

The Use of the Lexile System in MyReadingLab

The Lexile system in MRL diagnoses a student's reading ability over time. It begins with a Locator Test that estimates the student's initial reading level and continues by providing readings and accompanying diagnostic tests that incrementally adjust the estimate of the student's reading level with increasing precision.

The student's initial score is just an estimate. It is determined by a student's ability but also by a host of random factors. The Lexile system re-diagnoses the student with additional readings, and it is through these additional readings and tests that the student gets a much more precise and reliable estimate of their reading ability. As the student reads additional selections and takes additional diagnostic tests, their score is incrementally adjusted based not only on their score on the specific diagnostic test but also by their history in the Lexile system. Other things equal, the more tests the user takes, the less each additional test can affect the measurement. This is because later tests represent proportionately less information on the student's ability. In other words a student who does relatively poorly on their first diagnostic test (after they have taken the Locator test) could see their score drop significantly whereas a student who has taken many tests would see their score drop only marginally.

For example, consider a student who takes the initial Locator test and receives a score of 950. Is this a good estimate of the student's ability? Well, it is the best at the time, but it is still only one piece of information. Any number of factors could have affected the results besides the student's inherent reading ability. Fortunately, the student can do additional readings and take additional Lexile diagnostic tests. Suppose they do these readings, and gradually work their way up to a Lexile level of 1000. They have now taken many diagnostic tests and the Lexile system is confident in the 1000 assessment because there has been a steady change over time from the initial 950 to the final 1000. Now, if the student took one more test, and did poorly on it, the Lexile system would view this as something of an anomaly, and weight it accordingly. The Lexile system thus adjusts the score very little in response to an isolated out-of-trend score. On the other hand, if another student scored a 1000 at the start, and on the very next test did particularly poorly, their Lexile measure would drop significantly. The student would have to do additional readings and take additional tests for the system to be sure of their reading level.

It is the ability of the Lexile approach to provide readings targeted at a student's estimated reading level and also to repeatedly diagnose a student's performance over time that makes the Lexile measures such a powerful and precise estimate of a student's reading ability. This ensures that the results don't rest on fluky measurements. To take full advantage of the Lexile system you should encourage your students to continue to do additional readings and continue to take the Lexile diagnostic tests. This will give both you and the student much greater confidence that you are seeing just how well they are progressing over the course of the semester.*

* A student's initial Lexile level assessment is a point estimate, with an accompanying standard error. The error is due to the fact that the system assumes that a variety of random factors affect a student's performance. When the student takes additional tests, the Lexile level is adjusted based on two factors: the deviation of the diagnostic score from 75%, and the beginning standard error. A score above 75% will raise the Lexile level. The amount of the change is positively correlated with the standard error. Thus, a high score and a high beginning standard error will cause the Lexile level to rise a great deal. As the student takes additional tests, the standard error will drop if the test results depict a trend in student performance. This means that the Lexile level becomes less sensitive to additional score results. This is because the system becomes more confident in its predictions. Of course, if the student's test results display no trend at all, the standard error will remain high and the Lexile level will be less stable from one diagnostic test to the next.