
### Table 5.4

**Summarizing Narrative Discourse in a Report**

1. *Explain the elicitation procedure:* What types? Retelling or generation? Picture stimuli? Single or sequence? Listener knowledge?

2. *Provide length information:* For each narrative, give number of units (CUs or T-units), MLCU, and mean number of clauses per unit. If sampling conditions were replicated, compare with normative data.

3. *Describe the level of macrostructure:* What narrative level? Or what story structure level? What story grammar parts are present? What parts of high point analysis are present?


5. *Summarize the narrative language:* How well developed is the narrative macrostructure? Microstructure? What areas need improvement? What recommendations?

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The analysis of the samples must be summarized for a section of the report. For purposes of providing a brief summary of narrative skills within a larger report, the information shown in Table 5.4 should be included in the summary.

Box 5.1 shows report segments for five children ranging in age from 5 to 14 years seen for speech and language evaluations. For the younger children (i.e., Dale, Bob, and Seth), the narrative section is part of a more comprehensive report. For Example 5, a more in-depth report was done focusing only on narratives. These samples are meant to illustrate variety in the wording and comprehensiveness of report sections describing the results of assessment of narrative language.

### SUMMARY

Clinicians may find narrative language assessment to be useful for both initial evaluations to determine eligibility for services and for ongoing assessment of progress of children currently receiving intervention. For interchild comparison, the use of available quantitative data for narrative language (e.g., MLCU) for comparison purposes is a problem. Because time is limited, collection and transcription of 100-utterance or 12-minute narrative samples or the responses to six pictures and interview questions (as used by Loban, 1976) may be possible only for certain children (e.g., for a student whose scores on standardized tests are not consistent with difficulty in discourse). School clinicians may also opt for collection and analysis of longer samples only for initial and ongoing evaluations. For short narratives (e.g., less than 50 CUs) collected in the course of a single evaluation session, a clinician may calculate MLCU and other quantitative measures and report them as a way to describe the sample or samples. However, caution should be exercised in comparing that MLCU with normative data provided by either Moyano and McGillivray’s (1988) Minnesota study or Loban’s (1976) longitudinal study. Unless a considerably longer sample is obtained and transcribed, quantitative data such as MLCU should not be compared with norms from these studies. Schmidek’s procedure generally resulted in oral narrative samples that are shorter than 100 utterances or 12-minute samples, and thus would require less transcription time.
Example 1: Dale, age 5;6 years

Two oral narrative language samples were collected using the Mercer Mayer wordless picture book, One Frog Too Many. For the first sample, Dale independently produced a story as he looked at the pictures in the book. This sample was 19 utterances long, with a mean length of utterance (MLU) of 4.07 morphemes. The second narrative was produced using the same picture stimuli, following a story modeled by the clinician. This narrative was 23 utterances long, with an MLU of 6.15 morphemes. According to Leadholm and Miller's (1992) data for narrative samples of 5 year olds, the mean MLU is 6.06 and the range of MLU that is within one standard deviation of the mean is 5.12 to 7.0. While the obtained samples were not collected using the same methods as those used by Leadholm and Miller, this range suggests that Dale’s utterance length, at least for story generation, is shorter than expected. His MLU for the story retelling task was longer and appeared to be within age expectations, although a longer sample is needed to verify this. Grammatical errors observed in both samples included omission of past tense -ed (e.g., “He kick him off a turtle”) and object for subject case pronoun substitutions (e.g., “And him hop on then kick little turtle off”). Dale’s narrative followed the organization provided by the picture sequence; however, it did not include the main problem of the story (i.e., one frog’s jealousy of the new arrival). Dale’s story generation was shorter and less organized than his retelling, which indicates that the model story helped him produce a better narrative. Cohesive markers, such as pronoun reference and lexical repetition, were present and contributed to a coherent narrative. Intervention should target recognition of causal relationships using both story retelling and story generation, overall organization, and sentence-level grammar.

Example 2: Bob, age 6;4 years

Oral narrative development was informally assessed by three tasks: picture sequencing and creating a story, story retelling when given a picture, and story formation when given a single picture. Bob accurately sequenced four pictures in left to right order. His story was a simple description of the pictures, which is not unusual for children his age. Bob’s oral retelling of a short story was judged to be marginal. It contained story grammar elements from the beginning, middle, and end, suggesting that he has an awareness of story. Bob’s version lacked many major and minor details, suggesting that memory constraints may affect organization and sequencing of larger linguistic units, that is, a story. When Bob was given a picture and asked to make up a story, his responses were labeling of items and people in a picture, suggesting that although Bob may have a sense of story, his skill in formulating a story is not adequate. Intervention to improve story grammar knowledge and formulation of fictional stories is recommended.

Example 3: Seth, age 10;2 years, grade 4

Informal assessment of expressive language included analysis of oral and written narrative samples. Narrative language requires the organization of information about real or fictional events into a logical, temporally ordered story. Given story stems and picture stimuli that the listener could not see over the course of 12 minutes, Seth produced an oral narrative sample of 109 communication units (CU), with a mean length of CU (MLCU) of 5.49 words and a mean number of clauses per CU of 1.0. According to Moyano and McGillivray’s (1988) data for oral narrative samples, the range of MLCU for 8 year olds...

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that is within one standard deviation of the mean is 6.52 to 9.34 words. Thus, the MLCU of Seth's oral
narrative language is below the expected range. All of the CUs were simple sentences; thus, no subor-
dination of clauses was shown. The story's structure showed the following basic elements of a story:
setting, problem, response, and outcome. However, grammatical errors, and problems with coherence
and the cohesive markers were noted. Grammatical errors included overgeneralization of regular past
tense and inconsistent noun-verb agreement. Pronoun references were often unclear, and conjunctive
cohesion was limited to use of *then* and *and then*.

Seth's written narrative sample was 5 T-units in length, with a mean length of T-unit (MLTU) of
6.1 words and a mean number of clauses per T-unit of 1.0. According to Loban's (1976) data, the
MLTU for written samples of the random group of grade 3 students is 7.6 words. Thus, Seth's MLTU
appears to be below that expected for his age. Spelling errors indicate problems with letter-sound cor-
respondence and suggest that Seth has not learned the complete alphabet. Intervention should focus
on grammatical form errors and increasing sentence complexity. Use of story retelling is recommended,
with sampling of story generation periodically to assess generalization of grammatical and syntactic
improvement to self-generated stories. Also, practice with personal narratives is recommended, with
emphasis on self-monitoring of grammatical errors and improvement of sentence complexity, targeting
early developing complex sentences.

Example 4: Jen, age 14;4 years, grade 9 (The oral and written narratives produced by Jen are
shown in Box 3.7.)

An informal assessment of oral and written language was conducted through the analysis of nar-
rative samples. A narrative is a synthesis of real or fictional events into a logical, temporally ordered
story. Jen's oral narrative sample was collected in response to a request to pick a picture and tell a
story about it. The picture remained in view by both Jen and the clinician. The narrative contained 31
communication units (CU), with a mean length of CU (MLCU) of 9.03 words and a mean number of
clauses per CU of 1.23. According to Loban's (1976) data for oral samples of grade 9 students, the
range of MLCU that is within one standard deviation of the mean is 9.18 to 12.74 words. Thus, the
MLCU of this sample was slightly below expected performance; however, more or longer oral narrative
samples would be needed before judging utterance length to be a concern. The overall structure of her
narrative showed the basic elements of a story: a setting with characters introduced and an episode
structure with an initiating event, attempt, and a consequence. In addition, her story included a char-
acter's internal plan, which is sometimes missing in the narratives of children with language impair-
ments. The narrative had adequate temporal, referential, and causal coherence. Pronouns were used
to refer to previously introduced nouns. The story was complete, well organized, and easy to follow.

For her written narrative Jen was asked to select a picture and write a story about it. This nar-
rative was 11 T-units in length, with a mean length of T-unit (MLTU) of 10.81 words and a mean num-
ber of clauses per T-unit of 1.45. According to Loban's (1976) data for oral samples of grade 9 students, the
MLTU for the random group of grade 9 written samples is 10.05

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