

Foundational Skills Observation Tool

Components of Foundational Skills

Print Concepts Understand the organization and basic features of print.	Phonological Awareness Identify and manipulate units of oral language- such as words, syllables, onset/rime, and phonemes.
Phonics and Word Recognition Know and apply sound and spelling patterns and word analysis skills in order to recognize and decode words in print.	Fluency Read with sufficient accuracy, rate appropriate to text and task, and expression to support comprehension.

About the Foundational Skills Observation Tool:

Comprehensive college- and career-ready literacy instruction in grades K–2 requires developing strong foundational skills and growing knowledge and vocabulary through rich read alouds with complex texts. Effective foundational skills instruction for *all* students necessitates spending at least 45 minutes a day on the teaching of foundational skills through direct instruction and related practice opportunities for students.¹ This observation tool is designed to help K–2 teachers, and those who support teachers, to build understanding and experience with best practices to support the explicit teaching of foundational skills: Print Concepts, Phonological Awareness, Phonics and Word Recognition, and Fluency. Designed to aid teacher development rather than evaluation, this tool can be used for coaching, as well as planning, reflection, and collaboration.

This tool is a complement to the [Foundational Skills Guidance Documents](#) and should ideally be used along with instructional materials that provide explicit and systematic instruction and practice, regular evaluation of student work for evidence of learning, and other informal and formal assessments. For listening comprehension lessons, refer to the [K–2 Instructional Practice Guide](#).

Using the Foundational Skills Observation Tool:

Depending on the grade level and time of school year, lessons could emphasize a variety of foundational skills. For all uses, refer to the [Common Core State Standards for Reading: Foundational Skills](#). During each observed lesson, it will be important to note the interactions between aligned content, teacher moves, and student practice. Evidence for the indicators might include content from the lesson plan; observed exercises, tasks and assessments; and student work, discussion, or behavior. Although many indicators will be observable during the course of a lesson, there may be times when a lesson is appropriately focused on a smaller set of objectives or only a portion of a lesson is observed, leaving some indicators unobserved and some portion of this tool blank. Each of the indicators includes an optional rating scale.

A foundational skills lesson may include any of the following: whole class instruction, student independent practice, collaborative tasks, small group instruction, centers, and assessment opportunities. The observation tool can be used with any of these classroom structures.

Classroom observations are most effective when followed by a coaching conversation based on evidence collected during the observation. After discussing the observed lesson using this observation tool as a support, use the [Beyond the Lesson Discussion Questions](#) to put the content of the lesson in the context of the broader instructional plan for the unit or year.

Companion Resources:

Additional resources to support professional development and instructional practice can be found at achievethecore.org/foundational-skills. These include a modular course for professional development as well as classroom resources for decodable readers and assessment.

¹ Refer to the [Foundational Skills Guidance Documents](#) for research supporting the components of effective foundational skills instruction.

Foundational Skills Observation Tool

Date: _____ Time: _____ Teacher: _____ School: _____

Grade: _____ Targeted Foundation Skill(s) / Objective(s): _____

Foundational Skills Observation Tool Indicators

Aligned Content

The indicators in this section represent the intentional and explicit focus of the lesson.

- AC1. The foundational skill(s) observed in the lesson reflects grade-level standards.
 - AC2. The foundational skill(s) observed in the lesson is part of a systematic scope and sequence.
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Teacher-Directed Instruction

The indicators in this section represent the teacher-driven moves in the lesson, such as what the teacher says, models, and assigns.

- TD1. Foundational skill(s) instruction is explicit, clear, and correct.
 - TD2. When appropriate, instruction and materials provide opportunities to connect acquisition of foundational skills to making meaning from reading and listening.
 - TD3. The lesson includes adequate time for aligned teacher instruction and student practice of targeted skill(s).
 - TD4. The elements of the lesson are presented in an engaging and child-friendly manner.
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Student Practice

The indicators in this section represent what students say and do throughout the lesson. This format may change throughout the lesson, and can include whole group, small group, independent, and teacher-supported tasks/practice.

- SP1. Students practice with materials and written/oral tasks that are aligned to targeted content and skills.
 - SP2. Students practice target skills in the context of decodable text.
 - SP3. Students engage in multiple opportunities to work out of context.
 - SP4. Students actively participate in the content of the lesson.
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Assessment & Differentiation

The indicators in this section represent strategic collecting of data as well as adjustments to instruction based on observed student need.

- AD1. Teacher collects student data (formal and/or informal).
- AD2. Teacher responds to data and adjusts instruction accordingly to support students.

Foundational Skills Observation Tool

Date: _____ Time: _____ Teacher: _____ School: _____

Grade: _____ Targeted Foundation Skill(s) / Objective(s): _____

Aligned Content

The indicators in this section represent the intentional and explicit focus of the lesson.

Indicator/Rating	What To Look For	Notes
<p>AC1. The foundational skill(s) observed in the lesson reflects grade-level standards.²</p> <p> <input type="radio"/> Always <input type="radio"/> Often <input type="radio"/> Sometimes <input type="radio"/> Rarely/Never </p>	<p>The following area(s) of focus may be observed; please check all that apply:</p> <p> <input type="checkbox"/> Phonological Awareness (K–1) <input type="checkbox"/> Print Concepts (K–1) <input type="checkbox"/> Phonics and Word Recognition (K–2) <input type="checkbox"/> Fluency (K–2) </p> <p>All elements may not be addressed in each lesson.</p> <p>Refer to the Reading Foundational Skills standards as needed.</p>	
<p>AC2. The foundational skill(s) observed in the lesson is part of a systematic scope and sequence.</p> <p> <input type="radio"/> Always <input type="radio"/> Often <input type="radio"/> Sometimes <input type="radio"/> Rarely/Never </p>	<p>Classroom displays and/or student work that show past and current foundational skills foci, connections made by teacher to previously taught skills</p>	

Teacher-Directed Instruction

The indicators in this section represent the teacher-driven moves in the lesson, such as what the teacher says, models, and assigns.

Indicator/Rating	What To Look For	Notes
<p>TD1. Foundational skill(s) instruction is explicit, clear, and correct.</p> <p> <input type="radio"/> Always <input type="radio"/> Often <input type="radio"/> Sometimes <input type="radio"/> Rarely/Never <input type="radio"/> Did not observe teacher-directed instruction </p>	<p>Clear and accurate teacher pronunciation of sounds (phonemes), visual aids, explanation of rules for sound and spelling patterns, articulation of objective to students, and modeling of blending, segmenting, or other content-specific tasks</p>	
<p>TD2. When appropriate, instruction and materials provide opportunities to connect acquisition of foundational skills to making meaning from reading and listening.</p> <p> <input type="radio"/> Always <input type="radio"/> Often <input type="radio"/> Sometimes <input type="radio"/> Rarely/Never </p>	<p>Text-dependent questions used with decodable text, unfamiliar words connected to student-friendly definitions, use of newly decoded/blended words in meaningful sentences</p>	
<p>TD3. The lesson includes adequate time for aligned teacher instruction and student practice of targeted skill(s).</p> <p> <input type="radio"/> Always <input type="radio"/> Often <input type="radio"/> Sometimes <input type="radio"/> Rarely/Never </p>	<p>Appropriate pacing for the task provided, opportunities for students to practice targeted skill(s) through reading, writing, speaking, and/or listening</p>	
<p>TD4. The elements of the lesson are presented in an engaging and child-friendly manner.</p> <p> <input type="radio"/> Always <input type="radio"/> Often <input type="radio"/> Sometimes <input type="radio"/> Rarely/Never </p>	<p>Crucial skills taught and practiced through movement, songs, chants, high-energy activities, writing activities, discussion, and collaboration (see examples in the Effective Enhancements for Foundational Skills Instruction document)</p>	

² When observed content is not aligned to grade-level standards, determine whether this is reflective of data collected about student needs in a post-observation conversation. Use the Beyond the Lesson Guide at the end of this tool to guide the conversation.

Foundational Skills Observation Tool

Date: _____ Time: _____ Teacher: _____ School: _____

Grade: _____ Targeted Foundation Skill(s) / Objective(s): _____

Student Practice

The indicators in this section represent what students say and do throughout the lesson. This format may change throughout the lesson, and can include whole group, small group, independent, and teacher-supported tasks/practice.

Indicator/Rating	What To Look For	Notes
SP1. Students practice with materials and written/oral tasks that are aligned to targeted content and skills. <input type="radio"/> All <input type="radio"/> Most <input type="radio"/> Some <input type="radio"/> Few/No	Practice of new and/or previously taught skill(s)	
SP2. Students practice target skills in the context of decodable text. <input type="radio"/> All <input type="radio"/> Most <input type="radio"/> Some <input type="radio"/> Few/No <input type="radio"/> Not applicable (early Kindergarten)	Student reading material includes some use of decodable text (sentences or text containing previously taught high-frequency words and sound/spelling patterns) read and/or reread for accuracy/automaticity <i>Note: This indicator is applicable once students have learned enough sound and spelling patterns and high-frequency words to read meaningful text.</i>	
SP3. Students engage in multiple opportunities to work out of context. <input type="radio"/> All <input type="radio"/> Most <input type="radio"/> Some <input type="radio"/> Few/No	Tasks such as games, puzzles, music, movement, worksheets, or other discrete oral or written tasks	
SP4. Students actively participate in the content of the lesson. <input type="radio"/> All <input type="radio"/> Most <input type="radio"/> Some <input type="radio"/> Few/No	Student-to-student and student-to-teacher interaction with content, adequate support provided for students to participate actively in centers and with independent tasks	

Assessment & Differentiation

The indicators in this section represent strategic collecting of data as well as adjustments to instruction based on observed student need.

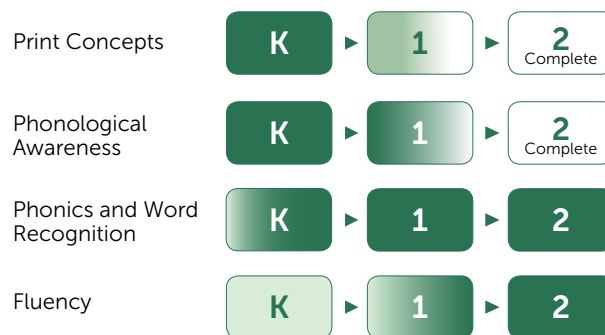
Indicator/Rating	What To Look For	Notes
AD1. Teacher collects student data (formal and/or informal). Opportunities were taken: <input type="radio"/> Frequently <input type="radio"/> Sometimes <input type="radio"/> Rarely <input type="radio"/> Not observed	Data collecting system in place (e.g., checklisting, sampling dictation responses, monitoring of student work), collection of student work and grading system (see examples in the Foundational Skills Assessment Protocol)	
AD2. Teacher responds to data and adjusts instruction accordingly to support students. Opportunities were taken: <input type="radio"/> Frequently <input type="radio"/> Sometimes <input type="radio"/> Rarely <input type="radio"/> Not observed	On-the-spot feedback, corrections, or confirmations of student answers (e.g., students use inventive spelling, teacher holds students accountable for taught sound and spelling patterns), adjustments made to task based on observations of student work/practice, differentiated groups and materials (including supports for students who need more and far more practice), evidence of planned supports based on student data	

Beyond the Lesson: Discussion Guide

Foundational Skills Observation Tool

The Beyond the Lesson Discussion Guide is designed for the post-observation conversation using the Foundational Skills Observation Tool. The questions put the content of the lesson in the context of the broader instructional plan for the unit or year.

Begin the conversation by reflecting on the evidence collected during the observation; discuss what worked, areas for improvement, and resources to support development. Then use the Beyond the Lesson Discussion Guide questions to help clearly delineate what practices are in place, what has already occurred, and what opportunities might exist—in another lesson, further in the unit, or over the course of the year—to incorporate the learning from the [Foundational Skills Guidance Document](#) into the classroom.



This visual shows each content focus area by grade. The darker the shading, the greater the emphasis on that component.

Aligned Content

- Beyond this lesson, what steps are being taken to ensure students receive at least 45 minutes of daily foundational skill instruction and opportunities for practice?
- Is this lesson part of a scope and sequence for foundational skills?
 - K-1** What phonemic awareness/phonological awareness skills are students learning this week?
 - K-2** What sound and spelling pattern(s) (and/or word families) are students learning this week?
 - K-2** If applicable, what other decoding and word analysis skills are students learning this week (e.g., high-frequency words, prefixes, suffixes, syllabication)?
- How are all students supported in progressing towards independently reading grade-level text by the end of 2nd grade?
 - K-Early 1st** How are students being supported in developing reading accuracy?
 - Early-Mid 1st** How are students being supported to read with accuracy and automaticity?
 - 1st (as appropriate), 2nd** How are students being supported in developing appropriate rate and prosody/expression?
 - K-2** How are students using decodable texts to demonstrate progress with accuracy, automaticity, prosody, and expression? (see examples in the [Decodable Readers Protocol](#)).
- When target skills are not aligned to grade-level standards, how are these instructional decisions made? How is this connected to ongoing data collection and supportive of students' access to grade-level work?

Teacher-Directed Instruction

- How does the classroom environment support student needs in regard to foundational skills? How does the classroom culture promote and support this work?

Student Practice

- What varied opportunities do students have to practice newly taught skills this week? Do they have five or more opportunities to independently practice this week's taught skills? What opportunities are provided for students who need more or far more practice?

Assessment & Differentiation

- How are students monitored (daily, weekly, and through unit/benchmark assessments) to identify discrete skills needed for additional practice? How is assessment data tracked?
- Are systems for responding to student data clear, concrete, systematic, and manageable?
- How are decisions made about differentiated groups, tasks, and supports in the lesson? How are students who need additional support given more time and practice opportunities?
- How are students' needs and abilities considered when providing practice with grade-appropriate texts?