

**Frequently Asked Questions About  
the Early Literacy Skills Assessment  
(ELSA)**

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## Frequently Asked Questions

### Setting

- Q.** Do the tester and child have to sit at a table to do the assessment? Can the child sit in the tester's lap?
- A.** Sitting at a table facilitates story reading and scoring. However, if the person administering the ELSA finds that the child is more comfortable on the floor, on a couch, or even in a lap, it is acceptable to use one of these positions. The key is to be sure that the scoring is done unobtrusively and accurately.
- Q.** Does the testing have to be done outside the classroom, or can it be done in a quiet corner of the classroom?
- A.** The ELSA must be conducted in an area free of noise and other distractions. It is best done in a separate room or in the classroom when other children are outside.

### Administration

- Q.** Can the test be given in two sittings? If so, does the tester review the story with the child before beginning the second test session?

- A.** The test can be given in two sittings if the child has special needs, speaks a language other than English as her first language, or is a young 3-year-old. We do not recommend making a practice of two sittings with **all** children, as it would increase the amount of time devoted to assessment.

If the decision is made to do the ELSA in two sessions, the tester marks the last page number completed on the score sheet. When the child returns to complete the ELSA, the tester first does a quick picture-walk through the part of the book completed previously. That is, she uses the pictures to briefly summarize the story for the child. The tester then continues with the assessment.

- Q.** Are the test items pictured the only acceptable answers to the rhyming questions?
- A.** Yes, the child must answer the questions about rhyming with the correct word that is pictured. A word that does rhyme but is not pictured is not valid, for instance, *me* for *tree*. Since this is a standardized assessment, only one of the *pictured* items can be selected and only one of these is the correct answer.

If the child spontaneously answers with a rhyming word not pictured, it is fine to re-direct him or her to the picture choices for that item. To do so, say something like this: "Let's look at these pictures. Which one of *these* pictures rhymes with \_\_\_\_\_?"

- Q.** On the rhyming questions, what should the tester do if the child appears not to understand the word *rhyme*?
- A.** If the child appears confused, it is okay to substitute "sounds like" for "rhymes with" ("What sounds like *shell*?").
- Q.** What if a child gets really off track during the story?
- A.** If the child is having difficulty paying attention to the story or test items, or repeatedly makes comments that do not apply to the story line, the tester might try to draw the child back to the story with comments like these: "Let's see what happens to Violet (or Dante) next," "That's really interesting. How do you think that might be part of this story?" or "Do you want to turn the page now?" If the child's inattention is due to special needs, young age, or second-language learning, the tester can do the ELSA in two sessions as mentioned in the first "Administration" question.
- Q.** During the reading, can the tester make comments or ask conversational questions that are not part of the assessment, as she would normally when reading with a child? Or should she stick to the story and the assessment questions?

- A.** The tester is free to make comments or ask questions as part of a natural interactive reading process as long as these have no relation to the assessment items. In the interest of time, however, it is probably best to limit this type of conversation to responses to the child's comments.

- Q.** Sometimes children get stalled during the letter-identification questions. How many times should a tester ask children to identify alphabet letters?
- A.** It is very important not to make the ELSA seem like a test. If a child stops naming and pointing to letters, the tester might say, once, "Have you looked for letters on the other page?" or, "Can you show me and tell me the names of any more letters?" However, the tester should not dwell on these pages for too long once a child has stopped identifying letters spontaneously.

Sometimes a child will invent a strategy to answer a letter-identification question and then get stuck on it. For example, after finding the first letter in his own name, one child began trying to find the first letters for all the character names. When the tester saw that the child was not making progress, she re-directed him by saying, "Which other letters do you know?"

- Q.** How much time should the tester give a child to answer comprehension questions?
- A.** It is very important to give a child sufficient time to think of an answer. This is called wait time. Young children's verbal

and thinking skills are just developing, so they often need more time to answer questions like this than an adult would. It can be difficult to wait if a child is silent or saying things like “Um...” many times. If after a short wait the tester feels sure the child will not provide an answer, it is helpful to say something like “Let’s keep reading and find out what happens next in the story.”

- Q.** If a child gives an incorrect answer and then corrects himself or herself, how should the answer be scored?
- A.** The tester should score this as a correct answer, but if the child changes his or her mind more than once, the final answer should not be scored as correct even if it is.
- Q.** What should the tester do when the child looks for an acknowledgment that his or her answer is correct?
- A.** A neutral comment such as “Okay,” “Okay, let’s go on,” or “Thank you” will reassure the child without compromising the test situation.
- Q.** What should the tester do if the child asks a direct question, such as “What is a unicorn?”
- A.** The tester can give a brief answer, as long as it doesn’t relate specifically to any of the test questions, and then return to the assessment.

## Usage

- Q.** Can this assessment be used in kindergarten and early elementary classes, or is it just for preschoolers?
- A.** The ELSA was originally designed to be used with 3- to 5-year-olds in pre-K classrooms. However, the ELSA is appropriate for kindergarten classrooms as well. Unless children in early elementary classes are struggling readers, the ELSA most likely would not be useful at that level.
- Q.** Can the ELSA be used to evaluate early literacy skills regardless of the early literacy curriculum being used in the classroom?
- A.** Yes, as long as the curriculum provides instruction in the four key principles of early literacy represented on the ELSA: comprehension, phonological awareness, alphabetic principle, and concepts about print.
- Q.** How often should the ELSA be administered?
- A.** The ELSA should be given at the beginning of the school year (pre-test) and again at the end (post-test). The book should never be left in the classroom for children to look at or read. It is important to remember that the ELSA is a test, not simply a storybook.
- Q.** Is the ELSA available in Spanish?
- A.** The ELSA is available in Spanish, and reliability and validity have been established for *La Aventura de Violeta*, the first

storybook tool. The second tool, *El Cambio en Dante*, will be piloted in 2005–2006. Initial results using *La Aventura de Violeta* indicate that the ELSA measures progress clearly and accurately for Spanish-speaking children. Spanish versions of additional ELSA components will be available in the future. See the High/Scope Web site ([www.highscope.org](http://www.highscope.org)) for updated information on the Spanish versions.

- Q.** Why are there two ELSA books, *Violet's Adventure* and *Dante Grows Up*?
- A.** There are several reasons. First, if children remain in a program for more than one year (for instance, if 3-year-olds stay until they are 5), a different ELSA book will be needed for the second year. If a book is used repeatedly, children's scores may improve simply from becoming familiar with the book. Second, having two versions of the ELSA provides programs with a choice of books. Third, having both books available allows programs with Spanish-speaking children to assess in both languages, using one of the ELSA books in English and one in Spanish with each child at the beginning and end of the year. This provides the program with information on how a child's literacy skills are developing in both English and Spanish.
- Q.** May *Violet's Adventure* and *Dante Grows Up* be used interchangeably?
- A.** Since both books test the same early literacy concepts on the same pages, it is fine to choose either book. However, if a program uses one title at the beginning of

the year for a child's pre-test, the same title must be used with that child at the end of the year for the post-test.

- Q.** How can teachers use the About Your Child as a Reader family report?
- A.** Teachers can either send this form home with a child or use it as part of a parent/guardian conference. Using it as part of a conference allows teachers to elaborate on the written comments and perhaps provide evidence of the child's skills with anecdotes or work samples.

This form can help parents and guardians understand specific areas in which their child needs the most assistance, making it easier for teachers to provide them with early literacy tips or activities.