

Appropriate Use of the TABE® 9&10 Locator Test



Locator tests are given to help determine which level of an assessment to administer to obtain the most accurate information about a student's academic strengths and weaknesses. Locator tests, such as those for TABE 9&10, are built to measure a wide range of ability with a limited number of items for each content area. As a result, the information from a locator test about a student should be viewed as only a very rough estimate of the student's functional level, not as an absolute prediction. As is true for all tests (and in accordance with Standard 13.7 of the Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing: AERA, APA, and NCME, 1999), any decisions about a student should not be made on the basis of a single locator test score, but should include other relevant information about the student.

That being said, it is often the case with adult students that little is known about the student's ability level when a test such as TABE needs to be administered, so locator tests are heavily relied upon to make decisions about which level of the test to administer. Because locator tests have a limited number of items, they do not provide results that are as reliable as the main assessments, nor can the same kind of generalizations about a student's probability of success in academic coursework be made based on the results. Therefore, locator tests should never be used in place of a main assessment such as the TABE Survey or TABE Complete Battery.

Moreover, the standard error of measurement (SEM) should be taken into account when using results from a locator test. SEM is an attribute of all tests because tests sample from a content domain, just like the results from a Gallup Poll always contain sampling error. Sampling error in Gallup Poll results is directly related to the size of the sample—the larger the sample, the lower the sampling error. The same is true for a test—SEM for a test will be lower if a larger sample of items is given. If a student's score on a locator test is right at a cut-score boundary, SEM alone could lead to a student being identified as having more, or less, ability than he/she actually has.

For example, the recommended cut-scores for the Language Locator Test are

- 6 items correct or below administer Level E
- 7-8 items correct administer Level M
- 9-10 items correct administer Level D
- 11-12 items correct administer Level A



The SEM for the TABE Language Locator Test is 1.42, so a student could be identified as being ready for Level D if they got 9 items correct when their actual functional level meant they should have taken Level M (i.e., $9 - 1.42 = 7.58$).

The recommended cut-scores and SEM values are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Recommended TABE Locator Test Cut-Scores

Reading	Mathematics	Language	TABE level to administer
6 and below*	4-6**	6 and below	E
7-8	7-8	7-8	M
9-10	9-11	9-10	D
11-12	12-16	11-12	A
SEM = 1.26	SEM = 1.54	SEM = 1.42	

In order to avoid administering a TABE level that is too difficult for the student a good rule of thumb would be to administer a lower level if the student scores at the lower bound of the recommended cut-scores (e.g., if a student got 9 Mathematics Locator Test items correct, administer Level M rather than Level D—if they got 10 or 11 correct, administer Level D). Because TABE is vertically scaled across its four levels it theoretically does not matter if a student takes an adjacent level—their scale score would be the same—but taking a level of TABE that is appropriate for the student’s ability level will provide more accurate diagnostic information and will be a less frustrating experience for the student.