



## The Washington Group Short Set on Functioning: Question Specifications

### Introduction

The Short Set on Functioning for use on national censuses and surveys was developed, tested and adopted by the Washington Group on Disability Statistics (WG). The basic actions represented in this set of six questions are those that are most often found to limit an individual and result in participation restrictions. Domains were selected using the criteria of simplicity, brevity, universality and comparability. The information that results from the use of these questions will, a) represent the majority of, but not all, persons with limitation in basic actions, b) represent the most commonly occurring limitations in basic actions, and c) be able to capture persons with similar problems across countries.

This document provides a description of each of the questions in the WG Short Set. Information on the intent of the question, the concepts being measured and the purpose of the specific language used is presented in order to improve understanding for translation and administration of the questions, as well as analysis of the resulting data.

### The WG Short Set Questions

The Washington Group Short Set comprises questions on six core functional domains: seeing, hearing, walking, cognition, self-care, and communication. The introduction is to be read before the questions are administered.

*Introduction:* The next questions ask about difficulties you may have doing certain activities because of a HEALTH PROBLEM.

1. Do you have difficulty seeing, even if wearing glasses?
2. Do you have difficulty hearing, even if using a hearing aid?
3. Do you have difficulty walking or climbing steps?
4. Do you have difficulty remembering or concentrating?
5. Do you have difficulty (with self-care such as) washing all over or dressing?
6. Using your usual language, do you have difficulty communicating, (for example understanding or being understood by others)?

This fourth in a series of **Washington Group Implementation Documents** covers the specifications for the Washington Group Short Set questions. The document provides the purpose and intent of each question in the Short Set, including definitions of terms and key concepts.

Additional Implementation Documents cover: The Washington Group Tools; The Washington Group Short Set on Functioning; Translation of the WG Tools; Analytic Guidelines; and other tools developed by the WG and partners for the measurement of disability.

For more information, visit the Washington Group website: <http://www.washingtongroup-disability.com/>.

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Each question has four response categories, which are read after each question. The response categories capture the full spectrum of functioning from mild to severe.

1. No, no difficulty
2. Yes, some difficulty
3. Yes, a lot of difficulty
4. Cannot do it at all

Note that the inclusion of assistive devices was considered for two domains only, seeing and hearing, as limitations in these domains can often be easily overcome with the use of glasses or hearing aids (use of these is common in most countries).

### Administration of the Questions

It is recommended that the response options be read aloud as part of each of the six questions as follows:

“Do you have difficulty walking or climbing steps? Would you say:  
No, no difficulty,  
Yes, some difficulty,  
Yes, a lot of difficulty, or  
Cannot do it at all”

Respondents may become familiar with the answer categories after the first few questions. In this case, the recommendation to repeat the categories can be relaxed. This is most likely to occur when the questions are asked of multiple people in a household. If respondents provide responses using the required answer categories, the categories do not need to be repeated after every question. They should be repeated as soon as the respondent does not use the required category (e.g., responds ‘yes’) or after the second or third question. Enumerators will require training in when it is appropriate to not read the answer categories.

### Question Specifications

**Introductory Statement: The next questions ask about difficulties you may have doing certain activities because of a HEALTH PROBLEM.**

The purpose of the introduction is to transition from questions in the census or survey that precede the WG Short Set, and may deal with other subject matter, to a new area of inquiry. It is intended to focus the respondent on difficulties he or she may have that are the result of physical or mental health problem(s).

Included are difficulties that occur within a health context rather than those caused by a lack of resources.

Health refers to the general condition of the body or mind with reference to soundness, vitality, and freedom from disease.

Problem refers to the respondent’s perception of a departure from physical, mental or emotional well-being. This includes specific health problems such as a disease or chronic condition, a missing limb or organ or any type of impairment or physical or

psychological symptoms. It also includes more vague disorders not always thought of as health-related such as senility, depression, developmental delay or intellectual impairment, drug dependency, accidental injuries, etc.

**Question 1: Do you have difficulty seeing, even if wearing glasses?**

The purpose of this question is to identify persons who have vision difficulties or problems seeing even when wearing glasses (if they wear glasses).

Seeing refers to an individual using his/her eyes and visual capacity in order to perceive or observe what is happening around them.

Even when wearing glasses refers to difficulty seeing with glasses if the respondent has, and uses, them – NOT how vision would be if glasses, or better glasses, were provided to one who needed them.

Included are problems:

- seeing things close up or far away, and
- seeing out of one eye or only seeing directly in front but not to the sides.

Any problem with vision that the respondent considers a problem should be captured.

**Question 2: Do you have difficulty hearing, even if using a hearing aid?**

The purpose of this item is to identify persons who have some hearing limitation or problems of any kind with their hearing even when using a hearing aid (if they wear a hearing aid).

Hearing refers to an individual using his/her ears and auditory (or hearing) capacity in order to know what is being said to them or the sounds of activity, including danger that is happening around them.

Even if using a hearing aid refers to difficulty hearing with a hearing aid if the respondent has, and uses, that device – NOT how hearing would be if hearing aids, or better hearing aids, were provided to one who needed them.

Included are problems:

- hearing in a noisy or a quiet environment,
- distinguishing sounds from different sources, and
- hearing in one ear or both ears.

Any difficulty with hearing that is considered a problem should be captured.

**Question 3: Do you have difficulty walking or climbing steps?**

The purpose of this item is to identify persons who have some limitation or problems of any kind getting around on foot.

Walking refers to the use of lower limbs (legs) in such a way as to propel oneself over the ground to get from point A to point B. The capacity to walk should be without assistance of any device (wheelchair, crutches, walker etc.) or human. If such assistance is needed, the person has difficulty walking.

Included are problems:

- walking short (about 100 yards/meters) or long distances (about 500 yards/meters),
- walking any distance without stopping to rest is included, and
- walking up or down steps.

Difficulties walking can include those resulting from impairments in balance, endurance, or other non-musculoskeletal systems, for example blind people having difficulty walking in an unfamiliar place or deaf people having difficulty climbing stairs when there is no lighting.

Any difficulty with walking (whether it is on flat land or up or down steps) that is considered a problem should be captured.

**Question 4: Do you have difficulty remembering or concentrating?**

The purpose of this item is to identify persons who have some problems with remembering or focusing attention that contribute to difficulty in doing their daily activities.

Remembering refers to the use of memory to recall incidents or events. It means the individual can bring to mind or think again about something that has taken place in the past (either the recent past or further back). With younger people, remembering is often associated with storing facts learned in school and being able to retrieve them when needed.

Remembering should NOT be equated with memorizing or with good or bad memories.

Concentrating refers to the use of mental ability to accomplish some task such as reading, calculating numbers, learning something. It is associated with focusing on the task at hand in order to complete the task.

Included are problems:

- finding one's way around, being unable to concentrate on an activity, or forgetting one's whereabouts or the date, and

- problems remembering what someone just said or becoming confused or frightened about most things.

Any difficulty with remembering, concentrating or understanding what is going on around them that they or family members (if the family member is the respondent) consider a problem should be captured.

Note: difficulties remembering or concentrating because of common everyday situations such as high workload or stress, or as a result of substance abuse are EXCLUDED.

**Question 5: Do you have difficulty (with self-care such as) washing all over or dressing?**

The purpose of this item is to identify persons who have some problems with taking care of themselves independently.

Washing all over refers to the process of cleaning one's entire body (usually with soap and water) in the usual manner for the culture.

The washing activity includes cleaning hair and feet, as well as gathering any necessary items for bathing such as soap or shampoo, a wash cloth, or water.

Dressing refers to all aspects of putting clothing or garments on the upper and lower body including the feet if culturally appropriate.

Included are the acts of gathering clothing from storage areas (i.e. closet, dressers), securing buttons, tying knots, zipping, etc.

Washing and dressing represent tasks that occur on a daily basis and are considered basic, universal activities.

**Question 6: Using your usual language, do you have difficulty communicating, (for example understanding or being understood by others)?**

The purpose of this item is to identify persons who have some problems with talking, listening or understanding speech such that it contributes to difficulty in making themselves understood to others or understanding others.

Communicating refers to a person exchanging information or ideas with other people through the use of language.

Communication difficulties can originate in numerous places in the exchange process. It may involve mechanical problems such as hearing impairment or speech impairment, or it may be related to the ability of the mind to interpret the sounds that the auditory system is gathering and to recognize the words that are being used or an inability of the mind to compose a sentence or say a word even when the person knows the word and sentence.

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Included is the use of the voice for the exchange or using signs (including sign language) or writing the information to be conveyed.

Included are problems making oneself understood, or problems understanding other people when they speak or try to communicate in other ways.

NOTE: Difficulty understanding or being understood due to non-native or unfamiliar language is NOT included.