

# Proceed with Caution **PLeasE**: Writing quality evaluations with the PLS-5-English

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## Using the PLS-5 To Write Quality Evaluations

Clinicians must consider the cultural and linguistic background of all children they evaluate. A review of the PLS-5 reveals that it primarily focuses on assessing whether a child has acquired information from an assumed set of prior experiences which raises validity and bias issues. However, a number of the test items probe areas of language that reveal much about a child's language development (Crowley, 2003).

## Hologram

A **hologram** is a description of a child's abilities within a speech and language evaluation. It illustrates the child's strengths and weaknesses to the reader, using concrete examples of interactions and utterances obtained from the caregiver/evaluator during an interview or in observation/collection of data (e.g., language sample) during the evaluation (Crowley, 2003; Crowley, 2013).

- Shows the child's ability to learn.
- Demonstrates the child's highest level of function.
- Determines if the delay is due to second language acquisition, a true disorder, or other factors.
- Must include individualized examples the evaluator obtained during interaction with the child and the parent/teacher interviews.
- Must include the 10 critical questions that the evaluator asked **PRIOR** to the evaluation to assist in determining the child's 10 best communicative abilities, in addition to where his/her communication breakdown occurs.

A good hologram does **NOT** include standard scores, percentile ranks or a list of test items that the child could and could not perform (Crowley, 2003; Crowley, 2013).

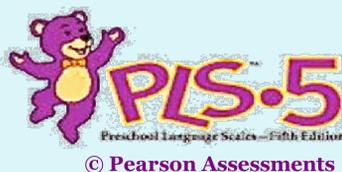
## Quality Unbiased PLS-5 Tasks

The following test items of the PLS-5 highlight a child's language formulation, relational vocabulary skills, executive function, semantics and word-finding skills and are not compounded by significant cultural or SES biases.

- Items that prompt a child to produce four-five sentences in response to a general question (e.g. Do you have any pets? Tell me about them.) providing excellent opportunity to obtain a short personal narrative in a conversational setting.
- Use of the picture manual is helpful when assessing children who perform better with visual support as it provides the student with another input modality, increased structure, and increased sensory input - all factors that influence comprehension, attention, and motivation.
- Items that prompt a child to provide reasons for common routines and actions (e.g. "Why do we brush our teeth?"/"So your teeth can be white/to clean our mouths. ")
- By asking appropriate follow-up questions, the examiner is able to obtain more complex language from a child ("What do you do with a coat?"/"I wear a coat. "/"Why do you wear a coat?"/"Because it is cold outside. ") (Zimmerman, I. L., Steiner, V. G., & Pond, R. E. )

## What the Law Says About Evaluations

- Must include a variety of assessment tools/strategies.
- Cannot rely on one procedure as the sole criterion for determining eligibility for speech services.
- Must be valid and reliable.
- Must not be discriminatory on racial or cultural basis. (Individuals With Disabilities Education Act, 20 U.S.C. § 1400 (2004).)



## Hologram Examples

*Ex. 1: On the PLS-5, John received a score of 67 on the expressive language section and a score of 69 on the receptive language, indicating a score greater than 2 standard deviations from the mean.*

*Ex. 2: On the PLS-5, John demonstrated the ability to answer questions logically. When asked, "What do you do when you are hungry", he replied, "I open the fridge and get a slice of cheese," followed by John rubbing his stomach and saying "mmm." When asked, "How are a bird and plane alike?, he replied, "They take off and land," followed by John using his right hand to demonstrate an upward and downward motion.*

This hologram demonstrated John's ability to engage in higher level thinking tasks, in addition to making appropriate, corresponding gestures. The PLS-5 deems the simple answers of "eat" and "flies" as correct. However, John's complex answers provided an opportunity for the clinician to obtain further insight into John's language abilities.

## Conclusion

A thorough **hologram** provides sufficient data that demonstrates the child's highest functioning levels, where the child's skills break down, and quantifies what that means. All of this must be analyzed within the context of the child's prior experiences and background. It is imperative that the evaluator gathers and interprets the data appropriately, as standardized test scores should not stand alone, nor determine if a child presents with a language disorder/difference.

### References

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- Zimmerman, I. L., Steiner, V. G., & Pond, R. E. (2011). *Preschool Language Scales Fifth Edition*. Pearson. San Antonio: TX.