

# Passage Selection Guidelines for the New Jersey Graduation Proficiency Assessment in ELA<sup>1</sup>

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 of the High School ELA Standards (the Standards). 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.

Assessment developers have agreed upon a framework for determining text complexity. Passage finders will utilize this framework to determine text complexity. The details of the framework are described below:

The assessment uses two components for determining text complexity for all passages/texts proposed:

1. Two quantitative text complexity measures (Lexile and Flesch-Kincaid) 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.

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this document, the words “passage” and “text” are used synonymously. For the purposes of this document, a passage or a text is defined as a stimulus that allows for the measurement of the assessment claims in reading. It should be noted too that a passage or text may contain artwork, photographs, graphics or other visuals. In addition, a passage or text may be print or multimedia.

- The Complexity Analysis Worksheets 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.<sup>2</sup>

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

Table 1. Minimum/Maximum Passage Lengths by Grade Band<sup>3</sup>

Grade Band	Minimum/Maximum Passage Length for Literary and Informational Text/Literary Nonfiction
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

<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>3</sup> 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.

the end of the word length 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. 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 graduation 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. Original titles should be used for all excerpts.

Informational texts that have been commissioned specifically for a test typically lack the quality and complexity required to meet the expectations of the Standards; 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. 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 Standards call for students to comprehend a range of grade-appropriate complex texts, it is important that passage finders and form assemblers select 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 and genres, and each text has its own unique purpose(s) and structure(s). Each text type 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. **Literary Text Types:** There are many literary genres, but for the purposes of helping passage finders and form assemblers select a variety of text types, literature text types will be categorized using four categories:
  - a. Poetry
  - b. Drama
  - c. Fiction
  - d. Multimedia texts
  
2. **Informational Text Types:** There are many informational text types, but for the purposes of helping passage finders and form assemblers select a variety of text types, informational text types will be categorized using four categories:
  - a. Literary Non-fiction
  - b. History/Social Science texts
    - i. Historical events should not be portrayed through passages/passage sets that have an overly narrow or biased focus.
  - c. Science/Technical texts
  - d. Multimedia texts

It will also be helpful for passage finders and form assemblers to consider a variety of 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
- Agendas
- Autobiographies
- Biographies
- Company profiles
- Contracts
- Correspondence
- Essays
- Feature articles
- Government documents
- Histories
- Interviews

- Journal articles <sup>4</sup>
- Legal documents
- Magazine articles
- Memoirs <sup>4</sup>
- News articles
- Opinion/editorial pieces
- Political cartoons
- Primary and secondary sources<sup>4</sup>
- Product specifications
- Product/Service descriptions
- Recipes
- Reports
- Reviews
- Science investigations
- Speeches
- Textbooks <sup>4</sup>
- Tourism guides
- Training manuals
- User guides/manuals <sup>4</sup>

### **Understanding Seminal and Foundational Texts**

Foundational literary texts include literature that addresses prominent themes, literary movements, schools of thought, or topics (political, social, or economic) within a given time period, including works of major writers in a variety of genres. Often, foundational texts in literary terms introduce concepts, ideas, metaphors, etc., that have influenced other texts or a literary or historical movement, and/or have been widely alluded to in other texts of literary merit written subsequent to the publication of the proposed text stimulus. As such, these are texts that have been widely read and studied. While there is no intention to develop a list of foundational texts, the assessment will recognize as “foundational” any text that meets the description above and that has extensive critical acclaim and/or is an extensive literary critical work focused on explaining/analyzing the proposed foundational text.

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<sup>4</sup> 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, bills 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 grade 10, as applied to the NJGPA, the Standards for reading contain a set of standards for literary texts and a set for informational texts. 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 evidence tables aligned to the reading literature and reading vocabulary subclaims. If the passage is informational, the passage finder should use the evidence table, aligned to the reading information and reading vocabulary subclaims. Science/technical texts must include sufficient data and/or quantitative details to elicit the evidences for the science and technical literacy standards. In some cases, it may be advisable to include information about the cultural and/or historical context of a passage (such as the location or when the passage was published) to help avoid unduly raising bias & sensitivity-related concerns. Information of this type should not be included if it will clue the answers to test items (particularly items that measure a student’s ability to recognize setting).

## D. Pairing Passages Effectively

Within each grade, several standards call for students to use more than one text in order to demonstrate achievement of the standard.

### Number of Standards Requiring More than One Text

The standard codes for the paired or multiple text standards in the Standards are listed in the table below. The table shows that the number of each standard by domain [Reading Literary Text (RL), Reading Informational Text (RI), Reading History/Social Studies Text (RH), and Reading Scientific and Technical Text (RST)].

Table 2. Standards Requiring Paired or Multiple Texts

Level	Number of RL, RI, RH, and RST Standards Requiring More Than One Stimulus (Stimulus May Be Text, Art, Graphic, Quantitative Info, Multimedia)	Standard Codes
GPA	8	RL.7, 9; RI.7, 9; RH.6, 7, 9; RST.9

### Considerations for Paired or Multiple Texts with Accompanying Visuals

For this assessment, a literary text can be paired with an informational text that is accompanied with a visual (i.e., painting, photograph) for paired passage sets. If the informational text that goes with the painting is to be assessed along with the painting, then the pairing fits into the “literary and informational text pairing” category, and the points when both informational and literary

standards/evidences are applicable are applied only to the Major Claim for Reading, not for the subclaims. Items would not assess a reading of only the painting.

It is possible to have a literary text paired with a painting with a small amount of informational text where one does not ask any items associated with the informational text (i.e., a painting with a brief informational caption). In this case, the points would be attributable to both the Major Claim for reading and the Reading Literature Subclaim.

For performance-based tasks, the only time informational and literary texts are paired is for the grade 7 Research Simulation Tasks that include RL.7.9, in which a literary document is paired with a historical document (to measure the one standard that actually requires this type of pairing).

### **Criteria for Selection of Paired or Multiple Texts**

Paired or multiple texts used to assess the standards shown in the table above should be selected with the same care as all texts used on the assessments. Exposing students to grade-level texts—including texts from the domains of ELA, science, history/social studies, technical subjects, and the arts—of appropriate complexity lies at the heart of the assessment of the Standards. The assessment should require the careful gathering of observations about each text and careful consideration about what those observations taken together add up to—from the smallest linguistic matters to larger issues of overall understanding and judgment.

There are several additional criteria for selecting the passages for the standards that require more than one text. These criteria are based on the language of the standard and depend on the explicit purpose of the standard—what it is that students are being asked to do with the text. The standards in Table 3 can be sorted into several general categories based on their purposes. Listed below are the general purposes and the requirements for the texts that will assess each purpose.

#### **1. Compare Literary Elements, Including Theme**

The two or more literary texts selected to assess standards that call for comparison and analysis of literary elements (including theme) must contain literary elements that:

- Are readily discernible to students (e.g., identifiable themes supported by textual evidence, clearly delineated points of view).
- Are meaningful (e.g., a setting that contributes to the plot or theme).
- Have significant points of comparisons (e.g., themes that have a recognizable relationship to each other, similar settings that have differing but related impacts in the literary texts, plots with similar elements).

#### **2. Compare Central Ideas, Topics, and/or Events (Including Same Event and Point of View) in Two or More Informational Texts**

The two or more informational texts selected to assess standards that call for comparison and analysis of central ideas, topics, or events must:

- Not only treat the same general topic but also both contain more focused ideas related to the broader topic (e.g., not two texts simply about bees, but texts that treat ideas like beneficial effects of bees or signals among bees).
- Have discernible points of comparison in terms of such aspects as author’s point of view or focus, amount and quality of evidence, differences in emphasis, significant omissions and/or inclusions of ideas.
- Have points of comparison that invite questions beyond superficial observations (e.g., “Which text has more detail about [idea]?” or “Which text mentions [topic]?”).

For standard RI.9–10.9, the texts must be selected from seminal U.S. documents of historical and literary significance.

Table 3. Standards in Which the Primary Focus Is Comparison of Central Ideas, Topics, or Points of View

Standard Code	Standard Language
RI.9–10.9	Analyze seminal U.S. documents of historical and literary significance (e.g., Washington's Farewell Address, the Gettysburg Address, Roosevelt's Four Freedoms speech, King's "Letter from Birmingham Jail"), including how they address related themes and concepts.
RH.9–10.6	Compare the point of view of two or more authors for how they treat the same or similar topics, including which details they include and emphasize in their respective accounts.
RST.9–10.9	Compare and contrast findings presented in a text to those from other sources (including their own experiments), noting when the findings support or contradict previous explanations or accounts.

### 3. Compare and/or Analyze Different Versions of the Same Text (Literature or Informational Texts)

Items that assess the standards in this category are based on a text and a second version of that text, with the second version either an audio or a video presentation. Students are asked to make comparisons between the two versions. Texts chosen to assess this category of standards must:

- Be a copy of the written text accompanied by an audio or video rendition of the text so that the aspects affected by delivery in a different medium can be discerned.
- If there are minor variations in words between the written version and the audio or video version, the script of the media version should be provided for ease of comparison.

### 4. Analyze How Ideas Are Transformed from One Text to Another Literature or Informational Text

Standards in this category require more than the comparison of literary elements (purpose 1) or the comparison of ideas, topics, events, or points of view in informational texts (purpose 2). They also are different from the standards in the purpose 3 category, where comparisons are required between a written text and another version of that same text.

Standards in the purpose 4 category require an analysis of how ideas or events have been transformed from one text to another. The transformation can be from one genre to another or from one work to another. Because the focus is transformation of ideas:



- The texts must contain ideas or events that have been reused and changed in discernible ways from an original text to a derivative text; the student must be provided with both the original text and the derivative text.
- The texts may be primary and secondary sources—historical or scientific/technical—and the same topics or events may be used.
- The texts may be classic works (e.g., mythology, Shakespeare) where one text transforms the other, or a classical text may be paired with a newer text that incorporates material from that classical text.
- Care must be taken to select texts that allow for meaningful analysis.

For standard RL.9–10.9, the texts must consist of an original source text and a new text that transforms material in the original.

For standard RL.9–10.7, and RI.9–10.7, the texts must be different mediums (e.g., art and text, text and multimedia).

For standard RH.9–10.9, primary and secondary sources on the same topic should be provided.

For standard RST.9–10.7, the set of texts should include quantitative or technical information that can be translated from words into visual form and vice-versa.

Table 4. Standards in Which the Primary Focus Is the Transformation of Ideas

Standard Code	Standard Language
<b>RL.9–10.7</b>	Analyze the representation of a subject or a key scene in two different artistic mediums, including what is emphasized or absent in each treatment (e.g., Auden’s “Musée des Beaux Arts” and Breughel’s <i>Landscape with the Fall of Icarus</i> ).
<b>RL.9–10.9</b>	Analyze how an author draws on and transforms source material in a specific work (e.g., how Shakespeare treats a theme or topic from Ovid or the Bible or how a later author draws on a play by Shakespeare).
<b>RI.9–10.7</b>	Analyze various accounts of a subject told in different mediums (e.g., a person’s life story in both print and multimedia), determining which details are emphasized in each account.
<b>RH.9–10.9</b>	Compare and contrast treatments of the same topic in several primary and secondary sources.
<b>RST.9–10.7</b>	Translate quantitative or technical information expressed in words in a text into visual form (e.g., a table or chart) and translate information expressed visually or mathematically (e.g., in an equation) into words.

## 5. Integrate Information for a Purpose

The standards in this category are less focused on comparison of texts and more focused on synthesis of ideas from texts, usually for a specific purpose. The texts selected to assess these standards must therefore;

- Lend themselves to synthesis of ideas so that students can develop a coherent understanding of the topic (e.g., sufficient information about the Emancipation Proclamation that students gain an understanding of most of the key ideas and details on this topic).
- Represent a range of different kinds of texts, including those with visual and quantitative representations of information.

For standard, RH.9–10.7, two or more texts must be used, one of which is in a different medium from the other; this medium can include a visual or quantitative presentation of information.

Table 5. Standards in Which the Primary Focus Is the Integration of Information

Standard Code	Standard Language
RH.9–10.7	Integrate quantitative or technical analysis (e.g., charts, research data) with qualitative analysis in print or digital text.

## 6. Compare Structures of Texts

This category is smaller than the others but has been kept separate in this document because the textual requirements are very specific. Texts selected for this purpose must:

- Have clearly discernible structures that are used consistently throughout most of the texts (e.g., a comparison structure used as the basis for an entire article rather than in a single paragraph).
- Rarely have structures that are simply chronological; a comparison of chronology-based texts is usually not fruitful. When two or more texts with a chronological structure are to be compared, there should be specific similarities and/or differences that lend themselves to meaningful analysis in terms of the authors’ purposes or viewpoints.

## 7. Analyze Supplemental Elements

The final category contains standards that call for supplemental elements. Two separate texts are not required, but a second element—visual, oral, multimedia, or quantitative—must be attached to the text to be assessed. Students are therefore not asked for comparison or synthesis of texts, as in the categories of standards discussed earlier, but they are asked to analyze the contribution of the supplemental element or the means of presentation of the element. Guidelines for selection of the element include:

- The additional visual, oral, multimedia, or quantitative element should provide information that is essential for understanding the text.
- The additional element should rise organically from the ideas in the text and not be “added on” simply for the purposes of testing (e.g., a chart of general statistics about which nations have won the most gold medals should not be artificially attached to an account of an Olympic hockey game).

### **Using Texts To Assess More Than One Purpose**

The preceding discussion of purposes for paired or multiple texts shows that for many of the Standards the requirements for text selection can be specific and stringent. Consequently, when selecting paired or multiple texts, it is important first to determine which category of standards the texts will be measuring and then to determine which other standards in that grade level need to be measured with the same texts. There may be instances when the requirements for one standard preclude or challenge the requirements for another. For example, in grades 9–10, paired informational texts that will be assessing RI.9–10.9 (“Analyze seminal U.S. documents of historical and literary significance (e.g., Washington's Farewell Address, the Gettysburg Address, Roosevelt's Four Freedoms speech, King's ‘Letter from Birmingham Jail,’ including how they address related themes and concepts”) may not be useful for also assessing RI.9–10.8 (“Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, assessing whether the reasoning is valid and the evidence is relevant and sufficient; identify false statements and fallacious reasoning”). In general, taking care to understand the focus of the standards during the text selection process will make item development go more smoothly and will result in higher quality items.

### **E. 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.