

Dictionary definitions task

We have used this task to measure how successful students are at looking up words in the dictionary. The programme focuses on dictionary skills so this can be a valuable outcome measure to explore progress in dictionary skills before and after the intervention. Only give credit for words that have been successfully looked up in the dictionary. Students should not get credit for words that they already knew without using the dictionary. You might like to change the target words included in this task, depending on the abilities of the students in your group, while keeping the structure and format of the task the same. You might need to choose easier or more difficult words.

You will see that we have chosen the target word (word in bold), and then provided the students with four different options: (1) correct meaning, i.e., same meaning as that of the word in bold (word in italics); (2) word with the opposite meaning^{op} to the target word (as close as possible to an antonym); (3) phonological distracter^{ph} (a word with same beginning sound(s) as the target word); (4) a word unrelated^{un} to the target. It is interesting to examine the errors made by the students as this can tell you a great deal about their word knowledge. For example, if a student continually chooses the phonological distracter, it suggests that he is guessing the word meaning and basing his answer on sound similarities without taking into account the meaning or using the dictionary to assist him.

It is important that you check that the target words are in the dictionary that the student uses. Dictionaries vary in the words and meanings they include so make sure you are not asking the student to look up a word meaning that is not in the dictionary being used. For example, ensure the dictionary includes the meaning 'neat' for the word 'spruce'.

In this task, you will be able to measure both **accuracy** (number of words the student correctly looks up in the dictionary and matches to its synonym) and **speed** (how long it takes the student to find each word). Some students find this task very difficult and take a very long time to find each word. If time is limited, it is advisable to have some overall time limit, for example, you may give a total time of 5–8 minutes per word for each student to find the answer. If they have not managed to access the word meaning in that time period, move on to the next item. This task is not appropriate for students who are unable to use the dictionary at all, as it will only induce further frustration.

Dictionary definitions task score sheet

Name: _____ Date: _____

School: _____ Tester: _____

Instructions

'We are going to play a game using a dictionary. I am going to say a word and show it to you and I want you to try to look up the meaning of the word in the dictionary. The word is written here in bold, can you see it? (show the student the target word in bold and read it out for the student). You need to find this word in the dictionary and look up its meaning. You will see that its meaning matches one of the four words next to the word you have looked up. I will read you these four words as well and you can tell me which word means the same as the word written in bold. Only one of these four words means the same as the word in bold. You need to tell me which one of them matches the meaning of the word in bold and you will find the right answer by using the dictionary. You can either tell me the answer or circle the correct answer from the four choices. I will time how long it takes for you to give me an answer. Let's try this one together.'

Scoring key

1 = correct answer with clear use of dictionary

0(d) = incorrect with dictionary use

0(nd) = correct answer **without use of the dictionary** (i.e., the child knew the meaning of word and did not need to use the dictionary, therefore is not credited here)

Example words

1	spruce	<i>neat</i>	<i>shabby^{op}</i>	<i>heavy^{un}</i>	<i>sprawl^{ph}</i>		
						1	0(d) 0(nd)

Time in Seconds:



2	flog	<i>flatter^{ph}</i>	<i>beat</i>	<i>hug^{op}</i>	<i>decorate^{un}</i>		
						1	0(d) 0(nd)

Time in Seconds:



3	ruddy	<i>abrupt^{un}</i>	<i>rowdy^{ph}</i>	<i>healthy</i>	<i>gaunt^{op}</i>		
						1	0(d) 0(nd)

Time in Seconds:



4	canopy	<i>covering</i>	<i>floor^{op}</i>	<i>canyon^{ph}</i>	<i>folder^{un}</i>		
						1	0(d) 0(nd)

Time in Seconds:



5	purpose	<i>patriarch^{ph}</i>	<i>empty^{op}</i>	<i>cheerful^{un}</i>	<i>aim</i>		
						1	0(d) 0(nd)

Time in Seconds:



6	dilute	<i>weaken</i>	<i>dissolve^{ph}</i>	<i>strengthen^{op}</i>	<i>pour^{un}</i>		
						1	0(d) 0(nd)

Time in Seconds:



7	amalgamate	destroy ^{op}	<i>combine</i>	timid ^{un}	amaze ^{ph}		
						1	0(d) 0(nd)

Time in Seconds:



8	cherish	<i>treasure</i>	dismiss ^{op}	cherub ^{ph}	extravagant ^{un}		
						1	0(d) 0(nd)

Time in Seconds:



9	unassuming	<i>modest</i>	arrogant ^{op}	unreasonable ^{ph}	bitter ^{un}		
						1	0(d) 0(nd)

Time in Seconds:



10	musty	musician ^{ph}	<i>stale</i>	fresh ^{op}	complete ^{un}		
						1	0(d) 0(nd)

Time in Seconds:



Correct responses: /10 test items

Incorrect responses [total no of 0(d)]: /10 test items

Incorrect responses [total no of 0(nd)⁹]: /10 test items

Percentage correct: _____%

(Correct responses/number attempted with use of dictionary [not including the 0(nd)].)

Total time of correct scores: _____ seconds (only for correct responses with use of dictionary [not including 0(nd)].)

Average time of correct scores: _____ seconds (total time of correct scores/number of correct responses with use of dictionary [not including 0(nd)]).

⁹ The student does not get credit in this task for knowing the word if they did not use the dictionary.

Dictionary definitions task

Place this sheet in front of the student and read out the word in bold. Then ask them to look in the dictionary for the meaning of the word which best matches one of the four words provided. Read these four words for the students too. Begin timing as soon as the student opens the dictionary.

Trial item

surmount	<i>overcome</i>	insist	summon	yield
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Give feedback and help to find in dictionary if needed for trial item.

Test items

1	spruce	neat	shabby	heavy ^{un}	sprawl
2	flog	flatter	beat	hug	decorate
3	ruddy	abrupt	rowdy	healthy	gaunt
4	canopy	covering	floor	canyon	folder
5	purpose	patriarch	empty	cheerful	aim
6	dilute	weaken	dissolve	strengthen	pour
7	amalgamate	destroy	combine	timid	amaze
8	cherish	treasure	dismiss	cherub	extravagant
9	unassuming	modest	arrogant	unreasonable	bitter
10	musty	musician	stale	fresh	complete