

SESOTHO-SETSWANA READING BENCHMARKS

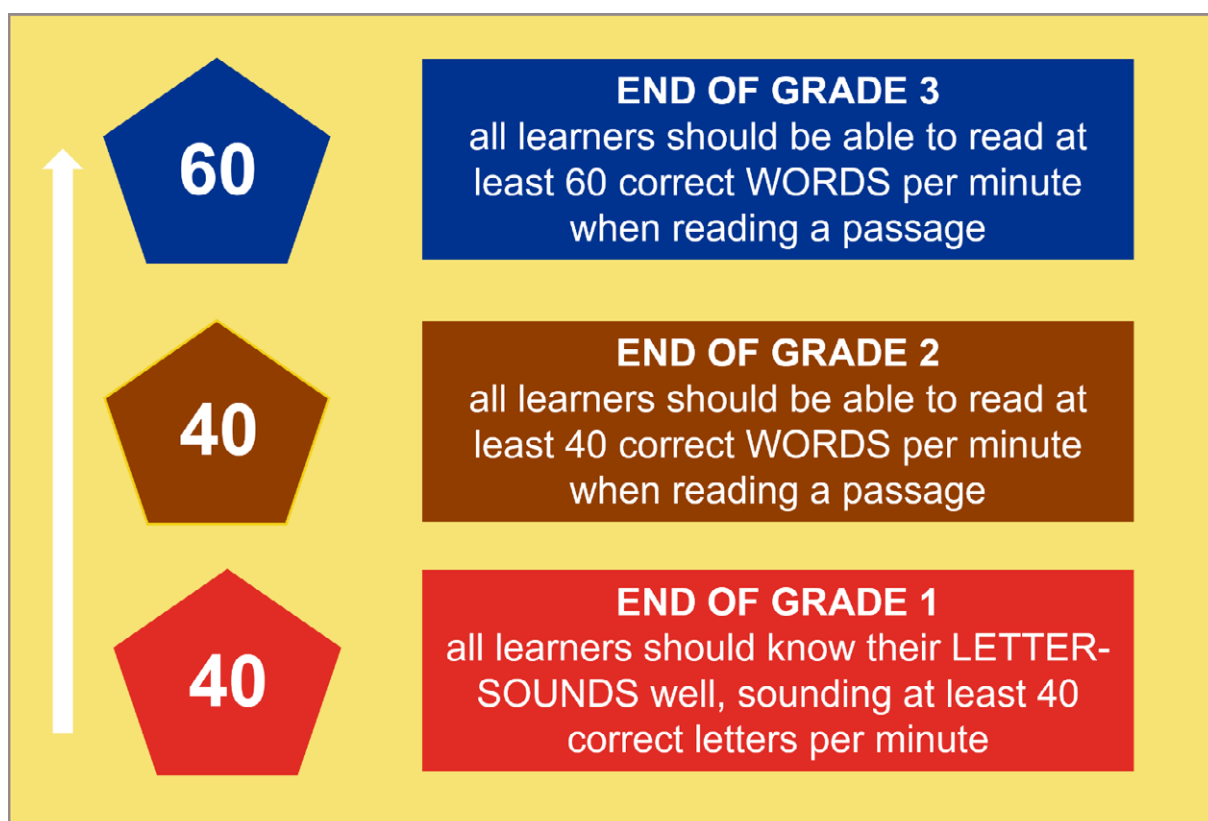
LEARNING BRIEF

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By the end of the Foundation Phase learners are expected to ‘read fluently and with understanding.’ To monitor if children are on track to meet that goal in the Foundation Phase, specific numerical measures of proficiency in specific reading skills are needed. **These measures of proficiency are referred to as reading benchmarks.**

Until recently reading benchmarks did not exist for South African languages including the Sesotho-Setswana languages. While the African Home language Curriculum Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS) curriculum for the Foundation Phase specifies levels of accuracy and fluency for reading and comprehension, they did not provide the metrics for measuring this according to specific skills. Recent work led by the Department of Basic Education (DBE) in collaboration with African language specialists, quantitative analysis, academics and reading practitioners, funders and international benchmarking specialists has bridged this gap, producing reading benchmarks for the Foundation Phase.

How fluently must Setswana Home Language learners in the Foundation Phase read to be able to “comprehend”?



- ◆ By the end of Grade 1, *all* learners should be able to correctly sound 40 letters per minute.
 - ◆ This is the same benchmark as for the Nguni languages. While pronunciation may be different the letters across languages are the same supporting the use of one benchmark.
 - ◆ Letters are a good early predictor of oral reading fluency (ORF) later in Foundation phase. Improvements in letter-sound speed stagnate at 40 letters.
 - ◆ Once learners have achieved this level of letter-sound knowledge, phonics instruction should focus on blending of sounds and complex consonants while decoding instruction should focus on helping learners apply word attack strategies.
- ◆ By the end of Grade 2, *all* learners should be able to correctly read at least 40 words per minute.
 - ◆ Below this threshold, accuracy is poor and we find little evidence that learners can understand what they have read. Quite simply they are making too mistakes and reading too slowly to comprehend what they are reading. For learners not meeting the Grade 2 benchmark, instruction should focus on improving decoding skills.
 - ◆ Once learners have reached this level, they would benefit from instruction that focuses on developing fluency and exposes learners to a wider range of texts.
- ◆ By the end of Grade 3, *all* learners should be able to correctly read at least 40 words per minute.
 - ◆ At this level of fluency reading comprehension becomes increasingly possible when learners read on their own. Once learners reach this level of fluency, it appears that poor comprehension skills become the limiting factor to further literacy development.
 - ◆ Once learners have reached this level of fluency, instruction should shift to strengthening comprehension skills through continued development of vocabulary, language skills and encouraging learners to engage critically with text.

How can we use the reading benchmarks?

NATIONAL AND PROVINCIAL ADMINISTRATION	SCHOOL	CLASSROOM
Establishes definition of reading proficiency	Standards and targets that school leaders can aim towards	Standard against which to measure learner skills
Clearly communicates standards and targets	Standardises assessment practices across and within schools	Identify early on learners at risk of not being able to read
Monitor progress	Identify the extent of remedial support required	Adapt instructional focus to meet learners' needs

How did we create these benchmarks?

The Sesotho-Setswana early grade reading benchmarks are based on reading assessments of more than 24 000 unique learners across more than 400 no-fee schools in the North West, Free State and Limpopo provinces

