NANCY MATHER
JANICE SAMMONS
JONATHAN SCHWARTZ

Adaptations of the Names Test: Easy-to-use phonics assessments

An enhanced version of a phonics screening tool called the Names Test lets teachers quickly assess students' decoding skills.

Early assessments of decoding development can help identify students who are at risk for reading failure so that teachers can implement appropriate interventions. One important aspect of beginning reading is mastery of letter–sound correspondences, referred to as grapheme–phoneme relationships or phonics knowledge. The ability to decode unfamiliar words using phonics knowledge is important to early reading acquisition as well as skillful reading (Adams, 1990; Cunningham, 1990). In addition, a solid foundation in phonics through direct instruction in the alphabetic code can enhance the reading performance of many students at risk for reading failure (Foorman, Francis, Fletcher, Schatschneider, & Mehta, 1998).

The most common procedure for assessing the development of phonics ability involves the presentation of pronounceable nonwords, nonsense words, or pseudowords. All of these terms refer to letter strings that are pronounceable and conform to English spelling rules but have no meaning. Nonword reading avoids the problem of a priori word knowledge and requires the reader to directly apply phonics principles to the decoding process (Rack, Snowling, & Olson, 1992). Because the student cannot use context cues or prior word knowledge, the reader must rely on grapheme–phoneme knowledge.

Nonword or pseudoword reading has a strong relationship with many aspects of reading performance. For example, Tunmer and Nesdale (1985) found that real-word and pseudoword decoding were highly correlated with each other and that pseudoword decoding accounted for a significant amount of variance in reading comprehension independent of the other factors. In addition, good readers perform pseudoword reading tasks with ease. When comparing skilled and unskilled readers, Perfetti and Hogaboam (1975) found that the greatest difference between the groups was their ability to pronounce pseudowords. Good readers recognize and use letter sequences and letter and sound redundancies quickly and automatically.

Typically, for this type of assessment, a list of nonwords is presented for the student to pronounce. One problem with this format, however, is that nonword reading itself may appear to students as an unfamiliar, seemingly nonsensical task because they are deprived of the reinforcement of arriving at a word that they already know (Duffelmeyer, Kruse, Merkley, & Fyfe, 1994). Furthermore, some students may even refuse to attempt to pronounce nonsense words, whereas others will attempt to change them into real, familiar words (Cunningham, 1990). Ideally, a student's grapheme–phoneme knowledge could be assessed in a way that more closely resembles real-word reading.

One way to assess developing phonics knowledge using a more meaningful format is to ask students to read names that conform to the rules of English spelling (e.g., *Bob Flot*). Cunningham (1990) developed a Names Test as a quick and easy screening tool for teachers to obtain information about a student's developing decoding skills. The test is individually administered. The student reads the names aloud, and the teacher places a check mark by each first and last name read correctly.

TABLE 1
Versions of the Names Test

Original (Cunningham, 1990)

Jay Conway	Cindy Sampson	Flo Thornton
Tim Cornell	Chester Wright	Dee Skidmore
Chuck Hoke	Ginger Yale	Grace Brewster
Yolanda Clark	Patrick Tweed	Ned Westmoreland
Kimberly Blake	Stanley Shaw	Ron Smitherman
Roberta Slade	Wendy Swain	Troy Whitlock
Homer Preston	Glen Spencer	Vance Middleton
Gus Quincy	Fred Sherwood	Zane Anderson
		Bernard Pendergraph

Augmented (Duffelmeyer et al., 1994)

Shane Fletcher	Neal Wade
Floyd Sheldon	Jake Murphy
Dean Bateman	Joan Brooks
Austin Shepherd	Gene Loomis
Bertha Dale	Thelma Rinehart

In selecting the names, Cunningham applied four criteria. The names would (a) be uncommon, (b) be fully decodable, (c) represent a sampling of the most common English spelling patterns, and (d) contain a balance of long and short names. On this 25-name list, there were 50 possible points: one point for each first and last name. The average score for second graders was 22.6, whereas the average score for fifth graders was 47.3. The lowest score for any fifth grader in the sample was 40.

After analyzing the original Names Test, Duffelmeyer et al. (1994) developed a revision that was designed to improve the reliability, usability, and validity while retaining the quick scoring of the test. In examining the phonics categories, they found that out of the 50 items, 5 phonics categories (consonant digraphs, long vowels, vowel–consonant–final *e*, vowel digraphs, and the schwa) did not have enough items. To increase the number of examples, they added 10 names to the original Names Test and developed a scoring sheet and comprehensive scoring matrix to increase the diagnostic information based on error patterns. Table 1 presents the original names in Cunningham's list and the 10 names added by Duffelmeyer et al. Table 2 presents the results by grade level for the 70 first and last names. Duffelmeyer et al. provided additional evidence of the test's validity by reporting scores by grade level, rate data, and stanine comparisons with the Iowa Test of Basic Skills.

Although both versions of the Names Test were designed and are useful for grades 2 through 5, many of the names on the tests are multisyllabic in nature (e.g., *Bernard Pendergraph*) and are thus too difficult for beginning or struggling readers. Furthermore, in both versions, the student is supposed to attempt to pronounce all of the names. In using the test in second-grade classrooms, we found some struggling readers who could pronounce only a few of the first names on the list. In the original study, Cunningham (1990) reported that students in second grade obtained an average score of 22.6 out of 50 items (or about 45% correct), whereas Duffelmeyer et al. (1994) found that the mean score in second grade for the 70 first and last names was 63% correct.

The purposes of the present study were twofold. The first was to administer the augmented

TABLE 2
Average scores on the augmented Names Test by grade (Duffelmeyer et al., 1994)

	Percent correct	Number correct
Grade 2	63%	44/70
Grade 3	73%	51/70
Grade 4	89%	62/70
Grade 5	91%	64/70

TABLE 3
Reordering of the augmented Names Test

1. Dee Conway	13. Ned Yale	25. Ginger Quincy
2. Gus Clark	14. Patrick Murphy	26. Dean Shepherd
3. Tim Brooks	15. Chester Skidmore	27. Troy Hoke
4. Fred Wright	16. Homer Sheldon	28. Zane Swain
5. Chuck Dale	17. Stanley Smitherman	29. Bertha Whitlock
6. Grace Wade	18. Flo Sherwood	30. Roberta Brewster
7. Jay Anderson	19. Jake Pendergraph	31. Thelma Middleton
8. Kimberly Tweed	20. Shane Slade	32. Yolanda Rinehart
9. Wendy Spencer	21. Glen Sampson	33. Bernard Cornell
10. Ron Blake	22. Floyd Shaw	34. Joan Thornton
11. Austin Westmoreland	23. Vance Fletcher	35. Gene Bateman
12. Neal Loomis	24. Cindy Preston	

Names Test (Duffelmeyer et al., 1994) to a sample of students and then reorder the first and last names by difficulty level. This would allow students to attempt to read easier names before attempting more difficult names and allow the teacher to discontinue the assessment if the names became too difficult for a student to pronounce. The second was to create a downward extension of the Names Test that would be more appropriate for use with first-grade and struggling readers.

Reordering of the augmented Names Test

The augmented Names Test was administered to a sample of 156 third graders during the first month of school. The students were asked to attempt to read all 35 pairs of first and last names. If the student could not or would not attempt all of the names, the data were discarded. Because students who could not read all of the words were removed from the sample, the sample has a restricted range and the average score of 59 out of 70 names (SD = 8.57) correct is an overestimate of the students' actual word-attack skills. Points were then assigned for both first and last names. Data were then entered for all students, and the full set of first and last names were reordered so that they would progress according to the difficulty level. The results of the reordering are presented in Table 3.

Early Names Test

Because the earlier versions were too difficult, we designed an informal, easy-to-use assessment to measure the ability of first- and second-grade students to pronounce pseudowords. The test can also be used with students in upper grades who are having trouble developing phonics knowledge.

Item development

Similar to the procedures used by Cunningham (1990), the names were selected to be fully decodable and represent a good sampling of the most common English spelling patterns. Because the test was designed to be used with young readers and to measure knowledge of the most common grapheme–phoneme relationships, no attempt was made to eliminate common names, such as Bob. Instead, the list was designed to include all of the letters of the alphabet, as well as a representative sample of words with different initial and final consonants, initial and final blends, common consonant digraphs, and short and long vowels. An effort was made also to include names with the most common phonograms or rimes. As examples of common phonograms, nearly 500 primary-grade words can be derived from the following set of 37 rimes (Wylie & Durrell, 1970): -ack, -all, -ain, -ake, -ale, -ame, -an, -ank, -ap, -ash, -at, -ate, -aw, -ay, -eat, -est, -ice, -ick, -ide, -ight, -ill, -in, -ine, -ing, -ink, -ip, -it, -ock, -oke, -op, -ore, -ot, -uck, -ug, -ump, -unk. Although we did not rely on this list for test development, our final list included over 55

common rimes. All names were restricted to one syllable.

Using the above criteria, 30 first names and 30 last names were developed for a class list for field testing. Eleven teachers participating in a professional development course in early reading administered the Early Names Test to their students. Initially, we attempted to administer the test to students who were just entering the first grade, but the majority of these students were unable to read through the list of names. Because we wanted to reorder the names by difficulty level, the students needed to attempt to read all of the names. Thus, we decided that students beginning second grade would be similar in performance to students ending first grade. The final sample then consisted of 443 children at the beginning of second grade. The percentage of special education students was 4.5%, the percentage of English-language learners was 3.8%, and there were equal numbers of boys and girls.

In addition, the test was administered to 30 fourth- and fifth-grade students who were receiving special education services in a resource room. The purpose was to determine if the test would still be appropriate for use with older students who were struggling with reading.

Administration procedures

The test was administered individually using the following procedures, adapted from Cunningham (1990).

Preparing the test. Thirty names (first and last) were typed on a sheet of paper using a font size of 20 points and leaving adequate space between the names. A scoring sheet was made with a list of the names and a blank after each first and last name to record if the responses were correct or incorrect. A final test, a scoring sheet, and administration instructions are presented in Figures 1 and 2.

Administering and scoring the test. The test was administered individually in a quiet environment (see Figure 2 for test directions). The student was encouraged to attempt all names. A 1 was placed in the blank for a correct response and a 0 for an incorrect response. All errors on first and last names were written above the words for later error analy-

FIGURE 1
Early Names Test

Rob Hap	Jen Dut
Jud Lem	Jake Bin
Ray San	Sid Gold
Pat Ling	Frank Lug
Tim Bop	Grace Nup
Brad Tash	Beck Daw
Pam Rack	Dell Smush
Trish Mot	Gus Lang
Fred Tig	Lex Yub
Bab Fum	Ross Quest
Kate Tide	Dane Wong
Brent Lake	Tom Zall
Flip Mar	Gail Vog
Jet Mit	Rod Blade
Rand Lun	Tag Shick

sis. The total number of first and last names read correctly was recorded.

Item analysis

For the 60 first and last names, the average score for the second graders was 43 with a standard deviation of 12.2. To replicate the procedures of Cunningham (1990), a statistic of internal-consistency reliability (Kuder-Richardson 20) was calculated. The resultant KR-20 reliability was .93, a high reliability estimate. In addition, the words were also rearranged so that the name combinations would progress from easiest to most difficult.

For the 30 fourth- and fifth-grade special education students, the average score was 34 out of the 60 names with a standard deviation of 15. The resultant KR-20 reliability was .98, similar to the reliability estimate obtained by Cunningham. Unfortunately, the decoding skills of these older special education students were not as well developed as those of many of the students who were just entering second grade.

Inspired by Duffelmeyer et al. (1994), we developed a reproducible scoring matrix, presented in Table 4, which can be used to analyze a student's performance. The phonics categories appear across the top, and the first and last names are listed alphabetically along the side. The columns in the table contain the phonics elements that are relevant for each name. Figure 2 provides the scoring sheet for the Early Names Test.

Say: "I want you to pretend that you are a teacher and you are calling out your students' names to take attendance. You are trying to figure out who is at school and who is not. Some of these names may be hard, but just do the best you can." Record a 1 for a correct response and a 0 for an incorrect response. Score both the first and last names. Write incorrect responses directly above the name.

Name: _____   Grade: _____   Date: _____

Rob	____	Hap	____		Jen	____	Dut	____
Jud	____	Lem	____		Jake	____	Bin	____
Ray	____	San	____		Sid	____	Gold	____
Pat	____	Ling	____		Frank	____	Lug	____
Tim	____	Bop	____		Grace	____	Nup	____
Brad	____	Tash	____		Beck	____	Daw	____
Pam	____	Rack	____		Dell	____	Smush	____
Trish	____	Mot	____		Gus	____	Lang	____
Fred	____	Tig	____		Lex	____	Yub	____
Bab	____	Fum	____		Ross	____	Quest	____
Kate	____	Tide	____		Dane	____	Wong	____
Brent	____	Lake	____		Tom	____	Zall	____
Flip	____	Mar	____		Gail	____	Vog	____
Jet	____	Mit	____		Rod	____	Blade	____
Rand	____	Lun	____		Tag	____	Shick	____

Total first and last names read correctly _____

Instructional implications

Many of the students entering first grade found the test to be too difficult, as they were just learning how to read. One cannot conclude from these results that the students require phonics instruction, but rather that they need increased early literacy experiences and opportunities to engage with sounds and print in meaningful ways. If throughout the year a student continues to struggle with acquiring sound-to-print connections, a teacher may increase the focus on language structure.

A few of the second graders also had difficulty reading many of the names. For these students, tasks that involve active word study can increase linguistic awareness. In general, teaching students about the regularities that exist in the English language is more important than asking them to memorize phonics or spelling rules (Ehri, 2000). For example, students may benefit from activities that draw attention to specific vowel sounds, such as engaging in word sorts that highlight or contrast different vowel spelling patterns. Once students can

sequence sounds, in-depth instruction in word structure may be appropriate. The goal of this instruction is to help students understand why English words are spelled the way they are.

Some of the second graders read all of the names correctly with ease. This suggests that these students have mastered early phonics skills and that instructional time should not be wasted on teaching them the grapheme–phoneme relationships that they already know and apply. Instead, instructional time would be better spent on reading authentic texts and engaging in conversations that will enhance language development. The augmented Names Test may provide additional information about these students' developing ability to pronounce multisyllabic words.

Unfortunately, some of the older readers in special education classes were still not automatic with beginning phonics skills and struggled to pronounce many of the names correctly. This suggests that these students' reading performances and development are being affected by poor word-attack skills.

Conceivably, these students would benefit from systematic, direct instruction in grapheme–phoneme correspondences, supplemented with practice reading decodable text. One should investigate the type of instruction that the student has already received, however, to determine why certain instructional techniques have been effective or ineffective. The results may indicate that the student would benefit from other types of systematic instructional interventions, such as a fluency-based program, rather than phonics. Or the results may suggest that the student would benefit from a specific type of phonics instruction such as an analytic phonics approach that focuses on whole words and onset–rime patterns, rather than a synthetic approach that starts with single letters and sounds. Although a few students do need and would benefit from explicit instruction in grapheme–phoneme relationships, competent reading clearly requires more than just decoding skills (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000). Students must be able to read and understand text in a variety of contexts. In addition, students who are receiving direct instruction with a phonics approach need to listen to and interact with authentic texts to enhance their language development and learning.

The most obvious instructional conclusion is that effective early reading intervention requires differentiated instruction. Juel and Minden-Cupp (2000) found that differential instruction was successful in maximizing the effectiveness of beginning literacy instruction. Students who entered first grade with some reading ability performed exceptionally well in a curriculum focusing on trade books and writing of text, whereas the students with the lowest reading scores benefited most from phonics and word-recognition instruction. In addition, they found that training in phonological processing was critical for some students but not for others.

Similarly, in a recent study of 108 children who failed a fourth-grade state reading assessment, Valencia and Buly (2004) observed that students failed for different reasons. They found that nearly 58% of the students had adequate or strong word-identification skills, making placement in a phonics or word-identification program inappropriate, whereas nearly 70% of the students demonstrated difficulty with fluency, suggesting the need for instructional programs that were devoted to helping

students read and comprehend more complex text. This type of study reinforces the importance of multifaceted, in-depth assessments and matching the results to an individual student's instructional needs.

Limitations

The Early Names Test has several limitations. One is that it measures only the ability to apply grapheme–phoneme knowledge to simple word patterns. Similar to Cunningham's (1990) original Names Test and the revision by Duffelmeyer et al. (1994), this version was developed to assess a narrow but critical aspect of reading development. A more comprehensive reading assessment would address many additional factors, such as sight-word knowledge, vocabulary knowledge, reading fluency or rate, comprehension of text, and the use of strategies for monitoring comprehension.

Another limitation is that we did not attempt to establish concurrent or predictive validity for the test. Ideally, this version of the Names Test could have been compared to widely used standardized measures of pseudoword reading like the Word Attack tests on the Woodcock Reading Mastery Test-Revised (WRMT-R) and Woodcock–Johnson III (WJ-III), or the Nonsense Word Decoding subtest on the Kaufman Test of Educational Achievement II (KTEA-II).

A further limitation of the Early Names Test is that the results are provided only for the beginning second-grade students. Because significant growth occurs in decoding ability in the early elementary grades, ideally norms would be provided for at least three points: the beginning, middle, and end of the school year. In addition, the norms were gathered in several schools in one school district and may not be representative of early reading performance in other school systems. Because reading performance varies substantially among schools, teachers could easily develop local norms for their individual schools or classes. Further, we found that the test was too difficult for many students who were just entering the first grade. Thus, it is inappropriate for use with students who are just beginning to learn to read. Before using the Early Names Test, one should consider the amount of print exposure a student has had, as well as the type of reading instruction that he or she has been provided.

TABLE 4
Scoring matrix for the Early Names Test

Name:_____ Grade:_____ Date:_____

Name	Initial consonant	Ending consonant	Consonant blend	Consonant digraph	Short vowel	Long vowel/Vowel-consonant-final *e*	Vowel digraph	Rime
Bab	B	-b			a			-ab
Beck	B			-ck	e			-eck
Bin	B	-n			i			-in
Blade		-d	Bl-			a-e		-ade
Bop	B	-p			o			-op
Brad		-d	Br-		a			-ad
Brent			Br- -nt		e			-ent
Dane	D	-n				a-e		-ane
Daw	D						-aw	-aw
Dell	D	-ll			e			-ell
Dut	D	-t			u			-ut
Flip		-p	Fl-		i			-ip
Frank			Fr- -nk		a			-ank
Fred		-d	Fr-		e			-ed
Gold	G		-ld					-old
Grace			Gr-			a-e		-ace
Gus	G	-s			u			-us
Hap	H	-p			a			-ap
Jake	J	-k				a-e		-ake
Jen	J	-n			e			-en
Jet	J	-t			e			-et
Jud	J	-d			u			-ud
Kate	K	-t				a-e		-ate
Lake	L	-k				a-e		-ake
Lang	L			-ng	a			-ang
Lem	L	-m			e			-em
Lex	L	-x			e			-ex
Ling	L			-ng	i			-ing
Lug	L	-g			u			-ug
Lun	L	-n			u			-un
Mar	M							-ar
Mit	M	-t			i			-it
Mot	M	-t			o			-ot
Nup	N	-p			u			-up
Pam	P	-m			a			-am
Pat	P	-t			a			-at
Quest	(Qu)*		-st		e			-est
Rack	R			-ck	a			-ack
Rand	R		-nd		a			-and
Ray	R						-ay	-ay
Rob	R	-b			o			-ob
Rod	R	-d			o			-od
Ross	R	-ss			o			-oss
San	S	-n			a			-an
Shick				Sh- -ck	i			-ick
Sid	S	-d			i			-id
Smush			Sm	-sh	u			-ush
Tag	T	-g			a			-ag

(continued)

TABLE 4
Scoring matrix for the Early Names Test (continued)

Name	Initial consonant	Ending consonant	Consonant blend	Consonant digraph	Short vowel	Long vowel/Vowel-consonant-final *e*	Vowel digraph	Rime
Tash	T			-sh	a			-ash
Tide	T	-d				i-e		-ide
Tig	T	-g			i			-ig
Tim	T	-m			i			-im
Tom	T	-m			o			-om
Trish			Tr-	-sh	i			-ish
Vog	V	-g			o			-og
Wong	W			-ng	o			-ong
Yub	Y	-b			u			-ub
Zall	Z	-ll						-all

*Note. *Qu is sometimes referred to as a consonant oddity or a consonant blend.*

As noted by Cunningham (1990), the names have to be decodable, so the Names Test has few foreign names. Some of the names sound more like nonsense words than like the names of real children (e.g., *Jet Mit*). Many of the children, however, thought the names were funny and did not seem to mind attempting to pronounce them. Although many English-language sounds are represented in this adapted version, the test does not contain a wide sampling of long-vowel sounds, vowel digraphs, or consonant digraphs. Thus, the test is most appropriate for a quick screening of early phonics skills (involving beginning consonants, short-vowel sounds, and ending rimes) rather than as an in-depth analysis of all major phonics elements and spelling patterns.

Combine tools for easier assessment

This Early Names Test was designed to be an informal assessment tool so that teachers can quickly assess students' beginning phonics knowledge. It is intended to measure one narrow, but important, aspect of reading performance—knowledge of grapheme–phoneme relationships. It can be used with more comprehensive assessments found on standardized tests (such as the WRMT-R, WJ-III, or the KTEA-II) and curriculum-based measurement tools, or it can be coupled with more authentic assessments of reading, such as informal reading inventories and running records. When coupled with additional information, this quick assessment can help teachers identify students who would benefit from additional assessments and early intervention.

Mather teaches at the University of Arizona in the Special Education, Rehabilitation, and School Psychology department (College of Education, PO Box 210069, Tucson, AZ 85721-0069, USA). E-mail nmather@u.arizona.edu. Sammons and Schwartz teach at the University of Arizona, South Campus.

References

Adams, M.J. (1990). *Beginning to read: Thinking and learning about print*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Cunningham, P. (1990). The Names Test: A quick assessment of decoding ability. *The Reading Teacher, 44*, 124–129.

Duffelmeyer, F.A., Kruse, A.E., Merkley, D.J., & Fyfe, S.A. (1994). Further validation and enhancement of the Names Test. *The Reading Teacher, 48*, 118–128.

Ehri, L.C. (2000). Learning to read and learning to spell: Two sides of a coin. *Topics in Language Disorders, 20(3)*, 19–36.

Foorman, B., Francis, D., Fletcher, J., Schatschneider, C., & Mehta, P. (1998). The role of instruction in learning to read: Preventing reading failure in at-risk children. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 90*, 37–55.

Juel, C., & Minden-Cupp, C. (2000). Learning to read words: Linguistic units and instructional strategies. *Reading Research Quarterly, 35,* 458–492.

National Institute of Child Health and Human Development. (2000). *Report of the National Reading Panel. Teaching children to read: An evidence-based assessment of the scientific research literature on reading and its implications for reading instruction* (NIH Publication No. 00–4769). Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

Perfetti, C.A., & Hogaboam, T. (1975). Relationship between single word decoding and reading comprehension skill. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 67,* 461–469.

Rack, J.P., Snowling, M.J., & Olson, R.K. (1992). The nonword reading deficit in developmental dyslexia: A review. *Reading Research Quarterly, 27,* 28–53.

Tunmer, W.E., & Nesdale, A.R. (1985). Phonemic segmentation skill and beginning reading. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 77,* 417–427.

Valencia, S.W., & Buly, M.R. (2004). Behind test scores: What struggling readers really need. *The Reading Teacher, 57,* 520–531.

Wylie, R., & Durrell, D. (1970). Teaching vowels through phonograms. *Elementary English, 47,* 787–791.