existed for 50 years. Several are still in use. The Lexile Framework[®], however, is different in three major areas:

- (1) The analysis is based on the entire book. Every word is counted; every sentence length is recorded. Most other readability formulas are based on samples.
- (2) Individual reading ability is measured by tests that measure on the same scale as the books are measured.

- (3) The Lexile Framework[®] is an open standard that can be linked to any test, such as the Stanford 9 and its Diagnostic Reading Test.

The Lexile Framework[®] is like a thermometer. Our Celsius and Fahrenheit scales are absolute and easily equated through a simple formula. We rely on temperature measures to make decisions, to treat a cold, to determine what to wear. With the Lexile scale, we can determine the reading difficulty of texts and the reading ability of students. This puts students and books on the same scale enabling us to target a treatment method to each individual. By being able to put student measures on a scale of books, we can adjust their reading challenge. When a reader is bored, they don't work hard enough to benefit. When a reader is overwhelmed, they give up. But when their book is on target, then they read to the challenge and grow.

We would not expect first-year Spanish students to read *Don Quixote de la Mancha*. Too often we ask students to read texts they aren't ready for or books too far below their reading ability to be challenging. The Lexile Framework[®] solves that dilemma.

The Lexile Framework[®] determines the difficulty of virtually any text from its syntactic and semantic structure. Measures are assigned in ascending order of difficulty from the simplest children's books to *The New England Journal of Medicine*. The formula for calculating the level of difficulty is simple: difficulty is governed by two variables, the complexity of the syntactic structure and the vocabulary used.

Fifty thousand books, including many world classics, have been measured. Among them are "Moby Dick" (Lexile



measure 1210), "To Kill a Mockingbird" (920), "The Boxcar Children" (550) and Dr. Seuss' "One Fish, Two Fish, Red Fish, Blue Fish" (260). 150 additional books are added every week.

Lexile Tests

Text measure is only half of a comprehensive strategy to improve literacy. The second half is the placement of readers on the same scale through Lexile tests. A useful method for developing reading test items is "embedded completion". Passages from published works are used. Each test item has its own Lexile measure. When a student can understand the passage, their answer will be correct. These Lexiled items produce tests geared to the ability levels of students.

An easy Lexile item:

"The giant was mean. He was very ugly, too. We all ran away."

- We were _____
 afraid
 done
 quite
 tired

A more difficult example:

"Within several hours after launch, the Spacelab crew went to work on the experiments. To do work without stopping, the crew was divided into two shifts. Young, Parker and Merbold made up the red shift. Shaw, Garriott and Lichtenberg were the blue shift."

- They _____ the work.
 finished
 graded
 hated
 shared

Each of the four options completes the sentence grammatically. However, only "afraid" and "shared" fit the passage. Following the administration of Lexile-linked tests, students receive a Lexile measure based on their pattern of correct responses. Typical Lexile tests contain 40 or more items.

Lexile Level

The next step is to direct students to books at their Lexile level. A decade of study by experts in measurement, testing and reading forecasts that students thrive when they can access approximately 75% of the materials they read. Students are therefore challenged, but not defeated, by a book set at their 75% success level. This is the basis for Lexile targeting.

In a typical fourth grade classroom, a teacher faces the challenge of developing a reading program for students at several different levels of ability. The Lexile Framework® program enables him or her to attack that problem as never before. For example:

Scholastic, Inc. has published biographies of Martin Luther King that are written at different levels of difficulty, different Lexiles. Students' Lexile measures can be used to assign the King book best targeted to their own reading ability. This is individualized instruction at its best. A teacher can assign 30 students to do a book report on Dr. King. Every student is studying the same subject but is doing it at his or her own level. This is the kind of classroom strategy that has a positive impact on the students and helps teachers who want to target students individually.

Lexile implementation has generated a lot of interest in our school system. Teachers are using the students' Lexile scores when developing classroom reading lists and/or providing supplemental books for unit studies.

Learning to effectively use Lexile scores has also supported the reading incentive program, "Accelerated Reader." Teachers are monitoring students' book selections so that the materials more closely match the student's Lexile level. As a system, our teachers are working on appropriate sample book titles that fall within lexile ranges for Level I, II, III and IV students. This resource will be very helpful for instructional planning and also conferencing.

Judy Hall
 K-5 Coordinator
 Wilks County Schools

