1. **Independent Reading Level.** Easy reading. In oral reading, a child would have one or less word calling errors in 100 words of text, with 100 percent accuracy on comprehension questions about the story. A student could read it alone with ease.

2. **Instructional Reading Level.** This is the best level for learning new vocabulary. It requires the assistance of a teacher or tutor. The word error range allowed while reading orally to the teacher is from 2 to 5 word calling errors per 100 words of text (95% accuracy or better), with at least 80 percent comprehension on simple recall questions about the story. This is where the best progress is made in reading. Children who are forced or permitted to attempt reading beyond the 5-word error limit soon begin to feel frustration when in an instructional setting.

3. **Frustration Reading Level.** This is too hard for the reader. Word errors are over 5 per 100 words of text. Comprehension questions are below 70 percent accuracy. Unfortunately, teachers sometimes allow this to happen, especially when the words missed are basic vocabulary sight words, such as "was" for "saw" and "what/that." The practice of having young children work in frustration level reading materials is not professionally sound. It is, however, all too often observed in the classrooms of well-meaning teachers.
To: Parents of Elementary School Children

Frequently, parents wonder exactly what reading test scores mean in terms of everyday achievement. If a child is reading "at grade level," what does that really mean? Is he or she reading well at grade level? Does the child know most of the words in the school reader at sight, or are there a good many words that require thoughtful analysis? The information that follows gives some insight into the reading process.

Most children are actually taught by the teacher at their instructional levels. This is the level at which the teacher "stretches" the student in his thinking and reading. The independent level, on the other hand, is the level at which the child can read easily and with pleasure. Reading scores generally refer to instructional levels.

1. The child's independent reading level is usually determined from books in which he/she can read with no more than one error in word recognition in each 100 words and has a comprehension score of at least 90 percent. At this level the child reads orally in a natural tone, free from tension. His silent reading will be faster than his oral reading.

2. The instructional reading level is usually determined from books (or other material) which the child can read with no more than one word-recognition error in approximately 20 words. The comprehension score should be 75 percent or more. At this level, the child reads orally, after silent study, without tension. Silent reading is faster than oral reading. The student is able to use word-recognition clues and techniques. He reads with teacher help and guidance. This is the "stretch" level. With the right materials and purposeful reading, he makes maximum progress.

3. The frustration level is marked by the book in which the child obviously struggles to read. Errors are numerous. The child reads without a natural rhythm and in an unnatural voice. No child should be asked to read at his frustration level, but the teacher needs to know that this level does exist for him.

4. The probable capacity reading level is shown by the highest book in a given series in which the child can understand 75 percent or more of what he hears when the book is read aloud to him. He should be able to answer questions and to use properly many of the special words used in the selection. He should be able to use in his own conversation or discussion some language structures comparable to those used in the selection.
Levels of Performance

One product of assessment is a student's level of performance--independent, instructional, or frustration--on a given task. Use of levels follows from Vygotsky's "zone of proximal development" paradigm of learning which posits that instruction should focus on that which a student has not mastered but is prepared to master next.

Knowing at which level of performance a student performs a given aspect of a skill allows an educator to maximize learning by focusing on instruction-level material and avoiding material that is too hard or too easy. In broad terms, this is what each level means:

- Independent-level performance by a student is demonstrated by very good speed and accuracy on a task or set of tasks. Assistance is not appropriate.
- Instructional-level performance by a student is demonstrated by fair speed or accuracy that improves notably with skilled assistance, that is, with scaffolding. The task or set of tasks is appropriate for instructional situations where skilled assistance is available.
- Frustration-level skill performance by a student is demonstrated by poor speed or accuracy. The task or set of tasks is not appropriate.

Criterion are not fixed, but here are some guidelines for accuracy:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Accuracy</th>
<th>Frustration</th>
<th>Instructional</th>
<th>Independent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Decoding</td>
<td>&lt;93%</td>
<td>93-95%</td>
<td>&gt;95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comprehension</td>
<td>&lt;60%</td>
<td>60-75%</td>
<td>&gt;75%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To find those levels, assessments of reading--whether reflecting general decoding or comprehension performance or performance on specific subskills--must provide answers to the descriptive question, "What does the student do?" Comparing those answers to a curriculum’s content and sequence yields answers to the treatment question, "What does instruction have to do next to meet this student’s goals?"

Brief and frequent formative assessments aligned with the curriculum are particularly suited to individualize a student’s instruction. For an educator to design effective instruction, he must answer assessment questions not once or once-in-a-while, but on a continuing basis.

A curriculum-based assessment, informal reading inventory, and some other assessment instruments are designed or can be modified to find a student's skill levels.

Such an assessment on, say, silent reading comprehension, might produce results like these:
- Independence: third grade
- Instructional: fifth grade
- Frustration: sixth grade.

In this case, a teacher would know that third-grade materials are appropriate for independent silent reading, materials for teaching reading should be mostly at fifth-grade, and sixth-grade materials are inappropriate for this student. This would be true only for this student, only for the specific skill or set of skills (in this case, silent reading comprehension) assessed, and only until the student's performance changed significantly.

It is not unusual for a student in special education to have dramatically different independence, instructional, or frustration levels in related reading skills. For example, a student might have an instructional level of fifth-grade for silent reading comprehension but an instructional level of ninth-grade for listening comprehension.

http://www.csun.edu/~hda75098/Levels.html