



Curriculum-Based Measurement-Written Expression: Guidelines for Use

CB-Written Expression: Description (McMaster & Espin, 2007)

CBM-Written Expression probes are simple to administer and offer several scoring options. Written-expression probes may be given individually or to groups of students. The examiner prepares a lined composition sheet with a story-starter sentence or partial sentence at the top. The student thinks for 1 minute about a possible story to be written from the story-starter, then spends 3 minutes writing the story. The examiner collects the writing sample for scoring. Depending on the preferences of the teacher, the writing probe can be scored in several ways, as explained below (from Wright, 1992).

CBM-Written Expression: Materials

The following materials are needed to administer CBM-Written Expression probes:

- Student copy of CBM writing probe with story-starter (the process for creating story-starters is described below)
- Stopwatch
- Pencils for students

CBM-Written Expression: Preparation

Before administering CBM-Written Expression, the teacher selects a 'story starter' (a brief introductory sentence or partial sentence) to serve as a prompt to elicit student story writing. The teacher selects a story-starter and places it at the top of a lined composition sheet. The story-starter should avoid wording that encourages students to generate lists. It should also be open-ended, requiring the writer to build a narrative rather than simply to write down a "Yes" or "No" response.

Schools can create their own CBM Written Expression Fluency assessment materials at no cost, using the Written Expression Probe Generator, a free online application: <http://www.interventioncentral.org/tools/writing-probe-generator>

This program allows the user to customize and to generate printable story-starter worksheets in PDF format.

The CBM writing probe in Figure 1 is an example of how a such a probe might be formatted. (This particular probe was used in a 5th-grade classroom.):

Figure 1: Example of a CBM writing probe

<p>CBM Writing Probe</p> <p>Name: _____ Grade: _____ Date: _____</p> <p>One day, I was out sailing. A storm carried me far out to sea and wrecked my boat on a desert island. _____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>
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CBM-Written Expression: Directions for Administration

1. The examiner distributes copies of CBM writing probes to all the students in the group. (Note: These probes may also be administered individually).
2. The examiner says to the students: *I want you to write a story. I am going to read a sentence to you first, and then I want you to write a short story about what happens. You will have 1 minute to think about the story you will write and then have 3 minutes to write it. Do your best work. If you don't know how to spell a word, you should guess. Are there any questions? For the next minute, think about . . .* [insert story-starter].
3. The examiner starts the stopwatch. At the end of 1 minute, the examiner says, *Start writing.*
4. While the students are writing, the examiner and any other adults helping in the assessment circulate around the room. If students stop writing before the 3-minute timing period has ended, monitors encourage them to continue writing.
5. After 3 additional minutes, the examiner says, *Stop writing.* CBM writing probes are collected for scoring.

CBM-Written Expression: Scoring Guidelines

The instructor has several options when scoring CBM writing probes. Student writing samples may be scored according to the:

1. Total Words Written (TWW),
2. Correctly Spelled Words (CSW), or
3. Correct Writing Sequences (One Correct Writing Sequence is scored whenever two adjacent units of writing (e.g., two words appearing next to each other) are found to be correct in their punctuation, capitalization, spelling, and syntactical and semantic usage.)

Scoring methods differ both in the amount of time that they require of the instructor and in the type of information that they provide about a student's writing skills. Advantages and potential limitations of each scoring system are presented below.

Total Words Written (TWW). The examiner counts up and records the total number of words written during the 3-minute writing probe. Misspelled words are included in the tally, although numbers written in numeral form (e.g., 5, 17) are not counted. Calculating total words is the quickest of scoring methods. A drawback, however, is that it yields only a rough estimate of writing fluency (that is, of how quickly the student can put words on paper) without examining the accuracy of spelling, punctuation, and other writing conventions. A 6th-grade student wrote the CBM writing sample in Figure 2. Using the total-words scoring formula, this sample is found to contain 45 words, including misspellings.

Figure 2: CBM writing sample scored for Total Words Written:

I woud drink water from the ocean	7 words
and I woud eat the fruit off of	8 words
the trees. Then I woud bilit a	7 words
house out of trees, and I woud	7 words
gather firewood to stay warm. I	6 words
woud try and fix my boat in my	8 words
spare time.	2 words
	Total=45 words



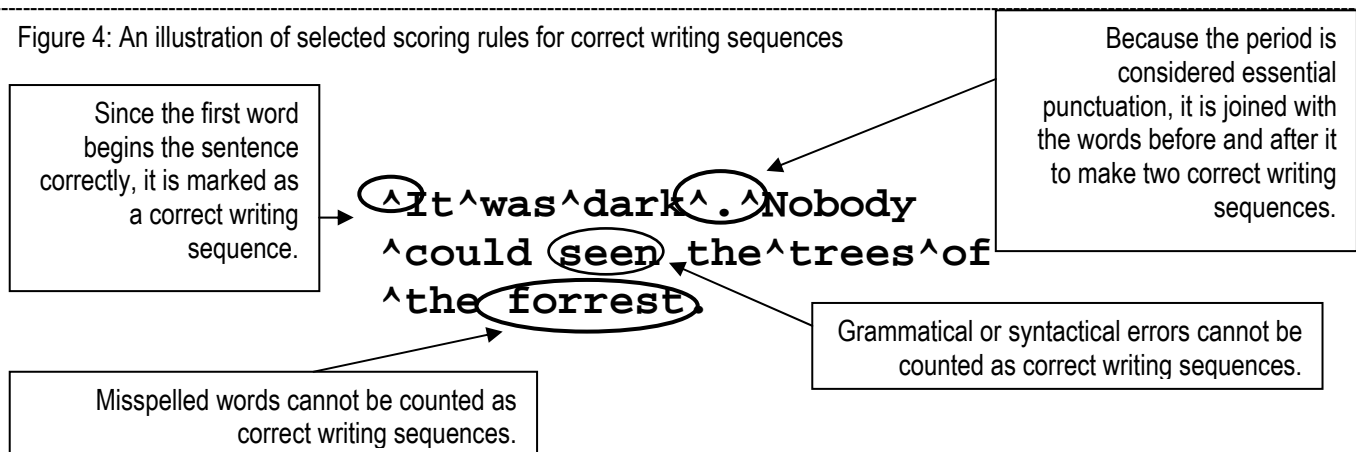
Correctly Spelled Words. The examiner counts up only those words in the writing sample that are spelled correctly. Words are considered separately, not within the context of a sentence. When scoring a good rule of thumb is to determine whether—in isolation—the word represents a correctly spelled term in English. If it does, the word is included in the tally. Assessing the number of correctly spelled words has the advantage of being quick. Also, by examining the accuracy of the student's spelling, this approach monitors to some degree a student's mastery of written language. As seen in figure 3, our writing sample is contains 39 correctly spelled words.

Figure 3: CBM writing sample scored for Correctly Spelled Words

I woud drink water from the ocean	6 correctly spelled words
and I woud eat the fruit off of	7 correctly spelled words
the trees. Then I woud bilit a	5 correctly spelled words
house out of trees, and I woud	6 correctly spelled words
gather firewood to stay warm. I	6 correctly spelled words
woud try and fix my boat in my	7 correctly spelled words
spare time.	2 correctly spelled words
	Total=39 correctly spelled words

Correct Writing Sequences. When scoring correct writing sequences, the examiner goes beyond the confines of the isolated word to consider units of writing and their relation to one another. Using this approach, the examiner starts at the beginning of the writing sample and looks at each successive pair of writing units (writing sequence). Words are considered separate writing units, as are essential marks of punctuation. To receive credit, writing sequences must be correctly spelled and be grammatically correct. The words in each writing sequence must also make sense within the context of the sentence. In effect, the student's writing is judged according to the standards of informal standard American English. A caret (^) is used to mark the presence of a correct writing sequence.

Figure 4: An illustration of selected scoring rules for correct writing sequences





The following scoring rules will aid the instructor in determining correct writing sequences:

- Correctly spelled words make up a correct writing sequence (reversed letters are acceptable, so long as they do not lead to a misspelling):

Example

^l^s^t^h^a^t^a^r^e^d^c^a^r^?

- Necessary marks of punctuation (excluding commas) are included in correct writing sequences:

Example

^l^s^t^h^a^t^a^r^e^d^c^a^r^?

- Syntactically correct words make up a correct writing sequence:

Example

^l^s^t^h^a^t^a^r^e^d^c^a^r^?

^l^s^t^h^a^t^a^c^a^r^r^e^d^?

- Semantically correct words make up a correct writing sequence:

Example

^l^s^t^h^a^t^a^r^e^d^c^a^r^?

^l^s^t^h^a^t^a^r^e^a^d^c^a^r^?

- If correct, the initial word of a writing sample is counted as a correct writing sequence:

Example

^l^s^t^h^a^t^a^r^e^d^c^a^r^?

- Titles are included in the correct writing sequence count:

Example

^t^h^e^t^e^r^r^i^b^l^e^d^a^y

Not surprisingly, evaluating a writing probe according to correct writing sequences is the most time-consuming of the scoring methods presented here. It is also the scoring approach, however, that yields the most comprehensive information about a student's writing competencies. While further research is needed to clarify the point, it also seems plausible that the correct writing sequence method is most sensitive to short-term student improvements in writing. Presumably, advances in writing skills in virtually any area (e.g., spelling, punctuation) could quickly register as higher writing sequence scores. Our writing sample in Figure 5 is found to contain 37 correct writing sequences.



Figure 5: CBM Writing sample scored for Correct Writing Sequence (Each correct writing sequence is marked with a caret(^)).

^I woud drink^water^from^the^ocean	5 correct writing sequences
^and^I woud eat^the^fruit^off^of	6 correct writing sequences
^the^trees^.^Then^I woud bilit a	5 correct writing sequences
^house^out^of^trees, ^and^I woud	6 correct writing sequences
gather^firewood^to^stay^warm^.^I	6 correct writing sequences
woud try^and^fix^my^boat^in^my	6 correct writing sequences
^spare^time^.	3 correct writing sequences
	Total = 37 correct writing sequences

References

McMaster, K., & Espin, C. (2007). Technical features of curriculum-based measurement in writing: A literature review. *Journal of Special Education, 41*(2), 68-84.

Wright, J. (1992). *Curriculum-based measurement: A manual for teachers*. Retrieved September 23, 20011, from <http://www.jimwrightonline.com/pdfdocs/cbaManual.pdf>