Congratulations on your purchase of the Flexible Small Groups Reading Folder. This Folder system will help you manage small group reading instruction. It will also help you plan and keep track of which reading group each student belongs to.

This Really Good Stuff® product includes:

- Flexible Small Groups Reading Folder
- 2 sets of Name Cards
- 2 sets of 12 Reading Level Cards
- This Really Good Stuff® Activity Guide

The Flexible Small Groups Reading Folder was designed by Debbie Diller to help you develop a simple system for keeping track of the students in each small reading group. Using it will also remind you of the focus for each small group. The folder is based upon her reading continuum from her book, Making the Most of Small Groups (Stenhouse, 2007).

Setting Up Your Flexible Small Groups Reading Folder

1. Write your name on the front of your reading groups’ Folder.

2. Open the Folder, which is divided into four sections, one for each small reading group. (On the back of the Folder is a fifth section in case you need another. Most teachers have a total of four to five reading groups in their class of 20-30 students. Managing more than five groups may be difficult.)

3. Most teachers I’ve worked with meet with two or three reading groups a day. If you work with another teacher, you can, between the two of you, see each group every day.

4. Write the name of each student on a Name Card. Then use your assessment data to determine which students to place in each group.

5. Put the Name Cards of the students in one group into the in the red section. These students are in the “red” group. (I like to use color to organize. You can keep materials for this group in a red basket or one labeled “red”)

6. Do the same for each group—yellow, green, and blue. If necessary, use the orange section on the back for a fifth group.

7. Find the Card describing the reading level of each student and slip that Card into the long pocket with the group to which it belongs. Use what you know about students’ reading levels to choose this Card. If you administer DRA II, use the DRA levels. If you use guided reading levels from Fountas & Pinnell, use the alphabetic levels. If you don’t use either of these, decide the grade level at which each student currently reads on your core program or core curriculum materials. Note that you won’t use every Reading Level Card provided. A small group, remember to work with students on their instructional reading level, which may not be their current grade level. For example, a first grader may be reading on a kindergarten level, and a second grader may be reading on a third-grade level. A student’s instructional level is the level at which he or she can be successful with just a bit of support.

8. Move the student Name Cards as necessary. You can, for example, move a student from the red group to the blue group. I find this a much better method than writing students’ names on a list and having to constantly cross out names and draw arrows.

9. Change the strips for what to focus on at each reading level as you see the need. As students move through the developmental continuum for reading, change the Cards with the matching skills listed on them.

All activity guides can be found online:
Frequently Asked Questions about Small Groups

• How do I form groups? Look at all your data, including formal and informal assessments. Place each student where you think he or she will best fit for now, and be prepared to be flexible. (That’s why the folder is set up like it is.) You can move students from group to group as you make decisions about where each student will be most successful. You can even place a student in more than one group, depending on his or her needs. For example, an emergent reader may need to work in one group for letter identification and in another for phonemic awareness. A student reading on a second-grade level may meet in one group that is focusing on phonics and in another group for fluency if the student needs both. You can always try a student in a group and then rearrange the groups based upon your observations. Follow the lead of the student and look for his or her success: It will guide you in the right direction. There is not just one correct way to group students. Your day-to-day work with small groups will show you if students are correctly matched to the texts and skills they need.

• How many students should I put in each group? I recommend no more than six in a group and prefer the groups to be smaller. The smaller the group, the more attention you can give each student, particularly those who are struggling readers.

• How many groups should I see each day? Most teachers in K-3 classrooms are working with two or three small groups during 90 minutes of reading instruction. I recommend working with two groups a day consistently for high-quality small-group reading instruction. You could meet with every group every day, but it would not necessarily yield the best instruction.

• Why don’t you recommend meeting with every reading group every day? If you try to meet with every group every day, you might run out of time for teaching other important subjects, such as Writing, Math, Science, and Social Studies. You also might not have time for whole-group reading instruction. In addition, it’s challenging to write four or five well-planned lessons for small groups daily.

• What if I have another teacher or assistant in my classroom during the day? If you have another teacher with you during small-group instruction, you most likely can meet with every student.

• How do I choose a focus for my lesson? Use the chart, How To Choose a Lesson Focus, in this guide. Look for patterns of what students in each group need. Use the matching skills for each reading level on the strips in your Flexible Small Groups Reading Folder to guide you.

• When do I move students to another level or another group? If the reading is too easy for a student, you might try him or her in a group that is reading at a slightly higher level. If the reading is too difficult, you might try the student in a group that is reading at a slightly lower level. If the reading is too difficult, you might try the student in a group working on a level that is a little easier. Use the chart, When Do I Move a Student into a Different Small Group? in this guide.

For More Information on Small-Group Reading Instruction

• Read Making the Most of Small Groups: Differentiation for All by Debbie Diller (Stenhouse Publishers, 2007).
• View Debbi’s video series, Think Small! Engaging Our Youngest Readers. (K-2) and Spotlight on Small Groups. (gr. 2-4). Both are available from Stenhouse Publishers at www.stenhouse.com.
• Contact Debbie Diller at www.debbiediller.com for training and staff development opportunities.

How to Choose a Lesson Focus

If You See This: Choose This Focus:

• low phonemic awareness scores • phonemic awareness
• lack of response in whole-group lessons on phonemic awareness
• inconsistency in phonemic awareness tasks
• difficulty with segmenting sounds (oral task or when writing)
• difficulty with blending sounds (oral task or when reading)

• low letter-sound knowledge • phonics
• decoding difficulties and reading miscues (pay attention to patterns of errors and focus on those phonics elements in small group)
• spelling difficulties and writing miscues (pay attention to patterns of errors and focus on those phonics elements in small group)

• low comprehension scores • comprehension
• good decoding, but poor comprehension
• basic understanding, but could go deeper with comprehension
• making errors and no self-correction with regard to meaning
• difficulty with connecting to the text, visualizing, summarizing, or inferring

• low fluency scores • fluency
• choppy or word-by-word reading
• struggling over words
• reading in a monotone voice with no intonation or expression
• reading too quickly and not pausing for punctuation

• low vocabulary scores • vocabulary
• limited oral vocabulary (even if native English speaker)
• little or no attention paid to new words while reading (or writing)
• use of basic words and could use vocabulary expansion
• lack of content-area word knowledge

Note: You may choose a focus and spend several lessons on the same focus. Work with it until you start to see students improving in this area. Then switch the focus to another area that will improve the reading of children in that group. Plan your lessons day by day, basing tomorrows lesson on what you saw happening today. Small groups need to be flexible.
**Early-mid-second grade—GRL: J-K**

- **Phonics**
  - Decodes longer words (two- to three-syllables)
  - Decodes two-four vowel combinations (ou, ough, ou, etc.)
  - Decodes silent letters on longer words
  - Decodes words with chunks like fan, axion, cial, etc.
  - Decodes more quickly, which adds fluency
- **Vocabulary**
  - Pays attention to new words and context of words and pictures to determine meaning
  - Starts to read and understand idioms and figurative language
- **Comprehension**
  - Moves more flexibly from fiction to nonfiction
  - Summarizes and extends text
  - Compares text read over several days
  - Infers, predicts, and analyzes characters
  - Uses text features to aid comprehension in nonfiction
  - Reads more smoothly
  - Reads in phrases and with expression over longer text
  - Reads silently most of the time

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**Mid-second grade—GRL: L**

- **Phonics**
  - Decodes more multisyllabic words and many words with two-four vowel combinations within those longer words (eigh, auh, etc.)
  - Decodes words with chunks like tion, ance, cial, etc.
  - Decodes more quickly, which adds fluency
- **Vocabulary**
  - Understands more difficult vocabulary
  - Understands idioms and figurative language in text
  - Uses prefixes and suffixes to figure out word meanings
- **Comprehension**
  - Figures out who’s talking when reading more complex dialogue
  - Understands multiple characters more deeply
  - Comprehends longer chapters
  - Understands greater range of genres
  - Uses text features and structures
  - Reads more rapidly with phrasing and limited self-correcting
  - Reads character voices with greater intonation

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**End of second grade—GRL: M**

- **Phonics**
  - Decodes longer words with more complex phonics patterns
  - Can decode most two-three syllable words
  - Uses letter sounds flexibly and fluently (sounds of c, g, and vowels, etc.)
- **Vocabulary**
  - Understands more sophisticated vocabulary and more complex language structures
  - Uses prefixes and suffixes for determining meaning
  - Reads and understands many new vocabulary words, especially in nonfiction
- **Comprehension**
  - Understands subtlety of plot and humor
  - Builds schema for unfamiliar topics when reading
  - Infers, reads critically, makes more connections
  - Understands multiple characters more deeply
  - Expands reading in a variety of genres
  - Visualizes most of the time
- **Fluency**
  - Sustains fluency while reading longer sentences and longer text
  - Reads more rapidly with phrasing and limited self-correcting
  - Reads character voices smoothly and with greater intonation
  - Reads varying rate depending on the type of text read

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**Third Grade—GRL: N—P**

- **Phonics**
  - Decodes most two-four-syllable words
  - Uses letter sounds flexibly and fluently
  - May erase simple words (like and the) when reading more fluently—words that don’t change the meaning
- **Vocabulary**
  - Understands more sophisticated vocabulary and more complex language structures in longer text
  - Uses wider range of prefixes and suffixes to determine meaning of new words
  - Is exposed to many new words in both fiction and nonfiction and determines meaning
- **Comprehension**
  - Infers, reads critically, makes deeper connections
  - Asks more questions as reading
  - Answers higher-level questions with increasing depth
  - Reads across a wider variety of genres
  - Visualizes most of the time
- **Fluency**
  - Sustains fluency on longer texts with more complex sentences and wider range of punctuation and text nuances
  - Reads more rapidly with phrasing and limited self-correcting
  - Uses intonation and expression to match mood, characters, type of text, etc. (interpretive reading)

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### Recommendations When Moving Students up a Grade

- **Use the Reading Levels and What to Focus on Lessons Reproducible**
- **Be flexible.** Don’t be afraid to move the child down again if needed.
- **Look at testing data to determine skill improvement of mastery.**
- **Listen to the child’s reading during independent reading.** Observe the child’s work for accuracy.
- **Does the student have more than 95 percent accuracy on a variety of texts?**
- **Read the child a_high_95 percent accuracy on a variety of texts?**

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### Recommendations When Moving Students to a Different Small Group

- **Use the Reading Levels and What to Focus on Lessons Reproducible**
- **Be flexible.** Don’t be afraid to move the child down again if needed.
- **Listen to the child’s reading during independent reading.** Observe the child’s work for accuracy.
- **Does the child have more than 95 percent accuracy on a variety of texts?**
- **Read the child a_high_95 percent accuracy on a variety of texts?**

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### When Do I Move a Student Into a Different Small Group?

- **Use the Reading Levels and What to Focus on Lessons Reproducible**
- **Be flexible.** Don’t be afraid to move the child down again if needed.
- **Listen to the child’s reading during independent reading.** Observe the child’s work for accuracy.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Phonological Awareness</th>
<th>Phonemic Awareness</th>
<th>Concepts About Print</th>
<th>Phonics</th>
<th>Vocabulary</th>
<th>Comprehension</th>
<th>Fluency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PreK/early K—GRL: Pre-A</td>
<td>rhyming</td>
<td>phoneme segmenting and blending</td>
<td>left-to-right movement</td>
<td>starts to use beginning consonant sounds</td>
<td>remembers and uses language patterns</td>
<td>uses pictures to check on words</td>
<td>moves away from finger pointing</td>
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<tr>
<td>DRA Level: Pre-1</td>
<td>sentence segmenting</td>
<td>phoneme substitution and manipulation</td>
<td>return sweep</td>
<td>may start to use ending consonants, too</td>
<td>acquires sight words</td>
<td>makes predictions and checks on them</td>
<td>begins to use more inflection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kdg.—GRL: A-B</td>
<td>syllable blending and segmenting</td>
<td>phoneme segmenting and blending</td>
<td>1-1 matching</td>
<td>predicts words that might be in the book</td>
<td>acquires high-frequency words</td>
<td>makes predictions and checks on them</td>
<td>moves more quickly through text</td>
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<tr>
<td>DRA Level: 1-2</td>
<td>onset-rime: blending and segmenting</td>
<td>phoneme substitution and manipulation</td>
<td>pays attention to print</td>
<td>uses words more than pictures</td>
<td>uses vocabulary of the book for retelling</td>
<td>pays attention to a wider variety of punctuation and uses for phrasing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kdg.—/Early—first grade GRL: C DRA Level: 3-4</td>
<td>begins to self-correct</td>
<td>phoneme segmenting and blending</td>
<td>begins to self-correct</td>
<td>reads compound words</td>
<td>uses new vocabulary, especially when reading nonfiction</td>
<td>makes connections and uses punctuation</td>
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<td>phoneme substitution and manipulation</td>
<td>phoneme substitution and manipulation</td>
<td>uses words more than pictures</td>
<td>notices words and figures out meanings, using the picture for support</td>
<td>reads in a more fluent, phrased way</td>
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<tr>
<td>Early first grade — GRL: D DRA Level: 5-6</td>
<td>phoneme segmenting and blending</td>
<td>phoneme segmenting and blending</td>
<td>phoneme substitution and manipulation</td>
<td>uses new words when reading nonfiction</td>
<td>makes connections across texts</td>
<td>reads with increasing detail using graphic organizers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phonics</td>
<td>phoneme substitution and manipulation</td>
<td>uses consonants and blends to decode words</td>
<td>uses parts of words (chunks) to predict and check meaning</td>
<td>reads to check meaning</td>
<td>makes connections across texts</td>
<td>connects to characters and topics</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vocabulary</td>
<td>continues to acquire high-frequency words</td>
<td>uses compound words (e.g., red-tailed hawk)</td>
<td>knows and uses most short vowels</td>
<td>reads and remembers</td>
<td>needs to infer at times</td>
<td>reads in a more fluent, phrased way</td>
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<td>Comprehension</td>
<td>uses new vocabulary, especially when reading nonfiction</td>
<td>uses words in retelling and conversation</td>
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<td>needs to infer at times</td>
<td>determines importance</td>
<td>reads with increasing detail using graphic organizers</td>
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<td>reads and remembers</td>
<td>moves more quickly through text</td>
<td>connects to characters and topics</td>
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<td>First grade — GRL: E DRA Level: 7-8</td>
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<td>First grade — GRL: F DRA Level: 9-10</td>
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<td>First grade — GRL: G-H DRA Level: 11-14</td>
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<td>End of first grade — GRL: I DRA Level: 15-16</td>
<td>phoneme segmenting and blending</td>
<td>phoneme substitution and manipulation</td>
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<tr>
<td>PreK-K 1</td>
<td>left-to-right movement, return sweep, 1-1 matching, pays attention to print</td>
<td>phoneme segmentation and blending, phoneme substitution and manipulation</td>
<td>remembers beginning consonant sounds, may start to use ending consonants, too</td>
<td>uses known words and phrases, makes connections</td>
<td>moves away from finger pointing, learns to read in phrases while rereading</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>left-to-right movement, return sweep, 1-1 matching</td>
<td>phoneme segmentation and blending, phoneme substitution and manipulation</td>
<td>uses consonants and blends to decode words, uses parts of words (chunks) to predict and check meaning</td>
<td>makes predictions and checks on them, uses pictures and words to predict and check meaning</td>
<td>moves more quickly through text</td>
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<tr>
<td>3-4</td>
<td>has left-to-right and return sweep, controls 1-1 matching, even on longer words, reReads self-corrected</td>
<td>phoneme segmentation and blending, phoneme substitution and manipulation</td>
<td>uses consonants and blends to decode words, uses parts of words (chunks) to predict and check meaning</td>
<td>makes predictions and checks on them, uses pictures and words to predict and check meaning</td>
<td>moves more quickly through text</td>
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<td>5-6</td>
<td>phoneme segmentation and blending, phoneme substitution and manipulation</td>
<td>uses consonants and blends to decode words, uses parts of words (chunks) to predict and check meaning</td>
<td>acquires high-frequency words, uses vocabulary of the book for rereading</td>
<td>makes predictions and checks on them, uses pictures and words to predict and check meaning</td>
<td>moves more quickly through text</td>
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<tr>
<td>7-8</td>
<td>phoneme segmentation and blending, phoneme substitution and manipulation</td>
<td>uses consonants and blends to decode words, uses parts of words (chunks) to predict and check meaning</td>
<td>acquires high-frequency words, uses vocabulary of the book for rereading</td>
<td>makes predictions and checks on them, uses pictures and words to predict and check meaning</td>
<td>moves more quickly through text</td>
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<td>9-10</td>
<td>phoneme segmentation and blending, phoneme substitution and manipulation</td>
<td>uses consonants and blends to decode words, uses parts of words (chunks) to predict and check meaning</td>
<td>acquires high-frequency words, uses vocabulary of the book for rereading</td>
<td>makes predictions and checks on them, uses pictures and words to predict and check meaning</td>
<td>moves more quickly through text</td>
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<tr>
<td>11-14</td>
<td>phoneme segmentation and blending, phoneme substitution and manipulation</td>
<td>uses consonants and blends to decode words, uses parts of words (chunks) to predict and check meaning</td>
<td>acquires high-frequency words, uses vocabulary of the book for rereading</td>
<td>makes predictions and checks on them, uses pictures and words to predict and check meaning</td>
<td>moves more quickly through text</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-16</td>
<td>phoneme segmentation and blending, phoneme substitution and manipulation</td>
<td>uses consonants and blends to decode words, uses parts of words (chunks) to predict and check meaning</td>
<td>acquires high-frequency words, uses vocabulary of the book for rereading</td>
<td>makes predictions and checks on them, uses pictures and words to predict and check meaning</td>
<td>moves more quickly through text</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Frequently Asked Questions about Small Groups

- **How do I form groups?** Look at all your data, including formal and informal assessments. Place each student where you think he or she will best fit for now, and be prepared to be flexible. That’s why the folder is set up like it is. You can move students from one group to another as you make decisions about where each student will be most successful. You can even place a student in more than one group, depending on his or her needs. For example, an emergent reader may meet in one group for letter identification and in another group for phonemic awareness. A student reading on a second-grade level may meet in a group that is focusing on phonics and in another group for fluency if the student needs both. You can always try a student in a group and then rearrange the groups based on your observations. Follow the lead of the student and look for his or her success: It will guide you in the right direction. There is not just one correct way to group students. Your day-to-day work with small groups will show you if students are correctly matched to the tasks and skills they need.

- **How many students should I put in each group?** I recommend no more than six in a group and prefer the groups to be smaller. The smaller the group, the more attention you can give each student, particularly those who are struggling readers.

- **How many groups should I see each day?** Most teachers in K-3 classrooms are working with two or three small groups during 90 minutes of reading instruction. I recommend working with two groups a day consistently for high-quality small-group reading instruction. You could meet with every group every day, but it would not necessarily yield the best instruction.

- **How do I choose a focus for my lesson?** Use the chart, How To Choose a Lesson Focus, in this guide. Look for patterns of what students in each group need. Use the matching skills for each reading level on the strips in your Flexible Small Groups Reading Folder to guide you.

- **When do I move students to another level or another group?** If the reading is too easy for a student, you might try him or her in a group that is reading at a slightly higher level. If the reading is too difficult, you might try the student in a group working on a level that is a little easier. Use the chart, When Do I Move a Student into a Different Small Group? in this guide.

**How to Choose a Lesson Focus**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>If You See This:</th>
<th>Choose This Focus:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>low phonemic awareness scores</td>
<td>phonemic awareness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lack of response in whole-group lessons on phonemic awareness</td>
<td>phonics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>inconsistency in phonemic awareness tasks</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>difficulty with segmenting sounds (oral task or when writing)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>difficulty with blending sounds (oral task or when reading)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>low letter-sound knowledge</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>decoding difficulties and reading miscues (pay attention to patterns of errors and focus on those phonics elements in small group)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>spelling difficulties and writing miscues (pay attention to patterns of errors and focus on those phonics elements in small group)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>low comprehension scores</td>
<td>comprehension</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>good decoding, but poor comprehension</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>basic understanding, but could go deeper with comprehension</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>making errors and no self-correction with regard to meaning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>difficulty with connecting to the text, visualizing, summarizing, or inferring</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>low fluency scores</td>
<td>fluency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>choppy or word-by-word reading</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>struggling over words</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>reading in a monotone voice with no intonation or expression</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>reading too quickly and not pausing for punctuation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>low vocabulary scores</td>
<td>vocabulary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>limited oral vocabulary (even if native English speaker)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>little or no attention paid to new words while reading (or writing)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>use of basic words and could use vocabulary expansion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lack of content-area word knowledge</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** You may choose a focus and spend several lessons on the same focus. Work with it until you start to see students improving in this area. Then switch the focus to another area that will improve the reading of children in that group. Plan your lessons day by day, basing tomorrow’s lesson on what you saw happening today. Small groups need to be flexible.
When Do I Move a Student into a Different Small Group?

- Use the "Reading Levels and What to Focus on in Lessons" reproducibles:
  - Does the child have all those reading behaviors in place?
  - Consistently?
  - Across a variety of books?

- Use running records. Look at:
  - Fluency (Has rate, phrasing, expression, intonation, and pacing on a variety of texts)
  - Comprehension (Can retell with details on a variety of texts)
  - Decoding (Reads consistently with 95 percent accuracy or above)

- Observe student during the small-group lesson.
  - Does the child finish faster than others?
  - Does the child have better comprehension than others?
  - Is the student having an easier time (working more independently) than the rest of the group?

- Listen in to the child's reading during independent reading. Observe his or her accuracy, fluency, and comprehension and take notes.

- Look at testing data to determine skill improvement or mastery.

- Recommendations When Moving Students up a Level:
  - Try easier books or tasks at the next level to start.
  - Be flexible. Don't be afraid to move the student down again if needed.
  - Look at the Reading Levels and What to Focus on in Lessons reproducibles:

- Warning: Forming a new small group may leave the old group feeling resentful. Observe the dynamics and be prepared to move students up or down if necessary.

- Be ready to make changes based on the student's progress.

- Keep an open line of communication with parents to ensure a smooth transition.

- Remember, the goal is not to make the best reader move down, but to make the student who needs support move forward.