ELA Passage Selection Guidelines

Passage Selection Guidelines for Summative Assessments, Grades 3-11, in ELA

Along with instructional materials and teacher training, assessment development is essential to the successful implementation of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). While many of the expectations outlined in the CCSS align with previous versions of many state standards for ELA, the CCSS do represent some shifts in emphasis with direct implications for assessment development. In particular, the CCSS devote considerable attention to the types and nature of texts used in instruction and assessment. The foundation for preparing students for the linguistic rigors of college and the workplace lies in the texts with which they interact. By the time they graduate, students should be prepared to successfully read and analyze the types of complex texts they will encounter after high school. Selecting passages of appropriate type and complexity for use in assessment is integral to this preparation.

One of the major shifts of the CCSS is an emphasis on developing skills for comprehending and analyzing informational texts. Increased exposure to informational texts better prepares students for the various types of texts they will encounter in college and the workplace. The array of passages selected for the assessments in grades 3-11 should support the development of the necessary skills to handle this range of informational texts.

Another shift is an increased emphasis on the analysis across multiple texts, often of varied genres and media. Several standards focus on the integration of knowledge and ideas across multiple texts and genres and, therefore, require inter-textual and multi-media analysis. These expectations require special attention to selection of related passages, chosen specifically to support assessment of the full range of expectations.

This document offers five guidelines to consider when selecting passages. These guidelines should inform the training of **passage finders** in order to ensure a pool of acceptable passages that can support assessment. These guidelines will also inform **form assemblers** as they construct forms that will assess the full continuum of standards. In choosing passages, passage finders should consider:

A.   Using the framework for determining text complexity
B.   Selecting a variety of text types (including different types of texts, a balance of authors by gender and ethnicity, and texts that appeal to a diverse student population)
C.   Selecting passages that allow for a range of standards/evidences to be demonstrated to meet the claims (as reflected in the task generation models and evidence statements).
D.   Pairing passages effectively
E.   Meeting demands of Bias and Sensitivity Guidelines

A. Using the framework for determining text complexity

Selecting passages of appropriate complexity is essential for assessing the comprehension skills at each developmental level. Passages too basic for a given level, will not possess the necessary vocabulary,

syntax, structures, and content development to assess the grade-level skills. Passages too complex for a given level will contain characteristics that interfere with the assessment of the grade-level skills.

Passage finders will utilize this framework to determine text complexity. The details of the framework are described below:

1. Two quantitative text complexity measures will be used to analyze all reading passages to determine **an initial** recommendation for placement of a text within a grade band.

   Note: In instances where the complexity measures do not place the text in the same grade level, passage finders should note the potential grade band for the text and then proceed to the qualitative complexity analysis.

2. The Complexity Analysis Worksheets (Lexile and Flesch-Kincaid) will be used to apply a separate qualitative measure for informational and literary text. The results will be used to determine a recommendation for text complexity within a final grade level, and will result in a categorization of each text as readily accessible, moderately complex, or very complex.[1]

   Note: For multimedia text, in addition to the first four criteria, qualitative judgments from one or both of the "optional" criteria in the two Complexity Analysis Worksheets must be considered to make a holistic judgment of the complexity of the material.

   For each text and multimedia text, the complexity level will be determined by the number of traits it exhibits that are classified as readily accessible, moderately complex, or very complex. In many instances, a text will demonstrate fairly uniform complexity across traits. Sometimes, however, there is a discrepancy in the complexity across traits. When this occurs, passage finders must carefully weigh the balance of complexity across traits to make a determination.

   As part of the passage selection process, the passage finder should record his/her rationale to describe how both the quantitative and qualitative information were considered and used to inform the final grade level and text complexity determinations. The rationale will be presented along with the passage to assist in the passage review process.

   The contractor for item development/passage selection brings passages to the review process with proposed complexity levels based on the process described above. Reviewers check that the quantitative data, qualitative data, and complexity levels assigned adequately reflect appropriate grade level and complexity level decisions.

   A Note about Length of Texts:

   One element quantitative measures use to determine text complexity is the length of a text. The following grade-level guidelines to inform passage selection with regards to length of texts.

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[1] Texts such as poetry, drama, transcripts, and those depicting step-by-step processes will be assigned a grade level based solely on a qualitative evaluation.

Table 2. Minimum/Maximum Passage Lengths by Grade Band[2]

Grade Band	Minimum/Maximum Passage Length for Literary and Informational Text/Literary Nonfiction
3 – 5	200 – 800 words
6 – 8	400 – 1,000 words
9 – 11	500 – 1,500 words

It should be noted too that for the performance-based tasks, the text selected for the Research Simulation task and one of the literary texts selected for the Literary Analysis task should be closer to the end of the range listed for the grade band than the beginning of the range for that grade band.

The length of a text is only one element in determining text complexity, and it is the overall appropriateness of texts, rather than merely text length that should guide text selection. In considering length of both print and multimedia texts, form assemblers must consider overall testing time when deciding which texts to place together in a single form.

B. Selecting a variety of texts (including different types of texts, a balance of authors by gender and ethnicity, and texts that appeal to a diverse student population)

General Criteria for Selecting Authentic Texts

The texts students encounter on tests should be worthy of careful attention, be content rich and challenging, and exhibit professional published quality. In short, assessment materials should be of sufficient quality and complexity that students can demonstrate that they are on the path to achieve college and career readiness.

Generally, texts used for assessment should be drawn from previously published materials because these materials have undergone professional review and editing in the publication process.

Informational texts that have been commissioned specifically for a test typically lack the quality and complexity required to meet the expectations of the Common Core; often they demonstrate poor use of evidence, possess weak organizational structure, lack density, and/or have questionable content accuracy. Also, commissioned texts are often simplistic, failing to provide sufficient information for students to gain important knowledge.

Similarly, literary texts that have been commissioned for a test often fail to demonstrate the deft character development, plotting, and thematic relevance that are hallmarks of the fiction writer's craft.

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[2] Some types of texts, such as poetry, political cartoons, and advertisements, may fall below the minimum word count. Care must be taken to ensure that these types of texts are robust enough to support a variety of reading comprehension questions.

Commissioned literary nonfiction also often fails to exhibit the professional qualities expected in this rich genre.

Consequently, passage finders will locate authentic texts for English Language Arts/Literacy.

Criteria for Range and Variety of Texts

Since the CCSS call for students to comprehend a range of grade-appropriate complex texts, it is important that passage finders and form assemblers select texts for the assessments that represent a range of texts that students should be reading at each grade level to prepare them for entry- level reading in college. In considering this range, one important consideration is a need to balance texts written by authors with diverse backgrounds, including a balance of authors by gender and ethnicity. In addition, since the students taking the assessments are themselves a diverse population, texts selected should appeal to a wide-range of student audiences. Form assemblers should create forms that demonstrate this range of diversity as well.

Texts come in a variety of forms or genres, and each text has its own unique purpose(s) and structure(s). Each of these types has unique characteristics, but they can be grouped by general similarities in structure and purpose. Passage finders and form assemblers will want to use a variety of text types in locating texts and in putting together forms so that the assessments allow students to demonstrate their ability to read and comprehend a range of complex texts.

1. <u>Literary Text Types</u>: There are many literary genres, but for the purposes of helping passage finders and form assemblers to select a variety of text types, literature text types will be categorized using four categories:
    a. Poetry
    b. Drama
    c. Fiction
    d. Multi-Media Texts

2. <u>Informational Text Types</u>: There are many informational text types, but for the purposes of helping passage finders and form assemblers to select a variety of text types, informational text types will be categorized using four categories:
    a. Literary Non-fiction
    b. History/Social Science Texts
    c. Science/Technical Texts
    d. Multi-Media Texts

It will also be helpful for passage finders and form assemblers to consider the many types of texts within these various text types that could serve as authentic source materials for the assessments, particularly when selecting informational texts. For science/technical texts, this will usually provide both prose and non-prose information (i.e., graphic or visual elements).

The following types of informational texts may be considered appropriate for the assessments:
- Advertisements

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- Agendas
- Autobiographies
- Biographies
- Company profiles
- Contracts
- Correspondence
- Essays
- Feature articles
- Government documents
- Histories
- Interviews
- Journal articles
- Legal documents
- Magazine articles
- Memoirs
- News articles
- Opinion/editorial pieces
- Political cartoons
- Primary and secondary sources[3]
- Product specifications
- Product/Service descriptions
- Recipes
- Reports
- Reviews
- Science investigations
- Speeches
- Textbooks
- Tourism guides
- Training manuals
- User guides/manuals

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[3] A primary source is a document or physical object which was present during an experience or time period and which offers an inside view of a particular event. Examples include letters, memoirs, diaries, journal entries, bill of sale, etc. A secondary source is a document or physical object that analyzes, references, and/or uses information from a primary source. Examples include textbook entries, journal articles based on primary source material, etc.

C. Selecting authentic passages that allow for a range of standards/evidences to be demonstrated to meet the claims

Evidence Tables

In grades 3 through 11, the Common Core State Standards for reading contain a set of standards for literary texts and a set for informational texts. In grades 6 through 11, there are two additional sets of standards, one for the science/technical domain and one for the history/social studies domain. After a text has been designated for use within a specific grade, the passage finder must consider how the content and structure of the passage support the claims and evidence to be elicited by the assessment. If the text is literary, the passage finder should use the appropriate grade-level evidence tables aligned to the reading literature and reading vocabulary sub-claims. If the passage is informational, the passage finder should use the appropriate grade-level evidence tables aligned to the reading information and reading vocabulary sub-claims. Science/technical texts must include sufficient data and/or quantitative details to elicit the evidences for the science and technical literacy standards.

D. Meeting the Demands of Bias and Sensitivity Guidelines:

Passage finders should become familiar with the bias and sensitivity guidelines and use these guidelines to help determine which texts are viable for use on the assessments.