

Questions and Answers About Documenting Study Context in WWC Reviews of Group Design Studies

The purpose of this document is to provide answers to the questions submitted before and during the What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) technical assistance webinar hosted on May 14, 2019 about documenting study context in WWC reviews of group design studies.

This document is a companion to the slide deck used during the webinar, which can be found on the [webinar archive page](#). Whenever possible, we identified the slide(s) to which a question pertains. We combined similar questions and rephrased some others for clarity, preserving the meaning of the original question. If additional questions arise, please contact the WWC Help Desk at <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/help>.

The end of this document provides links to resources mentioned throughout this document and during the webinar, such as the *WWC Procedures Handbook, Version 4.0* and WWC database of Intervention Reports.

Questions About Locating and Documenting Context Information

1. If a study combines racial categories (e.g., Asian and Pacific Islander), should a reviewer report “not specified” until an author query is conducted? (Question applies to slides 26 and 27.)

Yes. If a study combines racial categories (e.g., percentage of Asian and Pacific Islander students) for reporting, then reviewers should record those percentages as “not specified” until additional information is available from an author query (AQ), if conducted.

2. How should reviewers denote class type for a special education resource classroom? Neither the inclusion nor the general education class type fits. (Question applies to slide 37.)

At present, reviewers should leave that context field blank but mention the class type in the Notes field. Future iterations of the online study review guide (OSRG) may include additional options.

3. How should reviewers classify special schools, such as schools for students with autism or students with behavior disorders? (Question applies to slide 41.)

At present, reviewers should leave that context field blank but mention the school type in the Notes field. Future iterations of the OSRG may include additional options.

4. How should reviewers document postsecondary school type for colleges that primarily offer associates degrees, but also offer a limited number of bachelor's degrees? (Question applies to slide 42.)

Reviewers should choose both the 2-year college and 4-year college option in the School Type field.

5. If the district name is listed in a study description (for example, in the Kim, 2006, example) but the urbanicity and region aren't identified, would it fall on the reviewer to search the district name to independently identify urbanicity and region/state information?

Kim (2006) used a pseudonym for the school district but mentioned that it was urban and located in a Mid-Atlantic state. Therefore, the urbanicity and region were known. When this information is not provided, reviewers need only record context information that is explicitly mentioned in the study. Reviewers do not need to look up the district name to determine its urbanicity. However, if the reviewers are sending an AQ, then they should consider requesting that the author provide an urbanicity classification along with the region(s) and state(s). We discuss conditions for generating AQs for context information in further detail in the Questions About Author Queries section of this document.

6. Should reviewers document in the notes when baseline information is used to document study context?

Yes: Please indicate in the Notes field when baseline information is used to fill in the Context fields of the OSRG.

7. What information should go in the narrative section that asks about sample characteristics? Often this information is a repeat of what is included in context. Should it repeat in the narrative section too?

We assume this question is referring to the Narrative section of the OSRG. In the Context section, reviewers fill in the numerical values or check the applicable boxes for each category. In the Narrative section, reviewers describe the setting of the study, study design, sample sizes, sample characteristics, intervention, comparison, and implementation in narrative form. Each narrative question has a separate Notes field where reviewers can document where in the study information was obtained or to provide clarifying notes. The Narrative section does not need to report all the information included in the Context section.

8. When two reviewers complete separate SRGs for a study, are they both supposed to complete the context section or just the first reviewer? The person who sent this question added that at his or her organization, both reviewers complete the Context section, but other organizations may only have the first reviewer complete it.

When two reviewers complete separate SRGs for a study, both reviewers should complete the Context section, not just the first reviewer. When the master review guide is created, the entries of each reviewer are compared to create the master review. We want to make sure that all reviewers capture the same information. This is not possible if only one reviewer completes the Context section; thus, both reviewers should independently complete the Context section.

Questions About Author Queries

9. If a study only provides baseline demographic information that could be used to complete the Study Context section, but a reviewer must query an author for other information, should the reviewer also query for demographic information for the analytic sample?

If a reviewer needs to conduct an AQ for another reason, then the reviewer should consider also requesting context information for the analytic sample, even if baseline information is available. The reviewer should consult with a senior member of the review team about the need for context information for the analytic sample.

10. Many studies do not provide all information requested in the Study Context section of the OSRG. As such, previous guidance was that reviewers did not need to send an AQ if the only missing information for completing a review was context information (that is, reviewers only queried authors for context information if they were already querying for other information needed for the study's rating). Changing this guidance means that reviewers will have to send an AQ on most studies. Is this the expectation?

According to the *WWC Procedures Handbook, Version 4.1* (released for public comment on July 10, 2019 and available [at this link](#)), if a study meets WWC standards but is missing context information, an AQ should be sent for context information. If a study does not meet WWC standards based on available information and an AQ is being sent to gather additional information that could change the study's rating, then the reviewer should also request missing context information.

11. Are author queries needed for all reviews, including for practice guides?

If a study includes all information needed to complete a review, then there is no need to conduct an AQ. If reviewers need to conduct an AQ to collect information to assign a study rating, then

reviewers should also include a request for context information in the AQ. If only study context information is missing, then reviewers should follow the directions of topic area/practice guide leadership on whether to initiate an AQ for this information alone.

Questions About Resources

12. Will the definitions used during the webinar be added to the OSRG instructions for group studies?

In the short-term, reviewers should rely on the definitions used during the webinar, which are available in the [webinar slides](#). In the longer term, the definitions will be added to the *WWC Procedures Handbook* and the Study Review Guide Instructions.

13. Will the links posted in the chat during the webinar be available after the webinar?

All links posted in the chat box during the webinar are available in the General Resources section of this document.

Additional Questions

14. We received a few questions about study design. For example, we received a question about the common mistakes in choosing samples in education surveys, and another question about approaches to designing questionnaires for a study.

The WWC does not provide recommendations for designing and conducting research studies. The WWC reviews the research, determines which studies meet the WWC standards, and summarizes the findings from those studies. To conduct study reviews, the WWC follows guidelines outlined in the *WWC Standards and Procedures Handbooks*. The guidelines from these handbooks focus primarily on internal validity. Researchers should follow best practices in their fields, including best practices for sampling and questionnaire design, to ensure internal validity of impact estimates.

General Resources

In addition to the webinar and Questions and Answers document, the following resources provide guidance about documenting study context in WWC reviews of group design studies. These resources include resources shared during the webinar in the chat box.

- Draft *WWC Procedures and Standards Handbook, Version 4.1* (available for public comment from July 10–August 10, 2019): https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/Handbooks#draftV4_1.

- *WWC Standards Handbook, Version 4.0*:
https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/Docs/referenceresources/wwc_standards_handbook_v4.pdf.
- *WWC Procedures Handbook, Version 4.0*:
https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/Docs/referenceresources/wwc_procedures_handbook_v4.pdf.
- WWC Study Review Guide: Group Design studies:
https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/Docs/ReferenceResources/wwc_public_srg_userguide_022018.pdf.
- Kim, J. S. (2006). Effects of a voluntary summer reading intervention on reading achievement: Results from a randomized field trial. *Education Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 28(4), 335–355. Retrieved from
https://scholar.harvard.edu/files/jameskim/files/2006-eeepa-kim-voluntarysummerreading10schoolrct_website.pdf.
- WWC Intervention Reports: <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/Publication#/ContentTypeId:1>.
- WWC reviews of studies that meet ESSA tiers of evidence:
<https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/StudyFindings>.
- WWC database of reviewed studies: <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc>.
- Sign up to receive IES news briefs: <https://ies.ed.gov/newsflash/>.