

# Basic Phonics Skills Test III (BPST III)

## Description

The Basic Phonics Skills Test was developed by John Shefelbine to assess relatively quickly students' knowledge of a broad range of phonics skills beginning with consonant sounds normally taught in kindergarten and ending with polysyllabic word patterns encountered in third and fourth grade. The BPST is an informal test of (a) high-utility, spelling-sound relationships for reading single-syllable words and (b) syllabic and morphemic strategies for reading polysyllabic words. It is best used in conjunction with other kinds of assessments including graded passages, graded word lists, and measures of phoneme awareness (especially blending and segmentation).

The latest version of the BPST, the **BPST III**, directly assesses consonant sounds and names, short vowel sounds, and words representing the following 12 kinds of patterns: (a) short vowels with consonants (CVC), (b) short vowels with consonant digraphs (sh, ch, th, wh), (c) short vowels with consonant blends (st, sn, fl), (d) short vowels with inflectional endings (ed, ing), (e) final e (fine), (f) long vowel digraphs (lvd) (team), (g) r-controlled (r-c) (hurt), (h) other vowel digraphs and diphthongs (ovd) (boil), (i) two-syllable words, (j) polysyllabic words with affixes, (k) 3-4 syllable words, and (l) 3-5 syllable words. Students' responses can also be used to indirectly evaluate their knowledge of blending and the alphabetic nature of reading in English. [Note that changes from the BPST-II involved adding an extra line of more difficult polysyllabic word, replacing some polysyllabic words that students might know at sight, and making some single-syllable words more representative of a variety of consonant sounds.]

The BPST-III is most informative when students are reading below a fourth grade level on a graded word list such as the San Diego or on graded passages. At fourth grade reading levels and above, students typically do quite well because they have mastered basic phonics skills.

## When to Give

We recommend that the BPST-III be given to all students in grades kindergarten through second. It should be required for all K-2 students who are not proficient on benchmark measures of reading comprehension and "below-proficient" 3-6 students with graded word lists scores (such as the San Diego) below 4<sup>th</sup> grade.

## Materials

You will need to prepare two sets of materials: (a) multiple copies of the recording sheet on which you will write the students' responses and (b) a copy of the student sheet cut into three sections and pasted on three 5x7 cards from which the students will read the content of the test. The contents of the three cards should be:

- Card 1 - - consonants, short vowels, words with short vowels and consonants (cvc patterns), and words with short vowels and consonant digraphs,
- Card 2 - - consonant blends, inflectional endings, and final e, long vowel digraphs, r-controlled, and other vowel digraphs, and
- Card 3 - - all the remaining polysyllabic words.

## Administration

When giving the test, it is important that you place the recording sheet on a clipboard and hold it at an angle so students do not have to watch you write down their answers. Present the 5x7 cards, one at a time. Use a fifth blank card to help students look at just one row at a time and to keep them from getting discouraged by the words that follow. Record answers as directed on the recording sheet.

As students respond, give them neutral feedback by complimenting them on their effort rather than giving hints as to whether they were right or wrong. At no time should you give the students the answer since this entails teaching the test and limits its future usefulness.

**Introduce the assessment.** SAY: "I am going to have you tell me the sounds of some letters and read some words. I cannot give you any help because I need to see what you can do by yourself. This will help me decide what I need to teach you. Don't worry if you cannot read some of the words."

**Consonant sounds and names.** SAY: "Tell me the sound of each of these letters." Record responses as directed. Note distorted sounds (for example, "fuh") but still count them as correct. After covering all the consonant sounds, consider skipping their names if 10 or more sounds were correct but ask the names of any consonants that were missed.

**Short vowels.** SAY: "Tell me the sounds of these letters." If the students give you the name of the letter, ask them if they know another sound. [Note to the teacher: The short vowel sounds are the ones you hear at the beginning of at, ed, in, on, up.]

**Word reading (a - l).** SAY: "Read these words." Consider stopping when the total number correct on two consecutive rows is 0-1. Record incorrect answers above the words as directed on the response sheet.

## Interpretation and Instructional Implications

1. Row totals below 80% correct suggest a possible problem [less than 8/10 for **(a)** and 4/5 for **(b)-(l)**]. Highlight each category with scores below 80%.
2. Make an overall comparison of single-syllable versus polysyllabic word recognition proficiency. For single-syllable words, it is helpful to combine similar patterns: short vowel = (a+b+c+d), long vowel = (e+f). Instructional priorities do not necessarily follow the sequence of patterns listed on the BPST-III. For single-syllable phonics (a-h), K-2 students need to revisit problem areas in the sequence followed by the adopted reading program. Older students in grade three and above may need to start with polysyllabic strategy instruction since those skills are so critical in the upper grades. In such instances, single-syllable patterns that need attention are taught "on the side" during polysyllabic strategy instruction.
3. Examine polysyllabic errors to see if any are "legitimate" pronunciations, such as mom-ent for "moment." In order to be legitimate, all letters in the two versions have to match or line up. Students may mispronounce polysyllabic words because they have never heard of them before. Students with many legitimate polysyllabic word reading errors need vocabulary development rather than more decoding instruction.