

More about STAR READING TEST



NEW ZEALAND COUNCIL FOR EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH
TE RŪNANGA O AOTEAROA MŌ TE RANGAHAU I TE MĀTAURANGA

Introduction

We have updated the STAR tests. There are more test forms; new content; and student achievement is reported on a measurement scale allowing progress to be tracked over time. The new tests look similar in format to the old tests—the sub-test structure remains intact. They are still *supplementary* tests of achievement in reading and are intended to supplement other assessments teachers make about a student's achievement in reading.

This leaflet aims to help teachers and school leaders who are using the new tests, particularly those who were familiar with the old STAR tests. We also refer readers to the new STAR Teacher Manual.

Changes to the STAR tests

A new scale score

STAR results are now reported as scale scores. In the new STAR, you add up the scores for each sub-test and then convert that total into a scale score. All 10 new tests and student achievement from Years 3 to 9 are reported on the same STAR scale, which is measured in *star* units. The common scale means that scale scores can be compared regardless of which STAR test was used. For instance, a scale score on the Years 3–4 A test can be directly compared with a scale score for a student who took the Years 3–4 C or Years 5–6 B test. Scale scores should be used when you want to track a student's progress on STAR or compare a student's achievement with the achievement of other students. Stanines are still provided and are discussed later in this leaflet.

STAR scale scores are not dependent on a particular year group, test or time of year. Scale scores can

be compared across classes, year level cohorts and across other demographics such as gender and ethnic group regardless of the year level of students, the test administered or the time of year when the test was administered.

We recommend using scale scores to monitor progress for both individuals and groups of students.

More tests

There are more tests than before. Each new test has been designed with a particular year level and time of year in mind. The new tests **can** be used productively with students from alternative year levels and at different times of the year provided the test targets students appropriately. There are no longer any equivalent tests—each of the new STAR tests is designed to be a little more difficult than the previous test.

Test name	Targeted year level/time of year
Years 3–4 A	Start of Year 3
Years 3–4 B	End of Year 3/Start of Year 4
Years 3–4 C	End of Year 4
Years 5–6 A	Start of Year 5
Years 5–6 B	End of Year 5/Start of Year 6
Years 5–6 C	End of Year 6
Years 7–8 A	Start of Year 7
Years 7–8 B	End of Year 7/Start of Year 8
Years 7–8 C	End of Year 8
Year 9 A	Start of Year 9

Choosing the right test for your class

As shown in the table above, each test is associated with a “recommended” year level and time of year. If you are not sure which test to use, use the one recommended for the year level of your students.

If you have students who are achieving **well below** their year level average, you can choose an easier test for them—maybe two tests lower down. Similarly, for students achieving **well above** their year level average, a more difficult test may be more suitable. You will still be able to compare results for these students with other students’ results by using the new STAR scale.

I have a composite class. Can I use the same test form with all students?

You **can** give all your students the same test. However, you will get more useful results if you match students to the test level that best suits them. Achievement levels are better assessed if the test difficulty matches the achievement level of the student. The new STAR tests are designed so that the A, B or C tests from each group of tests can be run concurrently—that is, the same instructions, timing of sub-tests and examples are used.

What will happen if the test is too easy or too difficult for a student?

If the test is too easy or difficult, you will not get a lot of diagnostic information from it. You will particularly notice this when you fill in the student report form.

This is particularly apparent at Years 3 and 4. We know from extensive trialling of STAR that students demonstrate a great deal of growth in achievement from Years 3 to 5, particularly Years 3 to 4. The average Year 4 student is located much higher on the STAR scale than the average Year 3 student. The test designed for average Year 3 students (Years 3–4 A) is therefore not suitable for average Year 4 students. It is much better for Year 4 students to use the Years 3–4 B test, unless there is a specific reason to use an easier test. Achievement differences are less variable between adjacent year levels for older students.

Use of stanines with STAR

Stanines are useful when we want to get a sense of how a student's scale score compares with a nationally representative sample of students in a particular year level. This is sometimes called a normative comparison. When making a normative comparison, teachers need to select the stanines for the most appropriate year level reference sample and record which one they have used. The reference sample used will depend on the time of the year the student was tested. Because the reference data for the new STAR were collected in March, it is not always appropriate to use the reference sample for the same year group as the student.

At the start of the year (Term 1):

If students are tested at the start of the year, then stanines for their year level should be used. For instance, if a Year 3 student is assessed in February then teachers should record the appropriate stanine for the Year 3 reference sample and note that it is a Year 3 stanine.

At the end of the year (Term 4):

When students sit a STAR test in Term 4 their scale scores should be compared with the reference sample for the next year level up. This is because the reference data refer to students who did the test in Term 1. By the end of the year, students are more like students who are just starting the next year level up than students who are just starting their own year level. So, if a Year 3 student is tested in Term 4, then stanines for the Year 4 reference group should be used. It is important to record that they are Year 4 stanines.

In the middle of the year:

Making stanine comparisons in the middle of the year is less straightforward than doing so at the start or end of the year. This is because there is no obvious reference group to compare the students with. If you want to make a normative comparison in Term 2 or 3 it is probably best to record the stanine for the student's year level, but to note that this will tend to overestimate how well they are doing compared to peers at the same stage of schooling. So, for instance,

if a Year 3 student is tested in Term 2 then the Year 3 stanines should be used. Again, it is important to record that they are Year 3 stanines and to note they tend to make the students look a little better against their year level than if they were tested in Term 1.

Where can I find stanines for year levels not recorded in the Teacher Manual?

The Teacher Manual provides stanines for two or three year levels for each test form. Stanines for all year levels for each test form can be found at <http://www.nzcermarking.org.nz/>. You will be able to download the relevant PDF document from the left hand side of the screen under the heading "STAR 2nd edition—Stanine tables for all years".

What are the advantages and disadvantages of using stanines?

Advantages:

- Stanines let you compare your own students' results with a similar nationally representative group of students.
- Stanines form an "interval" variable which means that the amount of progress represented by going from the middle of one stanine band to the middle of the next stanine band is the same across all stanines.
- Because they form an interval variable, stanines can be averaged. An average stanine for a class or a year level cohort is a meaningful variable. (This is NOT true for percentiles.)

Disadvantages:

- Stanines are always tied to a particular year level and time of year. If your students have not done their STAR tests at the same time of year as students who formed the nationally representative sample, it is much more difficult to use stanines meaningfully.
- Stanines give us only nine bands with which to describe the full range of achievement within a year level. This means that stanines can only provide a rather coarse measure of achievement.

Tracking progress from the old STAR tests to the new STAR tests

It is possible to track progress from the old STAR tests to the new but it is quite a painstaking exercise. Tables for converting “old” to “new” can be found at: <http://www.nzcermarking.org.nz/>. You will be able to download the relevant PDF document from the left hand side of the screen “STAR 2nd edition—new Conversion Tables”.

This mapping should be **treated with caution**. Any mapping from an old system to a new system involves estimation, and therefore inherent error. While every care has been taken to keep this mapping precise, there will inevitably be some imprecision associated with the estimation process.

If you are mapping old STAR test scores to the new STAR scale:

- Record the old STAR test score (raw score).
- Find the correct comparison table.
- Read off the new scale score (and the +/- error) that matches the old test score.
- Use the **scale score** not stanines, to compare achievement.

Using the new STAR test results

An individual student’s achievement on the STAR scale can be mapped across a test as a whole and by sub-tests on a student report form. (See pages 20–21 of the Teacher Manual.) These forms have been printed on the outside back cover of the student booklet so teachers can record student results on the one piece of paper. You can use this to plan your next teaching or learning steps and to have conversations with the student, parents or others involved with this child. You can then dispose of the inner pages of the test booklet.

The Teacher Manual also has diagnostic information; the sorts of skills and knowledge students draw on to answer questions correctly are described on scale descriptions. These have been written up by individual sub-tests in PART C of the Teacher Manual. Use these descriptions to help inform your next steps.

Where can I find the test answers?

Previously there were individual answer sheets for each sub-test. Now there are answer booklets for each set of year levels.

Answer booklet	Test set
Years 3–4 answer booklet	Years 3–4 A Years 3–4 B Years 3–4 C
Years 5–6 answer booklet	Years 5–6 A Years 5–6 B Years 5–6 C
Years 7–9 answer booklet	Years 7–8 A Years 7–8 B Years 7–8 C Year 9 A

