Professional Article

Matching Students to Text: The Targeted Reader
Targeted reading is self-reinforcing, pleasurable, and productive.

By Jack Stenner

Teachers share two intuitions:
- Texts can be ordered according to the difficulty each presents for a reader.
- Readers can be assessed according to the success each will have with any particular text.

Teachers make use of these two premises to match readers to text. Knowing a lot about text is helpful because "text matters" (Hiebert, 1999). But ordering or leveling text is only half the equation. We must also assess the level of the readers. These two activities are necessary so that the right books can be matched to the right reader at the right time. When teachers achieve this match intuitively, they are rewarded with students choosing to read more.

When texts are selected that align with all the facets of the reading process, the reader is truly "targeted." The targeted reader benefits from a caring adult (teacher, library-media specialist, parent) who takes the time to understand the reader not just in the terms of reading level, but also in the terms of interests, motivation, developmental maturity, prior knowledge, purpose for reading, and available scaffolding support. An ideal or "targeted" context for reading practice and deepening comprehension can be created when this caring adult helps a student to select appropriate reading material (Five, 1986). The objective reality is that targeted readers comprehend a high percentage of the passages they read. The subjective reality is that they report confidence, capability, and control when reading. Finally, targeted readers choose to read, and thus read more and read better. Targeted reading is self-reinforcing, pleasurable, and productive. Poorly targeted reading can be discouraging, or worse—it can produce frustrated students who do not choose to read or like to read.

The best of my own teachers were gifted diagnosticians who seemed to have a second sight about the next chapter or book I should read. They built upon my strengths with just the right mix of success and failure, soaring and stumbling, clarity and confusion. As a learner, I felt centered and on target. However, it can take decades for teachers to polish intuition, to learn a 200-book classroom text collection from the lowest-level book to the highest, and to refine field-based techniques for leveling readers. And because the product of these thousands of hours of professional practice is a private, non-exchangeable metric for simultaneously ordering books and assessing readers, the profession at large does not advance.

The Lexile Framework® for Reading

The Lexile Framework for Reading is a system for measuring texts and readers by the same metric (a Lexile). When a reader's Lexile® measure and a book's Lexile measure are both known, a forecast can be made about the success that the reader will have with that book. Over 40,000 books and 40 million articles now have Lexile measures, and tests such as the Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI, print and electronic versions); the Harcourt SAT-9, SAT-10, MAT-8, and SDRT-4; the CTB/McGraw-Hill TerraNova Assessment Series (CAT/6, CTBS/5); the Riverside Publishing Educational Assessments (The Iowa Tests, GMRT-4); NWEA Achievement Level Tests, and other well-known reading achievement tests have been linked to the Lexile Framework. In addition, the Lexile Framework is used in states and districts throughout the nation. Such links make it possible for the users of these tests to request equivalent Lexile measures for any specific score.

Today, more than 14 million students get at least one Lexile measure each year from a standardized test report. Educators, librarians, and parents can use a student's Lexile measure to search the Lexile Web site (www.lexile.com) and build a customized, targeted reading list for the reader. Former Assistant Superintendent of Schools in North Carolina, Dr. Suzanne Triplett, states:

The Lexile Framework manifests what good teachers try to do anyway, which is to judge where a student is and find material that will challenge him adequately without being so difficult that he loses his motivation. The problem is that as children get into the latter stages of elementary school, the variance in texts and among students increases dramatically. The choice of material expands and the range of reading skills widens, so it becomes much harder for teachers to make accurate judgments about where children are and what materials are good choices for them. By using the Lexile Framework, schools can take the guesswork out of this equation and operationalize the selection of developmentally appropriate material for their students.
"Empowerment" has become a hackneyed word, but that's the key advantage of the Lexile Framework—it gives students, parents, teachers, and administrators accurate information that empowers them. With a Lexile measure, you know precisely where a student stands in terms of an absolute scale of reading comprehension, and you know exactly what steps that student needs to take to achieve higher levels of reading performance.

The Lexile Framework is a tool that can be combined with other tools, techniques, and strategies to optimize instruction. The Lexile Framework offers an open standard and a public, exchangeable metric for measuring text and readers.

The Lexile Map

The Lexile Map (sample, Figure 1) is a visual display of the reading continuum, ranging from early first-grade texts (100L) to advanced graduate school texts (1200L). The Lexile Map combines nouns (books) with numbers (Lexile measure). Every book ever written in English has a theoretical location on this Map. Once measured, a book takes a unique and invariant position in relation to every other book. In this sense, a Lexile measure is absolute in that it is independent of other books that might be measured or reader performances that might be observed. Readers can be visualized as "in motion," moving up the Lexile Map, each on an individual growth trajectory as he or she encounters various new and enriching texts. If we were to plot a "poor" reader's growth trajectory, we would find that a high proportion of the assigned reading registers above the growth trajectory-sometimes far above (250L+). In contrast, for a "good" reader, we find a high proportion of assigned reading falling below the growth trajectory—often far below. The consequence is that the "poor" readers get reinforced in the belief that they can't read for meaning and the "good" readers receive reinforcement that they can. There are, in absolute sense, no "good" or "poor" readers. Comprehension is relative; it is a simple function of the match between reader and text. We can control the text level and thereby gain control over the motivational consequences of reading "on" and "off" target.

The Shoe Store Story

Some time ago, I went into a shoe store and asked for a fifth-grade shoe. The clerk looked at me suspiciously, and asked if I knew how much shoe sizes varied among 11-year-olds. Furthermore, he pointed out that shoe size was not nearly as important as purpose, style, color, etc., but if I would specify the features I wanted and size, he could walk to the back and magically reappear with several options to my liking. He further noted—somewhat condescendingly—that the store used the same metric to measure feet and shoes, and that when there was a match between foot and shoe, the shoes got worn, there was no pain and the customer was happy and became a repeat customer. I called home and got my son's shoe size, and then asked the clerk for an 8 1/2, red, hightop basketball shoe.

After a brief credit-card transaction, I had my shoes. Then I walked next door to my favorite bookstore and asked for a fifth-grade fantasy novel. Without hesitation, the clerk and I walked to a shelf where she gave me three choices. I chose "The Hobbit," a 1000L classic that I had read three times, and went home. My son, I later learned, reads at 850L. As I write this, my son is passionately practicing free throws in the driveway.

Today, we can apply the Lexile Framework to avoid this kind of mismatch. It is available to bring the art of good teaching and the science of technology to a classroom, library, or living room near you.

About
Dr. Jack Stenner is chairman and CEO of MetaMetrics® Inc., developers of The Lexile Framework for Reading. In addition to his work at MetaMetrics, Stenner is president and cofounder of the Institute for Objective Measurement, and past president of the Professional Billiard Tour Association (PBTA). A published author in the area of measurement and evaluation methodology, he is also an active board member for Duke Children's Hospital, the NC Electronics and Information Technologies Association, and the National Institute for Statistical Sciences, and is a member of various national educational research and measurement associations. Stenner received his Ph.D. in educational psychology from Duke University in 1984 and dual undergraduate degrees in psychology and education from the University of Missouri-St. Louis. He continues to teach graduate seminars at both Duke University and the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill. For more information on The Lexile Framework for Reading, visit www.lexile.com or call 1–888–LEXILES.

Sample, Figure 1

Lexile® Leveled Reading Framework

Matching students to texts at appropriate levels helps to increase their confidence, competence, and control over the reading process. The Lexile® Framework is a reliable and tested tool designed to bridge two critical aspects of student reading achievement—leveling text difficulty and assessing the reading skills of each student.

Lexile Level: 1200L—1700L

Benchmark Literature: First Inaugural Address by George Washington	1700
The Good Earth by Pearl S. Buck	1530
The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass by Frederick Douglass	1400
Silent Spring by Rachel Carson	1340
Great Expectations by Charles Dickens	1200

Lexile Level: 1100L

The War of the Worlds by H.G. Wells	1170
Animal Farm by George Orwell	1170
Ethan Frome by Edith Wharton	1160
A Separate Peace by John Knowles	1110
Pride and Prejudice by Jane Austen	1100

Lexile Level: 1000L

Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl by Anne Frank	1080
One More River to Cross: The Stories of Twelve Black Americans by Jim Haskins	1070
20,000 Leagues Under the Sea by Jules Verne	1030
The Pearl by John Steinbeck	1010
Freak the Mighty by Rodman Philbrick	1000

Lexile Level: 900L

Exploring the Titanic by Robert Ballard	980
Beauty: A Retelling of the Story of Beauty and the Beast by Robin McKinley	970
The Abracadabra Kid: A Writer's Life by Sid Fleischman	940
Dogsong by Gary Paulsen	930
Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry by Mildred Taylor	920

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Lexile Leveled Reading Framework *(continued)*

Lexile Level: 800L

Anthony Burns: The Defeat and Triumph of a Fugitive Slave by Virginia Hamilton	860
Julie of the Wolves by Jean Craighead George	860
Johnny Tremaine by Esther Forbes	840
Call It Courage by Armstrong Sperry	830
The Dark Is Rising by Susan Cooper	820

Lexile Level: 700L

And Now Miguel by Joseph Krumgold	780
Red Scarf Girl: A Memoir of the Cultural Revolution by Ji-Li Jiang	780
Harriet the Spy by Louise Fitzhugh	760
Pacific Crossing by Gary Soto	750
From the Mixed Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler by E.L. Konigsburg	700

Lexile Level: 600L

Charlotte's Web by E.B. White	680
Henry Huggins by Beverly Cleary	670
Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes by Eleanor Coerr	630
Flossie and the Fox by Patricia McKissack	610
… If You Sailed on the Mayflower in 1620 by Ann McGovern	600

Lexile Level: 500L

Buffalo Woman by Paul Gable	590
The True Story of the Three Little Pigs by A.Wolf by Jon Scieszka	570
Encyclopedia Brown, Boy Detective by Donald J. Sobol	560
Red Riding Hood by James Marshall	520
The Magic School Bus Inside the Earth by Joanna Cole	500

Lexile Leveled Reading Framework *(continued)*

Lexile Level: 400L

Madeline by Ludwig Bemelmans	480
Dinosaur Bones by Aliki	460
How My Parents Learned to Eat by Ina R. Friedman	450
Henry and Mudge and the Forever Sea by Cynthia Rylant	420
Frog and Toad Are Friends by Arnold Lobel	400

Lexile Level: 300L

Babushka's Doll by Patricia Polacco	360
The Best Way to Play by Bill Cosby	360
Arthur's Nose by Marc Brown	350
Noisy Nora by Rosemary Wells	320
Pet Show! by Ezra Jack Keats	300

Lexile Level: 200L

Mr. Rabbit and the Lovely Present by Charlotte Zolotow	280
The Cat in the Hat by Dr. Seuss	260
Play Ball, Amelia Bedelia by Peggy Parish	220
Clifford, the Big Red Dog by Norman Bridwell	220
Danny and the Dinosaur by Syd Hoff	200

References

Five, C. L. (1986). "Fifth Graders Respond to a Changed Reading Program." *Harvard Educational Review*, 56, 395–405.

Hiebert, E. H. (1998). "Text Matters in Learning to Read." *CIERA Report*, 1–001.

(1997). *The Lexile Framework: A Map to Higher Levels of Achievement*. Durham, NC: MetaMetrics.

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