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 3/4/15 # 253**

If you are reading a bootleg version of **this newsletter** and wish to receive your own free copies of this newsletter, email me at johnzerowillis@yahoo.com. Back issues of this newsletter are archived at <http://www.asaif.net> under "Reports." The ASAIF Website <http://www.asaif.net> also includes opinion columns, such as "Have a WRAT for Lunch."

**CONTENT**

**Learning Yet Another New Test (Novel Stunts for Antiquated Canines)**

There seem to be a lot of new tests coming out all at once. I remember waiting until 1974 for a revision of the 1949 WISC. It took from 1960 to 1972 to change one word (coal to charcoal) and one picture (androgynous Andy) on the Stanford-Binet L-M (and from 1937 to 1960 to meld Form L[ewis Terman] and M[aud Merrill] into the L-M) <http://www.apadivisions.org/division-35/about/heritage/maud-merrill-biography.aspx> Consequently, this might be a good time to discuss the process of learning a new test.

 *These suggestions assume that you are already an experienced evaluator* and that you have successfully completed at least one advanced assessment course and have administered, scored, interpreted, reported, and fully mastered at least one controlled test in the same domain (academic achievement or cognitive abilities) as the new one you are approaching. Otherwise, you need to take at least one full-semester course on the new test.

These suggestions also assume that you have knowledge and experience in the skills and abilities the new test is intended to assess (such as reading skills, math skills, general intellectual ability, or memory) and that you are familiar with persons similar to those you would be testing with the new instrument (such as persons with specific learning disabilities, preschool children, or adolescents who are blind). It is, of course, imprudent and unethical to assess reading if we don't know much about the development of reading skills and how they is taught. An examiner who has never hung out with persons who are blind or who have cerebral palsy, for example, might provide a limitedly useful assessment of a person with one or both of those challenges.

 Recruit a qualified examiner who is skilled and experienced with the test and who is willing to help you learn the test. Arrange to reward your mentor handsomely. Share this article with your mentor, who can tell you what is wrong with it (in addition to your own criticisms and rebuttals).

**Take the Test Yourself**

 Before you become any more familiar with the test than you already are, persuade your mentor to administer the test to you. The process of taking the test is the best way to become intimately familiar with it. You will also gain some insight into the thought processes involved in responding to the test items and the experience of the examinee. If the test is not appropriate for you (such as a preschool test), you will still become familiar with the items and instructions, but you may not gain much understanding of the typical examinee's experience. To the extent that your background knowledge and skills and your style of thinking differ from an examinee's, your insights may be of limited value, but they can still be helpful. Make notes on any insights, revelations, and useful thoughts that came to mind while you were being tested.

 If necessary, many subtests can be self-administered in the privacy of your own home. You can dictate your responses to yourself and write them on the record form. You can block the answers in the manual with a card while you read the questions to yourself. Tests with recordings of test items are easy to self-administer. (In contrast, the Wechsler Digit Span is difficult to self-administer.) It is best to take all the items so you learn the whole tests.

**Read the Manual**

 "RTFM" stands for "Read the Fact-filled Manual." Read it! Reread it. Annotate it (or make pages of useful information in your companion notebook for the test manual).

If you will be using the new test frequently and do not yourself own the test, strongly consider purchasing a copy of the test manual. Having your own copy allows you to highlight, make marginal notations, insert index tabs, and tape in photocopies of additional information essential for administration, scoring, or interpretation. Possession of your own copy of the manual also allows you to score, recheck scoring, recheck scoring again, and interpret the test at home. If you cannot purchase a manual (they do make great holiday and birthday gifts), make a notebook for the test in which you can keep copies of useful information.

Shared tests can be interesting. On the WJ-R, on tests with illustrations, any item lacking an illustration was introduced by the examiner saying, "Listen!" before reading the item. One day, I turned a page to present the next item to a child and found that Frank Dialessi had crossed out "Listen!" and inserted "Yo!" The poor child wondered why I was choking back laughter.

For the first few administrations, you may also want to mark up each record form, for example highlighting start and stop rules and other essential information and writing in helpful notes until the information becomes easy to find.

**Administration**

 Study the general administration rules and the specific administration rules for each subtest. Compare what you read to your experience taking the test yourself. Annotate the manual or your notebook. Ask your mentor or email the publisher for clarification of anything that is unclear. Be sure you can administer the test precisely the way it is supposed to be administered and the way it was administered when it was normed. Otherwise, your scores will, of course, be meaningless.

 Pay particular attention to starting points and stopping rules for the different subtests. Whenever there is any doubt, administer extra items. It is better to have extra items and not need them than to need additional items and not have them. You don't want to be telephoning examinees at night and asking, "Do you remember when I was asking you the meanings of a lot of words? I have a few more I want to ask you." Items with pictures or paper-and-pencil work are difficult even with Skype. It's better to be cautious while administering the test. [Don't make this a permanent habit. As you become skilled with the test, you will be able to administer the necessary items and only the necessary items on the first try.] The goal is to be able to administer the test flawlessly without looking at the information in the manual or on the record form, although we would never, ever actually do that.

**Scoring**

After you have taken the test, grab the manual and score the test. Have your mentor check your scoring. You don't want to misdiagnose yourself. You might as well keep a file of the tests you take over the years.

When using score tables in the manual, be sure to use straightedges to keep columns and rows straight. If you have any difficulty, photocopy the relevant pages and draw circles and lines as needed. Some examiners need to use this accommodation every time, which is a lot better than making an error.

Fredye J. Sherr taught me to read aloud the page, column, and row headings every time I look up a score. Sometimes your ear will catch an error that your eye missed. I always gratefully follow Fredye's Rule.

Study the items that were not administered to you. Make sure you understand the scoring. Sometimes a thoughtful comparison of examples given for passing and failing (or for full, partial, or no credit) items will help you understand the authors' rationale for scoring the items.

**Practice Administration**

**First Practice Administration.** Find a Teddy bear, Barbie doll, action figure, or very lethargic pet. Assign this victim an age within the age range of the test, and administer the test. You will have to play both parts. [If not, you may have more important issues to deal with than learning a new test.] Learn to write the start time for each subtest next to the subtest title or number on the record form. Sometimes that information turns out to be important. Record the start and end times for any breaks. Occasionally, the precise time of day each subtest was administered becomes important. Write down responses for the "examinee" and again practice scoring.

Practice reading the wording of instructions and items on the easel or in the manual verbatim (also word-for-word).  Do not try to memorize these sentences.  Even experienced evaluators should use the provided words precisely, although in a relaxed, natural, friendly tone.  You are an actor trying to read a slightly awkward script as if you were speaking spontaneously. In some cases, it may help to tell the examinee that you are obliged to read the text rather than re-word it in order to ensure that all examinees have the same experience (standardization).  Examiners who rely on memory introduce and perpetuate errors over time ("examiner drift"). Many experienced evaluators mis-administer tests that have been revised, because they use the wording that they recall from an older version of the test that now has slight but meaningful changes to instructions. [Pity those of us who are learning the WISC-V after using the WISC, WISC-R, WISC-III, and WISC-IV!]

Practice following the instructions for the test seating and environment.  Use a quiet room with comfortable furniture for your Teddy bear or Barbie doll.  The examinee gets the best seat even if it means that you have to scrunch into the side of a large desk in order that the examinee may have the main seat. Note that some test manuals have required seating arrangements (e.g., face-to-face, cater-corner, or even examiner behind the examinee), but others merely recommend certain configurations.

**Second Practice Administration.** Now try out the test with a patient and cooperative human being, even an adult willing to pretend to be a child within the test's age range. Refine your administration and scoring. Learn to write down verbatim every response and as much as possible of anything else the examinee says. Writing (or abbreviating) every word in every response is essential. It might later turn out to be important to know whether the student said, "Um, er . . . . . . . I dunno . . . . maybe, um, something like lizards, I guess. Whatever." or said, "A gila monster and a horny toad are both desert-dwelling lizards." Simply writing "lizards" won't be much help in later analysis. Abbreviations are very helpful. I usually omit vowels and silent consonants, write digits that sound like words, and use any medical, literary, and scientific abbreviations with which I am familiar, such as Σ for "all" or "total" or a q with a line over it for "every." If the child mispronounces a word, I spell the pronunciation phonetically. However, be careful. If, for example, I write "H2O," I may later forget whether the child actually said "H2O" or simply "water" or even "wa-wa." I develop standard abbreviations for common phrases, such as "tbr" for "they both are" and "trb" for "they are both." If asked very nicely, I will share my abbreviations with the opposing attorney's expert witness who is reviewing my test record form.

Record times for all timed test items. Use a stopwatch, not a sweep second hand or counting of chimpanzees or polysyllabic state names. Sketch or describe puzzle assemblies and other nonverbal test responses. Connie Faro and Ron Dumont taught me to make a pencil dot each second while I waited around for a response to begin or resume (please see example above). That method leaves a useful record of approximate response latencies.

Record additional observations if you can, such as level of anxiety, maturity, conversational skills, and behavior (such as hyperactivity or eye contact). One goal is to create a script that would allow you to recreate years later the test session precisely as it took place. Another goal is to become so proficient at correctly administering the test and precisely recording responses that you can also record observations and make necessary decisions while you are working.

 Practice scoring again.

**Third Practice Administration.** OK, now we are ready to try out your new skills on a victim for whom the test would be appropriate (except, of course, for choosing an examinee who has not been and presumably never would be referred for evaluation; I once got all the way to the WISC-R Object Assembly in an assessment before the examinee commented, "These are the same puzzles Mommy's friend did with me last week. She said she was doing it for her college work."). You'll need to explain to the examinee and parents that you will not be able to report any scores for the test because you are still learning it. Try to do everything as realistically as possible.

 Afterwards, review your administration to correct any errors or uncertainties you may have discovered. Score the test. Have your mentor check your scoring.

**Fourth Practice Administration. T**his should be the same as the third, only better. Get permission to video-record the session so you and your mentor can review it and correct any errors.

**Subsequent Practice Administrations.** Repeat until you and your mentor agree you can fly solo. If the child has not recently taken a test of the same cognitive or academic abilities, I like to include a familiar test of those abilities along with my new assessment until my faith in myself and the test are established.

**Interpretation**

 Read the manual for information on interpretation. Go to the publisher's Web site (frequently – they do add and correct materials) and download all the information you can find on the test. Use Google Scholar. Check Joel Schneider's wonderful <http://my.ilstu.edu/~wjschne/>, [www.crossbattery.com](http://www.crossbattery.com), and [www.myschoolpsychology.com](http://www.myschoolpsychology.com). Seek out books on interpretation of the test, such as Sattler (2008), Sattler (2014), Wiley's *Essentials* series, edited by Alan and Nadeen Kaufman, and Academic Press's books on clinical interpretation of various tests. Discuss interpretation with your mentor, with other experts, and – for each examinee – with people who know the examinee well.

 Keep rechecking yourself (and soliciting peer supervision) on the test until you switch to the next edition. Help stamp out examiner drift! Errors do creep in.

**Dyslexia Awareness**

The Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) Smart Brief 11/1/14 (you can subscribe for free at <https://www2.smartbrief.com/signupSystem/subscribe.action?pageSequence=1&briefName=cec&utm_source=brief>) carried an optimistic *USA Today* story about growing awareness of dyslexia citing a congressional resolution (reprinted below) that has been introduced and referred to committee. <https://www.congress.gov/bill/113th-congress/house-resolution/456>

[**Dyslexia awareness grows among state, federal lawmakers**](http://r.smartbrief.com/resp/gilTCmhqmfCKuhnmCidycQCicNmDWm?format=standard). More states are taking steps to meet the needs of students with dyslexia during the school day. Eighteen states have passed laws regarding dyslexia, according to Bright Solutions for Dyslexia. Federal lawmakers also are taking steps to raise awareness with House Resolution 456, which calls on schools to recognize the educational effects of the condition. [USA Today](http://r.smartbrief.com/resp/gilTCmhqmfCKuhnmCidycQCicNmDWm?format=standard) (10/30). I am, of course, delighted that Congress wants us to do better (or will want us to if the bill makes it out of committee and is passed). I appreciate the encouragement, but wonder if a little money might also help.

113th CONGRESS 2d Session **H. RES. 456**

Calling on schools and State and local educational agencies to recognize that dyslexia has significant educational implications that must be addressed.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES January 10, 2014

Mr. Cassidy (for himself and Ms. Brownley of California) submitted the following resolution; which was referred to the Committee on Education and the Workforce

**RESOLUTION**

Calling on schools and State and local educational agencies to recognize that dyslexia has significant educational implications that must be addressed.

Whereas, defined as an unexpected difficulty in reading in an individual who has the intelligence to be a much better reader, dyslexia reflects a difficulty in getting to the individual sounds of spoken language which typically impacts speaking, reading, spelling, and often, learning a second language;

Whereas dyslexia is highly prevalent, affecting one out of five individuals in some form, and is persistent;

Whereas dyslexia is a paradox, so that often the same individual who has a weakness in decoding or reading fluency also has strengths in higher level cognitive functions such as reasoning, critical thinking, concept formation, and problem solving;

Whereas great progress has been made in understanding dyslexia at a scientific level, including its epidemiology, and cognitive and neurobiological bases; and

Whereas diagnosis of dyslexia is critical, and must lead to focused, evidence-based interventions, necessary accommodations, self-awareness, self-empowerment, and school and life success: Now, therefore, be it

*Resolved,*That the House of Representatives calls on schools and State and local educational agencies to recognize that dyslexia has significant educational implications that must be addressed.

**STYLE**

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

 – Robert Louis Stevenson

There arises from a bad and unapt formation of words a wonderful obstruction to the mind.

 – Francis Bacon

**%ile.** A couple of decades ago, I did a cognitive assessment and a skilled, experienced special education teacher did an academic achievement assessment with a child. We met to share our findings with each other minutes before the evaluation meeting. (Sometimes our "teams" seem less like the Red Sox or Bruins and more like a track team with some people running in circles around the football field, others jumping up and down or heaving heavy objects in some other place, and yet others a safe distance away flinging spears.) I saw that the teacher had reported percentile ranks with the common abbreviation "%ile." I groaned that the parents would mistake the percentile ranks for "percent correct." The teacher laughed derisively at my foolishness. As soon as the parents saw the report, the father roared in a rage that the "63 percent correct" for reading comprehension, obviously an F grade, was proof that the child needed to be tuitioned to a special school. It did not help his mood when the teacher tried to explain her burst of laughter by saying, "Dr. Willis told me this would happen. It's my fault for using a stupid abbreviation."

**Between.** I have never heard anyone say, for example, "I live between East Overshoe **to** Bog Bottom" or "I hope to get between two **to** three hours' sleep when this report is done." So why do people write, "Sardonica's standard scores were all between 90 **to** 110?" Why not "between 90 **and** 110"?

 Similarly, why do we write "standard scores from 90–110"? Why not "standard scores from 90 **to** 110"? The *Publication Manual* of the American Psychological Association (6th ed.) (Washington, DC: author, 2010 <http://www.apastyle.org/>) (of burning interest only to authors of journal articles and current doctoral candidates) agrees (p. 85). (If you enjoy irony, please see <http://supp.apa.org/style/PM6E-1st-Printing-Reprint-Corrections.pdf>.)