

The goal of this manual is to provide you, the teacher, with tools to assess your students' progress in the Hebrew reading skills of decoding and fluency. Decoding is the ability to decipher Hebrew syllables, words, phrases, and sentences phonetically and accurately. Fluency is doing so at a smooth and regular pace.

Hebrew Reading Assessment contains six sections, each with an introduction that provides guidance on how to assess decoding accuracy and fluency. The assessments themselves begin with basic letter and vowel recognition and progress to the reading of whole words, phrases, and texts from the siddur and the Torah as well as modern Hebrew phrases.

This introduction explores in greater depth the reasons to assess. It also suggests ways in which to implement assessments, analyze data, and provide the feedback that will enable students to flourish as fluent readers of Hebrew.

Note: Whereas understanding can help students decode correctly—for example, knowing the word *shalom* can help them pronounce the letters and vowels correctly—it is not the central focus of this manual.

I. Why and When to Perform Assessments

Why should we assess?

Assessment is a tool that enables students and their teachers to understand clearly where students are in the learning process and what the next steps should be in their learning. It can help you plan lessons and check your own performance. Ideally, students should see assessment as a reason to celebrate their success and, with your help, as a tool for charting the learning that lies ahead.

Systematic and focused assessment of learning enables you to

- acquire clear evidence of each student's skill development;
- determine students' strengths and areas that need further support;
- determine areas and skills in which there is widespread misunderstanding among a large percentage of students in the class;
- write accurate progress reports that reflect the achievement of each student and the class as a whole;
- restructure and modify the learning process to promote success—for example, by placing students in learning groups or adjusting lesson plans based on students' needs;

- reengage students in the learning process and inspire them to want to learn;
- communicate results to parents, other teachers, and your education director.

Assessment allows you to set clear goals for your students, measure progress, plan lessons, and communicate results.

When should we assess?

The assessments in this manual are particularly useful at the end of a unit of study, at the end of a term, and at the end of one school year and the beginning of the next. Below are four suggestions for appropriate times at which to conduct assessments. It's best to combine ongoing daily assessment (item 1 below) with two or all three of the additional types of assessment (items 2, 3, and 4).

1. **At every class meeting.** Assessment should be an ongoing activity so that you and your students are always aware of how they are doing. In every class, you should ascertain which students are feeling successful with the material and which students need additional or different types of support. Ongoing assessments may take the form of informal assessments. For example, you might ask students to raise their hand if they have questions, write a question or a concern on a note card that they hand you after class, or tell you their concern privately. Ongoing assessments might also include your using a notation sheet (much like an attendance sheet), on which you discreetly note how well each student is able to utilize the skills you're teaching. When students see evidence of their progress only at greater intervals in the form of more formal assessments, they may feel intimidated. Ongoing, incremental assessment helps students understand that assessment is a tool that enables their learning to proceed smoothly and successfully.

The pages in this manual are best used for the following three types of assessment:

2. **At the end of each unit of study.** As a unit of study comes to a close, assessment can serve as a celebratory moment, a time for students to look back and see how far they've come. A unit of study may be one chapter in their Hebrew textbook, a group of chapters, or a discrete skill or set of skills, such as properly pronouncing special vowel endings.

The assessment pages in this manual can help you determine areas in which students need more practice. Once you've pinpointed those areas, you can incorporate them into the next unit of study. You can then reuse the assessment page to spot-check progress.

3. **At the end of a term.** As students prepare for school vacation or a new semester, assessment provides a benchmark point from which students should start learning in the new period.

4. **At the beginning and end of the year.** Beginning-of-year assessments enable you to chart a learning path for each student. End-of-year assessments enable your education director to place each student in the appropriate class or reading group for the following year, and they help the next teacher plan the first few weeks of the school year.

By comparing assessments at the beginning of a year with those from the end of the previous year, you can see which skills—for example, distinguishing look-alike letters, blending sounds, or sight reading—students have mastered and which skills students might need to refresh after the summer hiatus. It is also an excellent way to measure students’ retention over the summer and, based on the results, to plan summer assignments for the following year.

II. Different Types of Assessments and Their Purposes

There are two main types of assessments. **Formative assessments** are ongoing (see item 1 under “When should we assess?” above). They include observations, direct input in the form of students’ questions or concerns, and class activities. Formative assessments enable you and your students to refine the learning process and the learning environment in an ongoing way.

Summative assessments are often used at the end of a unit or a term of instruction to evaluate the effectiveness of the instructional program. The goal of a summative assessment is to judge the students’ ability to use the knowledge and skills they’ve been taught and measure progress from one period of time to the next.

Both types of assessment are important. This table summarizes the differences.

POINT OF COMPARISON	FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT	SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENT
Purpose	To improve instruction and provide students with feedback	To measure students’ competence
When administered	Throughout the course of a unit	At the end of a unit or term
How students use the results	To monitor their understanding*	To gauge student progress toward course- or grade-level goals
How teachers use the results	To check students’ understanding*	To help assign grades and determine readiness for promotion

Adapted from Douglas Fisher and Nancy Frey, *Checking for Understanding: Formative Assessment Techniques for Your Classroom* (Alexandria, Va.: ASCD, 2007).

* In this manual, *understanding* refers to accurate decoding with fluency.