RIVIER UNIVERSITY

**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 10/22/12 # 243**

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 University,[[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**. 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 copies of this newsletter, email me at johnzerowillis@yahoo.com. Email versions include notices of ASAIF and other conferences and jobs in and near New Hampshire.

**CONTENT**

**Wechsler giveth and Wechsler taketh away.**

The rules for start points, reversing, basals, and discontinuing on the WISC-IV can be tricky. Be sure to study Table 2.6 (pp. 35 & 36 in the *WISC-IV Administration and Scoring Manual*) or Table 2.8 (pp. 50 & 51 in the *WISC-IV Integrated Administration and Scoring Manual*) and Table 2.9 (pp. 52 & 53 in the *WISC-IV Integrated Administration and Scoring Manual*).

Things are especially tricky when you elect to begin at a starting point lower than the one designated for the child's age (because of "suspected mental deficiency" or, I would argue, for a suspected severe weakness in verbal or nonverbal abilities).

First, the instructions generally refer to starting with Item 1. They really mean starting with the Sample(s) and then Item 1!

Second,

For children starting on items prior to their age-appropriate start point (e.g., children suspected of intellectual deficiency), special caution must be taken in scoring. *Regardless of the child's performance on items preceding the age-appropriate start point, full credit is awarded for preceding items if perfect scores are obtained on the age-appropriate start point and subsequent item* (p. 32 in the *WISC-IV Administration and Scoring Manual* and p. 46 in the *WISC-IV Integrated Administration and Scoring Manual*).

Therefore, the child might get credit for several failed items below the age-appropriate starting point if you started at a lower starting point and the child passes both the sage-appropriate starting item and the next one (so the child would not have had to reverse if you had simply started with the age-appropriate starting-point item). Wechsler does not want to penalize the examinee for the examiner's faulty judgment. The child should never have been asked those items, so untrue responses should not be penalized (this is known as the W. J. Clinton and K. W. Starr Rule).

Third, Be careful not to discontinue subtest administration prematurely. If you are unsure how to score a response and cannot determine quickly whether to discontinue a subtest, administer additional items until you are certain the discontinue criterion has been met. If after review, you find that the child was given items beyond the point at which testing should have been discontinued, *award no points for those items beyond the correct discontinue point, even if the child's responses ordinarily would have earned credit.* (p. 32 in the *WISC-IV Administration and Scoring Manual* and p. 48 in the *WISC-IV Integrated Administration and Scoring Manual*).

A large number of failed items below the age-appropriate starting point might be worth mentioning in the report if you can figure out why that happened and the reason seems to be important. Similarly, a large number of passed items beyond the discontinue point (which received no credit) might be worth mentioning. If we do mention such items, we should not bog the reader down in a discussion of these technical and arcane rules. Such discussions annoy experts and confuse or annoy non-experts. We should (if there is an important point to be made) simply discuss the fact that the child missed a lot of easier items despite succeeding with more difficult items or succeeded on a lot of more difficult items despite missing easier ones. Remember, however, that the subtest items may not actually be arranged in ascending order of difficulty.

**Other tests just take away.**

On most tests, there are three risks to taking advantage of permission to use a lower starting point than would be usual for the examinee's age. First, other tests do not use the Wechsler Giveth rule, so the examinee may fail (and lose credit for) items that the examinee never should have taken. Second, unnecessarily low starting points prolong the testing process, fatiguing the examinee and taking time from other activities. Third, the examinee may, despite our explanations, be insulted by being asked "stupid" items and may elect to live down to our apparent expectations. Ursula Willis calls this the "turtle" phenomenon as the examinee pulls back into his or her shell. This reaction is especially probable with students whose physical disabilities, e.g., cerebral palsy, impair communication and lead people to underestimate their intellectual abilities (Sattler, 2008, p. 210).[[2]](#footnote-2)

On most tests, starting points are intended to work for a wide range of abilities, so we should be cautious about messing with them.

The **KTEA-II Error Analysis** norms are often very useful, but we MUST use the norms! Comparisons of the numbers of items missed in various categories are totally misleading unless we use the norms! I know I mentioned this issue recently, but people are not listening.

**STYLE**

These comments will be excruciatingly familiar to many of you, but I am reading a new crop of student evaluations and feel the need to repeat some observations. My goal is not grammatical perfection (of which I am incapable), but unambiguous clarity of expression in our reports.

Don't write merely to be understood. Write so that you cannot possibly be misunderstood.

--Robert Louis Stevenson

**Abbreviations, Acronyms, and Bacronyms.[[3]](#footnote-3)** The first time we use an abbreviation in a report, it is best to spell out the entire term and add the abbreviation in parentheses. Then we are free (although not obligated) to use the abbreviation throughout the rest of the report. I am, for instance, laboriously training my new computer to automatically print "Individualized Education Program (IEP)" whenever I type "iep" or "IEP." If I do not want that replacement to happen again in the report, I just type CONTROL plus z and continue merrily on my way.

File 🡪 Options 🡪 Proofing 🡪 AutoCorrect Options 🡪 check "Replace test as you type" 🡪 fill the Replace box with the abbreviation, e.g., "iep" or "504," and the With box with the text you want, e.g., "Individualized Education Program (IEP)" or "a formal plan of accommodations and services under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act" 🡪 click Add 🡪 click OK. [Don't put the terms in quotation marks unless you want the quotation marks to print.]

[Yes, the law really does allow us to provide special education services through a 504 plan, although a student who needs direct services would usually qualify under the IDEA.]

**All right is 2 words. All ready is 2 words. Already is 1 word. Alright is not a word, although it is working to become one.** It's all right, we are already all ready to leave.

**Hyphenate compound adjectives unless they are used as predicate adjectives or the first word ends in –ly.**

*Quatherynnne is a nine-year, five-month-old repeating first grader.*

 *Buster's fine-motor skills are gross, but his gross-motor skills are fine.*

 *Sallie completed one- and two-digit subtraction examples.*

 *The 97-point difference between subtest scores limits the usefulness of the Composite.*

*Alann attempted most of the grade-appropriate items on the test. The items he ignored were not grade appropriate.* [No hyphen in predicate adjective.]

*No credit was given for the utterly ignored items on the third page.* [First word ends in *–ly*.]

 *The building-level team dropped the ball again, so we convened the problem-solving team.*

The hyphen shows the reader that you are using the two words as one, which spares the reader from re-reading the sentence until it eventually makes sense.

**When "however" is used to introduce a new independent clause, separate the clauses with a semicolon.**

Yes: *Ralph hates school; however, he achieves high grades.*

No: *Ralph hates school, however, he achieves high grades.*

Yes: *Ralph hates school, but he achieves high grades.*

**The first time we introduce a new statistic, we need to explain it briefly** (perhaps in a footnote) and refer the reader to our statistics explanation appended to the report. Often this need arises in the history section before we get around to our own results. We do not want to annoy and confuse the reader on the first page of the report. Normal human beings know nothing about standard scores and are confused about percentiles. Imagine reading a report on your child that told you in the third paragraph, "In previous testing, Sally achieved a statmetric score of 237 on the McPherson Scale and a pro-weighted score of 3 on the PDMQ. The significance of these scores for Sally's achievement and mental health is self-evident."

**Fail not to indicate whether scores are based on norms for the student's age, grade placement, or something else** (e.g., high school students intending to attend college). Remember that most readers do not know that the KABC-II has norms only for age. Go ahead and let them in on the secret. Mention the norms both in text and in table headings.

 *Alicejosephine attended a transition class between kindergarten and first grade and repeated second and third grades. She is now in fourth grade. Her KTEA-II Math Composite score was in the 48th percentile.*

**Always tell us when previous testing (and other noteworthy events) occurred and how old (or in what grade) the student was at the time.**

 *Rocky previously took the FUBAR test. His age-equivalent score was 6:2.[[4]](#footnote-4)*

**I wonder how many parents are familiar with the noun "affect."** *"Our principal has a flat affect." "Well, yeah, but it only shows in tight clothes."* Another word or phrase might communicate better.

**Try to avoid using the terms "basal" and "ceiling."** If we do, we will need to explain them without giving away the secret that failing a certain number of items is a good way for a kid to terminate a test.

**If we use a report shell or copy-and-paste to describe tests administered, we should usually delete tasks and subtests not actually administered.** There is not much point in describing the WISC-IV Cancellation subtest or the sound-matching and blending tasks within the KTEA-II Phonological Awareness subtest if the victim did not do that subtest or those tasks. An exception might occur if the subtest was omitted because of the nature of the task, e.g., "Because of Ecomodine's phobia of small, cute, furry animals, I did not administer the Cancellation subtest, which involves speed of marking pictures of animals scattered among other pictures."

**If we report raw scores** (e.g., "Ralph correctly answered 136 of the 287 questions"), **readers will try to interpret them.** So don't. That's why we have standard scores and percentile ranks.

I am a fan of the non-obligatory serial, **Oxford** (or Harvard) **comma** following the penultimate item in a series (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Serial_comma>) except on the rare occasion it would increase rather than diminish potential confusion. Sometimes the last two items might be mistaken for a single, compound item without a conjunction (*asyndeton* or omitting the conjunction in a series, e.g., "I came, I saw, I conquered."). For example, in the sentence, "Ralph failed reading, writing, math, science and social studies," we don't know for certain whether science and social studies were two separate courses or a single, primary-grade subject. A comma after "science" would remove all doubt. A newspaper article about a Merle Haggard retrospective, sent to me by Ron Dumont, said that "Among those interviewed were his two ex-wives, Kris Kristofferson and Robert Duval."

**Quotation marks.** In North America, we use double quotation marks to enclose direct quotations and single quotation marks only for quotations within quotations, e.g., Sophia said, "I am sick and tired of hearing Dr. Willis say, 'Correct punctuation creates clarity.'" We also use double quotation marks for other purposes (many of which are "unnecessary" or flat-out "wrong" like these two examples). See: http://www.writingcentre.uottawa.ca/hypergrammar/qmarks.html

The rule is the opposite in the U.K. Also, even when it makes no sense, commas and periods are placed inside the closing quotation marks.

**It is best to personalize our reports.**

Impersonal and aloof More personal and less annoying

the student Soozie

 Mom; the mom; Mother; the mother Soozie's mother; Ms. Swan; Mrs. Swan, Dr. Swan

 the paraprofessional Mr. Whipfeather

 this examiner I; me (on the rare occasions when we need to

refer to ourselves at all)

**Put "only" as close as possible in front of the word or phrase it modifies.**

*Maybeleene took the WISC and Rorschach, but I only scored the WISC* means that I scored the WISC, but did not administer or interpret it. It doesn't tell what I did with the Rorschach.

*Maybeleene took the WISC and Rorschach, but I scored only the WISC* says that I scored the WISC (and presumably administered and interpreted it), but did not score the Rorschach (which means I wasted a lot of time administering the thing).

**"It is important to note that"** suggests that all the other nonsense in my report can be ignored. Omit.

**"~~It was observed by the examiner that~~ Aliss chewed the erasers off 13 pencils during the 20-minute test session."** Who else would have observed the relentless gnawing? How would it be known unless it had been observed? Omit all those extra, additional, repetitive, pointless, unnecessary, superfluous, needless words that simply and utterly fail to add any new, unexpected, unique, and special information that was not already patently and apparently obvious. The gold medal goes to: "It is important to note that it was observed by the examiner that . . ."

**Word forms ending in *-ing*** are often ambiguous. For example, does "learning disabilities" refer to dyslexia, dysgraphia, dyscalculia, and related disorders or does it refer to what a Rivier student does during a course on exceptional children and disabilities ("I've been learning disabilities in ED560 this semester")? Similarly, does "processing strengths and weaknesses" refer to assets and deficits in the various "basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written" or does it refer to the activity of thinking about and trying to understand a child's stronger and weaker abilities ("I am trying to process Calpurnia's myriad strengths and weaknesses")?

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1. Neither ASAIF nor Rivier University 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. Sattler, J. M. (2008). *Assessment of children: Cognitive foundations* (5th ed.). San Diego, CA: Jerome M. Sattler, Publisher. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Backronym> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. The reader might want to know whether Rocky was 4 or 14 years old at the time. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)