

FAQ: The Alternate Standard Charts

Q. Who designed the Alternate Standard Chart, and why did they do it?

A. The first version of the Alternate Standard Chart was devised by Prof. Normand Giroux of the University of Quebec at Montreal. Nathan Crow, principal of Littleton Preparatory Charter School in Colorado, immediately perceived its superior readability, and found that teachers universally preferred it to the “standard chart.” After a couple of years had passed, Crow began to experiment with a revised design, adding the “chart prompts” to help teachers and students make better decisions about practice, altering the display somewhat, and redesigning the system for recording timing periods. Giroux and his associates at UQAM then revised Crow’s version for even better readability. When the producers had agreed on a final version, it was released in December 2000. Tryouts of the new chart with teachers and students indicate that they find it superior both to the “standard” chart and to previous versions of the alternate chart. (Indeed, if this were not the case, Giroux and Crow would not have bothered to release it.)

Q. What is the advantage of using the Alternate Standard Charts over the traditional “standard celeration chart”?

A. There are several advantages:

- First, the ASC charts are free and can be downloaded at no charge anytime you want.
- Next, any ASC is usable in normal type colors, not just blue.
- Third, the numbers are larger and therefore easier for both children and older adults to use.
- Fourth, the commonly used timing periods (“floors”) are easier to record than on the standard chart.
- Fifth, any ASC has a zero, so that when the student doesn’t make any errors, he can record it that way.
- Sixth, the ASC’s show the work pattern more clearly. It is easy to record any meaningful number in an easily readable fashion.
- Seventh, comparative work with both ASC’s and standard charts shows that teachers and children will learn to read this chart more quickly and enjoy using it more.
- Eighth, the ASC comes with “chart prompts” that help you or your students make effective decisions about practice.
- Finally, any ASC has the unique “Today’s Aim” feature, which helps children to focus on a specific goal for the day’s practice.

Q. How do you record the timing periods?

A. Just circle the correct timing period. And keep in mind that a 30-second timing period will usually get you better results than a 1-minute timing period! Don’t be afraid to try 15- and 20-second timings as well. Experiment and see what happens.

Q. Aren’t there any advantages to the “standard” chart?

A. Yes. The “standard” chart can record a wider range of data. If you are doing a task that occurs at a higher frequency than 500 per minute, it is a feasible choice. Also, many traditional PT practitioners use it, so the standard chart makes it easier to share data at conferences. (However, experience shows that all PT practitioners can easily read the ASC as well.) Third, the standard chart is printed on paper that is superior in some respects to the paper most of us keep in our

printers. Fourth, the standard chart covers a longer period of time. Finally, the standard chart has Saturday and Sunday.

Q. Can't administrators make teachers use the standard chart?

A. Our experience is that teachers usually strongly dislike the standard chart and will either resist using it or attempt to drop it. The ASC generally gets a positive reaction. If you are an administrator or lead teacher trying to get people to use PT, we think you'll have a lot better luck with the ASC. We suggest that you show people the ASC and the "standard" chart and let them choose the one they like.

Q. Why not include Saturday and Sunday?

A. We could have done that, but children find this chart easier to use partly because of the numbers on the weekend lines. Since very few schools arrange for at-home practice, we thought ease of use was a good trade-off.

Q. Does the ASC have the same "celeration lines" as a standard chart?

A. Yes. A 34-degree angle means a doubling of frequency from week to week. For example, if you draw a 34-degree angle from one Monday to another, the value of the line will double (e.g., the first Monday might have 15, and the second would have 30).

Q. Why does the standard chart cost so much money? Why don't they make it available on the Web?

A. We don't know, but we did want to make our chart available as an easily accessible alternative to the standard chart, which is expensive and difficult to order. The most important point is that this chart is free, easy to use, and easy to learn. Whenever you want to use one, you can just print it off from a PDF (Acrobat) file. (Users of Illustrator can even input their own names and skill designations on the charts.)

Another problem with the "standard" chart is that it won't work in any color except blue. Our chart works in regular laser printers (or other black & white printers) because the lines are spaced wider and are "gray scale," so a pencil shows up easily. And if you would like a colorful chart for "kid appeal," you may use our green chart. Just print it on your color printer. Either one will work well for you and your students.

Q. Why do some PT traditionalists dislike alternative charts so much?

A. Like any small movement that perceives itself as opposed by an "establishment," PT has tended to drift into a "circle-the-wagons" mentality. Any deviation from the group is perceived by a few older members of the PT community as an attack. We consider this attitude unfortunate.

Another reason is that some members of the PT community assert that "the chart" is the main and most important part of PT. We think this is wrong. From our point of view, what makes PT unique and effective is mostly the short timing periods, the way practice is arranged in small chunks, the accurate recording of rate per minute of both corrects and errors, and the materials, routines, and interventions for problems that PT practitioners have developed.

Please note that we do like the measure of acceleration, or we wouldn't have made our alternate chart. It's useful to have a chart that measures rate of change. But it's not *critical*. We recommend that you use our chart (or the standard chart if you prefer), and we think that you will find either chart very informative. The graphic display is a great motivational tool and will let you see patterns that would otherwise remain hidden. However, the most important thing is that you arrange practice to fluency using small chunks of practice materials and short timing periods, which make it fun and easy for your student (or you) to learn. Short timings, well-arranged materials, and keeping records of rate per minute are the most important things, not whether you use an official blue chart from Kansas.

You should also know that the standard chart traditionalists like to say there should be “one” chart, but in fact sell quite a few different charts. So it's not really correct to talk about one standard chart. (When we use this term, we are referring to the most popular of the charts that the traditionalists sell.)

Finally, the people who say the standard chart is “easy to learn” and claim that teachers like it usually don't stick around long enough to see whether the people they are training actually use it!

Q. Is the ASC actually easier to use? What's the proof?

A. Our own experience is that teachers learn the ASC at several times the rate that the inventor of the standard chart, Ogden Lindsley, describes for his workshops using the standard chart (see below). Since Professor Lindsley is the inventor of the standard chart and has spent decades teaching people to use it, we think that's pretty good evidence that the ASC is superior from a practical point of view.

We do have some quite concrete evidence that the ASC is easier to learn. According to Professor Lindsley (writing about his own “standard” chart), “when participants returned from lunch break [after training all morning], all could drop dots (SeeWrite) on daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly charts at 10 dots correct per minute! PointSeeSay fluency at 60 per minute produced 10 correct per minute SeeWrite with no SeeWrite shaping! Teaching chart reading before picking a pencil up for charting produced quicker and more accurate charting than we had ever before accomplished in 29 years!” [Exclamation points in original.]

Thus, we see that according to his own statement, “10 correct per minute” was “quicker and more accurate charting than” Professor Lindsley had ever been able to produce in his previous decades of work with the SCC.

In contrast, the first workshop teaching teachers how to write symbols on the ASC produced a low rate of 7 per minute and a high of 39 per minute. Only one participant was below 12 per minute. This was after only 70 minutes of training – less than half of the time invested by Lindsley to produce generally much lower rates of performance.¹

¹ It was Professor Lindsley's idea to first teach people how to read charts before “writing” them, and this was a major contribution.

Which chart will work better for you and your students? Again, the only way to tell is to try them out. If the standard chart works better for you, you should keep using it. If the alternate chart works better for you, then choose it.

Q. Is it OK if I send the ASC chart(s) to my friends by forwarding a PDF file?

A. Absolutely! We encourage you to do so. The only thing we ask in return is that you occasionally let us know about your successes. Also, please keep in mind that permission to use the chart is revocable at any time.

Q. Are there other charts I can buy or get from other sources?

A. Yes. Sopris West in Colorado sells PT charts of their own design. You can contact them at www.sopriswest.com. They also have an array of useful practice materials at a reasonable price.

Q. How do I open a PDF file?

A. Download free Acrobat Reader software from the Adobe site at www.adobe.com. (You have to do this only once, and it lets you read all sorts of cool web publications.) Once the Acrobat Reader is installed, double-clicking on the PDF file will automatically open the Acrobat software and the file at the same time. (If you haven't updated your Reader software recently, you should probably upgrade to version 4.0.)

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