Developmental Writing Scale: Inform Instruction and Measure Outcomes for Students With Complex Learning Needs

DWS DEVELOPMENTAL WRITING SCALE

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Disclosures

I am the sole author of the First Author Writing Curriculum (FAWC). I receive royalties from Don Johnston Incorporated for this curriculum. The FAWC may be mentioned in this presentation, and classroom-based examples will be provided. The focus of this presentation; however, is on the Developmental Writing Scale and its application to students with complex learning needs.

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Handouts

https://tinyurl.com/TheDevelopmentalWritingScale

DWS DEVELOPMENTAL WRITING SCALE

Janet M. Sturm & Maureen Staskowski November 9, 2021

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Goals For This Session

- Describe the Advantages of using the Developmental Writing Scale for beginning writers
- Identify Writing Goals that Drive Instruction based on the DWS
- Score writing samples by students with complex learning needs

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Setting the Stage For Today

…and remembering that the essence of writing is communication

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History & Development of the DWS

An Assessment Tool That Informs Instruction & Supports Measurement of Outcomes

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The Problem

"….no measure currently exists to bridge single-letter writing and spelling and beginning composition abilities."
(Coker & Richie, 2010, p. 178)

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Challenges with Existing Measures

- Not comprehensive (May miss stages)
- Lacks sensitivity
- Assesses only a specific construct
- Absent, Vague, or Unrelated Constructs
- Lacks Instructional Relevance
- Uses Time Limits
- Text Type Specific

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5 Purposes of the DWS – It Will:

- identify small differences in beginning writing skills
- be easy for educators to learn and use reliably
- offer instructionally relevant information about what to target next
- serve as a functional outcome measure for periodic assessment probes and classroom-produced writing artifacts
- quantify evidence of small but significant changes so that educators can celebrate growth with students and their parents.

Sturm, Cali, Nelson, & Staskowski, 2012

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Procedures for Developing the Scale: 4 Recursive Steps

Step 1: Clarify Theoretical Constructs

- Drawing, Scribbling, & Production of Print
- Demonstration of Alphabetic & Syllabic Principles
- Concepts of Words With Spaces
- Formulation of Sentences
- Production of Cohesive & Coherent Texts

Step 2: Generate Criteria For Scoring Content

- Scoring criteria generated to capture the features of the content of student writing samples
- Reviewed literature of typical writers & created list of initial constructs
- Initial hierarchy of levels of writing quality created
- 460 natural writing samples used of k-g & 1st grade students anchored each level
- Samples verified with 4th & 8th graders with LD

Step 3: Conduct Recursive Tryouts & Modify Criteria

- Ongoing revision of scoring criteria after scoring writing more than 1500 writing samples of students with DD
- Revised descriptions of linguistic features & skills linked to student writing samples
- Multiple coders (authors, undergraduate & graduate students) of sequentially produced samples
- Identified outliers & created a new level and/or descriptors

Step 4: Evaluate The Tool's Validity For Its Primary Purposes

- Construct & content validity partially ensured through steps 1-3
- Evaluation of tool validity for meeting its purposes also targeted by comparing to existing tools
- Goals:
  1. Build on existing tools
  2. Find commonality (concurrent validity)
  3. Capture linguistic changes in writing quality
  4. Identify distinctions from existing tools
  5. Be easy to learn & use

From Sturm, Cali, Nelson, & Staskowski, 2012

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Beginning Writers

"…beginning writing skills are defined as starting with emergent writing (drawing, scribbling, and writing letters) and ending with conventional writing abilities, usually acquired by second or third grade for typically developing children. More generally, a beginning writer is one who is learning to use written language to express communicative intent."

Sturm, Cali, Nelson, & Staskowski (2012) p. 299

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Developmental Writing Scale for Beginning Writers

(Abbreviated)

(Sturm, Cali, Nelson, & Staskowski, 2012)

Level	Abbreviated Description
1	Drawing
2	Scribbling
3	Letter strings (no groups)
4	Letters grouped into words
5	One real word
6	Two to three words
7	More than three words in a list
8	Partial sentence
9	One to two sentences
10	Three + sentences (not coherent)
11	Three + sentences (coherent but limited cohesive)
12	Organized + cohesive & coherent
13	Organized + two cohesive subsections
14	Organized + three cohesive subsections

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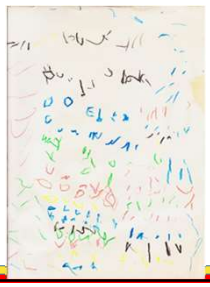
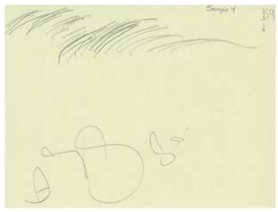
Level 2: Scribble writing with the majority of shapes not recognizable as letters

Typically Developing Beginning Writer	Writer with Developmental Disabilities
	

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Level 4: Strings of letters grouped into "words" but with no intelligible words

Typically Developing Beginning Writer	Writer with Developmental Disabilities
iLCR6a iLKVKC CPRSB WRKe BRKe	Hya L kirio s pDriD

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Level 8: More than three different intelligible words in a partially formed sentence

Typically Developing Beginning Writer	Writer with Developmental Disabilities
Me at HRHe. On BRtDoY. APRIL25.	Tom car cars red fast. Faster fun cars. mom mom. cars, blue, yellow blue orange. Love cars. The end.

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Level 9: One to two complete sentences with a subject phrase and a verb phrase

Typically Developing Beginning Writer	Writer with Developmental Disabilities
We Ro gowg to The Big SLiDe To SLiDon A FASD onthefewtrrep Me And My Daddy R Play with Mounika.	Alvin and the Chimpmuks They sing and dance

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Level 11: Organized writing with three or more sentences on a coherent topic but with limited cohesion between sentences (i.e., can reorder sentences)

Typically Developing Beginning Writer	Writer with Developmental Disabilities
Frogs are eggs. Frog are cool. I no how a frog grows egg then grow mory. Frog eat lot of things that we don't eat like bugs. I want a frog to play with. I thak frogs are mumloss because thae swim.	I love to watch the garbageman to pick up our trash can to. I don't watch the garman out to my window to. I love to watch the recycling person to get my recycling from my house to. Kristen I went on a pane so did I wish I was sleeping flying, My Mom was with me

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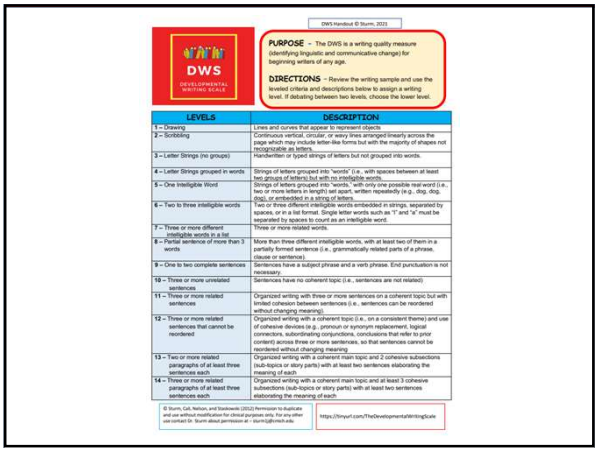

DWS Handout © Sturm, 2021

DWS DEVELOPMENTAL WRITING SCALE

PURPOSE – The DWS is a writing quality measure (identifying linguistic and communicative change) for beginning writers of any age.

DIRECTIONS – Review the writing sample and use the leveled criteria and descriptions below to assign a writing level. If debating between two levels, choose the lower level.

LEVELS	DESCRIPTION
1 – Drawing	Lines and curves that appear to represent objects
2 – Scribbling	Continuous vertical, circular, or wavy lines arranged linearly across the page which may include letter-like forms but with the majority of shapes not recognizable as letters.
3 – Letter Strings (no groups)	Handwritten or typed strings of letters but not grouped into words.
4 – Letter Strings grouped in words	Strings of letters grouped into "words" (i.e., with spaces between at least two groups of letters) but with no intelligible words.
5 – One Intelligible Word	Strings of letters grouped into "words," with only one possible real word (i.e., two or more letters in length) set apart, written repeatedly (e.g., dog, dog, dog), or embedded in a string of letters.
6 – Two to three intelligible words	Two or three different intelligible words embedded in strings, separated by spaces, or in a list format. Single letter words such as "I" and "a" must be separated by spaces to count as an intelligible word.
7 – Three or more different intelligible words in a list	Three or more related words.
8 – Partial sentence of more than 3 words	More than three different intelligible words, with at least two of them in a partially formed sentence (i.e., grammatically related parts of a phrase, clause or sentence).
9 – One to two complete sentences	Sentences have a subject phrase and a verb phrase. End punctuation is not necessary.
10 – Three or more unrelated sentences	Sentences have no coherent topic (i.e., sentences are not related)
11 – Three or more related sentences	Organized writing with three or more sentences on a coherent topic but with limited cohesion between sentences (i.e., sentences can be reordered without changing meaning).
12 – Three or more related sentences that cannot be reordered	Organized writing with a coherent topic (i.e., on a consistent theme) and use of cohesive devices (e.g., pronoun or synonym replacement, logical connectors, subordinating conjunctions, conclusions that refer to prior content) across three or more sentences, so that sentences cannot be reordered without changing meaning.
13 – Two or more related paragraphs of at least three sentences each	Organized writing with a coherent main topic and 2 cohesive subsections (sub-topics or story parts) with at least two sentences elaborating the meaning of each
14 – Three or more related paragraphs of at least three sentences each	Organized writing with a coherent main topic and at least 3 cohesive subsections (sub-topics or story parts) with at least two sentences elaborating the meaning of each

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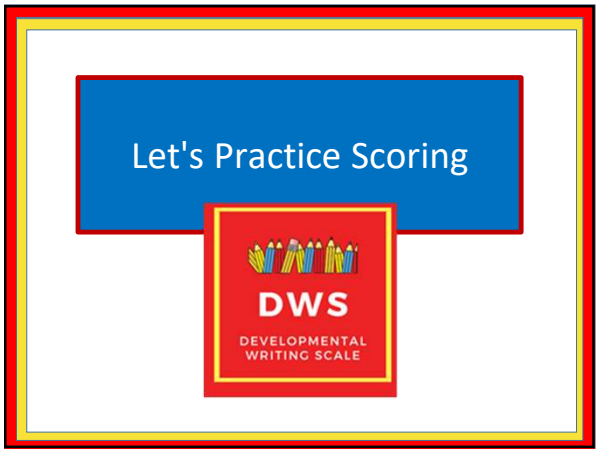

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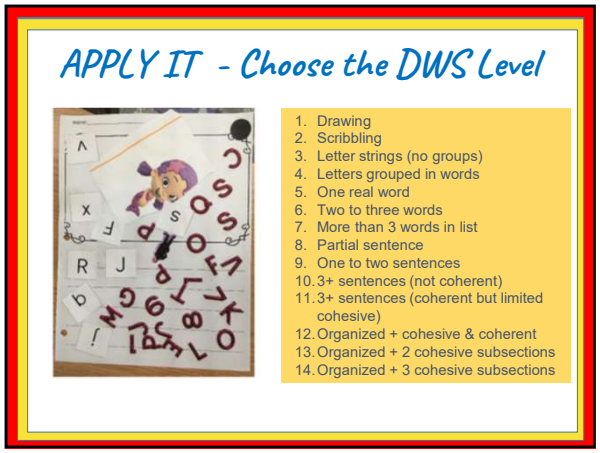

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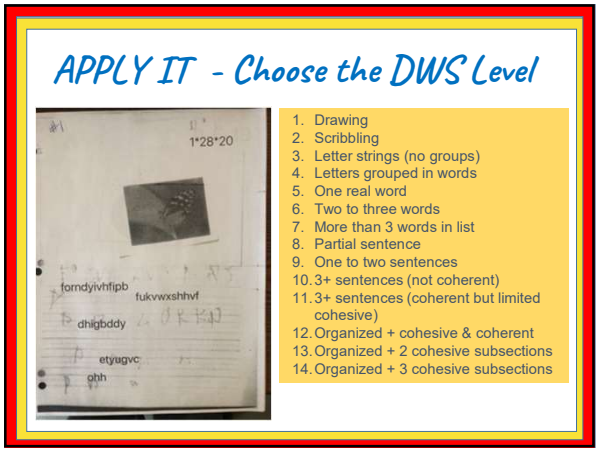

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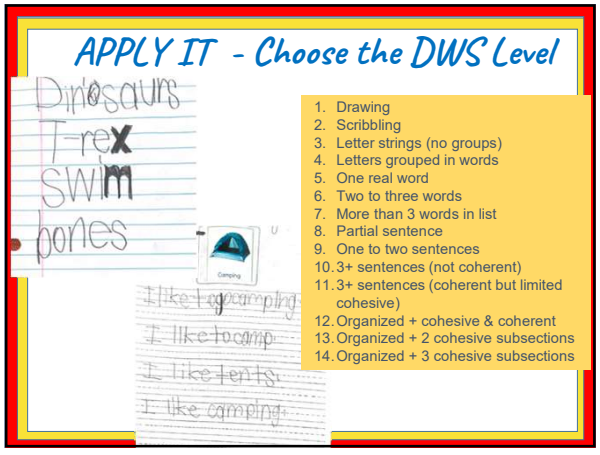

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The BEFORE

Analysis of writing goals provided evidence of need for a writing curriculum

Wrote program to pull writing goals of [redacted] students

95%

goals and objectives that included the following:

- Copy
- Trace
- Name / address
- Visual model
- Unscramble
- Vertical/horizontal lines
- AAC symbols
- Cutting
- Shapes

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The AFTER

Wrote program to pull writing goals of [redacted] students

15%

Identified goals and objectives that included the following:

- Copy
- Trace
- Name / address
- Visual model
- Unscramble
- Vertical/horizontal lines
- AAC symbols
- Cutting
- Shapes

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The AFTER

85%

85% goals addressed writing composition and development

Most goals and objectives have no fine motor or unrelated tasks such as recreating a scrambled sentence, using symbols, or unscrambling words

Will write letters to create a word.

Will write words.

Will write a complete sentence.

Will write 2 or more complete sentences.

Will write 3 or more sentences on a self-selected topic.

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Using the DWS For Progress Monitoring:

Reporting baseline & selecting appropriate writing targets in IEP Goals

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Standards-Based IEP Goals

TEXT TYPES AND PURPOSES -- LAFS.9-10.W.1.AP.2a Create an organizational structure for writing that groups information logically to support paragraph focus.

- By June of 2016, Michael will maintain writing at least three sentences on one topic *d*uring 3/5 writing probes.
- By June of 2016, Michael will produce 5 organized texts on one topic that cannot be reordered.

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Lucy
High School Student

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PLAAFP

- Lucy is writing at the conventional level. She writes 1-2 sentences, a level 9 on the Developmental Writing Scale. Lucy can label, write an argument piece in the area of opinion with " I like" statements and emerging with procedural writings in the area of informative text.
- During Author's chair Lucy makes eye contact with peers who are reading and reads her work proudly She makes comments but does not yet give reasons.

IEP Goal

- By June 2020, Lucy will write three or more sentences related to a topic, a level 11 on the Developmental Writing Scale, in 2 out of 3 writing sessions.

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Student Friendly Goals for Lucy

Writing Goal

I will write 3 sentences about my topic.

Communication Goal

I will make a comment and tell why.

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Celebrating Student Progress

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The Power of Writing

I had these kids that really couldn't write even….they could not write a word, they didn't know letters. Now I have these same kids. I have Michael [who] would actually write backwards. He'd start on the right and write to the left. But he couldn't do it. Now he's writing sentences on paper as well as the computer. It's amazing!

Paraprofessional at Bovenschen School

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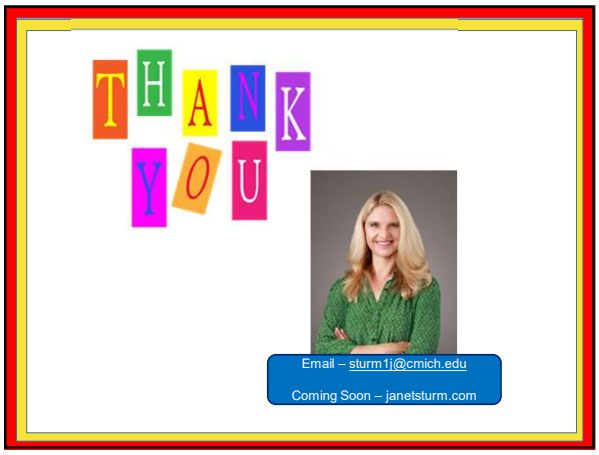
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