

Q: When the student scores poorly on both Exact reading speed and on reading comprehension accuracy, has the slow reading speed affected the accuracy score?

A: The short answer to this question is yes, probably. Reading comprehension accuracy and reading speed are not entirely independent measures and never can be in any test that involves reading. However, the picture is more complicated than it first appears. The slower the student's reading speed, the less of the text and questions that can be read in the time allowed, so slow reading speed can obviously affect the reading accuracy in a standardised test. But, equally, a very *fast* reading speed can also negatively affect the accuracy score. Because mental effort has to be devoted to understanding what is read and this takes a certain amount of time, it is generally the case that, within certain limits, reading faster tends to result in poorer comprehension and reading slower tends to result in better comprehension. There are exceptions, of course. If a student reads *exceptionally slowly* – e.g. they spent the whole 10 minutes just on the first one or two passages of the reading comprehension test – the results will, quite rightly, give a slow speed of reading and a relatively poor comprehension score because almost all students aged 11 and older normally do much better than this. At the other end of the scale, a *very bright, skilled reader* may complete all the passages within the 10 minute period and get most of the questions correct, obtaining both a fast reading speed and a high accuracy score. In general, however, most students lie somewhere in between these two extremes.

There could be several different reasons why a student scores poorly both on reading speed and on reading comprehension accuracy. Working exceptionally slowly (as in the example above) could be one reason. Another reason could be that they skipped through the passages, finishing the test early without having attempted a reasonable number of questions or just guessed. Another reason could be that despite devoting reasonable time and effort to the task the student's limited understanding meant that after the first couple of passages they were unable to make much sense of the rest. Examination of the student's performance pattern (this is shown on page 2 of the Exact report) passage-by-passage, including time taken, should enable the administrator to determine which is the most likely cause.

The usual pattern of performance by a student who has made a fair and conscientious effort in the test is revealed in a greater number of attempts and higher scores in the earlier (easier) passages, gradually tailing off to fewer attempts and lower scores in the later (harder) passages. The time taken is usually around one or two minutes in the first two passages, increasing to three minutes in the third and fourth passages. How much time is taken by the fifth and final passage will generally depend on what time is left, but is often only around a minute, except for older or brighter students, who are able to master the earlier passages more speedily and so have more time available to devote to the final passage.

If an administrator has misgivings about any results from the reading comprehension test the best course of action is to repeat the test using the other form, after first having provided appropriate guidance to the student regarding how the test should properly be attempted (see Section 3.8 of the Lucid Exact Administrator's Manual for further advice on this matter).