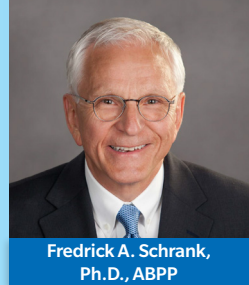




WJ Perspectives



The WJ IV COG Core Tests and the C-SEP Model

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The **WJ IV™ Tests of Cognitive Abilities’ (WJ IV COG;** Schrank, McGrew, & Mather, 2014) core test design inspired a common-sense model for specific learning disability evaluation that capitalizes on a school psychologist’s clinical judgment to determine if additional, selective testing is needed.

The **WJ IV COG** measures seven broad abilities and several narrow abilities derived from and validated by the most contemporary version of CHC theory (McGrew & Schneider, 2012; McGrew, LaForte, & Schrank, 2014). One of the design principles of the **WJ IV COG** was to place the seven most academically predictive, CHC factor-representative, and diagnostically important tests in a head-initial placement. Placing the core tests up front helps increase testing efficiency. By administering the core tests, school psychologists can obtain a representative sampling of seven broad CHC cognitive abilities and, based on clinical judgment, determine if any additional tests need to be administered. For many evaluation purposes, it may not be necessary to obtain two-test cluster scores for each broad ability.

The **WJ IV COG** includes a small set of core tests that serve as the foundation for the evaluation of relative strengths and weaknesses.

The **WJ IV COG** core test design principle was envisioned as a way for school psychologists to be efficient with testing time and use their clinical judgment to determine which additional tests, if any, beyond the core tests, should be administered to a particular student. During a testing session, school psychologists often refer to the scoring tables provided in the Test Record to help gauge whether the student’s performance on one test appears noticeably higher or lower than other tests administered, or noticeably higher or lower than the student’s age or grade placement. These and other clues obtained during the assessment process often provide insights for further exploration in an area of cognition. Also, the **WJ IV** online scoring and reporting program can be used to evaluate relative strengths and weaknesses among the core tests and help determine if any additional tests should be administered in a subsequent testing session. Examiners can administer additional tests and re-run a **WJ IV** score report within 90 days without additional charge.

WJ IV COG Core Tests, What Each Test Measures, and Representative Broad CHC Ability		
Core Test	Measures	Broad CHC Ability
Test 1: Oral Vocabulary	Knowledge of words and word meanings	Gc
Test 2: Number Series	Quantitative reasoning	Gf
Test 3: Verbal Attention	Temporary storage of verbal information and the cue-dependent search function in primary memory	Gwm
Test 4: Letter-Pattern Matching	Orthographic visual perceptual discrimination ability under timed conditions	Gs
Test 5: Phonological Processing	Word activation, fluency of word access, and word restructuring via phonological cues	Ga
Test 6: Story Recall	Listening ability with attention to orally imparted details; formation of mental representations in the stimulus phase; story reconstruction in the response phase	Glr
Test 7: Visualization	Size and shape perception, part-to-whole analysis, and mentally transforming two- and three-dimensional images	Gv

The C-SEP model uses the core tests of the **WJ IV COG** for a survey of basic cognitive processes and competencies

Any additional tests administered, beyond the core tests, are also included in the analyses of relative strengths and weaknesses and any clusters that are created are also included in the student's profile analysis. CHC cluster-level information is usually needed to document a relative strength or a disorder in cognitive processing. However, in many cases, no additional tests—beyond the core tests—may need to be administered because the core tests frequently provide the most important information for many assessment purposes. This is because each of the core tests often provides a representative snapshot of a student's abilities in a broad CHC domain.

The C-SEP Model for PSW-SLD Identification

The core test design principle of the **WJ IV COG** inspired Schultz and Stephens (2015) to operationalize and refine a method of determining the existence of an SLD using a pattern of strengths and weaknesses approach (PSW) in a way that reduces testing time and allows examiners the flexibility to home in and focus the direction of assessment toward cognitive factors of greatest concern. Schultz and Stephens suggest using the core tests of the **WJ IV COG** as a foundational survey of basic cognitive processes and competencies, which they call the Core-Selective Evaluation Process, or C-SEP. In their model, application of clinical judgment determines if additional selective testing is necessary. Their model gives credence to clinical skills by suggesting that additional tests beyond the core tests need not be administered unless the school psychologist believes the additional tests may provide information that will contribute to understanding the nature of the learning problem.

Over the past decade, both Stephens and Schultz noticed that some SLD identification practices had become mired in a lock-step model that required administering 14 or more cognitive tests for every evaluation. Administering that many tests increases the time required per evaluation, so they wondered whether so much cognitive testing was always necessary. For example, when there is no evidence that a student's cognitive processing speed (Gs) abilities are limited, why is it necessary to administer two tests of that cognitive factor to yield a cluster score? Stephens stated, "Whenever processes are intact within the core, it's not necessary to complete additional testing. However, if a process is weak, additional investigation through the administration of another test is warranted" (personal communication, January 9, 2016).

"The C-SEP is an efficient and accurate method of SLD identification. The **WJ IV COG core tests guide the examiner to make data-driven decisions about which, if any, additional tests will provide valuable information for diagnostic purposes." — A university professor and clinician**

A Refinement for Contemporary Practice

What Schultz and Stephens propose is a refinement of some current practices for determining the presence of processing strengths and weaknesses, part of the PSW model. Using the **WJ IV**'s core test design in the C-SEP model draws on a school psychologist's professional knowledge and clinical skills. Any additional test administered, beyond the core tests, is based on a thoughtful and knowledgeable clinical reason. This is a move away from the practice of administering a lot of tests and then attempting to interpret a morass of information, some of which may be irrelevant to the referral question. Dr. Schultz explained that if a school psychologist can save 25% of the time spent in administering tests, and invest that time into consultation, better interpretation, and using the test results to help plan an educational program, then the school psychologist becomes a more valuable resource to the student, the teachers, the school, and to parents (personal communication, January 5, 2016).

Discussion

The C-SEP model was developed in response to some lock-step PSW/SLD identification practices that required administration of 14 or more cognitive tests to determine areas of strength and weakness among broad CHC abilities. Administering so many cognitive tests simply to determine if a cognitive strength or weakness existed can result in increased testing often at the expense of reducing the time spent on other important professional roles including consultation, interpretation, and educational programming. The basic premise of the C-SEP is that test selection and data analysis should be proportional to problem complexity and is based on the presenting problem or referral question. The **WJ IV COG** core test design and intra-cognitive variations procedure aligns very well with the C-SEP model proposed by Schultz and Stephens.

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