



## The Clinical Café'

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Using the GFTA-2 *Sounds in Sentences* as Part of a Complete Language Assessment

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I don't know about you, but I find that the assessment of language skills in children is one of the most challenging aspects of my job. Language, unlike articulation, does not have a finite number of skills to master. Language learning and usage continue to develop throughout one's life.



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Perhaps the biggest challenge in language assessment is the balancing act involved in oral communication. We need to measure the broad range of skills in this area in a manner that is structured enough to compare the abilities of the examinee to a norm group, but also reflects the unstructured use of language in natural environments. The following case study should provide some insight into one option for balancing these goals.

#### CASE STUDY: SALLY, AGE 7 YEARS, 8 MONTHS

Sally was referred for speech and language testing by her classroom teacher. The case history information indicated that Sally's teacher rated her as being "incomprehensible" in classroom discussions. On the day of the speech and language assessment, I introduced myself to Sally and asked her if she had already been to P.E. class. She responded, "I ride the bus."

#### Step One: Initial Assessment

The *Comprehensive Assessment of Spoken Language (CASL)* was used as the formal measure of Sally's oral language based on the depth of detail it provides. All core and supplementary tests were administered for Sally's age level. Several weaknesses were identified, but they were not as severe or of the type I had expected. In the core tests, her standard scores were as follows:

Antonyms	88	Nonliteral Language	87
Syntax Construction	47	Pragmatic Judgment	73
Paragraph Comprehension	85	Core Composite	71

Frankly, I expected Sally's standard score for Syntax Construction to have been higher than the score for Nonliteral Language, which is a more complex task. The scores on the supplementary tests were generally average to low-average, with the exception of Sentence Completion, on which Sally obtained a standard

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score of 67. While Sally showed some obvious weaknesses on the CASL, she demonstrated enough competencies that I was surprised her teacher had rated her as "incomprehensible" in classroom discussions. Obviously, more information was needed on the type of language Sally used in less structured activities. In addition, I wanted a language sample typical of classroom activities in which the teacher provides topical structure.

### **Step Two: Making the Choice—*Sounds In Sentences***

After thinking about what exactly I needed to measure, I decided the *Sounds in Sentences* section of the *Goldman-Fristoe Test of Articulation, Second Edition* (GFTA-2) would be the best way to obtain the specific information for this situation. This portion of Sally's language assessment would be less structured than the tests on the CASL, but more structured than a spontaneous language sample.

Following the regular administration guidelines, I tape-recorded and transcribed Sally's responses on the *Sounds in Sentences*. An analysis of this sample indicated that Sally could retell a story with picture cues. Her sentences, while short, were logical and appropriate for the picture cues. She did omit regular past tense endings and some auxiliary verbs, and she would also confuse prepositions. Sally presented the story itself in logical sequence, however, and her language was comprehensible.

### **Step Three: *Finding Nemo*—Closing The Circle On Complete Assessment**

As the final step in this process, I asked Sally to tell me about her favorite movie, *Finding Nemo*. No comments were provided other than those related to active listening, such as, "REALLY!" Here is a sample from her story:

*Nemo was a boy and Marla mom it die from the shark ate it. Marla try to take the mother inside the house but all the eat then mom and the baby but one baby Nemo left and next morning Nemo a kid. The bus the fish in the water the busdriver come and he say then he goes under and they went under the fish driver...*

This time, Sally's story was extremely difficult to comprehend, even by a listener familiar with the storyline of the movie. Her teacher judged this language sample to be representative of Sally's spontaneous speech. From this example, it was readily apparent why the classroom teacher described Sally's conversational speech as "incomprehensible."

### **Next Steps: Help For Sally**

The GFTA-2 *Sounds in Sentences* provided valuable information in this case. Sally did much better than expected in the more opened-ended responses on the CASL, but very poorly in the unstructured speech sample. Her responses on the *Sounds in Sentences* indicated that Sally was a far more competent communicator when she had visual cues to provide topical and sequential structure for her responses. Working with the classroom teacher, a plan was designed not only for therapeutic intervention, but also for accommodations to support more meaningful and logical responses from Sally in the classroom. Without the use of the information provided by the *Sounds in Sentences* activity, this task would have been far more difficult.

### **Conclusion: The Benefits of *Sounds in Sentences***

The selection of the *Sounds in Sentences* stories for a language sample offers other benefits as well. Due to the popularity of the GFTA-2, most SLPs have a copy of the picture stories. With a copy of the GFTA-2 in hand, anyone working in the field would know the length and complexity of the stimulus sentences and be able to compare them with a student's responses provided in a written report. Using the *Sounds in Sentences* section of the GFTA-2, comparisons can be made from evaluation to evaluation to monitor the improvements made in an examinee's structured language production. It is also a "middle ground" assessment task that fits perfectly between standardized test performance and open-ended tasks, such as storytelling or retelling stories from movies or children's books.

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