

# Reading Level Descriptors

From Continuum of Literacy Learning, Grades K-8: A Guide to Teaching by Fountas & Pinnell

## Level A

At level A, readers are just beginning to learn how print works and to construct the *alphabetic principle* (understand that there are relationships between sounds and letters). They are learning to look (aided by the finger) left to right across words and across one line of print. They are learning to search for and use information from pictures and to use simple language structure to help them learn about print. They differentiate print from pictures and begin to notice the distinctive features of letters, attaching names to them. They are learning to read one line sentences with simple words and on familiar topics. They are learning how to match one spoken word with one word in print. As they read, they begin to learn some easy, high frequency words, to notice and use visual signposts of some words, and to notice mismatches. They use what they know (for example, a sound and related letter) to begin to self-monitor reading. Reading and rereading these very simple texts will help them gain gradual control of ways to look at and work with print.

## Level B

At level B, readers are learning how print works, particularly developing the concepts of left-to-right directionality across words and across lines of print. They are firming up voice-print match while reading texts with two or more lines of print. Readers may recognize repeating language patterns in texts that have simple stories and focus on a single idea, as well as learn more about the distinctive features of letters and the connections between sounds and letters. It is very important that they begin to self-monitor their reading and attempt to self-correct as they notice the mismatches and check one source of information against another. They are beginning to notice and use visual signposts and are expanding their core of simple high-frequency words.

## Level C

At level C, readers encounter simple stories and familiar topics in texts that usually have two to six lines of print on each page. They smoothly and automatically move left to right across words and across lines of print, sweeping back to the left margin for each new line and reading print on both left and right pages. Reading is becoming smooth, allowing for some expression, and the eyes are taking over the process of matching the spoken word to the printed word. Readers are moving away from needing to point and are showing phrased reading. Readers are noticing quotation marks and reflecting the dialogue with the voice. They are developing a larger core of high-frequency words that they recognize quickly and easily. At this level, readers are consistently monitoring their reading and cross-checking one source of information against another. Overt self-correction reveals readers' growing control of the ability to process print.

## Level D

At level D, readers follow simple stories of fiction and fantasy and easy informational texts. They can track print with their eyes (not pointing) over two to six lines per page and process texts with more varied language patterns (and those patterns that exist are more complex). They notice and use a range of punctuation and real dialogue, reflecting the meaning through phrasing. Readers can solve many regular easy two-syllable words, usually those with inflectional endings (*-ing*) and simple compound words. Voice-print match is smooth and automatic, and pointing is rarely needed (only at difficulty). The core of known high-frequency words is expanding. Readers consistently monitor their reading and cross-check one source of information with another.

## Level E

At level E, readers encounter texts that usually have three to eight lines of print per page. They are flexible enough to process texts with varied placement of print and a full range of punctuation. Texts have more subtle ideas and complex stories and require more attention to understand, but other processes are becoming automatic for readers. They take apart longer words with inflectional endings and read some sentences that carry over two to three lines or even across two pages. Readers are relying much more on the print as they encounter texts with less supportive pictures. Left-to-right directionality and voice-print match are automatic and effortless and oral reading demonstrates fluency and phrasing with appropriate stress on words. They read without pointing, bringing in the finger only occasionally at point of difficulty. They recognize a large number of high-frequency words and easily solve words with regular letter-sound relationships as well as a few irregular words.

## Level F

At level F, readers are beginning to build knowledge of the characteristics of different genres of texts. They can read stretches of both simple and split dialogue. They quickly and automatically recognize a large number of high-frequency words and use letter-sound information to take apart simple, regular words as well as some multi-syllable words while reading. They recognize and use inflectional endings, plurals, contractions, and possessives. They can also process and understand syntax that largely reflects patterns particular to written language, stories that have multiple episodes. In fiction, they are beginning to meet characters that are more developed, as well as some literary language. In informational texts, they are learning more new facts about topics. They read without pointing and with appropriate rate, phrasing, intonation, and word stress.

## Level G

At level G, readers encounter a wider range of texts and continue to internalize knowledge of different genres. They are still reading texts with three to eight lines of print per page, but print size is slightly smaller and there are more words on a page. With early reading behaviors completely under control and quick and automatic recognition of a large number of high-frequency words, they have attention to give to slightly more complex story lines and ideas. They are able to use a range of word-solving strategies (letter-sound information, making connections between words, and using word parts) as they go while attending to meaning. They read texts with some content-specific words, but most texts have only a few challenging vocabulary words. In their oral reading they demonstrate (without pointing) appropriate rate, phrasing, intonation and word stress.

## Level H

At level H, readers encounter challenges similar to level G; but the language and vocabulary are even more complex, the stories are longer and more literary, and there is less repetition in the episodic structure. They process a great deal of dialogue and reflect it through appropriate word stress and phrasing in oral reading. Readers will find that plots and characters are more elaborate but are still simple and straightforward. They solve a large number of multi-syllable words (many words with inflectional endings), plurals, contractions, and possessives. Readers automatically read a large number of high-frequency words in order to meet the demands for more in-depth thinking and also to solve words with complex spelling patterns. In order to achieve efficient and smooth processing, readers will begin to read more new texts silently. In oral reading, they demonstrate (without pointing) appropriate rate, phrasing, intonation, and word stress.

## **Level I**

At level I, readers will be processing texts that are mostly short (eight to sixteen pages) as well as some easy illustrated chapter books (forty to sixty pages) that require them to sustain attention and memory over time. They will meet some long sentences of more than ten words that contain prepositional phrases, adjectives, and clauses. They will also encounter compound sentences. They can effectively process complex sentences when required by a text. In addition to automatically recognizing a large number of words, they are using word-solving strategies for complex spelling patterns, multi-syllable words, and many words with inflectional endings, plurals, contractions, and possessives. They read many texts silently, following the text with their eyes and without pointing. In oral reading, they reflect appropriate rate, word stress, intonation, phrasing, and pausing.

## **Level J**

At Level J, readers process a variety of texts, including short informational texts on familiar topics, short fiction texts, and longer illustrated narratives that have short chapters. They adjust their reading strategies to process not only realistic fiction and informational texts but to read very simple biographies. In fiction, characters generally do not change since the plots are relatively simple and texts are not long. Readers process an increased number of longer and more complex sentences (those with more than ten words containing prepositional phrases, adjectives, clauses, and many compound sentences). Readers are able to automatically recognize a large number of words, and can quickly apply word-solving strategies to multi-syllable words with inflectional endings, suffixes and prefixes. They can read a wide range of plurals, contractions, and possessives. In oral reading, they reflect appropriate rate, word stress, intonation, phrasing, and pausing, (recognizing and using a range of punctuation). They read silently in independent reading and while reading individually in guided reading.

## **Level K**

At level K, readers process a wider range of genres (realistic fiction, animal fantasy, traditional literature, some simple biographies, and more informational texts). They read many illustrated chapter books (including some series books). Most fiction texts have multiple episodes related to a single plot but the demand on the readers' memory is higher than previous levels. They read about characters that change very little but are at the same time more complex; texts have multiple characters. Readers process a great deal of dialogue, some of it unassigned, and are challenged to read stories based on concepts that are distant in time and space and reflect diverse cultures. Readers solve many content-specific words and some technical words in informational texts. They automatically recognize a large number of words and quickly apply word-solving strategies to multi-syllable words with inflectional endings, and to words with suffixes and prefixes. They can read a wide range of plurals, contractions, and possessives. They read silently in independent reading, but when reading orally they demonstrate all aspects of fluent reading.

## **Level L**

At level L, readers process easy chapter books including some series books, with more sophisticated plots and few illustrations, as well as shorter informational and fiction books. They adjust their reading to process a range of genres (realistic fiction, simple fantasy, informational texts, traditional literature, and biography, as well as some special types of texts, for example, shorter series books, very simple mysteries, and graphic texts). They understand that chapters have multiple episodes related to a single plot. They learn some new content through reading and are required to bring more prior knowledge to the process; but the content is usually accessible through the text and illustrations. At this level, readers are beginning to recognize themes across texts (friendship, courage), and they understand some abstract ideas. They see multiple perspectives

of characters as revealed through description, what they say, think, or do, and what others say about them. They process complex sentences with embedded clauses and figurative language. They recognize and/or flexibly solve a large number of words, including plurals, contractions, possessives, many multi-syllable words, many content-specific words, and some technical words. They read silently in independent reading; in oral reading, they demonstrate all aspects of smooth, fluent processing.

## **Level M**

At level M, readers know the characteristics of a range of genres (realistic fiction, simple fantasy, informational texts, traditional literature, and biography). Some fiction texts are chapter books and readers are becoming interested in special forms, such as longer series books and mysteries. Fiction narratives are straight forward but have elaborate plots and multiple characters that develop and show some change over time. They read shorter nonfiction texts, mostly on single topics, and are able to identify and use underlying structures (description, comparison and contrast, temporal sequence, problem and solution, cause and effect). They can process sentences that are complex, contain prepositional phrases, introductory clauses, lists of nouns, verbs, or adjectives. Word solving is smooth and automatic in both silent and oral reading and can read and understand descriptive words, some complex content-specific words, and some technical words. They read silently and independently. In oral reading, they demonstrate all aspects of smooth, fluent processing.

## **Level N**

At level N, readers will process the full range of genres, short fiction stories, chapter books and shorter informational texts; also, they read special forms such as mysteries and series books. Fiction narratives are straightforward but have more elaborate plots with many episodes and multiple characters who develop and change over time. Some nonfiction texts provide information in categories on several related topics, and readers can identify and use underlying structures (description, compare and contrast, temporal sequence, problem and solution, cause and effect). They continue to read silently at a good rate and automatically use a wide range of word-solving strategies while focusing on meaning. In oral reading, they will continue to read with phrasing, fluency, and appropriate word stress in a way that reflects meaning and recognizes punctuation. Readers will slow down to problem solve or search for information and resume normal pace; there is little overt problem solving. They can process sentences that are complex, with prepositional phrases, introductory clauses, lists of nouns, verbs, or adjectives. They can read and understand descriptive words, some complex content-specific words, and some technical words. Length of text is no longer a critical factor as students are beginning to read texts that vary greatly. Word solving is smooth and automatic in both silent and oral reading.

## **Level O**

At level O, readers can identify the characteristics of a full range of genres. They read both chapter books and shorter fiction and informational texts. Also, they read special forms such as mysteries, series books, books with sequels, and short stories. Fiction narratives are straightforward but have elaborate plots and multiple characters who develop and change over time. They may also encounter texts that are hybrid (include multiple genres). Some nonfiction texts provide information in categories on several related topics, and readers can identify and use underlying structures (description, compare and contrast, temporal sequence, problem and solution, cause and effect). They can process sentences that are complex, contain prepositional phrases, introductory clauses, and lists of nouns, verbs, or adjectives. They solve new vocabulary words, some defined in the text and others unexplained. Word solving is smooth and automatic in both silent and oral reading. They can read and understand descriptive words, some complex

content-specific words, and some technical words. Length is no longer a critical factor as texts vary widely. They read silently with little overt problem-solving; in oral reading, they demonstrate all aspects of smooth, fluent processing.

### **Level P**

At Level P, readers can identify the characteristics of a full range of genres, including biographies on less well-known subjects and hybrid genres. They read both chapter books and shorter informational texts; also, they read special forms such as mysteries, series books, books with sequels, or short stories. Fiction narratives are straightforward but have elaborate plots and multiple characters who develop and change over time. Readers are able to understand abstract and mature themes and take on diverse perspectives and issues related to race, language, and culture. Some nonfiction texts provide information in categories on several related topics, many of which are well beyond readers' typical experience. Readers can identify and use underlying structures (description, compare and contrast, temporal sequence, problem and solution, cause and effect). They can process sentences that are complex and contain prepositional phrases, introductory clauses, lists of nouns, verbs, or adjectives. They solve new vocabulary words, some defined in the text and others unexplained. Word solving is smooth and automatic in both silent and oral reading. They can read and understand descriptive words, some complex content-specific words, and some technical words. They read silently; in oral reading, they demonstrate all aspects smooth, fluent processing with little overt problem solving.

### **Level Q**

At level Q, readers automatically read and understand a full range of genres, including biographies on less well-known subjects and hybrid genres. They read both chapter books and shorter informational texts; also, they read special forms such as mysteries, series books, books with sequels, and short stories. Fiction narratives are straightforward but have elaborate plots and many complex characters who develop and change over time. As readers, they understand perspectives different from their own as well as setting and people far distant in time and space. They can process sentences that are complex, contain prepositional phrases, introductory clauses, lists of nouns, verbs, or adjectives, and they solve new vocabulary words, some defined in the text and others unexplained. Most reading is silent, but fluency and phrasing in oral reading are well established. Readers are challenged by many longer descriptive words and by content-specific and technical words that require using embedded definitions, background knowledge, and readers' tools, such as glossaries. They can take apart multi-syllable words and use a full range of word-solving skills. They read and understand texts in a variety of layouts as well as fonts and print characteristics and consistently search for information in illustrations and increasingly complex graphics.

### **Level R**

At level R, readers automatically read and understand a full range of genres, including biographies on less well-known subjects, more complex fantasy, and hybrid genres. They read both chapter books and shorter informational texts. Also, they read special forms such as mysteries, series books, books with sequels, short stories, diaries, and logs. Fiction narratives are straight-forward but have elaborate plots and many complex characters who develop and change over time. As readers, they understand perspectives different from their own as well as settings and people far distant in time and space. They can process sentences (some with more than fifteen words) that are complex, contain prepositional phrases, introductory clauses, lists of nouns, verbs, or adjectives, and they solve new vocabulary words, some defined in the text and others unexplained. Most reading is silent, but fluency and phrasing in oral reading are well established. Readers are challenged by many longer descriptive words and by content specific and technical words that require using

embedded definitions, background knowledge, and readers' tools, such as glossaries. They can take apart multi-syllable words and use a full range of word-solving skills. They read and understand texts in a variety of layouts as well as fonts and print characteristics and consistently search for information in illustrations and increasingly complex graphics.

## **Level S**

At level S, readers automatically read and understand a full range of genres, including biographies on less well-known subjects, more complex fantasy, and hybrid genres. They read both chapter books and shorter informational texts; also, they read special forms such as mysteries, series books, books with sequels, short stories, diaries, and logs. Fiction narratives are straight-forward but have elaborate plots and many complex characters who develop and change over time. As readers, they understand perspectives different from their own as well as settings and people far distant in time and space. They can process sentences (some with more than fifteen words) that are complex, contain prepositional phrases, introductory clauses, lists of nouns, verbs, or adjectives, and they solve new vocabulary words, some defined in the text and others unexplained. Most reading is silent; fluency and phrasing in oral reading are well established. Readers are challenged by many longer descriptive words and by content-specific and technical words that require using embedded definitions, background knowledge, and readers' tools, such as glossaries. They can take apart multi-syllable words and use a full range of word-solving skills. They read and understand texts in a variety of layouts as well as fonts and print characteristics and consistently search for information in illustrations and increasingly complex graphics.

## **Level T**

At level T, readers will process the full range of genres, and texts will be longer with many lines of print on each page, requiring readers to remember information and connect ideas over a long period of time (as much as a week or two). They use genre features to support comprehension. Complex fantasy, myths, and legends offer added challenge and an increased use of symbolism. Readers understand perspectives different from their own, and understand settings and people far distant in time or space. Most reading is silent; fluency and phrasing in oral reading is well established. Readers are challenged by many longer descriptive words and by content-specific and technical words that require using embedded definitions, background knowledge, and readers' tools, such as glossaries. They can take apart multi-syllable words and use a full range of word-solving strategies. They search for and use information in an integrated way, using complex graphics and texts that present content requiring background knowledge.

## **Level U**

At level U, readers will process the full range of genres, and texts will be longer, requiring readers to remember information and connect ideas over many days of reading. They automatically adjust the different genres and use genre characteristics to support comprehension. Complex fantasy, myths, and legends offer added challenge and an increased use of symbolism. Readers understand perspectives different from their own, and understand settings and people far distance in time or space. Most reading is silent; fluency and phrasing in oral reading is well established. Readers are challenged by many longer descriptive words and by content-specific and technical words that require using embedded definitions, background knowledge, and readers' tools, such as glossaries. They can take apart long multi-syllable words and use a full range of word-solving strategies. They search for and use information in an integrated way, using complex graphics and texts that present content requiring background knowledge.

## Level V

At level V, readers will process the full range of genres, and texts will be longer, requiring readers to remember information and connect ideas over many days of reading. They automatically adjust strategic actions to skillfully use genre. Complex fantasy, myths, and legends offer added challenge and an increased use of symbolism. In addition, readers will encounter some abstract special forms of literature, such as satire. Readers understand perspectives different from their own and understand settings and people far distance in time or space. Most reading is silent; fluency and phrasing in oral reading is well established. In addition, readers can be very expressive when they present poetry or readers theater. Readers are challenged by many longer descriptive words and content-specific and technical words that require using embedded definitions, background knowledge, and readers' tools, such as glossaries. They can take apart multi-syllable words and use a full range of word-solving strategies. They search for and use information in an integrated way, using complex graphics and texts that present content requiring background knowledge.

## Level W

At level W, readers will process the full range of genres, and texts will be longer, requiring readers to remember information and connect ideas over many days of reading. They automatically adjust strategic actions to skillfully use genre. Complex fantasy, myths, and legends offer added challenge and require readers to identify classical motifs such as "the quest." Biographies offer a range of individuals who may not be previously known to readers and may not be admirable. Readers will encounter mature themes that expand their knowledge of racial issues. In addition, readers will encounter abstract special forms of literature, such as satire, and literary devices, such as irony. Themes are multi-dimensional and may be understood on several levels. Most reading is silent; fluency and phrasing in oral reading is well established. In addition, students are able to read aloud with expressiveness after practice (for example, readers theatre). Readers are challenged by heavy load of content-specific and technical words that require using embedded definitions, background knowledge, and readers' tools, such as glossaries. They search for and use information in an integrated way, using complex graphics and texts that present content requiring background knowledge. Many texts require knowledge of historical events and may contain language that is archaic or from regional dialects or languages other than English.

## Level X, Y, Z

At level X, Y, and Z, readers are able to process and understand a wide range of texts, including all genres. Although many texts are long and have complex sentences and paragraphs as well as many multi-syllable words, they vary greatly because readers are expected to understand and respond to mature themes such as sexuality, abuse, poverty, and war. Complex fantasy, myths, and legends offer added challenge and require readers to identify classical motifs such as "the quest" and to identify moral issues. Biographies offer a range of individuals who may not be previously known to readers and may not be admirable, requiring critical thinking on the part of readers. In addition, readers will encounter abstract special forms of literature, such as satire, and literary language to convey irony. They may even encounter parody, allegory or monologue. Themes and characters are multi-dimensional, may be understood on several levels, and are developed in complex ways. Most reading is silent; fluency and phrasing in oral reading is well established. Readers are challenged by a heavy load of content-specific and technical words that require using embedded definitions, background knowledge, and readers' tools, such as glossaries. Texts include archaic language or regional dialect. Readers search for and use information in an integrated way, using complex graphics and texts that present content requiring background knowledge. They have developed knowledge of content, including scientific information and historical events and apply prior understandings in a critical way when reading fiction and nonfiction texts.