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Reviewed by Bradley N. Axelrod

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BOOK REVIEW

Report Writing Assistance for Newcomers to Neuropsychology

Reviewed by Bradley N. Axelrod

The Neuropsychology Toolkit: Guidelines, Formats, and Language, by Richard L. Wanlass, New York: Springer, 2012, 160 pp. \$39.95 (hbk) \$29.95 (ebook). ISBN-13: 978-1461418818

Neuropsychologists frequently find a variety of books on their shelves, ranging from those that are used on a regular basis to those that are used only as an occasional reference. A new book should be added to one's existing professional library if there is added value to the individual. And the contribution of a new book also varies depending on the knowledge and expertise of the reader.

Enter *The Neuropsychology Toolkit: Guidelines, Formats, and Language* by Richard Wanlass. Intentionally targeted to students and junior clinicians struggling with the structure of neuropsychology reports, the book provides clear-cut information needed for the appropriate generation of such communication. Importantly, the book focuses primarily on how the clinician can produce a written document that best captures the findings of an assessment and effectively conveys the information.

The Neuropsychology Toolkit presents the information in three distinct sections that are differentially effective in helping student clinicians. The first section, focusing explicitly on guidelines for improving one's report, offers a sample report as a pre-test. The reader is encouraged to review the sample report to identify any errors of data interpretation and writing contained therein. The process aims to sensitize readers to overall systemic errors that might be included in a report, as well as aspects as mundane as spelling mistakes.

Generated through the author's years of experience as a clinical supervisor, Part I of the book addresses errors that can occur in any number of places in an evaluation or narrative report. In addressing assessment issues, the book discusses important aspects of conducting an evaluation, such as understanding the needs of the referral source, obtaining available background information, and the importance of an appropriate assessment environment.

The *Toolkit* approaches the content of reports in a methodical section-by-section analysis, much as a supervisor might provide feedback to a trainee. Dr. Wanlass identifies common issues he observed in the reports of others that he has reviewed. In

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a thorough dissection of a neuropsychological report, he carefully points out specific information that needs to be appropriately addressed. He discusses the importance of obtaining information from the examinee regarding substance abuse, and both medical and mental health histories. When approaching interpretation of the test findings, the book offers recommendations regarding the assessment of performance validity, intellectual functioning, processing speed, mental control, motor testing, psychological issues, and so on. In general, the *Toolkit* reminds the reader how to obtain accurate information from the examinee, while providing cautions against incorrect interpretation of test data. Dr. Wanlass also provides stylistic writing suggestions, covering topics such as the appropriate use of commas and hyphens, punctuation, spelling, and the correct use of commonly misused words (e.g., “that” vs. “which”). He also emphasizes the need to proof read your final document.

As an experienced clinician and clinical supervisor, one can recognize and appreciate all of the issues raised in the *Neuropsychology Toolkit* as they pertain to writings obtained from students. Likewise, of course, no clinician wants any errors in their evaluation or resulting reports. However, as a tool to guide less-experienced clinicians into the field of neuropsychological evaluation, the layout of this book gives the impression that all errors are of similar concern. For the novice neuropsychologist, organizing this book by types of errors might have made it easier to understand the magnitude of particular mistakes, rather than the employed strategy of covering each mistake as it was encountered in the text of the report. In that way, the importance of appropriate interpretation of data, accurate gathering of medical information, and issues of practice effects would be discussed separately from those pertaining to typographical errors, incorrect use of commonly use words, and punctuation.

Part II of the *Toolkit* offers two examples of neuropsychology history forms that Dr. Wanlass provides for use with patients or family members, and these can also be used to conduct a clinical interview. Included in these forms is a list of symptoms that the examiner can explore with the examinee as a series of questions or as a self-report checklist. On the one hand, these lists of symptoms allow the examiner to inquire about a wide range of symptoms that have implications for underlying neurologic function. However, it would be useful to note that such checklists are prone to being over-endorsed by patients who may embellish or fabricate their reported symptoms. Therefore the checklists are presented without critique and are best seen as a potential list of symptoms that could be endorsed for whatever reason, including neurologic or psychological conditions as well as intentional fabrication or embellishment. Particularly, in light of the targeted audience being novice neuropsychologists, presentation of checklists could have afforded a nice discussion of such topics, including the need to recognize the limitations of self-report.

Junior clinicians often look for samples of how neuropsychology reports are formulated and how specific test results can be presented to the reader. The latter half of Part II and the content of Part III explicitly present sample language and sample reports. While helpful for clinicians becoming familiar with the practice of neuropsychology, the sample language in Part III offers basic interpretation of the results that are so obvious it raises concern that the book will be used by people improperly trained in neuropsychology. Simply being able to give a test and import a sample description might result in well-meaning clinicians practicing beyond their scope by interpreting the results of a neuropsychological evaluation in a “cook-book” style fash-

ion. Likewise, the sample reports provided in Part II may assist some clinicians in categorizing test measures, but they omit important discussions on the integration of results in reaching conclusions and making recommendations.

The Neuropsychology Toolkit provides some useful advice for the student clinician in terms of suggested content, format, and language of a neuropsychological evaluation. Even an upper-level student seeking some improved competence in report writing will benefit from this text. This book is fine as a resource for those being trained in our field, but its value must be placed in the context of some of the book's limitations.