

**GUIDE TO THE QUALITATIVE
SCORING SYSTEM FOR THE
MODIFIED VERSION OF THE
BENDER-GESTALT TEST**

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To my wife, Linda.

G.G.B.

To M. Purcell, . . . at last.

N.A.B.

PREFACE

We began working on the Qualitative Scoring System for the Modified Version of the Bender-Gestalt Test in the 1980s. Since that time, the research base has expanded and the test has been refined.

The test utilizes six of the original nine Bender-Gestalt Test designs, which are copied by the child in either an individual or group format. The Qualitative Scoring System measures visual-motor-integration skill in preschool and early elementary school children. It involves a six-point (0 to 5) rating of the overall “quality” of each of the six designs. Examiners find the test easy to administer, score, and interpret. And research has consistently shown it to be a reliable and valid predictor of school performance.

The growth of interest in the Qualitative Scoring System for the Modified Version of the Bender-Gestalt Test has been gratifying. We have been contacted by researchers and practitioners in North America, South America, and various countries throughout the world, who are interested in incorporating the test into screening or assessment batteries. A recent study even normed the test on Hong Kong children.

This book should assist those interested in using the test in research and applied settings. It provides detailed coverage of the development of the test, as well as information needed for administration, scoring, and interpretation.

As with most projects of this scope, we received help from many sources. We wish to thank the children and school personnel from the many schools and preschools around the country who participated in the norming of this test. Without their help, this project would not have been possible. In addition, we want to acknowledge the contributions of our colleagues to the ongoing development and refinement of the Qualitative Scoring System for the Modified Version of the

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G.G.B.

N.A.B.

CONTENTS

	<i>Page</i>
<i>Preface</i>vii
 <i>Chapter</i>	
1. Introduction3
2. Historical Background on the Bender-Gestalt Test7
3. Educational Applications of the Bender-Gestalt Test .....	.13
4. Development of the Qualitative Scoring System for the Modified Version of the Bender-Gestalt Test .....	.19
5. Administration and Scoring .....	.25
6. Reliability and Validity .....	.29
7. Standardization and Norming .....	.37
8. Interpretation Guidelines .....	.42
9. Case Illustrations .....	.46
10. Future Research Directions .....	.59
 <i>Appendices</i>	
A. Scoring Guidelines for the Qualitative Scoring System for the Modified Version of the Bender-Gestalt Test .....	.69
B. Age Norms for U.S. Children for the Qualitative Scoring System for the Modified Version of the Bender-Gestalt Test .....	.106
C. Grade Norms for U.S. Children for the Qualitative Scoring System for the Modified Version of the Bender-Gestalt Test—Fall Testing .....	.109
D. Grade Norms for U.S. Children for the Qualitative Scoring System for the Modified Version of the Bender-Gestalt Test—Spring Testing .....	.111

E.	Age Norms for Hong Kong Children for the Qualitative Scoring System for the Modified Version of the Bender-Gestalt Test	113
F.	Case Descriptions	116
	<i>References</i>	129
	<i>Author Index</i>	137
	<i>Subject Index</i>	141

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

The Visual Motor Gestalt Test (Bender, 1938, 1946), more commonly referred to as the Bender-Gestalt Test, has a rich history as an assessment technique. As Piotrowski (1995) noted in his review of the clinical and research use of the Bender-Gestalt Test, the test “has been a perennial mainstay in the assessment battery for the past half-century. . . .” The Bender-Gestalt Test has been used as an assessment tool in appraisal of intelligence, . . . as a screening technique for neuropsychological dysfunction, as a clinical tool for sampling visual-motor proficiency, and as a standard projective technique in the assessment of personality” (p. 1272). Consistent with this observation, we found nearly 1300 references to the “Bender Gestalt Test” in a recent search on the Psych Info research data base.

Its popularity among clinicians working in diverse settings also has been well documented in studies of test usage over the past 40 years. During this time, the Bender-Gestalt Test has ranked consistently in the top five tests. See Tolor and Schulberg (1963) and Tolor and Brannigan (1980) for extensive reviews of these studies.

Several recent studies have focused on research more pertinent to the subject of this book—the use of the Bender-Gestalt Test with a school-aged population. Mooney and Harrison (1987) obtained evaluations of tests from 190 clinical-child psychologists (members of Section 1, Division 12 of the American Psychological Association). These psychologists were requested to provide the researchers with photocopies of “their last evaluation with a 5- to 6-year-old child, a 10- to 11-year-old child, and a 15- to 16-year-old adolescent” (p. 276). They found that the Bender-Gestalt Test was the third most frequently used test (following the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children–Revised,

and the projective drawings).

Archer, Maruish, Imhof, and Piotrowski (1991) examined test usage of clinical psychologists who specialized in adolescent therapy or assessment. One hundred sixty-five respondents to their survey (drawn from Division 12, clinical psychology division of the American Psychological Association, the Society for Personality Assessment, and from journal publications with an emphasis on adolescent assessment) indicated how frequently they used 67 assessment instruments. The Bender-Gestalt Test ranked third (behind the Wechsler scale and the Rorschach). Further, 49% of those who indicated that they used a “standard test battery” included the Bender-Gestalt Test.

Ganschow, Sparks, and Helmick (1992) examined the speech and language referral practices of school psychologists. Nine hundred fifty-one school psychologists from across the United States completed a survey that included a question about “the use of specific assessment instruments in testing a child for LD” (p. 316). The Bender-Gestalt Test was the second most frequently used assessment device (next to the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children–Revised).

Stinnett, Harvey, and Oehler-Stinnett (1994) also surveyed members of the National Association of School Psychologists about their assessment practices. The survey included tests in seven general assessment areas:

- Intelligence/Cognitive
- Academic Achievement
- Perceptual and Perceptual Motor
- Behavior/Social-Emotional
- Adaptive Behavior
- Vocational Interests and Aptitude
- Preschool Functioning

One hundred and twenty-three respondents rated each instrument on two dimensions: frequency of use and importance. The Bender-Gestalt Test was used by 71% of the psychologists and rated the number one test in the Perceptual and Perceptual Motor Categories (both in frequency and importance). The test was also considered in the Behavior/Social-Emotional category, where it was used by 38% of the psychologists. It ranked fourth in frequency, behind teacher interview,

child interview, and behavioral observation, but somewhat lower in terms of perceived importance.

Kennedy, Faust, Willis, and Piotrowski (1994) conducted a similar study to explore the social-emotional assessment practices of school psychologists. They collected surveys from 293 school psychologists drawn from the Directory of Nationally Certified School Psychologists. On the question that asked subjects to indicate “how frequently they used each of 23 social-emotional tests” (p. 230), the Bender-Gestalt Test again ranked second only to the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children–Revised.

Finally, Wilson and Reschly (1996) conducted an extensive study of school psychologists in applied and training settings. They obtained 1,689 surveys of test usage from members of the National Association of School Psychologists, and 156 surveys from instructors in school psychology programs, on their test teaching and training practices. With respect to the practitioners’ test usage, in response to the question “For each of the tests or assessment procedures, please estimate the number of times per month that you use the test/procedure” (p. 12), the Bender-Gestalt Test ranked third, behind “structured observations” and the Wechsler scales. Further, data from instructors indicated that besides intelligence tests, the Bender-Gestalt Test was the only assessment device for which over 70% of the programs provided supervised training.

In sum, it appears that Tolor and Brannigan’s (1980) conclusion still holds true. The “Bender-Gestalt Test continues to enjoy great popularity as evidenced by . . . its widespread and persistent use as a diagnostic tool” (p. 4).

This book will detail the development and refinement of a relatively new approach to the Bender-Gestalt Test: The Qualitative Scoring System for the Modified Version of the Bender-Gestalt Test. It measures visual-motor-integration skills in preschool and early elementary school children, and is used as an aid in the identification of learning problems in psychoeducational and neuropsychological assessments.

We begin with the historical perspective on the development of the Bender-Gestalt Test, and highlight some of the most influential research on the test in Chapter 2. In Chapter 3, we give a detailed account of the early educational research applications of the Bender-

Gestalt Test. The next five chapters provide a comprehensive look at the development and refinement of the Qualitative Scoring System for the Modified Version of the Bender-Gestalt Test. Chapter 4 examines the research that influenced the development of this test. Chapter 5 provides precise administration and scoring information. Chapter 6 includes information on standardization and norming. Chapter 7 chronicles the research on reliability and validity of the test. Chapter 8 includes interpretation guidelines for the test. Chapter 9 presents protocols for readers to score and interpret. Finally, Chapter 10 discusses the need for further research and points out some potentially productive avenues to pursue. Additionally, the Appendices include detailed scoring guidelines for each design (Appendix A), age and grade norms (Appendices B, C, D, and E), and detailed analyses of the protocols presented in Chapter 9 (Appendix F).

In short, this book contains everything psychologists and educational specialists need to know to use The Qualitative Scoring System for the Modified Version of the Bender-Gestalt Test.