

(Preliminary Manual)
The Miller Word-Identification Assessment

Edward Miller, 1991 & Donald L. Potter 2012

(Introduction by Charlie M. Richardson)

Introduction

The purpose of the *Miller Word-Identification Assessment* (MWIA) is to discover how a person “looks at” printed words, or the extent to which he/she is reading with the whole-word memorization or a phonetic decoding strategy.

The person is asked to read two lists (called “Holistic” and “Phonetic”) of words which, though different, are all easy enough that a Phonetic-decoding reader will exhibit substantially equal fluency in both lists. However, for the whole-word trained reader one list (the Holistic list) will be significantly easier, it being composed of high-frequency words found in most basal-reader school texts and in children’s books such as *The Cat in the Hat* and *Green Eggs and Ham*. The drop in fluency and accuracy as the person proceeds from the Holistic List to the Phonetic list indicates the degree to which he/she has become “dyslexic,” that is, having dysfunctional reading, by having learned to view words as whole pictorial configurations rather than sound-decodable syllables where sequences of letters represent the order of sounds to be pronounced. The latter process is, of course, what has historically been called “sounding-out”, or “decoding,” by alphabetic principles often called “phonics.”

CAUTION: Although this test may lead to a student’s being judged “dyslexic,” it is NOT an intelligence test, NOT a psychological test, NOT a medical test. It is an *educational* test yielding insight as to how a student has learned to “look at” words in print. Since the Holistic list contains 15 multi-syllable words and 18 having irregularities and/or “silent” letters, and the Phonetic list contains only one-syllable alphabetically-regular words, differences in fluency/accuracy are NOT explainable via biological factors, and must therefore be learned behaviors.

By way of background, psychiatrist Hilda Mosse (*The Complete Handbook of Children’s Reading Disorders*, Riggs Institute) identified a category of “sociogenic reading disorders .. caused by .. establishment and practice of wrong reflexes.” She pointed out that a “conditioned reflex” emplaced in the brain by whatever is learned *first* as a reading strategy is highly resistant to change thereafter. Similarly, teacher-researcher Geraldine Rodgers (*The Case for the Prosecution, 1981*)¹ identifies two categories of readers, “subjective” and “objective,” confirming Oskar Messmer’s 1903 research, described by Edmund Burke Huey in his 1908 *The Psychology and Pedagogy of Reading*. The “subjective” readers are the holistic readers who guess unfamiliar words from context and/or parts of meaning-bearing words, and have difficulty with the new material. By contrast, “objective” readers are those who have learned syllable decoding to automaticity, leaving their intellects free to concentrate on the text meaning. Thus it has been known for many years that phonics skills learned AFTER a whole-word reflex has been acquired tend NOT to be used automatically. Rodgers found similar patterns of differences in students learning to read in four other languages other than English. I observed this effect in my own practice during the 1970’s, but did not understand its nature.

¹*The Hidden Story*, AuthorHouse.com, 1998

Test Description

The MWIA has two levels, each being a pair of lists: Holistic I & Phonetic I; Holistic II & Phonetic II, all contained on five pages (attached), identical for both student and teacher/examiner. The first page contains the Level I Holistic and Phonetic lists; the second page and third pages respectively contain the Holistic II and Phonetic II lists, fourth and fifth pages two 150-word articles titled “Vote I and Vote II;” A sixth page is an optional Summary Sheet for recording student data and all test scores and analyses. The Level I is for young or relatively beginner-level readers. The Holistic-D I list has 50 words from The Dolch Basic Sight Vocabulary of 220 Words and Dolch Noun List. The Holistic-D II list is composed of 210 words from the same list. The Phonetic I list is 50 phonetically regular words of one syllable taken from the first 14 Phonics Exercises Rudolf Flesch’s 1955 *Why Johnny Can’t Read and what you can do about it*. The Phonetic II words are simple phonetically regular from the first 39 Phonics Exercises in Flesch’s book.

Procedure

A. Decide whether you will start at Level I or Level II, based upon your judgment of the student. Young or low-level students might be able to do only Level I; secondary or adult students usually start at Level II. Prepare a teacher’s copy of the test by writing the student’s name in the spaces of the sheet you will be using. The student will be timed as he reads each list, so you will need a stopwatch or equivalent timing device. The student works from an unmarked copy of the test; it may be useful to set aside copies in (non-glare) plastic page protectors. Arrange the student comfortably seated at a desk or table with a copy of the test face down or with the first row covered. Arrange yourself where the student cannot see if, how, or when you are marking your copy. (If you are recording the test, arrange a microphone in as non-threatening a position as possible, preferably a small clip-on lavalier microphone clipped to the front of the student’s clothing.) To help the student keep his place, provide a short ruler or file card as a line guide if he seems to need it; or let him use his finger or place a light pencil mark at the beginning of each row as he starts it.

B. Say to the student: “We are going to ask you to read words from two lists. You probably know some of them already. Read all the words across in each row, then the next, and so on. Say each word carefully as you can; accuracy is the most important thing, so do not hurry even though I will be timing you. This is NOT a speed test; we just need to see how long it takes you to read the words.” If he has questions, answer them as best you can; then say, “Please turn over the paper and begin.” [Point wherever you are starting.]

C. Point as needed to where the student should begin. Help him align his line guide if necessary. Start your timer as the student says the first word. Listen carefully (if not taping), and underline on the teacher’s copy each word that the student mis-calls or double-calls. (Notice if his “double-calls” are first holistic, or the reverse.) Stop your timer when he says the last word in the Holistic section. Enter the timer reading in minutes and second by the word “TIME.” Reset your timer. (Writing the student’s responses over the misread words can reveal valuable insights into the student’s word processing strategies – suggested by Donald Potter of Odessa, TX.)

D. Repeat C for the Phonetic List. After doing the Phonetic list, in the phonetic section only, revisiting the words (at least 5 – 10 if not all) that were missed/underlined, point to each in turn, and ask the student to:

1. Spell the word aloud while looking at it, and then,
2. Say the word again.

If he now calls the word correctly, draw a circle around it in your copy. If he still mispronounces the word, put /slashes/.

E. If the student took more than 100 seconds on both level I lists, go no further. If he had read either list in less than 100 seconds, proceed with level II, using the same procedures as above.

F. After giving the Phonetic II section, have the student spell and retry missed words as in D, above. Note: For a young student or one who struggled with Level II lists, it may be too much to re-try all the missed words. Revisit only enough to support the computing of a sensible correction basis, say 5 – 10. Record the number revisited in the second blank space after “Spell-corrected.” Make the “Phonic Efficiency” computation as the number corrected divided by the number revisited, converted to a percentage.

G. If the student read the Phonetic II list well, have him read the “Vote” article. Underline the mis-called or skipped words, and if possible indicate any substitutions or additions. Record time and errors where indicated.

H. Tell the student he did great things even if he only followed directions!

Scoring

Count the underlined words (including circled) words in each section; write the count on the line “Err.” Convert the “times” from minutes & seconds to total seconds. Convert total seconds to word-per-minute (WPM), calculating per the formula below:

For Level I (50-word) test, compute WPM by dividing total seconds into 3000: $WPM = (50 \times 60) / (\text{TIME in SECONDS}) = 3000 / \text{TIME}$; e.g., for a time of 150 seconds, the speed would be 3000 divided by 150 or 20 WPM. (Round to the nearest whole number.)

For Level II (210 word) sections, WPM is 12600 divided by total seconds: $WPM = (210 \times 60) / (\text{TIME in seconds}) = 12600 / \text{TIME}$; e.g., for a time of 200 seconds, the speed would be 12600 divided by 200 or 63 WPM.

For the “VOTE” articles, WPM is 9000 divided by Total Seconds.

For the Phonetic Sections, count the words that are *circled* and enter the count in the space after “Spell-Corrected.” Divide this count by number of words underlined, revisited per the NOTE in Part F, above. Express the results as a percentage, i.e., multiply by 100. This is the “Phonetic Efficiency” indicator, the student’s ability to decode words phonetically once his attention has been directed to the spelling.

Compute “percent of slow-downs” as: $100 \times (\text{Holistic WPM} - \text{Phonetic WPM}) / \text{Holistic WPM}$, and record in the space indicated. In Level II, it is convenient to transcribe the Holistic scores on to the Phonetic page where indicated, so as to have all data on one page.

Interpretation/Discussion

If the student reads at 30 WPM or more (50 words in 100 seconds or less; or 210 words in 420 seconds or less), he is using an “automatic” system, whatever it is.

Observe the percent slow-down between the corresponding Holistic and Phonetic lists. If the student has first learned a non-phonetic word identification system as a principal strategy, he may be “running on automatic” in the Holistic list, but unable to do so, and significantly (15% or more) slower in the Phonetic list. (Students have been found who slow down more than 50%.)

Compare the numbers of errors between corresponding Holistic and Phonetic lists. If the student is a whole-word reader, his accuracy will suffer on the Phonetic lists. Students whose strategy is holistic have been known to make over 10 times as many errors on the Phonetic as on the Holistic list. Look at the pattern of “double-called” words. The student with the non-phonetic or holistic strategy calls the word non-phonetically *first*, never the other way around.

The spell-and-re-try steps, note that where the student correctly calls certain words *only after his attention is directed to their spelling*, this indicates the existence of TWO knowledge systems relevant to identification of words. The two knowledge systems are mutually exclusive, and the student cannot deny either one by conscious effort. This is a condition known to psychologist as “cognitive dissonances,” which has been known to lead to emotional disturbance and trauma.

The holistic, or shape-recognition, a way of perceiving visual stimuli relies mainly on the RIGHT brain hemisphere for processing as simultaneous or “parallel” data. Conversely, the phonetic way of decoding letters and syllables is in *serial* order uses mainly the LEFT brain hemisphere, which is a “serial processor,” and which has been found generally to be more involved in language activities – appropriately, as language is inherently serial data.

Also, since the two eyes map mirror-symmetrical images in the two brain hemispheres, an instructional emphasis on “right-brain reading” may account for the increased tendency for reversals and transpositions among non-phonetically-taught students.

If the student’s total accuracy is 96% (a *total* of less than 10 errors) in the combined Phonetic sections, his automatic system is phonetically based and will guard him against becoming educationally dyslexic. Such a student will read both kinds of word lists at substantially the same speed, and the newspaper articles in two minutes or less with no substantive errors.

A student who reads ONLY the Holistic list well is a “disabled” or “dyslexic” reader, and will need intensive re-training to re-condition his automatic reflex. Success is uncertain unless the student is highly motivated. Obviously, the earlier the intervention, the more favorable the prognosis.

The acquired-dyslexic condition has been found to be language-specific; that is, an English-dyslexic reader can acquire a phonetic-based reflex in a second (or additional language) as long as efforts are made to get the student to look at the words analytically instead of holistically.

Perhaps the most important results of this test is that we may better understand the problems associated with learning to read, and begin to examine reading programs in terms of the reading reflexes they produce in their students.

The Miller Word-Identification Assessment-D (MWIA-D)

SUMMARY SHEET

Donald Potter, 2012

Name _____ M ()/F () Age ____ Grade ____ Test Date ____

School _____ City/State _____

Level I

Holistic WPM _____ Phonetic WPM _____ Difference _____

Difference _____/Holistic WPM _____ x 100 = _____% of Slow-down

Holistic Errors _____ Phonetic Errors _____ Difference _____

Ratio of Phonic Errors _____/Holistic errors _____ = _____

Phonetic Corrected _____ out of _____ attempted = _____% Phonic Efficiency

Level II

Holistic WPM _____ Phonetic WPM _____ Difference _____

Difference _____/Holistic WPM _____ x 100 = _____% of Slow-down

Holistic Errors _____ Phonetic Errors _____ Difference _____

Ratio of Phonic Errors _____/Holistic errors _____ = _____

Phonetic Corrected _____ out of _____ attempted = _____% Phonic Efficiency

Tested by _____

Scored by _____

“Vote I” Article: WPM _____ Errors _____

“Vote II” Article WPM _____ Errors _____

K – 1 School _____ City/State/District _____

Method/Program _____

Publisher _____

Comments:

Name _____ M ()/F () Age _____ Grade _____ Test Date _____

Holistic-D – I

Time ____:____” = (_____ Sec)\3000 = _____ WPM

Err _____

boy am and anywhere a are box be
boat could car do party eggs eat bear
green kitty good little here house I in
if like let jump me may not on
or rain say see so that them there
they tree come the try thank would will
with you

Phonetic – I

Time _____’ _____” = (_____ Sec)\3000 = _____

WPM

Err _____ Spell-Cor _____/ _____ Phon Eff _____% Slow-Down _____%

Ben nip map tag job met sip mix
pad lock wig pass hot rack jet kid
pack Tom luck neck pick cut deck kick
duck fuzz mud hack sick men hunt rash
pest land tank rush mash rest tent food
bulk dust desk wax ask gulps ponds hump
lamp belt

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Name: _____ M ()/F() Age ____ Grade ____ Test Date _____

Holistic-D – II Time _____' _____" = (_____ Sec\12,600 = _____ WPM

Errors: _____ Phonic Spelling _____ Errors _____ % _____

about	a	after	all	always	and	where	are	as
at	away	back	his	ball	be	ride	bet	big
blue	three	make	live	box	brown	but	cat	cake
came	can	call	come	cold	could	five	day	just
soon	did	dish	do	down	grow	fall	fan	fast
ask	four	find	fish	buy	for	run	funny	fly
from	game	get	go	good	who	over	apple	help
hands	had	have	he	head	eight	her	here	sing
light	him	hold	sleep	best	house	how	I	if
in	is	it	jump	goes	kind	ate	round	know
black	like	an	little	has	would	let	look	made
make	man	any	me	use	milk	baby	mother	my
where	which	new	no	not	now	going	of	am
one	out	on	our	or	right	draw	pick	home
play	old	put	brother	ran	red	again	said	bird
walk	say	saw	off	see	first	every	she	carry
sit	once	show	six	thank	write	green	so	some
may	pretty	sun	stop	chair	four	take	full	done
duck	think	tell	things	this	those	the	that	there
then	these	they	give	them	their	tip	top	today
toy	too	to	two	stop	us	up	well	want
way	was	we	white	went	wish	with	what	when
why	will	wood	would	yellow	into	yes	you	wash
open	under	please						

Name: _____ M ()/F () Age ____ Grade ____ Test Date _____

Phonetic – II Time _____ ' _____ " = (_____ Sec\12,600) = _____ WPM

Errors _____ Spell-Corrected _____ / _____ Phonics Efficiency _____ % Slow-Down _____ %

dig	pass	men	mass	fuss	fill	Jill	Ned	beg
jam	Ann	Nat	win	gas	yell	wig	mud	rob
Tim	pan	rip	mug	pad	fig	dog	Ted	den
nod	bed	set	web	hug	lid	rib	nap	muff
fog	mill	sell	sob	pup	well	Gus	ten	tap
moss	dad	sop	Dan	map	pet	hen	sip	jazz
bit	hum	fib	doll	Ed	bib	jet	hip	kept
ring	notch	crack	thrash	test	chink	glad	pond	slot
tax	stub	fins	whisk	melt	clap	prompt	thrill	step
chunk	mush	trip	clip	ask	brat	bangs	masks	frog
drink	block	punch	strap	mend	monk	bugs	ash	grunt
camp	sand	gang	ink	spit	cuffs	much	mink	sled
dress	wept	scat	switch	chick	wax	sing	hunt	chop
branch	hills	facts	lend	hops	mist	shrub	gulps	drift
snag	quench	sketch	patch	moth	slip	grip	hints	damp
flint	lifts	dash	strip	crib	nest	long	brink	lumps
cloud	storm	reap	moist	broil	curl	thaw	charm	peach
found	lord	bound	stir	foil	leaf	birch	squeal	or
fort	chart	proud	lark	jar	ground	veal	roof	brawl
Ma	launch	Roy	girl	beast	drawn	torn	down	our
hound	talk	soot	spout	ouch	how	street	draw	farm
cork	bar	fir	Paul	coo	pout	spook	sheep	wheat
cool	boost	sweet	beam	loin	paw	chirp	shark	crook
clamp	flap	hand						

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Grade: _____ Boy or Girl _____ Age _____

Date _____ Time ____' ____" (____Sec)/9000 = _____ WPM

Errors _____

Vote I

One last time: vote

Please vote for the people who are going to run the school. Go and vote.

If today is Tuesday and you have not voted, please go vote now.

This vote is important. It is not important because the people running for office send you lots of material to get your vote. It is not important because there are a lot of people running for office. It is not important because they are spending a lot of money to get the job. It is important because you need to make sure that the best people get elected. You want good people over the schools. Your job as a voter is to vote.

It is bad when people do not vote. It is your job to make sure that good people run the schools. We do not want bad people running the schools. Please help us now. Please.

(150 words, 14 sentences, 10.4 words per sentence, 3.9 characters per word, Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level 4.2)
Written by Donald Potter 5/12/03.

Grade: _____ Boy or Girl _____ Age _____

Date _____ Time ____' ____" (____Sec)/9000 = _____ WPM

Errors _____

Vote II

One last time: vote.

The board of education election and the party primary election is tomorrow. Make sure you vote.

For some readers of this newspaper, it may already be Tuesday when you find time to read this far. If any registered voter reading this hasn't voted, drop everything and go to the polls.

This election is an important one. Not because of the volume of promotional material, or the number of candidates, or the amount of money spent, but because of the solemn responsibility voters bear to select the best people available to carry out serious duties of government.

It is perhaps the most vital component of our national heritage, the democratic challenge to elect our government. What a shame it is when governing bodies are chosen by a minority of the voters. Make sure this election is a valid reflection of public will. Do your part. Go vote.

Notes from Internet Publisher: Donald L. Potter

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The *MWIA-D Level 2* is a revised version of the MWIA Level 2 with the 78 Non-Dolch List words on the original word replaced by Dolch List Sight Words. It was created by Donald L. Potter on March 24, 2012 for researchers testing students who were taught to memorize Dolch List Sight Words. The original MWIA Level 2 consisted of all 210 words from Dr. Seuss' famous, *The Cat in the Hat*. *The Cat in the Hat* was a successful attempt by William Spalding of Macmillan Publishing and Bennett and Phyllis Cerf of Random House to produce a look-and-say reader that would be attractive to young children. The book was created largely from words Random House sent to Dr. Seuss that were considered important for beginning readers. I simply replaced 76 non-Dolch list words in the book with 76 corresponding words from the Dolch Lists. All the Pre-Primer, Primer, 1st Grade, and 2nd Grade words are included as well as some from other grades and 6 nouns. There were 8 Non-Dolch List words on the MWIA I, which consisted originally of the 50 words from *Green Eggs and Ham*, another Dr. Seuss composed of words from Phyllis Cerf's list for juvenile authors.

Mr. Miller suggested that the Holistic (Sight Word) List could be revised to reflect the specific sight words used by a particular school or district. In this case, in my school district, all the students coming to me for tutoring have been required to memorizing Dolch List Words in their primary classrooms. I assume their administrators or curriculum directors require the teachers to teach their student to memorize the sight words.

Memorizing sight words by shape is a very bad practice, which often creates a condition that imitates dyslexia, that Mr. Miller called, "artificially induced whole-word dyslexia." Mr. Richardson often used the short hand expression WWD (Whole-Word Dyslexia). It is called Whole-Word Dyslexia because the students are obviously guessing the meaning of the whole-word, that is its shape or configuration when read in lowercase manuscript or print.

For student with artificially induced whole-word dyslexia, I recommend Mrs. Hazel Logan Loring's 1980 *Reading Made Easy with Blend Phonics for First Grade*. It is available for FREE on my website, www.blendphonics.org. Students who have been taught to guess at the meaning of sight words can break this disabling habit in just a few hours work with this powerful program.

During a phone call in March of 2003, Mr. Miller explained to me how he used Rudolf Flesch's phonics program in the back of Flesch's 1955 educational blockbuster, *Why Johnny Can't Read and What You Can Do About It*. I have confirmed in my own tutoring the effectiveness of that program.

Much detailed information on the best way to teach reading will be found on the www.donpotter.net website, as well as the smaller www.blendphonics.org weblog.