RIVIER COLLEGE

**DIVISION OF EDUCATION**

# **SPECIALIST IN THE ASSESSMENT OF INTELLECTUAL FUNCTIONING PROGRAM**

AND

**ASSOCIATION OF SPECIALISTS IN ASSESSMENT OF**

**INTELLECTUAL FUNCTIONING (ASAIF)**

[**http://www.asaif.net**](http://www.asaif.net)

**Comments on Reports 5/11/12 # 241**

The **Association of Specialists in Assessment of Intellectual Functioning (ASAIF)** sponsors educational activities supporting the assessment of intellectual functioning, including this newsletter, co-sponsored by the Specialist in Assessment of Intellectual Functioning program at Rivier College,[[1]](#footnote-1) evening dinner-and-training events called "Shorties," and workshops. **ASAIF is now authorized by NASP to offer CPD credits.**  **If you have topics on which you would like ASAIF to do a workshop or Shorty, please tell me at** [johnzerowillis@yahoo.com](mailto:johnzerowillis@yahoo.com)**. We have worked with school districts to co-sponsor workshops in the districts. We are happy to travel outside New Hampshire if someone wants to pay the speaker's travel expenses.**

If you wish to receive your own copies of this newsletter, email me at [johnzerowillis@yahoo.com](mailto:johnzerowillis@yahoo.com). Email versions include ASAIF and other local conferences and New Hampshire job listings.

**ANNOUNCEMENTS**

**Benoit Education Center**

The Benoit Education Center at Rivier College has been named after Sr. Mary Jane Benoit, Ph.D., p.m., Professor of Education Emerita and retired chair of the Education Department. This most fitting honor delights me because Sr. Mary Jane first hired me to teach a course at Rivier in 1980, assigned me to teach the SAIF certification program in 1984, and has been my mentor and inspiration for graduate-level teaching for one-third of a century.

**Rivier University**

"Rivier College is pleased to announce that it will officially become a university on July 1, 2012. New Hampshire Commissioner of Education Virginia M. Barry Ph.D. granted the approval for this status change from college to university last week. . . . Founded in 1933 by the Sisters of the Presentation of Mary, Rivier College is a Catholic, co-educational institution offering undergraduate, graduate, and postgraduate programs in the liberal arts and professional courses of study. Rivier is proud of its strong academic programs, community, and commitment to service as an integral part of its mission of transforming hearts and minds to serve the world."

**Rivier University Psy.D. Program**

Rivier is opening a program for the Psy.D. degree with Counseling Psychology and School Psychology tracks. The plan is to admit students for the Fall semester 2013. Information sessions will be held over the summer and into the fall. The Rivier website <http://www.rivier.edu/> will have details. Dr. Robert Walrath will be Director of the program. You can email Dr. Walrath at [rwalrath@rivier.edu](mailto:rwalrath@rivier.edu) with questions.

**CONTENT**

Please, please, please indicate in reports whether **test scores are based on norms for the child's age or norms for the child's grade.**  I recently spent a frustrating hour trying to determine the normative basis for achievement-test scores in an evaluation report. Nothing in the table headings, no footnotes, and not even a hint (e.g., "compared to other 19-year-olds" or "by norms for third grade") in the text. Nothing. Nowhere. If a child attended a "readiness," "transition," or "red-shirting" year between Kindergarten and first grade and then repeated first and second grades just to be on the safe side, and you are attempting to use achievement-test scores to track progress,[[2]](#footnote-2) the differences between age-based and grade-based standard scores would be important. Of course, we should be reporting scores twice, by age norms and by grade norms, in such cases.

**STYLE**

When two or more words are used together to make a single **compound adjective**, we hyphenate them to show that they are just one adjective, not a series of two or more independent adjectives. This convention usually saves the reader a moment's confusion and hesitation and occasionally prevents enduring confusion.

*three-year reevaluation fine-motor skills problem-solving model*

*fine- and gross-motor skills* (note the hyphen and space after "fine")

*ten-year, seven-month-old child the child is ten years old* (no hyphen)

*16-year-old young man* (otherwise, you might have a 16-year, old, young man)

*social-emotional testing* (otherwise it would be emotional testing done socially)

*Emmallee had fine gross-motor skills but gross fine-motor skills.*

**Raw Scores.** *Ralph answered 27 items correctly.* ["Wow!" thinks the reader of my report. "Twenty-seven! I wonder how many items there were. I wonder how many items other kids get right. Maybe it's 27 out of 100. That would be really terrible. Maybe there were only 27 items. That would be amazing. Good to know it was 27, in any case. Must be really important."] If we report raw scores in tables or in text, readers will inevitably attempt to assign meaning to them.

If the standard scores are all the lowest ones given in the norms tables (e.g., 25, 40, <40) and percentile ranks are all (illogically) "<0.1,"[[3]](#footnote-3) and age-equivalent scores are all lower than the lowest age equivalency in the norms tables, and the test does not offer Item Response Theory (IRT) "growth scores," "w scores," or "ability scores," then we might need to provide raw scores as the only possible means of tracking progress. If so, we need to explain what the raw scores do not mean.

**Test rules.** When we describe test rules, it helps to distinguish between normal, standardized rules and special accommodations. If we write, for instance, that *Soosie was not penalized for spelling, punctuation, and grammar errors on this test*, it is not clear whether this was a special accommodation for her deficiencies in writing skills. It would be clearer to write *Examinees are not penalized for spelling, punctuation, or grammar errors on this test.*

**Direct quotations** personalize a report and can provide valuable insights about the examinee's abilities, skills, and attitudes. The grammar and punctuation can, however, be tricky.

*Ecomodine told me she "likes to read books."*

The quotation marks imply that those (I "likes to read books") were Ecomodine's actual words. My report is likely to cause unwarranted excitement from my friendly, local speech/language pathologist or to suggest that Ecomodine speaks one of the variant English dialects in which "I likes to read books" is the customary form. We can use brackets to indicate editorial changes in a direct quotation or we can rephrase the sentence [as Sara Brody often told us, try again for What I Really Meant Is (WIRMI)].

*Ecomodine told me she "like[s] to read books."*

*Ecomodine told me "I like to read books."*

*Ecomodine told me she likes to read books.*

When I am quoting written material, such as previous evaluation reports or teachers' comments, I simply correct obvious, unequivocal, indisputable typos and spelling errors, and I hope future evaluators of my examinees will do the same for me. If the written sentence is beyond hope of correction, I usually paraphrase it with an indirect quotation [as in the case of this complete report-card comment from an English department head, "Flunked sentence fragments," which became, "Her English teacher reported that she had failed the unit on sentence fragments."] The American Psychological Association (APA) *Publication Manual* (<http://www.apastyle.org/>) and most other authorities allow us to use brackets to make the quotation fit the grammar of the sentence or paragraph in which we embedded it, as I did in the first Ecomodine example above. The APA *Publication* *Manual* and some other authorities tell us to change initial upper- or lower-case letters as necessary without even using brackets.

The temptation to use a richly illustrative direct quotation to make a point must be balanced against potential harm to the examinee. The following sentence is one I reluctantly deleted from a report on a middle-school girl some years ago. I discussed the issue without the direct quotation.

*When asked how well she followed school rules, Xxxxx thoughtfully*

*replied, "Pretty good unless they are too \*\*\*\*ing stupid."*

Direct quotations of really snarky comments about classes and specific teachers could also extinguish a teacher's unrewarded but persistent efforts to help the student or unfairly harm the teacher's reputation. [If the student reports misconduct, we need to follow up on that concern. We also need to find out and try to remedy causes of a student's dislike of a class or a teacher. Many administrators balk at changing classes when a motivated student and a dedicated, skilled teacher have learning needs and teaching styles that are simply incompatible. I am not sure those administrators should always resist such changes. ["Students have to learn to get along and work well with everybody just the way adults do in our jobs."] [Yeah, right.]

Concerns about direct quotations also apply to specific test items. We have all seen reports with so many quoted items that they could serve as a training guide for students who want to ace an IQ test to get into a gifted program ["Allburt knew the following 18 Vocabulary words: . . . . He did not know the meanings of any of these 12 words: . . . ."] In many cases, we can paraphrase the item and the response or use made-up items to illustrate our point ["Sayonara seemed baffled by questions about the reasons for maintaining certain governmental functions, similar to public works departments and traffic signals. She said she could not even guess at the reasons."]. Rarely, however, there seems to be an overwhelming need to quote. If a blind child gave Dr. Carol Anne Evans's example of a response to the test question about what to do if you see thick smoke pouring from a nearby dwelling ["Fall on my knees and thank God for restoring my vision."] or this actual response, "Get marshmallows," it would be pretty tough to refrain from quoting.

**BOOKS**

I recently presented a workshop on assessment of writing and a couple of workshops on the WIAT-III, which necessarily included some close attention to Sentence Composition and Essay Composition. Preparation for these workshops sent me back once again to

Nancy Mather, Barbara J. Wendling, and Rhia Roberts's *Writing Assessment and Instruction for Students with Learning Disabilities* (2nd ed.) (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2009) ISBN 978-0-470-23079-4. <http://www.josseybass.com/WileyCDA/WileyTitle/productCd-0470230797.html>

The book begins with a Foreword by Noel Gregg and a wonderful introductory chapter, "Very Gently with No Red Marks." The other chapters are:

2. Components of Written Language 7. Improving Written Expression

3. Theoretical Perspectives and Effective Principles 8. Informal Assessment and Curriculum-

4. Effective Accommodations for Struggling Writers Based Measurement

5. Helping Students with Handwriting 9. Analysis of Writing Samples

6. Building Basic Writing Skills 10. Writing as Communication.

Although "the primary purpose of this book is to help educators become effective writing teachers" (p. 4), it is also extremely valuable for evaluators who are not engaged in direct classroom or individual instruction. One conclusion we reached in the workshop on assessment of writing was that none of the available normed writing tests was sufficient for a complete and useful assessment of a student's writing abilities and needs, so it was necessary to apply additional analysis to writing samples obtained from normed tests and, often, to include analysis of informal, examiner-made writing samples or of samples of writing stolen from the classroom (assuming we can verify the provenance[[4]](#footnote-4)). Mather, Wendling, and Roberts's *Writing Assessment and Instruction* provides a great deal of valuable guidance in such analysis, tremendously enhanced by 192 figures showing analyzed and annotated samples of actual children's writing and 24 other useful figures and exhibits. Appropriate parts of the wealth of information designed to help teachers improve their writing instruction can, of course, be passed on by the evaluator in the evaluation report, and the evaluator can recommend the book to the examinee's teachers and IEP team. Don't assess writing without this book.

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1. Neither ASAIF nor Rivier College is in any way, shape, or form responsible for the quirky opinions in this newsletter. They cannot be blamed for what is written here. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. A risky proposition at best, given the incredibly small differences in expected raw scores for a standard score of 100 from one grade to the next on many subtests of all individually administered achievement tests. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. How can something be lower than the lowest *X* percent? [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. My word for the day from *Antiques Roadshow*. It is helpful to know whether we are looking at a hurried first draft or a fifth draft that has benefitted from editing by, among others, a mother with a Ph.D. in English Literature. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)