

Riverside Insights

Official Guidance for UK/Ireland Administrations

Woodcock-Johnson V (WJ V) — Literacy Subtests: Americanisms and Cultural Adaptations

Purpose of This Guidance

This document provides official guidance from Riverside Insights to UK and Ireland practitioners administering the WJ V literacy subtests. It addresses items containing U.S.-specific language, spelling conventions, cultural references, or vocabulary that may be unfamiliar to UK/Irish students, and clarifies which items may be adapted, which alternative responses should be accepted as correct, and how to handle edge cases.

This guidance has been prepared in consultation with SASC. SASC is a standard-setting group which promotes good practice and monitors standards for SPLD assessors and practitioners. <https://www.sasc.org.uk>

General Principles

Audio Recordings:

No WJ V subtests are available with a British English audio recording. For subtests that include audio recordings, examiners are guided to read the instructions or words aloud to the student rather than playing the audio recording. This approach reduces the impact of American pronunciation and phrasing on student performance and is the recommended method of administration for UK and Ireland practitioners.

Examiner-Spoken Instructions and Re-administration:

Several subtests permit the examiner to speak instructions if the examinee experiences difficulty. This is acceptable across all tests where it is permitted by the standard administration instructions. Assessors should use their professional judgement to determine when a student's difficulty appears to stem from unfamiliarity with U.S.-specific content rather than a genuine skill deficit. In such cases, the examiner may rephrase or clarify instructions using culturally appropriate language, provided this does not alter the skill being assessed.

Cultural Issues in Vocabulary Understanding:

If an assessor believes a student has failed an item due to unfamiliarity with a culturally specific term rather than a lack of the underlying skill, the assessor should use their professional judgement. In most cases the appropriate course of action is to score the item as correct and proceed to the next item, consistent with the approach set out below. Assessors should note any such decisions in their session records.

Category C — Items that can and should be adapted: Where an item contains a U.S.-specific term or spelling that has a UK equivalent (e.g. "fall" for autumn, "criticize" for criticise), the assessor may substitute the culturally equivalent UK term when reading the question aloud or when accepting written or oral responses. Where a written stimulus also contains the U.S. term, guidance is provided on a per-item basis.

Score as Correct — Items that cannot reasonably be adapted: Where an item involves U.S.-specific content that cannot be meaningfully replaced (e.g. "dime"), the assessor should award credit automatically and proceed to the next item. This prevents students being penalised for content unrelated to the skill being assessed.

Basal and Ceiling Rules: Awarding credit for unadaptable items may allow a student to progress further in the test than they otherwise would. This is acceptable and does not compromise the validity of the assessment. The purpose of basal and ceiling rules is to give students the best opportunity to demonstrate their abilities, reduce unnecessary testing fatigue, and maintain standardisation while accommodating content differences. Allowing continuation to additional items ensures that performance reflects true academic ability rather than familiarity with U.S.-specific content.

If adaptation is not practicable: If any item cannot be adapted as suggested due to the complexity required of the assessor in the moment, the assessor should always default to awarding credit and moving to the next item. The basal and ceiling rules will continue to operate as stated above, and this approach ensures that no student is disadvantaged by content that falls outside their cultural experience.

WJ V ACH

Picture Vocabulary

Examiner reads items aloud.

Item / Reference	Issue Description	Official Guidance
Item 12	<i>'Zipper' — UK English equivalent is 'zip'.</i>	Accept both responses: Accept "zip" as a correct answer in addition to "zipper." Both terms refer to the same object; the U.S. term "zipper" is not in common use in the UK and students should not be penalised for providing the standard UK equivalent.

Spelling

Examiner reads items aloud.

Item / Reference	Issue Description	Official Guidance
Item 51	<i>'Criticize' — standard UK spelling is 'criticise'.</i>	Accept both spellings: Accept "criticise" as correct in addition to "criticize." Both spellings are standard variants of the same word; UK students are taught "criticise" and should not be penalised for using it.

Sentence Writing Accuracy

For this subtest, examiners should read instructions and words aloud to the student rather than playing the audio recording. However, the introduction uses examiner-spoken wording that includes U.S.-specific terminology.

Item / Reference	Issue Description	Official Guidance
Intro 2, 4 & 5	<i>Spoken wording uses 'capitalized' and 'period', which are not standard UK terms.</i>	Adapt spoken wording: When delivering the introduction, replace "capitalized" with "capital letters" and "period" with "full stop." These are the standard UK equivalents and will be immediately understood by students. The instructions themselves are not scored, so this adaptation does not affect standardisation.

Sentence Reading Fluency

There is no audio recording for this subtest. As this is a timed reading fluency task, there is no practicable way to identify during administration whether any individual sentence has been misunderstood due to an Americanism. There are two items which have been identified with items with Americanisms these are: "gas pumps" (UK equivalent is *petrol pump*) - page 3 and "a pitcher" (UK equivalent is a *jug*) - page 8.

After the test is complete, it is suggested that the examiner ask the student about whether any sentences did not seem to make sense to them. If the student is able to identify specific sentences where they experienced confusion, this should be noted in the assessment report. The report should state that the student's score may be lower than their true ability due to cultural impact rather than a deficit in reading fluency skill.

Based on the nature of the sentences in this subtest, it is highly unlikely that enough sentences would be misunderstood to significantly impact the overall score. Any cultural effect is expected to be minimal.

Sentence Writing Fluency

Examiner reads items aloud.

Item / Reference	Issue Description	Official Guidance
Item 28	<i>'Dime' — a U.S. coin not used in the UK.</i>	Score as correct and proceed: The word "dime" refers to a U.S. ten-cent coin with no UK equivalent. Students cannot reasonably be expected to know this term. Award full credit for this item and continue to the next item. Basal and ceiling rules remain in effect.
Item 33	<i>'Tire' — UK spelling is 'tyre'.</i>	Accept both spellings: Accept "tyre" as correct in addition to "tire." Both spellings refer to the same object; "tyre" is the standard UK spelling and students should not be penalised for using it.

Word Reading Fluency

This is a timed test of reading fluency. Guidance below applies where students experience difficulty with specific items due to cultural unfamiliarity.

As a timed fluency test, individual items cannot be skipped or substituted without affecting standardisation. However, if a student pauses or struggles on an item due to unfamiliarity with a culturally specific word (rather than a decoding difficulty), the assessor should note this and use professional judgement when interpreting results. The following items are flagged:

Item / Reference	Issue Description	Official Guidance
Page 1 — 'dime'	<i>'Dime' is a U.S. coin not in common use in the UK.</i>	Assessor note: If the student hesitates on or misreads "dime," consider whether this reflects decoding difficulty or cultural unfamiliarity. As this is a timed fluency task, no item-level adaptation is possible. Record any observed difficulty in

Item / Reference	Issue Description	Official Guidance
		session notes. Where results are interpreted, assessors should note that unfamiliarity with this term may have affected fluency score.
Page 4 — ‘quarter’ (paired with ‘penny’)	<i>‘Quarter’ in U.S. currency context (25 cents) differs from UK usage; pairing with ‘penny’ may cause confusion.</i>	Assessor note: While “quarter” exists in UK English, its use as a coin denomination (25 cents) is U.S.-specific. Students may associate “quarter” with a fraction rather than a coin. As this is a timed fluency task, no item-level adaptation is possible. Record any observed difficulty in session notes and note when interpreting results.

Academic Vocabulary

Questions are read aloud by the examiner.

Item / Reference	Issue Description	Official Guidance
Item 10	<i>Question asks: ‘What is the word for summer, fall, winter, and spring?’ — ‘fall’ is not used in the UK; the UK term is ‘autumn’.</i>	Adapt spoken wording and accept both responses: When reading the question aloud, replace “fall” with “autumn” (e.g. “What is the word for summer, autumn, winter, and spring?”). If the student is asked to identify or produce the collective term for the seasons, accept “seasons” as correct. “Fall” should not be required as part of any correct response.

Academic Facts

Questions are read aloud by the examiner.

Item / Reference	Issue Description	Official Guidance
Item 16	<i>Item relates to punctuation; UK term is ‘full stop’ rather than ‘period’.</i>	Accept both terms: Accept “full stop” as a correct response in addition to “period.” Both terms refer to the same punctuation mark. UK students are taught “full stop” and should not be penalised for using it.
Item 29	<i>Item uses the term ‘three-fourths’; the standard UK expression is ‘three quarters’.</i>	Accept both terms: Accept “three quarters” as a correct response in addition to “three-fourths.” Both expressions refer to the same fraction (3/4). The UK term is “three quarters” and students should not be penalised for using it.

Story Comprehension

For this subtest, examiners should read instructions and words aloud to the student rather than playing the audio recording.

Item / Reference	Issue Description	Official Guidance
Story 9 Presentation & Item 1	<i>Contains measurements in feet and inches; metric units are more commonly used in the UK.</i>	Assessor note: Feet and inches are still taught and used in the UK, particularly in everyday contexts (e.g. personal height). Students should not be wholly unfamiliar with these units. If a student's response is affected by unfamiliarity with imperial measurement rather than a comprehension difficulty, use professional judgement. If the item cannot be meaningfully answered due to this unfamiliarity, score as correct and proceed.
Story 12 Presentation	<i>Contains measurements in feet and inches; metric units are more commonly used in the UK.</i>	Assessor note: As above for Story 9. Feet and inches are taught in UK schools and students should have some familiarity with the units, though metric is more commonly encountered. If a student's comprehension is genuinely impeded by the imperial measurement context rather than by language comprehension difficulty, use professional judgement and score as correct if needed.
Story 13	<i>Uses Fahrenheit for temperature; the UK uses Celsius (also known as Centigrade).</i>	Assessor note: Fahrenheit is not in common use in the UK. If the story or item requires the student to interpret or work with a Fahrenheit temperature figure, and this appears to affect their response, the assessor should use professional judgement. If the item cannot be meaningfully answered due to this unfamiliarity, score as correct and proceed.
Story 14	<i>'Interns' is not used in reference to junior doctors in the UK; 'doctor' is the more common general term.</i>	Assessor note: In the UK, junior hospital doctors are not referred to as "interns." If this term causes confusion and appears to affect a student's comprehension of the story or their response to an item, the assessor may clarify that "intern" refers to a junior doctor (resident doctor). This clarification does not alter the comprehension skill being assessed. Note any such clarification in session records.

Commented [JK1]: I don't have access to the story to see the context of this but junior doctors are now called resident doctors. It may be that in the context of this comment 'resident doctors' is put in brackets after junior doctors. If this is new guidance then it should be up to date and reflect current terminology

WJ V COG

Oral Vocabulary

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For this subtest, examiners should read instructions and words aloud to the student rather than playing the audio recording. No further item-level adaptations are required.

Story Recall

For this subtest, examiners should read instructions and words aloud to the student rather than playing the audio recording. No further item-level adaptations are required.

Verbal Attention

For this subtest, examiners should read instructions and words aloud to the student rather than playing the audio recording. No further item-level adaptations are required.

General Information

Questions are spoken by the examiner. Some items may be more difficult in a UK context due to differences in vocabulary or cultural knowledge. Assessors should use professional judgement: if a student's difficulty appears to stem from cultural unfamiliarity rather than a lack of the underlying knowledge, the assessor should score the item as correct and proceed.

Where? Items

Item / Reference	Issue Description	Official Guidance
Item 6	'Faucet' — the UK term is 'tap'.	Adapt spoken wording: If the question uses the word "faucet," the examiner may substitute "tap" when reading aloud. Alternatively, accept "tap" as a correct response. Both terms refer to the same object.
Item 13	'Marrow' — in the UK, 'marrow' primarily refers to a vegetable (a large courgette), which may cause confusion.	Assessor note: The item uses "marrow" in its anatomical sense (bone marrow). UK students may associate the word primarily with the vegetable. If a student appears confused by the term, the examiner may clarify that the question is asking about the substance found inside bones. Note any such clarification in session records.
Item 23	'Finial' — in the UK, a finial can refer to a decorative feature on top of a building, which may differ from the U.S. context.	Assessor note: The term "finial" is used in both U.S. and UK contexts, though the specific reference may differ. If a student provides a UK-context answer that is architecturally or decoratively accurate (e.g. referring to a spire or rooftop ornament), assessors should use professional judgement as to whether this demonstrates the relevant knowledge. Note any such decision in session records.

What? Items

Item / Reference	Issue Description	Official Guidance
Item 12	<i>'Yardstick' — has a very different meaning in the UK (a standard of comparison). In the WJ IV Easel, 'or metre stick' appeared in brackets alongside 'yardstick'.</i>	Adapt spoken wording: When reading this item aloud, include "or metre stick" after "yardstick," consistent with the WJ IV Easel convention. Accept responses referring to either a yardstick or a metre stick as correct. This ensures students are not disadvantaged by the UK meaning of the word "yardstick."
Item 20	<i>'Cistern' — 'tank' is more commonly used in the UK, though 'cistern' is also understood in plumbing contexts.</i>	Accept both terms: Accept "tank" as a correct response in addition to "cistern." While "cistern" is understood in the UK, "tank" is the more commonly used everyday term. Students should not be penalised for providing the more familiar UK equivalent.

WJ V VTL

Animal-Number Sequencing

For this subtest, examiners should read instructions and words aloud to the student rather than playing the audio recording. No further item-level adaptations are required.

Segmentation

The examiner speaks instructions for this subtest.

UK pronunciations: Assessors should mark responses according to UK pronunciations rather than the U.S. pronunciations given in the scoring guide. Where a student produces a phonologically accurate segmentation based on standard UK English pronunciation, this should be accepted as correct.

Item / Reference	Issue Description	Official Guidance
Introduction 4	<i>'Dime' is used as an example word in the introduction; it is not in common use in the UK.</i>	Assessor note: The word "dime" appears in the introduction as a practice example, not as a scored item. If a student is unfamiliar with the word, the examiner may briefly clarify that it is a type of coin, as the purpose of the introduction is to demonstrate the segmentation task rather than to assess vocabulary knowledge. This clarification does not affect scoring.

Sentence Repetition

For this subtest, examiners should read instructions and words aloud to the student rather than playing the audio recording. Examiner may also speak instructions. No further item-level adaptations are required.

Sound Deletion

For this subtest, examiners should read instructions and words aloud to the student rather than playing the audio recording. Examiner may also speak instructions.

Item / Reference	Issue Description	Official Guidance
Item 28	<i>Task: Say 'fast' without the /s/. U.S. expected answer: 'fat'. In some UK regional accents, the answer may be 'fart' due to differences in vowel pronunciation.</i>	Accept both responses: In non-rhotic accents common across much of the UK, removing /s/ from "fast" can produce "fart" (where the 'a' is pronounced as a long vowel, /fɑ:st/). This is a phonologically valid response in those accents and reflects accurate phoneme deletion. Accept "fart" as correct in addition to "fat" where the student's response is consistent with their regional accent. Assessors should note the student's accent and response in session records.

Sound Substitution

For this subtest, examiners should read instructions and words aloud to the student rather than playing the audio recording. Examiner may also speak instructions. No further item-level adaptations are required.

Summary Note

This guidance has been developed to support valid and fair administration of the WJ V literacy subtests in UK and Ireland contexts. Adaptations are limited to language and cultural terminology and do not alter the underlying skills being assessed. Assessors are encouraged to document any adaptations or professional judgement decisions made during a session in their administration notes.

For questions about this guidance, please contact Riverside Insights.

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