What is the Nelson Denny Reading Test (NDRT) ?

Reading skills are one of the most critical factors in academic success at any level. No matter if a person is in 3rd grade, 10th grade, the first year of college, or thinking of returning to college 25 years after graduating from high school, without strong reading skills the required school work is going to be difficult for them to keep up with, let alone excel at. This isn't only true of courses in English language and literature, but across virtually the entire academic spectrum. A person who doesn't possess at least a basic mastery of reading skills is going to have trouble in other courses such as science, social studies and other subjects which require any amount of reading. This is why the Nelson Denny Reading Test (NDRT) is so important, for both students, and educational institutions.

The test was developed in 1929, and named after its creators, M.S. Nelson and E.C. Denny, two professors at Iowa State Teacher's College (now known as the University of Northern Iowa). It has been in continuous use ever since, and has been revised and updated several times in the intervening decades, the last revision being in 1993. There are two parts to the exam: Vocabulary, and Reading Comprehension. The Vocabulary section has 80 multiple choice questions, and test takers will choose from five possible answers on each one. For the Reading Comprehension section, the test taker will read five brief passages taken from high school and college textbooks, and then answer 38 multiple choice questions testing both direct comprehension skills, and the ability to make inferences based on what they've read. The entire test takes about 45 minutes, and it is usually given in a group setting. (There is also an extended version available.)

The Nelson Denny test isn't really an admissions test in the usual sense of the phrase, as it typically isn't used to help determine which applicants will be admitted, and which ones won't. Schools use the NDRT for a variety of purposes. It is more of a diagnostic exam. One of the main purposes is screening incoming students for their current level of reading skills, as well as any problems that need to be addressed. The exam is also a very reliable indicator of which students will be successful. It can also be used for measuring progress, either for overall reading skills, or in specific problem areas.

The Nelson-Denny Reading Test has become one of the most widely-adopted measures of reading comprehension since it was developed in 1929. The Nelson-Denny test is not an "admission test" for learning institutions, though it may have limited use in that area. Neither is Nelson-Denny to be regarded as a clinical evaluation of reading problems. Nelson-Denny's chief purpose is to identify students who have difficulty in reading, to gauge levels of progress after remediation, and to predict future potential for academic success.

The Nelson-Denny Reading Test can be administered in as little as 35 minutes. The time allotted for the test can be extended to meet a variety of classroom concerns. One reason for extending the time period would be to aid students for whom English is a second language. Also, adults who are returning to earn a high school diploma may require an extension of the time limits.

The Nelson-Denny measures the student's reading rate in words per minute; it also measures vocabulary level and reading comprehension. Nelson-Denny is useful in secondary school placement for learning assessments. The Nelson-Denny test can be given individually or administered to larger groups.

The Nelson-Denny consists of a vocabulary section comprised of 80 multiple-choice questions. The vocabulary level is similar to that of high school and college textbooks. There are an additional 38 multiple-choice questions requiring the test taker to read paragraphs and identify content and inference. When the test is used to measure progress resulting from remedial reading classes, the Nelson-Denny test administrator will use both Form G and Form H of the Nelson-Denny test.