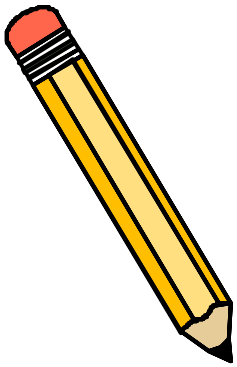
Curriculum-Based Measurement: Directions for Administering and Scoring CBM Probes in…

WRITING



Excerpt from:
Curriculum-Based Measurement: A Manual for Teachers
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Written Expression

Description

CBM Writing probes are simple to administer but offer a variety of scoring options. As with math and spelling, writing 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 (see below).

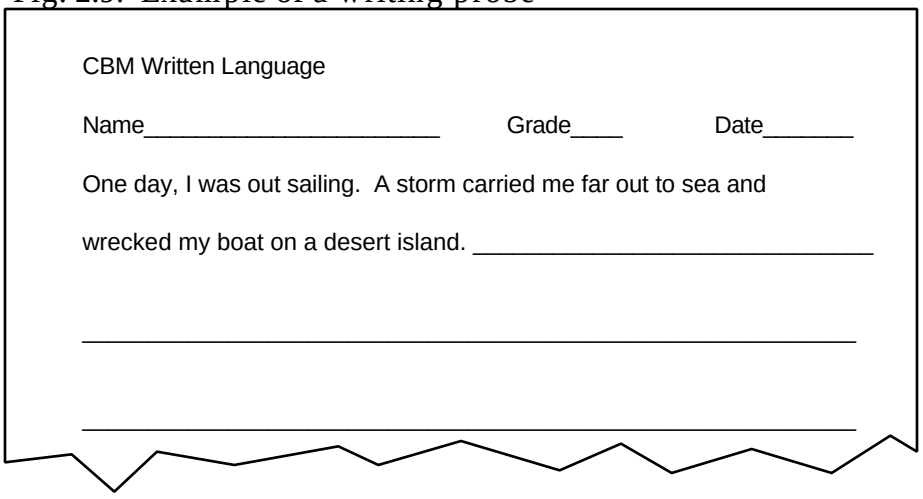
Creating a measurement pool for writing probes

Since writing probes are essentially writing opportunities for students, they require minimal advance preparation. The measurement pool for writing probes would be a collection of grade-appropriate story-starters, from which the teacher would randomly select a story-starter for each CBM writing assessment. Writing texts are often good sources for lists of story-starters; teachers may also choose to write their own.

Preparing CBM writing probes

The teacher selects a story-starter from the measurement pool 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

Fig. 2.9: Example of a writing probe



"No" response. The CBM writing probe in Figure 2.9 is a good example of how a such a probe might appear. This particular probe was used in a 5th-grade classroom.

Materials needed for giving CBM writing probes

- o Student copy of CBM writing probe with story-starter
- o Stopwatch
- o Pencils for students

Administration of CBM writing probes

The examiner distributes copies of CBM writing probes to all the students in the group. (Note: These probes may also be administered individually). 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]. The examiner starts the stopwatch.
>
> At the end of 1 minute, the examiner says, *Start writing.*
>
> 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.
>
> After 3 additional minutes, the examiner says, *Stop writing.* CBM writing probes are collected for scoring.

Scoring

The instructor has several options when scoring CBM writing probes. Student writing samples may be scored according to the (1) number of words written, (2) number of letters written, (3) number of words correctly spelled, or (4) number of writing units placed in correct sequence. Scoring methods differ both in the amount of time that they require of the instructor and in the quality of information that they provide about a student's writing skills. Advantages and potential limitations of each scoring system are presented below.

1. Total words--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. The CBM writing sample in Figure

2.10 was written by a 6th-grade student:

Fig. 2.10: CBM writing sample scored for total words

```
I woud drink water from the ocean.....07
and I woud eat the fruit off of.......08
the trees.  Then I woud bilit a.......07
house out of trees, and I woud........07
gather firewood to stay warm.  I......06
woud try and fix my boat in my........08
spare time.  ..........................02
                          Word total = 45
```

Using the total-words scoring formula, this sample is found to contain 45 words (including misspellings).

2. Total letters--The examiner counts up the total number of letters written during the 3-minute probe. Again, misspelled words are included in the count, but numbers written in numeral form are excluded. Calculating total letters is a reasonably quick operation. When compared to word-total, it also enjoys the advantage of controlling for words of varying length. For example, a student who writes few words but whose written vocabulary tends toward longer words may receive a relatively low score on word-total but receive a substantially higher score

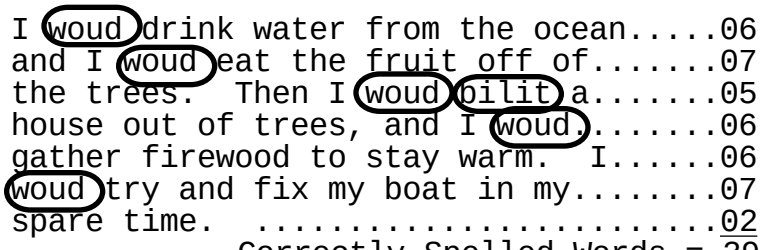
Fig. 2.11: CBM writing sample scored for total letters

```
I woud drink water from the ocean.....27
and I woud eat the fruit off of.......24
the trees.  Then I woud bilit a.......23
house out of trees, and I woud........23
gather firewood to stay warm.  I......25
woud try and fix my boat in my........23
spare time.  ..........................09
                       Letter total = 154
```

for letter-total . As with word-total, though, the letter-total formula gives only a general idea of writing fluency without examining a student's mastery of writing conventions. When scored according to total letters written, our writing sample is found to contain 154 letters.

3. 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 word according to this approach, a

Fig. 2.12: CBM Writing sample scored for correctly spelled words

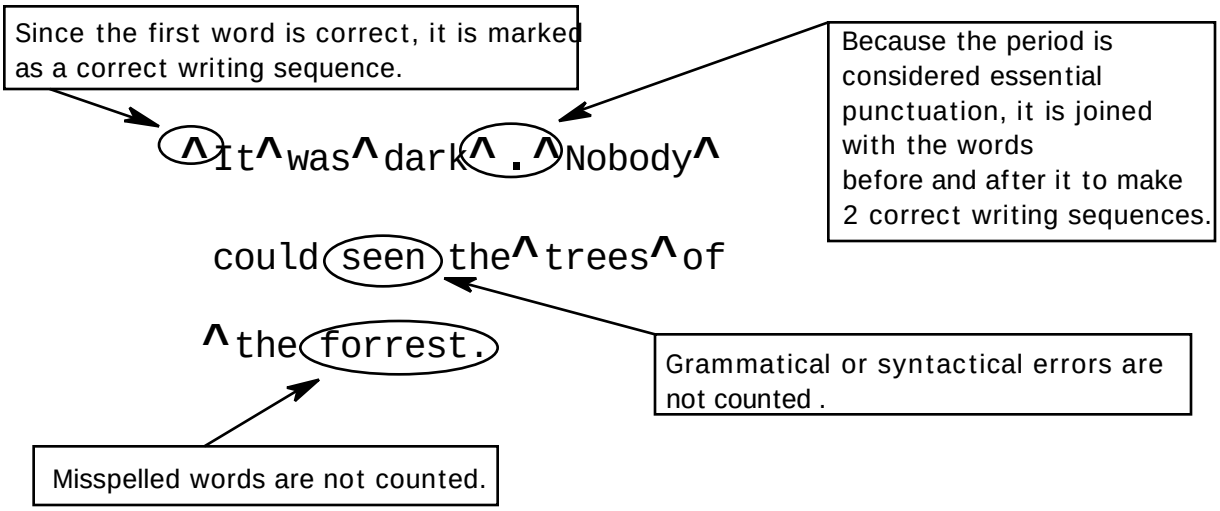


good rule of thumb is to determine whether--in isolation--the word represents a correctly spelled term in English. If it does, the word is included in the tally. Assessing the number of correctly spelled words has the advantage of being quick. Also, by examining the accuracy of the student's spelling, this approach monitors to some degree a student's mastery of written language. Our writing sample is found to contain 39 correctly spelled words.

4. 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.

Fig. 2.13: 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
  ^Is^that^a^red^car^?

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

  Example
  ^Is^that^a^red^car^?

- Syntactically correct words make up a correct writing sequence:

  Example
  ^Is^that^a^red^car^?

  ^Is^that^a^car red?

➔ Semantically correct words make up a correct writing sequence:

Example

^Is^that^a^red^car^?

^Is^that^a read car^?

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

Example

^Is^that^a^red^car^?

➔ Titles are included in the correct writing sequence count:

Example

^The^Terrible^Day

➔ With the exception of dates, numbers written in numeral form are not included in the correct writing sequence count:

Example

^The 14 soldiers^waited^in^the^cold^.

^The^crash^occurred^in^1976^.

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

Fig. 2.14: CBM Writing sample scored for correct writing sequence (Each correct writing sequence is marked with a caret (^)):

^I woud drink^water^from^the^ocean...05

^and^I woud eat^the^fruit^off^of.... 06

^the^trees^. ^Then^I woud bilit a....05

^house^out^of^trees,^and^I woud 06

gather^firewood^to^stay^warm^.^I.... 06

woud try^and^fix^my^boat^in^my 06

^spare^time^. 03

Correct Word Sequences = 37

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 is found to contain 37 correct writing sequences.