Fluency Addition to the National Assessment of Adult Literacy

What is the Fluency Addition to NAAL (FAN)?

FAN is the component of NAAL that measures oral reading fluency. FAN was first administered in 2003 and is designed as a proxy for basic (i.e., word-level) reading skills. All NAAL respondents, from the least literate to the most literate, are administered the FAN. FAN assesses components of literacy performance not measured by the "main NAAL."

What are the principal goals of FAN?

FAN goals are to (1) establish a basic reading skills scale and a baseline measure for future comparisons; (2) identify, for the first time, the relationship between basic reading skills and overall literacy (i.e., compare scores for the basic literacy skills measured by FAN with performance results from the main NAAL); (3) identify the relationship between FAN scores and the health literacy scores measured by NAAL; (4) identify results for selected demographic groups as well as for participants with selected background characteristics; and ultimately (5) permit development of more effective instructional programs for adults at low levels of literacy, to enhance their everyday lives.

What are the FAN tasks?

FAN respondents are asked to read aloud, in English, from letter lists, digit lists, word lists and text passages. Directions and questions are provided in English or Spanish, as preferred by the participant. FAN lists and passages are as follows:

- *digit lists*;
- *letter lists*;
- *word lists,* which consist of English words arranged in increasing order of difficulty; they provide a measure of adults' ability to recognize familiar words (often referred to as "sight words") as well as to decode;
- *pseudoword lists*, which consist of possible but nonoccurring English forms (e.g., "wike"); they provide a measure of adults' ability to "decode" (or identify the sounds of) words with which they are not familiar; and
- *text passages,* which consist of 150–200 words each; they provide a measure of adults' ability to read words in connected texts.

What does FAN measure?

To measure oral reading fluency, FAN tasks are timed. Timing participants' performance gives an indication of their ability to apply basic reading skills automatically (i.e., fluently), without pausing to give conscious thought to the reading process.

Specific FAN measures include

- total words read correctly;
- total words read per minute (whether correctly or not);
- words read correctly per minute; and
- words read correctly as a percentage of total words read.

How does FAN measure oral reading fluency—and how does it ensure fairness?

FAN uses new speech-recognition software to assess and record these measures of accuracy and fluency. This software recognizes accepted pronunciations of each word, taking into account, for example, variant dialects. Advantages of the speech-recognition software are that it automatically identifies many different features of speech; extracts much more information from speech than a human listener can; uses consistent procedures, time after time, to determine probabilities and produce scores; and, since it evaluates only what it has been programmed to evaluate, avoids biases based on irrelevant factors.

Extensive development work was done to ensure that correctness would be measured reliably and that speakers of nonstandard varieties of English would not be unfairly penalized. For a brief discussion of development work for the new software, see the New Features section of the NAAL website (http:nces.ed.gov/naal).

What are the differences between FAN and another new feature of NAAL, the Adult Literacy Supplemental Assessment (ALSA)?

ALSA, like FAN, measures basic, word-level literacy skills. However, ALSA was designed for and is administered to the least-literate adults only, and the literacy tasks are simpler. NAAL participants with very low performance on a set of core screening items take ALSA instead of the main NAAL. In contrast, *all* NAAL respondents take FAN.

In both FAN and ALSA, instructions may be given in English or Spanish. However, while ALSA oral responses may be given in either language, FAN oral responses must be given in English. The material to be read is in English in both assessments; however, ALSA also incorporates nonlinguistic materials such as pictures, and familiar, tangible materials such as food boxes, whereas FAN does not. Scoring for ALSA is done by trained interviewers on the spot, whereas FAN scoring is performed by programmed, speech-recognition software. Inclusion in NAAL of ALSA makes it possible for individuals with very limited English skills, such as those for whom English is a second language, to participate and have their English literacy strengths and weaknesses assessed.