

# **Interpreting and Extending the Cooper Screening of Information Processing C-SIP**

A Guide for Teachers and Parents

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## **Introduction**

**The purpose of this document is to provide you with comments and suggestions pertaining to the use of the Cooper Screening of Information Processing (C-SIP). We hope that it will help you to extract from each screening the most useful and relevant insights, help to structure your planning, and give you some ideas as to instructional changes that you might make in your classroom.**

The first two pages of this document titled *Characteristic of Skill Deficiencies* contains information regarding patterns that have emerged from looking at a large number of C-SIP results. The patterns are generalizations about the characteristics that would be found if specific skill strengths or deficiencies are present.

This document is formatted in a way that identifies within each section of the C-SIP the following major points:

1. Themes that are evaluated by that part of the C-SIP
2. Implications for planning and instruction
3. Additional questions to do additional assessment in that area
4. Activities and Strategies that will addresses weaknesses in that area

## **About the Authors**

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As you administer the C-CIP you may begin to notice patterns in the types of responses that the clients provide. The following are some of those patterns.

## **Characteristics of Individual Skill Deficiencies**

### **Students who have poor language skills (reading and writing)**

- These students will have a problem with rhyming.
- These students will have poor decoding and word attack skills.
- These students make many errors. They confuse small words, substitute similar words, and add, delete and change endings.
- These students have a limited sight vocabulary.

### **Students who have adequate word recognition but poor reading comprehension**

- These students would most likely have a weakness in attention.
- These students will most likely have an underdeveloped vocabulary.
- These students exhibit many reading errors such as omissions, mispronunciations, and the substitutions of similar words.

### **Students who have adequate reading skills but poor writing skills**

- These students tend to be reluctant writers which means they write very little.
- These students do not understand the structure of language, grammar and grammar rules.
- These students often mispronounce words and word endings. Such as *walked* and *walks*.
- These students may have poor spelling skills.

### **Students who have adequate writing skills but poor spelling skills**

- These students cannot hear the sounds in words.
- These students do not understand the structure of language, prefixes, suffixes, roots.
- These students tend to spell phonetically.
- These students do not write much because of their spelling weakness.

### **Students who have problems with language and math skills**

- These students often have problems with attention, especially with details.
- These students are often confused by things that are similar.
- These students have big issues with avoidance.
- These students have poor educational backgrounds which complicates everything.
- These students have limited or underdeveloped vocabularies. They do not understand instruction because they do not understand the words that are used.

### **Students who have good language skills but poor math skills**

- These students have a high level of avoidance and/or math anxiety
- These students do not know the basic number facts.
- These students have an underdeveloped understanding of quantitative concepts.
- These students have attention problems, especially details.
- These students confuse things that are similar. (right/left discrimination)
- These students tend to have problems with organization of things and ideas.

### **Students who lack basic math skills but have adequate concept and problem solving skills**

- These students confuse items that are similar.
- These students have not been taught techniques to compensate for their weaknesses.
- These students have difficulty with sequence.

### **Students who have good math skills but limited math vocabulary**

- These students tend to have difficulty with word problems and using math in everyday situations.

### **Students with poor organization skills**

- These students have difficulty paying attention to detail.
- These students get overwhelmed when the task gets too large.
- These students are not consistent with routines and the way they do things.
- These students are flexible and tend to consider too many options.

## **C-SIP Area: Educational History**

This subset of questions taps the extent to which the individual's learning problems have been evident during his/her formal schooling, and the extent to which that formal education has been completed.

Themes that are evaluated by this part of the C-SIP:

- How early was a problem evident?
- Did the problems rise to a level that warranted special education intervention?
- How long did it take to complete the 12 years of schooling, if it was completed?
- If it was not completed how many years did the individual complete?
- What areas of study or school activities did he/she like and dislike?
- Was the student in a vocational preparation program?
- What was the extent to which he/she engaged in outside activities?

Implications for planning and instruction:

- A diploma may be a prerequisite for employment. Not having a diploma suggests that the focus should be on a GED unless other factors clearly indicate a minimal prognosis that it could be obtained.
- Completion of less than 9 years of schooling suggests that academic levels will be low. Higher achievement in the face of low formal education suggests a strong capacity to learn through experience and the likelihood of "common sense" or "practical intelligence." Instruction should be pragmatic and relevant to life needs as this is the way that this type of individual has survived.
- Long enrollment in special education (SE) suggests more severe difficulty. Low test scores after long periods of SE instruction indicate either failure to benefit from more individualized instruction or possibly poor basic instruction while in SE.
- Indications of high levels of mainstreaming in SE suggest less severity of learning problems. Acceptable academic test scores by the individual would indicate a potential to benefit from individualized or "support" instruction.
- Low academic skills but completion of 12 years of education indicate a lower capacity to benefit from instruction or a negative sensitivity to some types of instruction. This may suggest "attitude" problems while in school, domestic instability, or lack of valuation commonly considered under the umbrella of "immaturity."
- Persons with a diploma may have a spuriously high estimate of their academic skills, equating 12 years of schooling with possessed knowledge comparable to an average high school senior. The average adult does not demonstrate mastery of academic knowledge consistent with the coursework requirements of a high school diploma, i.e. while basic algebra is required, most adults could not pass a general algebra final exam.

- Questions about “favorite subject” can provide indications as to possible things that will be motivating to the client or that can be used for practice. This is referred to in some literature as using the client’s “affinities” to motivate them, to offset weaknesses, and to increase relevance of content.
- Whether they have attempted GED studies is a potential barometer of the individual’s interest in self-improvement.

## Additional Questions

- If the student terminated early, why? Not all early terminations mean the same thing and you will want to explore possible underlying behavioral or attitude problems.
- What type of Special Education did the individual attend? For older clients this may not be possible as special education was not that prevalent 20 years ago. Also, newer program labels like “learning support” do not provide much help in terms of the etiology of the problem.
- If the person was in Special Education, what is the extent of their knowledge of the kind of program that they were in?
- If the person was in Special Education, what impact did it have on their self-image or view of their capacity? What is their view of the program that they were in, what did they like about it, what didn’t they like?
- Did they ever attempt a GED preparation program or take the GED Predictor Test? If they did, what was their score?

## Activities

- If the person indicated that he received special education services and recently left school, see if you can access his school records.
- Provide instruction that is learner-centered and use real life materials. You want your classes to be a completely different experience from the schooling experience.
- Have a discussion with your student about what the student’s strengths were in school. Make a list of the strengths and discuss how the student can use his strengths in your classroom or tutoring experience.

## C-SIP Area: Attention

This subset of questions taps a variety of issues that deal with the individual's ability to focus on a single activity, to sustain that attention with appropriate energy for sufficient time, to fend off distractions that might make him quit early or start another task before the original one was completed, to evaluate the quality of performance, and to function in an organized and methodical manner.

Themes that are evaluated by this part of the C-SIP:

- Does the individual exercise too much, too little, or just enough energy and attention to the task at hand?
- Does the individual finish jobs that they start?
- Can the individual ignore outside distractions such as noise, visual images, or internal "thoughts that pop into his mind?"
- How ambitious is the individual in terms of projects that he takes on? How accurate is his judgment about his capacity to do this?
- What is his level of concentration and perseverance? Can he block distracting thoughts or daydreaming?

Implications for planning and instruction:

- Attention is a precursor to any meaningful activity. Before a person can do anything he needs to know what is expected and how it might be done. These are two critical elements of Direct Instruction and are pieces of information that an instructor or tutor should give the student with every request for performance; "I want you to \_\_\_\_\_" and "Let me show you one way that you can do \_\_\_\_\_."
- Students may not be able to independently ignore distractions. The instructor may need to cut assignments into shorter segments, be more concrete about what the student is being asked to do, or simplify the task. Of course, attempting to reduce distractions would always be a help.
- Students may be poor judges of how much they can do, and may start a lot of projects and not finish any of them. In such a case, the instructor needs to work on planning and monitoring as much as they work on the actual task. Assignment books, flow charts, work schedules, and timers can all be used in the teaching of planning and self evaluation.
- Organizing tasks for the student can be helpful, i.e. "You have 5 minutes to do part B and then bring it up and we will check it together. Then we will work on part C".
- Sometimes students do not hear what was said and therefore make mistakes because they are doing the wrong thing. To improve attention and focus, ask the student to repeat your directions back to you and to specify exactly what it was that you asked them to do.

- Some students simply have difficulty maintaining focus. The instructor might consider roaming around the room, or asking to check the status of the project at the first sign of mental wavering.
- Counsel students to get enough rest and to eat a healthy diet. Quite likely there are medical factors behind many problems with drowsiness, fatigue and sustained concentration.

## Additional Questions

- How are you doing right now, are you tired, sleepy, restless?
- Describe what it's like when you have trouble focusing on what the instructor is saying.
- Are there any consistent themes that occur when you daydream?
- Do you notice any pattern to periods of fatigue, such as right after you eat, at a certain time of day?
- Is it hard for you to sit and not do anything?
- Is it hard for you to be quiet and not talk to anyone or have anyone talk to you?
- Can you sit and read an entire short story or long article? Do you find your eyes jumping ahead and not really remembering what you have read?
- Do you have to shake your legs, tap your feet or do other movements while you sit and listen?
- Do you have to doodle or draw in order to maintain concentration when you are listening to someone talk?
- Do you have to do more than one thing at a time in order to sustain interest, focus, and concentration?

## Activities

- A person with attention problems will work better if he/she can control the environment. Discuss with your student if he/she works better with an uncluttered workspace or a busy one, a quiet place or one where there is enough noise to fill the void of silence. Some students may need a template, a piece of heavy paper with a window cut out of it, to isolate necessary information or a given assignment.
- Provide structure for the student and explain why you are doing that. Accepting the fact that one needs structure, and requesting help in establishing that structure, can often make the difference between success and failure.
- Use a technique called Small Looping Circles in order to help your student check his work. The technique involves tasks that are broken into small segments and include a method to check for accuracy. The person should loop back and check that each step was completed when that segment of the whole task is finished. The technique, Small Looping Circles, involves the looping back to check a few answers at a time rather than waiting until the end and checking all the answers.

- Students can learn to make attention-getters to help them to remember all the steps in a learning activity. An example of an attention getter is having the student write out his memory clue or reminder on the test, assignment, or scrap paper before beginning the task.
- Provide frequent breaks in the learning. You also may want to provide a quiet place and/or background music for the student.
- Provide a checklist or sequential steps as a reminder for the student. This can provide the student the adaptation he needs to complete tasks without drifting off or being distracted.

## C-SIP Area: Motor Skills

This subset of questions taps a variety of issues that deal with the individual's ability to smoothly execute a variety of large muscle (gross motor) and small muscle (fine motor) coordination. The questions tap areas that might be thought of as being related to terms such as "clumsy," "uncoordinated," or "awkward." One subset of those skills, handwriting is addressed in much more detail in a later area. While there are some educational areas where motor skills are required, for the most part deficiencies in this area have their greatest impact in social and recreational areas and on the person's self-image.

### Themes that are evaluated by this part of the C-SIP:

- Does the individual have difficulty with tasks that require physical coordination?
- Has the individual made critical decisions about what he likes and how he spends his leisure time based on his perception of the physical coordination.
- What is the individual's image of himself or herself, based on their physical skills?

### Implications for planning and instruction:

- The individual may have difficulty with some fine motor tasks such as turning pages, writing in very restricted areas, having good letter formation while writing, etc.
- The individual may have a real resistance to writing or printing and may prefer to use a computer.
- The individual may not volunteer or show a motivation to engage in activities that he thinks will require an open display of his physical coordination.
- Clumsiness, lack of balance, and a shuffling gait are sometimes side effects of medication or early symptoms of neurological difficulties.
- The individual may be very sensitive to "standing out" in any activity.
- The individual may have difficulty writing on unlined paper or paper with very small lines.
- Letter formation may be poor, and handwriting may have a very course appearance.
- The individual may have difficulty with filling in the small circles required on some multiple-choice tests.
- The individual may have difficulty manipulating small parts or tools.

### Additional Questions

- Do you feel dizzy or have numbness in any parts of your body?
- Do you have a favorite type or color of paper that you prefer to write on?
- Does lined or graph paper help you to write neater?
- Do you have a favorite type of pen that "feels better" when you write?
- How well do you type? Do you want to learn?
- Tell me some of the specific physical things that you have trouble doing?

- How well can you catch and throw? (wad up a piece of paper and have them throw it, try to catch it, etc.)
- What is their overall state of physical conditioning?
- What sports do you play?
- Have them trace lines on paper (or using tracing paper) and watch their coordination.

## Activities

- Doodling, as an exercise, can be used to help the person improve fine motor control. Students should be encouraged to make large doodles reducing their size gradually.
- Use assistive devices with your students. This could include grips, guides, and paper with raised lines.
- Try using a different writing instrument. This can help some students improve their handwriting. Students should experiment with various types of pencils, felt tip pens, or pens with erasable ink.
- Try stabilizing the paper in a frame or with some type of adhesive.
- Use graph paper sized to the student's handwriting in order to provide the person with a visual guide to format numbers and symbols.

## C-SIP Area: Auditory

This subset of questions taps a variety of issues that deal with the individual's ability to hear and discriminate between sounds and words that they hear. Several of the items deal with the person's hearing acuity and others deal with the capacity to distinguish between sounds and words, referred to as auditory discrimination. There are also questions that explore the individual's ability to focus and concentrate on what they hear.

### Themes that are evaluated by this part of the C-SIP:

- How well can the individual hear?
- How accurately can he discriminate between sounds and words?
- Does he know how to rhyme, to identify in his mind, the correct sounds that are similar to ones presented to him?
- In what kinds of settings is it more difficult for him to hear?
- How well does he know basic phonics?
- How long can he sustain listening?
- Does he hear, but not understand or remember what has been heard?

### Implications for planning and instruction:

- The individual may have a great deal of difficulty hearing if there is a lot of background noise.
- The individual may not have a sense of "sounds like." Just like some people are "tone deaf," some people have a lot of difficulty with rhyming.
- An individual, because of poor attention or poorly developed listening skills, hears only parts of a sentence because he tunes out early, or tunes in and out and misses key points.
- An individual can have limited vocabulary, and often only know one meaning for a word. He has difficulty testing out possible other meanings.
- An individual confuses similar sounding words because of a combination of weak vocabulary and poor auditory discrimination, i.e. ballot - ballad.
- Attention may have to be artificially solicited, i.e. "look at me!"
- Do not assume that the student heard what you said, have him repeat or paraphrase what was heard.

### Additional Questions

- Tell me as many meanings as you can for the word ....
- Have you ever had your hearing tested?
- Listen to this question, and then tell me what I asked you?
- I'm going to say a string of numbers, when I'm done repeat them back to me.

## Activities

- If the student has poor rhyming, this indicates a problem with the structure of language. Simple rhyming exercises can help build this skill, but if slow progress is made, then rhyming should be used sparingly and mnemonic clues should be used to help a person develop automaticity.
- The student may have difficulty with hearing words clearly. Discuss this with the student. Helping a person to understand that he or she does not hear words clearly is the first step. Practice the correct pronunciation of words with the student on a routine basis.
- Helping a person with poor decoding skills due to auditory problems learn to read prefixes and suffixes as sight words, provides them with the ability to read many words as if they were compound words. For example, the word **action** can be read as the prefix **ac** and the suffix **tion**. The same is true for **disable** and many other words. Although this technique appears to be simple and obvious, it usually is not simple and obvious to individuals with limited decoding skills.
- Another alternative decoding technique is that of reverse word attack. This technique works only with words that have certain characteristics, that of small words in words. If a person is unable to read the word **slice**, he can look at the word searching for a part he does recognize. When he recognizes **ice**, he can add the **l** for **lice** and the **s** for **slice**. This technique also works with suffixes. When attempting to read the word **confrontation**, the person who does not recognize the word may find that reading the suffix **tion** and **ta** to for **tation**, may then recognize **front** and finally add **con** to the set to get the word **confrontation**.
- During instruction or oral reading, provide students with complete outlines to follow, partially completed outlines, or blank outline templates to fill in during the lesson.

## C-SIP Area: Right/Left Discrimination

This subset of questions taps a variety of issues that deal with the individual's ability to spontaneously orient movements and perceptions in terms of spatial directions. In most cases that orientation involves right/left orientations but also involves his "inner sense" of compass directions, orientation in space, sequence, and visual code interpretation. A common theme of these problems is a lack of automatic orientation or "knowing" position, relationship, or orientation that requires the individual to have to deliberately think about a decision that for most people is automatic. A symptom that is also elicited is the tendency to do the opposite of what is correct, i.e. moving one's hand to the right when he wanted to move it to the left.

### Themes that are evaluated by this part of the C-SIP:

- Can the individual automatically perceive relative directions?
- Can the individual automatically execute motor movements in a desired direction?
- Does the individual reverse letters? (this could be receptive, see a "b" as a "d" or "p") or write them backwards).
- Does the person need to divert attention to orienting himself, where most people direct attention immediately to the response?
- Is knowledge of a range of "direction concepts" automatic for the individual? (up, before, behind, north, prior, subsequent, etc.)
- The person's ability to constantly "sense" where they are relative to where they may have been or relative to some second object.
- The occurrence of behaviors that reflect the opposite of the desired behavior, that are assumed to represent some type of neurological "crossed message."
- The likelihood of occurrences of "mismarked" answers, especially on multiple choice answer sheets, forms, etc.

### Implications for planning and instruction:

- The individual may need to stop and analyze the directional elements of a statement or question before he responds. This may involve physical orientation, i.e. touching his side with his right hand to verify "right."
- The individual may have difficulty with "direction words" or "temporal sequence words" embedded in questions.
- The individual may "misread" letters or words.
- The individual may need physical confirmation of some direction, spatial concepts embedded in questions.
- The individual may have difficulty with visually complex response forms.
- The letter formation of the individual may appear primitive.
- The person may say one thing and mean the opposite, i.e. in a sentence say "left" when they meant "right."

- The individual may have to pause and reorient himself before he moves to another location or seeks out materials to complete a task.
- The individual may need to have directions presented more slowly so that he can fully identify and integrate direction and spatial concepts.
- The individual may have a great deal of difficulty with maps, graphs, etc.

## Additional Questions

- Do you make mistakes like writing answers on the wrong line when you fill out forms?
- Do you have difficulty reading a map or understanding a globe?
- Do you have difficulty understanding charts and graphs.
- What do these words mean, “prior,” “simultaneous,” “sequential,” “latitude,” “clockwise,” “initial.”
- Ask the person to quickly point or move his pencil point up, down, north, south, right, left, etc. Look for speed and any confusion.
- Have the student explain a series of cartoon frames. Mix them up and ask the student to put them in order.
- Ask the student to quickly read a sequence of letters that are easily confused, b,d,p,g,h,k,s,z.

## Activities

- First and foremost, a person with a right/left discrimination problem must understand this thought process. The person who makes reversals or has difficulty learning items that are similar usually believes that it is due to a low intelligence or, to put it in a crass way, “because I am stupid.” Provide examples of how reversals and right/left confusion is a thought process that can be positive. For example, thought processes caused by a right/left discrimination difference allow a person to more easily see both sides of an issue, thereby enhancing creativity and enabling a person to be more tolerant of others with differences.
- Use a technique called weighted learning. This technique for learning and remembering involves learning one side of an “either/or” rather than both. For example, with odd and even numbers, the person only learns the even numbers of 2, 4, 6, 8 and 0. When a number is not one of these, then the number is odd.
- Use mnemonics as a technique for dealing with the right/left discrimination problem. There are commonly known mnemonics (**every good boy does fine** for the lines of a musical staff or **Please excuse my dear Aunt Sally** for the order of operations), and there are those which are custom made to help the individual learn and remember things that are confusing. An example would be, “the **d** in denominator is associated with the word **down**”. These memory aids should **not** be created to help remember both parts of an “either/or” since this leads to the confusion of the memory aids.
- Do prioritizing activities with the student. Help the student decide what to do first and show them how to make steps to a problem or activity before they begin the activity.

- Learning items in a series instead of in pairs is another technique for reducing the confusion caused by the right/left discrimination problem. For example, the student who is confused by the operations involved in solving fractions should learn the operations of addition, subtraction, multiplication and division as a set rather than individually.

## C-SIP Area: Organization Skills

This subset of questions taps a variety of issues that deal with the individual's ability to approach tasks in a planned, controlled, and organized manner. It also taps the individual's tendencies to terminate tasks before completion and comply with a schedule. Indirectly, this planning may reflect poor ability to sequence ideas in terms of planning what he wants to say, or organizing elements of a question or statement. One component of poor organization may be difficulty in sustaining focus or concentration.

### Themes that are evaluated by this part of the C-SIP:

- Does the individual finish what he starts?
- Does the individual's mind shift from topic to topic resulting in forgetting or failure to complete a task.
- Does the individual think through a task before starting?
- Is the person able to adhere to a schedule?
- Is the person orderly and neat or disorganized and cluttered?
- How strong is the individual's short-term memory?
- Does the individual think logically, following some structure for ideas?
- Can the individual isolate pieces of information and relate them in a temporal sequence?
- Is the individual able to focus or concentrate for long periods?
- Is the individual able to "dig in" and concentrate after initial difficulty?

### Implications for planning and instruction:

- The individual may need to be given short, grammatically simplified questions or directions.
- The individual may need artificial organizers or assignment sheets to keep track of work that is due.
- The individual may need to have his attention focused on the speaker before a question or statement is given.
- The individual may need aids in keeping his work, i.e. a spiral tablet instead of loose sheets of paper, or a formal "note" book.
- A standard procedure may be needed at the start and close of each lesson, providing a set time for "getting ready" or "closing up" their work.
- Complex tasks may need to be broken into parts, with a check of accuracy at each break point.
- The student may need to develop short-term memory skills. Provide "memory drills" as part of class activities.
- Teach the student to outline. Teach "mind mapping" as a way to organize ideas.

## Additional Questions

- Do you have difficulty finishing a page because your mind drifts off?
- Do you have a calendar where you mark important dates or appointments?
- Do you get overwhelmed when you have a lot of things you have to get done?
- Do you make “to do” lists or write notes to remind you what you need to do?
- Do you have any hobbies? or What do you do in your spare time?
- Observe the individual’s organization and sequencing as he responds to the question “Tell me how you would fix a flat tire”, or “How do you go about your Christmas shopping?”

## Activities

- You need to teach organization. Do not expect it.
- When the student is completing assignments or tests, he needs to learn to keep work separate so that he does not become confused and can go back later and check it.
- Practice organizing. Setting up organizational activities, both with things and with ideas, provides the student with exercises that can help him develop such skills.
- Many students who are given reminders about staying organized or who learn to structure their work will learn to stay organized.
- Color code different instructional activities for the student. This can help with organization.
- Always reinforce verbal directions for assignments by writing information on the board or flipchart or providing a handout. Make sure the student has a clear understanding of the materials he will need to complete for an assignment.
- Help the student understand how to appreciate organizational structure and how it can help in learning and understanding. Show how the student can organize concepts into groups. For example, in spelling you can organize words by prefixes and suffixes or by vowel sounds.
- Help the student understand how much time is needed to complete a learning task. Teach him how to analyze a task before beginning it and to estimate how long they think it will take to complete the task. You may need to demonstrate how to do this type of time estimation, and how to budget time accordingly.
- Help your student break complex tasks into parts. Provide the student with a blank time frame or flow chart so that he can break the task into parts and plan for how to complete the task.
- Teach labeling and remind the student to label his work.

## C-SIP Area: Employment

This subset of questions taps a variety of issues that deal with the individual's ability to secure and retain employment. It asks about past use of government support for training or job acquisition and indirectly, the individual's perception of the quality of his performance.

### Themes that are evaluated by this part of the C-SIP:

- Are you currently employed?
- Have you ever been employed?
- Do you have difficulty in securing employment?
- Have you ever had difficulty on the job?
- Have you ever used the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation in seeking employment or training?
- How extensive is your job history?
- What is your typical length of employment?
- Have you ever been fired?

### Implications for planning and instruction:

- For many people employment is a major part of their self-identity. If unemployed the individual may have negative feelings about himself.
- Many individuals can get jobs, but cannot hold them. This may stem from difficulty accepting the structure and discipline required by employment, or may indicate problems with sustained motivation.
- The type of jobs the individual had reflects his self-image. A string of rather unskilled employment may be indicative of low self-expectancy.
- Individuals are often motivated by financial difficulty and lack of employment is a key element in financial difficulty. The "relevance" of instruction, can greatly increase the degree to which the individual will be motivated.
- The individual's ability to learn a new task is a good barometer of overall learning capacity.

### Additional Questions

- Have you ever participated in any job training programs?
- How much would you consider to be the minimum amount for which you would work?
- How did you get along with your supervisors?
- What kinds of jobs would you like?
- Do you have trouble following directions?
- What parts of a job do you find to be the most difficult?
- How well do/did you get along with co-workers?

- Did you need any special help in performing your job or learning new material?
- Could you read the materials that your employer would give you?

## Activities

- Help students with forms that may be associated with work.
- Use work related reading materials in tutoring sessions.
- Do task analysis activities with the student. Use the Personal Project Planner provided by Dr. Richard Cooper.
- Do time management activities with the student. Use the Day and Night planner provided by Dr. Richard Cooper.

## **C-SIP Area: Emotional**

This subset of questions taps a variety of issues that deal with the individual's ability to control and regulate their emotions, their freedom from significant psychiatric involvement, and possible substance abuse.

### **Themes evaluated by this part of the C-SIP:**

- Are you susceptible to mood swings?
- Is there any history of substance abuse?
- Do you have difficulty with taking tests?
- Have you suffered any head trauma that might have caused a decrease in learning ability?
- Have you ever had formal psychiatric treatment or hospitalization?
- Are you currently taking any psychotropic medication(s)?
- Are you susceptible to worry and anxiety?

### **Implications for planning and instruction:**

- Some students tend to “freeze up” when presented with formal testing. This may negate valid results on the test.
- The student may show a variety of moods ranging from anger to sadness. This may significantly affect his performance at any specific time. You may need to interpret any observations or formal test results by considering the student's mood at the test time.
- Some students may use alcohol to relax, including the use before class. This may affect their performance.
- Individuals on psychiatric medications often show negative side effects ranging from “feeling groggy all the time” to significant weight gain. In some cases the medications can negatively impact concentration, memory, perseverance, energy level, etc.
- Students who feel anxious in a learning session may be prone not to speak up or ask questions, even when they know that they do not understand the material. Deliberate efforts to reduce the anxiety may be necessary, including general rapport building.
- On “moody days” it may be best to have the student work alone and avoid possible conflicts with other students.

### **Additional Questions**

- Have you discussed the side effects of your medications with your doctor?
- What are the things that make you nervous? Think out loud. Explain what is going through your mind?
- Describe your moods, and how strong are they?
- How much alcohol do you consume in a week's time?
- Are you currently receiving psychiatric treatment or counseling?

- Are you prone to periods where you feel tired, sad and lacking in energy?
- Have you ever been told that you suffered any serious head injuries such as falls, automobile accidents, etc.?
- When you feel very nervous about something, how do you deal with those feelings?

## Activities

- Your agency may have a policy on how to deal with different personal situations. You should refer to this policy if it exists.
- Your agency should have a referral policy/process with a list of resources for referrals to community sources that can provide emotional support. If your agency does not, you may want to investigate options within your community to help the student with his emotional issues.

## C-SIP Area: Social and Family

This subset of questions taps a variety of issues that deal with the individual's ability to establish friendships and positive family relationships. It also investigates any possible family tendencies to have learning problems.

### Themes that are evaluated by this part of the C-SIP:

- Is there any difficulty in meeting people and making friends?
- Are there any learning problems with other members of the family?
- What is the size of their network of friends?
- How does the individual view his social skills?
- How comfortable is the person with the opposite sex?
- What are this individual's family responsibilities?
- Has the individual ever been in special education classes?

### Implications for planning and instruction:

- Individuals who are shy or prone to be "loners" may need additional support in order for them to make contacts, participate in discussions, or be accepted within groups.
- For a variety of reasons, some individuals have significant difficulty in talking to the opposite sex.
- A large family may indicate the existence of a small amount of time or "window" for formal studying.
- Previous special education enrollment suggests longstanding educational problems.
- Conflicts at home can have a significant impact on attendance.
- Positive relationships at home can have a positive impact on attendance and may suggest a possible support person who can reinforce what is being covered in class.
- Depression can include physical tiredness, short frustration tolerance, anger, indecisiveness, and nervousness.

### Additional Questions

- Would you be open to working on a project with another student?
- Do you have anyone who can help you with home studies or practice test taking?
- Are there any problems at home that are a distraction?
- What do you do for fun? Do you have any hobbies or interests?

### Activities

- Since a student may be overwhelmed by speaking in front of a large group, students who are shy by nature should be encouraged to participate in small groups.
- You could role play scenarios of social situations with the student. The instructor could model appropriate and inappropriate behaviors.

- If the person has inappropriate social behaviors, he should be dealt with on a one-to-one basis with emphasis being placed on a student's learning to get a long with a group.
- In placing a student in a classroom or tutoring, you will need to consider his social preferences.

## C-SIP Area: Oral Communication

This subset of questions taps a variety of issues that deal with the individual's ability to articulate words, construct effective sentences, and control impulsive verbalizations.

### Themes that are evaluated by this part of the C-SIP:

- Does the individual talk too much?
- Does the individual have an articulation problem?
- Is there any dysarthria (difficulty with the rapid and controlled movement of the tongue, lips, oral cavity).
- What is the person's assessment of his vocabulary skills.

### Implications for planning and instruction:

- Severe difficulty with articulation may be indicative of serious neurological difficulty, especially if seen in an individual who does not have a history of speech difficulty.
- Limited vocabulary skills are at the heart of many learning problems.
- Persons who have speech or language problems may be very sensitive to speaking aloud or before a group.
- A person can have a strong recognition vocabulary but a poor expressive vocabulary. You want to check both.
- The student may need to become more sensitive to the reactions of others, and to develop greater perceptiveness of the appropriateness of his speaking patterns.

### Additional Questions

- Were you ever in speech therapy?
- What do you watch on TV? (You are looking for the possible use of TV and Radio to build vocabulary skills)
- Have your friends ever told you that you talk too much or talk too fast?

### Activities

- Allow the student extra time for responding to questions. Be sure to provide "time for thought" so that the student has time to reflect on the question.
- Provide oral recitation activities as part of your lessons. Use material that is part of the student's interests or daily activities. Give the student advance practice with reading a passage before reading it aloud.
- Have the student explain the steps of a procedure both orally and in writing. Use a flow chart that breaks down a procedure into its component parts. Teach the student how to use the flow chart.
- Give the student an opportunity to apply new vocabulary in his writing, in classroom discussions and activities, etc.

- Practice with the student stating his point first and then providing detail as needed. The student may start with the details and will need to learn to start with the point first.
- Have the student collect and practice words that he has difficulty pronouncing. Provide him with an audiotape of those words for individual practice.

## C-SIP Area: Writing

This subset of questions taps a variety of issues that deal with the individual's ability to use writing as a viable tool in everyday life. Indirectly, it measures one's level of "comfort" with using writing as a method of communication. A later section measures actual writing skills. This section deals with the student's feelings, attitudes and confidence when writing.

### Themes that are evaluated by this part of the C-SIP:

- Does the individual see himself as having difficulty in spelling and in the use of writing as a way to communicate?
- Does the student feel comfortable with such things as taking notes, writing notes, etc.?
- Does the student have difficulty with grammar, and the development of sentences that fit rules or "sound right?"
- Does the student feel that he knows correct punctuation?
- Is there resistance to writing?

### Implications for planning and instruction:

- It is not uncommon for students who feel deficient in the use of writing to be very resistive. It is perfectly normal to avoid what we are not good at, and these students are simply avoiding something that is difficult for them.
- Writing is the most difficult of expressive skills because it requires the student to develop ideas, identify the words that express those ideas, translate those words into a grammatical sequencing system, and then formulate the letters that express the words in the correct sequence. Reading is heavily weighted toward recognition. Writing requires the individual to "invent" all of the response.
- There is often a lot of embarrassment that has to be circumvented or addressed. Many weaknesses can be hidden. Writing, by its nature, puts all of the errors out for everyone to see.
- Many students do not understand that writing is simply speech on paper. They may have had bad experiences with formal English instruction, and as a result, look at it as if it were something foreign that needs to be learned in isolation. Students need to see the parallel between oral and written language.
- Some students have difficulties with fine motor control and find it very hard to make neat and legible letter formation and spacing. It may be necessary to address the issues of "content" and "production" as two individual problems.
- Few students who have writing problems find it enjoyable. It is likely that you will need to go backwards to a level where the student makes few errors, and then begin developing skills. This will provide the student with some enjoyment that will be a key factor in his using writing in everyday life.

## Additional Questions

- Do you write notes to others?
- Do you write letters or include notes in Christmas cards, etc.?
- Do you have anyone write notes or fill out forms for you?
- Do you avoid situations where you have to write?
- Can you feel yourself get tense or angry when you need to write?
- Is there anything that you do enjoy writing?
- Do you know how to use a dictionary?

## Activities

- Have the student practice writing notes. Writing notes to a tutor or teacher is a way to have one's practice writings reviewed so that one can receive feedback for improvement. To practice writing notes, the person should rewrite the corrected notes each day until the person can write the note consistently without errors.
- Use a techniques called "three, five word sentences." This is a simple writing exercise which helps students in a number of ways. Writing three, five word sentences emphasizes the structure of language rather than imitating speech. It is a manageable and measurable task. Students with low skills can be asked to write three sentences with at least five words, pronouns are allowed. The sentences do not have to be related. A student with higher level writing skills is asked to write three sentences with exactly five words, including articles and without pronouns. Another level of difficulty is added when the person is asked to make the three, five word sentences related to one idea, making a small paragraph. Requiring no pronouns makes it more difficult.
- If the student indicated that he speaks better than he writes, he probably will have problems with sentence structure and written expression. Individuals who have difficulty with written language need to practice writing skills. Free writing, just trying to express ideas in writing, can actually reinforce poor sentence structure and bad habits because the person often tries to write as he speaks. Expanded drafts is a technique which can be used with students. This technique emphasizes using written language rather than oral expression. The technique of expanding drafts involves the writing of short simple sentences and expanding them with modifiers, phrases and clauses with each subsequent draft. This writing technique can be introduced to individuals with very weak writing skills by first working on single sentences before introducing the use of the technique for paragraphs.
- Obtain a copy of the CD-ROM course "Teaching Writing" from the PA-LDC for additional activities.

## C-SIP Area: Handwriting

This subset of measures taps the student's actual ability to form letters, spell, organize, and essentially produce legible written communication. Unlike the preceding section that looks at how they feel about writing, this section solicits actual writing samples for objective analysis.

### Themes that are evaluated by this part of the C-SIP:

- Can the student form letters?
- Can the student space letters and words and generally organize his writing in terms of visual-spatial organization?
- Does the student know and can he print the alphabet?
- Does the student know capital and lower case letters and is he consistent in usage?
- Does the student show letter reversals or other signs of fine motor directional confusion?
- Is the student controlled or impulsive? This is a measure of self-regulation.
- Can/does the student check his work for errors? This is a measure of self-monitoring.
- Does the student know the correct way to use a pencil or a pen?

### Implications for planning and instruction:

- This section provides an excellent opportunity to compare the student's self-report with actual production. There can be serious discrepancies in either direction, the student who is excessively critical of his ability and the student who overestimates his functioning level. In either case, it will probably be necessary to establish more realistic perceptions on capacity.
- Efforts at completing the alphabet will provide an opportunity to observe many memory, sequencing, and self-evaluative skills.
- Mixing upper and lower case letters and changing from script to print are indications of inconsistency in mastery.
- While not asked for directly, completion of the tasks provides a measure of mastery in terms of the speed and ease with which the tasks are completed. Very slowly formed letters may be correct, but they are not highly functional in a normal or competitive environment.
- There is a progression of difficulty that you might want to use in completing additional testing. Remembering and creating is more difficult than copying or recognition. Start with copying, because that does not require the student to really "recall" anything. Move from simple to more difficult (letters to sentences). Then move to dictation (you provide the ideas for the student) and then go on to the most difficult level where idea generation and word recall are needed, i.e. "write me a story about...."

## Additional Questions

- Is it easier for you to write using lined paper?
- Do you ever use a ruler or guide so that you can stay on the line?
- Do you have a favorite type of pen that you use?
- Is it easier for you to write with a marker or a ball point pen?
- Can you find the 3 errors in this sentence?
- Try again, but this time, I'd like you to stay between these two lines.
- I'm going to say a sentence. When I'm done, I'd like you to write exactly what I said. (Start with short and easy and generally make sentences longer and more complicated.)

## Activities

- See activities under motor skill development.
- For students who cannot correctly sequence the alphabet, have them practice segments of that sequence instead of all 26 letters at once. For example, "ghijklm." Don't start with the beginning of the alphabet.
- Provide the student with a printed alphabet to use for reference (laminated, large index card size is excellent.) Ask him questions or have him complete tasks that require use of the reference card.
- For students who misform letters, provide them with memory clues for the formations.
- Have a variety of pens and pencils for the student to try. Let him use the ones that "feel best."
- For slanting, provide lined paper that has heavy lines or an underlay with heavy lines to guide the person's handwriting.
- Teach formatting skills for a student who has disproportionate or congested writing. Such as margins, indentations, and spacing. For students who do not have enough or too much space between letters, give them a concrete tool such as the width of a pencil between words.
- Have the student practice making a variety of loops, lines and "scribbles" to develop speed and mastery of motor control.
- Encourage the student to draw and doodle.
- Reinforce the rules of basic grammar. (provided in the LDC training titled "5 Lessons to Better Writing").
- Have the student copy materials and check for accuracy. He is much less likely to make errors with copying which will negate the hesitation that is normal when he has to "make up" the content being written.

## C-SIP Area: Basic Math Skills

This subset of questions taps a variety of issues that deal with the individual's self-assessment of basic math skills as well as their ability to perform simple addition, subtraction, multiplication and division.

### Themes that are evaluated by this part of the C-SIP:

- What are the math areas that the student sees as deficient?
- Can the student perform simple addition, subtraction, multiplication and division?
- What are the student's reactions when asked to perform oral mathematical operations?
- What is the student's overall level of confidence in performing basic math tasks?

### Implications for planning and instruction:

- The actual math deficiencies need to be separated from any deficiencies due to negative emotional reactions. Many students get "flustered" at the sheer use of the words "math problems" and often can perform at much higher levels if they can just get beyond the self-imposed anxiety.
- Mastery of the basic addition, subtraction, multiplication and division facts are very important. Students often can remember the "process" or "sequence" but lack of mastery of the basic facts becomes the source of the error.
- Speed is a component of mastery. If the student is correct but only with a great deal of struggle, it is unlikely that they will have functional mastery of the computational ability. In the background, make notes about how fast the student responds and the ease with which they can respond.
- Some students, despite years of drill and practice, simply cannot remember the "facts." Rather than add your efforts to the others, provide the student with age appropriate and easy to use (neat, easy to read, etc.) pocket and desk reference materials.
- Many students overestimate their mastery of basic facts and make errors on relatively easy problems. Often these same students are reluctant to admit their lack of mastery. Regardless, you will need to "go back" to learning the facts or providing some alternative usable reference that provides the data and/or sequence that their memory is not providing.
- Watch for the use of memory aids (some are very subtle) such as counting on fingers, making dots on paper, tapping, teeth clicking, etc. that are all techniques that help the student to remember or structure his thinking.
- Many students do not have any concept that addition and multiplication are related. For some this might make things even more confusing, but for others it might be helpful.

### Additional Questions

- Do you have any "tricks" to help you to remember your math facts?
- Are any of the facts harder for you to remember than others?
- If I show you this chart, can you tell me how much 4 times 9 is?

## Activities

- There are 45 addition math facts that a student needs to learn in order to be proficient with addition and subtraction. Identify the ones they know, and teach the ones they don't know. This reduces the task into something manageable.
- Discourage counting for all basic operations. It is not the combination of numbers and takes too long.
- Teach mnemonic techniques for the basic number facts that the student is having difficulty remembering. Such as  $6 + 6$  is a dozen or "5678" for  $8 \times 7$  and  $7 \times 8$  equals 56.

## C-SIP Area: Math Skills

This subset of questions taps a variety of issues that deal with the individual's self-evaluation of his higher level math skills. Unlike the preceding section, this part does not ask the student to actually solve any problems, thus it does not provide objective verification of the student's beliefs. This section provides questions that deal with areas ranging from division to algebra.

### Themes that are evaluated by this part of the C-SIP:

- What is the student's assessment of their skills with various computational processes?
- What level of difficulty has the student had in the past with learning various computational processes?
- What is the highest level of formal math instruction that the student has completed?

### Implications for planning and instruction:

- Mastery of the basic addition, subtraction, multiplication and division facts are very important. Students often can remember the "process" or "sequence" but lack of mastery of the basic facts becomes the source of the error.
- Speed is a component of mastery. If the student is correct, but only with a great deal of struggle, it is unlikely that they will have functional mastery of the computational ability. In the background, make notes about how fast the student responds and the ease with which he can respond.
- Some students, despite years of drill and practice, simply cannot remember the "facts." Rather than add your efforts to the others, provide the student with age appropriate and easy to use (neat, easy to read, etc.) pocket and desk reference materials.
- Many students overestimate their mastery of basic facts and make errors on relatively easy problems. Often these same students are reluctant to admit their lack of mastery. Regardless, you will need to "go back" to learning the facts or providing some alternative usable reference that provides the data and/or sequence that their memory is not providing.
- It is very difficult (and it's probably ill advised) to make any assumptions about a student's actual skill proficiency based on the classes that he has taken or the number of years of schooling that have been completed.
- You are probably going to need to verify skill mastery. This can be done through direct questioning or the use of a broad area test such as the Wide Range Achievement Test or WRAT.
- It is not unusual for students to be able to do math in the traditional sense, when provided with paper and pencil, but they have much greater difficulty when they need to solve problems "in their head." Mastery requires the latter, even though many students want to define themselves as competent at the former level.

## Additional Questions

- I have a few questions; let's see if you can solve them? Have a few practical problems that require multiplication and division to have them solve with/without the use of paper and pencil.
- Do you avoid situations where you have to solve math problems?
- What math do you need to use on your job?
- What kinds of math problems do you run into that you have difficulty with?
- The use of a brief but general assessment of actual computational skills is recommended.

## Activities

- Some students have problems with understanding what a word problem is asking them to do. To help with problems understanding verbal explanations, teachers should give these students correctly solved problems (demonstration models) to analyze and talk about.
- Good work in math depends upon a systematic stepwise approach to problem solving. Some students have difficulty with problem solving because they try to do everything at once or they work too quickly or they don't consider alternative strategies, trying only the first approach that comes to mind. Often they don't proofread or focus enough on the details. Help students like this pace themselves. Reward them for working slowly. Give them proof reading exercises, opportunities to find errors in the work of others. Encourage them to talk their way through problems – step by step. Have them describe how they will solve a problem before they begin their work. Also, have them explain the steps they used once they have completed a problem.
- Provide specialized materials to allow the student to organize their calculations. This could include graph paper, or lined paper turned sideways, to keep the numbers in columns. Encourage the use of scrap paper and the highlighting of key words and numbers.
- Use a rule book. Have the student keep a notebook to write math rules in his own words.
- Teach subvocalization of a strategy. Show the student how to quietly repeat sequences under his breath while working. Practice this strategy by giving the student a sequence of numbers or directions and have him quietly repeat them under his breath.

## C-SIP Area: Math Vocabulary

This subset of questions taps a variety of issues that deal with the individual's ability to understand and use terminology related to mathematical computations, measurement, money management, etc. It also indirectly measures the individual's ability to express higher level concepts, and it provides a measure of any variability between the students ability to "use" words compared to their ability to "define" them. This might be looked at as a brief measure of receptive and expressive vocabularies.

### Themes that are evaluated by this part of the C-SIP:

- The meaning of a limited number of basic mathematical terms.
- The ability to the person to conceptualize and define specific terms.
- The person's mastery of specific terminology that may have been taught in a mathematic's class or course.
- The student's level of comfort with mathematical terminology.

### Implications for planning and instruction:

- Every area of study has its own vocabulary. The degree of mastery of that vocabulary is a good barometer of more generalized skill in that area. Capacity to recognize technical terms is a good measure of general skill levels.
- This test measures the ability to use words and the ability to define words. Often, students can recognize the meaning of words and use them correctly in a sentence, but have difficulty defining them. "Defining" an object or term requires a unique set of cognitive organizational skills and a set of verbal expressive skills that are much more sophisticated than those necessary to simply use the term in a sentence. Students who can use terms but have difficulty defining them are displaying higher-level language and cognitive skill deficiencies.
- The type of explanation required by this section may be quite difficult for students who come from environments where formal verbal expression is not encouraged. They have difficulty with the formal, "x" is a term that means ..... They often offer vague single word responses rather than precise and logical definitions. For example, compare the response "average means middle," with "average is the sum of any measurement divided by the number of measurements."
- You may see a need to formally work on a student's knowledge of mathematical terminology. Often, the student can perform the calculations, but because he does not know the real meaning of a key term used in the problem, he applies the wrong process. Some books and tests contain lists of mathematical terms grouped by area, i.e. the Brigance Test of Essential Skills.
- Terms are often matched with symbols or "signs." Students may be able to associate the name of the symbol with the graphic symbol, but may not be able to articulate the concept inferred by it.

## Additional Questions

- I'm going to read you a math question. Tell me the important words that I use that tell you what you need to do to solve the problem.
- Does "equal" mean "add?"
- What are the different names that mean to reduce the number of things that you have.
- Tell me as many terms as you can that deal with money.

## Activities

- Check to make sure that students have a correct understanding of terms, such as, equal means "the same" not "the answer." Odd means "not paired", not "weird."
- Collect and study math words of which they are unsure of the meaning. Use a Word Net.
- Provide the student with mnemonic clues for confusing terms, such as the "**d**" in denominator means down.

## C-SIP Area: Reading

This subset of questions taps a variety of issues that deal with the individual's difficulty in the area of Reading. This section measures actual reading skills and requires good observational and listening skills by the examiner.

### Themes that are evaluated by this part of the C-SIP:

- Can the student display a number of basic decoding tasks?
- Does the student understand the function of a variety of punctuation markings?
- How much speed and flexibility does the student display?
- Does the student use artificial devices/behaviors to maintain his place while reading?
- How clear is the student's articulation?
- How well can the student analyze and identify new words?
- How well can the student actually read everyday elements such as the newspaper?

### Implications for planning and instruction:

- The ability to identify words, to "decode" words, is essential for reading comprehension. "Decoding" is an umbrella term that refers to an array of skills that allow the student to "figure out" words that they may not recognize by memory. Mastery of these skills is essential because comprehension depends on rapid word recognition. A major subset of decoding skills is phonetic analysis.
- Students often overestimate their decoding skills. Because this section requires actual reading, it can provide you with information about actual skills and the accuracy of their assessment of their skills.
- Mastery includes skills and speed. Listening to the student's speed, noting the number and types of errors, and other observational skills can generate a great deal of diagnostic information.
- It might be helpful to have some estimate of the difficulty levels of the materials read by the student. You can do this by using materials that have already been analyzed and ordered in terms of difficulty, or you can type the text into a word processor and have a "readability analysis" performed on the text. However, it is generally more useful to talk about the specific skills that the student seems to have difficulty with, than it is to talk in terms of grade equivalents.

### Additional Questions

- Augment the questions with a formal phonetic skills test.
- Give the student text, similar to what they will encounter in a training program, to measure his readiness for instruction that relies on textbook reading.
- Try a few pairs of cheap "reading glasses" to see if the student finds them helpful when you observe a student who seem to hold a book at arm's length, or who is squinting at the material.

## Activities

- Use Word Nets with students who have limited sight word vocabulary and poor decoding skills. Word Nets are bookmarks designed for the students to collect words that they do not know or are unfamiliar. They have many uses in assisting learners to improve their language skills. Word Nets provide individuals with a systematic way for new readers to collect words from their environments. Do not add too many words to a Word Net at one time.
- Use weighted learning for students who confuse words. Weighted learning means that the person learns to recognize one part of a pair so that if it is not that one it is the other. For example, focusing on the vowels in **big** and **bag**, the person can associate the **i** with an arrow pointing up indicating something **big**. If the word does not have the **I**, it is the other word, **bag**.
- Use compound word lists to practice recognizing prefixes and suffixes
- For a student who has trouble hearing or reproducing phonic sounds, use the technique word part decoding. Helping a person with poor decoding skills learn to read prefixes and suffixes as sight words, provides them with the ability to read many words as if they were compound words. For example, the word **action** can be read as the prefix **ac** and the suffix **tion**. The same is true for **disable** and many other words. Although this technique appears to be simple and obvious, it usually is not simple and obvious to individuals with limited reading skills. They need to be taught how to pronounce the prefixes and suffixes and practice them until they are automatic. Even then it will take practice for them to pay attention to the prefixes and suffixes in words so that they can apply this technique.
- Use the technique reverse word attack. This technique works only with words that have certain characteristics, that of small words within words. If a person is unable to read the word **slice**, he can look at the word searching for a part he does recognize. When he recognizes **ice**, he can add the **l** for **lice** and the **s** for **slice**. This technique also works with suffixes. When attempting to read the word **confrontation**, the person who does not recognize the word may find that reading the suffix **tion** and **ta** to for **tation**, may then recognize **front** and finally add **con** to the set to get the word **confrontation**.

## C-SIP Area: Reading Comprehension

This subset of questions taps a variety of issues that deal with the individual's impression of his ability to remember what is read. This subtest does not involve any actual reading so it taps only the individual's impressions of his capacity. The section asks about some specific comprehension skills and has several questions that deal with difficulty due to distraction.

### Themes that are evaluated by this part of the C-SIP:

- Does the individual sense that he may have difficulty understanding what is read?
- Is there any sense that visual factors may cause him not to be able to focus on the text?
- Is he distracted when he attempts to read?
- Does he sense that vocabulary problems may be causing him not to understand?
- Has he had difficulty when using textbooks?

### Implications for planning and instruction:

- Students often have inflated estimates of their reading ability. Since there is not objective verification of comprehension in the C-SIP, the examiner will need to compare answers with other observations. For example, compare the estimate with their writing sample.
- Vocabulary mastery is a critical skill for comprehension. A student may know how to decode a word, but if he does not know its meaning, his reading will not make much sense. It is not uncommon to find students whose difficulty is in word analysis and not in actual comprehension. These students will need to build a foundation of word knowledge and factual information.
- There are several questions that address the student's capacity to focus on his work and sustain concentration. In such cases the problem is one of attention and sustained effort and not decoding or comprehension.

### Additional Questions

- Have the students read random paragraphs and then ask them questions about what they read. Vary the questions as to type, level of abstraction needed, language utilized, etc.
- Why do you feel that remembering what you read is so difficult?
- Ask the student to name items that are shown in pictures.

### Activities

- Many people, even those without learning problems, have difficulty reading when there are too many distractions. Teachers can show learners how to keep a notebook handy for jotting down distracting thoughts. Usually, when these thoughts are written down in a safe place, the person can let them go and concentrate on the reading material.

- Experiential integration is the style of reading in which the reader uses his or her previous experiences and opinions to interpret the material being read. Although this is not necessarily a negative, it is if it is the only way one reads. Individuals who evidence experiential integration need to learn to read information using the author's ideas and opinions rather than their own ideas and opinions. This can be accomplished by having the reader explain what he thinks the author is communicating, if it is different than what the author meant. A teacher or tutor can help the learner to focus on the author's meaning rather than using one's own ideas.
- Some students do not understand what they read because they have information gaps or limited experiences. Teachers should not be surprised by a learner's limited experiences or information gaps and need to be careful not to show any visual signs of judgment or disapproval. Teachers need to explain things that the person may not have experience with, so that he can better understand what is being read.
- Some students do not understand what they read because they have a limited or ambiguous vocabulary. You need to set up a systematic study of vocabulary for the student. See activities under vocabulary.
- For individuals who have weaknesses in written language, the structure of language can be very abstract. Since many of these individuals have little difficulty communicating orally, they appear to understand the structure of language, but, when it comes to breaking written language apart to use the parts to understand the meaning, those who do not understand the structure of language are stuck. For example, they would have difficulty finding the basic elements of a sentence, *who does what or the subject noun and verb*. Helping learners to recognize sentence parts such as clauses, subject phrases, verb phrases and preposition phrases can help them improve their reading comprehension.
- Individuals who are not good readers might never have developed good eye movement, so their eyes may jump around on the page, consequently skipping words and lines. Consequently, comprehension is reduced, and the person may have to read passages a number of times to understand the author's meaning. Individuals who have poor eye movement can guide their eyes by using: their fingers, bookmarks, Word Nets, a window cut into cardboard or a magnifying tracking bar. Additionally, learners can practice the eye movement needed for reading with exercises. An example of such an exercise is to have the reader of any level practice tracking across the page and consciously move down to the next line. The person does not have to read the words but rather focus on what he is seeing.
- Some students may have a problem with the rereading of words and lines. These students will also have problems with fluency. For poor readers, the problem is complicated by the fact that they often are so focused on recognizing or decoding words in sentences that they get little or no meaning from the sentence. When the person re-reads the line, he or she is often unaware that it is the same line because there was little or no comprehension. Some individuals will actually read the same line a number of times. Training these readers to group words and helping them increase their sight reading vocabularies will help them to get more meaning. In addition, these students can use the techniques suggested for reducing tracking problems.

## C-SIP Area: Vocabulary

This subset of questions taps a variety of issues that deal with the individual's knowledge of word meanings and his ability to use words in sentences. It requires actual word definition. The words cover a range from very easy to quite complex. The requirement that students define words involves verbal expressive skills, thus the area represents both vocabulary knowledge and verbal expressive skills.

### Themes that are evaluated by this part of the C-SIP:

- Can the student formulate a sentence that appropriately defines the meaning of a word?
- Can the student correctly utilize a word in a sentence?
- At what level of complexity and difficulty does the student begin to show difficulty?

### Implications for planning and instruction:

- Vocabulary mastery is a critical skill for comprehension. A student may know how to decode a word, but if he does not know its meaning, his reading will not make much sense. It is not uncommon to find students whose difficulty is in word analysis and not in actual comprehension. These students will need to build a foundation of word knowledge and factual information.
- Vocabulary mastery is an indirect measure of content mastery, that is, the amount of technical or factual details that can be utilized upon demand. Students who have poor vocabulary skills may also have low levels of mastery in areas such as History, Geography, Current Events, etc. This lack of word mastery may lead to spuriously low estimates of their general ability.

### Additional Questions

- Name five or six people what were included on last night's news.
- I'm going to highlight a number of words that are in today's newspaper. I'd like you to tell me what each of the words mean.
- Do you have any friends, acquaintances with whom you can carry on a meaningful conversation?
- What TV shows do you watch?
- What books have you read in the past month?
- Do you ever listen to books on tape?

## Activities

- Check to make sure that the student has a correct understanding of words.
- Collect and study words that he encounters daily and are unsure of the meaning. Use a Word Net.
- Encourage the student to use the words he has collected in his writing and oral communication.
- Provide mnemonic clues for the definition of the words that the student is having difficulty remembering.
- Set up a regular and systematic study of vocabulary. It should be part of every lesson.
- Teach the student how he can use prefixes and suffixes to change the part of speech or the meaning of the words.
- Present new vocabulary words in categories. Group new vocabulary words according to concepts or groups that are familiar to the student.
- Teach new words by relating them to words the student already knows. Suggest possible uses for the new words.
- Use language games. Use games such as crossword puzzles or Scrabble to build word familiarity. Also play listening games where the student has to identify mismatched meanings.

## C-SIP Area: Avoidance

This subset of questions taps a variety of issues that deal with the individual's level of stress and frustration relative to academic skills. It addresses the issue of a student's avoidance of materials and sources of possible anxiety that may be barriers to a student fully benefiting from instruction. It taps some possible behaviors that the student may have developed to distract attention from his problems.

### Themes that are evaluated by this part of the C-SIP:

- What is their general level of anxiety regarding learning?
- Are there any specific areas of study where the student is highly anxious?
- Does the student actively avoid some areas of instruction?
- Does the student respond to anxiety by showing frustration and anger?
- What areas are most threatening for the student?
- What practical life skills do they see as deficient?
- In what areas might an instructor need to tread delicately in order to avoid frustration and termination?

### Implications for planning and instruction:

- Some students show high levels of anxiety about learning in general or specific areas. This is often seen when the topic of mathematics is brought up in a conversation. Often, this anxiety becomes a secondary problem that needs to be addressed, at times blocking the communication that is critical for instruction to take place.
- Students deal with anxiety differently; some show avoidance, some become angry at themselves, some become angry at the instructor, some stop coming to class, etc. There are a lot of reactions but the underlying cause is the same – students avoid what is hard and what has the potential to make them look dumb. Getting around this issue has to be addressed before issues of content can be addressed.
- Avoidance will necessitate proactive action. That means that the instructor cannot be passive. He will need to lead, guide, and mentor the student through uncomfortable waters.
- Much of the anxiety stems from uncertainty. To often the student is left to “figure it out.” If the student could have done that he would have, and placing him into that position simply causes more anxiety. The instructor needs to show the student, mentor the student, and support initial efforts that often will not be totally correct. The perception of being a “mentor” and not an “evaluator” is critical.

### Additional Questions

- How are you feeling about learning right now?
- How do you typically respond when you feel nervous?
- What is it about xxx that you think is hard for you?
- Do you tend to quit or discontinue when things get really hard?

- What would you like me to do to help you to learn to xxx” ?
- What did you like the least about previous classes?

## Activities

- Help a student become aware of how avoidance activities are interfering with the attainment of student goals.
- Isolate one avoidance behavior and make the student aware of it. Help the student develop an action plan for the avoidance of the behavior. Provide support and follow-up to make sure that the person is, in fact, eliminating or reducing the avoidance.

## **Bibliography**

### **Print Resources**

Cooper, Richard. (2003) *Teaching Reading to Individuals with Learning Differences*. PA: Center for Alternative Learning.

### **Web Resources**

<http://www.allkindsofminds.org>

This is the official website of Dr. Mel Levine

<http://www.learningdifferences.org>

This is the official website of Dr. Richard Cooper