

Vocabulary Assessment

Why the Vocabulary Assessment was developed

In 2011, the Vocabulary Assessment was developed for the Literacy and Numeracy for Adults Assessment Tool to allow Educators to assess learners' vocabulary. The Vocabulary Assessment is designed to support the literacy learning of adults by providing an assessment of receptive vocabulary; that is, the words the learner understands either orally or in print. It is computer adaptive and lets learners hear the questions being read out to them as well as read them themselves. The assessment will be most useful when assessing readers achieving below or at the lowest steps of the adult learning progressions. A low score on the Vocabulary Assessment is likely to indicate that vocabulary is hindering progress in reading whereas a higher score on the Vocabulary Assessment could indicate that the learner is having problems with, for example, decoding and that it is not lack of vocabulary that is hindering reading.

The development of the Vocabulary Assessment

The Vocabulary Assessment draws from a bank of almost two hundred items (questions). Each of these is based on words and phrases selected from a number of internationally recognised word lists, for example, the General Services List (GSL), Academic Word List (AWL), and the British National Corpus (BNC). Most of the words have been selected to represent the 7,000 most used word families. Having access to these word families is sometimes cited as the level of vocabulary knowledge needed to access newspaper texts productively.

All the items have been trialled with learners in New Zealand and there has been wide consultation with wānanga and other organisations about content and presentation. Many learners who have English as an additional language have also trialled the assessment.

About half of the items use a traditional multiple-choice format, where learners select the best synonym for a word or phrase underlined in a sentence; the other half use specially generated images to provide alternative illustrations for the meaning of a word. Examples of the types of images are shown below: in the first instance the learner clicks on a hotspot in the image; in the second instance the learner selects one of four images.

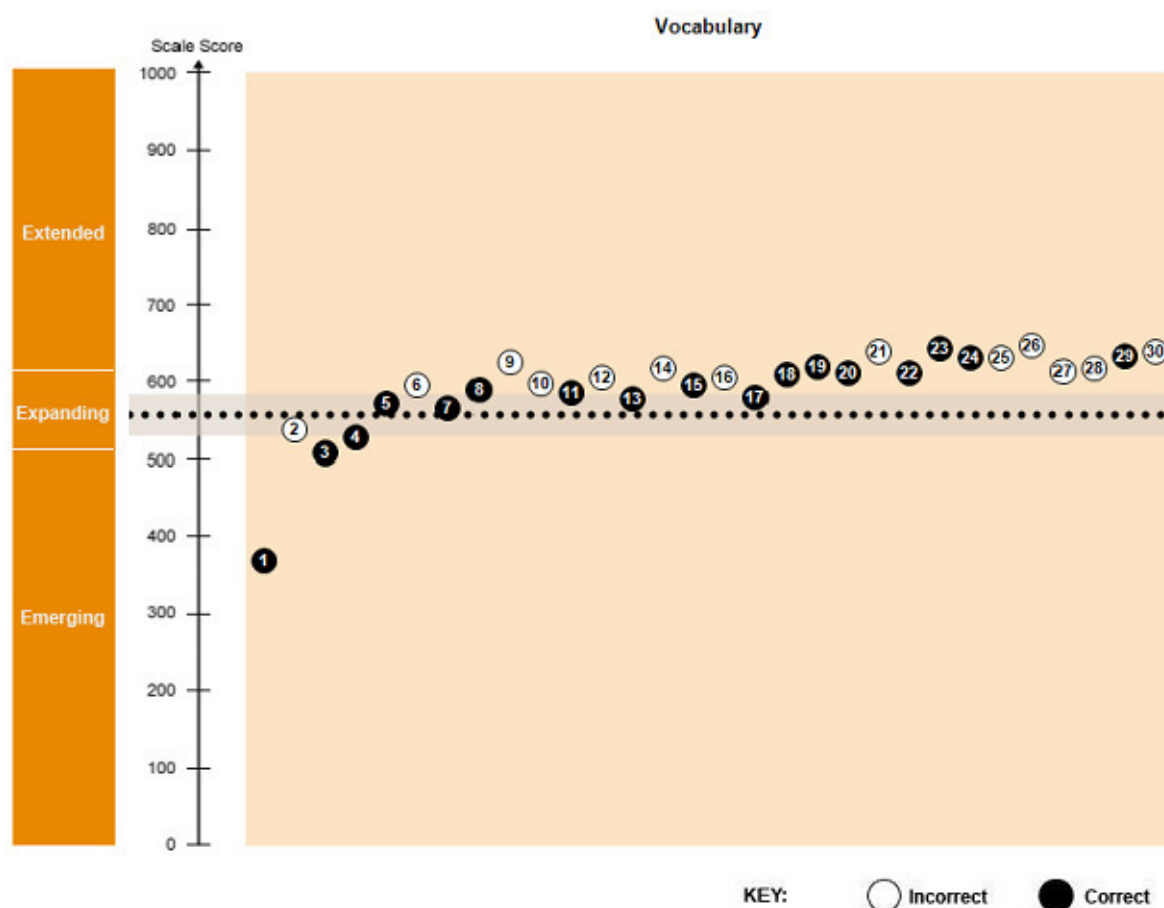


How the assessment is reported

Unlike the other assessments in the tool, the Vocabulary Assessment does not use the Learning Progressions as its underlying framework. This is because the trials indicated that the three categories – *emerging*, *extended* and *expanding*- provided a clearer report about learners' receptive vocabulary, than could be achieved using the vocabulary progressions as the framework.

The assessment locates a learners' score on a measurement scale and categorises their vocabulary knowledge as emerging, extended, or expanding. The step descriptors have been chosen as positive labels, which describe the vocabulary capabilities of the learners.

LEARNER	SCALE SCORE	STEP	ASSESSMENT DATE
	557 +/- 27	Expanding	4 October 2010



Please note: learners should not make use of a dictionary or other learning aids when sitting a Vocabulary Assessment.

Scale scores, boundary points and category descriptors

The scale was provisional until the end of January 2011 when final calibrations of word difficulty were made using the additional data generated by new users over the following three months.

Scale score boundaries for each category are:

- Extended (scores ≥ 616)
- Expanding (scores ≥ 509 but < 616)
- Emerging (scores < 509)

Vocabulary	
Learners at this step:	
Emerging	• have an emerging vocabulary. They will be most comfortable with concrete nouns and frequently used verbs, adjectives and adverbs. These will usually be words used at home and in the community, or words specific to workplaces with which they are familiar. Learners towards the top end of this step will be able to make sense of some lower frequency words, particularly when these are presented with contextual supports.
Expanding	• have an expanding vocabulary that is likely to include some general academic and specialised words. They understand that words can have more than one meaning and can sometimes recognise when a word has been used figuratively. They are beginning to make sense of some popular idioms, such as "business as usual" and "look up to".
Extended	• have an extended vocabulary that allows them to make sense of many general academic and specialised words. They are likely to understand when words and phrases have been used figuratively and can make sense of a range of idioms. Learners towards the top end of this step will have access to many low frequency words.