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# Ability Levels

Within the gifted education literature and on many websites, levels of giftedness are often reported. Although these levels may be loosely based around standard deviations, normal curve distributions or even developmental milestones, it is important to understand that they are essentially arbitrary in nature. In general, these levels and their labels reflect differences in experts' notions of what intelligence means.

Tables that include levels of giftedness should therefore be interpreted with caution, especially with regard to IQ scores above 140. It is important to recognise that scores attained on more recently constructed tests (e.g., the SB5 in 2003 and the WISC-IV in 2004) are not comparable to those attained on older tests (e.g., SB-LM) because of their distinct theoretical bases. Owing to this, there has been confusion as to what constitutes a score that may indicate ability in the Highly to Profoundly Gifted ranges.

We have conducted more than 2000 assessments over several years and have created the table below to reflect distinct levels of ability that can be catered for in specific ways. This table categorises ability levels according to percentile ranks and we believe that it can be used accurately and appropriately when interpreting modern IQ test results.

| Ability Levels | Percentile Ranks | Possible Academic Interventions |
|---|---|---|
| Above Average Ability | $86^{th}$ – $94^{th}$ | Enrich/cluster |
| Gifted Ability | $95^{th}$ – $99^{th}$ | Differentiate/group/extend |
| Highly Gifted Ability | >$99^{th}$ – $99.9^{th}$ | Group/extend/accelerate |
| Exceptionally Gifted Ability | >$99.9^{th}$ | Double accelerate/mentor |

The percentile ranks of standard scores (e.g., Full Scale IQ, Verbal IQ, Nonverbal/Performance IQ) show how an examinee has performed relative to age peers. Higher percentile ranks indicate intellectual ability further from the mean and, therefore, suggest greater need for intervention in mixed-ability classrooms. For instance, a child who has scored at the $95^{th}$ percentile has performed equal to or higher than 95% of other children the same age (i.e., in the top 5% of age peers) and will have intellectual needs that are different from the majority of same-aged peers. A child who has scored beyond the $99^{th}$ percentile will have intellectual needs that are even more different from age peers and also different from other gifted children.

It should be noted that appropriate intervention will depend on school policy, academic achievement, social-emotional considerations and other issues, including learning difficulties and disability, as well.

Note: In extremely rare cases, IQ scores above 160 can be derived from raw scores that well exceed "at the ceiling" scaled scores on both the SB5 and WISC-IV. Based on the SB5 technical manual, for example, Extended IQ scores of 176+ are referred to as being in the Profoundly Gifted Ability range.