

SCORING PROCEDURES: HOLISTIC, ANALYTIC, AND PRIMARY TRAIT

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One of the missions of the 17-year-old Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory is to gather and disseminate news on performance assessment. Its Center the Performance Assessment, headed by Dr. Rick Stiggins, has for the past four years, been engaged in collecting information and data. Stiggins shared the Center's findings and concerns with us in this session.

Scoring writing samples, he said, is based on the assumption that one either is or is not a writer. This is absurd because writing is a multi-dimensional skill of such complexity that no one-number evaluation can describe it accurately. But the assessment of writing is increasing around the country, and so we need to know as much as possible about the various methods of writing assessment.

The first thing we need to understand is that there are, according to Stiggins' Center, eight uses for writing tests. One method of writing assessment, of course, cannot serve to evaluate writing samples for all eight purposes. Currently, the holistic, primary trait, and analytic methods of assessing writing are most often used. All of us involved in assessing writing must understand these and other alternative methods.

The Center has developed the following table of uses of writing tests and the assessment method(s) that seem consistent with those uses.

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SCORING PROCEDURES..., (continued)

| TEST CONTEXT | TYPE OF SCORING | | |
|--|-----------------|----------|---------------|
| | Holistic | Analytic | Primary trait |
| 1. Instruction management | | | |
| A. Diagnosis | | X | X |
| B. Placement | X | X | X |
| C. Guidance | X | ? | ? |
| 2. Student screening | | | |
| A. Selection | X | ? | ? |
| B. Certification (of minimal competencies) | | X | X |
| 3. Program evaluation | | | |
| A. Survey evaluation | X | | |
| B. Formative evaluation | X | X | X |
| C. Summative evaluation | X | X | X |

The Center also collects and studies commercially available writing tests. Counting new tests in increments of three years, it found that the number of new tests is steadily proliferating. Moreover, 58% of the new tests in 1979-81 included an optional writing sample test—up from 0% in 1973-75. There are also interesting trends in specific skills tested. From the advent of modern writing assessment to 1981, those tests that claim to evaluate spelling and mechanics are fewer, those that claim to evaluate usage and writing (indirect testing) skills have remained about constant in number, and those purporting to measure sentence structure and organizational skills have increased in number. Stiggins stated that there are quality writing tests "out there," for *what they are designed for*.

During the question and answer period, thoughts surfaced that served to summarize and conclude this session. Everyone seemed to agree that state assessment tests should be the result of input "trickled up" from teachers in the field rather than from the state down. Stiggins concluded by voicing hope that, in the future, measurement of writing skills will better reflect the complexity of writing.