



Northwest Evaluation Association

*Partnering to help all kids learn*

# Glossary of Terms

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## **Achievement Level Tests**

Achievement Level Tests (ALT) are NWEA's paper-pencil tests.

## **Achievement vs. Ability**

NWEA's tests measure a student's academic achievement, not his or her ability. Achievement is evidence of what a student has learned and can do. NWEA assessments measure a student's achievement in a subject area. NWEA's mission relates to improving this achievement. Ability describes a student's capacity to learn, independent of what has been achieved. NWEA's tests do not measure ability.

## **ALT**

ALT is the acronym for **Achievement Level Tests**.

## **Average Growth Index**

Average growth index is a statistic that appears on some NWEA Reports. It is the total growth index of the group divided by the total number of students in the group. For more information, see also *Growth Index*.

## **Class Roster File (CRF)**

The class roster file is a data file that contains information about students, classes, and schools. This file controls how reports are configured.

## **DesCartes: A Continuum of Learning**

DesCartes translates test scores into skills and concepts students may be ready to learn. It orders specific reading, language usage, mathematics, and science skills and concepts by achievement level. For reading, language usage, and mathematics, the skills and concepts align to the goal structures and content of a state's standards. For science, the skills and concepts align to national standards for the two domains of science: concepts and processes and general science. For easy reference, the skills and concepts are grouped along the continuum according to the NWEA measurement scale.

## **Differentiated Instruction**

Differentiated instruction recognizes that students have varying background knowledge, readiness, language, preferences in learning, and interests. It is an approach to teaching and learning for students of differing abilities in the same class. The intent of differentiating instruction is to maximize each student's growth and individual success by meeting each student where he or she is and assisting in the learning process.

## **District Leadership Team**

This is a select group of people from within a school district who provide effective leadership and support for implementation and use of NWEA assessments. This team is integral to ensuring the participation and support of all district staff during implementation, staff development, and the use of assessment data

## **Dynamic Reporting Suite**

NWEA's Dynamic Reporting Suite simplifies data analysis and offers classroom tools to apply test scores directly to instruction. The Dynamic Reporting Suite provides reports that are tailored for all members of a student's learning team. Results are timely, allowing you to use the information when it has the greatest impact. This suite of reports visually portrays student achievement so teachers and principals can immediately take action to improve learning.

**Equal Interval**

The RIT scale is theoretically infinite, but most student scores fall between the values of 140 and 300. Like meters or pounds, the scale is equal-interval, meaning that the distance between 170 and 182 is the same as the distance between 240 and 252. This allows educators to apply simple mathematical equations to the scores to determine information such as the mean and median scores in a class or grade.

**External Accountability**

External accountability expectations are related to the performance of students or groups of students established by an external body. For example, state-mandated student assessments are required for the purpose of providing data for holding schools and districts accountable for student achievement. See also *Internal Accountability*.

**Goal Structure**

Goal structure is the term used to describe how goal performance areas are organized and reported on MAP and ALT reports and in DesCartes. Each goal performance area also includes a set of sub-goals.

**Goal Performance Area**

Goal performance areas are goal reporting categories on NWEA reports that are aligned to the content of individual state standards.

**Grade Independent**

Because the tests are adaptive and the test items displayed are based on student performance, rather than age or grade, a score is independent of grade level parameters. For example, a third grader who received a score of 210 and a fourth grader who received a score of 210 are learning at the same instructional level. This allows growth to be measured.

**Growth Index**

The growth index is a statistic that appears on some NWEA reports. The growth index indicates the RIT value by which the student exceeded the target RIT (plus values), fell short of the target RIT (minus values), or exactly met the target RIT (0). The target RIT is determined by the NWEA RIT Point Growth Norms.

**Growth Research Database (GRD)**

NWEA's nation-wide database of longitudinal test results is the largest collection of student growth information of its kind. The GRD offers a tremendous opportunity to explore the components of effective teaching and learning. Educators and researchers query data in the GRD to identify those elements that contribute to high academic growth. The findings provide reliable answers that guide educational policy.

**Growth vs. Progress**

Growth is defined as the change in a student's score and improvement in achievement over time. NWEA assessments measure growth.

Progress is defined as growth targeted to an end result. For example, a student makes progress toward a standard. Using NWEA assessments, educators can monitor progress toward desired results.

**Typical vs. Expected**

When talking about target growth, it is referred to as "typical" growth. Use of the term "expected" growth should be avoided, as we cannot expect every student to achieve at the same rate. Rather, based on NWEA normed data, we can determine what is "typical" for students at various grade and instructional levels.

Often expectations are that a student should achieve growth that equals the average. In other words, we expect students to perform the same as average students. This expectation may be unreasonable and undesirable. For example, a below average student needs to grow more than average to attain an achievement level required for college. And high-achieving students may set goals beyond the average growth to stay challenged.

For these reasons, “typical” is a more accurate word to describe the average growth of students.

### **Instructional Level**

The instructional level of a student or group of students is represented by the items associated with the RIT score achieved by the student or students. The RIT score represents items that a student gets right about half of the time. Therefore, the data is relative to the students’ current learning and is not representative of “mastery” of the items. The instructional level is a starting point which informs the teacher where to begin instruction with the student or group of students.

### **Instructional Resources**

NWEA Instructional Resources are a suite of reports that give teachers easy access to student data in a format customized for classroom use. With these Internet accessible reports, teachers have a quick overview of classroom academic diversity – information they can use to target instruction. Reports included in the suite include Class Breakdown by Overall RIT and Class Breakdown by Goal.

### **Internal Accountability**

Internal accountability serves to provide educators information about students within the district, school, or classroom and is used for their own purposes – as opposed to external accountability. See also *External Accountability*.

### **Knowledge Academy**

These convenient courses provide all educators the training they need, at their pace, and within their schedules. These online courses offer all staff members in a district the opportunity to deepen their knowledge of assessment data.

### **Knowledge Base**

You can use NWEA’s online Knowledge Base to find answers that address technical issues, research, and data usage questions. The Knowledge Base is available on the NWEA web site ([www.nwea.org](http://www.nwea.org)).

### **Leaders’ Edge: Growth Analysis Tool**

NWEA Leaders’ Edge is a powerful, computer-based analysis tool. With it, educators can analyze data from the district level down to the individual student. Grouping and disaggregation features enable creation of reports and charts to meet an individual district’s or school’s needs.

### **Learning Continuum**

The NWEA Learning Continuum is a document listing skills and concepts that appear in the NWEA item banks. In the fall of 2004, the Learning Continuum was dramatically expanded and improved. This new version is known as DesCartes.

### **The Lexile Framework® for Reading**

A Lexile is a unit for measuring text difficulty created by MetaMetrics. Lexile scores are linked to reading RIT scores. Lexile is reported on an equal interval scale, similar to the RIT scale. 10L is at the low end of the scale and 1700L is at the high end. Books for beginning readers are listed as BR on the scale. The Lexile web site can be accessed at <http://www.lexile.com>.

The Lexile range is included on several NWEA reports. It allows educators and parents to find appropriately challenging books, periodicals, and other reading material for students.

The Lexile range represents a level of reading difficulty that leaves readers neither frustrated nor bored. This level should stimulate a student to new learning while rewarding their current reading abilities.

### **MAP**

MAP is the acronym for NWEA's **M**easures of **A**cademic **P**rogress. See *Measures of Academic Progress*.

### **MAP for Primary Grades**

Computerized adaptive assessments in reading and mathematics specifically designed for early learners.

### **MAP Team**

In addition to the District Leadership Team, other people also play key roles in supporting the use of NWEA assessments. These go-to people are involved in initial MAP implementation and become resources for staff as they use the data to influence instruction.

The MAP Team consists of the following:

#### **MAP Coordinator**

This person will serve as the testing coordinator for the district. Good communication skills are critical, as this person will coordinate all processes and disseminate all information and updates. He/she should have decision-making authority within the district.

#### **Main Contact**

This person receives all key communication from NWEA regarding finances, new products, and events. Often the MAP Coordinator and Main Contact roles are filled by the same individual.

#### **Technical Coordinator**

This person will serve as the liaison between the district and the NWEA Technical Support Team. He/she should have a good working knowledge of the servers and network systems within the district.

#### **Class Roster File Coordinator**

This person will be responsible for preparing and submitting all student data for each test season. He/she should be familiar with the district's student information system and an adept Excel user.

#### **Staff Development Coordinator**

As NWEA's main contact regarding staff development opportunities, this person will be responsible for making district-wide professional development decisions and coordinating each event.

### **MAPPING the Data Trail**

This workshop supports the efforts of district and building leaders as they create a culture that uses data to improve learning. The focus is on supporting staff as they use data to guide instruction in the classroom and identifying strengths and areas of concern at grade, building, and district levels.

**Mean**

The mean is the arithmetic average of a group of scores. The mean is sensitive to extreme scores when population samples are small.

**Measures of Academic Progress**

Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) assessments are a collection of computerized adaptive tests.

**Median**

The median is the middle score in a list of scores; it is the point at which half the scores are above and half the scores are below.

**Network Test Environment (NTE)**

The network test environment (NTE) is a shared folder located on a school's file server that contains the data necessary for testing students. A school's technical coordinator can usually help set up the folder on the file server. The data necessary to test students is placed into this folder by using the download functions of the Test Administration Application (TAA). After testing students, the data are uploaded from the NTE using the TAA. The act of uploading the data from the NTE is what makes the data available for reporting.

**Norm Study**

The NWEA RIT Scale Norms describe the performance and growth of students from school systems that volunteered to participate in the most recent study. The study provides a reasonable way to compare the performance of a single student, school, or school district to a larger, meaningful reference group.

**Percent Meeting Growth Target**

This is the total student growth divided by the total of target RITs expressed as a percentage. It shows the proportion of the overall RIT growth targets achieved by the students. Performance of 100 percent is considered average, meaning the student growth equaled the targets. This is used in conjunction with the "Percentage of Students who Met or Exceeded their Target RIT."

**Percent of Target Met**

The percent of target met is a statistic that appears on some NWEA reports. It is the total student growth divided by the total of the student growth targets. The example below illustrates:

Student	Growth	Target Growth	Met Target
Robert	12	10	Yes
Jen	4	8	No
Jarron	14	6	Yes
Hannah	10	10	Yes
Karin	10	6	Yes
Percent of Target Met	50	40	125% (50/40)
Percent of Students Meeting Target			80% (4/5)

**Percentile Rank**

This number indicates the percentage of students in the NWEA norm group for this grade that this student's score equaled or exceeded.

The percentile rank is a normative statistic that indicates how well a student performed in comparison to the students in the norm group. The most recent norm sample was a group of approximately 2.3 million students from across the United States. A student's percentile rank indicates that the student scored as well as, or better than, the percent of students in the norm

group. In other words, a student with a percentile rank of 72 scored as well as, or better than, 72 percent of the students in the norm group.

### **Placement Guidelines**

This document features guidelines for screening or placement in mathematics, reading, language usage, and science instructional settings based on the student's RIT score. The tables include grade level medians, and considerations for Gifted, At Risk/Special Needs, and programs for each grade level. The document can be found in the Document Library on the Support Section of the NWEA web site.

### **Professional Development**

Workshops and courses that build capacity in understanding and using test data.

### **Progress vs. Growth**

See Growth vs. Progress.

### **RIT**

Tests developed by NWEA use a scale called RIT to measure student achievement and growth. RIT stands for Rasch unIntI, which is a measurement scale developed to simplify the interpretation of test scores. The RIT score relates directly to the curriculum scale in each subject area. It is an equal-interval scale, like feet and inches, so scores can be added together to calculate accurate class or school averages. RIT scores range from about 140 to 300 depending upon the scale and test season. They make it possible to follow a student's educational growth from year to year.

### **RIT Block Growth Norms**

RIT Block Growth Norms are tables that allow educators to get a more realistic look at growth across various RIT bands within grade levels. These norms measure student growth relative to students who started with a similar RIT score.

### **RIT Point Growth Norms**

RIT Point Growth Norms are tables that allow educators to get a more realistic look at growth across various RIT points within grade levels. These norms measure student growth relative to students who started with the same RIT score.

### **Scoring and Reporting System [enhanced version] (SRSe)**

NWEA's enhanced Scoring and Reporting System (SRSe) is a paper-pencil scoring system used to preprint paper-pencil answer sheets, scan completed answer sheets, and upload results to NWEA for scoring and reporting. SRSe is reliable, easy-to-use, and works in conjunction with NWEA's MAP system.

### **Special Programs File (SPF)**

The special programs file is a data file that contains special program information about students. When submitted with the class roster file, the data in the special programs file provides an extra layer of disaggregation for district-level reports.

### **Standard Deviation**

Standard deviation is a statistic expressing the homogeneity/heterogeneity of instructional level of a group of students. The larger the standard deviation, the more academically diverse the group.

### **Standard Error of Measurement (SEM)**

The standard error of measurement is an estimate of the precision of the achievement (RIT) score. The smaller the standard error, the more precise the achievement estimate is.

**Standards (Content)**

Standards are statements, developed by states or districts expressing content students should know and be able to do related to specific academic areas.

**Standards (Performance)**

Performance standards are a minimum proficiency level that students are expected to achieve on a particular assessment. Individual states, school districts, and schools establish such standards.

**TAA**

TAA is an acronym for **T**est **A**dministration **A**pplication.  
See Test Administration Application.

**Target Score**

A target score is a statistic that appears on some NWEA reports. The target RIT number is calculated by adding the Target Growth to the starting RIT. It reflects the score that the student is attempting to achieve in the next testing session. As it appears on NWEA reports, it represents the RIT Point growth norm for the student. Target scores may also be set independently of norm data.

**Test Administration Application**

The Test Administration Application (TAA) is the application that is used for managing a district's Network Test Environment (NTE). This application can be used to perform tasks such as adding students to an NTE on a student-by-student basis, moving students from one NTE to another, and uploading test results. The TAA can be accessed at <https://map.nwea.org/taa.hta>.

**TestTaker**

TestTaker is the software application that students use to take MAP tests.

**Training Continuum**

Throughout a partnership with NWEA, members can engage in professional development that builds capacity within their districts to become expert users of assessment data. Regardless of previous experience using assessment data, NWEA provides an opportunity to take learning to the next level.

Our training continuum steps members through a series of workshops, advancing understanding and proficiency with assessment information.

**Step 1 – MAP Administration**

The first training in the continuum is designed for districts new to Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) assessments. This workshop is offered on-site, encouraging staff members to participate and learn about their roles in administering MAP tests and using assessment data.

**Step 2 – Stepping Stones to Using Data**

In the second workshop, attendees gain an understanding of the reports available after their first test season. This workshop provides an opportunity for staff members, including the District Leadership Team, to take a look at their data, learn to interpret data, and to develop a common vocabulary to facilitate communication.

**Step 3 – Climbing the Data Ladder**

In the third workshop, participants delve into applying the information districts glean from their reports. After developing the skills to understand and interpret data in the Stepping Stones to Using Data workshop, suggestions are offered for applying the data to inform classroom instructional practices.

#### **Step 4 – Growth and Goals**

In the fourth workshop, participants will focus on growth data to establish and evaluate goals. Teachers will begin to learn how to work with students to set growth targets and the District Leadership Team will gain a better understanding of the value of analyzing data over time to evaluate programs and instructional practices.

#### **Triangulation**

Triangulation refers to the process of looking at multiple points of data, typically three supporting pieces that agree, to make informed decisions about students and/or academic programs. Three or more scores can also be referred to as a “body of evidence.”

#### **Types of Tests**

**Survey Test** - A 20 item test that gives an overall RIT score for the subject but does not provide goal performance scores. It takes about 30 minutes to administer and is most commonly used for course placement and intake testing.

**Goals Survey Test** - A 42-64 item test in math, reading, language, and science that gives an overall RIT score for the subject as well as scores in each of the goal performance areas. It takes about an hour to administer and is typically given in the fall and spring. Many districts also use this test in winter when assessing the effectiveness of specific instructional strategies that have been implemented after fall testing.

**End of Course Test** - A single level test that contains a year’s worth of work concentrated in one main goal area. End of course tests are administered late in the course.

#### **Web sites**

NWEA has a number of web sites available to the general public and clients:

[www.nwea.org](http://www.nwea.org) The NWEA web site is available to the general public.

<https://map.nwea.org/taa.hta>. This web site is available only to clients for the Test Administration Application (TAA).

<https://reports.nwea.org>. The Reports Site is where clients change the test window, declare testing complete, order reports, retrieve reports, access online reports, and access teacher User Names and Passwords.

#### **Zone of Proximal Development**

Scientific studies of learning have shown that an optimal match can be made between any given learner’s background knowledge and current achievement with the introduction of new ideas and skills to produce maximum growth. This match is called the “zone of proximal development.”

**Vygotsky, L. S.** (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.



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