

# Translating IALS into the World of Instructional Practice: 2 Examples

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**Fall Institute 2011**

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# 2 Examples

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- **ReadForward** – a series of informal adult reading tests referenced to IALS
- **Alberta Reading Benchmarks** – provincial literacy levels referenced to IALS

# ReadForward

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- National project funded by OLES
- Why did we create ReadForward?
  - There were few, if any, professionally-created, informal, developmental reading tests for adults available to practitioners

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# Goal: Create a series of informal tests spanning the range of skills in literacy / basic education classrooms

- To do this, there need to be tests at multiple levels of increasing difficulty

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# Establishing levels for the tests

- If you are going to create a set of graduated adult reading tests, what do you base your gradations on?
  - Design a set of custom levels
  - Use grade levels from the school system
  - Use the widely referenced set of international literacy levels

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# Why use IALS as a framework for levels of tests?

- IALS is the reference benchmark to increasing national literacy skills as set out by the Canadian government
- IALS/Essential Skills is the only broadly known skills benchmarking system for adults in Canada
- IALS levels are empirically-based
- IALS levels are arguably based on better measurement methodology and research than other adult reading level frameworks

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# Problems with using IALS levels as a basis for graduated levels in practical reading tests

- IALS was not intended as a system of levels to be used in an instructional setting
- There are particular challenges with IALS Levels 1 and 2 which are the domain of literacy instruction:
  - IALS did not do much with Level 1 (doesn't provide a score below 200)
  - Level 2 has a very narrow score band (225 – 275 points out of 500) but encompasses a very broad range of skills

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# Problems continued...

- Both IALS 1 and 2 encompass too broad a range of skills to be used as levels for instructional purposes
  - E.g. A reader beginning at low level 2 taking part-time literacy courses could study for years and still be in level 2 because there is such a large increase in skills required to move from the bottom of level 2 to the top
  - Learners and teachers need more “small” levels to mark achievable progress increments

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# Solving the problems....

- We had to find a way of subdividing the IALS levels into smaller levels
- Consulted with Scott Murray and Stan Jones who thought this could be doable.
- Stan Jones went back to the data he had available from the International Survey of Reading Skills that had been done in conjunction with IALS testing.

# Result

- The data supported dividing IALS 1 and 2 into these sublevels:

<b>Referencing ReadForward to IALS Levels</b>		
<b>IALS Level</b>	<b>IALS Score Range</b>	<b>ReadForward Segment</b>
<b>1</b>	<b>Below 200</b>	(no ReadForward Segment at lowest level)
		<b>A</b>
	<b>200-225</b>	<b>B</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>225-240</b>	<b>C</b>
	<b>241-260</b>	<b>D</b>
	<b>261-275</b>	<b>E</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>276-300</b>	<b>F</b>

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# The parameters of the tests

- Prose and Document combined
- Content: everyday life, community and workplace
- Texts would be informed by samples provided by learners of things they needed to read in their lives
- Easy to use
- Take an one hour (or less) to complete
- Accessible to practitioners:
  - paper and pencil
  - practitioner guide
  - economical cost (rights given to reproduce copies)
- Learner more of a participant in the process than in standardized IALS testing

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# Designed for the day-to-day classroom

- 5 forms of the test at each of the levels (30 in all)
  - Enough for several forms of the test to be used as class activities and several for testing
- 2 locator tests
- 32 tests in all

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# Quality control measures

- Tests were piloted in literacy and basic education programs nationally (but not statistically validated to IALS levels)
- Item analysis done by an expert with IALS experience

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# Test item samples

- See handout

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What is the accountant's name? \_\_\_\_\_

▶▶ **Sharon Nish**  
Accountant



**BIG LAKE FIRST NATIONS RESERVE**

Box 165

**PHONE**

403.234.5823

**EMAIL ADDRESS**

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# readforward

## The resource contents

**User Guide**

language awareness  
BRIGHT FUTURE  
LITERACY SKILLS  
educational  
INSTRUCTIONAL assessment  
ADVANCE GROW TEACHER  
establish JOB EXPAND  
idea NOUN DOCUMENT  
PROSE responsive  
STRATEGIES continuous  
student everyday  
PLAN learning  
NEEDS basic  
build VERB  
ENGAGING COMPREHENSIVE

advantage DEVELOPMENT  
understand PROMOTE  
adult  
feedback PROGRESS  
TRAINING PROGRAM  
TEXT  
reading  
promote

readforward  
BOW VALLEY  
Centre for Foundational Learning



Results Feedback Form for Segment B

Try Segment A

Keep working on your reading skills:

- Understand context/words in text
- Make connections words to other words in nearby text
- Know where to find personal information in a text
- Recognize a short text in a personal response to a text
- Select main details
- Make choices based on understanding meaning rather than relying only on structure

Try Segment C

20% 80%

Questions	Score*	Total Score	Recommended Segment
1 - 10		1 - 10	A
11 - 20		11 - 20	B
21 - 30		21 - 30	C
Total Score		30	Use Lower Segment: C, D, E, & F

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# Alberta Reading Benchmarks

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- Background:
  - Alberta Government produced the Living Literacy framework in 2009 to guide literacy programming in the province
  - The Living Literacy framework committed the province to creating literacy levels referenced to IALS

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# The process

- The government gave the task for creating Alberta's reading levels to a partnership team:
  - 3 umbrella literacy organizations
  - 2 community colleges
  - 2 government departments (a third is joining)
- Goals included system alignment and transition
- Collaborative, consultative process
- Government gets a lot of credit for how it has gone about this—gave leadership to the field

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# Setting the stage

- We were expected to utilize existing work that had been done
- Researched the literacy frameworks established in other provinces and countries
- Consulted with practitioners across Alberta about qualities they wanted the benchmarks to have

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# What we settled on

- Benchmarks in other jurisdictions were not closely aligned to IALS
- Reading benchmarks, not literacy benchmarks
- The work Stan Jones had done in creating sublevels for ReadForward had provided us with set of descriptors for levels.
- Decision was made to adopt this framework of levels and sublevels and their descriptors as the base for the Alberta levels for a number of reasons:
  - IALS alignment
  - Based on significant empirical research
  - Simplicity

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# IALS features included in Alberta Reading Benchmarks

- IALS scores referenced in the benchmarks
- Separation of text and task
- Broad definition of text (prose and documents)
- Tasks reflect real-life tasks that readers need to do (this differs from a reading comprehension approach)
- The difficulty of task is based on an analysis of complexity (Mosenthal, Hardt)

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# IALS features continued....

- Decoding: stems from the IALS-related component skills work of the International Survey Reading Skills
- Vocabulary: also stems from the ISRS

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# Other design features of the Benchmarks

- Intended to be a resource to teachers/tutors and learners
  - Accountability not the primary driver
- Simplicity paramount
- Simplified language
- Use of examples

level

1b

IALS LEVEL  
AND  
SCORE RANGE

**LEVEL 1** No IALS score range because IALS scores below 200 can't be divided into level ranges.

#### TYPES OF TEXTS THAT READER CAN DEAL WITH AT THIS LEVEL

- Common formats: phone numbers, addresses, prices
- Short lengths of text about something familiar that are usually a few words long but can be up to one short simple sentence in length
- Simple lists
- Texts contain only information that is directly related to the task

#### EXAMPLE TEXTS

- Shopping list with the number of items needed:  
⇒ 4 apples  
⇒ 1 onion  
⇒ bread
- Simple menu with prices:  
⇒ hamburger - \$5.00  
⇒ fries - \$4.50
- Simple forms like a luggage tag that requires the reader's name to be written,
- Simple flyer ads
- Simple rental listings such as found on a bulletin board

#### TYPES OF READING TASKS THAT READER CAN DO AT THIS LEVEL

Able to deal with reading tasks that:

- Focus on words rather than phrases or sentences: a task that asks the reader to identify the country that the woman lived from this sentence: "The woman lived in China."
- Involve common and concrete words: dog, car, door, street
- Involve recognizing common formats to find the required information: finding a phone number on a form or an address on an envelope.
- Match word-for-word what is written in the text: answering the question "When was the dog lost?" based on a text that explicitly states: "Dog lost, when: June 22, where: Crescent Park."
- Locate only one piece of information: "What is the cost of a hamburger?"
- Involve simple comparisons: a task that asks for first, last, most or cheapest when comparing two items.

#### DECODING SKILLS AND VOCABULARY OF A READER AT THIS LEVEL

- Reading vocabulary generally consists of concrete nouns and simple action verbs: house, pencil, run, eat
- Reading vocabulary generally consists of one- and two-syllable words: dog, pay, table, walked
- Has enough decoding ability to deal with words that are simple and easy to sound out.

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- Alberta Reading Benchmarks:  
[www.albertaliteracybenchmarks.ca](http://www.albertaliteracybenchmarks.ca)
  - ReadForward:  
<https://agrosso.bowvalleycollege.ca/bookstore/>
  - For further information, contact the Centre for Excellence in Foundational Learning:  
[bvccfl@bowvalleycollege.ca](mailto:bvccfl@bowvalleycollege.ca)