

Guidelines For Assessing Reading Skills in Deaf Children

The following points are important to remember when assessing the reading skills of a child who is deaf or hard of hearing.

The Child

- Consider each child individually. Some children may prefer to use British Sign Language, some may use a mixture of signing and speaking and some may use only speech.
- Ask the child / their parents /their teacher whether the child prefers to sign, speak or use both prior to the assessment so that the child is not disadvantaged by the mode of communication used. The child's communication should guide the assessor's style of communication.
- For children who predominantly use sign language, the assessment should be conducted by a fluent signer or with the use of an appropriately qualified interpreter.

The Environment

- The assessment room should be in a quiet area with good acoustics.
- The examiner and child should sit so they can see each other's faces easily.
- The examiner's face should be well lit and clearly visible to allow the child full use of speech reading cues.
- Use a video recorder to record the session so that scoring may be checked afterwards.

The Assessment

- Deaf children may find some assessments difficult to understand because of delayed language development or gaps in their vocabulary. Low reading test scores may reflect poor language development.
- When presenting an assessment using spoken language, the assessor should use clear speech patterns.
- It is often worth considering different ways of presenting the test materials such as using simpler language, giving examples or practice items, using sign support (if children are signers), using pictures.
- Think about how the tasks are presented. If tasks are presented orally, deaf children may miss the unstressed aspects of the language such as endings like 'cats' or 'jumped'. In some instances, presenting the task with pictures is fairer.
- Think about what you want the deaf child to do. If the child is asked to read / produce words, the intelligibility of their speech may affect the scores. Some children may be penalised because they cannot pronounce all the sounds in the word.