TeacherVision®

Running Records

What is it?

A running record is a method of assessing reading that can be done quickly and frequently. It is an individually conducted formative assessment, which is ongoing and curriculum based. It provides a graphic representation of a student's oral reading, identifying patterns of effective and ineffective strategy use. This method was developed by Marie Clay, the originator of Reading Recovery, and is similar to miscue analysis, developed by Kenneth Goodman.

Through a running record, teachers can obtain:

- Information about a student's use of reading strategies
- Information about a student's self-monitoring
- An accuracy rate
- An error rate
- A self-correction rate

Running records can be used to:

- Document reading progress over time
- Help teachers decide what students need to learn
- Match students to appropriate books

Running records are different from informal reading inventories in that running records do not use a specified text. Teachers don't need to photocopy reading passages before students are assessed. This makes the running record not only a little more spontaneous but also a little more challenging.

Why is it important?

Running records help teachers measure students' progress, plan for future instruction, provide a way for students to understand their progress, and communicate progress to parents and the school community.

Assessments should measure what teachers teach and what students learn. Such assessments help teachers to discover what is working and what is needed in the teaching-learning interactions (Farr 1992).

Farr also describes assessment information as helpful only when it is used to help children better understand their own literacy development.

Expert teachers use knowledge about their students – their backgrounds, strengths, and weaknesses – to create lessons that connect new subject matter to students' experiences (Westerman 1991).

When should it be taught?

Running records are meant to be ongoing assessments and should be administered early in the year – and repeated often throughout the year – to monitor reading progress. These assessments are valuable because they not only give the teacher an opportunity to learn more about the needs and strengths of individual students but also provide time to interact with individual students. In addition, the results of these assessments are invaluable when communicating with parents about individual students.

As helpful as these diagnostic assessments can be, unless a teacher is fortunate enough to have a full-time instructional aide in the classroom, it is often challenging to find time to fit these mini-tests into an already jam-packed schedule. Here are a few ideas for squeezing these assessments into a busy classroom:

1. **Sneak in a few minutes during silent reading.**

   Ideally, you are already reading alongside your students during this time rather than using it to catch up on other paperwork. While it is not recommended that all of the time allocated for silent reading be used for assessing students, it might be possible to steal a few minutes to complete one or two assessments before and after school while still allowing time to model silent reading for your students.

2. **Use before and after school.**

   There always seem to be those one or two students who arrive at school 10 minutes early or stay a few minutes after dismissal. These few minutes could be used to complete a diagnostic or two.

3. **Become a center.**

   If your classroom uses centers during reading workshop or mathematics instruction, you can fit in a few individualized assessments during this time. Again, it is probably unwise to use the entire center time to complete assessments, but even 15 minutes can be useful.

4. **Work with a partner.**

   Some teachers find it very helpful to work with a partner to facilitate the assessment process. One teacher supervises both classes for a short period of time, perhaps 45 minutes, while the other teacher pulls students out individually to conduct assessments. The key to making this plan work is for students to have engaging tasks to work on in the large group.

Ideally, school administrators will help reorganize schedules to facilitate the assessment process, but it never hurts to have some ideas on completing these assessments on your own. If planned for in advance, these diagnostics will be opportunities that you and your students look forward to participating in.

What Does It Look Like?

The process of recording responses during a running record is explained in detail in the next section. Use the following example of a blank running record form:

Blank Running Records Form

How Can You Make It Happen?

To take a running record, choose a student who is reading and gather paper and pencils for recording. As the student reads, record miscues. Ask the student to retell the passage to check for comprehension. Then analyze the responses, and use the information to decide on future instruction.

Preparation

During silent reading time or small-group reading time, sit beside a student and explain that you want the student to read a part of his or her book to you. Be sure to tell the student that you will be writing while he or she is reading, and that it doesn't mean a mistake has been made. Position the recording form in a way that student won't be distracted by what you are writing. Since you may do this frequently during the year, make a note of the book or pages the student is reading, as the passages should be new each time a running record is taken. For older students, who tend to read quickly, it may be helpful to copy the pages the student is reading and record notes on the copy.

Recording

Record all correct responses with a checkmark. Use a symbol to mark each substitution, insertion, omission, and self-correction, along with words students don't know or ask for help pronouncing. A list of conventional symbols used to code responses during a running record can be found at on this printable.

Hesitations or repetitions may not affect the understanding of the story, but they can provide information about a student's reading strategies, so it is helpful to note them. If you think a student is losing meaning, you may say, "Try that again," and make a note of the prompt. Practice using these symbols prior to actual assessments, as that may help you keep up with students who read quickly.

After the student reads the passage, check comprehension by asking him or her to retell the story or answer questions that are both literal and inferential. Take notes on what the student learned and understood.

Scoring

Once you have noted self-corrections and the words read correctly and incorrectly, look through the running record to tally the number of errors. Here is the standard way to score each error:

- Substitutions, insertions, omissions, and words the student didn't know are scored as errors.
- Self-corrections are not scored as an error if the correct response was given.
- If a line of text was omitted, each word in the line is scored as an error.
- If a student repeatedly made an error on a proper noun, score it as one error.
- "Try That Again" (TTA) is counted as one error.
- Told words (T) and Appeals (A) are each scored as one error.
- Repetitions (R) are not scored as an error.

Cueing Systems

After the running record is scored, look closely at the errors to see if they are errors in meaning, structure, or visual cues. Try to determine which cues the student is using for each miscue and self-correction. Kenneth Goodman developed three basic cueing systems.

- **Meaning/semantic**: Readers use meaning to predict the message of text. Reinforce this cueing system by asking, "Does it make sense?"

- **Structure/syntax**: Readers use grammar and knowledge of how language goes together to identify words. Readers who use this cueing system would choose a noun to replace a noun, instead of choosing a verb to replace a noun, because it would sound right to them. Reinforce this cueing system by asking, "Does it sound right?"

- **Visual/graphophonic**: Readers use letter-sound relationships to figure out words by looking at the letters and using the sounds they make. Reinforce this cueing system by asking, "Does it look right?"

Students may have a pattern to the way they read. They may rely heavily on one cueing system, or not use another at all. If students need a reading strategy strengthened, consider using mini lessons, small group, or individual instruction, all of which can teach and review cueing systems.

Finding an Accuracy Rate, Error Rate, and Self-Correction Rate

Now that the running record is scored, the student's accuracy, error, and self-correction rates can be found.

To find the **accuracy rate**, subtract the number of errors from the number of words, divide by the number of words, and multiply by 100. This will tell if the text is appropriate for the student. Text that has an accuracy rate over 95% can be read by the student independently. An accuracy rate between 90 and 95% shows the student can read the text with some guidance and instruction. If the accuracy rate is below 90%, the student is likely to be frustrated and not be able to gain meaning from the text.

Independent Reading Level: more than 95%

Instructional Reading Level: 90-95%

Frustration Level: below 90%

To find the **error rate**, divide the number of words in the passage by the number of errors.

Independent Reading Level: 1:200-1:25

Instructional Reading Level: 1:10-1:20

Frustration Level: 1:3-1:9

To find the **self-correction rate**, add the number of errors and self-corrections together and divide by the number of self-corrections. A ratio of 1:5 indicates one self-correction to every five errors and indicates that the student needs strategies for self-monitoring or self-correcting. Self-correcting is important, because it, along with comprehension checking, is a strategy that good readers use.

Excellent: 1:1-1:2

Good: 1:3-1:5

Needs strategies to self-correct: 1:5 or more

How Can You Measure Success?

Student improvement in reading, due to information gained during running records, is the best measure of success. In conducting running records throughout the year, teachers will be able to see progress over time, intervene with instruction when necessary, and communicate progress to parents.