

# WJ

# PERSPECTIVES



## How to Use The Woodcock-Johnson IV Tests of Achievement and Oral Language: Best Practices for Special Education Teachers



Beth Varner,  
M.Ed., NCSP,  
National Clinical  
Account Executive

For many special education teachers, the primary use of *The Woodcock-Johnson® IV (WJ IV™)* is as part of a psychoeducational evaluation conducted to determine eligibility for special education and related services. Both the **WJ IV ACH** and **OL** fill an important role in these evaluations. Due to their comprehensive nature, the **WJ IV ACH** and **WJ IV OL** provide an extensive data set to examiners.

In addition to driving decision-making about a student's initial or continuing eligibility for special education, the **WJ IV ACH** and **WJ IV OL** are important sources of data for creating a student's educational plan. This may include determining areas of individualized education program (IEP) goals and services, identifying appropriate placements, and planning interventions.

Individually administered standardized assessments (such as *The Woodcock-Johnson IV*) are an essential component in special education evaluations. The **WJ IV** is used to provide insight into a student's ability and skills under optimal conditions: one-on-one with an adult who is providing encouragement, breaks, and rewards as needed. It allows the student to demonstrate his or her ability in academics and language-related areas that are not tied to any particular curriculum or learning sequence. When **WJ IV ACH** and **WJ IV OL** scores are used in conjunction with other student data (e.g., parent and teacher reports, classroom observations, curriculum-based measurement, educational history), assessment teams have a robust data set to draw upon when making eligibility determinations.

### Selecting Tests

The organization of the **WJ IV ACH** and **WJ IV OL** places a core set of tests together at the start of each battery. These core tests are the starting point for any administration because they measure a



broad set of abilities using an efficient set of tests. When the core tests are administered, a strengths and weaknesses analysis is provided on the score report. The **WJ IV ACH** core tests (Tests 1–6) provide a measure of the examinee's basic skills and skill application in reading, writing, and math. The **WJ IV OL** core tests (Tests 1–4) measure a broad set of language skills, including expressive and receptive language, phonetic segmentation, and processing and word retrieval speed.

The **WJ IV** is built on a selective testing model, which requires the examiner to administer only those tests required to sufficiently answer the referral question and inform classroom instruction. Beginning with a core set of tests and adding tests based on areas of weakness can minimize assessment time. Examiners should use the Selective Testing tables at the front of each **WJ IV** Test Book to guide the test selection process. At the outset of the evaluation process, examiners should consult with their evaluation team and referral documents to determine an examinee's areas of suspected or previously identified disability and focus test selection on these areas.

## Scores

### Standard Score/Percentile Rank

The **WJ IV ACH** and **WJ IV OL** are key components of special education evaluations because they provide standardized, norm-referenced assessments of a student's academic and language-related skills. Standard scores (SS) and percentile ranks (PR) provide an analysis of the student's relative standing—how the student's achievement and language skills compare to that of his or her age- or grade-level peers in the normative group. The mean, or most typical, SS is 100. This equates to a PR of 50. The further a student's score is from the mean, in either direction, the less typical his or her performance is (when compared to a national sample of same age-level or grade-level peers).

### Relative Proficiency Index

Additionally, examiners can analyze a student's relative proficiency index (RPI) scores. An analysis of the RPI allows examiners to estimate the extent of a student's skill deficit created by any normative differences reflected in the standard score/percentile rank. The RPI provides a measure of the student's predicted proficiency on tasks where an average peer would perform at 90% proficiency. For example, if Maria received an RPI score of 34/90 on the Reading Comprehension cluster, it would predict that on reading comprehension tasks where an average grade-level or age-level peer would perform with 90% proficiency, Maria would perform with 34% proficiency. This is key data for understanding Maria's classroom performance in this area and can inform decisions about accommodations, placements, and intervention plans.

### Cognitive-Academic Language Proficiency

Cognitive-academic language proficiency (CALP) is an additional score provided by the **WJ IV** that is useful for determining placement and planning instruction. This score is calculated for language, reading, writing, and academic knowledge clusters on the **WJ IV ACH** and the **WJ IV OL**. It provides an analysis of a student's fluency with the academic-related language required in each cluster area. CALP scores are often utilized when evaluating English Language Learners and other students with limited English exposure. It can contribute to language-dominance determination as well as instructional and intervention planning.

## Qualitative Data

An additional source of data helpful for educational planning is qualitative data collected during the evaluation process. The **WJ IV ACH** Test Record contains qualitative observation ratings for each test on the **WJ IV ACH** Standard Battery (ACH Tests 1–11). These ratings, when entered to the online scoring and reporting program, will be reflected on the score report and will provide qualitative context for the student's **WJ IV** scores. Further qualitative information can be found through item analysis. Reviewing a student's performance on individual items may reveal trends in his or her skills. For example, an examiner may note, "While she attempted three of three items involving two-digit addition or subtraction, Maria was unable to complete any of these items successfully." This insight, found not in the score report but through a qualitative analysis of the student's responses, may provide key data that is useful for instructional planning.

## The WJ IV Interpretation and Instructional Interventions Program

It's clear that the **WJ IV ACH** and the **WJ IV OL** provide a comprehensive set of tools that plays an essential role in psychoeducational assessment. The usefulness of these tools is greatly enhanced by the use of the **WJ IV Interpretation and Instructional Interventions Program™ (WIIP®)**, which streamlines the process of connecting student scores to detailed interpretation and targeted interventions. The WIIP is an add-on purchase to the **WJ IV** online scoring and reporting program. Examiners with **WIIP** licenses are able to access a number of comprehensive reporting features. The **WIIP** features that special education teachers and other school-based examiners find most useful include:

- Interventions and Accommodations—One component of the **WIIP** Comprehensive Report that is of particular interest to special education teachers is the bank of evidence-based interventions and accommodations it contains. As part of the online scoring and reporting program's comprehensive reporting procedure, the program suggests interventions and/or accommodations appropriate to the student's developmental level. Interventions and accommodations are targeted to areas of weakness shown in the student's score profile and specific strategies for building deficient skills are provided.



Echo reading provides a model of fluent reading and a means for Marissa to improve fluency. Read a sentence aloud while Marissa silently reads along in the text. Then have Marissa echo the sentence by reading it aloud independently. Gradually increase the length of the passage that is read aloud.

Audio-recorded books are an effective way to demonstrate and practice fluent reading. Select an appropriate recording and matching text for Marissa. When Marissa first uses the audio recording, it would be best to break the recording into small, manageable passages. Have Marissa listen to the recording while following along in the text. The first time through, suggest

that she listen and follow along in the text by moving her finger under each word as it is read. Then, the next time through the text, have Marissa try reading along, keeping pace with the recording. Repeat until the desired level of fluency is achieved.

- **Formative Interventions**—The importance of item analysis as part of a qualitative observation was discussed above. The **WIIP** allows for item scores to be entered for five of the **WJ IV ACH** tests (Letter-Word Identification, Applied Problems, Spelling, Calculation, and Word Attack) and provides formative intervention suggestions based on specific skill deficits found at the item-level of analysis.

Review how to make a plural by adding *s* to the end of a word. Write the following words on the board: *car, cat, dog, bug, pin, pen, wig, pig, bat,* and *rock*. Ask Marissa to read each word. Provide assistance as needed. Then ask her to add an *s* to the end of each word and read them again. Ask whether letter *s* sounds the same at the end of each word. Use *cats* and *bugs* to illustrate. Say each word slowly and ask Marissa what sound the *s* is making. Point out that for *cats* the *s* sounds like /s/ and for *bugs* the *s* sounds like /z/. Using the words on the board, have Marissa read each again and tell you if the *s* is saying /s/ or /z/.

- **Interpretive Overview of Scores**—This portion of the comprehensive report provides an overview of the student's scores, including an overview of strengths and weaknesses and a description of areas of deficit. Many special education teachers find this summary useful when describing **WJ IV** scores in the Present Levels of Performance portion of individualized education programs (IEPs).

Marissa's overall academic achievement, as measured by the **WJ IV** Broad Achievement standard score, is in the low range of others her age.

Among the **WJ IV** achievement measures, Marissa's standard scores are within the average range for one cluster (Written Expression) and three tests (Writing Samples, Oral Reading, and Sentence Writing Fluency). Her scores are within the low average range for five clusters (Reading Fluency, Written Language, Broad Written Language, Academic Applications, and Academic Fluency) and four tests (Passage Comprehension, Word Attack, Sentence Reading Fluency, and Math Facts Fluency).

An analysis of variations among Marissa's achievement scores in broad curricular areas suggests that Sentence Writing Fluency and Written Expression are relative strengths for her. She demonstrated a relative weakness in Letter-Word Identification.

- **WJ IV Dyslexia Report**—This report summarizes the student's performance in areas typically associated with dyslexia. Evaluation teams can use this report when making diagnostic and intervention decisions to assist in determining whether a student demonstrates characteristics of dyslexia.

By providing special education teachers access to **WIIP** comprehensive reporting, school districts equip them with a streamlined, easy-to-use method of providing detailed analysis and targeted, evidence-based interventions. This will increase the quality and thoroughness of evaluation reporting and IEPs without requiring teachers to spend additional time on reporting and interpretation.

*Using WIIP gives examiners a streamlined method to provide deeper analysis of student performance.*

## Conclusion

**The Woodcock-Johnson IV Tests of Achievement** and the **Woodcock-Johnson IV Tests of Oral Language** provide special education teachers and other school-based examiners with a comprehensive set of tools to use to conduct a standardized evaluation of an examinee's academic and language-related skills. The **WJ IV** is designed around a selective testing model that allows examiners to focus testing time on areas of suspected or identified deficit. While many examiners use the **WJ IV** scores to report relative standing (standard score and percentile rank), additional levels of analysis are available by using the relative proficiency index, cognitive-academic language proficiency (CALP) scores, and qualitative data analysis. Examiners who expand their analysis to include this additional data will expand the utility of the **WJ IV** beyond determining eligibility to include informing decisions such as placement and intervention planning. Using the **Woodcock-Johnson IV Interpretation and Instructional Interventions Program** gives examiners a streamlined method to provide deeper analysis of student performance.





## Contact Us

Tel: 800.323.9540

Fax: 630.467.7192

### e-Mail Orders:

[assessmentsorders@hmhco.com](mailto:assessmentsorders@hmhco.com)

### e-Mail Inquiries:

[assessmentsCS@hmhco.com](mailto:assessmentsCS@hmhco.com)

## Customer Service Hours

Monday–Friday

8:00 AM–6:00 PM CST

## Connect with us



Woodcock-Johnson®, WJ IV™, the WJ IV® logo, WJ III® and the WJ III logo are trademarks or registered trademarks of Riverside Assessments LLC.

© Riverside Assessments. All rights reserved. 2/19 PERSP100

Riverside Insights™ is the new name of Houghton Mifflin Harcourt's former clinical and standardized testing business, which was divested from HMH in October 2018 and is now independent.