

Screening What it is and Why we need to do it



1. [Screening: What Is It and Why Is It Important?](#)
2. [Understanding Screening: Overall Screening and Assessment](#)

3. The Seven Most Important Factors to Consider When Selecting a Screener *(Based on the work of Dr. Nadine Gaab)*

Dr. Nadine Gaab explains that there are seven key factors to consider when selecting the right screener to identify children in your school, classroom, or district who may be at risk for reading difficulties.

Choosing the right screener is essential — it determines how early and how accurately we can identify children who need additional support to develop strong literacy skills.

1. Assessing Key Skills

First and foremost, make sure the screener assesses all of the critical foundational skills that are important for learning to read. A good screener should measure phonological awareness, letter-sound knowledge, rapid naming, and other early literacy skills that are strong predictors of reading success.

2. Evidence-Based Screener

Secondly, ensure the screener

is evidence-based. There should be solid research supporting its effectiveness. Avoid tools that are based solely on personal experience or anecdotal success — such as someone saying, “*It worked in my classroom last year.*” Instead, look for screeners that have been validated through research and have published data showing reliability and predictive accuracy.

3. Characteristics of the Norming Group

Next, consider who the screener was normed on. This is essential for ensuring fairness and accuracy.

For example, if you are working in an urban school with many children from lower socio-economic status (SES) families, make sure those demographics were represented in the norming process. In other words, ask: *Were children from low-SES backgrounds included when the screener was developed and standardized?*

If not, the results might not accurately reflect the abilities or needs of the students in your population.

4. Time Considerations

Another practical factor is how much time it takes to administer the screener. There are very short screeners and much longer ones — and what works best will depend on your context. Make sure the screener fits your school’s screening protocol and schedule. For example:

- Some schools screen students in the summer before kindergarten, which allows for more one-on-one time.
- Others screen during the first week of kindergarten, when time is extremely limited. Choose a screener that is efficient but still provides meaningful, reliable data.

5. Sensitivity and Specificity

It’s also important to understand the terms sensitivity and specificity:

- Sensitivity is the screener’s ability to correctly identify children *who are at risk* for a reading disability.

- Specificity is the screener’s ability to correctly identify those *who are not at risk*.

Both are essential for accuracy — a balance between the two helps ensure that children get the support they truly need.

6. False Positives and False Negatives

These two terms relate directly to sensitivity and specificity:

- A false positive occurs when a child is identified as being at risk but actually isn’t. This can happen for various reasons — maybe the child was tired, hungry, anxious, or simply had an off day during testing.
- A false negative occurs when a child *is* at risk, but the screener fails to identify it.

False negatives are especially concerning because these children may not receive early intervention when it could make the greatest difference.

7. Managing False Positives and False Negatives

Finally, every district needs to decide how to balance these two outcomes.

Ideally, you want to avoid false negatives — it’s better to identify every child who might be at risk, even if that means a few extra false positives. However, the balance depends on your resources, the number of trained testers, and the capacity for follow-up support.

You can think of it as adjusting two sliders: one for false positives and one for false negatives. The goal is to find the balance that best fits your district’s needs while ensuring that no at-risk child is overlooked.

In Summary

Selecting the right screener is about much more than convenience — it’s about ensuring equity, accuracy, and early support. When educators carefully consider these seven factors outlined by Dr. Nadine Gaab, they can make informed decisions that lead to better outcomes for all students.

4. What is BC doing

They are going to use the Diebels [\[Link\]](#) for the first year or so and then design their own to use.

[What do Parents need to know about Diebels](#)

5. As Parents

- You are your child's best advocate.
- Learn everything you can.
- Keep a Journal - Write everything down that happens with the school as well as with your child.
- Always ask questions.
- Find out what the benchmarks are for the screeners.
- When do you ask for more screening or testing?

6. Where to go for Resources -

[Dr Nadine Gabb - The Gabb Lab](#)

[National Center on Improving Literacy](#)

[Yale Center for Dyslexia and Creativity](#)

[The Reading League](#)

7. What are the 5 pillars of reading

The National Reading Panel, using decades of research, has identified five critical areas of reading instruction: Phonemic Awareness, Phonics, Fluency, Vocabulary and Comprehension.

Articles to Read

1. [Screening and Assessment](#)
2. [Understanding Literacy Screening : Reliability](#)
3. [4 Questions to Ask After Universal Screening For Dyslexia](#)
4. [The Adolescent Assessment of Literacy Tool \(AAL\)](#)

5. [7 Factors to consider when choosing a screening tool](#)
6. [Core Considerations for Selecting a Literacy Screener](#)
7. [Early Literacy Screening Tools Resource - Government of BC 2025](#)
8. [Early Literacy Universal Screening Assessment Guidance - The Reading League](#)
9. [Universal Screening | Elementary Literacy | Surrey Schools ONE 2025](#)
10. [Explaining Ontario's Early Reading Screening program - Western News](#)
11. [Screening for Reading Impairments — Gaab Lab](#)