Using WIDA MODEL to Support Instructional Planning for Multilingual Learners

WIDA MODEL is an English language proficiency assessment for students in kindergarten through grade 12. The test scores are used to support a variety of instructional purposes and high-stakes decisions about multilingual learners in schools throughout the WIDA Consortium in the United States, and across the WIDA International School Consortium.

WIDA has always recommended that multiple measures be used to support decisions about students and to not rely solely on test scores. WIDA also recognizes that test scores are important to educators and to policy makers in their decision-making processes, especially in the area of instructional planning. In this Focus Bulletin, we aim to help readers better understand how WIDA MODEL test scores may be used to support instructional planning decisions for multilingual learners and their teachers. We briefly describe the test scores that students receive after taking WIDA MODEL, then consider the rich resources available to educators to understand the test scores in detail. Finally, we explain how these resources provide valuable information for educators as they use WIDA MODEL scores to plan for future instruction.

WIDA MODEL Quick Facts

- Contains four domain tests (Listening, Speaking, Reading, Writing)
- WIDA MODEL for Kindergarten: paper-based test
- Grades 1–12: paper-based or online version (in grade-level clusters 1–2, 3–5, 6–8, and 9–12)
- United States: Often used as interim assessment, monitoring progress between annual administrations of ACCESS for ELLs.
- International schools: Often used to identify students who would benefit from English language services, and to track students' English language proficiency growth across grades.

Using WIDA MODEL to Plan Instruction

For illustrative purposes in this bulletin, let's consider an imaginary student called Mario. Mario is in 4th grade, and he recently took WIDA MODEL as an interim assessment.

The table below shows Mario's scores in all four language domains on WIDA MODEL. Students receive scale scores (100–600) and proficiency levels (PLs 1–6) for each language domain and three composite scores (oral language, literacy, and overall).

Language Domain	Scale Score (Possible 100–600)	Proficiency Level (Possible 1.0–6.0)
Listening	338	4.0
Speaking	176	1.0
Writing	254	1.6
Reading	328	3.6
Oral Language	257	1.8
Literacy	291	2.3
Overall Score	280	1.9

Now let's consider Mario's teachers, and look at the kinds of questions they ask themselves as they work out how to meet Mario's needs.

Question 1

How do I use the information in my students' score reports? What information in the report is most important to me?

First, let's review how scores are calculated. In order to calculate the scale scores, the number of questions a student answers correctly, known as the raw score, is tallied. Raw scores are then converted into scale scores using an algorithm which takes into account the difficulty of items students answered correctly. Scale scores are useful for understanding student growth.

The scale scores show how much progress a student has made in their academic English language development since the last time they took WIDA MODEL. The proficiency levels (which are determined from the scale scores) help teachers and students understand what students *can do* with their language skills, depending on their test performance and grade level. In this Focus Bulletin we will emphasize the use of proficiency levels and how they may be used to support instructional planning decisions.

The WIDA MODEL score report also includes a set of descriptors to help teachers and students understand what the proficiency level scores mean, in terms of students' language development. Figure 1, below, shows an example of the proficiency levels that allow teachers and students to interpret the meaning of the proficiency level scores.

Figure 1. WIDA MODEL Score Report Proficiency Level Descriptions

Description of Proficiency Level	
1	**Entering** - Knows and uses minimal social language and minimal academic language with visual and graphic support
2	**Emerging** - Knows and uses some social English and general academic language with visual and graphic support
3	**Developing** - Knows and uses social English and some specific academic language with visual and graphic support
4	**Expanding** - Knows and uses social English and some technical academic language
5	**Bridging** - Knows and uses social English and academic language working with grade-level material
6	**Reaching** - Knows and uses social and academic language at the highest level measured by this test

However, more information about what students *can do* at the different proficiency levels can be found in the WIDA Can Do Descriptors. The WIDA Can Do Descriptors are available on the WIDA website at https://wida.wisc.edu/teach/can-do/descriptors. The Can Do Descriptors provide a rich set of resources that educators may use to support more detailed instructional planning for students who take WIDA MODEL. Using the proficiency levels students attain on WIDA MODEL, educators can reference the WIDA Can Do Descriptors to look up what students may be expected to do with their English language development, based on the following criteria:

- Student's grade level (K–12)
- Language domain (Listening, Speaking, Reading, Writing)
- Key Uses of language (Recount, Explain, Argue, Discuss)

These Can Do Descriptors are framed around four Key Uses of language. Within each grade cluster (K, 1, 2–3, 4–5, 6–8, 9–12), educators can make use of descriptors across all six proficiency levels for each of the language domains. Put another way, for every grade-level cluster, there are six Can Do Descriptors for Listening, six for Speaking, six for Reading, and six for Writing. When multiplied by four Key Uses, that's a total of 96 Can Do Descriptors per grade cluster; a rich resource for educators to better understand their students' English language development.

Figure 2 shows examples from the Can Do Descriptors that may be used to understand students' English language development, based on their WIDA MODEL scores. This figure illustrates what students would be expected to be able to do in grades 4–5 across proficiency levels 1 through 6, with their oral language skills for the Key Use of Discuss.

Figure 2: Can Do Descriptors for Grades 4–5, Oral Language, Key Use of Discuss

	ELP Level 1 Entering	ELP Level 2 Emerging	ELP Level 3 Developing	ELP Level 4 Expanding	ELP Level 5 Bridging	ELP Level 6 Reaching
ORAL LANGUAGE	**Discuss by** • Expressing own ideas in a variety of ways *(e.g., drawing, using gestures, graphing)* • Tracking the person speaking • Sharing own work *(e.g., graphic organizers, drawings)* to contribute to the conversation	**Discuss by** • Taking turns and applying conventions specific to particular conversations • Addressing others according to relationship *(e.g., student-peers, student-teacher)*	**Discuss by** • Asking clarifying questions to demonstrate engagement • Using examples to clarify statements • Answering questions to contribute to a topic	**Discuss by** • Elaborating on statements of others to extend ideas • Presenting creative solutions to resolve communication issues • Contributing ideas to co-create group responses	**Discuss by** • Recognizing how language can be used to express bias and influence others • Challenging ideas respectfully • Managing conversations to stay focused on a topic	**Discuss by** • Examining the value of examples to bring clarity to statements • Extend conversations by developing topics with clear examples and information

Let us consider how to use these Can Do Descriptors, based on Mario's sample score report presented earlier and partially reproduced here.

Language Domain	Proficiency Level
Listening	4.0
Speaking	1.0
Writing	1.6
Reading	3.6
Oral Language	1.8
Literacy	2.3
Overall Score	1.9

Mario has attained a PL of 1.8 in oral language. Referencing the oral language proficiency levels in Figure 3, we see that at PL 1, he would be expected to:

Discuss by

- Expressing own ideas in a variety of ways (e.g., drawing, using gestures, graphing)

- Tracking the person speaking

- Sharing own work (e.g., graphic organizers, drawing) to contribute to the conversation

In contrast, we can see that a different student, at PL 2, would be expected to:

Discuss by

- Taking turns and applying conventions specific to particular conversations

- Addressing others according to relationship (e.g., student-peers, student-teacher)

This information from the Can Do Descriptors can help support instructional planning. We know that Mario's score (PL 1.8 in oral language) indicates that he needs some reinforcement of the skills described at PL 2. If we review the PL 3 oral language descriptors in Figure 3, we get a sense of some of the oral language skills relevant to the next steps in Mario's learning trajectory. We can see that at PL 3 in oral language, we would expect a student to be able to ask and answer questions to maintain a conversation, plus use examples to support statements.

Question 2

How could I plan a lesson to focus on using examples to support statements in a conversation? How might this lesson also be relevant to students at slightly lower and higher proficiency levels?

These oral language discussion skills could be the focus of future lessons to support Mario's learning trajectory. WIDA MODEL test scores and the WIDA Can Do Descriptors may be used in tandem to help support instructional planning, using specific language skills that are relevant to each student's language development.

Now, let us consider Mario's performance on the WIDA MODEL Reading test and use the WIDA Can Do Descriptors to support instructional decisions. Figure 3 shows what students would be expected to be able to do in grades 4–5 across proficiency levels 1 through 6, with their reading skills for the Key Use of Argue.

Figure 3: Can Do Descriptors for Grades 4-5, Reading, Key Use of Argue

ELP Level 1 Entering	ELP Level 2 Emerging	ELP Level 3 Developing	ELP Level 4 Expanding	ELP Level 5 Bridging	ELP Level 6 Reaching
Process arguments by • Identifying key words and phrases of claims • Identifying a claim or an opinion in multimedia with a partner	**Process arguments by** • Identifying language indicative of points of view • Organizing evidence based on sequential language in texts • Differentiating between claims and evidence	**Process arguments by** • Identifying evidence from multiple places within text • Identifying different perspectives, stances, or points of view	**Process arguments by** • Hypothesizing or predicting based on evidence • Comparing multiple points of view on a topic	**Process arguments by** • Connecting personal experience with textual evidence to strengthen an interpretation of the text • Evaluating the strength of evidence as support for claims	**Process arguments by** • Evaluating claims and evidence by drawing from multiple print sources • Differentiating from the strength of different pieces of evidence as support for claims

(Row label: READING)

Mario attained a PL 3.6 on the MODEL Reading test. Referencing the reading proficiency levels in Figure 3, we see that at PL 3, a student would be expected to:

Process arguments by

- Identifying evidence from multiple places within text

- Identifying different perspectives, stances, or points of view

We see that at PL 4, a student would be expected to:

Process arguments by

- Hypothesizing or predicting based on evidence

- Comparing multiple points of view on a topic

Question 3

How could you plan a lesson to focus on helping students evaluate the strength of evidence for claims within a text? How might this lesson also be relevant to students at slightly lower and higher proficiency levels?

As with the previous oral language example, we understand from Mario's MODEL Reading score that he may need some reinforcement with regard to the PL 4 Reading skills articulated in the Can Do Descriptors, as he scored a PL 3.6.

We may also use the PL 5 Reading Can Do Descriptors to support instructional planning for Mario. We see that he would potentially benefit from instruction and support in how to connect personal experiences with evidence from a written text. We also see that Mario will likely need to learn how to evaluate the strength of evidence for claims within a text. These higher order reading skills may be incorporated into instructional planning before Mario takes the next WIDA MODEL test to keep him on his trajectory of developing the reading skills needed to fully access the content in the classroom.

Reflection Activity

These principles of using WIDA MODEL test scores and WIDA Can Do Descriptors to support instructional planning may be applied across all grades and language domains. Below, in Figures 4 and 5, we see Can Do Descriptors for grades 6–8 in the domains of Listening and Writing. Teachers of middle school multilingual learners may use these Can Do Descriptors and the other sets of Can Dos available from WIDA to better understand how to interpret their students' MODEL test scores.

Figure 4: Can Do Descriptors for Grades 6–8, Listening, Key Use of Recount

	ELP Level 1 Entering	ELP Level 2 Emerging	ELP Level 3 Developing	ELP Level 4 Expanding	ELP Level 5 Bridging	ELP Level 6 Reaching
LISTENING	Process recounts by • Identifying familiar objects or places from oral statements • Pointing to objects, people, or places based on short oral descriptions	Process recounts by • Sequencing labeled visuals per oral directions • Identifying settings or time frames in narrative or informational scenarios read aloud	Process recounts by • Matching main ideas of familiar text read aloud to visuals • Stating the next event in a series based on clues from narrative or informational oral texts	Process recounts by • Identifying main ideas and details in oral discourse • Evaluating oral presentations of peers based on criteria for success	Process recounts by • Categorizing details of content-related main ideas seen and heard in videos or other technologies • Sequencing a series of illustrated events from oral passages (*e.g., historical recaps*)	Process recounts by • Identifying key ideas expressed orally • Identifying new information expressed by others

Figure 5: Can Do Descriptors for Grades 6–8, Writing, Key Use of Argue

	ELP Level 1 Entering	ELP Level 2 Emerging	ELP Level 3 Developing	ELP Level 4 Expanding	ELP Level 5 Bridging	ELP Level 6 Reaching
WRITING	**Argue by** • Generating words and phrases that represent opinions *(e.g., "I think…")* • Making lists of topic choices with peers	**Argue by** • Stating opinions using evaluative language related to content *(e.g., "I agree. Metric is better.")* • Connecting simple sentences to form content-related ideas	**Argue by** • Substantiating opinions with content-related examples and evidence • Providing feedback to peers on language used for claims and evidence	**Argue by** • Crafting persuasive pieces *(e.g., editorials)* with a series of substantiated content-related claims • Composing scripts with protagonists and antagonists	**Argue by** • Presenting opinions in persuasive essays or reports backed by content-related research • Justifying ideas using multiple sources	**Argue by** • Introducing claims and opposing claims, along with their associated reasons and evidence • Closing with concluding statements or paragraphs that support claims

The combined use of WIDA MODEL and WIDA Can Do Descriptors can provide detailed information on students' learning trajectories across the four language domains. The Can Do Descriptors provide rich information on language skills students have already developed, those they are in the process of developing, and indicate those skills students need instruction in to continue their own linguistic journeys.

Using the WIDA MODEL test scores below, and the Can Do Descriptors for students in grades 6–8 in Figures 4 and 5, think about the following questions:

• What Listening and Writing skills have these students already developed?

• What Listening and Writing skills will be developed at the next proficiency level?

• What classroom activities could students engage in to develop towards that next level?

Language Domain	Proficiency Level
Listening	4.0
Speaking	1.0
Writing	1.6
Reading	3.6
Oral Language	1.8
Literacy	2.3
Overall Score	1.9

Summary

For assessment data such as WIDA MODEL scores to be most helpful for instructional planning decisions, the data must be timely. If students take a test but then must wait several weeks or months for the results, the scores may be valuable for decision making at a broad policy level, but these scores are less helpful for immediate instructional decisions in the classroom. WIDA MODEL, as a flexible test that may be administered when needed, provides timely assessment data about multilingual learners' current language development. Students' test scores can be reported within a day or two of students taking the test and then immediately used to inform instructional decisions in the classroom.

Using the WIDA Can Do Descriptors alongside MODEL test scores, as described in this Focus Bulletin, adds rich supporting detail about multilingual learners' language development. The combination of timely assessment data and resources to help understand what students *can do* with their language skills can provide strong support for instructional planning decisions. We hope this support will be valuable for both multilingual learners and their teachers.

WIDA MODEL is an English language proficiency assessment for students in grades K–12. As a flexible, on-demand assessment, this test can be administered at any time during the school year, depending on the needs of the district, school, teacher, or student. Scores from WIDA MODEL can be used to support instructional planning decisions and can predict student performance on ACCESS for ELLs.

wida.wisc.edu/assess/model

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