

Woodcock-Johnson IV: Tests of Oral Language®

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The field of educational diagnostic assessment is in the midst of an explosion of “new and improved” versions of several popular cognitive and academic achievement batteries. The Woodcock-Johnson IV (WJ-IV)® Cognitive and Achievement batteries have been revised during this “explosion” and have added a “new” battery to the WJ-IV assessment system, the Woodcock-Johnson® Test of Oral Language (WJOL). The WJOL contains tests found in the previous WJ-III cognitive and achievement batteries, as well as new tests that specifically measure narrow aspects of language. The WJOL can be used as an independent battery or as a diagnostic supplement to the other Woodcock batteries. This review will briefly describe the WJOL and discuss the possible uses for this assessment.

According to the authors (Shrank, Mather, & McGrew 2014), the WJOL provides users with the tools to gain critical insights into the influence of language on a student’s academic and cognitive performance. Educational diagnosticians can selectively use these tests and improve diagnostic precision by further exploring narrow cognitive abilities underlying language. Included in the WJOL are measures of oral expression and listening comprehension that were previously in the WJ-III. The tests that comprise these composites have remained unchanged with the exception of their being re-normed. One of the more notable features is the capability to compare oral language comprehension in English or Spanish by using parallel (English and Spanish) versions of three tests (Picture Vocabulary, Oral Comprehension, and Understanding Directions). A new test of phonetic coding is included (Segmentation) as well as a test used as a screener (Sound Awareness). The new features of this battery increase diagnostic capability and can potentially be used by a variety of professionals.

The response and use of the WJOL will ultimately be determined over time as the field becomes more familiar with the instrument and its features. In Texas, this assessment tool may have multiple applications for a variety of reasons including: current education policy con-



cerning dyslexia and specific learning disability (SLD) identification; the increase in English Language Learners (ELLs) and the shortage of qualified bilingual examiners; and the collective knowledge of using cognitive processing models of identification. The following list contains the potential uses of the WJOL.

1. Several features of the WJOL make it an ideal “entry” test for students whose referral question includes a need to discriminate between a language difference and language-based disorder (i.e., speech impaired, SLD). A comparative language index (CLI) score can be obtained by administration of three tests in English and the three parallel versions in Spanish. This score can help inform which language to administer further assessments in and provide important diagnostic information regarding the influence of language on a student’s academic deficit. In addition, a Cognitive-Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) level can be obtained. There is a chapter in the examiner’s manual dedicated to assisting a monolingual diagnostician form a primary or ancillary examiner team.

2. Another potential use of the WJOL is for educational diagnosticians and reading specialists to explore the underlying cognitive correlates of students who exhibit characteristics of dyslexia. Similar to the “entry test” concept described above, this instrument can help discriminate dyslexia from general reading disabilities. Establishing a common assessment among professionals can support collaboration.

3. Listening comprehension and oral expression are now contained in these batteries, which are critical to understanding learning disabilities. The WJOL is co-normed with the WJ-IV Cognitive and Achievement batteries, which allows for interpretative options such as predicting academic achievement based on the scores obtained from the WJOL. Educational diagnosticians can be more selective in

their test selection and ultimately increase the confidence they place in their findings.

4. School psychologists who are responsible for evaluating students with emotional disturbance may find this instrument diagnostically important as underlying language problems have been associated with poor self-regulation skills and deficits in executive function (Benner, Martison, Nelson, & Ralston, 2009; Benner, Nelson, & Epstein, 2002). The correlation between the WJOL and the WJ-IV Cognitive and Achievement batteries allow for decisions to be made more precisely and with greater confidence.

5. Finally, categorical placement of students with disabilities is necessary to access special education services. The majority of professionals agree that a full evaluation should lead to a greater understanding of the students capabilities and inform intervention recommendations. For students who are suspected of having co-occurring disabilities (i.e., ED and Dyslexia), or have language difficulties, the WJOL battery provides a deeper understanding of the role of language in the academic behavior of these students.

The test publishers have been generous with the amount of information that can be found on the world wide web (<http://www.riversidepublishing.com/products/wj-iv/pdf/Test-of-Oral-Language.pdf>). These materials will support the educational diagnostician in utilizing the WJOL in its use as an independent or supplemental battery when assessing the needs of students.

References

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