

Developmental Reading Continuum (Phase 1)

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the provincial developmental reading continuum?

Manitoba's Developmental Reading Continuum (Phase 1) is a formative assessment tool based on teacher observations—that is, the continuum describes what teachers see and hear students doing. The teacher and student can use the reading continuum to discuss and reflect on the student's knowledge, skills, strategies, and attitudes in making meaning before, during, and after reading texts.

The descriptors for the continuum have been developed from targeted clusters of learning outcomes from Manitoba's English language arts (ELA) curriculum as observable behaviours, which reflect the characteristics of proficient readers at milestone stages of reading development: emergent, beginning, developing, transitional, expanding, and bridging. Rather than providing a checklist of behaviours, a scope and sequence of content skills, a trajectory of a step-by-step process, or a rubric of performance levels, the developmental continuum describes the observable developmental characteristics of what proficient readers feel, know, and demonstrate throughout their learning as readers.



The team of educators who developed the reading continuum included classroom teachers, Reading Recovery™ teachers, resource teachers, university professors, reading clinicians, and ELA consultants in Manitoba's English, French Immersion, and Français Programs.

The continuum was piloted in various classrooms throughout Manitoba during the 2005-2006 school year. Use of the continuum is not mandatory, but rather, is intended to support assessment for/as/of learning.

What is the purpose of a provincial continuum?

A provincial continuum serves various purposes in the classroom, the school, and the larger learning community:

- The developmental reading continuum is a resource that supports teachers in planning for instruction, monitoring and assessing learning, and reporting student progress to parents.*
- In the multilevel classroom, continua are an effective and efficient means of managing assessment across more than two grades.
- The provincial reading continuum supports the Grade 3 Reading Assessment process by focusing on reading competencies: reflection, oral reading skills and strategies, and reading response (as well as other comprehension strategies in becoming a proficient reader). Beginning in Kindergarten, students can be tracked on their development of strategies that will be reported early in Grade 3. Monitoring of students beyond the Grade 3 Reading Assessment is an ongoing process to assist in appropriate planning and differentiation.
- When used throughout the years in a school, in a school division, and in the province, continua may increase the consistency of student performance of provincial learning outcomes across grades.

* The term "parents" refers to both parents and guardians and is used with the recognition that in some cases only one parent may be involved in a child's education.



How does the reading continuum help students achieve learning outcomes?

Students are able to achieve learning outcomes when they have clear targets, or realistic learning goals, to guide their learning. Because the continuum descriptors are developmental, they support students as they set attainable goals toward end-of-year outcomes. Subsequently, when teachers use the continuum descriptors to plan with the end in mind, strategic instruction becomes focused on the needs of the learner, and the targeted descriptor(s) and scaffolding, or differentiated instruction, ensure the success of most learners.

Since the continuum descriptors have been developed from specific learning outcomes, students, parents, and teachers may determine where a student is in relation to grade-level learning outcomes by regarding the outcomes as

benchmarks (see Appendix D: A Continuum for English Language Arts Outcomes, Kindergarten to Senior 1 [Grade 9] in *Kindergarten to Grade 4 English Language Arts: Manitoba Curriculum Framework of Outcomes and Grade 3 Standards* [Manitoba Education and Training, 1996]). What is important for student success and achievement, however, is to focus on the developmentally appropriate descriptors to inform instruction and assessment. When students are successful in achieving their learning goals, their achievement of grade-level learning outcomes is significantly improved.

How might I use the developmental reading continuum?

Teachers can use the developmental reading continuum to

- monitor development/growth in reading
- inform and plan instruction
- consider the needs of diverse learners because continua show learning over time
 - learners with adapted programming can show progress when they have more time to develop skills and strategies
 - young learners who are new to English can be expected to progress through the three stages of learning an additional language before being emergent readers on the developmental reading continuum; however, depending upon their reading development in their first language, English as an additional language (EAL) learners may progress at an accelerated pace as their command of English improves (see the Department's EAL website: <www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/cur/diversity/eal/>)
- describe what students know and are able to do and what they will learn next
- discuss with parents what their child knows and is able to do and what she or he will learn next in terms that parents understand
- discuss literacy and assessment for learning with colleagues, including support staff, specialists, and content area teachers
- report to parents
- "publicize" the reading process—for example, by creating a Continuum Wall in the school foyer, staff room, classrooms, or resource teacher's room to show the public what reading looks and sounds like in light of the ELA curriculum

How do I place my students on the continuum?

Teachers often like to think about the continuum milestones when guiding goal setting at the outset of the school year; however, they would not actually plot students on the continuum until they had gathered sufficient information to serve as the evidence of the descriptor(s) at the end of a term and/or school year. That is, teachers observe students in a variety of literacy-rich contexts over time to determine the consistent observable behaviours represented on the continuum. It is normal that most learners will demonstrate evidence of knowledge and understandings across three developmental stages. Also, not all learners will demonstrate all behaviours. Some descriptors will not be reflective of all learners.

What texts do I use for assessing readers using the continuum?

Students generally choose the texts that they want and need to read for a variety of purposes in the classroom, including sharing with the teacher at a reading conference. It is important that students have a wide variety of quality texts to choose from. There may be occasions, however, when a teacher wants to invite a reader to read a specific continuous text to focus observation on a particular skill or strategy. Observing the pattern of the reader's choices and the strategies that the reader uses to make meaning of a variety of texts for different purposes provides important assessment information for planning instruction.

Suggestions and links for quality texts for instruction/assessment can be found online:

- Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth
 - ELA website: <www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/cur/ela/>
 - EAL website: <www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/cur/diversity/eal/>
- Western and Northern Canadian Protocol (WNCP) website: <www.wncp.ca/>



How do I get enough time to assess individual students?

Using continua is time consuming if educators add them to the planning, monitoring, and assessing that already take place in a classroom. However, when continua are integrated as tools for monitoring development, planning instruction, and reporting student progress to parents, teachers will find that their current assessment practices may be redundant and that they can drop some less effective assessment strategies. Making meaning is a socially constructed process; therefore, much observable behaviour takes place during regular classroom instruction. Students, too, need to learn to use continua to monitor their own learning and to share some of the responsibility that has traditionally been the teacher's.

How might developmental continua be used for reporting?

Developmental continua may be used throughout the reporting process to

- clarify the teacher's description of a particular reading behaviour when writing a report card
- relieve teachers of rewriting continuum descriptors on a report card by serving as a component of a report card
- support the learner's conversation around a portfolio at a student-led conference
- engage parents in the goal-setting process and in creating an action plan at a student-led conference



Will parents understand the developmental reading continuum?

Parents are familiar with developmental growth. In the past, educational researchers listened to parents of pre-schoolers and noted the developmental nature of learning articulated in conversations with parents about their children's learning to walk and talk. They asked why this developmental

conversation would not also apply to learning to view and represent, listen and speak, and read and write. They found that once parents have been shown the difference between developmental continua and traditional assessment, they appreciate knowing exactly what their child can do and what the next step(s) in their child's learning will be. Parents often comment, "Now I know how I can help my child; now I understand what to expect next."

How might teachers become familiar with using the continuum?

Revisiting the suggestions for instruction and assessment (columns two and three) in the ELA Foundation for Implementation documents is valuable in

- clarifying the descriptors
- planning for strategic instruction
- providing ideas for developing literacy-rich classrooms
- helping to ensure consistency from grade to grade and/or from teacher to teacher

When schools set out to implement continua for assessment for learning, educators need to understand that it may take three to five years to develop a common understanding of the descriptors. Some educators see this process as a learning opportunity for assessment and literacy conversations.

Can schools use developmental continua for evaluating programming?

Developmental continua may be used in a variety of ways for evidence-based decision making in evaluating literacy planning:

- Create student profiles to accompany learners from year to year and to assist with continuity and consistency of strategic instruction from teacher to teacher.
- Make a school profile to analyze/evaluate the implementation of the ELA curriculum, plan for professional learning for staff, select appropriate learning resources, and/or develop/revise literacy plans.
- Track students over time to determine whether the gap between proficient and struggling readers is narrowing or widening, and take appropriate action to plan to close the gap.



Visit the Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth website:

<www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/cur/ela/>