

## EDUCATOR GUIDE



ÉCLAIRER LE **C**HEMIN VERS LA **L**ECTURE POUR  
CHAQUE **A**PPRENANT.E ET **I**LLUMINER LA **R**OUTE

# ÉCLAIR

ÉCLAIRER LE CHEMIN VERS LA LECTURE POUR CHAQUE APPRENANT.E ET ILLUMINER LA ROUTE  
Lighting the path to reading for every learner to illuminate the direction

**A diagnostic assessment tool to support  
phonological awareness, phonics, and word reading skills**

This resource has been made possible thanks to the financial support of the Ontario Ministry of Education and the Government of Canada through the Department of Canadian Heritage.

The views expressed are the views of the French Immersion Diagnostic Assessment team and do not necessarily reflect those of the Ontario Ministry of Education or the Government of Canada.

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# Context

All children in all education programs have the fundamental right to learn to read. An essential component of effective reading instruction is knowing the learner's profile in order to provide differentiated instruction in response to individual needs. *Éclairer le chemin vers la lecture pour chaque apprenant.e et illuminer la route* / Lighting the path to reading for every learner to illuminate the direction (ÉCLAIR) was developed in response to an overwhelming need for effective diagnostic assessment tools to support phonological awareness, phonics, and word reading skills in French Immersion programs across Ontario. This need was identified through Greater Essex County District School Board and the Canadian Association of Immersion Professionals' (ACPI) work on the Building Competent and Engaged Readers project in 2022-2023 and the release of the Ontario Human Rights Commission's Right to Read Inquiry Report, 2022.

Through partnering with ACPI on this project, our team was able to gather professional knowledge and support from across Canada to service Ontario educators and students. ACPI provided input on selecting team members; shared knowledge, resources and experiences from other provinces connected to diagnostic assessments and reading; and were critical contributors to the ÉCLAIR team.

With the financial support of the Ministry of Education of Ontario, Greater Essex County District School Board (GECDSB) was able to assemble a team with intentionally selected members to embark upon this unprecedented collaboration. Our interdisciplinary team includes specialized members from across the province and Canada with a variety of backgrounds, experiences, and expertise. This collaboration helped bridge research and practice and mobilize knowledge. The GECDSB is extremely



grateful for the contributions of all members of the project team, with special thanks to the team at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto, participating boards, educators and students for their role in developing and piloting the assessment.

French Immersion programs across Ontario have different entry points, percentages of French versus English instruction, and number of subjects taught in French, ranging from Kindergarten to Grade 4. These programs have become more reflective of the linguistic, cultural, and social diversity within our communities including students with no prior reading instruction in English. The Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) provides us with a common understanding of French language development through an asset-based lens. As such, this tool is aligned to CEFR levels (Pre-A1 to A1) as opposed to grades to be responsive to the needs of each learner, honouring their diverse social, cultural, and linguistic identities and entry points. This tool is to be used by classroom educators to provide meaningful insight into next steps for teaching and learning phonological awareness, phonics, and word reading skills. ÉCLAIR is distinct from and does not replace Ministry-approved early reading screening tools that identify students who may be at risk for reading difficulties. This diagnostic assessment can be used in tandem with screening tools to determine students' strengths and inform next steps for instruction.

Though this tool focuses on phonological awareness, phonics, and word reading skills, we recognize that oral language (comprehension, interaction, and production) is a critical component of additional language learning and should be part of daily assessment and instruction. The CEFR uses asset-based language to describe what each learner can do and inspires confident and lifelong language learning.





# Project team

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# Rationale

ÉCLAIR was developed with French Immersion literacy instruction and learning in mind. The measure supports evidence-based, systematic, and explicit phonics instruction to promote skills in decoding. Each assessment item was selected intentionally based on several features, including word length in syllables, word and syllable structure, grapheme-phoneme transparency, and word frequency. All features determine the degree of complexity of an item, although those considered in selecting items varied somewhat from subtest to subtest. For example, grapheme-phoneme transparency was key to choosing items for the word, nonsense word and sentence reading tasks. Word frequency was the only feature considered in item selection in all phonological awareness and word and sentence reading subtests. A brief description of each of the features follows.

## Word Length

Items were selected based on their length (i.e., number of syllables). The research literature suggests that multisyllabic words increase the working memory load for both phonological awareness and reading tasks, therefore words ranging from 1 to 4 syllables in length were selected and introduced progressively within subtests.

## Word and syllable structure

The items included in ÉCLAIR vary in terms of word structure, ranging from a simple CV (e.g., *la*) or VC (e.g., *il*) structure to the more complex syllabic structures that are found in French words. Syllables are classified as open or closed. A closed syllable is a syllable that ends with a consonant sound, whereas an open syllable is a syllable that ends with a vowel sound. Open syllables are more common in French than closed syllables and tend to be easier to manipulate than closed syllables. However, both were represented in the phonological awareness tasks.

## Grapheme-phoneme transparency

In selecting items for the word and sentence reading tasks, grapheme-phoneme (or letter-sound) transparency was categorized as simple, moderately complex, and complex. Simple words are those in which each grapheme corresponds to a single phoneme (e.g., *je*). Moderately complex words are words in which a sequence of two graphemes elicits a single phoneme (e.g., *jour*) and complex words are words in which a sequence of three graphemes elicits a single phoneme (e.g., *beau*).

Key words were embedded in each of the eight sentences that make up the sentence reading subtest to test knowledge of spelling patterns of varying degrees of complexity. In sentences 1 to 3, for example, key words test knowledge of 1:1 grapheme-phoneme correspondence, whereas key words in subsequent sentences test knowledge of moderately complex and complex spelling patterns. The final sentence included a word in which a three-letter spelling pattern elicits two phonemes (e.g., *chien*).

The word reading subtest was designed to assess knowledge of both regular and irregular word reading ability. Whereas regular words can be read applying the rules of letter-sound correspondence (e.g., that -eau is pronounced /o/), irregular words are words such as *dix*, *piéd*, and *monsieur* whose pronunciation cannot be derived based on letter-sound correspondence alone.

## Word frequency

Word frequency was established by considering educator ratings of individual items as well as by *Manulex* scores. Ontario French immersion educators provided ratings for all proposed items by considering the grade level at which a child would likely encounter the word, either orally for the phonological awareness items, or in print for the word reading items. Educators taught students from a variety of entry points into the French Immersion program; in rating words, the educators considered the FSL curriculum and other curriculum areas that were taught in French in their local context. *Manulex* is a database of 1.9 million French words which provides grade-level word frequencies in print for readers in grades 1 through 5. *Manulex* was used to determine the estimated frequency per million words of each item to ensure that they were relevant and consistent. Educator ratings, together with *Manulex* scores, were used to compile items and create three versions of each subtest that were of equivalent difficulty.



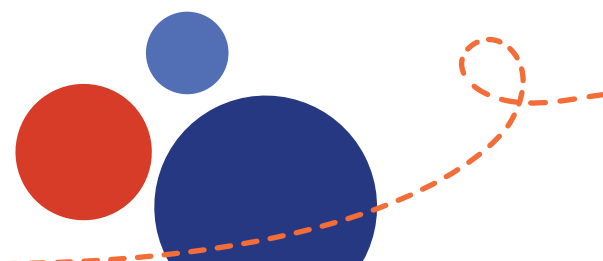
# Implementing ÉCLAIR

ÉCLAIR was designed for use with emergent and early readers within a French as an additional language setting, with a focus on French immersion. From the perspective of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), ÉCLAIR is most suitable for students of French as an additional language who are at an Pre-A1 to A2 level. ÉCLAIR can provide informative data to support phonological awareness, phonics, word reading and sentence reading skill instruction for students at all entry-points. Professional judgement should be used to determine which subtests to administer with students.

Students enter school with diverse backgrounds and abilities, and exposure to reading and reading instruction. Before engaging in assessment practices, it is key that educators use culturally responsive and relevant pedagogy (CRRP), and engage in critical reflection to be aware of, and mitigate, conscious and unconscious biases that can result in different treatment and supports for different student groups. Educators should provide evidence-based instruction with differentiated and/or more intensive instruction as needed to target reading skill gaps.

Students with special education needs have unique strengths, needs and interests, and may or may not have difficulties with reading. The information from ÉCLAIR can be used to support the development of a profile of students' reading skills. When administering ÉCLAIR, it is important to provide accommodations to meet the individual needs of each student (e.g., larger print, chunking one skill at a time, etc.), including accommodations documented in the student's Individual Education Plan (IEP).

There are three versions of each subtest for use throughout the year. Statistical analyses based on pilot data collected on a sample of 224 children from six different school boards in Ontario confirmed that the three versions were equivalent in terms of their levels of difficulty. Therefore, you may choose to administer Version A in the fall (September/October), Version B in the winter (January/February) and Version C in the spring (May/June) to monitor student progress over time. Pilot data also confirmed the reliability of all subtests, meaning that all items within a subtest measure the same construct so students subsequently tested on the ECLAIR are likely to obtain similar results to those obtained by the pilot sample (see Appendix 1 for more detailed information about the statistical properties of ECLAIR).







The scope and sequence of administration of the different subtests by grade is given in the table below.

**Note:** The model below is based on programs with 100 % French instruction. If you are working with a student who has not been taught 100 % in French, use your professional judgement to determine which skills to evaluate.

Senior Kindergarten	Grade 1	Grade 2
Letter naming / Letter sounds		
Phonological Awareness <sup>1</sup>		
	Word / Nonsense word Reading	
	Sentence Reading	

<sup>1</sup> Phonological Awareness measures can be used for students in Grade 2 and beyond identified at risk.

The subtests included in ÉCLAIR are as follows:

## Phonological awareness Pre-A1 → A1

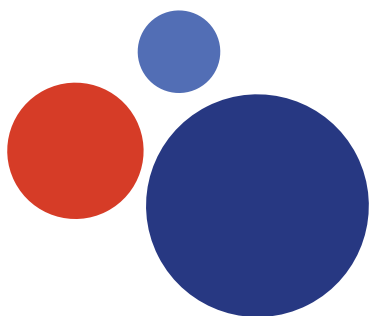
For the phonological awareness subtests, a script with practice items is provided in three steps to support an 'I do, we do, you do' format. It is important to use your professional judgement when using the scripted instructions for each subtest. If the child understands the task at 'I do', you may move directly to the test items.

Note the use of the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) throughout the tasks assessing phonemic awareness. This is a transcription system in which phonemes are represented with a symbol. For example, the symbol /u/ corresponds to the grapheme *ou* and the symbol /y/ corresponds to the grapheme *u*. For more information, visit [Francisation phonétique](#) or [La vitrine linguistique](#).

The subtasks for phonological awareness are as follows:

- Phoneme blending
- Initial sound isolation
- Final sound isolation
- Phoneme segmentation
- Syllable tapping\*
- Syllable blending\*

\*Please note that the awareness of the larger elements of speech such as syllables may be of interest when gathering information about students' phonological sensitivity. Current research supports prioritizing instruction beginning at the phoneme level as these skills directly support reading and writing. ([International Dyslexia Association Building Phoneme Awareness: Know What Matters 2022](#))



## Word reading Pre-A1 → A2

It is recommended that each of the subtests in this series be administered in alignment with the stop rule. You may choose to administer subtasks on separate occasions. Please read the instructions accompanying each task to understand the stop rule. Stop rules indicate when to stop administration of an assessment at a point where students are unlikely to successfully continue the task.

- Letter naming Pre-A1 → A1
- Sound identification Pre-A1 → A1
- Word reading
  - Simple orthography (1 letter = 1 sound/phoneme) A1
  - Complex orthography (2 letters = 1 sound/phoneme) A1
  - Complex orthography (3 letters = 1 sound/phoneme) A1
  - Irregular words A1
- Nonsense word reading
  - Simple orthography (1 letter = 1 sound/phoneme) A1
  - Complex orthography (2 letters = 1 sound/phoneme) A1
  - Complex orthography (3 letters = 1 sound/phoneme) A1
- Sentence reading A1 → A2



# Summary of referenced literature

This inventory of studies provides educators with an overview of the research that examines phonological awareness and word reading among elementary French Immersion students. Phonological awareness is a key foundational skill that supports successful word decoding and, by extension, reading comprehension.

**Phonological awareness/ Conscience phonologique** is defined as a student's awareness of the sounds of spoken language, and their ability to isolate and play with those sounds. Phonological awareness is an umbrella term that encompasses syllable, onset-rime, and phonemic awareness.

**Syllable awareness/ Conscience syllabique** is the ability to isolate and play with the syllables in a word (a syllable is defined as a part of a word a part of a word that contains a single vowel sound but may also contain one or more consonant sounds). For example, students demonstrate syllable awareness when they can "clap out" the syllables of a word (e.g., *lavabo*: *la-va-bo*).

**Onset-rime awareness/ La conscience de l'attaque et de la rime** is the ability to isolate a word's onset (i.e., the consonant or consonant group at the beginning of most words) and its rime (the sounds that follow the onset. For example, in the word *fleur*, /f/ is the onset and /œʁ/ is the rime.

**Phonemic awareness/ La conscience phonémique** is the ability to isolate individual phonemes (i.e., the smallest unit of sounds). For example, the English word *bee* contains two phonemes (/b/ /i/) whereas the French word *jupe* contains three (/ʒ/ /y/ /p/). Phonemic awareness is the phonological awareness skill that is most important for learning to read alphabetic languages like French and English. That is because in an alphabetic writing system, printed words are basically sequences of letters that represent sequences of phonemes. The phonemic awareness skills that are most important to master to become successful readers and writers are phoneme blending (/b/ /i/ → *bee*; /ʒ/ /y/ /p/ → *jupe*) and phoneme segmentation (*bee* → /b/ /i/; *jupe* → /ʒ/ /y/ /p/).

Instruction in phonological awareness, together with instruction in letter naming and letter-sound correspondence, lays the groundwork for phonics instruction. Explicit phonics instruction reinforces the relationship between the sounds of spoken language and the letters that represent them in written language. Learning to read requires an understanding of that relationship. Phonics supports the development of skills in decoding, through which children use knowledge of letter-sound (or grapheme-phoneme) correspondences to translate a printed word into speech.

Multiple studies highlight the importance of teaching and assessing phonemic awareness skills, as well as letter name and letter-sound knowledge, in early French Immersion. They further highlight the importance of evidence-based, systematic, and explicit phonics instruction to support decoding. While all learners benefit from systematic instruction in basic literacy skills and ongoing assessment of skills, it is essential for at-risk readers.



# Appendix 1

## Reliability data

The ten measures in ÉCLAIR were administered to 776 students from junior kindergarten to Grade 3 from six school boards across Ontario in the summer and fall of 2023. All students entered French immersion programs in junior kindergarten and had received French instruction for between 0.5 and 3.5 years when they were tested. Random cluster sampling was conducted to select approximately equal numbers of students who had completed either Version A, B, or C and had participated in French immersion since junior kindergarten. Reliabilities were calculated based on data collected from a subsample of 224 students who were in senior kindergarten to grade 3 at the time of testing. The reliability results showed that the ten measures had very good to excellent Cronbach's alpha values, ranging between .79 and .98. (Very Good: .80-.89; Excellent: .90-.99). The high reliability indicates that the items measured the same underlying construct in each measure and that consistent results were likely to be produced across different samples and contexts.

Measure	Form/Card	Number of Items	Number of Students	Reliability (Cronbach's alpha)
Tapping syllables	A	10	51	.89
	B	10	54	.85
	C	10	59	.85
Blending syllables	A	10	51	.91
	B	10	54	.86
	C	10	52	.79
Blending phonemes	A	10	51	.89
	B	10	54	.90
	C	10	51	.88
Isolating initial-final sounds	A	10	50	.90
	B	10	52	.81
	C	10	51	.84
Segmenting phonemes	A	10	51	.86
	B	10	50	.85
	C	10	51	.83
Letter names	One Form	26	165	.92
Letter sounds	One Form	25	155	.89

Measure	Form/Card	Number of Items	Number of Students	Reliability (Cronbach's alpha)
Word reading	Form A, Cards 1-3	36	47	.98
	Form B, Cards 1-3	36	43	.96
	Form C, Cards 1-3	36	43	.96
	Card 4	12	67	.84
Nonsense word reading	A	36	41	.98
	B	36	41	.97
	C	36	42	.96
Sentence reading (All words)	A	49	46	.98
	B	49	46	.96
	C	49	48	.96
Sentence reading (Key words)	A	24	46	.95
	B	24	46	.93
	C	23	48	.94



# Additional resources

Chiang, P., & Rvachew, S. (2007). English-French bilingual children's phonological awareness and vocabulary skills. *Canadian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 10(3), 293-308. <https://journals.lib.unb.ca/index.php/CJAL/article/download/19747/21436>

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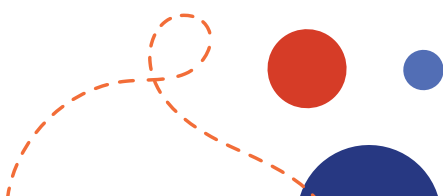
Erdos, C., Genesee, F., Savage, R., & Haigh, C. A. (2014). Predicting risk for oral and written language learning difficulties in students educated in a second language. *Applied Psycholinguistics*, 35, (2), 371-398. <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/applied-psycholinguistics/article/abs/predicting-risk-for-oral-and-written-language-learning-difficulties-in-students-educated-in-a-second-language/82285859504DD2779101E3B32C846663>

Genesee, F. (2007). The suitability of French immersion for students who are at risk: A review of research evidence. *Canadian Modern Language Review*, 63(5), 655-687. <https://www.psych.mcgill.ca/perpg/fac/genesee/Suitability%20of%20Immersion%20for%20At-Risk%20Students.pdf>

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Wise, N., D'Angelo, N., & Chen, X. (2016). A school-based phonological awareness intervention for struggling readers in early French immersion. *Reading and Writing*, 29, 183-205. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11145-015-9585-9>







# EDUCATOR GUIDE



## DIAGNOSTIC ASSESSMENT TOOL