

## Using Readability Levels to Guide Students to Books

### Accelerated Reader™

Accelerated Reader is the daily progress monitoring assessment technology designed to help you motivate and monitor student reading practice. When Accelerated Reader is used according to best practices for classroom implementation, it has been shown to accelerate reading growth for all students, regardless of ability.

Readability:

#### What It Is and Why It Is Useful

For more than 50 years, readability formulas have helped teachers, librarians and parents match books to students. Readability formulas use objective measurements to analyse text and predict which materials can be comprehended by individual readers. This concept is particularly important in Accelerated Reader, which emphasises that students show the most reading improvement if they regularly practice reading within a range of difficulty that is neither too challenging nor too easy. Accelerated Reader uses the ATOS™ readability formula—for more information on this formula, see Page 3 of this document.

#### What It Is Not

Advances in technology and statistical techniques have led to improvements in the science of readability, but there are still some things that readability formulas cannot do—and will never be able to do. All readability formulas produce an estimate of a book's difficulty based on selected variables in the text, but none analyses the suitability of the content or the literary merit for individual readers. This decision is up to educators and parents, who know best what content is appropriate for each student.

#### Judging the Suitability of Books for Individual Pupils

In this guide, we will refer to three different levels to use when matching books to students. The first two levels refer to a book; the third refers to the student.

- Readability level, or book level, measures the textual difficulty of a book and is determined by a readability formula such as ATOS. For example, *Of Mice and Men* has an ATOS readability level of 4.5.
- Interest level refers to the sophistication and maturity level of a book's content, ideas and themes. These levels are based on publisher recommendations about the content. *Of Mice and Men* has an upper-years (UY) interest level, indicating the content is generally suitable for students in years 10–13.
- Reading level measures the most difficult level of text a student can comprehend based on standardised tests or results from Accelerated Reader Reading Practice Quizzes. Technically, *Of Mice and Men* could probably be read by year 5 students, but the content might not be suitable for them. That is why using all three levels—and considering the maturity level of each student—is so important.

These three levels often differ, which presents both challenges and opportunities in the classroom. You can use the differences in the three levels to help students with specific needs. For example, *Of Mice and Men* is not suitable for most students in year 5, but it might be the perfect choice for students in the upper years who are struggling with books written at higher levels.

The table on the next page shows some other possible scenarios that might occur with specific readers in your class, along with practical advice for addressing these situations.

## Readability: How to Use It in the Classroom

Self-selection of books is an essential component of Accelerated Reader because it empowers students to choose books that appeal to them. Of course, you need to set some guidelines. Here is how you can use readability levels, reading levels and interest levels to guide students to the right books:

### 1. Start by explaining the levels to your students.

Take a few minutes in class to explain the differences, using sample readability, interest and reading levels and sample books that are similar to those that most students in the class would encounter. Tell students that the reading level is about them (their tested reading level), while readability level and interest level are about the book. The readability level is about the difficulty of the text, and the interest level is about the content and whether it is suitable for a certain age group. Show students how Accelerated Reader books are labelled and what the labels mean.

### 2. Identify the students' ZPD (Zone of Proximal Development) with STAR Reading™.

ZPD represents a range of reading levels that is appropriate for a student's reading ability.

#### Advice for Matching Books to Students

Pupil	Book	Example
High-performing year 4 reader	Suggest books with higher readability level than interest level. Make sure that the student is still reading within her Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD).	The Finger-Eater ATOS readability level = 4.9 Interest level = LY
Struggling year 6 reader	Suggest books with low readability level and interest level that matches the students' age.	Boffin Boy and the Rock Men ATOS readability level = 2.2 Interest level = MY
High-performing year 7 reader	Suggest books with higher readability level than interest level. You can also suggest books with lower readability level, but with content or literary devices that may make text more difficult. Make sure that the student is still reading within their zone of proximal development (ZPD).	Little Women ATOS readability level = 7.5 Interest level = MY
Struggling upper years reader	Suggest books with low readability level and upper-year interest level. Conduct Status of the Class to monitor whether the student is struggling with the text and whether the content is appropriate	Point Blanc: Graphic Novel ATOS readability level = 2.6 Interest level = UY

LY = Lower Years (1–4) • MY = Middle Years (5–8) • UY = Upper Years (9–13)

### 3. Guide pupils to select books with readability levels in their ZPD ranges.

The readability level should fall within the ZPD range. Books that are outside of this range may be too challenging or too easy for the student.

### 4. Guide students to select books within the appropriate interest level.

For example, teachers in the lower years might want to make a rule that their students read only LY interest-level books. You can grant exemptions if you feel an individual student could handle the ideas and content of a book with a higher interest level.

### 5. Monitor progress daily.

After helping students select books, monitor comprehension with the daily routine called Status of the Class. This routine involves a short conversation with each student, in which you talk to students about their progress through their books. Is the book too easy or too hard for the student? Does the student understand the book? Is the student enjoying the book?

## What to do with proficient Upper Years readers

Students usually move up to higher readability levels as their reading improves, but upper years readers pose unique challenges. As they move up, they find that there are fewer and fewer books to choose from at higher readability levels. For this reason, we recommend that you not continue to “up the year” indefinitely for upper years readers, but use these strategies instead:

### Emphasise the importance of variety in reading.

Rather than focusing on a book’s readability level, emphasise how important it is to enjoy many different kinds of literature. Encourage students to explore new subjects, new genres and new authors. Recommend that they read non-fiction books written at their reading levels. Also, suggest longer books at their current reading levels.

### Use “Honours Reader” book lists.

You can create special lists to direct Upper Years’ students to challenging literature. It is motivational for students to read from a teacher selected list. Acknowledge students who achieve Honours Reader status by posting their names on a bulletin board or applauding them at a rally.

## About ATOS

The ATOS for Books formula is the first and only readability method based on analysis of actual student reading of entire books. Other formulas were developed from statistics derived from students reading short passages.

ATOS is based on extensive research on:

- the characteristics of text that most heavily influence readability
  - the world’s largest database of words used in actual books (more than 30,000 books comprising nearly 500 million words)
  - comprehension statistics from 30,000 US Students reading almost a million books
- ATOS also calculates readability from full-text computer scans of all the words in a book, rather than just sample passages employed by most other formulas.

For all these reasons, ATOS most accurately measures book difficulty, especially for hard-to-measure books such as these:

- “high-low” books, which are read by struggling readers and often are overestimated by Flesch-Kincaid and other widely accepted readability formulas
- emergent reader books, which often are underestimated by other formulas
- non-fiction books, which often are more difficult than fiction books but are underestimated by other formulas
- long books, which can also be underestimated by other formulas

For more information about ATOS, call 020 8184 4000