

High Frequency Word Assessment (Grades 3-8)

Purpose:

The purpose of this assessment is to determine the number of high-frequency words that students control. Control means they recognize them immediately when reading a text, and write them automatically when writing. (That is, they are not sounding them out and thinking about patterns.) One way to assess control is to have students spell the words. When they can quickly spell the word that shows automaticity. When reading words, Samuels (2006) calls this automatic recognition of high frequency words part of *automaticity*. He states that when these words are instantly recognized, the short term memory is not overloaded and is freed to focus on comprehension of what is being presented in the text. Similarly, if a student is able to spell a word automatically, attention is freed to focus on the message they are attempting to write. Therefore, this assessment can be used throughout the year to record students' growth in control of high frequency words.

Ehri (1998) found students eventually *encapsulate* the letters of a word into a bonded unit that is recognized (or written) immediately. In designing the assessment, words were ranked according to their frequency of occurrence in English, using lists from *The Reading Teacher's Book of Lists* 5th Edition (Fry and Kress, 2006). From these lists, words that are considered "spelling demons" were chosen, because they contain spelling features that are often difficult for students. Therefore, learning them as a "bonded unit" will enable students to write them quickly and correctly. If a student has to stop and "tap out" or "say the sounds of each letter in the word" before writing it correctly, this should be noted.

Directions:

The words lists are organized in groups of 25 words. As stated above, the words are ranked in order of highest frequency in the English language so your students should progress through the lists in frequency order.

Sentences are provided, if needed, for the teacher to dictate as the student spells each word. High frequency words are not new vocabulary. The notion of high frequency words is that these are common in reading and writing. The following format should be used:

1. Say the word.
2. Read the sentence that contains the word.
3. Repeat the word.

Scoring:

Words must be spelled correctly. Self-corrections are counted as correct. A student must be able to provide the conventional spelling of each word. These are words that students need; therefore when they miss 2 words or more, we usually stay with that list as their principal word study list. If a student spells all words on a list correctly, we keep moving up until we find the list on which they miss one or two words.

Many teachers are helping students set up personal word study lists by having laminated copies of the lists available, and students have word study notebooks where they tackle about 5 words each week, following a look, cover, say, spell pattern.

Ehri, L.C. (1998). Grapheme-phoneme knowledge is essential for learning to read words in English. In J.L. Metsala & L.C. Ehri (Eds.). *Word recognition in beginning literacy*. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

Fry, E.B. and J.E. Kress (2006). *The reading teacher's book of lists 5th ED*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Samuels, S.J. (2006). Toward a model of reading fluency. In: S. Jay Samuels and A.E. Farstrup (Eds.). *What research has to say about fluency instruction*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association, Pp. 24-46.