

Using the TABE in WIA Youth Programs

Cheryl R. Sturko Grossman

2008

The TABE, or Tests of Adult Basic Education, is one of several tests used to assess the basic literacy and numeracy skills of out-of-school youth in Workforce Investment Act (WIA) youth programs. Under Common Measures, literacy/numeracy gains *must* be reported using Educational Functioning Levels (EFLs) and the TABE is one of only a few tests with scores that can be translated into EFLs.

What Is the TABE?

The TABE is an achievement test for adults and youth ages 14 and older who are learning basic reading, mathematics, and writing skills. It is based on adult education standards and curricula, and higher levels can be used to predict student performance on the 2002 version of the General Educational Development (GED) tests.

The current TABE comes in 2 equivalent forms, 9 and 10. Each form covers the same content and either form should be used as a pre-test or post-test for the other. The TABE, given as a pre-test, helps determine what content needs to be mastered; as a post-test, the TABE demonstrates gains in skills or knowledge. McGraw-Hill, the publisher of the TABE, recommends that at least 60 hours of instruction occur between a pre-test and a post-test.

McGraw-Hill also recommends that the previous forms (TABE 7/8) *not* be used as a pre-test or post-test for forms 9/10.

The TABE 9/10 includes a Locator Test, a Survey, and a Complete Battery. The Locator Test should be given first in order to determine the level of the Complete Battery or the Survey to administer.

Using the Locator Test

The Locator Test is a very brief, 12-question form that helps determine the appropriate level of the Survey or Complete Battery that should be given to a specific youth. The Locator Test should be administered before both pre- and post-testing to determine if a different level should be given. Testing at a level appropriate for a youth is important because the assessment

- More accurately indicates what content and skills need to be mastered by the youth
- Is less frustrating to a youth than taking a test that is too easy or too difficult
- Provides an accurate baseline for Common Measures performance reporting
- Places a youth in the appropriate level to demonstrate *all* his or her skill gains

When selecting the appropriate level (see below) for administration of the TABE, the publisher recommends that the lower level test be administered if a youth scores on the low side of the cut score range. For instance, a youth who scores a 9 on the Language Locator Test is at the low end of the cut score range (9-10) for administering the Difficult test level and should be given the next easier level (Medium). The Locator should never be used as a substitute for the Survey or Complete Battery.

The Complete Battery and the Survey

The choice of the Complete Battery or the Survey should be based on the needs of the individual youth. The TABE Complete Battery provides detailed diagnostic information, but is longer than the Survey. It takes 3 hours and 37 minutes for 255 questions. There are 5 test levels.

- Limited Literacy (L)
- Easy (E)
- Medium (M)
- Difficult (D)
- Advanced (A)

The Survey provides sufficient information for placement and demonstration of skill gains. As a shorter test, it may also be less stressful for youth. The Survey takes 2 hours and 8 minutes for 160 questions and has 4 test levels.

- Easy (E)
- Medium (M)
- Difficult (D)
- Advanced (A)

All of the levels are calibrated to the same scale, so the level of test selected should be based on Locator results. For instance, it is appropriate to administer the E level for the pre-test and the M level for the post-test if the Locator results suggest it.

All levels of the Complete Battery and the Survey cover the same content. The optional sections of the TABE take 38 minutes and provide more in-depth information about a youth's reading and writing skills.

- Reading
- Math Computation
- Applied Mathematics
- Language
- Vocabulary (optional)
- Language Mechanics (optional)
- Spelling (optional)

The Advanced level in both the Complete Battery and the Survey is the only level correlated with the GED and includes several additional content areas.

- Science
- Social Studies
- Algebra/Geometry
- Writing

There are support materials for the TABE, including

- An introduction to standardized testing that may be useful for youth with test anxiety
- Study workbooks for each level (E, M, D, and A)
- A Spanish language version
- Braille and large-print versions

The TABE also offers multiple test-taking and scoring options, including online and computer-based administration, scoring, and reporting. Hand scoring is more error prone than electronic scoring; therefore, use electronic scoring options whenever possible.

Understanding TABE Scores

The publisher of the TABE reports both norm-referenced and criterion-referenced scores. It is important to understand the uses and limitations of scores.

The **raw score** is used to derive all other scores. The raw score is simply the number correct and has no interpretive value.

3 Criterion-referenced scores measure what a youth knows and is able to do. Scores are based on how well the test-taker is able to meet an absolute standard of content knowledge or skills. They also are used to measure gains in knowledge or skills over time. The most important TABE score for WIA purposes is the criterion-referenced **scale score**.

The scale score is reported in 3 digits (e.g., 467) and shows what a test-taker knows and can do. The scale score can be used to demonstrate skill gains over time. Because the TABE levels (E, M, D, A) are calibrated to the same scale, the same scale score will indicate a similar level of knowledge and skills, no matter which level of the TABE is being administered. Scale scores can be correlated with EFLs, which are required for reporting Common Measures performance. Scale scores are the *only* scores that should be entered into the Sharing Career Opportunities and Training Information (SCOTI) system.

Norm-referenced scores compare an individual youth's performance against the performance of a *norm group*. Norm groups are selected based on the intended audience for a test, but the comparison may be invalid if a youth differs significantly from the norm group. Because norm-referenced assessments compare and rank people rather than measure content mastery, *they cannot be used to demonstrate gains in knowledge or skills over time*. The TABE reports several norm-referenced scores.

- **Grade equivalent score.** This score is reported in grade and month. However, a score of 7.0 does not mean that a youth is reading at the 7th grade level, for instance. It means that the youth's reading score is similar to the average results of the norm group of 7th graders who took the test. There is no way of knowing the skill levels of the 7th graders in the norm group. Therefore, the grade equivalent has no value in determining a youth's skill level and cannot be used to show academic growth over time.
- **Percentile rank.** This score is reported in percentages from 1-100 and ranks test-takers. A percentile rank of 75 indicates that the test-taker scored higher than 75 percent of the norm group.
- **Stanine score.** This score is reported in numbers from 1-9 and is based upon dividing the percentile scores of the norm group into equal intervals where 5 is the average score.

The TABE in WIA Youth Programs

The TABE can be a valuable tool for WIA youth programs. Staff who administer the assessment can improve their practice in a number of ways.

- Review TABE supplementary materials to determine their value to youth in your program.
 - *Getting to Know TABE* is a workbook that introduces standardized testing.
 - *Building Skills with TABE* is a series of 8 study guides, 2 for each test level.
- Administer the Locator before both the pre- and post-tests to determine the correct level (E, M, D, or A) of TABE to use.
- Have youth take the easier test if their Locator score is at the low end of the recommended cut score range for a test level.
- Select the Complete Battery or the Survey based on the needs of the individual youth.
 - The Complete Battery takes longer and has more questions but provides more specific diagnostic information.
 - The Survey takes less time, has fewer questions, and may be less stressful for youth but provides less specific diagnostic information.
- Follow instructions as written for administering the TABE.
 - Use the Spanish language version of the TABE if appropriate and approved.
 - Use the Braille or large-print versions of the TABE if appropriate and approved.
- Use different forms (9/10) for pre- and post-tests to reduce the possibility that test-takers will recall some of the questions.
- Provide at least 60 hours of instruction before giving a post-test.
- Use electronic scoring options, if possible.
- Understand the significance of the various scores provided in TABE reports and profiles, especially the scale score.
- Use TABE results in formulating the Individual Service Strategy (ISS) for a youth.
- **Enter only the scale score into SCOTI.**

All test scores represent a snapshot in time and provide limited information about a youth. The TABE can be one valuable source of information but should not be the only source. Never make important decisions based solely on the results of a single assessment; use other information and methods to develop a more complete view of a youth's needs, character, accomplishments, and potential.

- CTB/McGraw-Hill. (2007). *Appropriate use of the TABE 9 and 10 locator test*. Monterey, CA: Author. Retrieved July 25, 2008, from http://www.ctb.com/media/articles/pdfs/AdultEducation/TABE9-10LocatorTestWhitePaperAug07.pdf?FOLDER%3C%3Efolder_id=9852723696560733&ASSORTMENT%3C%3EEast_id=1408474395213825&bmUID=1218464186261
- CTB/McGraw-Hill. (2003). *Beyond the numbers: A guide to interpreting and using the results of standardized achievement tests*. Monterey, CA: Author. Retrieved July 25, 2008, from <http://www.ctb.com/media/articles/pdfs/ResearchArticles/BeyondtheNumbers.pdf>
- CTB/McGraw-Hill. (2003). *Introducing TABE 9 and 10*. Monterey, CA: Author.
- Employment and Training Administration, U.S. Department of Labor. (2006, February 17). *Common Measures policy for the Employment and Training Administration's (ETA) performance accountability system and related performance issues*. Training and Employment Guidance Letter 17-05. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved July 25, 2008, from <http://wdr.doleta.gov/directives/attach/TEGL17-05.pdf>
- Friedman, M.I., Hatch, C.W., Jacobs, J.E., Lau-Dickinson, A.C., Nickerson, A.B., & Schnepel, K.C. (2003). *Educators' handbook on effective testing*. Columbia, SC: Institute for Evidence-Based Decision-Making in Education.
- Gronlund, N.E. (2006). *Assessment of student achievement*. (8th ed.). Boston, MA: Pearson.
- Grossman, C.R.S., Wonacott, M.E., & Jackson, D. (2007). *Assessment in WIA youth programs*. Youthwork Information Brief No. 24. Columbus, OH: LearningWork Connection. Retrieved August 4, 2008, from <http://www.learningworkconnection.org/docs/infobriefs/infobrief24-AssessmentinWIA.pdf>
- Jackson, D. (2008). *Literacy/Numeracy. PowerPoint slides*. Columbus, OH: LearningWork Connection.
- Ohio Department of Education (n.d.) *Ohio ABLE assessment policy, fiscal year 2008*. Columbus, OH: Author. Retrieved July 24, 2008, from <http://www.ode.state.oh.us/GD/DocumentManagement/DocumentDownload.aspx?DocumentID=32784>
- Wagner, J.O., & Wonacott, M.E. (2008). *Objective assessment*. Focused Futures: Youth Development System Builder. Retrieved August 5, 2008, from <http://www.learningworkconnection.org/docs/FocusedFutures/Objective%20Assessment.pdf>

© The Ohio State University, 2008.

LearningWork Connection
Center for Learning Excellence
The Ohio State University
1900 Kenny Road
Columbus, OH 43210
614.292.8665
www.learningworkconnection.org

