

What Can We Learn From the Word Writing CAFÉ?

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Building on the work of an earlier article, these authors investigated the use of a simple assessment tool with a different audience to yield similar useful results.

When we first read about the Word Writing CAFÉ (Complexity, Accuracy, and Fluency Evaluation) in *The Reading Teacher* (Leal, 2005/2006), we were interested in this new assessment tool because there are few such straightforward and easy-to-use ways to assess student writing. The Word Writing CAFÉ is designed to objectively evaluate students' word writing ability for complexity, accuracy, and fluency in a whole-class setting. It is a way to learn about a student's writing out of context and track progress over time. It is also one of the few tools for assessing student writing in general. For these reasons, we decided to accept Leal's friendly enticement: "We invite you to try it out" (Leal, 2005/2006, p. 348).

We used the CAFÉ to assess the word writing ability of a group of struggling readers enrolled in an after-school program. We discovered that the CAFÉ had much to tell us about the strengths and needs of these students which could help in planning appropriate instruction. The CAFÉ offered us a window on students' ability to write words in isolation and provided information about their linguistic knowledge, interests, thinking, and problem solving.

The purpose of this article is to provide background on various writing assessments, describe how we used the CAFÉ, and share our data which indicate a wider contribution to writing assessment and instruction than Leal (2005/2006) had proposed. We also of-

fer observations about the CAFÉ's limitations, and suggestions for adapting it for classroom use.

Writing Assessment

"We have strong evidence that high-quality classroom assessments improve learning tremendously, possibly more effectively than any other teaching intervention" (Shepard, 2000, p. 7). High-quality writing assessment can improve student learning by showing teachers what kind of instruction students need in order to become better writers. Writing assessment also shows students their progress and achievement, provides accountability for parents and administrators, and facilitates grading. Most important is that good classroom assessment practices help struggling writers figure out what they need to do to become competent writers (Bromley, 2007). And assessment practices in writing that include self-assessment build metacognitive skills that can lead to independence.

Three methods typically used to score and evaluate students' writing performance are holistic, primary trait, and analytic scoring (Espin, Weissenburger, & Benson, 2004). Holistic scoring, which can be thought of as norm referenced, assigns a score to a written piece in relation to how that piece compares to others like it. This method, used by teachers in the past and by some today, does not always provide information that is helpful for instruction. Primary trait scoring, which is criterion referenced, provides information about aspects of a specifically designed written piece. An example of a test that uses primary trait scoring is the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). Analytic scoring rates the quality of a written piece on predetermined characteristics or factors applicable to any written piece. Many of the rubrics currently used by classroom teachers are examples of

analytic scoring because they offer specific feedback on such attributes as organization, clarity, sentence structure, and punctuation, which can be used to inform instruction.

The Word Writing CAFÉ adds one measure to the few tools currently available to assess students' writing performance. We found three commonly used tests in our survey of the literature. The Writing Vocabulary Observation Assessment (1993) was designed for young children and is administered individually. It measures the number of words a student writes in isolation. The Test of Written Language (TOWL-3; 1996) was created for use with students in grades 2–12 who have significant hearing losses. It is a norm-referenced test typically administered individually that focuses on errors students make when they write in context about a picture or target words. Curriculum-Based Measurement (CBM; 1985) was developed for students identified for special education to monitor their progress and help teachers make instructional decisions. It is a group test that requires students to write about prompts and specific topics. It measures students' writing performance in terms of total words written, words spelled correctly, correct word sequences, mature words, and large words (Espin et al., 2000, 2004). None of these tests are analytic or necessarily quick or easy to use, and none are designed for use with an entire class of students in grades 1–6, as is the CAFÉ. So the contribution of the CAFÉ as a quick way to tell more about specific aspects of a group's writing is important.

The Word Writing CAFÉ

The Word Writing CAFÉ can be administered to an individual, a small group, or an entire class as a quick way to assess students' out-of-context writing. Leal (2005/2006) suggested that students be taken to a print-free environment, given a grade-level CAFÉ form, and asked to write down as many words as they can think of in 10 minutes. The teacher can prompt students, but after 10 minutes collects the forms and analyzes them (see Figure 1 for a completed form).

The CAFÉ is initially scored based on the number of words attempted. Next, incorrectly spelled words or duplicates are crossed out, and the number of syllables is noted above each correctly spelled word. This information is then included in the appropriate columns on a class coding sheet (Leal, 2005/2006, p. 349)—total words, words correct, number of one-

syllable words, number of two-syllable words, number of three-syllable words, and so on up to words with six or more syllables. For comparison purposes, Leal provides means by grade level (1–6) and gender (Leal, 2005/2006, pp. 344–345). She is conducting a nationwide sampling of diverse populations to create national averages for grades 1–12 for both fall and spring.

According to Leal (2005/2006), the Word Writing CAFÉ has several strengths. It provides information on fluency (total number of words written), accuracy (number of words written correctly), and complexity (number of syllables in words written). Leal posits that the CAFÉ reveals class-wide and individual student interests, strengths, and weaknesses, and allows for instructional planning on specific areas of difficulty. She also says the CAFÉ can track students' thinking and determine difficulties with digraphs and blends.

Leal's (2005/2006) findings on the Word Writing CAFÉ are derived from a small sample of grade 1–6 students within one state. She warns that the test should be used to track students' progress and not to assign writing levels to students. She reminds teachers to administer the test consistently so that results are comparable. For example, she suggests teachers should use only general prompts, give the same time limit for all students, and provide a print-free environment.

How We Used the CAFÉ

We used the CAFÉ as one way to assess the writing of 24 students in grades 3–5 who participated in an after-school tutoring program called Partner Power. The program is a collaboration between a university and an elementary school in which teachers enrolled in masters education programs tutor students struggling in literacy. The tutoring is the practical component of a graduate course in literacy assessment and instruction which the first author (Karen) teaches at the school.

The school receives Title I funding, and 54% of the students are eligible for free or reduced-cost lunches. The students in Partner Power were recommended by their classroom teachers as reading from one to three grades below actual grade level and in need of one-on-one tutoring. The school provided pizza for students before tutoring and a late bus to take students home afterward. There were 10 girls and 14 boys; 7 in third grade, 11 in fourth grade, and 6 in fifth grade (see Table 1). We had no data on their writing performance.

Figure 1
Word Writing CAFÉ Form

Name:		Date: 2/7/06		Teacher:	
baton ²	blocks ¹	snow ¹	brother ²		
mall ¹	comper	summer ²	sis ter ²		
ocean ²	t.v. ²	music ²	mom ¹		
play ¹	friends ¹	stars ¹	dad ¹		
swim	pizza ²	moon ¹	cats ¹		
school ¹	soda ²	outside ²	math ¹		
room ¹	candy ²	food ¹	inside ²		
learn ¹	family ³	apples ²	makeup ²		
color ²	dance ¹	dolphins ²			
art ¹	sing ¹	dogs ¹			
TW: 38	CW: 36	1S: 19	2S: 16	3S: 1	4S: 5S: 6S:

What We Did

The tutoring occurred in one of the school's two adjoining libraries where each tutor and student sat together a library table. Tutors assessed students and provided literacy instruction based on students' interests, strengths, and needs. The Word Writing CAFÉ was one of several literacy assessments administered

over the course of the semester. Tutors were trained in administering the CAFÉ and each one administered it individually to a student.

In an ideal situation, a print-free environment like a gymnasium or cafeteria is best. However, because both these areas were in use when Partner Power met, we remained in the libraries for the assessment. We

Table 1
Raw Data

Grade level	Gender	Total words	Words correct	Percent accuracy	One-syllable words	Two-syllable words	Three-syllable words	Four-syllable words	Five-syllable words	Correlation to Leal grade level means
3	F	92	84	91	73	11	-	-	-	3
3	F	50	44	88	41	3	-	-	-	1
3	F	49	38	78	26	12	-	-	-	1
3	F	36	32	89	31	1	-	-	-	1
3	F	35	29	83	22	7	-	-	-	1
3	M	29	27	93	25	2	-	-	-	<1
3	M	27	13	48	13	-	-	-	-	1
4	M	88	73	83	53	18	2	-	-	2
4	M	74	65	88	60	4	1	-	-	2
4	F	62	50	81	42	7	1	-	-	3
4	F	50	48	96	41	7	-	-	-	1
4	M	48	45	94	42	2	1	-	-	1
4	M	51	45	88	43	2	-	-	-	1
4	M	45	39	87	22	9	6	-	-	1
4	M	38	38	100	33	5	-	-	-	1
4	F	38	36	95	19	17	-	-	-	1
4	M	37	34	92	30	3	1	-	-	<1
4	F	33	25	76	18	8	-	-	-	<1
5	M	108	99	92	89	10	-	-	-	4
5	M	100	88	88	51	28	7	2	-	4
5	F	81	76	94	61	15	-	-	-	3
5	M	48	40	83	10	19	3	4	-	1
5	M	41	34	83	20	12	2	-	-	1
5	M	24	17	71	11	6	-	-	-	<1

seated students facing away from book shelves where they might copy words and reminded them that we wanted to see how many words they could write themselves. Tutors observed students to determine if they seemed to use the environment to aid their writing. After giving the CAFÉ, each tutor wrote a short report analyzing the assessment.

To obtain our data, we first checked each completed student CAFÉ form for accuracy. We tallied results (see Table 1) and calculated means for fluency, accuracy, and complexity by grade (Table 2) and gender (Table 3). Then, two of us independently reviewed the completed student CAFÉ forms, listing patterns we found and our observations. We compared lists, discussed minor differences, and came to consensus. Next, we independently reviewed the tutors' analyses and used the same process to reach consensus. Last, we tallied occurrences of common patterns in students' word writing and examples of patterns (Table 4).

What We Found From Using the CAFÉ

The following findings are limited by the size of our sample but provide some new and interesting data for classroom teachers who may want to use the CAFÉ to assess word writing and plan instruction. When comparisons are made with Leal's data, it should be noted that our students were struggling readers and writers and her data is derived from heterogeneous classrooms in three schools in one state.

Words Written

Our findings are represented graphically in tables 1, 2, and 3. Analysis revealed the following points.

- Accuracy (words correct) was 76% or higher for all but two students (see Table 1). This was well below Leal's grade-level averages, and fluency (words written) was also quite low compared to Leal's data (see Table 2).

Table 2
Means by Grade Level

Grade	Number of students	Total words	Words correct	Number of one-syllable words	Number of two-syllable words
3 (3)	7 (44)	45.43 (93.45)	38.14 (78.93)	33.00 (59.93)	5.14 (15.70)
4 (4)	11 (42)	51.27 (120.76)	45.27 (108.24)	36.64 (82.79)	7.45 (21.17)
5 (5)	6 (49)	67.00 (128.45)	59.00 (118.63)	40.33 (87.29)	14.83 (26.71)
Total	24 (135)				

Note. Data from Leal's (2005/2006) Table 1, p. 344, appear in parentheses.

Table 3
Means by Gender

Grade	Gender	Number of students	Total words	Words correct	Number of one-syllable words	Number of two-syllable words
3	F	5 (26)	52.60 (94.77)	45.40 (77.88)	38.60 (59.04)	6.80 (16.35)
3	M	2 (18)	28.00 (91.56)	20.00 (79.00)	1.00 (61.22)	1.00 (14.78)
4	F	4 (16)	45.75 (149.00)	39.75 (140.31)	30.00 (104.75)	9.75 (30.38)
4	M	7 (26)	54.42 (103.38)	48.43 (88.50)	6.14 (69.27)	6.14 (15.50)
5	F	1 (26)	81.00 (139.81)	76.00 (131.00)	61.00 (96.92)	15.00 (27.35)
5	M	5 (23)	64.20 (115.61)	55.60 (104.65)	15.00 (76.39)	15.00 (26.00)

Note. Data from Leal's (2005/2006) Table 1, p. 344, appear in parentheses.

- Most students wrote predominantly one- and two-syllable words with few writing longer words (see Table 1). Leal's grade 3–5 students correctly wrote words up to three syllables and had some success in writing four- and five-syllable words (see Leal, 2005/2006, p. 345).
- There were increases over the grade levels in all categories (fluency, accuracy, and complexity) that mirrored Leal's data (see Table 2).
- Means for total words written (fluency), words correct (accuracy), and number of one-, two-, and three-syllable words (complexity) were much lower than in Leal's sample (see Table 2).
- Overall, girls ($n = 10$) did better than boys ($n = 14$) except the fourth-grade girls ($n = 4$), whose fluency and accuracy were somewhat lower than the boys ($n = 7$) see Table 3). This could be because

there were more boys than girls, or because one fourth-grade boy wrote many words and scored 100% in accuracy. Leal found girls did better than boys at the fourth- and fifth-grade levels, but girls in third grade were somewhat below boys in accuracy (see Table 3), again possibly because of unequal numbers or anomalous scores of one or two students.

Patterns in Written Words

Next, we discuss patterns in the content and structure of the words students wrote (see Table 4). We defined a pattern as a repetition of two or more words of a particular type that appeared together either horizontally or vertically. The first five patterns represent the content of words written and the remaining patterns represent the structure of words written.

Patterns are described by total occurrences, occurrences according to gender, number of students

Table 4
Occurrences of Pattern, Occurrences by Gender, and Number of Students Who Demonstrated Pattern in Words Written

Pattern	Total occurrence of pattern	Occurrences of pattern by gender (M/F)	Number of students who demonstrated pattern	Student examples
Related words	115	67/48	10	sea/blue, bed/sleep, tree/seed, deer/doe, dog/puppy, school/class, cone/cube, spelling/math, overhead, keyboard, clock, dictionary, computer, books, copier, paper
Words in categories	76	44/32	19	baseball, Jets, Yankees, football, dog, fish, bird, turtle, hunting, gun, beaver, log, month, day, year, hour, pink, red, blue, yellow
Word opposites	50	26/24	12	men's/girls', home/school, man/woman, sun/moon, hot/cold, bus/walk, sun/rain, today/yesterday, can/can't, up/down, go/stop
Complete thoughts	29	17/12	9	Green Day, ice cold, man of steel, hot tub, Valentine's Day
Synonyms	24	18/6	5	cap/hat, house/home, rock/stone, jail/prison
One-syllable words	804	488/316	11	cat, mall, dog, fun, some, came, hat, pin
Nouns	655	411/244	8	bird, TV, school, owl, grass, rag, hat, block, chair, calendar, teacher, movie, table
Multisyllabic words	238	145/93	9	hammerhead, vocabulary, reading, baton, brother, inside, family
Initial consonant repetition	86	56/30	14	ride, reading, running, they, than, that, pink/pig, grass/green, meat/mean, then/them, why/what, fish/fine
Word families	86	52/34	13	bat/fat/cat, dog/fog, hall/mall, grass/pass, me/see, fun/run/sun, walk/talk
Plurals	81	53/28	5	books, wires, lobsters, friends, dolphins, blocks, dogs
Compound words	37	26/11	6	baseball, basketball, homework, home, work, bathroom, bedroom, backyard
Capitalization	241 incorrect 31 correct	160/81 21/10	12 10	bahamas, Numbers, valentine's, Pink, Pencil, Time, Month, June, May, Pillows, Pet, Stairs, Jets, Yankees, Mets, Old Navy, Italy, Buffalo, Binghamton
Combination of parts of speech	21	11/10	4	snow, reading, fat
Homophones	20	14/6	10	be/bee, see/sea, meet/meat, there/their, than/then, son/sun
Apostrophes	16 incorrect 7 correct	4/9 3/7	6	book's, men's, girl's, dog's, book's, sheet's, it's, can't
Phonemic spelling	11	8/3	2	bahomas, kittins, elovator, telephone
Handwriting	12	2/0	2	legibility

who demonstrated the pattern, and examples of words student wrote. Occurrences of all patterns (except apostrophes; see Table 4) were higher for boys than girls probably because there were more boys than girls in our sample. The most often occurring patterns exhibited by at least half the students were “words in categories,” “word opposites,” “initial consonant repetition,” “word families,” and “incorrect capitalization.” Because of the small sample size and unequal numbers, it is difficult to make generalizations by gender or grade level.

However, we found a surprising range in the writing skills and other behaviors the CAFÉ revealed that go well beyond Leal’s (2005/2006) observations. We include selected comments from tutors’ reports, our thoughts about patterns in students’ writing, and potential avenues for instruction where appropriate.

Related Words. The most often occurring pattern (115), used by several students (10), was writing two or more related words next to each other. One tutor commented, “I was impressed with his ability to write words that go together, like *doe* and *deer* and *bed* and *sleep*, which showed me he could think beyond isolated words.” Noting this and occurrences of other conceptually related words (next four patterns below) resulted in the use of different vocabulary games by several tutors to build on students’ existing strengths in word associations. One expressed, “[Maybe] I can use what he knows about connecting words to one another to develop this skill further and increase his vocabulary.”

Words in Categories. The next most often occurring pattern (76), with nearly all students (19) exhibiting it, was the ability to write three or more words in a row that could be considered a class (such as sports, animals, or colors). In addition to providing a window on vocabulary knowledge, these categories often helped determine student interests and avenues for tutors to explore in instruction. For example, one tutor noted, “I realized a pattern with words revolving around sports and I am now more aware of his thinking and interest in sports. This could be a way to interest him in reading.” The tutor then found several biographies of baseball players from which the student chose three to read. The student also used the Internet to find information on the three players and write a “scouting” report on one player.

Word Opposites. This pattern occurred 50 times, with half the students (12) writing pairs of opposites. One tutor said, “The fact that she wrote the opposites for several words showed me she has knowledge of antonyms. I can build on this by playing a word game of opposites with her and extending into synonyms and homonyms.” To do this, the tutor began with happy and when the student supplied sad, the two made lists of other synonyms for both, such as pleased and glad for happy, and dejected and downcast for sad. This built on the student’s strength and helped her learn about shades of meaning among words.

Complete Thoughts. Several occurrences (29) showed that some students (9) wrote complete thoughts. One tutor said, “It was interesting to read her words and imagine what her thought process must have been.... She wrote phrases and was organized as opposed to writing random words.” One student wrote complete thoughts in the same box and the tutor noted, “Either he didn’t follow directions or he is not aware where one word stops and another starts in oral and written language.” Noticing words that represented complete thoughts gave tutors information about students’ metacognition, which suggested they possessed problem-solving abilities in completing the task this way.

Synonyms. This pattern occurred only a few times (24) for a few students (5). One tutor noted, “Although he doesn’t appear to have a wide speaking vocabulary, it is evident from the synonyms he wrote that his vocabulary is broader than I originally thought.” The tutor pointed this skill out to the student when she reviewed the words he had written with him.

One-Syllable Words. This pattern appeared most often (804), with every student writing one-syllable words and nearly half the students (11) writing several in a row. One tutor commented, “I think she has some concerns about spelling and doesn’t want to write anything unless it is spelled perfectly. But, using the one-syllable words she wrote, I can show her how to build on them to write compound words.” Another tutor wrote, “Toward the end she attempted to write more difficult words. I think she is somewhat afraid to take risks, which could affect her writing—especially her creativity.” Another tutor noted, “He could benefit from free writing in a journal to build confidence and handwriting fluency. I need to help him think

about word parts and how a word sounds and looks so he can feel better about spelling longer words.”

Nouns. This structure pattern appeared next most often (655), with some students (8) writing only nouns. One tutor observed, “I noticed she seemed to stick to easy and common words that she could spell.” Another tutor noted, “All his words were nouns. That tells me he may be able to picture things but has difficulty describing them. I need to help him understand adjectives and adverbs.” Another tutor noted the absence of words other than nouns and wrote, “I am going to have him read some children’s poetry to experience different types and uses of language.” Another observation was, “Of course, the lack of variety in this student’s written vocabulary may be related to the type of task this is.”

Multisyllabic Words. This pattern occurred 238 times, with only about a third of the students (9) writing three-syllable words and only two students writing four-syllable words. One tutor noted, “His ability to write multisyllabic words was close to the average for his grade level. He is a thoughtful student who considers topics and word choice.” Another tutor noted the absence of multisyllabic words and wrote, “My student was probably trying to fill as many boxes as she could and so wrote the easiest words she could think of.”

Initial Consonant Repetition. Over half the students (14) wrote words in a row that began with the same letter (86). This signaled to one tutor that the student was using this pattern to help him think of words to write. The tutor said, “My student had somewhat of an idea how to make the most of the 10 minutes by writing as many words as he could that started with the same letters.” This behavior suggests that these students may have used some problem-solving abilities to complete the task.

Word Families. About half the students (13) wrote two or more words together that rhymed (86). One tutor saw a possibility for instruction from this and said, “She wrote rhyming words, which shows she understands how to use onsets and rimes. Now I can show her how to add digraphs and blends to extend her vocabulary.”

Plurals. There were a few occurrences (81) by a few students (5) of plurals written in a row. One tutor observed, “He made many of his words in plural, but did not write them in singular. I don’t think that he has a

great awareness of words as building on themselves.” Another observation was, “My student could have written plurals but didn’t. I need to show him how to add common endings [like] -s, -ed, and -ing to his words.”

Compound Words. There were some occurrences (37) by a few students (6) of compound words. One tutor said, “She wrote several compound words and then the two words that made them.” This prompted the observation “She figured out how to fill more blanks more easily, which tells me she has good thinking and problem-solving skills (maybe better than her word writing ability)!” Other students who wrote compound words did not write the two words individually and one tutor commented, “I need to show her how compound words are formed and how to find little words in big words.”

Capitalization. Using capital letters incorrectly occurred often (241 times) and by nearly half the students (12). One tutor said, “It seems he understands that proper nouns need to be capitalized, but he was unsure of what [qualifies] as a proper noun.” One student capitalized most of the words he wrote and another “capitalized his B’s more than any other letter.” Although no points were lost for incorrect capitalization of common nouns, noting this pattern caused some tutors to plan lessons on common and proper nouns using appropriate children’s literature and nonfiction Internet selections. Several students (10) used capitals correctly (31 times). One tutor noted, “Even though I can’t count the names he wrote, I see that he tends to use capital letters when he writes proper nouns. I will point this out to him as a skill he possesses.”

Combination of Parts of Speech. A few students (4) wrote a combination of nouns, verbs, adjectives, and other parts of speech (21). In noticing this, a tutor wrote, “He is familiar with various parts of speech.” Another said, “She has range in her writing vocabulary and I am going to point this out to her and praise her for it when we review what she wrote.”

Homophones. A few occurrences (20) of homophones written by several students (10) showed their ability to change one letter in a word to make a different word. This prompted the observation by one tutor, “This shows he can manipulate letters in short words, so I want to build on this strength and do some ‘making words’ activities with him. This could help his spelling improve as he sees how letters go together to spell words.” In fact, many tutors used “making words”

(Cunningham & Allington, 2007) to build vocabulary and strengthen students' awareness of how letters go together to spell words.

Apostrophes. There were only a few instances of correct use of apostrophes to show ownership (7), with many more instances of incorrect use (16). Only a few students (3) wrote contractions. One tutor said, "I was impressed with his use of contractions, but also wondered why he didn't write the words that make up the contractions." Another observation included a plan for instruction, "I will plan a lesson on making contractions from two words using colored markers. I'll have him use them to cross out the letters that disappear in forming contractions."

Phonemic Spelling. Two tutors noted the phonemic spelling (11 instances) of their students. One tutor said, "My student will sometimes spell words the way he says them." The other tutor noted, "I feel as though he has a good grasp of phonics. He seemed to sound the word out in his head and write the letters that matched the sounds he heard. We will keep a list of misspelled words and make a point to incorporate them into our writing." Every student but one spelled some words incorrectly. Nearly every tutor commented on these misspellings. One tutor noted, "This child has very good ideas, but seems to lack the confidence to put them on paper and avoids taking risks in his writing. I want to help him overcome his fear of being incorrect."

Handwriting. Two tutors noted handwriting by boys that was close to illegible. One tutor wrote, "His letter formation, spacing, horizontal alignment, letter height, and 'scale' consistency between letters in the same words all show a jumpy irregularity. He seems to have very little graphic sense of the space above or below the line that a word might fill." All students used print and for several of them neatness was an issue. For example, "His writing was irregular. His letters were formed incorrectly and there was no size difference in the way he wrote small and tall letters. He used a stubby pencil. I want to try him with a longer pencil and see if that makes a difference."

What We Learned From Using the CAFÉ

Even though tutors' observations are based in some cases on only a few words written by students, administering the CAFÉ and carefully analyzing its results

sensitized these tutors to the importance of looking for patterns in writing that might reveal interesting information about students and possible areas for instruction. Thus, we make the following observations, and offer suggestions for adapting the CAFÉ for more reliable classroom use.

Ability in Handwriting and Accuracy in Spelling May Affect Results. We noticed that students worked at different rates, often not fast enough to write a large number of words in the time limit they had. We wondered if handwriting instruction might help improve students' writing speed and legibility. A desire to be correct affects results as well. One tutor said, "Even though it is not a test of spelling, it shows which students will take risks and write words they know but aren't sure how to spell. It gives the teacher words that he or she will need to work on with the student." We also noticed the boxes were too small for some students who wrote in large print. So to ensure that younger students and those who have difficulty with handwriting have enough room to write, the boxes on the CAFÉ form should be enlarged (See Figure 2). Six rows of three boxes on a sheet provide 18 large boxes that allow more room to write words. Each student would need several sheets of this larger form.

Difficulty Understanding CAFÉ Directions May Affect Results. Leal's (2005/2006) directions contained many "do's" and "don'ts," which seemed to confuse some students and could impede the writing of appropriate words. For example, among several "don'ts," students were told not to write proper nouns. However, some students wrote them even though they were told not to before the test and again during the test. Directions that are confusing or misunderstood because of too many prompts or "don'ts" may cause a student to spend time thinking, write more slowly and deliberately, produce fewer words, or stop writing altogether. We suggest simplified directions with fewer prompts and "don'ts" to make them easier for students to understand (see Figure 3). We also note that it may be a better measure of word writing to follow the 10-minute restriction, but put no restrictions on the words students write. Then, an analysis of all written words that identifies patterns can inform future spelling and writing instruction.

Reviewing the CAFÉ With Students May Affect the Complexity of Words Written the Next Time the Assessment Is Given. Leal (2005/2006) suggests,

Figure 2
Revised Form With Larger Boxes

Name: _____ Date: _____

TW	CW	1S	2S	3S	4S	5S	6S

“making students a part of the evaluation process to track...correct words” (p. 348), and we encouraged tutors to review the completed form with students. First, we saw value in talking with students about the strengths and patterns in their word writing. This allowed students to be part of the assessment process and gave them valuable feedback. Second, we did not plan to administer the test again. Note, however, that if the CAFÉ is used regularly to determine progress, results may be skewed because familiarity with scoring and knowing that multisyllabic words are important may affect what students write.

Scoring May Vary According to Interpretation.

For example, homonyms and capital letters can cause confusion in scoring. Leal (2005/2006) stipulates names of people may not be counted. We noticed that some students wrote words like bill, raven, and pat that could be considered proper nouns and marked incorrect, but we counted them because they did not begin with capital letters and could be considered nouns and a verb. Because some students

used capital letters inconsistently, this interpretation may have inflated our scores. Of course, allowing proper nouns and not discounting incorrect capitalization could raise students' scores.

The Time Limit and Test Format May Cue Some Students to Write One-Syllable Words.

When students are told to write as many words as they can in 10 minutes, they may write more one-syllable words and fewer multisyllabic words. One tutor said, “She wrote mostly one-syllable words. Afterward, I asked her to think about some words that have at least two syllables. She wrote about 10 or so...some with three but most with two syllables. This was evidence to me that she could do it but chose to try to fill the blanks with short, easy-to-write words.” So this student could write multisyllabic words but recognized the time constraints of the task and decided to write short rather than long words. To encourage students to write multisyllabic words, it may help to enlarge the boxes on the CAFÉ form, because smaller boxes may constrain the writing of longer words.

Figure 3
Revised CAFÉ Directions

1. Make enough copies of the CAFÉ form for students to have two or three each. Use large boxes (see Figure 2) for young students or those with handwriting difficulties. Use smaller boxes for older students who write legibly.
2. Give the CAFÉ in a room with limited print on the walls, like the gym. If this is not possible, seat students facing away from print (e.g., facing a print-free wall or windows with shades drawn).
3. Give each student two copies of the form and two sharpened pencils with erasers.
4. Use the following directions.
 - Today I want you to show me how many different and interesting words you can write in 10 minutes. I won't grade this, but please do your best work. First, write your name and the date at the top of the first page.
 - Only write words in English, not in another language.
 - Write just **one** word in a box, and write neatly so I can read it.
 - Try your best even if you're not sure how to spell a word.
 - If you want to write numbers, spell them out.
 - Don't write names, abbreviations, or the words at the top of the paper.
 - Write words that do the following:
 - Tell what you like to do and where you like to go.
 - Tell what you can see, hear, smell, taste, or feel.
 - Tell what is in your house or school.
 - If you run out of boxes, raise your hand and I'll give you another sheet.
5. Before beginning, ask, “Are there any questions?” If you are asked about spelling, tell students to try their best—you can't tell them how to spell.
6. Say, “I will tell you when you have 3 minutes left. You can begin now.”
7. Give the 3-minute warning, and give the general prompts above again.
8. With 30 seconds left, say, “Finish writing your last word and put your pencils down.” Collect papers after 10 minutes is up.

Note. Adapted from Leal (2005/2006)

Students May View List Writing and Writing Connected Text Differently. Thus, they may exhibit different behaviors in completing the two tasks. Along with giving the CAFÉ, asking students to write on a specific topic like “My favorite thing to do on Saturday” or “My best friend” could help assess skill in sentence and paragraph writing. Analyzing the writing of connected text and using the CAFÉ, which measures writing in isolation, might be a good way to compare writing behaviors and form a more balanced picture of a student’s writing from which to plan appropriate writing instruction.

Testing Students in the Library or a Classroom Can Work. Leal (2005/2006) recommended administering the CAFÉ in a print-free environment, and a gym or cafeteria is ideal although not always practical. In a library or classroom, however, students can sit at tables or desks with their backs to book shelves or bulletin boards to limit exposure to print. It is important to tell students that the goal is to provide information about their writing to help determine what to teach them. Thus, they should write only those words they can pull from their own memories. If a student begins to write words from the environment, the student can be reminded to just write words he or she knows. If a reminder doesn’t work, words copied from or prompted by the environment should not be counted. Thus, the CAFÉ can be given in a regular classroom as long as the teacher prepares students and monitors them. Other possibilities are to face desks toward a print-free wall or windows with blinds closed or have students stand manila folders upright on their desks to block nearby print.

Step Into the CAFÉ

The Word Writing CAFÉ complements other available writing tests. It can provide valuable information

about the accuracy, fluency, and complexity of a student’s writing vocabulary. Although it is a measure of words written in isolation, our data show that it also provides valuable information about knowledge of written language, interests, thinking, and problem-solving abilities. Identifying patterns, in words spelled correctly and in words not counted, can provide information for making decisions about writing instruction. With adaptations, the CAFÉ can occasionally be used in the regular classroom or as a beginning and end-of-year test to show students their progress. It is a quick and easy-to-administer tool that should be supplemented with an analysis of connected text to provide balanced information about student writing. We’re glad we accepted Leal’s (2005/2006) invitation to try out the CAFÉ, and we suggest you try it, too!

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