

# Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge

## Training and Scoring Tips for the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scales

This document was developed by Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge (RTT-ELC) Anchors to support consistent training and scoring on the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS). It is intended to be used with existing clarifications from Environment Rating Scales Institute (ERSI), where Anchors provided additional, specific clarification about certain indicators. This tool also should be used when training new assessors to guide consistency of interpretation.

### SPACE AND FURNISHINGS

Item #	Indicator	Indicator Description (Language from ECERS-R)	Training and Scoring Tips
1. Indoor space	3.1	Sufficient indoor space for children, adults, and furnishings.	Consider all the spaces in the room. If all the children are in different areas, Consider the maximum group size that could be in the space.
	3.2	Adequate lighting, ventilation, temperature control, and sound-absorbing materials.	Can the conversations be heard without speaking loudly? Is it difficult for the children or staff to hear and be heard without raising their voices?
	5.1	Ample indoor space that allows children and adults to move around freely (Ex. furnishings do not limit children's movement; sufficient space for equipment needed by children with disabilities).	Ample space is comfortable use of space without children being crowded in two or more areas of the classroom. Do not evaluate empty spaces; if two or more areas are crowded, then the room is crowded. Consider the maximum group size that could be in the space.

## RTT-ELC Training and Scoring Tips – ECERS

Item #	Indicator	Indicator Description (Language from ECERS-R)	Training and Scoring Tips
2. Furniture for routine care, play and learning	3.1	Sufficient furniture for routine care, play and learning.	<p>If morning and afternoon classes share cubbies they must be completely emptied between sessions to give credit for 3.1.</p> <p>Having enough space to store jackets and backpacks without touching (contamination) is under Space and Furnishings, while piling jackets in a playground during gross motor play is health-related (Item 13).</p>
	5.1	Most furniture is child-sized.	If mixed sizes of chairs are available, and 75% of the children are able to use them, give credit for 5.1 (please refer to the notes for clarification page 13).
3. Furnishings for relaxation and comfort	3.1	Some soft furnishings accessible to children (Ex. carpeted play space, cushions).	Very large soft animals or other items can be considered as a piece of furniture if being used by the children as a furnishing (e.g., giant bear being used as seating rather than played with as a toy) give credit for 3.1.
4. Room arrangement for play	5.2	Quiet and active centers placed to not interfere with one another (Ex. reading or listening area separated from blocks or housekeeping).	Quiet areas and noisy areas are defined by the way they are used.

## RTT-ELC Training and Scoring Tips – ECERS

Item #	Indicator	Indicator Description (Language from ECERS-R)	Training and Scoring Tips
	General Notes		Ranges depend on activity and number of children possible in the room.
5. Space for privacy	3.1	Children are allowed to find or create space for privacy (Ex. behind furniture or room dividers, in outdoor play equipment, in a quiet corner).	Give credit if child created the private space, supervision is considered at 3.2.
	5.1	Space set aside for one or two children to play, protected from intrusion by others (Ex. no-interruption rule; small space protected by shelves).	Space must be intentionally planned or created by the teacher. It can be protected by arrangement, redirection, or observed enforcement of classroom rules.
	General Notes		Be clear regarding the distinctions between spaces created by the children or the teacher.
6. Child-related displays	5.3	Many items displayed on child's eye level.	<p>To determine whether a display is at child's eye level, look for the halfway point on the wall. Items below the halfway point are easily seen by children, items above the halfway point are not easily visible at the child's eye level. Consider the size of pictures and children's height.</p> <p>Children should be able to point and talk about the details of their work and/or display.</p>

## RTT-ELC Training and Scoring Tips – ECERS

Item #	Indicator	Indicator Description (Language from ECERS-R)	Training and Scoring Tips
	General Notes		<p>Consider all displays based on the following definitions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Child-related: Intended for children.</li> <li>• Child-created: Any work done by children.</li> <li>• Individualized: Work carried out in the child’s own way.</li> </ul>
7. Space for gross motor play	1.1 3.1	No outdoor or indoor space used for gross motor/physical play.	1.1 and 3.1 must have some type of barrier to keep vehicles from getting into the playground. Playground Safety Guidelines state: “A discrete barrier, such as structural bollards, trees, or posts, should be placed along any side of the playground which is within 30 feet of streets or parking lots.” Playgrounds within 30 feet of street/parking lot must have: load bearing wall or a six-foot-wide curb, trees, or safety bollards.

## RTT-ELC Training and Scoring Tips – ECERS

Item #	Indicator	Indicator Description (Language from ECERS-R)	Training and Scoring Tips
	1.2 3.2	Gross motor space is very dangerous (Ex. access requires long walk on busy street; same space used for play and parking lot; unfenced area for preschoolers).	Determination of level 1 or 3 is based on perceived likelihood a vehicle could enter playground considering proximity to road, speed limit allowed, and parking (e.g., straight into the parking take off at 1.2; if parking is parallel take off at 3.2).
	5.2	Space is easily accessible for children in group (Ex. on same level and near classroom; no barriers for children with disabilities).	How long it takes to get there is considered here. Conditions that make it difficult to access relate to distance as well as time. If children have to go upstairs (steep or long), then “no.” If children have to walk through another classroom, then “no.”

## RTT-ELC Training and Scoring Tips – ECERS

### PERSONAL CARE ROUTINES

Item	Indicator	Indicator Description (Language from ECERS-R)	Training and Scoring Tips
8. Gross motor equipment	3.3	Most of the equipment is appropriate for the age and ability of the children.	Requires 75% or more of stationary equipment to give credit for 3.3.
	General Notes		Even on rainy days, staff must provide gross motor activities. Even if raining, the assessor still must go out and measure the equipment!
9. Greeting/ departing	3.1	Most children greeted warmly (Ex. staff seem pleased to see children, smile, use pleasant tone of voice).	New staff entering the room to either take over or share in responsibility for the children must greet the children in some way but not necessarily individually. It is sufficient to greet the group as a whole. Also, staff must greet late arriving children.
10. Meals/ snacks	1.2	Food served is of unacceptable nutritional value.	Personal dietary preferences of the observer are not to be used in determining the quality of foods served. Sugary and unhealthy foods are still considered within their respective food groups (e.g., cookies = grain). Determine whether the correct components of the meal/snack are being served.

## RTT-ELC Training and Scoring Tips – ECERS

Item	Indicator	Indicator Description (Language from ECERS-R)	Training and Scoring Tips
	1.3	Sanitary conditions not usually maintained (Ex. most children and/or adults do not wash hands before handling food: tables not sanitized; toileting/diapering and food preparation areas not separated).	<p>Providers should be marked off at this level only for serious negligence of sanitation. Programs should be given credit for 1.3 if some attempts are made.</p> <p>If the same sink is used for toileting but is not disinfected, it is not marked off here, but it is in Toileting/diapering practices, Item 12.</p>
	3.2	Well-balanced meals/snacks.	<p>Food meeting minimum component and quantity requirements must be offered. Children do not need to accept. Refer to nutrition guidelines in the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Child Care and Adult Food Program at: <a href="http://www.nal.usda.gov/childcare/Cacfp/index.html">www.nal.usda.gov/childcare/Cacfp/index.html</a>.</p>
	3.3	Sanitary conditions usually maintained.	<p>If the same sink is used for toileting but is not disinfected, it is not marked off here, but it is in Toileting/diapering, Item 12.</p>

## RTT-ELC Training and Scoring Tips – ECERS

Item	Indicator	Indicator Description (Language from ECERS-R)	Training and Scoring Tips
	California Modification		Due to water restrictions, water may be turned off while soaping hands. After soaping, the child may turn the water off with paper towel or the staff may control the water to avoid children’s recontamination. This is a California Modification adopted and approved by C. Riley of ERSI in May 2015.
11. Nap/rest	5.3	All cots or mats are at least 3 feet apart.	If space between cots/mats is between 18 to 36 inches, give credit for 3.2.
12. Toileting/ diapering	1.1	Sanitary Conditions of area are not maintained (Ex. toilet/sinks dirty; diapering table/potty chairs not sanitized after each use, toilets rarely flushed).	The sink is required to be disinfected when it is used for washing after toileting and before it is used for other purposes (e.g., washing before eating). All use of the sink for one purpose can be completed before the sink needs to be disinfected for another use. If disinfecting does not take place, mark “yes” on 1.1. The sink does not have to be disinfected before toileting use.
	1.2	Lack of basic provisions interferes with care of children (Ex. no toilet paper or soap; same towel used by many children; no running water in area).	The 2011 edition of Caring for Our Children, page 111 states hand sanitizers can be used in place of hand washing if hands are not visibly soiled. Hand sanitizer can be used by

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			<p>children 2 years of age and older as long as manufacturers' instructions are followed, and very close supervision of children is provided. If children are not closely supervised, consider in supervision-related indicators, and in Safety and supervision, Item 14. Sanitizer should be controlled by staff and kept away from children if the label indicates "Keep out of reach of children."</p>
	<p>3.3  California Modification</p>	<p>Staff and children wash hands most of the time after toileting.</p>	<p>Due to water restrictions, water may be turned off while soaping hands. After soaping, the child may turn the water off with paper towel or the staff may control the water to avoid children's recontamination. This is a California Modification approved by C. Riley of ERSI in May 2015.</p>

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Item	Indicator	Indicator Description (Language from ECERS-R)	Training and Scoring Tips
	General Notes		<p>Disinfectants must be used for cleaning anywhere bodily fluids may have contacted surfaces, including changing tables and toileting sinks. Sanitizers are used for eating surfaces (e.g., tables). If non-bleach disinfectants are used on eating surfaces, rinsing may be required. Score in accordance with instructions on cleaner.</p>
13. Health practices	General Notes		<p>Water temperature for hand washing does not need to be measured, but should be judged based on children's perceived comfort.</p> <p>Water and food should be treated as not to be wasted, in a general manner. However, there are no specific indicators where excess or conservation are directly scored in ECERS.</p> <p>Water should be turned off and food should be appropriately handled to avoid contamination or re-contamination.</p>

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Item	Indicator	Indicator Description (Language from ECERS-R)	Training and Scoring Tips
14. Safety practices	1.1	Several hazards that could result in serious injury indoors.	Cleaning solutions and other products or chemicals labeled “Keep out of reach of children” do not have to be locked up or in a separate room, but must not be accessible to children. Step stools and children’s ability to climb to access chemicals should be considered.
	1.3	Inadequate supervision to protect children’s safety indoors and outdoors (Ex. too few staff, staff occupied with other tasks; no supervision near area of potential danger; no check-in or check-out procedures).	Children must be closely supervised when using hand sanitizer. It should be controlled by staff and kept out of reach of children if the label indicates “Keep out of reach of children.”

## RTT-ELC Training and Scoring Tips – ECERS

### LANGUAGE AND REASONING

Item	Indicator	Indicator Description (Language from ECERS-R)	Training and Scoring Tips
15. Books and pictures	5.1	A wide selection of books are accessible for a substantial portion of the day.	Books outside may be considered toward substantial portion of the day (SPOD) only if all requirements for “many and varied” are also met outdoors.
	5.2	Some additional language materials used daily.	Additional language materials can refer to materials anywhere in the classroom. Attention should also be given to science, dramatic play, and other areas when considering this indicator.
	5.4	Books, language materials, and activities are appropriate for children in group.	Appropriateness of books, language materials, and activities should be considered in all parts of the classroom.
	General Notes		<p>For ECERS-R, damaged books are not considered in the book count. However, to be considered a book, the cover and pages must be intact and the pages must not be so torn or defaced that they cannot be read. Magazines are not counted as books.</p> <p>Please refer to “Books defined as Inappropriate or Damaged for Infants,</p>

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Item	Indicator	Indicator Description (Language from ECERS-R)	Training and Scoring Tips
			Toddlers, and Preschool-age Children for ERS Tools” in the <a href="#">Assessor Resources</a> , Chapter 2 for additional information.
16. Encouraging children to communicate	3.2	Some materials accessible to encourage children to communicate.	Some materials accessible means that two or more materials encouraging expressive language must be accessible for a minimum amount of time; time depends on length of program day.
	3.3	Communication activities are generally appropriate for the children in the group.	Communication activities generally appropriate, include the types of music played. For example, popular music with explicit lyrics would not be appropriate.
	5.2	Materials that encourage children to communicate are accessible in a variety of interest centers (Ex. small figures and animals in block area; puppets and flannel board pieces in book area; toys for dramatic play outdoors or indoors).	Materials encouraging communication must be accessible in three or more centers for a minimum amount of time.
	7.2	Staff link children’s spoken communication with written language (Ex. write down what children dictate and read it back to them; help them write notes to parents).	If dictation is up on the wall, no verbal evidence of staff linking children’s spoken and written communication is required. However, if an assessor sees

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Item	Indicator	Indicator Description (Language from ECERS-R)	Training and Scoring Tips
			<p>a teacher write as the child dictates, the teacher must read it back to the child for credit, even if dictation is on the wall. Posted dictation needs to be where children frequent and can see (not necessarily eye-level, but not too high).</p>
<p>17. Using language to develop reasoning skills</p>	5.1	<p>Staff talks about logical relationships while children play with materials stimulate reasoning (e.g., sequence cards, same/different games, size and shape toys, sorting games, number and math games).</p>	<p>Some kind of materials must be used to illustrate sequencing, sorting, or order. Staff must verbally label the concept while children are using the materials for credit. Must observe at least one example to give credit. Refer to the 7 concepts in the notes for clarification on p. 37.</p>
	5.2	<p>Children encouraged to talk through or explain their reasoning when solving problems (Ex. why they sorted objects into different groups; in what way are two pictures the same or different).</p>	<p>Child must be asked to explain a relationship or their reasoning (e.g., how or why one item fits inside or comes before another).</p>
	General Notes		<p>Each indicator at the 3, 5, and 7 levels require two examples of specific communications. These must be unique; 11 unique examples must be observed at the 7-point level.</p>

## RTT-ELC Training and Scoring Tips – ECERS

### ACTIVITIES

Item #	Indicator	Indicator Description (Language from ECERS-R)	Scoring Tips
19. Fine motor	7.2	Containers and accessible storage shelves have labels to encourage self-help (Ex. pictures or shapes used as labels on containers and shelves; word labels added for other children).	<p>Labels must be meaningful to children so children know where to put things back and support independence.</p> <p>Labeling varies based on age group. Both the container and shelf must be labeled unless the container is clear. Labels and materials must match.</p>
	General Notes		Puzzles must include different skill levels across types, not within every type.
20. Art	7.1	Three-dimensional art materials included at least monthly (Ex. clay, play dough, wood gluing, carpentry).	<p>To count materials as three dimensional (3D), the observer either must see a display of child's art with in the past 30 days (evidence) or observe 3D materials in use. The presence of 3D materials that could be used is not adequate.</p> <p>Display must be dated within the last month to give credit at the 7 point level.</p>
21. Music and movement	5.1	Many music materials accessible for children's use (Ex. simple instruments; music toys; tape player with tapes).	Children four-years and older need to be able to use the equipment independently (or anything that produces music (e.g., tape recorder, iPod, CD).

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Item #	Indicator	Indicator Description (Language from ECERS-R)	Scoring Tips
	5.2	Various types of music are used with the children (Ex. classical and popular music; music characteristic of different cultures; some songs sung in different languages).	Scroll through the iPod to make sure there is a variety of music and all is appropriate.

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### LANGUAGE AND REASONING

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22. Blocks	3.1	Enough blocks and accessories are accessible for at least two children to build independent structures at the same time.	All accessories for blocks do not need to be stored near the blocks as long as children know they can be used together. It must be observed that children use the materials as block accessories.
	3.3	Blocks and accessories accessible for daily use.	If the accessories are not stored near the blocks, it must be obvious that the children use the materials together.
	5.3	Special block area set aside out of traffic, with storage and suitable building surface (Ex. flat rug or other steady surface).	Read clarification about exception in indicator 5.4. To score, determine if fine motor enhances play or if additional materials interfere with block play.
	General Notes		If you are going to count materials outdoors, see outdoor definition for SPOD and access.
23. Sand and water	7.1	Provision for sand and water play, both indoors and outdoors (weather permitting).	There is the possibility (in theory) of four separate activities at once. Only requires “provision for” (doesn’t have to be observed).
	General Notes		Refer to clarification notes to define usage; as ½-hour each week.

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	California Modification		If observing and there is a statewide water restriction, then handle this the same way as “air advisory.” Waive the water requirement if there is a water restriction from a government agency with jurisdiction.
24. Dramatic play	5.3	Props for at least two different themes accessible daily (Ex. housekeeping and work).	Materials must be very distinct, meaningful and encourage children to pretend with depth to count as separate themes. (e.g., one doctor’s coat isn’t a theme; but, a hard hat, vest, and other construction materials with it may be considered a theme).
	General Notes		Theme props should be centralized together for meaningful use. Don’t assume the child will piece together materials from around the room that could possibly be made into a theme.
25. Nature/ science	5.4	Everyday events used as a basis for learning about nature/science (Ex. talking about the weather, observing insects or birds, discussing the change of seasons, blowing bubbles or flying kites on a windy day, watching snow melt and freeze).	Also listen for language. Need to hear at least one occurrence of intentional language during the observation to give credit for 5.4.
	General Notes		Plastic or imitation plants do not count.

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27. Use of TV, video, and/or computers	3.3	Time children allowed to use TV/video or computer is limited (Ex. TV/videos limited to one hour daily in full-day program; computer turns limited to 20 minutes daily).	No more than 15 minutes per day for a maximum of 30 minutes total per week to give credit for 3.3.  YouTube during music also counts toward screen time.

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### INTERACTIONS

Item #	Indicator	Indicator Description (Language from ECERS-R)	Training and Scoring Tips
28. Promoting acceptance of diversity	5.2	Some props representing various cultures included for use in dramatic play (Ex. dolls of different races, ethnic clothing, cooking and eating utensils from various cultural groups).	Requires more than two examples representing different cultures to give credit for 5.2.
29. Supervision of gross motor	3.1 5.1	Supervision is adequate to protect children’s health and safety (Ex. enough staff present to watch children in area; staff positioned to see all areas; staff move around as needed; intervene).	Staff need to be active and monitoring at indicators 3 and above. If supervision is adequate but not good, then score “no” on 5.1.
	5.3	Staff assists children to develop skills needed to use equipment (Ex. help children learn to pump on swing; help child with disabilities use adaptive pedals on tricycle).	At least one example must be observed to give credit for 5.3.
	7.2	Staff helps with resources to enhance play (Ex. help set up obstacle course for tricycles).	Staff must do something to enhance gross motor play (e.g., staff brings out or helps children find additional materials).
	General Notes		Interview question is only asked if you don’t see this because the weather is so bad they can’t go outside for gross motor play and no active physical play is provided inside (refer to All About, p. 299).

## RTT-ELC Training and Scoring Tips – ECERS

Item #	Indicator	Indicator Description (Language from ECERS-R)	Training and Scoring Tips
30. General supervision of children	3.1	Sufficient supervision to protect children's safety.	<p>If you see a child go in the bathroom and an adult can't supervise, then 3.1 is "no," even for one instance.</p> <p>Include observations during play activities and routines.</p>
	General Notes		Outside is not always gross motor related.
31. Discipline	7.1	Staff actively involves children in solving their conflicts and problems (Ex. help children talk out problems and think of solutions; sensitize children to feelings of others).	May not see staff actively involving children in problem-solving during the observation so look for other types of evidence, like children carrying out problem-solving strategies, or other evidence it has been taught/understood (in curriculum).
	7.2	Staff uses activities to help children understand social skills (Ex. use storybooks and group discussions with children to work through common conflicts).	Has to happen at least once a week. If you don't see it, you have to ask teacher the question about how often it happens.
32. Staff-child interactions	5.1	Staff shows warmth through appropriate physical contact (Ex. pat child on the back, return child's hug).	In close proximity/warmth must be observed.
	5.3	Staff responds sympathetically to help children who are upset, hurt, or angry.	Responding sympathetically means staff reiterate and validate children's

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			feelings. Majority means consistently observed.
	7.1	Staff seems to enjoy being with the children.	This includes all staff (be mindful of the different temperaments).
	General Notes		Wait until the end to score.
33. Interactions among children	5.2	Staff helps children develop appropriate social behavior with peers (Ex. help children talk through conflicts instead of fighting; encourage socially isolated children to find friends; help children understand feelings of others).	During problem solving/conflict resolution process between children to give credit, assessor must observe teacher proactively assisting and reminding.

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### PROGRAM STRUCTURE

Item #	Indicator	Indicator Description (Language from ECERS-R)	Training and Scoring Tips
34. Schedule	5.3	A substantial portion of the day is used for play activities.	Play activities emphasize active play; includes free play, group, and outdoor play.
35. Free Play	5.3	Ample and varied toys, games and equipment provided for free play.	Pay attention to gross motor equipment. “Ample” could be a trigger for 5.3 in Free play.  Rating criteria applies to outdoors and indoors.
36. Group time	5.1	Whole-group gatherings limited to short periods, suited to age and individual needs of children.	At 5-point level, no leeway for children not being engaged.
	General Notes		To understand the distinction between the 5 point level and 7point level, think about whether small groups are created, self-selected, or teacher selected?
37. Provisions for children with disabilities	General Notes		Only gets rated when there is a child with an Individualized Education Program or doctor diagnosis (e.g., physical) requiring environmental accommodation.