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**Running Records and Benchmark Books**

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**What is a Running Record?**

A running record allows you to assess a student's reading performance as she/he reads from a benchmark book. Benchmark books are books selected for running record assessment purposes. A running record form, with text from the book printed on the form, accompanies each of the benchmark books. Only the first 100 -150 words of the longer benchmark books are used for the upper level running records. A [blank running record form](#) is supplied for teachers who wish to perform running records on books other than the benchmark books or for additional text from the upper level benchmark books.

There are conflicting views on whether students should be assessed using a book they have never read versus using a book they are familiar with. We believe using a book that has not been previously read will give a more accurate measure of a student's ability to handle text at the assessed level. For this reason, we provide two benchmark books at each level: one fiction and one non-fiction. You can always opt to read the book before doing a running record if you prefer using previously-read text for your running record.

After completing a running record, you may want to assess a student's comprehension of the book read. Reading A-Z provides [Retelling Rubrics](#) for this purpose. Both fiction and non-fiction Retelling Rubrics are provided.

**Taking a Running Record**

Running records are taken most often at the earlier stages of reading. Students who are not progressing at the expected rate should be assessed even more frequently than the schedule suggested below.









- Early Emergent readers (Levels aa – C): every 2 to 4 weeks
- Emergent readers (Levels D – J): every 4 to 6 weeks
- Early fluent readers (Levels K – P): every 6 to 8 weeks
- Fluent readers (Levels Q – Z): every 8 to 10 weeks

Taking a running record takes practice. Before attempting a running record, read the procedural steps below, then go to the section on [Marking a Running Record Form](#).

1. Select a book that approximates the student's reading level. Explain that she/he will read out loud as you observe and record her/his reading skills.
2. With the running record form in hand, sit next to the student so that you can see the text and the student's finger and eye movements as she/he reads the text.
3. As the student reads, mark each work on the running record form by using the appropriate [Running Record Symbols and Marking Conventions](#) shown below. Place a checkmark above each work that is read correctly.
4. If the student reads incorrectly, record above the word what the student reads.
5. If the student is reading too fast for you to record the running record, ask her/him to pause until you catch up.
6. Be sure to pay attention to the reader's behavior. Is the student using meaning (M), structural (S), and visual (V) cues to read words and gather meaning?
7. Intervene as little as possible while the student is reading.
8. If the student is stuck and unable to continue, wait 5 to 10 seconds, then tell her/him the word. If the student seems confused, provide an explanation to clear up the confusion and say, "Try again."

Table 1  
**Running Record Symbols and Marking Conventions**

Reading behavior	Marking convention	Example
Accurate word reading	✓ above each correctly read word.	✓ ✓ ✓ The brown fox.....
Substitution (one error if not self-corrected; record one error regardless of the number of errors)	Write each word attempted above the actual word.	✓ brave ✓ The brown fox.....

INCORRECT SUBSTITUTIONS)		
Omission (one error)	— (long dash)	
Insertion (one error)	^ at point of insertion with the inserted word above it	
Repetition of one word (no error)	R (one repetition) R2 (two repetitions) R3 (three repetitions)	
Repetition of phrase (no error)	R with line and arrow to the point of where the reader returned to repeat.	
Self-correction (no error)	SC after the error to indicate child has corrected error.	
Intervention / student confused and unwilling to try again (one error)	Write TA if you need to tell student to "try again" and point to where he or she needs to try again. Place brackets around part of the text that the child had to try again.	
Intervention / unable to read a word (one error)	Write T above word if you tell the child the word after a 5–10 second wait.	
Beginning sound (no error)	Mark the beginning sound above the word if the child says it first, then a (check) if he or she follows with the correct word.	

### Marking a Running Record Form

Several terms are used when marking a running record form. You should become familiar with these terms by reviewing the explanations below.

- Errors (E)--Errors are tallied during the reading whenever a child does any of the following:
  - Substitutes another word for a word in the text
  - Omits a word
  - Inserts a word
  - Has to be told a word
- Self-correction (SC)--Self-correction occurs when a child realizes her or his error and corrects it. When a child makes a self-correction, the previous substitution is not scored as an error.
- Meaning (M)--Meaning is part of the cueing system in which the child takes her or his cue to make sense of text by thinking about the story background, information from pictures, or the meaning of a sentence. These cues assist in the reading of a word or phrase.
- Structure (S)--Structure refers to the structure of language and is often referred to as syntax. Implicit knowledge of structure helps the reader know if what she or he reads sounds correct.
- Visual (V)--Visual information is related to the look of the letters in a word and the word itself. A reader uses visual information when she or he studies the beginning sound, word length, familiar word chunks, and so forth.

There are two steps to marking a running record. Step 1 involves marking the text on the running record form as the student reads from the benchmark book. Before taking your first running record, become familiar with the symbols used to mark a running record form. These symbols are found in [Table 1](#). Also review the [Sample Running Record](#) to see how a completed form looks. It also is a good idea to take a few practice running records by role-playing with a fellow teacher as she/he plays the role of a developing reader, intentionally making errors for you to record.

Once the student has read all the text on the running record form and you have recorded their reading behavior, you can complete Step 2. In Step 2 you fill in the boxes to the right of the lines of text you have marked. Begin by looking at any error the student has made in the first line. Mark the number of errors made in the first box to the right of the line. If the student self corrected any of these errors, mark the number of self-corrections in the second box to the right of the line. Next determine whether the errors and self-corrections were made as a result of meaning, structure, or visual cueing. For a description of each of these cues, review the explanations provided above. Write MSV in each box for each error and a self-correction made and circle the appropriate letter for the cue used by the student.

After completing step two you should total the number of errors and self-corrections and write each total in the box at the bottom of the appropriate column. Next calculate the student's [error rate](#), [accuracy rate](#), and [self-correction rate](#), found in the next section [Scoring and Analyzing a Running Record](#).

You do not have to mark the MSV cueing portion of the running record form. It is simply used to help you further analyze a student's reading behavior and provide deeper insight into a student's possible reading deficiencies. You can still use the information on error, self-correction, and accuracy rates to place the student at the developmentally appropriate instructional level.

Sample Running Record

**Reading a-z Running Record**

**Level D**

Student's Name Matt Jones Date 1/28/02 The Wheel  
99 words

Have the student read out loud as you record. Assessed by B. Castillo

page	E = errors M = meaning S = structure V = visual	S-C = self-correction	E	S-C	E			S-C					
					M	S	V	M	S	V			
3	The wheel comes off the truck. <i>of/sc</i>			1		M	S	V	M	S	V		
4	It rolls down the hill. Faster and faster.												
5	The wheel <i>went/goes</i> through the field. It rolls <i>pl</i> past the cows. Faster and faster. <i>R</i>		1			M	S	V					
6	The wheel rolls through the <i>farm</i> barn. It rolls <i>TA</i> past the chickens. Faster and faster.		1			M	S	V	M	S	V		
7	The wheel rolls toward the river. It rolls over the bridge. Faster and faster. <i>Rz</i> <i>water</i>		1			M	S	V	M	S	V		
8	The wheel rolls into the school. It rolls out <i>of</i> the door. Faster and faster. The wheel rolls <i>through</i> the town. <i>B</i>		1	1		M	S	V			M	S	V
9	It rolls past the policeman. Faster and faster. <i>P/R</i>												
10	The wheel rolls into the garage. It stops rolling. The wheel is on the truck. <i>track/sc</i>		1			M	S	V					
<b>Totals</b>			<b>8</b>	<b>3</b>									

Accuracy Rate: 92% Error Rate: 1:12 Self-correction Rate: 1:4

**Scoring and Analyzing a Running Record**

Scoring: The information gathered while doing a running record is used to determine error, accuracy, and self-correction rates. Directions for calculating these rates are given below. The calculated rates, along with qualitative information and the student's comprehension of the text, are used to determine the student's reading level.

**Qualitative Analysis:** The qualitative analysis is based on observations that you make during the running record. It involves observing how the student uses the meaning (M), structural (S), and visual (V) cues to help her/him read. It also involves paying attention to fluency, intonation, and phrasing. Think back to the prompts you offered and how the student responded. These observations help you form a picture of the student's reading development.

- [Error](#)
- [Accuracy](#)
- [Self-Correction](#)

The formulas below were used with the sample running record above.

**Error Rate**

Error rate is expressed as a ratio and is calculated by using the following formula:

$$\text{Total words} / \text{Total errors} = \text{Error rate}$$

*Example:*

$$99 / 8 = 12.38, \text{ or } 12 \text{ rounded to nearest whole number}$$

The ratio is expressed as 1:12.

This means that for each error made, the student read approximately 12 words correctly.

**Accuracy Rate**

Accuracy rate is expressed as a percentage. You can calculate the accuracy rate using the following formula:

$$(\text{Total words read} - \text{Total errors}) / \text{Total words read} \times 100 = \text{Accuracy rate}$$

*Example:*

$$(99 - 8) / 99 \times 100 = \text{Accuracy rate}$$

$$91/99 \times 100 = \text{Accuracy rate}$$

$$.919 \times 100 = 91.9\%, \text{ or } 92\% \text{ rounded to the nearest whole number}$$

You can use accuracy rate to determine whether the text read is easy enough for independent reading, appropriate to use without frustration during reading instruction purposes instruction, or too difficult for the reader. The breakdown of these three categories is as follows:

Easy enough for independent reading = 95 – 100%

Instructional level for use in leveled reading session = 90 – 94%

Too difficult and will frustrate the reader = 89% and below

**Self-Correction Rate**

Self-correction rate is expressed as a ratio and is calculated by using the following formula:

$$(\text{Number of errors} + \text{Number of self corrections}) / \text{Number of self corrections} = \text{Self-correction rate}$$

*Example:*

$$(8 + 3) / 3 = \text{Self-correction rate}$$

$$11 / 3 = 3.666, \text{ or } 4 \text{ rounded to the nearest whole number}$$

The self-correction rate is expressed as 1:4. This means that the student corrects approximately 1 out of every 4 errors.

If a student is self-correcting at a rate of 1:4 or less, this indicates that she/he is self-monitoring her/his reading.

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