

Making PaCT judgments

PaCT provides a structured way to use teacher judgments to assess students' levels of achievement in reading, writing, and mathematics. When teachers and their colleagues share a strong understanding of how to use PaCT, the scores and curriculum levels it produces will be more dependable (valid and reliable). This paper provides some guidelines for using PaCT to make judgments.

- 1. Understand each aspect.** At the heart of PaCT are the Learning Progression Frameworks (LPFs) for reading, writing, and mathematics. These provide the reference points and cues that PaCT uses to guide decision making. Each LPF is presented as a collection of aspects, with each aspect focused on a different component of what it means to progress in the area of learning which the LPF has been designed to represent. A first step in using PaCT is having a solid understanding of what each aspect is fundamentally about. Having this understanding helps teachers “home in” on what defines progress and achievement when making a best-fit decision.
- 2. Understand what differentiates the sets of illustrations from each other.** Each aspect is presented as a series of sets of illustrations (signposts). It is important to have a clear idea of what differentiates each set of illustrations from the sets immediately above and below. The LPFs provide a description of the ideas behind each set of illustrations. In PaCT, these can be found on the judgment screens associated with each set. The example below is the description of the big ideas that sit behind signpost 3 on the *writing meaningful text: encoding* aspect from the writing framework. Each illustration within signpost 3 will provide a rich example drawn from the work of students who have the skills and knowledge described.

The students encode words by matching sounds to letters across each word with beginning, medial, and end sounds evident in most of their words. They attempt to use their knowledge of common word endings and simple rimes to generate words, and they recognise that there may be more than one way to represent a sound.

The students are building a bank of high-frequency words (Essential Word Lists 1 and 2) as well as personal words that can be written accurately and fluently.

Their letters are mostly recognisable, although they are not yet always uniform or accurate, and upper and lower cases are inconsistent.

- 3. Take notice of the annotations.** The illustrations that make up each set work together to provide a sense of what teachers should be observing, noticing, and responding to when students are working at the level exemplified. Each illustration begins with a short description (called an annotation) that points to the things in the illustration that signal what really matters in terms of achievement and progress. Teachers should always refer to the annotations when deciding what is central to an illustration.

- 4. Know the meaning of best fit.** For each aspect, teachers select the set of illustrations that is the best fit for a student. Best fit means that in that aspect, the selected set of illustrations best represents what the student knows and can do by themselves and most of the time. The two big ideas here are that there is a level of independence (the students know and can do the kinds of things illustrated by themselves) and that they can do these things consistently (reliably). When a best-fit decision is made, the teacher is signalling that the student can do the things described by the set of illustrations they have selected and is now working towards achieving the knowledge and skills associated with the sets above.
- 5. Make your own decision first.** When making an aspect judgment, it is best to start by making your own judgment before considering the last aspect judgment that was made for the student. Research shows that having a “starting point” or “anchor” in our minds can affect the judgments we make. If we are going to consider a previous judgment, it is best done after an initial judgment has been made.
- 6. Work in a community of practice.** Decisions made using PaCT are enhanced (made more dependable) when teachers work together to become familiar with the LPFs and the PaCT decision-making process. As well as supporting the dependability of the judgments, this practice encourages rich discussions about the curriculum and the nature of progression (see the background paper on moderation for a more in-depth treatment of how moderation should be used within the context of PaCT).