PAT Early Literacy

Assessment framework

Australian Council *for* Educational Research

Contents

October 2026

Figures and tables **II**

Introduction **1**

Phonics and Related Skills 1

Listening Comprehension 1

Reading Comprehension 1

Rationale for PAT Early Literacy **2**

Progressive Achievement approach 2

Progressive Achievement in Early Literacy 3

PAT Early Literacy and curricula 3

Construct **4**

Definition 4

Structure 4

Assessment design **19**

Measuring the construct 19

Delivery 23

Reporting **27**

Phonics and Related Skills 27

Listening Comprehension and Reading Comprehension 27

PAT scale score 27

Achievement bands 28

Appendices **23**

Appendix 1

Literature review: Early literacy development 30

Appendix 2

Trial design and assessment validity 33

Appendix 3

Test delivery features and item response format examples 34

Phonics and Related Skills 34

Listening Comprehension 36

Reading Comprehension 38

References **40**

Copyright © 2026 Australian Council for Educational Research Ltd

Figures and tables

Table 1 Phonics and Related Skills strand processes classified by strand 9

Table 2 Listening Comprehension strand processes classified by strand 12

Table 3 Reading Comprehension strand processes classified by strand 14

Table 4 Percentages of PAT Early Literacy Phonics and Related Skills items by strand for each test 19

Table 5 Percentages of PAT Early Literacy Listening Comprehension items by strand and text type for each test pathway 20

Table 6 Percentages of PAT Early Literacy Reading Comprehension items by strand and text type for each test pathway 21

Table 7 Mean difficulty and standard deviation of PAT Early Literacy Listening Comprehension testlets 22

Table 8 Mean difficulty and standard deviation of PAT Early Literacy Reading Comprehension testlets 22

Table 9 Summary of test delivery details for PAT Early Literacy Phonics and Related Skills 24

Figure 1 PAT Early Literacy Listening Comprehension test design with two entry levels 25

Figure 2 PAT Early Literacy Reading Comprehension test design with two entry levels 26

Copyright © 2026 Australian Council for Educational Research Ltd

Introduction

The ACER Progressive Achievement Tests in Early Literacy, commonly known as PAT Early Literacy, are a set of assessments that allow teachers to accurately and efficiently measure students' level of proficiency in early literacy, to diagnose gaps, strengths and weaknesses in student learning, and monitor student progress over time. The assessments have been developed especially, but not exclusively, for use in Australian schools. The PAT Early Literacy construct is appropriate for broad international use.

PAT Early Literacy assesses three domains via three separate but related assessments: Phonics and Related Skills, Listening Comprehension and Reading Comprehension. Each domain is sub-divided into strands and strand processes, where relevant, to ensure that the breadth of students' proficiency is being covered. For Phonics and Related Skills, students are assessed in all skill components required for reading: phonological awareness, phonemic awareness and phonics. For Listening Comprehension, a range of comprehension skills are assessed across different text types to reflect different modes of aural comprehension. For Reading Comprehension, the focus is on early word, sentence and narrative comprehension. PAT Early Literacy Reading Comprehension aligns with, and provides a foundation for, later PAT Reading assessments. The PAT Reading Assessment Framework describes the reading comprehension skills assessed across the PAT Reading suite.

The assessments are designed to be engaging and to encourage students to interact with the content to the best of their ability. Each assessment uses a narrative, character-guided format. Students work their way through narrated story content with encouragement prompts from a digital character, with practice and test items presented in between. The simplicity of the item types is intended to encourage greater independent engagement by reducing cognitive load and increasing student confidence and momentum. Embedding practice items within the assessment experience ensures they are modelled at the point students need them. More information about the delivery and reporting of the online assessments can be found within ACER's online School Support Centre.

Phonics and Related Skills

- Comprises 3 linear (non-adaptive) test forms.
- Items assess three strands – phonemic awareness, phonological awareness and phonics – and several related strand processes.
- Student results are reported at the item level, without an achievement scale, due to the constrained nature of the assessed skills.

Listening Comprehension

- An adaptive assessment comprising two entry levels of differing difficulty and one in-test branching point (one level up or down in difficulty).
- Items assess three strands – recall, interpret, and reflect – and several strand processes.
- Student results are reported at the item level and against a described PAT Listening achievement scale.

Reading Comprehension

- An adaptive assessment comprising two entry levels of differing difficulty and one in-test branching point (three levels: up, down, or similar in difficulty).
- Items assess four strands – retrieve, interpret explicit, interpret implied, and reflect – and several strand processes.
- Student results are reported at the item level and against the described PAT Reading achievement scale, enabling comparison with results from PAT Reading 5th Edition and PAT Reading Adaptive assessments.

For additional information about PAT Reading, please also refer to PAT Reading Assessment Framework.

Copyright © 2026 Australian Council for Educational Research Ltd

Rationale for PAT Early Literacy

Early literacy development is a critical foundation for children's future learning, academic success, wellbeing, and participation in society, making it essential that these skills are both supported and systematically monitored from the earliest years. Because reading and related language skills underpin access to learning across the curriculum, ongoing evaluation of student performance in these areas is necessary to identify difficulties early, guide effective instruction and intervention, and ensure that all children are given the opportunity to achieve positive long-term educational and life outcomes (Ferrer et al., 2015; Snow, 2020).

Progressive Achievement approach

The Progressive Achievement approach provides a framework for integrating student assessment, resources that support teaching practice, and professional learning. PAT assessments allow teachers to collect evidence of student learning; to identify where students are in their learning at a given point in time; to monitor growth over time; and to reflect on student attainment. They provide reliable measures that enable a variety of interpretations about attainment and progress, such as:

- what students attaining specific levels of progression are likely to know, understand and be able to do
- how much students have improved over time and what skills, knowledge and abilities they have been able to develop
- how a student's level of achievement compares with other students.

The value of an integrated approach to assessment and student learning has become widely acknowledged. There is now a wide variety of formative, diagnostic assessment tools used in Australian classrooms. Summative assessments, such as NAPLAN, are also often used to inform teaching and learning. As Dylan Wiliam (2011, p. 43) makes clear, 'any assessment is formative to the extent that evidence about student achievement is elicited, interpreted, and used by teachers, learners, or their peers to make decisions about the next steps in instruction'. In his Report, David Gonski (2018, Finding 7) refers to the compelling evidence that 'tailored teaching based on ongoing formative assessment and feedback is the key to enabling students to progress to higher levels of achievement.'

ACER's PAT tests provide indicators of student achievement via scale scores and the accompanying achievement band descriptions. Upon completing their assessments, students are allocated a scale score that represents their ability in reading comprehension. The PAT scale is divided into achievement bands from which the skills and understanding represented at each level are described. The achievement bands provide valuable evidence-based information about the concepts and skills students have achieved, are consolidating and are working towards. As the Gonski report recommends, reporting on assessment should have an emphasis on achievement and growth and that growth should be measured against learning progressions (Gonski, 2018, Recommendation 4). Masters (2013) also expresses the idea that learning should be assessed by measuring growth over time and against empirically derived learning progressions.

The only exception to a scaled assessment in the PAT suite is PAT Early Literacy Phonics and Related Skills. The skills required are constrained; they are mastered within a narrow developmental window and quickly show ceiling effects, meaning they do not provide stable or meaningful differentiation across learners when scaled (Paris, 2005). For these skills, progression is better represented in terms of mastery of specific knowledge or behaviours, rather than scale scores, as their limited range and rapid acquisition make fine-grained comparisons less meaningful over time.

PAT reports provide higher level achievement and progress measures in addition to detailed item-level information about students' performance. Taken together along with the achievement band descriptions, teachers can structure learning specifically to students' needs, rather than where they are expected to be.

Copyright © 2026 Australian Council for Educational Research Ltd

Progressive Achievement in Early Literacy

PAT Early Literacy is designed to target the key skills and concepts that underpin growth, and to assist teachers in understanding the progression of early literacy skills through the PAT reports and teaching resources.

Higher student growth in reading and listening comprehension is achieved when teachers have information about their students' progress. Using assessment to inform teaching ensures that instruction is timely and appropriate to students' needs (Conley & Wise, 2011, p. 97; Förster et al., 2018, p. 99). PAT Early Literacy Listening Comprehension and Reading Comprehension assist in informing teaching by categorising comprehension into strands – the skill components that make up reading and listening comprehension. Student performance can be analysed by strand, so that teachers can identify learning needs and monitor progress at this more formative level. PAT Early Literacy Listening Comprehension and Reading Comprehension also assess students on a range of text types, offering another avenue for the analysis of student performance. Understanding student growth is also important when learning to read, although the way to measure and support that growth looks different. For PAT Early Literacy Phonics and Related Skills, progress is reported via a mastery report, guiding teachers to focus on the components of decoding that most need support for individual students.

Reading comprehension is a highly complex area of achievement, one that needs to be understood as the coordination of a number of integrated processes (Conley & Wise, 2011, p. 93; Kendeou et al., 2016, p. 63; O'Reilly et al., 2019). These integrated processes have been incorporated into the design of the PAT Early Literacy Listening and Reading assessments through the strand processes. These processes provide a finer grained understanding of student performance and can more specifically inform areas for targeted teaching.

Resources within the PAT Teaching Resources Centre are organised by strand process within each of the strands, at the relevant achievement band level, and can be used for differentiated classroom practice and to monitor more specific areas of growth. Teaching activities specifically designed to support the development of the skills assessed by PAT Early Literacy have been developed following an 'I do, we do, you do' model (whole class lesson, small group lessons, and independent student activities) and organised around a set of authentic texts – illustrated stories, audio texts and slide decks – to promote engagement of young learners. PAT Early Literacy teaching resources will be launched in early 2027.

While growth indicators are available for many formative assessment tools, the PAT Early Literacy Listening Comprehension and Reading Comprehension achievement band descriptions are evidence-based, developed from valid and reliable assessment data that have identified a 'typical' trajectory of reading comprehension development. This can provide teachers with confidence in the data they are using to target areas of learning, and to identify how students' progress over time.

PAT Early Literacy and the curricula

The Australian national curriculum, and all state curricula, describe expected levels of performance in early literacy based on year or stage level. Early Literacy appears throughout English curricula, supported by content descriptors. Early Literacy is now more commonly taught in schools as part of literacy programs, but the skills are applicable across all learning domains.

PAT Early Literacy items are not explicitly developed according to the Australian Curriculum, as the PAT construct is based on a Progressive Achievement approach, rather than year-based expectations. Early literacy is a component of the broader English curricula, which also incorporate writing and verbal communication skills. PAT Early Literacy results do not directly align with curriculum-based year or stage level outcomes. But items are mapped to the Australian curriculum and some state curricula, with content codes and descriptions provided in the online reports and the PAT Teaching Resources Centre.

PAT Early Literacy assesses early literacy skills in more depth than curricula, which generally describe the skills in broader terms. For this reason, there is often a single content description aligned to many test items at similar levels of difficulty. A single test is likely to be aligned to curriculum descriptions across a range of year levels, because each test assesses a range of ability.

Copyright © 2026 Australian Council for Educational Research Ltd

Construct

Definition

A construct is a description of an ability that can be measured on a single dimension (with a single numeric variable). It often refers to 'what students know and can do'. A mathematical model is used to transform observations (e.g. student responses to test items) into measurements. A careful definition of ability/proficiency helps ensure that the assessment and reporting are consistent and legitimate.

The ability to read and understand text is fundamental to full participation in modern adult life. It is essential to educational progress across domains, but increased literacy levels are also linked to positive outcomes in employment and health. Reading includes a broad variety of perceptual, linguistic, and cognitive skills required to extract meaning from visually presented material, most commonly, written text. Proficient reading takes years to develop and involves both understanding a language (comprehension) and understanding the symbolic representation of that language as written text (learning to read aloud).

PAT Early Literacy aims to measure all key skill areas that are foundational to the act of reading. Students are assessed on their proficiency in learning to both read and to comprehend on an online platform.

Structure

The PAT Early Literacy construct is the organising principle of the assessments; it is used to guide test development and structure the PAT reports. This structure is also part of the Progressive Achievement approach because the knowledge, skills and understanding represented in the assessments is designed to support educators in identifying student needs.

Three overarching elements guide assessment development in each learning domain:

- Strands
- Strand processes
- Text types (Listening Comprehension and Reading Comprehension only)

Strands

Strands are the skills that students use when engaging in the act of listening to or reading text. The strands are the core competencies that form the foundation of textual understanding. As core competencies, they are essential to growth in student learning across a range of disciplines. Each test item is targeted to one strand. The PAT Early Literacy strands are an organising component of the PAT reports, so that educators can analyse the performance of students according to these different skill areas.

Copyright © 2026 Australian Council for Educational Research Ltd

Phonics and Related Skills

There are three strands used in PAT Early Literacy Phonics and Related Skills:

- Phonological awareness
- Phonemic awareness
- Phonics

Together, these skills form a developmental progression: phonological awareness provides the foundation, phonemic awareness develops precision at the sound level, and phonics enables the application of this knowledge in reading and writing.

Progression in the PAT Early Literacy Phonics and Related Skills strands is reflected in the reports. However, these reports are not accompanied with achievement band descriptions. This is because skill development in learning area is closely tied to which skills are taught when. See the reporting section for information on how the Phonics and Related Skills reports can be used diagnostically.

Phonological awareness

Phonological awareness refers to the ability to recognise and manipulate the sound structure of spoken language, independent of print. It includes awareness of larger and smaller units of sound, such as words, syllables, rhymes, and onset–rime[1] patterns, as well as the ability to blend, segment, and manipulate these units. Children's involvement in singing songs, playing with sounds, and listening to stories and poems helps develop this skill. Students may be assessed on their ability to identify and manipulate syllables and onsets and rimes, or recognise whether a provided pair of words rhyme.

Phonemic awareness

Phonemic awareness is a specific skill that focuses on the smallest units of sound – phonemes. It involves recognising, isolating, blending, segmenting, and manipulating individual sounds within words (e.g. identifying that 'cat' consists of /k/ /a/ /t/). Awareness of sounds in spoken words develops before and alongside other early literacy skills. Students may be assessed on their ability to identify sounds in words, match phonemes (including phoneme blends), add, delete and substitute phonemes in words.

Phonics

Phonics connects sound-based skills to written language. It refers to understanding the systematic relationship between phonemes (sounds) and graphemes (letters or letter patterns). Students use this knowledge to decode written words and encode (spell) them. While phonological and phonemic awareness involve hearing and manipulating sounds without print, phonics explicitly introduces print and teaches how sounds map to letters. Students may be assessed on their ability to identify letter–sound correspondences, recognise a letter from its name, and read words with less common spelling patterns.

Copyright © 2026 Australian Council for Educational Research Ltd

Listening Comprehension

There are three strands used in PAT Early Literacy Listening Comprehension:

- Recall
- Interpret
- Reflect

To some extent, these strands can be understood as the equivalent of their reading comprehension strand counterparts, but there are some differences in cognitive processing that are outlined in the descriptions of the strands below.

Progression in the PAT Early Literacy Listening Comprehension strands is reflected by the achievement band descriptions, as discussed in the Reporting section.

Recall

Recall in listening comprehension involves using language comprehension and memory processes to accurately retrieve explicit information from a spoken text and applying it according to the demands of the task. As in reading, the focus is on recognising the meaning of discrete pieces of explicitly stated information, rather than on understanding how this information might fit into the larger meaning of the text. Students may be assessed on their capacity to put this information into their own words or recognise a reworded version of the information. Listening differs from the retrieval process of reading in that it does not involve scanning a text for key words or information.

Interpret

Interpreting information when listening to a text is a similar cognitive process to interpreting when reading, although it relies on language comprehension and memory processes to recall the key information to be interpreted. Students may need to interpret the meaning of a phrase, make connections between pieces of information or make inferences from clues in the text. Interpreting includes summarising or making generalisations about ideas that underpin the text to identify, for example, a main idea or key attributes of a character.

Reflect

Reflecting on the form or content of the text requires students to bring some external knowledge to the text.

Reflecting on the form of the text is about the technical features of the text. It is concerned with structure and linguistic features, including stylistic devices and print conventions. Students need prior knowledge in order to name them. They also need to know what the relevant criteria might be if they are required to evaluate them.

Reflecting on form in heard texts has a different focus to reflecting on form in read texts. In PAT Early Literacy Listening Comprehension, students are seeing the texts they hear, and so can reflect on common aspects of texts, such as the purpose of images. Most reflections in listening will focus on the features of heard texts, such as the type of communication (e.g. a discussion).

Reflecting on the content of the text is about the meaning of the text. PAT assessments do not provide the opportunity to students to generate and provide personal evaluations of the content of the text. But in listening comprehension, students can reflect on important aspects of the heard content, such as style, mood, tone and the use of authorial techniques.

Copyright © 2026 Australian Council for Educational Research Ltd

Reading Comprehension

PAT Early Literacy Reading Comprehension uses the same four strands as PAT Reading:

- Retrieve
- Interpret explicit
- Interpret implied
- Reflect

In PAT Early Literacy Reading Comprehension, retrieve, interpret and reflect skills are assessed in context of single words and sentences, and short simple texts. More challenging reading skills are assessed in the PAT Reading assessments (PAT Reading 5th Edition and PAT Reading Adaptive).

The progression of skills reflected in the PAT Early Literacy Reading Comprehension assessments are part of the achievement band descriptions for PAT Reading, as discussed in the section Reporting.

Retrieve

Retrieving directly stated information requires students to locate and understand one or more discrete pieces of explicitly stated information in the text. The focus is on finding and recognising the meaning of a piece of information rather than on understanding how this information might fit into the larger meaning of the text. The extent to which students understand the meaning of a piece of information is usually assessed by their capacity to put this information into their own words or recognise a reworded version of the information.

The skills students use in retrieving directly stated information underpin the skills of interpreting explicit information and interpreting implied information, as students have to first locate the relevant information in order to interpret it and they need to find the relevant clues or evidence on which to base their inference.

Interpret explicit

Interpreting explicit information requires students to locate and interpret explicitly stated information. Students may need to interpret the meaning of a phrase, summarise information or make links or connections between pieces of information. Interpreting explicit information tends to focus on the meaning of the whole text, paragraph or section of the text and the way ideas are connected and related as distinct from retrieving directly stated information, which focuses on the location and understanding of discrete pieces of information.

Interpret implied

Interpreting implied information requires students to recognise an idea that is suggested or implied by the text but is not explicitly stated. Students often need to combine information from scattered clues to infer the meaning. The focus is on understanding what the clues or evidence in the text implies.

Generalisations about all or part of the text, and ideas that underpin the text, but are not explicitly stated, are also classified as interpreting implied information. For example, the main idea of a text may not be explicit in a heading or in the opening sentences, so students may need to gather clues and hints to work this out. Generalising about the key attributes of a character across an extended piece of text and making judgements to differentiate details from key qualities, when these are not explicitly identified, also requires students to make inferences based on evidence in the text.

The skills students use when retrieving directly stated information are also required for interpreting implied information, as students have to locate the relevant clues before they can interpret them. Students may also have to interpret explicit information as part of the evidence that supports an inference.

Copyright © 2026 Australian Council for Educational Research Ltd

Reflect

Reflecting on the form or content of the text requires students to bring some external knowledge to the text.

Reflecting on the form of the text is about the technical features of the text. It is concerned with structure and linguistic features, including stylistic devices and print conventions. Students need prior knowledge in order to name them. They also need to know what the relevant criteria might be if they are required to evaluate them.

Reflecting on the content of the text is about the meaning of the text. Students may be required to evaluate the quality of an argument or its bias, the coherence of a plot, the plausibility of a character's actions or anything else concerned with reflecting on the meaning of the text. Students need to know the relevant criteria or appropriate personal values to use in evaluating the content of the text.

Reflecting on the content can be about students' personal evaluations of the text or opinions about the efficacy of the writer's craft where students provide evidence from the text to support their evaluations of a text. The mode of PAT assessments do not allow these kinds of responses, and so the focus in more commonly on assessing the form of the text.

The PAT Early Literacy Reading Comprehension assessments have few reflect questions. This is because students completing these assessments are most likely in the early stages of developing their skills in reflecting on texts.

Copyright © 2026 Australian Council for Educational Research Ltd

Strand processes

While the PAT Early Literacy strands are broad categorisations of skills in the act of listening to or reading text, the PAT Early Literacy strand processes offer a way of further focusing learning intentions. By being able to identify the processes by which students read and understand text, teachers achieve a finer grained understanding of students' gaps and strengths within each of the core skill areas and are therefore better able to target students' learning needs.

Each item in the PAT Early Literacy assessment is aligned to a strand process. The PAT strand processes are also a key organisational component of teaching activities in the PAT Teaching Resources Centre.

Phonics and Related Skills

Table 1 *Phonics and Related Skills strand processes classified by strand*

Phonological awareness	Phonemic awareness	Phonics
Recognising and/or manipulating syllables, onsets and rimes	Identifying initial sounds	Identifying common letter-sound correspondences
Recognising and/or producing sound patterns	Identifying final sounds	Reading and writing simple words and non-words
	Identifying middle vowel sounds	Reading and writing words with less common spelling patterns
	Manipulating phonemes in word play	Recognising lower case letters
		Recognising upper case letters

Copyright © 2026 Australian Council for Educational Research Ltd

Phonological awareness

Recognising and/or manipulating syllables, onsets and rimes

The ability to recognise and manipulate larger units of sound within words is a foundational skill in early literacy. Recognising words in the stream of speech, hearing syllables in words, and becoming aware that words can be segmented into different units of sound are central skills associated with later reading and spelling development.

Recognising and/or producing sound patterns

The process of identifying and producing rhyming words and alliteration patterns supports beginning readers' awareness of sound patterns in language and the development of skills that enable them to manipulate sounds within words.

Phonemic awareness

Identifying initial sounds

Analysing words to identify initial sounds, and matching initial sounds in words helps build awareness that words are made up of individual sounds. This understanding is important to spelling, writing and reading development.

Identifying final sounds

Identifying final sounds in words helps children focus attention on sounds within the whole word, not just the beginning or more obvious sounds. Listening for final sounds builds skills that are essential for accurate spelling and word reading.

Identifying middle vowel sounds

Identifying middle vowel sounds in words can be challenging for children and cause confusion in spelling or decoding unfamiliar words. Practice in isolating these sounds helps children listen carefully to the whole word and focus attention on sounds they can hear in the middle; not just the beginning or end.

Manipulating phonemes in word play

Manipulating or playing with sounds in words strengthens children's phonemic awareness skills in ways that are useful for decoding and spelling development. Playing with sounds in words can involve breaking words apart into individual phonemes, adding or deleting phonemes, or substituting phonemes to create new words. Practising these skills supports not only the development of phonemic awareness but also supports the development of cognitive flexibility that is useful for learning to read and spell words.

Copyright © 2026 Australian Council for Educational Research Ltd

Phonics

Identifying common letter-sound correspondences

Understanding the links between letters and the sounds they can be used to represent is often referred to as the 'alphabetic principle'. This fundamental understanding is central to early literacy development. As children learn that the spoken sounds of language can be mapped onto letters or combinations of letters, they build an enduring knowledge base for later successful decoding and spelling.

Reading and writing simple words non-words

Reading and writing simple words and non-words provides children with opportunities to apply their knowledge of common letter-sound correspondences.

Reading and writing words with less common spelling patterns

Reading and writing words with less common spelling patterns provides opportunities for children to apply their knowledge of more complex grapheme-phoneme correspondences, and other less common morphemic and orthographic patterns associated with later literacy development.

Recognising lower case letters

Alphabet knowledge is central to learning to read and spell. It develops alongside other early literacy skills such as phonological and phonemic awareness and early writing. For children to be able to read and write words, they must be familiar with the letters that can be used to represent speech sounds. Most of the letters they will use will be lower case so developing knowledge of these letter forms is an important task in early literacy instruction. Rapid recognition of letters can assist in making decoding and spelling easier.

Recognising upper case letters

Alphabet knowledge, or children's ability to recognise the written shapes of letters, is an important building block for later literacy development. As with lower case letters, upper case letter familiarity is important for word solving in spelling and writing. They will use both upper and lower case letters as they learn to write names and create sentences of their own.

Copyright © 2026 Australian Council for Educational Research Ltd

Listening Comprehension

Table 2 *Listening Comprehension strand processes classified by strand*

Recall	Interpret	Reflect
Listening for key information	Developing an interpretation	Recognising textual features and purpose
Rewording	Comparing and contrasting	Recognising authorial techniques
Classifying and re-organising	Generalising and summarising	Extrapolating beyond the text
Using grammatical structures	Making connections	Evaluating and critiquing
	Interpreting language and tone	

Recall

Listening for key information

Listening for key information is the act of processing aural language and using memory recall to identify and apply the information you are after. Whereas scanning while reading can be challenging based on where the information is located, the challenge in listening for key information is based on how prominent and explicit the information is. For example, the less significant the detail, the more difficult it is likely to be to recall. Text length also plays a significant role: the longer the text, the greater the cognitive load of finding the key information. The ability to re-hear part or all of the text supports the recall process, particularly if it takes place once the information required is clear to the listener.

Rewording

Similarly to reading, the difficulty of recalling information depends on how easily the required information can be recognised. Information that is phrased differently from what is expected is more challenging to recall than information that directly matches the required wording The complexity of this process varies from recognising simple synonymous to the rephrasing more complex ideas. The emphasis here is on identifying different ways of saying the same thing, rather than being required to make interpretations.

Classifying and re-organising

Classifying and re-organising is about recognising similarities between pieces of information and grouping them accordingly. The process of classifying and re-organising information while listening to a text, without the support of textual features such as a table or graph, has significant cognitive load. For that reason, students in the early years of school are likely to perform very simple classification tasks while listening, such as recognising different foods or types of animals.

Using grammatical structures

Early understanding of grammatical structures is an important precursor to reading. While students in the early years of school are unlikely to have explicit knowledge of grammar and syntax, they can demonstrate understanding through comprehension that is tied to different sentence structures. For example, they may provide information that relies on understanding the purpose of a conjunction, pronoun or preposition. A knowledge of grammar is key to making meaning.

Copyright © 2026 Australian Council for Educational Research Ltd

Interpret

Developing an interpretation

As with reading, this is the process of identifying and integrating appropriate information in order to form an interpretation. Readers engage in the process of combining information to identify key ideas in a text they have heard. Whereas the act of reading on and backtracking are useful tools when reading a text, listening relies on the recall of relevant evidence to form an interpretation.

Comparing and contrasting

The act of comparing and contrasting when listening shares key features with that of reading. Both involve relating, differentiating and making distinctions between ideas. Both involve distinguishing between different perspectives, recognising subtle shifts in attitude or point of view, identifying ideas that support each other, and differentiating key ideas and details. As with other comprehension processes, listening relies on the act of recall first, as opposed to the ability to identify key information through scanning and re-reading.

Generalising and summarising

Generalising and summarising is the process of recalling, relating, integrating and synthesising information across part or all of a text to identify what it is mainly about. This ability is applicable across a range of contexts, many of which do not include the act of reading, such as the description of day-to-day experiences. For this reason, generalising and summarising should be systematically practised prior to independent reading.

Making connections

Interpretations are often made through the linking of information across parts of a text. This ranges from the simple task of linking ideas within a sentence to the more challenging task of dismissing irrelevant information to make links across a text. Although sentences are not signalled in print as they are for reading, the processes are similar in terms of the challenge posed by distance, language complexity and subtlety of ideas. Making connections is commonly related to cause and effect: the reasons for events, character behaviour etc. Explicit support is required to learn how to connect ideas across a heard text, support that is key to the later development of this process in reading comprehension.

Interpreting language and tone

Interpretations require the navigation of language, and sometimes complex language structures. As with reading, building ability in comprehension involves learning how language is used in the construction of tone and atmosphere. Explicit support is needed in understanding the role that language plays in the forming of interpretations and how difficult or unfamiliar language can be approached. This support can take place well before the same type of language can be read independently.

Reflect

Recognising textual features and purpose

The ability to recognise a text type and its features, and to understand their purpose, is an essential component of learning to read. Although the same understanding of textual features is hardly to be expected when listening to a text, some of these features remain highly relevant, particularly when viewing the text being read (e.g. the purpose of images or parts of a book cover). Early understanding of text type and purpose is of foundational importance to the act of reading, helping to build key connections between the printed text and what you hear.

Recognising authorial techniques

Reflecting on the reasons why authors employ certain techniques and the effect they create is a key part of comprehending text. It is no less important when listening to text than when reading. Authorial techniques are an essential part of learning to think critically about texts, and early understandings of how to employ them in different contexts will support students when it comes to their own writing.

Extrapolating beyond the text

The process of extrapolating beyond the text involves the application of external knowledge or contexts to the ideas in the text, such as when making predictions or applying ideas to a new context. In the early years of school, students are building their understanding of how external knowledge can be applied to texts that they hear. This could include recognising key aspects relating to genre, such as why experts are included in an article.

Copyright © 2026 Australian Council for Educational Research Ltd

Reading Comprehension

Table 3 outlines the strand processes assessed by items in PAT Early Literacy Reading Comprehension. The strand processes are described in more detail below.

Table 3 *Reading Comprehension strand processes classified by strand*

Retrieve	Interpret explicit / Interpret implied	Reflect
Scanning for key information	Developing an interpretation	Recognising textual features and purpose
Navigating text structures	Comparing and contrasting	Recognising authorial techniques
Rewording	Generalising and summarising	Extrapolating beyond the text
Classifying and re-organising	Making connections	
Labelling	Interpreting language and tone	
Using grammatical structures		

Retrieve

Scanning for key information

Scanning for information, the process of running your eyes over text for specific words and phrases, is a skill that precedes all others in reading comprehension. All information that needs to be interpreted, analysed or evaluated must first be located. Scanning is made more or less difficult depending on where the required information is located in the text.

Navigating text structures

Readers learn to navigate a variety of different text structures when looking for information, such as components of a book cover or the use of images. Familiarity with the structures of different texts and an understanding of how different textual components relate to each other is essential to reading across a range of contexts.

Rewording

Part of retrieving information involves recognising pieces of information that are written in different ways. It is common practice to scan for information that may not be written in the same way that the reader expects. The complexity of this process varies from recognising simple synonymous matches to rephrasing more complex ideas. The emphasis here is on identifying different ways of writing the same thing, rather than being required to make interpretations.

Classifying and re-organising

Classifying and re-organising is about recognising similarities between pieces of information and grouping them accordingly. Identifying information from different locations that share particular features is also a common skill used in a variety of different contexts.

Copyright © 2026 Australian Council for Educational Research Ltd

Labelling

Labelling is the process of matching words and images, thereby indicating knowledge of a single word or simple phrase (such as an action). This process is relevant at the lower ability levels, where students are not yet independent readers but are able to identify, for example, that a girl looking at a book indicates reading, or which child from a group of several images is jumping, or more simply which of several objects is the cat. This skill is an important precursor to understanding words strung together to make meaning in sentences.

Using grammatical structures

A knowledge of grammar is important for reading comprehension. In the early stages of learning to read, a basic understanding of grammatical structures is needed to make meaning, such as recognising pronoun references and the differences in meaning between prepositions, in order to successfully retrieve information. Knowledge of more complex grammatical structures provides access to more complex meaning.

Interpret explicit and Interpret implied

Developing an interpretation

This is the process of identifying and integrating appropriate information in order to form an interpretation. Readers engage in the process of combining information to identify key ideas. The act of reading on and backtracking are commonly used in the collection of evidence to form an interpretation. When making an interpretation, readers learn ways of identifying the evidence that is relevant and dismissing the information that is not.

Comparing and contrasting

The process of comparing and contrasting information is fundamental to our development as both readers and critical thinkers. The act of reading involves relating, differentiating and making distinctions between ideas. It is from learning and understanding this process that readers become better equipped to evaluate and critique information. Comparing and contrasting involves such processes as distinguishing between different perspectives, recognising subtle shifts in attitude or point of view, identifying ideas that support each other, and differentiating key ideas and details. Early readers are able to make simple comparisons, such as how one explicit opinion on a familiar topic differs from another.

Generalising and summarising

Generalising and summarising is the process of relating information across a text, or section of a text, to identify what it is mainly about. The ability to read over and accurately understand the main idea in a text is commonly used in our day-to-day experience and so requires systematic practice in the school years, particularly the process of integrating and synthesising information. Early readers can make simple generalisations about, for example, the main idea in a short text that has clear, explicit clues.

Making connections

Interpretations are often made through the linking of information from different places within a text. Making connections is the process used for sequencing events, identifying the reasons for events, or relating a character to a behaviour or action, to name a few. Explicit support is required to learn how to connect ideas at different locations in the text and across a range of different text types and structures.

Interpreting language and tone

Interpretations require the navigation of language, and sometimes complex language structures. Developing in reading ability involves learning how language is used in the construction of tone and atmosphere. Explicit support is needed in understanding the role that language plays in the forming of interpretations and how difficult or unfamiliar language can be approached. Early readers can make interpretations that rely on a key piece of language, such as a common phrase, pronoun or time reference.

Copyright © 2026 Australian Council for Educational Research Ltd

Reflect

Recognising textual features and purpose

The ability to recognise a text type and its features, and to understand their purpose, is an essential component of learning to read. It is the foundation on which more complex evaluations about text construct can be built. Early readers are likely to be in the beginning stages of recognising highly familiar text types and some common textual features.

Recognising authorial techniques

The techniques authors employ in the communication of information and ideas is rich and varied. Recognising what these techniques are is an essential part of learning to think critically about texts, as well as knowing when and how to employ them in your own writing. Early readers are likely to recognise the effect of a small number of authorial techniques, such as the use of onomatopoeia.

Extrapolating beyond the text

The process of extrapolating beyond the text involves the application of external knowledge or contexts to the ideas in the text. This can be in making a prediction (beyond that which the author has clearly implied), applying ideas to a new context, reflecting on information from different perspectives, or deducing practical applications of information. This process is a critical part of relating information to the world outside the text, in particular identifying appropriate uses. Early readers can often relate the characters and events in familiar texts to their own experiences and are working towards using a broader external knowledge to reflect on the ideas in a text.

Copyright © 2026 Australian Council for Educational Research Ltd

Text type

Comprehension ability can only be clearly demonstrated by the assessment of a range of text types. The text types are an organising component of the PAT reports, so that educators can analyse the performance of students according to the types of texts they have responded to.

Listening Comprehension

For early readers, there is the expectation that their listening comprehension skills are more advanced than their reading comprehension, as they can draw on broader oral language knowledge to understand texts that are more complex than those they are able to decode independently. For this reason, PAT Early Literacy Listening includes a variety of text types, within which there is a range of topics or genres reflected. These texts range from sentence-level, where students show their comprehension of different grammatical structures, to the conceptually complex, where students navigate technical or idiomatic language on unfamiliar topics. As an aural assessment, the texts are designed to reflect both prevalent forms of spoken language in contemporary contexts (e.g. podcasts) and the types of texts students commonly encounter through read-aloud experiences at home and in school. Procedural texts are not included at this stage because they tend to rely on visual aids and cues.

For PAT Early Literacy Listening Comprehension there are four text types assessed:

- Word or sentence
- Narrative
- Information
- Persuasive

Narrative

PAT Early Literacy Listening includes fictional texts of different genres (e.g. reflective, character-based, action-driven etc.)

Information

This is any text where the primary purpose is to communicate information. Topics are commonly familiar and contain some technical or unfamiliar vocabulary.

Persuasive

These texts attempt to influence or persuade their audience in some way. The language can be informal and idiomatic and tone is often important.

Word or sentence

This relates to those items assessing single words or sentences. In PAT Early Literacy Listening Comprehension, sentence-level items target how well students can make link across sentences to identify, for example, a cause and effect, or navigate different grammatical structures, such as pronouns and conjunctions.

Copyright © 2026 Australian Council for Educational Research Ltd

Reading Comprehension

For early readers, a limited range of text types is appropriate as they continue to build their decoding skills.

For PAT Early Literacy Reading Comprehension there are four text types assessed:

- Word or sentence
- Narrative
- Information
- Procedural

A single test of PAT Early Literacy Reading Comprehension will include a range but not all of these. Procedural and information texts, for example, often contain less common or technical vocabulary that would not be appropriate for early readers. For this reason, PAT Early Literacy Reading Comprehension assessments include large proportions of word or sentence items and simple narrative texts. These text types provide useful information about how well students are understanding different parts of speech or sentence structures, as well as linking sentences together to make meaning.

Word or sentence

Word or sentence relates to those items assessing single words or sentences. For early readers, the focus is most usefully on the reader's ability to make meaning from very small amounts of text.

Narrative

PAT Early Literacy Reading includes fictional texts on a variety of familiar topics.

Information

In these texts, the primary purpose is to communicate information. For PAT Early Literacy Reading, topics selected are familiar and straight-forward to be suitable for early readers.

Procedural

This includes any text in which the reader must follow a procedure or list of instructions for comprehension. For PAT Early Literacy Reading, texts are on relatable topics with clear and simple steps.

Copyright © 2026 Australian Council for Educational Research Ltd

Assessment design

Measuring the construct

In developing items and designing the tests, the major criteria considered are as follows:

- distribution of items across strands
- distribution of text types
- distribution of item difficulty
- appropriateness of texts
- appropriateness of delivery mode.

Distribution by strand and text type

It is necessary to assess students on an appropriate distribution of strands and text types, so that the assessment encompasses a range of reading processes and experiences. This approach ensures that the formative data gained provides insight into possible strengths, gaps and weaknesses in different areas. The strands and text types are not evenly distributed across all levels, because some are more appropriate at the lower levels than the higher and vice versa. In PAT Early Literacy Reading Comprehension, for example, very early readers are likely to be assessed on a large percentage of word and sentence comprehension, and unlikely to be assessed on their ability to reflect on the form or content of a text. Text types are not applicable for PAT Early Literacy Phonics and Related Skills items.

Table 4 shows the strand distribution for PAT Early Literacy Phonics and Related Skills. Table 5 and Table 6 show the distribution of items by strand and text type for PAT Early Literacy Listening Comprehension and Reading Comprehension respectively.

Table 4 *Percentages of PAT Early Literacy Phonics and Related Skills items by strand for each test*

Test level	Phonological awareness (%)	Phonemic awareness (%)	Phonics (%)
Test 1	37	35	28
Test 2	6	42	52
Test 3	0	37	63

Copyright © 2026 Australian Council for Educational Research Ltd

Table 5 *Percentages of PAT Early Literacy Listening Comprehension items by strand and text type for each test pathway*

			Strand %			Text type %			
Adaptive pathway no.	Stage 1 level	Stage 2 level	Recall	Interpret	Reflect	Information	Narrative	Word or sentence	Persuasive
1	1	1	19	81	0	12	58	31	0
2*			23	77	0	12	62	27	0
3		2	15	81	4	12	69	19	0
4*			19	77	4	12	73	15	0
5	2	3	27	65	8	31	50	0	19
6*			19	73	8	15	54	12	19
7		4	8	69	23	27	54	0	19
8*			0	77	23	12	58	12	19

* Parallel content at Stage 1 levels 1 and 2

Copyright © 2026 Australian Council for Educational Research Ltd

Table 6 *Percentages of PAT Early Literacy Reading Comprehension items by strand and text type for each test pathway*

			Strand %				Text type %		
Adaptive pathway no.	Stage 1 level	Stage 2 level	Retrieve	Interpret explicit	Interpret implied	Reflect	Narrative	Word or sentence	Procedure
1	1	1	77	19	4	0	19	81	0
2*			77	23	0	0	15	85	0
3		2	62	27	12	0	31	69	0
4*			62	31	8	0	27	73	0
5		3	62	31	8	0	31	69	0
6*			62	35	4	0	27	73	0
7	2	4	39	39	15	8	42	58	0
8*			42	42	12	4	50	50	0
9		5	39	42	15	4	39	42	19
10*			42	46	12	0	46	35	19
11		6	39	42	15	4	62	39	0
12*			42	46	12	0	69	31	0

* Parallel content at Stage 1 levels 1 and 2

Copyright © 2026 Australian Council for Educational Research Ltd

Distribution of item difficulty

It is important to have a spread of item difficulties that match the abilities of students. This is especially important in the context of computer adaptive assessments, including PAT Early Literacy Listening Comprehension and Reading Comprehension, to enable accurate and efficient measurement across ability levels.

Table 7 and Table 8 show the mean difficulty and standard deviations of the items in PAT Early Literacy Listening Comprehension and Reading Comprehension respectively (as of release in 2026).

Table 7 *Mean difficulty and standard deviation of PAT Early Literacy Listening Comprehension testlets*

Testlet location		No. of items	Mean item difficulty (scale score)	Standard deviation (scale score)
Stage 1	Level1*	14	116	8
			116	7
	Level2*		124	8
			123	6
Stage 2	Level 1	12	110	5
	Level 2		121	5
	Level 3		119	8
	Level 4		131	6

* Parallel content at Stage 1 levels 1 and 2

Table 8 *Mean difficulty and standard deviation of PAT Early Literacy Reading Comprehension testlets*

Testlet location		No. of items	Mean item difficulty (scale score)	Standard deviation (scale score)
Stage 1	Level1*	14	64	12
			62	13
	Level2*		75	10
			75	9
Stage 2	Level 1	12	53	11
	Level 2		64	12
	Level 3		71	7
	Level 4		67	10
	Level 5		75	8
	Level 6		83	7

* Parallel content at Stage 1 levels 1 and 2

Copyright © 2026 Australian Council for Educational Research Ltd

Appropriateness of the texts

For PAT Early Literacy Listening Comprehension and Reading Comprehension, texts are designed to be appropriate for students in the early years of schooling, with a range of increasing complexity to reflect progression in skill development. The overall text difficulty is unlikely to be suitable for significantly older students, of whom PAT Reading 5th Edition and PAT Reading Adaptive are likely to provide more appropriate assessment.

Appropriateness of delivery mode

Consideration has been given to the practical challenges associated with delivering an interactive digital assessment to students in the early years of schooling. These challenges include, amongst others, varying levels of familiarity with technology, independent reading ability and self-regulation. These challenges were addressed by the assessment design and delivery.

Delivery

Choosing the right test

Planning and consistency are important in ensuring PAT assessments are used effectively and that students' results are useful and meaningful. For PAT Early Literacy Phonics and Related Skills, the difficulty of each test and the teacher's knowledge of a student should be taken into consideration when selecting an appropriate level. It is not necessary to provide all students in a class with the same test. Instead, the focus should always be each student's ability at the time of the assessment, not where they are expected to be.

PAT Early Literacy Listening Comprehension and Reading Comprehension are adaptive assessments. Entry levels for these assessments are automatically assigned to students according to their year level and/or previous results, while in-test branching further supports accurate targeting of test content to student ability.

Frequency

For the purpose of monitoring student progress, a gap of 9 to 12 months between testing sessions for both Listening Comprehension and Reading Comprehension is recommended. Learning progress may not be reflected in a student's scale scores over a shorter period of time. Longitudinal growth should be measured over a minimum of two years of schooling, or three separate testing sessions, in most contexts. This will help account for possible scale score variation, for example where external factors may affect a student's performance on a particular testing occasion. For Listening Comprehension, the Listening scale is specific to the PAT Early Literacy Listening Comprehension assessments. For Reading Comprehension, growth measurement can continue as students move on to PAT Reading 5th Edition and/or PAT Reading Adaptive.

Growth in phonics and related skills can be swift amongst young learners and is commonly tied to what is explicitly taught in the classroom. It may not be necessary to assess all students at each test level within the first two years of school. Teachers should review the content of each Phonics and Related Skills test form and use professional judgement when deciding which students to assess, with which test form, and how frequently. The tests increase in difficulty, with Test 1 being the easiest.

Test administration

Teachers are required to supervise test administration. Headphones are required by all students. Practice items support administration of the tests. The recommended test administration time is 30 minutes for all domains. This should be sufficient for all students to complete their tests. Consistency in the time allowed to students will assist teachers in comparing the results of students. Some additional time may be allowed if students are working productively.

Copyright © 2026 Australian Council for Educational Research Ltd

Test delivery features

To ensure the appropriateness of the online delivery mode, PAT Early Literacy assessments utilise a narrative, character-guided format that engages early years students by presenting test content around storytelling. Three digital characters – Flurg, Ginger and Tweety – lead the experience, each associated with a specific theme: Phonics and Related Skills (Flurg the alien and the Solar System), Listening Comprehension (Ginger the cat and friends), and Reading Comprehension (Tweety the bird and her chicks).

Students see 5–8 screens that combine narrated story content with encouragement from the character. Practice and test questions sit in between the storytelling with encouragement prompts. Each test includes practice items designed to familiarise students with the response formats they will encounter. These practice items are typically presented in context, immediately before the first question of that type. The test interface is designed specifically for the early years with audio support, large buttons, 'tappy hand' guidance, engaging images and an updated authentic eBook format in Listening Comprehension and Reading Comprehension.

Examples of story screens, encouragement prompts and practice items are provided in Appendix 3.

Item response formats

Most items in PAT Early Literacy assessments use a selected-response item format (multiple-choice). When the selected-response format is not suitable for the skill being targeted, an interactive item type – 'tap-and-drop' is used. For example, some items in Phonics and Related Skills use the tap-and-drop content type to assess students' ability to correctly spell words by combining graphemes. In most instances, interactive item types are not necessary to assess the target skill. Examples of different item types are provided in Appendix 3.

Phonics and Related Skills

The Phonics and Related Skills assessment comprises 3 linear test forms of increasing difficulty.

Table 9 *Summary of test delivery details for PAT Early Literacy Phonics and Related Skills*

Test level	Generally suitable for	No. of items	Recommended time
Test 1	Foundation	46*	30 minutes
Test 2	Foundation and Year 1	48*	
Test 3	Year 1	49*	

* Some paired items are scored as one; item counts shown in reports will be lower.

Copyright © 2026 Australian Council for Educational Research Ltd

Listening Comprehension and Reading Comprehension

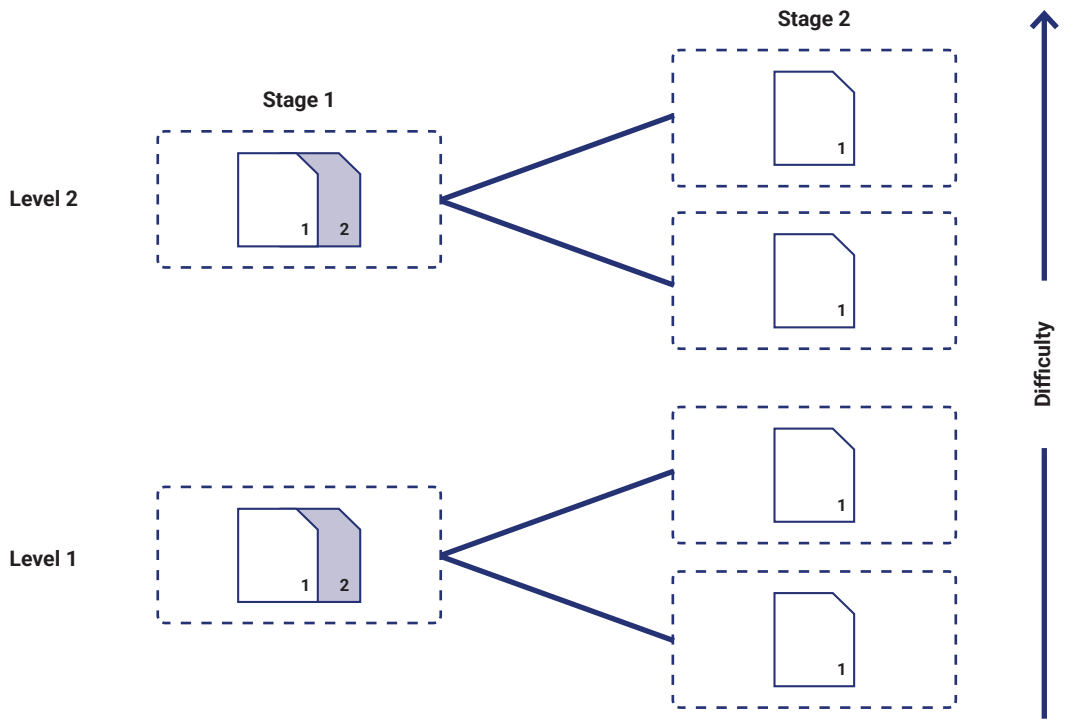
A testlet-based adaptive model or multistage testing (MST) is used for PAT Early Literacy Listening Comprehension and Reading Comprehension assessments. A testlet is a small block of items presented to a student. The content and difficulty of testlets are simpler at lower levels and more advanced at higher levels.

Students' entry levels are automatically assigned depending on their estimated ability – according to their most recent PAT score in the learning area and/or their current year level. After completing a testlet at stage one, students are allocated another testlet of items of targeted difficulty based on their performance to that point. The branching mechanism is designed to provide the maximum amount of information for estimating a student's ability (mean scale score) at each stage.

Testlet containers allow the allocation of different but equivalent content to students according to various system rules. 'Parallel' testlet rules mean that students are presented alternative content in two consecutive test sittings, reducing their potential exposure to the same content. In total, there are 8 total unique possible pathways in Listening Comprehension and 12 in Reading Comprehension.

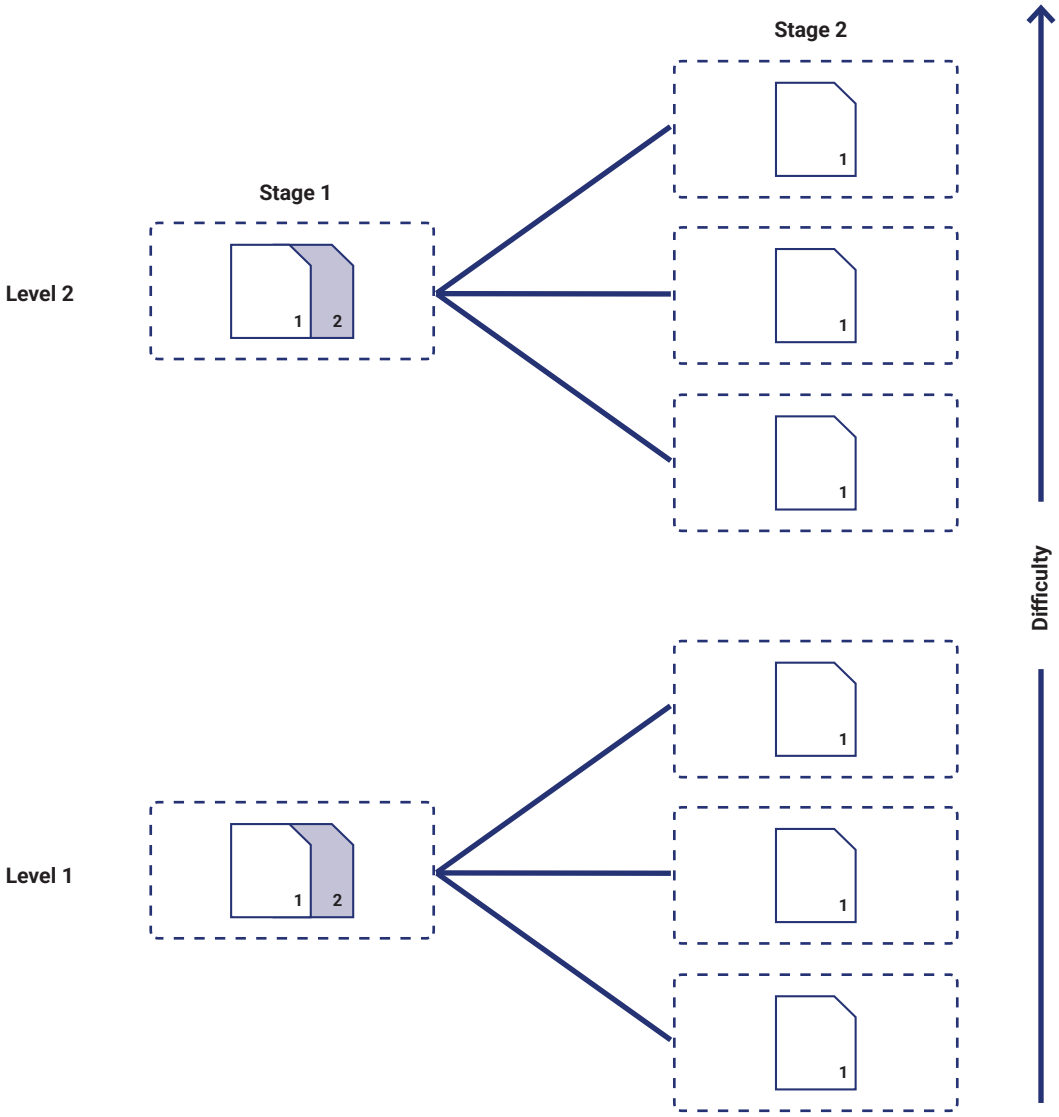
Figure 1 displays the PAT Adaptive MST design for PAT Early Literacy Listening Comprehension. Figure 2 displays the PAT Adaptive MST design for PAT Early Literacy Reading Comprehension. Each assessment features two entry levels with parallel testlets. A single in-test branching point directs students towards content of differing difficulty according to their responses to that point.

Figure 1 *PAT Early Literacy Listening Comprehension test design with two entry levels*



Copyright © 2026 Australian Council for Educational Research Ltd

Figure 2 *PAT Early Literacy Reading Comprehension test design with two entry levels*



Copyright © 2026 Australian Council for Educational Research Ltd

Reporting

The information provided by the PAT Early Literacy reports is intended to assist teachers in understanding their students' abilities, diagnosing gaps, strengths and weaknesses in students' learning, and measuring learning progress over time.

Phonics and Related Skills

Unlike other PAT assessments, PAT Early Literacy Phonics and Related Skills results are not aligned to a described achievement scale. This is because, while these skills are pre-requisites for future growth in reading comprehension, they are 'constrained' – growth in these skills stops once they are mastered. For this reason, assessment results are presented at the item, strand and strand process levels, allowing for diagnostic analysis to support you in understanding students' needs.

Several Phonics and Related Skills items are scored together as pairs. Students must correctly respond to both paired items to receive one score point. This approach ensures measurement reliability for two-option items.

Listening Comprehension and Reading Comprehension

Both PAT Early Literacy Listening Comprehension and Reading Comprehension are aligned to described achievement scales. Listening is aligned to a new scale, constructed as part of the development of PAT Early Literacy. Reading aligns with the existing PAT Reading scale used by both PAT Reading 5th Edition and PAT Reading Adaptive.

PAT scale score

A PAT scale score is a numerical value given to a student whose achievement has been measured by completing a PAT assessment. A student's scale score lies at a point somewhere on the specific PAT scale, and it indicates the student's level of achievement in that learning area — the higher the scale score, the more able the student.

Regardless of the test level or items administered to students, they will be placed on the same scale for the learning area. This makes it possible to directly compare students' achievement and to observe students' progress within a learning area by comparing their scale scores from multiple testing periods over time.

Item difficulty is a measure of the extent of skills and knowledge required to be successful on the item. This makes it possible, for example, to allocate each PAT Reading test item a score on the same scale used to measure student achievement. An item with a high scale score is more difficult for students to answer correctly than a question with a low scale score. It can generally be expected that a student is able to successfully respond to more items whose difficulty is located below their achieved scale score than above. By referencing the difficulty of an item, or a group of items, and the proportion of correct responses by a student or within a group, it may be possible to identify particular items, or types of items, that have challenged students.

A score on the PAT Reading scale, for example, has no meaning on the PAT Maths scale. In fact, the units of the scale will have different meanings for each scale. This is because these units are calculated based on the range of student levels of achievement, which vary widely between learning areas.

Copyright © 2026 Australian Council for Educational Research Ltd

Achievement bands

While a scale score indicates a student's achievement level and can be used to quantitatively track a student's growth, it is only in understanding what the number represents that teachers can successfully inform their practice to support student learning. For this reason, PAT scales are divided into achievement bands that include written descriptions of what students are able to do at that band (band description). A student scoring in a particular band can be expected to have some proficiency in that band and be progressively more proficient with the knowledge, skills and understanding outlined in lower bands.

Students in the same achievement band are operating at approximately the same achievement level within a learning area regardless of their school year level. Viewing student achievement in terms of achievement bands may assist teachers to group students of similar abilities. By referencing the PAT achievement band descriptions, teachers can understand the types of skills typical of students according to their PAT band.

The complete achievement band descriptions for both PAT Reading and Listening Comprehension can be found in separate documents within ACER's online School Support Centre.

The example below from the PAT Reading achievement band descriptions illustrates how the descriptions can support teachers' understanding of progression and help to inform their teaching practices in a specific and targeted way.

PAT Reading achievement band description summaries

100–109

Students at the top of this band demonstrate a variety of simple comprehension skills such as linking adjacent sections of a text, ordering brief sequences of events, making inferences and reflecting on prominent, familiar features of the text. They can manage low-level competing information They read and understand a range of familiar, common text types that may include slight complexities such as several clearly implied ideas.

↑

90–99

Students at the top of this band demonstrate a variety of simple comprehension skills that mainly concern prominent information in straightforward texts with familiar ideas and structures, some sentence complexity and a few less familiar words. They can directly match words in longer and more complex texts to retrieve adjacent information. They are unlikely to interpret information that is unexpected or in complex sentences or be able to use the context to interpret the meaning of words they don't know.

↑

80–89

Students at the top of this band can read and understand prominent ideas and some details in short, simple, explicit texts with a small range of familiar words. They begin to make synonymous matches. They can directly match words in more complex texts to retrieve adjacent information.

Copyright © 2026 Australian Council for Educational Research Ltd

While the achievement band descriptions are intended to be considered in their entirety and not as discrete components, these extracts help to demonstrate the progression of skills within a student's ability to make an interpretation. In 'typical' development of Reading ability, students progress from identifying main ideas based on clues across a text, to distinguishing the overarching from explicit detail, to managing a certain level of contrast and differing perspectives. This information helps to inform teachers' learning intentions for students performing at these different levels, to ensure their progression from one level to the next

Copyright © 2026 Australian Council for Educational Research Ltd

Appendices

Appendix 1

Literature review: Early literacy development

Early literacy development is widely recognised as a critical foundation for later learning, academic success, wellbeing, and participation in society. Foundational skills such as reading extend far beyond just learning to read. Research on literacy development indicates that well-developed reading skills support access to knowledge across the curriculum and are strongly associated with long-term educational and life outcomes. It also indicates that early difficulties in language and literacy can be persistent and, without effective instruction and early intervention, many children will be unlikely to catch up with their peers (Ferrer et al., 2015; Konza, 2014; Snow, 2020) and become strong readers.

One way of conceptualising how readers learn to process and comprehend text is that it occurs through the interaction between understanding the codes or symbols of written language (decoding) and understanding the words that those codes are used to represent (language comprehension). This theory, the Simple View of Reading (Gough & Tunmer, 1986; Hoover & Gough, 1990), proposes that both decoding and language comprehension are essential to successful reading comprehension, but that neither component is sufficient on its own.

The Simple View of Reading has been used extensively to build models of how best to teach reading and has been developed in more detail by researchers seeking to add to its theoretical and practical power. Subsequent frameworks, including Scarborough's Reading Rope (Scarborough, 2001), the Cognitive Foundations Framework (Hoover & Tunmer, 2020), and the Active View of Reading (Duke & Cartwright, 2021), have elaborated on the theory, proposing that the foundations of decoding and language comprehension are complex. For example, successful decoding depends on subskills such as phonological awareness, phonemic awareness, alphabetic knowledge, and sight word recognition, while comprehension depends on broader oral language capabilities including syntax, inferencing, and background knowledge. The Active View of Reading further suggests that reader self-regulation is central to successful reading. These researchers propose that there are also bridging processes such as vocabulary, fluency, print concepts, morphemic awareness, and cognitive flexibility in decoding that facilitate the interaction between decoding and language comprehension that Gough and Tunmer (1986) first proposed as the key to skilled reading.

With this complexity in mind, high-quality, nuanced assessment is essential in early literacy classrooms. Effective assessment helps educators identify children's strengths and needs across the different components of literacy. Early reading assessment should monitor both word recognition skills and language comprehension skills, rather than focusing narrowly on one component, so that teaching can be targeted appropriately and next steps in learning can be identified (National Reading Panel, 2000; Rowe, 2005; Rose, 2006).

Such an approach recognises that students may have uneven profiles across these components, enabling teachers to target support to the specific areas where early literacy development is most needed. There are implications from this in how we assess students. Paris (2005) argues that the two components of the Simple View of Reading – word recognition (decoding) and language comprehension – should not be treated as equivalent dimensions on a single scale, because they represent constrained and unconstrained skills with fundamentally different developmental trajectories, distributions, and roles in differentiating reading performance over time. Consequently, targeted intervention requires that decoding and comprehension be understood as distinct but related components in assessment.

This research base informs the rationale for the structure of the PAT Early Literacy framework. If early literacy development depends on both code-based skills and meaning-based language processes, then assessment needs to provide information about each of these areas in ways that are useful for teaching. For this reason, the framework separates Phonics and Related Skills, Listening Comprehension and Reading Comprehension, while also recognising the interactions that occur among them. The sections that follow describe each domain and explain how its inclusion supports a more complete understanding of students' early literacy development.

Copyright © 2026 Australian Council for Educational Research Ltd

Phonics and related skills

Phonics and related skills refer to the cluster of foundational code-based skills that support children's early decoding development. These include phonological awareness, phonemic awareness, and phonics. Phonological awareness is the ability to hear and consciously identify sound structures in spoken language, such as syllables, rhyme, onset and rime. Phonemic awareness is a more specific subset of phonological awareness and refers to the ability to identify and manipulate individual phonemes, the smallest units of sound in words. Phonics builds on these aural skills by connecting phonemes in spoken language to graphemes in written language, enabling children to decode words by applying knowledge of letter–sound relationships (Dickinson et al., 2003; Storch & Whitehurst, 2002; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998; Castles et al., 2018).

These skills are important because they underpin children's understanding of the alphabetic principle: the insight that written words represent spoken words through systematic sound–symbol correspondences. Children need to be able to hear and work with the sounds in spoken words before they can link those sounds to letters in print. As children learn letter–sound correspondences, their awareness of phonemes is further strengthened, creating a reciprocal relationship that supports increasingly accurate decoding (Castles et al., 2018; Dickinson et al., 2003; Hulme et al., 2012; Storch & Whitehurst, 2002).

A strong body of evidence shows that early skill in phonological and phonemic awareness is a robust predictor of later reading achievement, highlighting these skills as foundational components of early literacy development (e.g., Adams, 1990; Bowey, 2005; Ehri et al., 2001; Hulme et al., 2012; Melby-Lervåg et al., 2012; Snow et al., 1998; Stanovich & Stanovich, 2003; Wasik & Bond, 2001). This evidence also indicates that phonics instruction is most effective when it is explicit, systematic, and carefully sequenced, consistent with major reviews of reading instruction (National Reading Panel, 2000; Rose, 2006; Rowe, 2005).

In practice, this means effective early literacy teaching should support children to hear and manipulate sounds in spoken words, connect those sounds to letters, and apply this knowledge to reading and spelling. It also means assessment should distinguish among different code-based skills—for example, recognising rhyme, identifying initial and final phonemes, blending and segmenting sounds, and applying letter–sound knowledge in word reading—so that teachers can identify what each child knows and where targeted support is needed (Castles et al., 2018; Snow & Juel, 2005).

Listening comprehension

In the context of early literacy, listening comprehension refers to the ability to understand spoken language in orally delivered texts. It involves more than simply hearing words: it includes understanding vocabulary, sentence structure, discourse, inferential meaning, and the broader ideas conveyed in a range of texts. It draws on the same language comprehension processes used in reading comprehension, but without the additional cognitive demand of decoding print (Hogan et al., 2014; Hoover & Gough, 1990).

Listening comprehension includes both lower-level language skills and higher-level language processes. Lower-level skills include vocabulary and grammar, which support literal understanding at the word and sentence level. Higher-level processes include making inferences, building coherent mental models of texts, understanding text structures, and using background knowledge to interpret what is heard (Hogan et al., 2011; Hogan et al., 2014; Kintsch & Kintsch, 2005; Smith et al., 2021).

Listening comprehension is important because it provides the language foundation for later reading comprehension. Early learners can typically understand oral texts that are more complex than those they can decode for themselves. This means that listening allows children to engage with richer vocabulary, more complex syntax, and more sophisticated ideas well before they can access these independently through print. As children move from learning to read to reading to learn, the influence of language comprehension becomes increasingly important, and listening comprehension becomes a stronger determinant of reading comprehension than decoding alone (Adlof et al., 2006; Chall, 1983; Language and Reading Research Consortium & Logan, 2017; Shiel et al., 2012).

Listening comprehension is a key component of broader oral language proficiency, reflecting children's ability to understand and interpret spoken language. Longitudinal evidence shows that young learners' oral language skills at school entry are strong predictors of later reading comprehension success. In particular, children with less developed oral language in the preschool years are more likely to experience later difficulties in understanding written texts, even if these challenges are not immediately apparent during the early stages of learning to decode (Catts et al., 2006; Elwér et al., 2015; Hulme et al., 2015; Lervåg et al., 2018; Nation et al., 2010). This highlights the importance of monitoring listening

Copyright © 2026 Australian Council for Educational Research Ltd

comprehension from the start of schooling as an indicator of underlying oral language development, rather than waiting until students encounter more complex texts and begin to show visible comprehension difficulties.

Reading comprehension

Reading comprehension refers to the construction of meaning from written text. It is not a single isolated skill but the outcome of coordinated interactions among multiple subskill processes of word recognition and language comprehension, including accurate word reading, vocabulary knowledge, syntactic understanding, inferencing, awareness of text structures, and background knowledge (Catts, 2018; Hoover & Gough, 1990).

In the earliest phases of schooling, reading comprehension is strongly constrained by decoding because children cannot understand printed words if they cannot decode them. However, once children become more accurate and fluent in word reading, comprehension increasingly depends on broader language and knowledge-based factors. Reading comprehension for a fluent reader is primarily dependent on listening comprehension and broader language abilities. This shift commonly becomes more evident from around the third or fourth year of schooling onward (Catts et al., 2005; Language and Reading Research Consortium, 2015; Tilstra et al., 2009).

Reading comprehension is important because it is the central purpose of reading and the means by which learners access written information, engage with curriculum content, and participate fully in education. Some learners decode adequately but still experience significant reading comprehension difficulties because of weaknesses in oral language or higher-order language processes. This is important for both teaching and assessment, because it means that poor reading comprehension cannot be assumed to result only from weak decoding; children may need targeted support in oral language, vocabulary, inferencing, and discourse knowledge as well (Catts et al., 2006; Nation et al., 2010; Snowling et al., 2019).

Like other aspects of early literacy, reading comprehension can be improved through explicit instruction and targeted intervention. Each component of reading depends on, and contains, other elements, where learning about one affects learning about others (Such, 2021). Understanding these subcomponents and the relationships between them is necessary for educators to provide differentiated instruction. Research shows that comprehension is improved through targeted support in the areas of vocabulary instruction, discussion of texts, inferential questioning, understanding different text structures, and the use of background knowledge to support meaning. Reading comprehension difficulties can be ameliorated through appropriate teaching, reinforcing the importance of assessing both code-based and meaning-based skills as part of early literacy development (Arrow et al., 2015; Hogan et al., 2011; Hoover & Tunmer, 2020; Smith et al., 2021).

Copyright © 2026 Australian Council for Educational Research Ltd

Appendix 2

Trial design and assessment validity

A test is said to be valid if it measures what it was intended to measure. The PAT Early Literacy tests are planned and constructed to assess early literacy skills that are commonly accepted as important by expert teachers. In constructing the tests, care is taken to include a range of text types, where relevant, and skill areas to ensure that the breadth of students' abilities are being captured. All the items are subjected to intensive scrutiny, review and revision by panels of experts.

All items are developed by a group of experienced test developers specialising in early literacy, who review and panel the items until they are ready for trial. A rigorous process of quality checking, proof-reading and formatting then takes place. The psychometric team provides a trial design based on the items (number, distribution of stand and text type etc.) To ensure the most valid and reliable psychometric data is made available, PAT Early Literacy items were trialled in standalone trial test forms with sets of items placed into different locations in multiple versions of a single form. Schools using any of ACER's online PAT assessments opted for their students to participate in the PAT Early Literacy trial. Data analysis was performed after trial by the psychometric team, with the Test Development Manager making final decisions about item performance and deletions.

Each trial is designed to strengthen the construct, ensuring a spread of items along the PAT scale that meets the demands of strand and text type distribution, where relevant. The calibration procedures identified items that also appeared to be measuring skills other than those measured by the majority of items. Items 'misfitting' in this way were not retained. The items retained for PAT Early Literacy were shown to fit the Rasch measurement model satisfactorily. All PAT Early Literacy Reading Comprehension items, for example, could be regarded as measuring a student's location on a single underlying continuum of reading comprehension skills. PAT Early Literacy Reading Comprehensions includes items that also appear in PAT Early Years Reading End Year 1 Test and PAT Reading Adaptive.

Copyright © 2026 Australian Council for Educational Research Ltd

Appendix 3

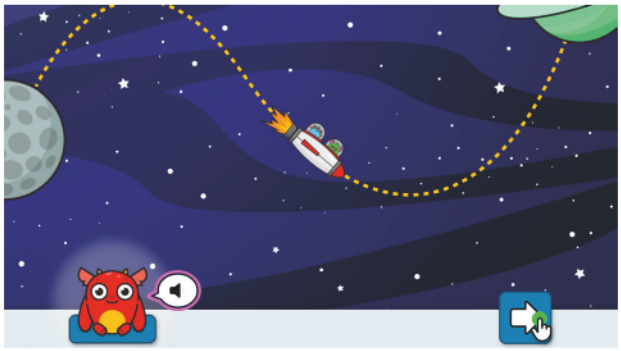
Test delivery features and item response format examples

Examples of beginning, middle and end story/encouragement screens are shown below for a single test in each domain. The practice item examples that follow illustrate commonly used item response formats and background screens.

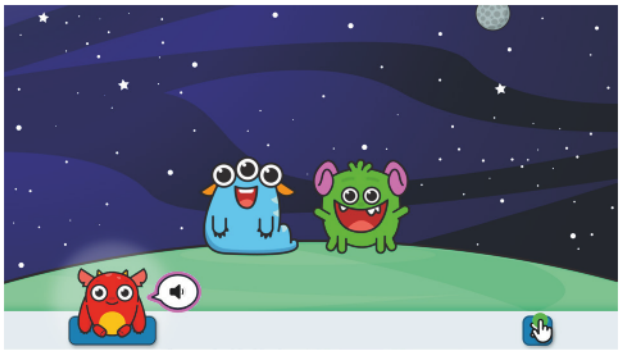
Phonics and Related Skills

Story/encouragement screen examples

Audio (beginning) – *"Hi, I'm Flurg. My friends and I are lost and we need your help. By answering these questions, you can help us get back to our home planet. Now watch and listen closely. Tap play when you want to hear me again. Start by tapping the arrow."*



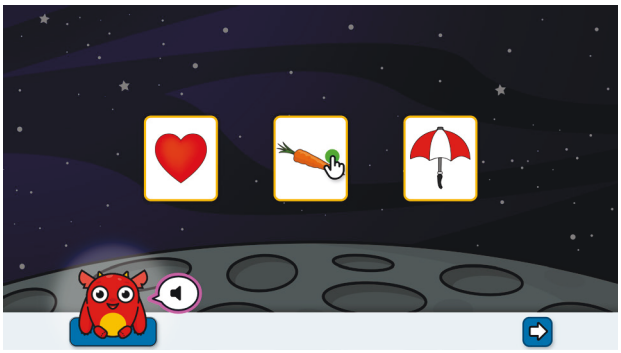
Audio (middle) – *"Well done! Thank you for helping us. We are halfway home."*



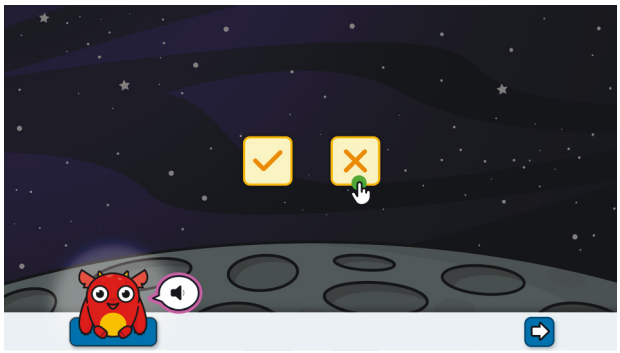
Audio (end) – *"Thank you, we got back to our planet! We are so happy to be home. You've done a fantastic job, and we appreciate all your efforts. Now let your teacher know that you have finished."*

Copyright © 2026 Australian Council for Educational Research Ltd

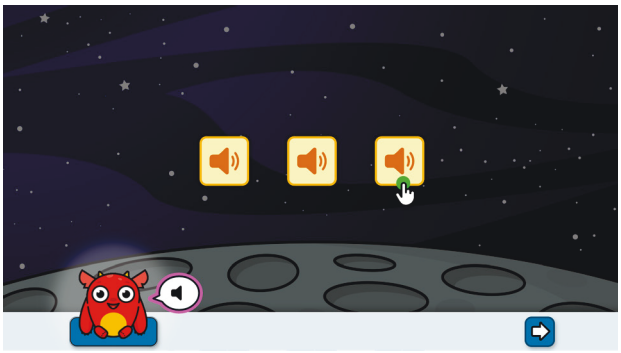
Practice examples



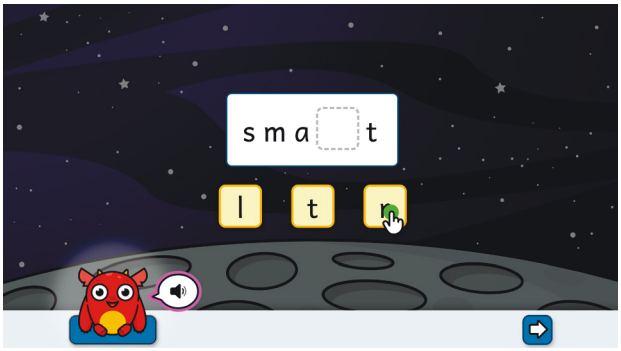
Multiple-choice with image response options – *"First, we need to practise how to use the buttons. Have a go at selecting the carrot."*



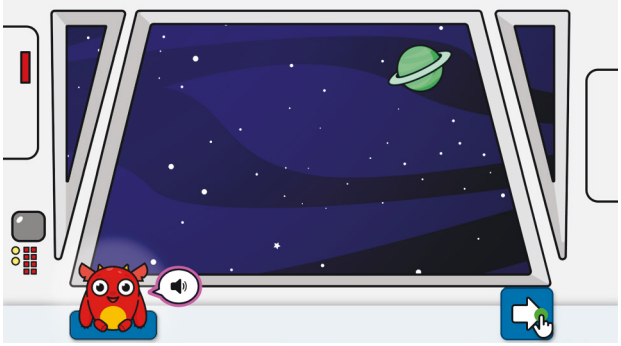
Multiple-choice with audio yes/no response options – *"I am going to ask you a question and you need to answer 'yes' or 'no'. One button has a tick for 'yes', and one button has a cross for 'no'. Let's practise together. Here is the question: Does 'dog' rhyme with 'cat'? No it doesn't so you need to select the cross button"*



Multiple-choice with audio response options – *"We are going to practise one more time. Listen and select the button that says 'horse'."*



Tap-and-drop – *"We are going to select the missing letter from a word. The word is 'smart'. The letter 'r' is missing. Tap on the letter 'r' and it will complete the word."*

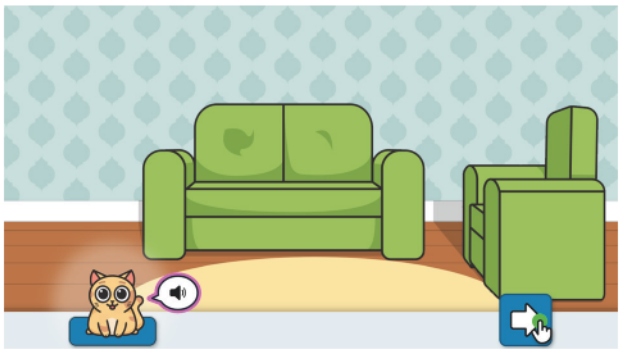


Audio-only practice instruction – *"We are going to be listening to the sounds at the start of words. 'Slow' starts with /sl/. Now it's your turn. Tap on the arrow to continue."*

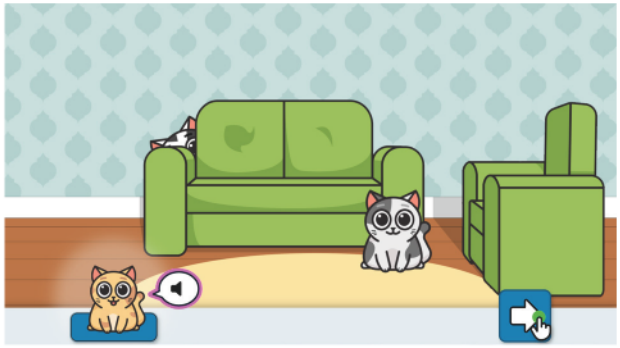
Copyright © 2026 Australian Council for Educational Research Ltd

Listening Comprehension

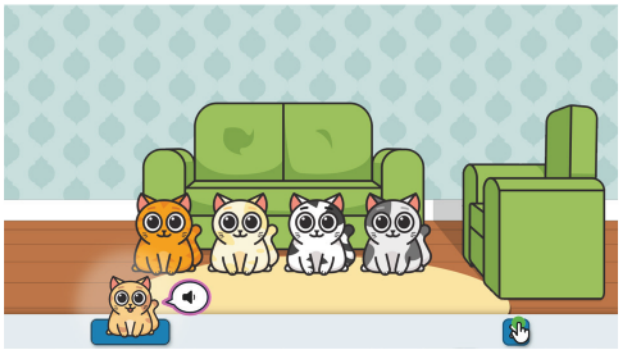
Story/encouragement screen examples



Audio (beginning) – *"Hello. My name is Ginger. Oh no! I've lost my friends, and I need your help. You can help me by answering some questions. Now watch and listen closely. Tap play when you want to hear me again. Start by tapping the arrow."*



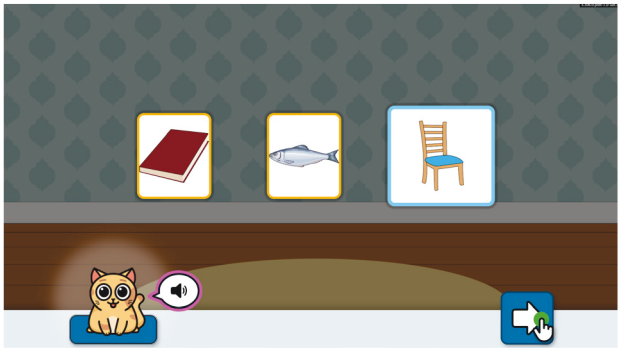
Audio (middle) – *"I think I can see some ears. That might be Fluffy. Please help again by answering some new questions."*



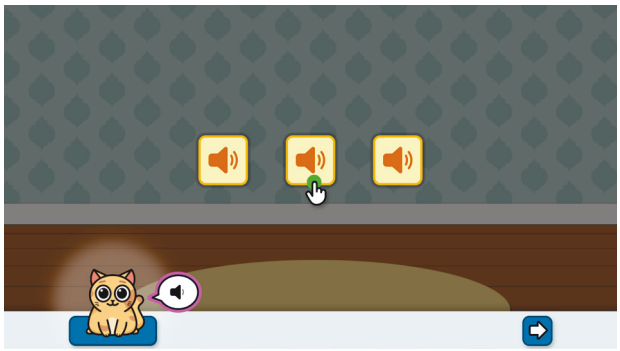
Audio (end) – *"You have found all my friends, Thank you so much for all your help. Now let your teacher know that you have finished."*

Copyright © 2026 Australian Council for Educational Research Ltd

Practice examples

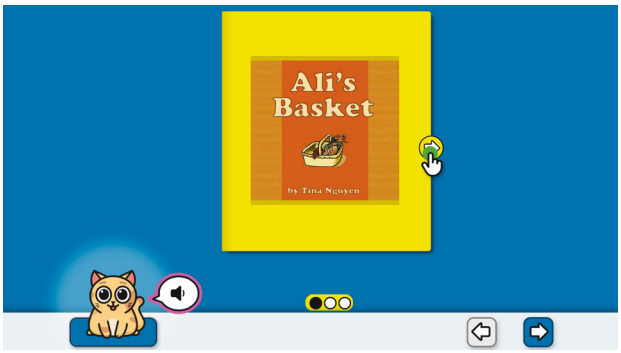


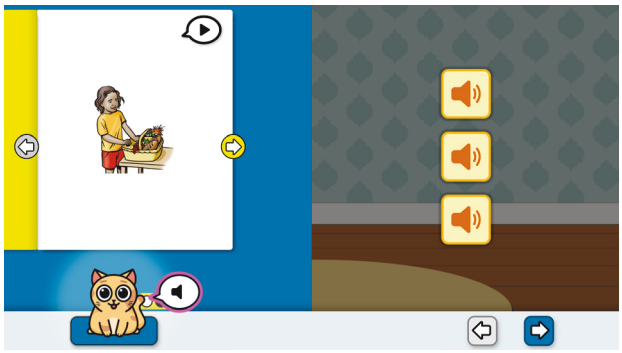
Multiple-choice with image response options – *"First, we need to practise how to use the buttons. Have a go at selecting the chair."*



Multiple-choice with audio response options – *"We are going to practise one more time. Listen and select the button that says 'star'."*

eBook with practice (listen to the book and questions)



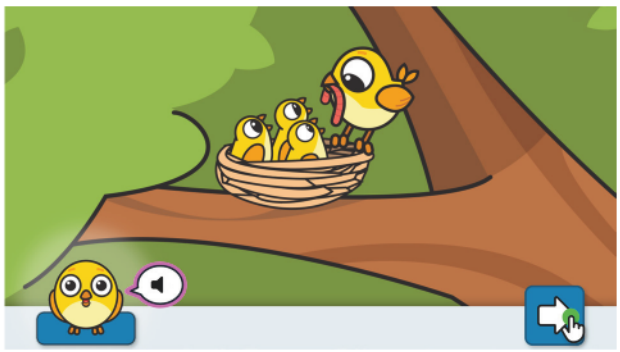


Copyright © 2026 Australian Council for Educational Research Ltd

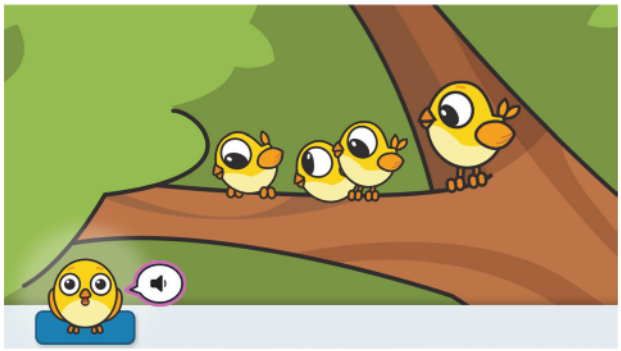
Reading Comprehension

Story/encouragement screen examples

Audio (beginning) – *"Hi, I'm glad you're here! My name is Tweety. By answering these questions, you can help me feed my chicks until they are ready to fly. Tap play when you want to hear me again. Start by tapping the arrow."*



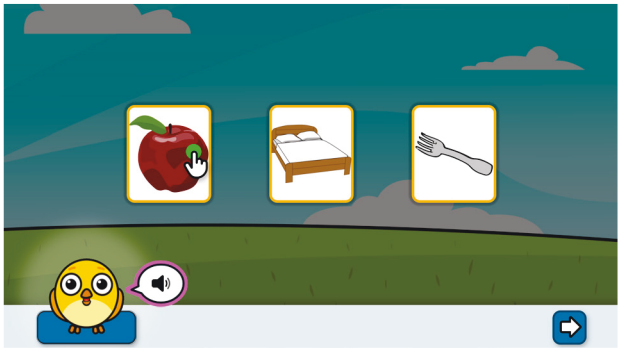
Audio (middle) – *"Wonderful! Keep going. My chicks are so big now! Soon they will be able to fly."*



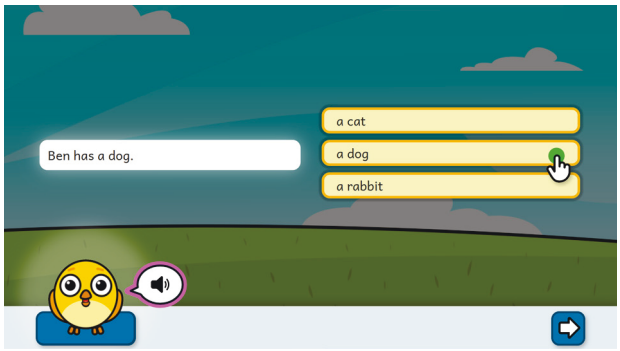
Audio (end) – *"Congratulations! You did it! My chicks are all grown up! I think they're ready to learn to fly! I'm so glad you were able to help me. Now let your teacher know that you have finished."*

Copyright © 2026 Australian Council for Educational Research Ltd

Practice examples

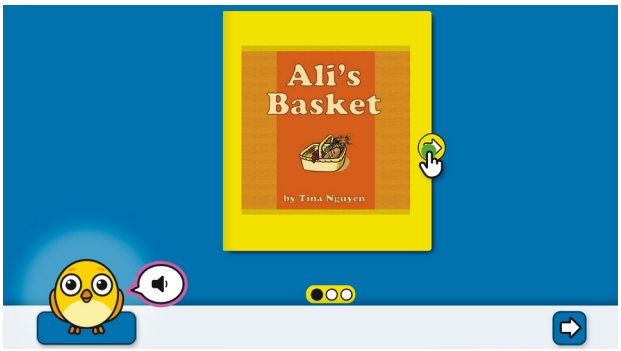


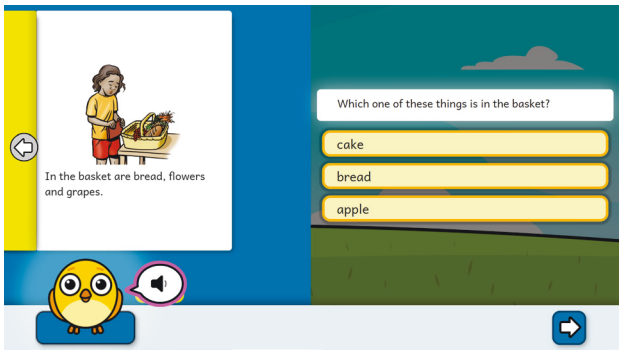
Multiple-choice with image response options – *"First, we need to practise how to use the buttons. Have a go at selecting the apple."*



Multiple-choice with audio instruction – *"Now let's practise together. Read the sentence first, then select the answer to the question: What does Ben have?"*

eBook with practice (read the book and questions)





Copyright © 2026 Australian Council for Educational Research Ltd

References

Adams, M. J. (1990). *Beginning to read: Thinking and learning about print.* MIT Press.

Adlof, S. M., Catts, H. W., & Little, T. D. (2006). Should the simple view of reading include a fluency component? *Reading and Writing, 19*(9), 933–958. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11145-006-9024-z

Arrow, A. W., Chapman, J. W., & Greaney, K. T. (2015). Meeting the needs of beginning readers through differentiated instruction. In W. E. Tunmer & J. W. Chapman (Eds.), *Excellence and equity in literacy education: The case of New Zealand* (pp. 171–194). Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137415578_8

Bowey, J. A. (2005). Predicting individual differences in learning to read. In M. J. Snowling & C. Hulme (Eds.), *The science of reading: A handbook* (pp. 155–172). Blackwell.

Castles, A., Rastle, K., & Nation, K. (2018). Ending the reading wars: Reading acquisition from novice to expert. *Psychological Science in the Public Interest, 19*(1), 5–51. https://doi.org/10.1177/1529100618772271

Catts, H. W. (2018). The simple view of reading: Advancements and false impressions. *Remedial and Special Education, 39*(5), 317–323. https://doi.org/10.1177/0741932518767563

Catts, H. W., Adlof, S. M., & Weismer, S. E. (2006). Language deficits in poor comprehenders: A case for the simple view of reading. *Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research, 49*(2), 278–293. https://doi.org/10.1044/1092-4388(2006/023)

Catts, H. W., Hogan, T. P., & Adlof, S. M. (2005). Developmental changes in reading and reading disabilities. In H. W. Catts & A. G. Kamhi (Eds.), *The connections between language and reading disabilities* (pp. 25–40). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Chall, J. S. (1983). *Stages of reading development.* McGraw-Hill.

Conley, M. W., & Wise, A. (2011). Comprehension for what? Preparing students for their meaningful future. *Theory Into Practice, 50*(2), 93–99. https://doi.org/10.1080/00405841.2011.558411

Dickinson, D. K., McCabe, A., Anastasopoulos, L., Peisner-Feinberg, E. S., & Poe, M. D. (2003). The comprehensive language approach to early literacy: The interrelationships among vocabulary, phonological sensitivity, and print knowledge among preschool-aged children. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 95*(3), 465–481. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-0663.95.3.465

Duke, N. K., & Cartwright, K. B. (2021). The science of reading progresses: Communicating advances beyond the simple view of reading. *Reading Research Quarterly, 56*(S1), S25–S44. https://doi.org/10.1002/rrq.411

Ehri, L. C., Nunes, S. R., Willows, D. M., Schuster, B., Yaghoub-Zadeh, Z., & Shanahan, T. (2001). Phonemic awareness instruction helps children learn to read: Evidence from the National Reading Panel's meta-analysis. *Reading Research Quarterly, 36*(3), 250–287.

Elwér, Å., Gustafson, S., Byrne, B., Olson, R. K., Keenan, J. M., & Samuelsson, S. (2015). A retrospective longitudinal study of cognitive and language skills in poor reading comprehension. *Scandinavian Journal of Psychology, 56*(2), 157–166. https://doi.org/10.1111/sjop.12188

Ferrer, E., Shaywitz, B. A., Holahan, J. M., Marchione, K. E., Michaels, R., & Shaywitz, S. E. (2015). Achievement gap in reading is present as early as first grade and persists through adolescence. T*he Journal of Pediatrics, 167*(5), 1121–1125.e2. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpeds.2015.07.045

Förster, N., Kawohl, E., & Souvignier, E. (2018). Short- and long-term effects of assessment-based differentiated reading instruction in general education on reading fluency and reading comprehension. *Learning and Instruction, 56, 98–109.* https://doi.org/10.1016/j.learninstruc.2018.04.009

Gonski, D. (2018). *Through growth to achievement: Report of the review to achieve educational excellence in Australian schools.* Commonwealth of Australia.

Gough, P. B., & Tunmer, W. E. (1986). Decoding, reading, and reading disability. *Remedial and Special Education, 7(1), 6–10.* https://doi.org/10.1177/074193258600700104

Copyright © 2026 Australian Council for Educational Research Ltd

Hogan, T. P., Adlof, S. M., & Alonzo, C. N. (2014). On the importance of listening comprehension. *International Journal of Speech-Language Pathology, 16*(3), 199–207. https://doi.org/10.3109/17549507.2014.904441

Hogan, T. P., Bridges, M. S., Justice, L. M., & Cain, K. (2011). Increasing higher level language skills to improve reading comprehension. *Focus on Exceptional Children, 44*(3), 1–19.

Hoover, W. A., & Gough, P. B. (1990). The simple view of reading. *Reading and Writing, 2*(2), 127–160. https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00401799

Hoover, W. A., & Tunmer, W. E. (2020). *The cognitive foundations of reading and its acquisition: A framework with applications connecting teaching and learning.* Springer.

Hulme, C., Bowyer-Crane, C., Carroll, J. M., Duff, F. J., & Snowling, M. J. (2012). The causal role of phoneme awareness and letter-sound knowledge in learning to read: Combining intervention studies with mediation analyses. *Psychological Science, 23*(6), 572–577. https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797611435921

Hulme, C., Nash, H. M., Gooch, D., Lervåg, A., & Snowling, M. J. (2015). The foundations of literacy development in children at familial risk of dyslexia. *Psychological Science, 26*(12), 1877–1886. https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797615603702

Kendeou, P., McMaster, K. L., & Christ, T. J. (2016). Reading comprehension: Core components and processes. Policy Insights from the *Behavioral and Brain Sciences, 3*(1), 62–69. https://doi.org/10.1177/2372732215624707

Kintsch, E., & Kintsch, W. (2005). Comprehension. In S. G. Paris & S. A. Stahl (Eds.), *Children's reading comprehension and assessment* (pp. 71–92). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Konza, D. (2014). Teaching reading: Why the "Fab Five" should be the "Big Six". *Australian Journal of Teacher Education, 39*(12), 153–169. https://doi.org/10.14221/ajte.2014v39n12.10

Language and Reading Research Consortium. (2015). Learning to read: Should we keep things simple? *Reading Research Quarterly, 50*(2), 151–169. https://doi.org/10.1002/rrq.99

Language and Reading Research Consortium, & Logan, J. (2017). Pressure points in reading comprehension: A quantile multiple regression analysis. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 109*(4), 451–464. https://doi.org/10.1037/edu0000150

Lervåg, A., Hulme, C., & Melby-Lervåg, M. (2018). Unpicking the developmental relationship between oral language skills and reading comprehension: It's simple, but complex. *Child Development, 89*(5), 1821–1838. https://doi.org/10.1111/cdev.12861

Masters, G. N. (2013). *Reforming educational assessment: Imperatives, principles and challenges.* Australian Council for Educational Research.

Melby-Lervåg, M., Lyster, S.-A. H., & Hulme, C. (2012). Phonological skills and their role in learning to read: A meta-analytic review. *Psychological Bulletin, 138*(2), 322–352. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0026744

Nation, K., Cocksey, J., Taylor, J. S. H., & Bishop, D. V. M. (2010). A longitudinal investigation of early reading and language skills in children with poor reading comprehension. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry, 51*(9), 1031–1039. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-7610.2010.02254.x

National Reading Panel. (2000). *Report of the National Reading Panel: Teaching children to read: An evidence-based assessment of the scientific research literature on reading and its implications for reading instruction: Reports of the subgroups.* National Institute of Child Health and Human Development.

O'Reilly, T., Wang, Z., & Sabatini, J. (2019). How much knowledge is too little? When a lack of knowledge becomes a barrier to comprehension. *Psychological Science, 30*(9), 1344–1351. https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797619862276

Paris, S. G. (2005). Reinterpreting the development of reading skills. *Reading Research Quarterly, 40*(2), 184–202. https://doi.org/10.1598/RRQ.40.2.3

Rose, J. (2006). *Independent review of the teaching of early reading.* Department for Education and Skills.

Rowe, K. (2005). *Teaching reading: Report and recommendations.* Department of Education, Science and Training.

Scarborough, H. S. (2001). Connecting early language and literacy to later reading disabilities: Evidence, theory, and practice. In S. B. Neuman & D. K. Dickinson (Eds.), *Handbook of early literacy research* (pp. 97–110). Guilford Press.

Copyright © 2026 Australian Council for Educational Research Ltd

Shiel, G., Cregan, Á., McGough, A., & Archer, P. (2012). *Oral language in early childhood and primary education (3–8 years): Commissioned research report.* National Council for Curriculum and Assessment.

Smith, R., Snow, P., Serry, T., & Hammond, L. (2021). The role of background knowledge in reading comprehension: A critical review. *Reading Psychology, 42*(3), 214–240. https://doi.org/10.1080/02702711.2021.1888348

Snow, C. E. (2020). *Reading for understanding.* Harvard Education Press.

Snow, C. E., Burns, M. S., & Griffin, P. (Eds.). (1998). *Preventing reading difficulties in young children.* National Academy Press.

Snow, C. E., & Juel, C. (2005). Teaching children to read: What do we know about how to do it? In M. J. Snowling & C. Hulme (Eds.), *The science of reading: A handbook* (pp. 501–520). Blackwell.

Snowling, M. J., Nash, H. M., Gooch, D. C., Hayiou-Thomas, M. E., Hulme, C., & Wellcome Language and Reading Project Team. (2019). Developmental outcomes for children at high risk of dyslexia and children with developmental language disorder. *Child Development, 90*(5), e548–e564. https://doi.org/10.1111/cdev.13216

Stanovich, P. J., & Stanovich, K. E. (2003). Using research and reason in education: *How teachers can use scientifically based research to make curricular and instructional decisions.* RMC Research Corporation.

Storch, S. A., & Whitehurst, G. J. (2002). Oral language and code-related precursors to reading: Evidence from a longitudinal structural model. *Developmental Psychology, 38*(6), 934–947. https://doi.org/10.1037/0012-1649.38.6.934

Such, C. (2021). *The art and science of teaching primary reading.* SAGE Publications.

Tilstra, J., McMaster, K., Van den Broek, P., Kendeou, P., & Rapp, D. (2009). Simple but complex: Components of the simple view of reading across grade levels. *Journal of Research in Reading, 32*(4), 383–401. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9817.2009.01401.x

Wasik, B. A., & Bond, M. A. (2001). Beyond the pages of a book: Interactive book reading and language development in preschool classrooms. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 93*(2), 243–250. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-0663.93.2.243

Wiliam, D. (2011). *Embedded formative assessment*. Solution Tree Press.

Whitehurst, G. J., & Lonigan, C. J. (1998). Child development and emergent literacy. *Child Development, 69*(3), 848–872. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8624.1998.tb06247.x

Copyright © 2026 Australian Council for Educational Research Ltd