



## The Clinical Café'

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Scoring Nuances of the Comprehensive Assessment of Spoken Language  
Part 1: Basal and Ceiling Rules

**April 2005 Clinical Café**  
**By Kathy Swiney, CCC-SLP, BRS-FD**

The *Comprehensive Assessment of Spoken Language* (CASL) is fast becoming "the test of choice" for identifying oral language skills in children and young adults aged 3 to 21. As more and more examiners use the CASL, specific questions arise about the administration of the instrument. This article will address questions that have been posed regarding the basal and ceiling rules.

Dr. Elizabeth Carrow-Woolfolk, author of the CASL, has made the administration particularly logical and straightforward. It is, however, the examiner's responsibility to have a thorough knowledge of the administration instructions for each of the fifteen tests in the CASL test battery. It is essential that each examiner read the Examiner's Manual thoroughly before administering this or any other standardized assessment instrument. Unless the CASL, or any other standardized test, is administered in the same manner utilized during the standardization process, the results obtained may not be interpretable. (Examiner's Manual, p. 68).



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Before we address specific questions, it might be helpful to review some of the guidelines contained in the Examiner's Manual for obtaining accurate results.

**Consider the special needs of the examinee.** (Examiner's Manual. p. 30, 31, 68.)

Does the examinee have visual, aural, physical, attentional, articulatory, emotional, or English proficiency limitations that might affect his or her responses? Any adaptations made in the administration of the tests must be documented and considered during interpretation. If sufficient modifications are made, the use of normative scores may not be possible. If so, the examiner's clinical judgment may be used to formulate a qualitative evaluation of the examinee's skills.

**Adhere to the prompting, repetition, basal, and ceiling rules.** (E.M. ibid. p. 7, 69.)

Keep the Test Book open to the appropriate tabbed page for prompting and scoring information. This information is repeated on each Record Form in a box preceding the section for recording responses. The majority of tests have the same basal, three consecutive correct responses, and ceiling, five consecutive incorrect responses, rules. On the Sentence Comprehension of Syntax test and Ambiguous Sentences, while the basal and ceiling rules follow the general format, the examinee must give a correct response to both parts of the stimulus item(s) to receive a score of 1. Paragraph Comprehension and Grammaticality Judgment have unique basal and ceiling rules.

**Specifics on Basal and Ceiling Rules**

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## Double Basal/Double Ceiling

*What is Dr. Carrow-Woolfolk's rationale for using the lowest basal and the highest ceiling when obtaining raw scores on the CASL?*

The goal in the testing world is to capture the most complete view of a child's abilities. The lowest basal and highest ceiling rule allows you to obtain as much information as you can without tiring or frustrating the examinee by administering too many items that are either too easy or too difficult for him/her.

## Earned Ceiling vs. Tested Ceiling

*What should the examiner do when an open-ended question is administered and the examiner is not sure that the response is correct?*

In this case, the examiner should not break the continuity of the test administration. The examiner should continue administering items until he or she is sure a ceiling is met, checking questionable responses after the test is complete.

*Does the highest ceiling rule apply in this case?*

When the examiner goes back to score the test, he or she should keep in mind that the child's performance drives where the ceiling is, not the examiner's decision to keep testing. So, if the examiner, after the fact, scores a child's response as incorrect and that creates a child's "earned" ceiling, then that is the ceiling to be used. [Click here for "FAQ" questions on CASL](#)

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