

National Reporting System

Frequently Asked Questions on Assessment

North Carolina Basic Skills/Literacy Programs

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1. Why do I have to use a standardized assessment instrument?

The National Reporting System (NRS) is the accountability system for the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA) of the Workforce Investment Act. The NRS requires states to test all Basic Skills/literacy students with a standardized test developed for adults. Local Basic Skills/literacy providers are required to assess students using standardized pre/post assessments approved by the NRS and to place students in educational levels and report gain measures.

2. Who needs to be assessed?

All students in programs funded by the North Carolina Community College System must be tested twice annually with an approved Basic Skills assessment (CASAS, TABE, WorkKeys, BEST, and BEST Plus). All students reported in the National Reporting System data submission must be tested and scores entered in the appropriate data system (LEIS, Literacy Education Information System, for community colleges; LACES, Literacy, Adult and Community Education System - for community-based organizations). Students who are unable to understand or respond to some tests due to low literacy or English proficiency or due to disability should be assessed with CASAS preliteracy and POWER Level 5A.

If a student is not given a pre- and post-assessment, the program cannot show student completion of a federal educational functioning level (EFL) or movement to a higher level.

3. What are federal educational functioning levels?

Federal educational functioning levels (EFL's) are levels that states use to provide information to the federal government about student progress. The levels provide global descriptions of students' abilities in reading, writing, and/or math.

The following are the federal functioning levels:

Adult Basic Education

Beginning Adult Basic Education Literacy

Beginning Basic Education

Low Intermediate Basic Education

High Intermediate Basic Education

Adult Secondary (GED & Adult High School)

Low Adult Secondary

High Adult Secondary

English as a Second Language

Beginning ESL literacy
Low Beginning ESL
High Beginning ESL
Low Intermediate ESL
High Intermediate ESL
Advanced ESL

4. What assessments may be used to determine federal educational functioning levels?

Allowable tests include the following: Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System (CASAS), Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE), BEST, BEST Plus and WorkKeys. In addition, local programs are encouraged to use a variety of informal assessments to assist instructors/tutors in selecting appropriate teaching methods and materials.

No other tests may be used to determine federal educational functioning levels. See the chart below to determine which assessment may be used with each federal educational functioning level:

TEST	ABE	ESL	GED/Adult High School
CASAS	√	√	√
TABE	√		√
Workkeys	√ High Intermediate ABE only		√
BEST/BEST Plus		√	

5. In what skill areas should students be assessed?

Students do not need to be assessed in all of the areas described in the level descriptors. The local program must decide, in accordance with state guidelines, the skill areas most relevant to each student's needs or the program's curriculum and assess students in these areas. At a minimum, students must be assessed in basic reading, writing, listening, performance, **or** math.

If multiple skill areas are assessed and the student has different abilities in different areas, the program should place the student according to the *lowest* educational functioning level. For example, if a student is at the beginning level in reading and the low intermediate level in numeracy, then the student would be placed in the beginning level.

The lowest functioning level also should be used to determine educational gain in subsequent assessments.

See the chart below to determine the subject areas assessed on each of the approved assessment instruments.

TEST	Reading	Math	Writing	Listening	Other
CASAS	√	√	√	√	Speaking Government & History
TABE	√	√			Language
WorkKeys	√	√			
BEST/BEST Plus	√		√	√	Communication Fluency Pronunciation

6. Do I need to use locators and appraisals?

Assessment systems, such as TABE and CASAS, have a locator or appraisal component to be used to determine the most appropriate pre-assessment instruments for each student. The locator/appraisal should be used prior to administering the pre-assessment battery or test. Locators or appraisals may NOT be used in place of pre-assessments to determine a scale score or grade equivalent for placement on an entry federal functioning level.

A locator or appraisal may be administered on the first day of class because it is not a lengthy assessment. Because the full assessment process may be overwhelming to some students, it is better to avoid giving all components of the test battery on that same day. All test batteries should be completed within a two week period.

7. How do I match standardized assessment results to federal educational functioning levels (EFL's)?

The following chart should be used to determine the entry and exit federal functioning levels:

Beginning ABE Literacy	
Test Benchmark: TABE (9–10) scale scores (grade level 0–1.9): Reading: 367 and below Total Math: 313 and below Language: 389 and below	CASAS scale scores: Reading: 200 and below Math: 200 and below Writing: 200 and below
Beginning Basic Education	
Test Benchmark:	CASAS scale scores:

<i>TABE (9–10) scale scores (grade level 2–3.9):</i> Reading: 368–460 Total Math: 314–441 Language: 390–490	Reading: 201–210 Math: 201–210 Writing: 201–225
Low Intermediate Basic Education	
<i>Test Benchmark:</i> <i>TABE 9–10) scale scores (grade level 4–5.9):</i> Reading: 461–517 Total Math: 442–505 Language: 491–523	<i>CASAS scale scores:</i> Reading: 211–220 Math: 211–220 Writing: 226–242
High Intermediate Basic Education	
<i>Test Benchmark:</i> <i>TABE (9–10) scale scores (grade level 6–8.9):</i> Reading: 518–566 Total Math: 506–565 Language: 524–559	<i>CASAS scale scores:</i> Reading: 221–235 Math: 221–235 Writing: 243–260 <i>WorkKeys scale scores:</i> Reading for Information: 75–78 Writing: 75–77 Applied Mathematics: 75–77

Low Adult Secondary Education (GED & Adult High School)	
<i>Test Benchmark:</i> <i>TABE (9–10) scale scores (grade level 9-10.9):</i> Reading: 567–595 Total Math: 566–594 Language: 560–585 <i>CASAS scale scores:</i> Reading: 236–245 Math: 236–245 Writing: 261–270	<i>WorkKeys scale scores:</i> Reading for Information: 79–81 Writing: 78–85 Applied Mathematics: 78–81
High Adult Secondary Education (GED & Adult High School)	
<i>Test Benchmark:</i> <i>TABE (9–10) scale scores (grade level 11-12):</i> Reading: 596 and above Total Math: 595 and above Language: 586 and above <i>CASAS scale scores:</i> Reading: 246 and above Math: 246 and above Writing: 271 and above	<i>WorkKeys scale scores:</i> Reading for Information: 82-90 Writing: 86-90 Applied Mathematics: 82-90

Beginning ESL Literacy	
<i>Test Benchmark:</i> CASAS scale scores: Reading: 180 and below Listening: 180 and below	<i>Oral BEST:</i> 0-15 (SPL 0-1) <i>BEST Plus:</i> 400 and below (SPL 0-1) <i>BEST Literacy:</i> 0-7 (SPL 0-1)
Low Beginning ESL	
<i>Test Benchmark:</i> CASAS scale scores: Reading: 181-190 Listening: 181-190 Writing: 136-145	<i>Oral BEST:</i> 16-28 (SPL 2) <i>BEST Plus:</i> 401-417 (SPL 2) <i>BEST Literacy:</i> 8-35 (SPL 2)
High Beginning ESL	
<i>Test Benchmark:</i> CASAS scale scores: Reading: 191-200 Listening: 191-200 Writing: 146-200	<i>Oral BEST:</i> 29-41 (SPL 3) <i>BEST Plus:</i> 418-438 (SPL 3) <i>BEST Literacy:</i> 36-46 (SPL 3)
Low Intermediate ESL	
<i>Test Benchmark:</i> CASAS scale scores: Reading: 201-210 Listening: 201-210 Writing: 201-225	<i>Oral BEST:</i> 42-50 (SPL 4) <i>BEST Plus:</i> 439-472 (SPL 4) <i>BEST Literacy:</i> 47-53 (SPL 4)
High Intermediate ESL	
<i>Test Benchmark:</i> CASAS scale scores: Reading: 211-220 Listening: 211-220 Writing: 226-242	<i>Oral BEST:</i> 51-57 (SPL 5) <i>BEST Plus:</i> 473-506 (SPL 5) <i>BEST Literacy:</i> 54-65 (SPL 5-6)
Advanced ESL	
<i>Test Benchmark:</i> CASAS scale scores: Reading: 221-235 Listening: 221-235 Writing: 243-260 Exit Criteria from Advanced ESL : CASAS Writing: 261 and above CASAS Reading and Listening: 236 and above Oral BEST: 65 and above (SPL 7) BEST Plus: 541 and above (SPL 7)	<i>Oral BEST:</i> 58-64 (SPL 6) <i>BEST Plus:</i> 507-540 (SPL 6) <i>BEST Literacy:</i> 66 and above (SPL 7)

8. *When do I administer the pre-tests?*

Pre-tests are administered during the student orientation process, before entering class at an assessment center, or within the first two weeks of classroom instruction. It is not advisable to administer a complete set of pre-test on the student's first day.

9. *How do I document student completion of a federal educational functioning level (EFL) or movement from one level to the next?*

The only way to document that a student has completed a level or moved to a higher one is with documented pre- and post-assessment scores. (The only exception is that adult high school students may be moved from low adult secondary to high adult secondary upon completion of half of their credits.)

10. *Are standardized assessments the only kind of assessment to be used in a classroom?*

The North Carolina Community College System Office encourages local Basic Skills/literacy programs to use a variety of informal assessments to assist instructors/tutors in designing appropriate educational programs for adults. The use of instructor/tutor-made tests, unit tests, portfolios, applied performance assessments, and learner observations are encouraged to design and monitor learning opportunities.

These tests may not be used to determine completion of a federal educational functioning level (EFL) or movement from one level to the next.

Types of formal/informal assessments may be (but are not limited to):

- Computerized assessments
- End of unit tests from textbooks
- Informal reading inventories
- Portfolios
- Applied performance measures
- Learner observations
- Instructor/tutor-made assessments
- GED practice tests
- TABE Espanol
- Other tests that help diagnose student learning needs and progress.

11. Where should assessment take place?

Assessments may take place in the classroom or in assessment centers; however, those environments should be well-lit, have comfortable seating and heating/cooling, and be free of distraction or noise. An instructor or test proctor has to be available for questions, timing, etc.

12. Are standardized assessments interchangeable?

Assessment scores from one standardized test are not interchangeable with another. You cannot pre-test with one instrument and post-test with another. For example, you cannot pre-test with CASAS ESL and post-test with BEST Plus.

13. What assessment form should be used to post-assess?

The corresponding form of the assessment instrument used in pre-testing must be used in post-testing. For example, if you pre-test with TABE M, Form 9, then you must post-test with TABE M, Form 10.

14. How frequently should I post-test?

You should post-test according to manufacturer's post-test guidelines. If post-testing occurs less than the manufacturer's post-test guidelines, the program must keep written documentation which includes the reason for post-testing early. The written documentation must include evidence of why the students are expected to make gains on the test even though the post-test guidelines have not been followed.

15. What are the manufacturer's post-test guidelines?

Recommended Timeframes for Pre- and Post-testing
Adult Education Assessments

Test Name	Recommended Pre- and Post-testing Timeframes	Contact/Notes
ACT/ Workkeys	We typically recommend that the student be involved in regular instruction that is offered by the institution. This would amount to a semester or quarter course.	Barb Ciha Placement Programs barb.ciha@act.org

Test Name	Recommended Pre- and Post-testing Timeframes	Contact/Notes
<p>Basic English Skills Test (BEST) [Includes the Oral Interview and Literacy Skills Sections]</p> <p>BEST Plus</p>	<p>60 hours minimum; 80-100 hours recommended</p> <p>If the hours for a course of instruction exceed the recommended number of hours, post-testing may most appropriately take place at the end of the instructional session.</p> <p>Because program-related factors such as intensity of instruction, class size, teacher training and experience, and use of appropriate curricula and materials will affect language learning proficiency gains, programs should consider these factors when determining timing for pre- and post-testing.</p>	<p>Frank Finamore <i>BEST Plus</i> Project Manager Center for Applied Linguistics frank@cal.org, 202-362-0700</p>
<p>CASAS</p>	<p>70-100 hours (40 hours is the minimum)</p> <p>Allow exceptions for courses with different schedules and intensity, e.g., allow more time for courses that meet infrequently or not intensively and for very intensive courses wait longer than the recommended number of hours to post-test.</p> <p>Programs offering high intensity courses (e.g., class meets more than 15 hours per week) may choose to test at the end of a semester, term, quarter, or other substantial block of instruction, even though the instructional intervention is more than 100 hours of instruction.</p> <p>Programs offering low intensity courses with less than 70 hours in a semester, quarter, term, or other block of instruction, may choose to post-test at the end of the</p>	<p>From Linda Taylor, Director of Assessment Development, CASAS, 800-255-1036, ext. 186, ltaylor@casas.org, www.casas.org</p>

Test Name	Recommended Pre- and Post-testing Timeframes	Contact/Notes
TABE, Forms 9 and 10	<p>instructional period.</p> <p>Programs testing with POWER need to allow 200 hours of instruction between testing.</p> <p>Programs may choose to assess students who indicate they are leaving the program before the scheduled post-test time, to maximize collection of paired test data.</p> <p>If the pre- and posttest are for the same level but using a different form (e.g., (TABE 9 Level M to TABE 10 level M): 60 hours.</p> <p>If the pre- and posttest are with the same level and use the same form (e.g., TABE 9 level M to TABE 9 level M): 120 hours.</p> <p>CTB/McGraw-Hill suggests the pre- and post-test guidelines as Best Practices recommendations based upon feedback and APA guidelines. The purpose for assessing with TABE will also have an impact on the implementation of these recommendations. CTB discourages random and frequent testing as it will not present valid gain scores and could create a practice effect, thus producing questionable or spurious scores. Instructional intervention between testing periods is strongly recommended to maximize gain. Proper use of the Locator Test as a determinant of appropriate content level testing is also strongly recommended and is an integral part of the testing process.</p> <p>If a test is to be administered as a retest because the initial test</p>	<p>Michaeline M. Powell, District Manager CTB/McGraw-Hill mpowell@ctb.com 703.698.1325</p>

Test Name	Recommended Pre- and Post-testing Timeframes	Contact/Notes
	session was invalid, there is not a prescribed length of time that needs to occur. However, CTB strongly encourages some instructional time in order to avoid a practice effect.	

16. Are there any guidelines which test administrators must follow?

Quality control must be maintained for assessment procedures. Local program directors/coordinators may use the following assessment checklist to ensure correct assessment procedures have been followed.

<i>Standardized Assessment Checklist</i>	
Assessment Procedures for Test Administrators	yes/no
1. The test administrator has been trained in giving the assessment(s).	
2. The test administrator has read the test manual(s).	
3. The test administrator follows all directions in giving the assessment(s).	
4. The testing facility is quiet, has adequate lighting, and adequate space for test-takers.	
5. The test administrator follows all directions, including strict adherence to time limits, etc.	
6. The tests are accurately scored and raw scores are converted to scale scores.	
7. Tests results are kept confidential.	
8. Test results are shared with test takers and appropriate instructors and staff in a timely manner.	
9. Test answers are not shared with test takers, but the type of questions missed may help test takers to understand what they need to learn.	
10. Tests results are available for instructors and program staff.	
11. Test results are reported in LEIS or LACES in a timely manner (no less than quarterly).	
12. Tests are kept in a secured location.	

17. When should test data be entered in LEIS or LACES?

LEIS is the Literacy Education Information System which all community colleges use to enter their data electronically. LACES is the electronic data system used for community-based organizations. Testing data should be entered into LEIS (community colleges) and LACES (community-based organizations) on an on-going basis. Data should be entered no less than quarterly.

18. How many times annually must students be tested?

Students must be tested twice per year to show movement from one level to the next.

19. How will pre-post testing help with instruction?

Pre-testing will help place learners in the correct educational functioning level so they are not working with instructional materials that are too easy or too difficult. Most curriculum developers align their materials with the federal educational functioning levels so students may receive appropriate instruction. Post-testing will help instructors determine when students need to be placed in higher level material.

20. Where can I get training on administering assessments?

The North Carolina Community College System funds a cadre of CASAS trainers to provide training in CASAS for all community colleges, community-based organizations funded by NCCCS, and other non-profit agencies working with community colleges or community-based organizations funded by NCCCS. These trainers conduct annual training sessions in different regions of the state. Check the Basic Skills website for a list of certified CASAS trainers. In addition, NCCCS offers annual training sessions on other approved assessments, pending availability of trainers from assessment manufacturers. Check the Basic Skills Training Calendar on the community college system website for training opportunities or check with your local program director.

21. Which levels should be assessed with each approved standardized test and what are the training requirements?

See Chart below.

Assessment	Appropriate Levels	Training Requirements
CASAS	<p>All ABE levels All Adult Secondary Levels All ESL levels</p>	<p>CASAS requires that minimally one person from each agency using the CASAS system successfully complete CASAS Implementation training. Once trained, this individual can train others within his or her respective agency but may not train outside that agency.</p> <p>Separate CASAS Implementation trainings have been developed for ABE/ASE, ESL, and Employability Skills. These trainings focus on teaching participants to administer, score, and interpret CASAS reading, listening, and math assessments. Implementation trainings also address how to use the CASAS competency system as well as how to use CASAS resources, such as Quick Search, to facilitate instruction.</p> <p>Separate trainings are available for CASAS Functional Writing, POWER (for developmentally disabled adults), Citizenship, and Workplace Speaking, among others.</p> <p>The North Carolina Community College System requires all local agencies to comply with the CASAS training policy presented above.</p>
TABE	<p>All ABE levels (except Compensatory Education) All Adult Secondary Levels</p>	<p>Training is required for all personnel who administer the TABE. Training must be conducted by someone who has been trained in administering the TABE (may be someone at the local level). Training may be in group sessions or individualized.</p>
Basic English Skills Test (BEST)	<p>All ESL levels</p>	<p>Training is required for all personnel who administer the BEST. Training must be conducted by someone who has been trained in administering the BEST (may be someone at the local level). Training may be in group sessions or individualized.</p>
BEST Plus	<p>All ESL levels</p>	<p>Training is required for all personnel who administer the BEST Plus. Training must be conducted by someone who has been trained in administering the BEST Plus (may be someone at the local level). Training may be in group sessions or individualized.</p>
Workkeys	<p>High Intermediate ABE Low Adult Secondary High Adult Secondary</p>	<p>Training is required for all personnel who administer WorkKeys. Training must be conducted by someone who has been trained in administering the WorkKeys (may be someone at the local level). Training may be in group sessions or individualized.</p>

22. What would happen if a local program does not follow the state's assessment guidelines?

If a program does not follow the state's assessment guidelines, technical assistance will be offered by System Office staff to help the program comply with regulations. If a program continues not to follow assessment guidelines, the program will get an audit exception (for colleges only) or could lose federal funding (for colleges and community-based organizations).

For more information on Basic Skills/literacy assessment in North Carolina, please visit the System Office Basic Skills website at www.nccommunitycolleges.edu. Information about assessment will be under "Administration and Regulations."

You may also contact Dr. Randy Whitfield at 919-807-7132 or whitfieldr@nccommunitycolleges.edu.