



Reading Recovery®

## Rationales and Guidelines for Selecting the Lowest-Achieving First-Grade Students for Reading Recovery

Developed by the North American Trainers Group  
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### Section A: Rationales

The design of Reading Recovery requires that the lowest-achieving children are the first to be placed in the available teaching slots. The selection process is guided by the teacher leader who has particular expertise in assisting teachers in the analysis of data and the selection of children, and is supported by a school team.

There are at least three rationales for taking the lowest-achieving children in Reading Recovery.

1. When a child enters Reading Recovery it is difficult to predict the level and rate of progress.
2. The lowest-achieving children are least able to wait for the intervention because they are not benefitting from classroom instruction. Left to wait, they will fall further behind.
3. If the lowest-achieving students are not selected for Reading Recovery, the school will not eliminate the children with literacy difficulties from their rosters.

Source for the rationales: *Changing Futures*, Schmitt, et al. (2005, pp. 65–66).

Clay noted in her 1991 chapter, “Reading Recovery Surprises” as cited in the Standards and Guidelines (2012, p. 6), that

Reading Recovery is designed for children who are the lowest achievers in the class/age group. What is used is an inclusive definition. Principals have sometimes argued to exclude this or that category of children or to save places for children who might seem to “benefit the most,” but that is not using the full power of the program. It has been one of the surprises of Reading Recovery that all kinds of children with all kinds of difficulties can be included, can learn, and can reach average-band performance for their class in both reading and writing achievement. Exceptions are not made for children of lower intelligence, for second-language children, for children with low language skills, for children with poor motor coordination, for children who seem immature, for children who score poorly on readiness measures, or for children who have been categorized by someone else as learning disabled.

## **Section B: General Guidelines for Full Implementation**

1. The goal is 100% coverage meaning there are enough teaching slots for every child who needs Reading Recovery in a school.
2. Administrators can use 20–25% of the first-grade population as a planning guide. Some schools will need more, some less depending on the number of children not reaching grade-level literacy. (Source: Clay, 2005a, p. 7)
3. Teachers usually have four 30-minute slots of time in their daily teaching schedules to teach Reading Recovery. Plan for approximately one teacher trained in Reading Recovery per two first-grade classrooms.
4. Each teacher trained in Reading Recovery works with at least four first-grade students, individually on a daily basis. (Source: Standards and Guidelines, 2012, p. 11)
5. If there is only one first-grade classroom in the school and only four children need Reading Recovery, select all four students right away, instead of two in fall and two in spring.
6. Districts often assign teachers to other teaching responsibilities after all children needing Reading Recovery have been reached.

## **Section C: How to Assess and Select Students**

1. In the previous spring, kindergarten teachers will rank their classes from the highest to the lowest based on their expert knowledge about the children’s literacy progress. To help with selection at the beginning of the first-grade school year, consult with the first-grade classroom teacher to rank first-grade students, by classroom, from lowest to highest, based on their literacy development. It’s easier to do this if you use alternate ranking, identifying first the lowest student and the highest student, then the next lowest and next highest, and so on, until the middle students are last to be identified.
2. Test the bottom 20–30% of the first-grade cohort with *An Observation Survey of Early Literacy Achievement* (Clay, 2002, 2013); begin with the lowest-ranked students.
3. Select the lowest-achieving students first. Generally speaking, these are the children with the most stanine 1s, 2s, and 3s on the six tasks of the Observation Survey. But also take into account the students’ responses and raw scores on the individual tasks.
4. Where children’s profiles are similar, select the student with the least evidence of problem-solving activity (monitoring, self-correcting, initiating solving). Also, ask the classroom teacher who is gaining the least from classroom instruction.
5. When a slot becomes vacant, select the next-lowest-achieving student within 2 days. Several students may need to be assessed in order to identify the next-lowest student. Include students who may have moved into the school since the last round of assessment. Re-administer the Observation Survey if a student’s assessment is more than 3 weeks old. (Source: Standards and Guidelines, 2012, p. 7)

## Section D: Which Children Should Be Considered for Selection?

According to Clay, “We must consider all children in the age group, and not exclude any child for social or psychological or physical problems (*unless the child has already been admitted to a special assistance programme with a trained professional*) [italics added] (2005b, p. 1).

Care must be taken however, to ensure that Reading Recovery is implemented as a prereferral program and that children are not routinely placed in special education settings for their reading instruction or labeled as learning disabled in reading and or writing without first receiving Reading Recovery instruction. In fact, many children who have been labeled as dyslexic are experiencing reading difficulties because of inadequate instruction and not because of biological reasons (Vellutino et al., 2004). It is reasonable to expect therefore that Reading Recovery, which is evidence-based, designed for children having great difficulty learning to read, and tailored to individual needs with the goal of accelerated growth, can help children catch up to their peers.

These guidelines apply for selection:

1. A child who has already been admitted to a special education program for reading instruction may or may not be selected for Reading Recovery (see above for the rationale). (Source: Principal’s Guide, 2012, p. 53)
2. A child retained in first grade receives an extra year of schooling, and that in itself serves as the intervention selected by the school. Children retained in first grade would only be served in Reading Recovery if all first-time first graders who need the intervention have been served. (Source: Principal’s Guide, 2012, p. 55)
3. Regardless of their native language, children who are the lowest achievers in the classroom are eligible for Reading Recovery in English if they are receiving literacy instruction in English and if they can understand the tasks on the Observation Survey. (Sources: Principal’s Guide, 2012, p. 54; Lose & Konstantellou, 2005, pp. 35–36; Clay, 2001, p. 279; Forbes, 2001, pp. 28–29. See also Clay, 2005b, p. 182 for more information.)
4. Students who were retained in kindergarten are eligible. (Source: Lose & Konstantellou, 2005, p. 37)
5. Children who were frequently absent from school in kindergarten are eligible; the attendance issues need to be addressed with the child’s caregivers so that attendance improves. ( Sources: Principal’s Guide, 2012, p. 5; Clay, 2005a, p. 24)

## References

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## Additional Resource

- Site coordinator's guide to the effective implementation of Reading Recovery*. (2006). Worthington, OH: Reading Recovery Council of North America.