The 0-to-3 Verbal Rating Scale (VRS)

Instructions: Please [interactive PDF: select; interview: tell the word or phrase] that best represents [your current pain intensity, the least intensity of your pain in the past (24 hours, seven days), the worst pain intensity in the past (24 hours, seven days), and the average intensity of your pain in the past (24 hours, past seven days)].

- No pain
- Mild pain
- Moderate pain
- Severe pain

Primary source document for VRSs

There is no “official” source document for the VRS, but see Jensen (2010) for a review of evidence supporting the reliability and validity of the VRS, including the findings that it may be more useful than other pain intensity scales for assessing pain in elderly patients or in individuals who have significant cognitive deficits.

Scoring instructions for VRSs

The word or phrase selected by the respondent represents that respondent’s pain intensity. If a number is needed for analysis, VRSs are usually scored so that “No pain” is given a 0, “Mild pain” = 1, “Moderate pain” = 2, and “Severe pain” = 3. All else being equal, the NRS should usually be administered instead of the VRS, as the NRS provides more response categories and may therefore be more sensitive to changes in pain than the VRS (Jensen, 2010). However, the rare individual, such as someone who is elderly or who has advanced disease (e.g., advanced cancer), may have difficulty understanding or using the NRS and may find the VRS easier to understand and use.