

WRITING DISABILITIES EVALUATION GUIDE

This quick reference guide summarizes the nuts and bolts of what school psychologists need to know about writing disabilities (dysgraphia) when planning their assessments. This guide delineates writing disorder subtypes, includes correlated cognitive processes, and provides a menu of test batteries that fall under each construct.

WRITING DISABILITIES EVALUATION GUIDE

When should I consider a learning disability in written expression?

Concerns for writing include (Cherame, 2019; Feifer, 2015; TEA, 2018):

- work avoidance for written expression tasks
- illegible handwriting
- taking a long time to complete tasks of writing
- a disconnect between oral expression and written expression
- difficulty organizing and expanding on thoughts
- poor use of spelling, grammar, and punctuation
- letter reversals (past the age when they are expected)

How should I assess for a learning disability in written expression?

Consider referral concerns and clinical observations to determine which areas merit further exploration. In addition to your typical LD battery, you may consider:

SENSORIMOTOR AND VISUAL- MOTOR INTEGRATION

Deficits here are associated with poor handwriting; poor motor control; poor motor planning, spacing, and writing fluency

- Beery VMI-6: Visual-Motor Integration, Motor Coordination, Visual Perception
- DTVP-3: Eye-Hand Coordination, Form Constancy
- FAW: Graphomotor Index (Alphabet Tracing Fluency; Motor Sequencing; Copying Speed; Motor Planning)
- KABC-II NU: Hand Movements
- NEPSY-II: Fingertip Tapping (including error score analysis); Design Copying; Imitating Hand Positions; Visuomotor Precision; Manual Motor Sequences
- WISC-V: Coding (pencil/paper version)

LONG-TERM RETRIEVAL: IDEATIONAL FLUENCY

Deficits here are associated with orthographic processing

- FAR: Verbal Fluency
- FAW: Retrieval Fluency
- KTEA-3: Associational Fluency
- NEPSY-II: Word Generation
- WIAT-4: Oral Word Fluency
- WJ-IV OL: Retrieval Fluency



PROCESSING SPEED: PERCEPTUAL SPEED

Deficits here affect writing fluency

- Bateria-IV: Cancelación de Pares; Pareo de Letras Idénticas; Pareo de Numeros Idénticos
- WAIS-IV: Cancellation; Coding
- WISC-V: Cancellation; Coding; Symbol Search
- WJ-IV Cog: Letter-Pattern Matching; Number-Pattern Matching; Pair Cancellation
- WNV: Coding

ORTHOGRAPHIC SKILLS

- FAR: Orthographic Processing
- FAR: Visual Perception
- FAW: Dyslexia Index (Homophone Spelling, Isolated Spelling)
- KTEA-3: Orthographic Processing composite (Word Recognition Fluency, Spelling, Letter Naming Facility)
- TOC: Orthographic Ability Index; Spelling Accuracy Index; Spelling Speed Index
- TOSCRF-2: Index
- TOSWRF-2: Index
- TOWRE-2: Sight Word Efficiency Index
- WIAT-4: Orthographic Processing (Orthographic Fluency, Spelling); Orthographic Processing Extended (Orthographic Fluency, Spelling, Orthographic Choice)
- WJ-IV Ach: Spelling; Spelling of Sounds
- WJ-IV Cog: Letter-Pattern Matching
- WRMT-III

PHONEMIC/PHONOLOGICAL AWARENESS

- aimswebPlus: Initial Sounds (K-1st only)
- aimswebPlus: Phoneme Segmentation (K-1st only)
- Bateria IV Cog: Procesamiento Fonético
- CTOPP-2: Phonological Awareness Composite; Alternate Phonological Awareness Composite
- DIBELS 8: Phonemic Segmentation Fluency (CBM)
- FAR: Phonemic Awareness; Positioning Sounds
- IDEL: Fluidez en la Segmentación de Fonemas
- KTEA-3: Phonological Processing
- TAPS-3:SBE: Basic Phonological Skills (Word Discrimination, Phonological Segmentation, Phonological Blending)
- TAPS-4: Phonological Processing Composite
- WIAT-4: Phonemic Proficiency
- WJ-IV Cog: Phonological Processing
- WJ-IV WJ-IV OL: Phonetic Coding Composite

EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONS

- BASC-3: Executive Functioning Index
- BRIEF-2
- Brown EF/A
- CAS2: Planned Connections
- D-KEFS: Trail Making tests; Verbal Fluency Tests; Design Fluency tests; Color-Word Interference tests
- FAW: Executive index (Executive Working Memory, Sentence Scaffolding, Retrieval Fluency, Expository Writing)
- NEPSY-II: Animal Sortin; Design Copying; Inhibition subtests



ORAL LANGUAGE

- FAR: Semantic Concepts
- KTEA-3: Oral Expression; Association Fluency
- NEPSY-II: Word Generation
- Ortiz PVAT: Picture Vocabulary
- TAPS-4: Processing Oral Directions
- WIAT-4: Oral Expression (Oral Word Fluency, Expressive Vocabulary, Sentence Repetition)
- WJ-IV Cog: Oral Vocabulary
- WJ-IV OL: Oral Language (Picture Vocabulary, Oral Comprehension); Broad Oral Language (Picture Vocabulary, Oral Comprehension, Understanding Directions); Oral Expression (Picture Vocabulary, Sentence Repetition); Listening Comprehension (Oral Comprehension, Understanding Directions); Lenguaje oral (Vocabulario sobre dibujos, Comprensión oral; Amplio lenguaje oral (Vocabulario sobre dibujos, Comprensión oral, Comprensión de indicaciones); Comprensión auditiva (Comprensión oral, Comprensión de indicaciones)
- WMLS III: Listening (Analogies, Oral Comprehension); Speaking (Picture Vocabulary, Oral Language Expression); Broad English Oral Language (Analogies, Oral Comprehension, Picture Vocabulary, Oral Language Expression); Basic English Oral Language (Analogies, Picture Vocabulary); Escuchar (Analogías, Comprensión oral); Hablar (Vocabulario sobre dibujos, Expresión de lenguaje oral); lenguaje oral amplio en español (Analogías, Comprensión oral, vocabulario sobre dibujos, expresión de lenguaje oral); lenguaje oral básico en español (Analogías, vocabulario sobre dibujos)

GRAMMAR/MECHANICS

Skills here are associated with orthographic processing

- FAW: Copy Editing
- KTEA-3: Written Expression
- TOC: Punctuation
- WIAT-4: Oral Expression Sentence Composition; Essay Composition
- WJ-IV Ach: Editing
- WMLS III: Dictation; Dictado

ORGANIZATION/THOUGHT DEVELOPMENT

- FAW: Compositional Writing Index (Expository Writing, Copy Editing, Story Mapping)
- KTEA-3: Written Expression
- WIAT-4: Essay Composition
- WJ-IV Ach: Writing Samples
- WMLS III: Written Language Expression; Expresión de lenguaje escrito

FLUENCY

- FAW: Copying Speed; Alphabet Tracing Fluency
- KTEA-3: Writing Fluency
- WIAT-4: Alphabet Writing Fluency; Sentence Writing Fluency
- WJ-IV Ach: Sentence Writing Fluency

How should I interpret results?

A child does not have to obtain a below-average composite score to justify a significant challenge in written expression, especially since many tests do a poor job of capturing deficits. Analyze subtest scores to find patterns and gather numerous work samples. If a child has a cognitive deficit that impacts writing, they may have a learning disability in written expression.

“Dysgraphia” subtypes:

1. Graphomotor Dysgraphia (Cherame, 2019; Feifer, 2015; TEA, 2018)

- Problems with sensorimotor integration and writing speed. Fine motor skills are not developed within normal limits, and handwriting may be unintelligible. The child may be able to spell a word orally but not when required to write it out. Drawing and writing are both difficult. A child with this subtype will show difficulty copying information; will show difficulties in fine motor planning, control, and dexterity; will write laboriously; will produce less volume than expected given their expressive language skills; and will fatigue after writing assignments. Spelling and knowledge of grammatical rules may be well developed, and the child may be able to apply spelling and grammar when writing. A child with this subtype may have a hard time copying and transferring written information, will show difficulty anchoring print to lines and may write with “floating letters”, may not adhere to columns or margins on ruled paper, and will not show consistent or adequate spacing when writing words.
- Observations: Atypical pencil grip, tendency to apply too much or too little pressure, sloppy handwriting, inconsistent letter formation, losing stamina or running out of time, poor spacing (placing letters and words too close together or too far apart, difficulty writing on a line, running out of space at the end of a line, etc.), difficulty holding the paper in place, and misperceiving items when copying.

2. Dyslexia Dysgraphia (Feifer, 2015)

- Problems with spelling and phonological processing. Fine motor skills may be intact, and the child may be able to copy information and draw just as well as their peers. A child with this subtype shows deficits in spelling, grammar, and punctuation; will write slowly or quickly and will produce less volume than expected given their expressive language skills; will fatigue after writing assignments and may still show signs of letter reversals.
- Observations: Non phonetic spelling of regular words (for example, “joib” instead of “job” or “chan” instead of “train”) or failure to learn and apply spelling patterns in irregular words (for example, “bild” instead of “build” or “sed” instead of “said”). Errors in grammar and word order.

3. Executive Dysgraphia (Feifer, 2015)

- Problems with executive functions, including organization and initiation, expressive language, working memory, retrieval fluency of words, and attention.
- Observations: Careless mistakes, errors in grammar and word order, inconsistent application of rules (spelling, capitalization, and punctuation), errors in word endings, difficulty staying on topic or transitioning to a new topic, difficulty coming up with or expanding on ideas, tendency to leave out words or write the wrong word (despite saying the right word), incorrect use of words (such as pronouns or homonyms), tendency to “write how you talk.”



REFERENCES

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