Behavioral Observations

Why Include Them?

Provides explicit, concrete examples of different clinically relevant behaviors

Can often provide information that self-report or testing data cannot

Can collaborate or disconfirm hypotheses about a person's difficulties

Types of Observations

Different settings
- One-on-one testing
- Interviews
- Naturalistic settings

Different methods of recording
- Objective
- Subjective

During the Assessment

Usually a highly controlled environment
- Attempts to elicit maximum performance
- More personal and focused

May not be representative of a person's typical behaviors
- Obtain collaborative information and compare to typical home / work / school behaviors

Critical to understanding and interpreting test performance

During the Assessment

Be very comfortable with the test, so you can focus on the person rather than the mechanics
- Pay attention to comments, responses, and actions

Take notes on the record form during testing
- Behaviors or quotations from the examinee can be very useful

Even those behaviors that seem initially irrelevant may be important latter

During the Assessment

Behaviors alone are not informative on a report, so you should interpret those behaviors for the reader

If any contradictions occur, attempt to account for or explain them

Many different topics fit into a Beh Obs sections, but emphasis will vary depending on the case

Beh Obs Topics

Physical appearance
- Height, weight, build
- Grooming

Rapport
- Ease of establishment
- How person relates to you
- Ease of maintaining it

Beh Obs Topics

Communication
- Speed, pitch, volume, and rhythm of speech
- Ease of conversations
- Any word finding difficulties
- Quality of speech

Response to failures
- Frustration level
- Confidence level

Beh Obs Topics

Response to Feedback
- Verbal and nonverbal responses

Attention
- Vary across the evaluation
- Vary across task
- Length of sustained attention
- Amount of redirection needed
- Level of distractibility

Beh Obs Topics

Activity level
- Mannerisms and movements
- Interpreted based on developmental appropriateness
- Posture

Mood and temperament
- Affect and influences
- Easy, slow-to-warm-up, or difficult

Beh Obs Topics

Problem-solving strategies
- Approach to task completion
- Self-talk

Attitude toward self
- Facial expressions or statements
- Subtle (blushing) or non-subtle ("I should know this") behaviors and speech

Unusual mannerisms or habits

Objective Observations

Several tools are available to assist with objective observing during test situations

Many newer tests incorporate observations into the test itself

There are also separately developed systems for use with specific tests (e.g., K-WIII)

WJ-III-COG

TEST SESSION OBSERVATIONS CHECKLIST

Check only one category for each item.

Level of conversational proficiency
- ❏ 1. Very advanced
- ❏ 2. Advanced
- ❏ 3. Typical for age/grade
- ❏ 4. Limited
- ❏ 5. Very limited

Level of cooperation
- ❏ 1. Exceptionally cooperative throughout the examination
- ❏ 2. Cooperative (typical for age/grade)
- ❏ 3. Uncooperative at times
- ❏ 4. Uncooperative throughout the examination

Level of activity
- ❏ 1. Seemed lethargic
- ❏ 2. Typical for age/grade
- ❏ 3. Appeared fidgety or restless at times
- ❏ 4. Overly active for age/grade; resulted in difficulty attending to tasks

Attention and concentration
- ❏ 1. Unusually absorbed by the tasks
- ❏ 2. Attentive to the tasks (typical for age/grade)
- ❏ 3. Distracted often
- ❏ 4. Consistently inattentive and distracted

Self-confidence
- ❏ 1. Appeared confident and self-assured
- ❏ 2. Appeared at ease and comfortable (typical for age/grade)
- ❏ 3. Appeared tense or worried at times
- ❏ 4. Appeared overtly anxious

Care in responding
- ❏ 1. Very slow and hesitant in responding
- ❏ 2. Slow and careful in responding
- ❏ 3. Prompt but careful in responding (typical for age/grade)
- ❏ 4. At times responded too quickly
- ❏ 5. Impulsive and careless in responding

Response to difficult tasks
- ❏ 1. Noticeably increased level of effort for difficult tasks
- ❏ 2. Generally persisted with difficult tasks (typical for age/grade)
- ❏ 3. Attempted but gave up easily
- ❏ 4. Would not try difficult tasks at all

Behavioral Observations

Optional Summary of Qualitative Indicators

Subtests	Disruptive QIs					Enhancing QIs			
	Fails to sustain attention	Impulsively responds incorrectly	Perseverates	Is reluctant to respond when uncertain	Worries about time limits	Perseveres	Tries out options	Is unusually focused	Verbalizes a strategy, ideas, etc.
Atlantis									
Conceptual Thinking									
Face Recognition									
Story Completion									
Number Recall									
Gestalt Closure									
Rover									
Atlantis Delayed									
Expressive Vocabulary									
Verbal Knowledge									
Rebus									
Triangles									
Block Counting									
Word Order									
Pattern Reasoning									
Hand Movements									
Rebus Delayed									
Riddles									
Totals									

Behavioral Observations

Make a check mark in the column(s) for the groups of subtests on which the listed behaviors were observed. Alternatively, make a mark in the "Total or Overall" column for behaviors that characterized the test session.

	Reading	Reading-related	Math	Written Language	Oral Language	Total or Overall
Disruptive						
Does not sustain attention						
Impulsively responds incorrectly						
Is reluctant to respond when uncertain						
Is uncooperative during testing						
Frequently asks that instructions be repeated						
Has difficulty understanding instructions						
Expects to fail						
Needs reminders to work from left to right or top to bottom						
Makes excessive corrections						
Enhancing						
Responds carefully/Monitors accuracy						
Approaches tasks with confidence						
Is unusually focused						

WIAT-II

Spelling Qualitative Observations
Note how frequently a behavior occurred by checking the appropriate box.

	Never	Seldom	Often	Always	Not Observed
Has difficulty with single consonant letter/sound relationships	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Has difficulty with consonant letter cluster/sound relationships	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Makes spelling errors at the beginning of words	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Makes spelling errors in medial position of words	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Makes spelling errors at the ending of words	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Writes and rewrites a word several ways to determine which "looks" right	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Spells phonetically	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Self-corrects errors	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Omits suffixes that mark tense or part of speech markers (e.g., -ed, -ing, -ly)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Makes spelling errors on contractions	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Writes the incorrect homonym (words shown in **bold type**)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Writing Assessment Beh Obs

Determine the behaviors to describe

Describe specific behaviors and provide examples

Give interpretations of those behaviors

Support these interpretations with specific examples

Organize your thoughts logically around different types of behaviors

Writing Assessment Beh Obs

Take special note of any behaviors that may influence test data or results

Include a statement indicating if the results are reliable and valid, and state why

Let's try some out!

Outside the Assessment

Should supplement in-session observations whenever feasible

Easier to obtain for children and adolescents, but can often be obtained for adults

Helps to verify parent, teacher, or self-reports of behavior outside testing environment

Outside the Assessment

Examiners can design an observational system to meet their own needs, or rely on premade ones

Either way, there are numerous types of ways to conduct structured observations in naturalistic environments

Operational Definitions

Before any behavior can be recorded, make sure that you have a sufficient OD of it

Usually topographical, but can also include duration or intensity of the behavior

To develop one, take descriptive data (from teachers, parents, etc.) and mold it into a specific, concrete behavior

Event Recording

Simplest recording method

Record the number of times a target behavior occurs during a set period of time

Best for behaviors with discrete starts and stops that are brief and low-frequency

Duration Recording

Provides information on how long a behavior occurs

Again, best with those behaviors that have discrete beginnings and endings

Can be easily combined with event recording to measure duration and frequency

Time Sampling

Also called interval recording or sampling, this records presence of absence of behavior within specific intervals

Three types of time sampling:
- Whole-interval records behavior that takes place during the entire time
- Partial-interval records if the behavior happens at all during an interval
- Momentary recording record the behavior if it is present at the end of the interval

Narrative Recording

Provides a running description of the person's natural behavior

No specific time frame or coding criteria

Can include direct observations and inferences of behaviors

Narrative Recording

Daily communication logs
- Track progress or communicate with others who work with a person
- A short, general description of home someone behaved that day

A-B-C analysis
- Records descriptions of the antecedents, behaviors, and consequences

Published Systems

Most widely used are BASC and CBCL forms

Structured observational systems, but have no published norms to accompany them

Can use them as templates to build a system that is tailored to a particular client, or as-is

Peer Observation

Useful to obtain a "baseline" for normal behaviors in a situation that you can compare to a client's behaviors

Use the same type of Beh Obs with 2-3 of the person's peers