
Reliability & Validity

Hearing Healthcare Industry

Savvy Audiology



Introduction

During applied linguistics studies, the relevance of reliability and validity in the assessment of language abilities was emphasised. Not only are the variables of the student applicable but of equal importance are those of the teacher and the learning environment. Audiology practice is no different. With client, clinician, front of house staff and consulting environment at play, this paper will consider some of the relevant variables of which every participant needs to be aware, in order to obtain reliable and valid outcomes.

The Client

Fatigue, ill health, stress, anxiety, feeling emotionally unsettled, cognitive processing ability, motivation, poly-pharmacy, physical and mobility difficulties, age and sensory impairments are variables requiring attention. As an audiologist, one must always acknowledge that any one of these factors could be affecting the client at any given time. For those clients of advanced age, the likelihood of the co-existence of several of these variables is heightened. If the client presents fatigued or emotionally troubled, the assessment will be unlikely to elicit reliable results because the ability to focus and remain on task is reduced. Similarly, the highly medicated client who attends the appointment in a state of mild cognitive confusion will not perform optimally. Being alert to the possible affective variables of the client helps the audiologist to ascertain the best course of action for that individual. Spending extra time during the history taking stage will always help foster rapport, provide a better insight into the individual needs of the client, build trust and ultimately ensure person centred care.

The Audiologist

Many of the aforementioned affective variables apply equally to the clinician conducting the appointment. Perhaps the audiologist has a sick child and did not sleep, has travelled over an hour to the clinic and has not yet had breakfast. Such factors will most certainly affect the rapport building phase with the client. Having to follow a strict set of guidelines for an appointment, such as elicit specific listening goals and recommend a certain level of technology within the initial assessment, may not be possible when the audiologist is not performing optimally. It is important to acknowledge the pressure to perform within certain timeframes is not always achievable, even for the highly

organised, time efficient clinician. Affective factors will inevitably influence performance. Being prepared but also willing to be a little spontaneous, follow the client's lead as necessary, are useful skills for an audiologist. The power of listening to the client also, reassuring him or her that they are being heard, should not be underestimated.

The Environment

Humans react to their environment. Is the temperature too cold? Is there natural light coming into the room? Is there a strange smell lingering in the testing booth? Why are there so many cables hanging from the wall? Why does the receptionist look so sullen? As soon as one enters a new environment, there is an immediate reaction. This reaction will indirectly affect how the client is going to feel and in turn, perform in that particular environment. Because many audiologists work for small or large businesses, the office spaces are not controllable as marketing and management will usually direct how the clinic is decorated. Thankfully, the audiologist can influence aspects of this environment, specifically the individual office space. Savvy Audiology recommends keeping the office free from clutter, always ensure cables are kept secure and tidy, do not leave food in view, ensure the client has room to sit comfortably, try and establish a one on one rapport where both individuals are equal, never presume anything about the client and most importantly, actively listen to all your client has to say. Sometimes the client is unwilling to divulge the information required to help guide them on his or her journey, so an audiologist needs to be ready to develop techniques to elicit the required information. One of the best ways to learn such skills is to observe an experienced audiologist 'in action'. Over the years I have observed many great clinicians and these interactions have proven invaluable in my training.

Final Thoughts

When working as an audiologist, always consider the client, the clinician and the environment. What is the best time to assess a particular client? How can we best manipulate the testing environment to support an individual? What can you do to help build rapport even though you are feeling exhausted? Is the client motivated to be in the clinic at this particular time? Hearing assessment is so much more than the audiogram and the hearing device.