

# Directions for Administering and Interpreting the Beginning Phonics Skills Test (BPST) John Shefelbine, California State University, Sacramento

## Purpose

The BPST is primarily an informal test of high-utility, spelling-sound relationships for reading single-syllable words. It is best used in conjunction with other kinds of assessment including graded passages, graded word lists, and measures of phoneme awareness (especially blending).

The test directly assesses consonant sounds and names, consonant digraphs, short vowels, and one-syllable words with five common vowel patterns: shore vowels, final e, long vowel digraphs (lvd), other vowel digraphs (ovd), and r-controlled (r-c). Two-syllable patterns are also examined. Students' responses can also be used to indirectly evaluate their knowledge of blending and the alphabetic nature of reading in English.

The BPST is most informative when students are reading below a second grade level on a graded word list such as the San Diego or on graded passages. At second and above, students tend to know most of the content. In such cases, it makes more sense to evaluate errors made while reading connected text and higher level graded word lists, paying particular attention to whether polysyllabic words are a significant problem.

## Preparation

You will need to prepare two sets of materials: (a) copies of the recording sheet on which you will write the students' responses and (b) three 5x7 cards from which the students will read the content of the test.

In preparing the 5x7 cards, type or neatly print the spellings or words in the same order that they occur on the recording sheet. For beginning readers, you may want to use a primary font or script that is familiar. Otherwise "1" may be confused with "i", and "a" and "g" will be completely unfamiliar. On one card type or write the consonants, consonant digraphs, and short vowels, leaving sufficient space between the letters and between the rows. On the second card, type or write the ten short vowel words in two rows of five followed by a row of final e words. The remaining words go on the last card.

## Administration

When giving the test, it is important that you place the recording sheet on a clipboard and hold it at an angle so students do not have to watch you write down their answers. Present the 5x7 cards, one at a time. Use a fourth blank card to help students look at just one row at a time and to keep them from getting discouraged by the words that follow. Record answers as directed on the recording sheet.

As students respond, give them neutral feedback by complimenting them on their effort rather than giving hints as to whether they were right or wrong. At no time should you give the students the answer since this entails teaching the test and limits its future usefulness.

1. **Consonant names and sounds.** Say to the student, "Tell me the sound of each of these letters." Record responses as directed. Note distorted sounds but still count them as correct. After covering all consonant sounds, you may wish to go back and ask the names of any consonants that were missed.
2. **Consonant digraphs.** These spellings have a sound that is different from the sounds of the individual letters. Possible key words are **she, that, thin, chin, when**. Note that **th** has two sounds, one voiced and one not. Count either as correct. For **wh**, accept either /hw/ or /w/ since the sound of **h** in **wh** is disappearing in regular speech.
3. **Short vowels.** These are the sounds you hear at the beginning of **at, ed, in, on, up**.
4. **Rows 1 and 2.** Short Vowel words. Follow the directions for recording errors.  
**Row 3.** Final e words. In these words, the e at the end is "silent" and the first vowel is long.

**Row 4.** Long vowel digraphs. Here a vowel pair makes the sound of a long vowel. (Do not teach as “2 vowels go walking, the first does the talking.”) Common spellings include ai (paid), ay (say), ee (feet), ea (eat), igh (light), oa (boat), ow (grow), ew (few).

**Row 5.** R-controlled. Here an r that follows a vowel “controls” the sound of that vowel. Common spellings are: ar (car), er (her), ir (bird), ur (turn), or (for).

**Row 6.** Other vowel digraphs. Here a vowel pair makes a sound that is not long. Common spellings are: oo (moon), ew (blew), oo (foot), ou (out), ow (cow), oy (boy), oi (oil), aw (law), au (author).

**Row 7.** Two-syllable words.

## Interpretation

In analyzing the results, keep in mind that there are at least three levels of phonics knowledge and instruction. The first involves reading simple short vowel words. The second covers the more complex spelling for single syllable words (final e, long vowel, digraphs, other vowel digraphs, and r-controlled). The last entails polysyllabic/morphemic patterns. It is more valuable to evaluate performance in terms of these three levels than to simply list phonic elements students seem to miss.

Blending and understanding the alphabetic principle are particularly important in reading short vowel words in the first level. Some students may know most consonants and short vowels but still cannot read many short vowel words. For some blending (combining sounds) may be a problem. Others may not even realize that vowels are important because they focus on first and last consonants. Still others may have difficulty blending because they distort the consonants (fuh, luh, tuh). On the other hand, a student who reads “map” as “mape” and “met” as “meet” may not know short vowels but has an understanding of the alphabetic nature of reading (a major milestone).

Note that the order of the content of the test does not represent an instructional sequence. In other words, you would not teach all the consonants, then the consonant digraphs, then the short vowels. Instead, teach a few consonants and a short vowel or two so students can build and read short vowel words early on. Keep adding consonants, short vowels, and consonant digraphs till all have been covered. Then teach the final e pattern. Then cover the vowel digraphs and r-controlled in any order but note that long vowel digraphs and r-controlled patterns are more common than other vowel digraphs.

There are no absolute criteria for “passing” each section. Scores of 4 and 5 are better than 0 to 2. Expecting each student to read each pattern perfectly is unrealistic and unnecessary. Note also that words which are read at sight are not good indicators of phonics knowledge because students don’t need to use phonics to read them. The results of this assessment need to be compared with performance on other measures including reading passages that have not been memorized and graded word lists. Furthermore, since a sample of 5 is not very large, you may want to give students other examples that follow a particular pattern.

m s f l r n h v w z

b c d g p t j k y x q

sh th ch wh

i o a u e

map rip met rub mop

lip lot zap fell nut

fine rope rake cute kite

soap leak pain feed ray

fur sort sir tar serve

coin moon round lawn foot

silent ladder napkin locate cactus

**BPST Beginning Phonic Skills Test** Recording Sheet (For kindergarten and beginning first grade)  
John Shefelbine, California State University, Sacramento

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_ Grade \_\_\_\_\_ Evaluator \_\_\_\_\_

1. **Consonant sounds and names:** Record sounds on top of each letter and names under each letter; do all sounds before doing letter names; consider skipping names if 10 or more sounds are correct; mark correct answers with ✓, incorrect answers with actual response, and no response with ?; also note which sounds are distorted, e.g, “fuh”.

m s f l r n h v w z (continuous sounds)

\_\_\_\_\_/21 b c d g p t j k y x q (stop sounds)

2. **Consonant digraph sounds:** Follow directions for sounds in #1. (th can have two sounds: voiced (that) (v) and unvoiced (thin) (uv))

\_\_\_\_\_/4 sh th ch wh

3. **Short vowel sounds:** “Tell me the sounds of these letters.” If the students give a long vowel sound, prompt them by asking if they know another sound. Do not specifically ask for short vowel sounds. Mark on top with ~ for short, ¯ for long. Record incorrect answers with actual response or ? if no response. You are really most interested in the short vowel sounds so there is no need to prompt students if they do not give the long sounds.

\_\_\_\_\_/short i o a u e

4. **Reading words with short, final e and long and other vowel digraphs, and r controlled vowel patterns:** Record incorrect answers with actual response or ? if no response.

_____/10 short	map	rip	met	rub	mop	lip	lot	zap	fell	nut
_____/5 final e	fine	rope	rake	cute	kite	(stop here if 0 to 3 words were correct in the first 3 rows)				
_____/5 lvd	soap	leak	pain	feed	ray					
_____/5 r-c	fur	sort	sir	tar	serve					
_____/5 ovd	coin	moon	round	lawn	foot					
_____/5 syl	silent	ladder	napkin	locate	cactus					

5. **Phonemic Awareness:** Test of oral blending. (optional) (Do not do this task if it is clear that the student can blend sounds in part 4 above.) Introduction to the task. Say to the student. “I’m going to say something slowly. See if you can guess what I’m saying.” (model correct responses as necessary) (i) cow (pause) boy, -what is it? (ii) pic (pause) ture, what is it?, (iii) s (pause) un,--what is it? (iv) n (pause) o--what is it? (Be careful not to distort sounds by adding an “uh” at the end.) (Note that of the five levels, the last six are more difficult and most relevant for beginning reading because they entail blending individual phonemes.)

- |                            |               |       |
|----------------------------|---------------|-------|
| (a) pan (pause) cake       | --what is it? | _____ |
| (b) pic (pause) ture       | --what is it? | _____ |
| (c) s (pause) ack          | --what is it? | _____ |
| (d) f (pause) an           | --what is it? | _____ |
| (e) m (pause) e            | --what is it? | _____ |
| (f) s (pause) ea           | --what is it? | _____ |
| (g) s (pause) oa (pause) p | --what is it? | _____ |
| (h) l (pause) a (pause) ke | --what is it? | _____ |
| (i) s (pause) a (pause) d  | --what is it? | _____ |
| (j) m (pause) o (pause) m  | --what is it? | _____ |

\_\_\_\_\_/10 total oral blending

\_\_\_\_\_/6 individual phoneme blending

Directions for Administering and Interpreting the Basic Phonics Skills Test (BPST-II)  
John Shefelbine, California State University, Sacramento

**Purpose.** The BPST-II is an informal test of (a) high-utility, spelling-sound relationships for reading single-syllable words and (b) syllabic and morphemic strategies for reading polysyllabic words. It is best used in conjunction with other kinds of assessment including graded passages, graded word lists, and measures of phonemic awareness (especially blending).

The test directly assesses consonant sounds and names, consonant digraphs, short vowels, and one-syllable words with six common vowel patterns: short vowels, short vowels with consonant blends, final e, long vowel digraphs (lvd), r-controlled (r-c), and other vowel digraphs (ovd). Inflectional endings and different kinds of polysyllabic patterns are also examined. Students' responses can also be used to indirectly evaluate their knowledge of blending and the alphabetic nature of reading in English.

The BPST-II is most informative when students are reading below a fourth grade level on a graded word list such as the San Diego or on graded passages. At fourth grade reading levels and above, students tend to know most of the content. In such cases, it makes more sense to evaluate errors made while reading connected text and higher level graded words lists, paying particular attention to whether students are missing polysyllabic words because they have never heard of them.

**Preparation.** You will need to prepare two sets of materials: (a) multiple copies of the recording sheet on which you will write the students' responses and (b) four 5x7 cards from which the students will read the content of the test. In preparing the 5x7 cards, arrange the spellings or words in the same order that they occur on the recording sheet. The contents of the four cards should be: (card 1) consonants, consonant digraphs, short vowels, (card 2) words with short vowels, blends, and final e, (card 3) vowel digraphs, r-controlled and inflectional endings, and (card 4) polysyllabic words.

**Administration.** When giving the test, it is important that you place the recording sheet on a clipboard and hold it at an angle so students do not have to watch you write down their answers. Present the 5x7 cards, one at a time. Use a fifth blank card to help students look at just one row at a time and to keep them from getting discouraged by the words that follow. Record answers as directed on the recording sheet.

As students respond, give them neutral feedback by complimenting them on their effort rather than giving hints as to whether they were right or wrong. At no time should you give the students the answer since this entails teaching the test and limits its future usefulness.

**Part 1. Consonant names and sounds.** Say to the student, "Tell me the sound of each of these letters." Record responses as directed. Note distorted sounds but still count them as correct. After covering all the consonant sounds, you may wish to go back and ask the names of any consonants that were missed.

**Part 2. Consonant digraphs.** These spellings have a sound that is different from the sounds of the individual letters. Possible key words are **she, that, thin, chin, when**. Note that **th** has two sounds, one voiced and one not. Count either as correct. For **wh**, accept either /hw/ or /w/ since the sound **h** in **wh** is disappearing in some regional speech.

**Part 3. Short vowels.** These are the sounds you hear at the beginning of at, ed, in, on, up.

**Part 4. Reading words.**

Rows a.1 and a.2. **Short vowel words.** Follow the directions for recording errors.

Row b. **Consonant blends in short vowel words.** These are harder than the previous two rows.

Row c. **Final e words.** In these words, the e at the end is "silent" and the first vowel is long.

Row d. **Long vowel digraphs.** Here a vowel pair makes the sound of a long vowel. (But do not teach as "2 vowels go walking, the first does the talking.") Common spellings include ai (paid), ay (say), ee (feet), ea (eat), igh (light), oa (boat), ow (grow), ew (few).

Row e. **R-controlled.** Here an r that follows a vowel "controls" the sound of that vowel. Common spellings are: ar (car), er (her), ir (bird), ur (turn), or (for).

Row f. **Other vowel digraphs.** Here a vowel pair makes a sound that is not long. Common spellings are: oo (moon), ew (blew), oo (foot), ou (out), ow (cow), oy (boy), oi (oil), aw (law), au (author).

Row g. **Inflectional endings.** These endings are part of verb tenses (-ing, -ed, -s, -es) and also indicate plurality (girls) and possession (the girl's bike), "Filled" and "licked" are one syllable words; the rest have two syllables.

Row h. **Two-syllable words.** Polysyllabic words are harder for many students because conventional "left-to-right" sounding out strategies do not work. Instead students have to read by syllable units – a strategy that takes time to learn and requires a lot of practice.

Row i. **Polysyllabic words with affixes.** Affixes are prefixes and suffixes. They are morphemic units that carry meaning and are common words with a Latin origin. Some affixes such as "inter" are made up of more than one syllable.

Row j. **Three- and four-syllable words.** Three- and four-syllable words are more difficult to read than two syllable words. It is important to note that syllabication strategies lead to an approximate pronunciation of a words that the reader then matches with a familiar pronunciation. (Students may have a difficult time reading words they have never heard of before because they cannot make a "match.") In these instances, vocabulary development is needed and decoding strategies may be fine.

**Interpretation.** In analyzing the results, keep in mind that there are at least three levels of phonics knowledge and instruction. The first (Level I) involves reading simple short vowel words. The second (Level II) covers the more complex spellings for single syllable words (final e, long vowel digraphs, r-controlled patterns, and other vowel digraphs). The last (Level III) entails polysyllabic/morphemic patterns. It is more valuable to evaluate performance in terms of these three levels than to simple list phonic elements students seem to miss.

Blending and understanding the alphabetic principle are particularly important in reading short vowel words in Level I. Some students may know most consonants and short vowels but still cannot read many short vowel words. For some blending (combining sounds) may be a problem. Others may not even realize that vowels are important because they focus on first and last consonants. Still others may have difficulty blending because they distort the consonants (fuh, luh, tuh). On the other hand, a student who reads "map" as "mape" and "met" as "meet" may not know short vowels but has an understanding of the alphabetic nature of reading (a major milestone).

Note that the order of the content of the test does not represent an instructional sequence. In other words, you would not teach all the consonants, then the consonant digraphs, then the short vowels. Instead, teach a few consonants and a short vowel or two so students can build and read short vowel words early on. Keep adding consonants, short vowels, and consonant digraphs and r-controlled in any order but note that long vowel digraphs and r-controlled patterns are more common than other vowel digraphs.

Since polysyllabic words require different strategies, it is helpful to evaluate these words separately. Note the previous note about how vocabulary knowledge affects students ability to pronounce words correctly. Some upper grade students (grades three and above) may need instruction in both complex spellings (Level II) and polysyllabic strategies (Level III).

There are no absolute criteria for "passing" each section. Possible guidelines are listed at the bottom of the recording sheet. Expecting each student to read each pattern perfectly is unrealistic and unnecessary. Note also that words which are read at sight are not good indicators of phonics knowledge because students don't need to use phonics to read them. The results of this assessment need to be compared with performance on other measures including reading passages that have not been memorized and graded word lists. Furthermore, since a sample of 5 is not very large, you may want to give students other examples that follow a particular pattern.

m s f l r n h v w z

b c d g p t j k y x q

sh th ch wh

i o a u e

map rip met rub mop

lip lot zap fell nut

left must frog flip snack

fine rope rake cute kite

soap leak pain feed ray

burn fork dirt part serve

coin soon round lawn foot

filled letting rested passes licked

silent ladder napkin locate cactus

distrust useful unfair hardship nonsense

volcano potato electric respectfully transportation

**BPST-II - - Basic Phonic Skills Test** Recording Sheet (For students reading below a 4<sup>th</sup> grade level)  
John Shefelbine, California State University, Sacramento, 2002

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_ Grade \_\_\_\_\_ Evaluator \_\_\_\_\_

1. **Consonant sounds and name:** Record sounds on top of each letter and names under each letter; do all sounds before doing letter names; consider skipping names if 10 or more sounds are correct; mark correct answers with **II**, incorrect answers with actual response, and no response with NR; also note which sounds are distorted, e.g. "fuh".

m	s	f	l	r	n	h	v	w	z	(continuous sounds)	
b	c	d	g	p	t	j	k	y	x	q	(stop sounds) _____/21

2. **Consonant digraph sounds:** Follow directions for sounds in #1. (th can have two sounds; voiced (that) (v) and unvoiced (thin) (uv)

sh          th          ch          wh          \_\_\_\_\_/4

3. **Short vowel sounds:** "Tell me the sounds of these letters." If the students give a long vowel sound, prompt them by asking if they know another sound. Do not specifically ask for short vowel sounds. Mark on top with for short, - - long. Record incorrect answers with actual response or NR if no response. You are really most interested in the short vowel sounds so there is not need to prompt students if they do not give the long sounds.

i          o          a          u          e          \_\_\_\_\_/5 short

4. **Reading words with short, final e, long and other vowel digraphs, and r-controlled vowel patterns, blends, inflections and polysyllabic patterns:** Record incorrect answers with actual response or NR.

- |    |          |      |         |      |          |   |                |     |      |                |                     |
|----|----------|------|---------|------|----------|---|----------------|-----|------|----------------|---------------------|
| a) | map      | rip  | met     | rub  | mop      | lip   | lot            | zap | fell | nut            | _____/10 short      |
| b) | left     | must | frog    | flip | snack    | (Note: consider stopping after only 0-2 total correct on <u>two</u> consecutive rows) |                |     |      | _____/5 blends |                     |
| c) | fine     | rope | rake    | cute | kite     |   |                |     |      |                | _____/5 final e     |
| d) | soap     | leak | pain    | feed | ray      |   |                |     |      |                | _____/5 lvd         |
| e) | burn     | fork | dirt    | part | serve    |   |                |     |      |                | _____/5 r-c         |
| f) | coin     | soon | round   | lawn | foot     |   |                |     |      |                | _____/5 ovd         |
| g) | filled   |      | letting |      | rested   | passes  | licked         |     |      |                | _____/5 inflections |
| h) | silent   |      | ladder  |      | napkin   | polite  | cactus         |     |      |                | _____/5 2-syl       |
| i) | distrust |      | useful  |      | unfair   | hardship  | nonsense       |     |      |                | _____/5 affixes     |
| j) | volcano  |      | potato  |      | electric | respectfully  | transportation |     |      |                | _____/5 3-4 syl     |

**Summary:**

- (1&2) consonants: good (19-25)/fair (12-18)/poor (0-11)
- (3) short vowels: good (4-5)/fair (2-3)/poor (0-1)
- (a) short vowel words: good (8-10)/fair (4-7)/poor (0-3)
- (b) consonant blends; good (4-5)/fair (2-3)/poor (0-1) (c) final-o: good (4-5)/fair (2-3)/poor (0-1)
- (d, e, f) vowel digraphs and r-controlled: good (12-15)/fair (7-11)/poor (0-6)
- (g) inflections: good (4-5)/fair (2-3)/poor (0-1)
- (h, i, j) polysyllabic words: good (12-15)/fair (7-11)/poor (0-6)

Alphabetic Principle: yes/partial/no **Overall single-syllable phonics:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Overall polysyllabic phonics:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Instructional recommendations:** \_\_\_\_\_