



## CASE STUDY: The Lexile® Framework for Writing

# Mississippi K–12 Students Write Their Way to Success With The Lexile Framework for Writing

*“Lexile measures are a wonderful tool for differentiating and individualizing instruction.”*

A vital ingredient in a school district’s success is the dedication and determination of its administration and educators to overcome obstacles. In Mississippi’s Corinth School District, educators and administrators build on a long-standing local legacy for prevailing against overwhelming odds.

Located in the northeast corner of Mississippi near the Tennessee and Alabama borders, Corinth was the site of the Civil War’s Siege of Corinth, where the Union and the Confederacy fought for control of key railroad lines. One hundred fifty years later, this small town of 14,000 is a community united in its commitment to providing its students with outstanding educational opportunities. The Lexile Framework for Reading and The Lexile Framework for Writing, both from MetaMetrics®, are two of the tools that have helped make that goal a reality.

The Lexile Framework for Reading provides a common, developmental scale for matching reader ability and text difficulty. Lexile measures enable educators, parents and students to select targeted materials that can improve reading skills and to monitor reading growth across the curriculum, in the library and at home. The Lexile Framework for Writing enables educators to measure and monitor growth in student writing ability on a common, developmental scale over time and across the curriculum. The Lexile Framework for Writing expresses student writing ability on the same Lexile scale as reading ability, providing educators with a consistent and straightforward method to monitor growth in both reading and writing and to reinforce the importance of reading in the development of writing skills.

### **Extending the Power of Lexile measures to Writing**

Lee Childress, Ed.D., superintendent of the Corinth Public School District, began to see the power of The Lexile Framework for Reading in 2004 when his district’s students received their first Lexile measures with Mississippi state assessment results. The following year, district teachers learned more about Lexile measures at the Program for Research and Evaluation of Public Schools (PREPS), a statewide consortium of more than 90 Mississippi school districts.

“Our attendance at that workshop gave us the opportunity to speak with leaders from MetaMetrics about issues we were dealing with in the school district,” Childress recalled. “They asked if we’d be interested in working with them to develop The Lexile Framework for Writing.”

Corinth School District was an early adopter of the newly released Lexile Framework for Writing, a developmental scale that assesses students’ writing ability based on factors related to semantic complexity (the level of words used) and syntactic sophistication (how the words are written into sentences), as well as measures of conventions, such as spelling, grammar, capitalization and punctuation.

The educators who attended the workshop brought back new ideas and great enthusiasm for using Lexile measures to link assessment with instruction. Other faculty was gradually introduced to Lexile measures, and with additional training in matching targeted text with student reading levels and finding grade-appropriate materials, the teachers have integrated Lexile reader and writer measures into instruction, with encouraging results.

“We’re always looking for ways to differentiate instruction to get the most growth and achievement for each child,” said Denise Webb, principal of Corinth’s East Elementary School, which serves second, third and fourth graders. “Lexile measures do that. They are a wonderful tool for differentiating and individualizing instruction.”

### **Linking Writing Assessment With Instruction**

The Lexile Framework for Writing is having a major impact on how the district’s students perform on the Mississippi Curriculum Test (MCT). While the state of Mississippi assesses writing in grades four, seven and 10, Corinth School District began using MetaMetrics’ new MyWritingWeb program in third grade.

MyWritingWeb is an innovative, online classroom writing product that includes activities designed to monitor student writing development and support the acquisition of skills necessary for students to become successful writers.

MetaMetrics developed MyWritingWeb to provide educators with a tool for determining a student's Lexile writer measure and making that measure actionable in their classrooms. Using MyWritingWeb helps to enhance student writing ability, knowledge of writing conventions, such as spelling and grammar, and keyboarding fluency.

Regular use of MyWritingWeb pays off in the classroom, said fourth-grade teacher Deborah Yeates. "I could really see a difference in the students' writing," she said. "I had some students who began the year as really poor writers, and, after using MyWritingWeb for about seven months, scored very well on the state assessment. It helped the students overcome their fear of writing. They were able to hone their writing skills, and they became much better at editing. There was great improvement."

MyWritingWeb has proved to be an invaluable tool for Corinth educators, both for its assessment capability and the way it motivates students to practice writing.

"We saw phenomenal growth with the students," said Childress. "While Lexile measures are not designed to foster competitiveness, they did. They worked hard to improve where it would show."

"With MyWritingWeb, every student can benefit," he continued. "They can all improve their reading and writing skills. And they did. In one class alone, the average growth in writing narratives was almost 200W in Lexile measures. Another benefit is that students get instant feedback on their essays. The automatic scorer gives them their Lexile writer measure right away."

The Corinth team said that because MyWritingWeb is an online tool, students found it particularly motivating. Students who have difficulty using pencil and paper write better, longer essays on the computer.

"One fourth-grade student was so motivated that she answered the elementary, middle school and high school prompts during her MyWritingWeb assignment," said Childress. "Some of the best essays she wrote were in response to the high school prompts, and that was at the end of her fourth-grade year."

Yeates added, "An advanced student writer is often bored in class, so it thrilled her to be able to do some of the high school work."

### **Improving Writing With Practice, Practice, Practice**

Assessment results confirm the good news and suggest that Lexile writer measures are sensitive to growth over time. In Deborah Yeates' fourth-grade class, the first essay of the year—a persuasive essay—yielded an average Lexile writer measure of 325W. At the end of the year, a second persuasive essay showed an increased average score of 465W.

"They wrote for an average of 29 minutes, out of the 30 minutes allotted," Childress said proudly. "They're organizing their thoughts, going through the steps of the writing process to get there. On the narrative essay they went from Lexile 345W at the beginning of the year to 480W."

At the high school level, Barbara Trapp's Advanced Placement English class began the year with an average Lexile writer measure of 1060W on an informative essay and ended the year at 1300W. Overall, there's been approximately 100W to 175W growth in students' Lexile writer measures throughout the district.

### **Showing the Community the Power of Lexile measures**

Just as the town pulled together to survive the Siege of Corinth, it is uniting to give students every opportunity to succeed. "We have tried to create a culture where we use both Lexile reader and writer measures to create growth in our students," said Childress. "We made numerous presentations to civic clubs and librarians, to bookstore owners and employees in order to build a strong community understanding." In particular, Childress targeted the community agencies that provide after-school programs, such as the Boys and Girls Clubs, Project Attention and the Lighthouse. "Since MyWritingWeb is

Web-based, we wanted to involve the tutoring agencies so they can access it. The more children write, the better writers—and readers—they become.”

Parents are reached through “Parents University,” which offers several reading-focused workshops on Lexile measures.

As Lexile measures have become integrated into instruction at Corinth School District, the students have embraced them. “Lexile measures have become a way of life for the children,” said Childress. Lured by using the computer for MyWritingWeb, many students have become intrigued by their own improvement. “One seventh grader who hasn’t been successful in school in the past was so intrigued by using the computer and Web to practice writing that he called me after the school year had ended to see what kind of growth his Lexile [writer] measure showed.”

As Corinth students reach the high school level, the battle to turn them into readers and writers reaches a fevered pitch. “If the text is too challenging, the frustrated reader becomes a non-reader,” said teacher Barbara Trapp. “If we don’t do something like Lexile measures, they totally shut down.”

Trapp accesses EBSCO databases from home to find “Lexiled” articles and encourages her students to do the same. She also urges them to make time for the Paragraph Edit assignments in MyWritingWeb, even opening up the computer lab for early-morning access.

“I have a lot of students who do assignments at home, and now kids will come in early to do a Paragraph Edit,” she said. “A large number of my AP English students want to go on to community college or a four-year university. Many students said the Paragraph Edit assignments were very helpful in preparing them for the ACT.”

### **Success for All With Lexile measures**

With the proven success of The Lexile Frameworks for Reading and Writing, Childress and his team are focused on ensuring that the measures are part of the district’s culture. The books in school libraries are Lexiled, as are all new book purchases; content-area textbooks are re-evaluated according to Lexile levels, and supplemented with articles at varying levels to differentiate instruction and keep all students on track. Teachers in content-areas are also being trained on how to use Lexile measures to differentiate instruction.

“Lexile measures make it so easy to individualize instruction,” said elementary principal Denise Webb. “That’s where the growth and achievement is going to come in.”

“You can see your low-achievers experience success,” added fourth-grade teacher Yeates.

High school teacher Trapp had a slightly different perspective. “Part of the problem we’re seeing is fewer jobs in manual labor. We want to give our students every advantage they can have at a well-paying job. It’s uplifting for us—if we can get kids reading or writing, we can get kids out of high school and successful in the real world.”

Superintendent Childress feels the answer lies in the community. “Lexile measures are powerful tools, and they work with both challenged students and the exceptional. When students, teachers and parents understand Lexile measures, they embrace the concept and use them at school, at home and in their personal life—to improve their reading and writing abilities.”

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For more information on Lexile measures, visit [www.Lexile.com](http://www.Lexile.com).

MetaMetrics, an educational measurement and research organization, develops scientific measures of academic achievement that link assessment with targeted instruction to improve learning. The organization’s renowned psychometric team created The Lexile Framework for Reading; El Sistema Lexile para Leer, the Spanish-language version of the reading framework; The Quantile Framework for Mathematics; and The Lexile Framework for Writing. In addition to licensing Lexile and Quantile measures to state departments of education, testing and instructional companies, and publishers, MetaMetrics offers professional development, resource measurement and customized consulting services.

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