CSAI Report

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English Language Arts (ELA) Item Writing Guide and Item Exemplars

June 2016

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Introduction

Purpose of This Guide

Although instructional staff are already experienced in the creation and use of classroom assessments, there is a demand for in-depth guidance and professional development related to assessment literacy. This guide is intended to support professional learning related to assessment design and assessment literacy, with a particular focus on formative assessment. The guide includes detailed explanations of assessment-related concepts that are relevant to the needs of instructional staff. Item exemplars from across the K–12 grades illustrate how these concepts are applied, and commentary on each item provides further insight into the development of high-quality English language arts (ELA) assessment items.

The ultimate goal of this guide is to help instructional staff refine their senses of what constitutes a high-quality ELA assessment item, and to understand, in some detail, reasons that a particular item is or is not successful. Staff can apply this knowledge to create high-quality formative assessments for classroom use, and/or to develop local assessments for use in meeting accountability and evaluation requirements. Enhanced assessment literacy can also inform the evaluation of commercial assessments that are being considered for use at the local and/or state level.

How to Use This Guide

This guide should be read from beginning to end, since the sections build on one another to demonstrate the craft and principles of ELA item development.

The first part of this guide contains four sections that, together, provide an overview of the principles of sound item development. The first section discusses common item formats and their component parts in detail, with a particular emphasis on the mechanics of constructing high-quality multiple-choice (also referred to as selected-response) and constructed-response items. Readers will gain familiarity with the building blocks with which item writers work—and with how these parts are assembled into a successful whole.

These foundational principles of item writing provide the basis for the second section, which focuses on developing well-aligned, rigorous, and grade-appropriate ELA content and language. In addition to alignment, this section considers rigor and cognitive complexity, and distinguishes between rigor and complication; it also pays special attention to accessibility and the needs of English language

learners. Readers will learn strategies for increasing the rigor of items while reducing irrelevant sources of challenge that interfere with a student's ability to demonstrate skills or knowledge.

The third section explores the unique challenges of vocabulary items, and readers will receive guidance for developing items about the use of context, figurative language, connotation, and more.

The fourth section includes two useful tools: a general checklist for item development and a set of guiding questions to inform high-quality item writing.

The second part of the guide contains thirteen annotated item exemplars that demonstrate the principles set forth in the guide's first part. Cross-references are provided throughout the text of the first part of the guide, so that readers can locate relevant examples among these item exemplars. Item exemplars are included from each of the K–12 grades. The item exemplars represent a variety of formats and approaches and align to a range of standards. Brief text excerpts are included with selected items when considered helpful in illustrating a specific point.

Each item exemplar is designed to illustrate common issues that arise during item development. In many cases, two versions of the item are included: one flawed version, and one edited version that illustrates how the flaws might be corrected. Commentary about each item provides further insight into the process of item development.

The item exemplars from grades K–5 focus, for the most part, on illustrating the mechanics of item writing — the material that is covered in the first two sections of the guide. The relative simplicity of items in this grade band allows for clear illustration of how successful items are constructed.

The item exemplars from grades 6–12 reflect a concern with mechanics, but also focus on the development of rigorous and grade-appropriate content. The relative complexity of standards in this grade band brings into relief the contrasts between items that are superficial and poorly aligned and items that are rigorous and strongly aligned. These exemplars demonstrate strategies for raising rigor, increasing complexity, and strengthening weak alignments. Indeed, some of the grade 6–12 item exemplars involve complete revisions of approach or content. These revised items are labeled as "alternative" items, whereas items that have undergone less-drastic revisions are labeled as "edited" items.

Item Development Basics:
Format and Structure

Item Formats

This guide focuses on two basic item formats that are the backbone of formative assessments: multiple-choice (MC) items and constructed-response (CR) items. Innovative item formats such as evidence-based selected-response (EBSR) items and technology-enhanced items (TEIs) are discussed briefly in this section.

Several different types of MC and CR items are appropriate for assessments. MC items may be single select or multiple select. MC items may be single select or multiple select, or may have two related parts (as in EBSR items). CR items may require a short response of several sentences or may require a longer response in the form of an essay or narrative. TEIs can involve tasks such as matching, sorting, dragging and dropping answers into a table or graphic organizer, or using drop-down menus to complete sentences.

Table 1 describes the characteristics of each item format and provides rationales for using each format.

Table 1—Item Format Overview

Item Format	Characteristics	Rationale for Use
Single-select multiple choice (SSMC)	One response is selected from among several answer choices The industry-standard number of answer choices is four	Versatile, user-friendly format that can measure a range of constructs, including higher-order thinking skills Use when there is only one correct answer or when one answer is clearly the strongest possibility

Multiple-select multiple choice (MSMC)	Two or more responses are selected from among several answer choices	The construct must justify the use of a more complex item format
	Desired number of responses is usually indicated in the stem	Use when there are two or more distinct and equally strong correct answers
	Advisable to have more distractors than correct answers (e.g., four distractors and two correct answers for a total of six answer choices)	
	Partial credit may be awarded for selecting some, but not all, correct answers	
Evidence-based selected response (EBSR)	One-part or two-part multiple-choice item	May be used for passage-based items
	Each part may be single-select or multiple-select (best to avoid combining two multiple-select parts)	Use when passage provides details or evidence that directly support an interpretation
	Provides evidence that supports an interpretation of the text	Use when it is valuable to know how a student arrived at an answer
	Often consists of an accuracy component, followed by an evidence component	
	Accuracy component must be correct in order for partial credit to be awarded	
Constructed response (CR)	Student provides a written response to a prompt	Use for multi-step tasks that cannot be accommodated in other item formats
	Answer may be short (e.g., one or two sentences) or long (e.g., a multi-paragraph essay)	Use to elicit a range of student responses
	Scoring must be based on an item-appropriate rubric	
Technology-enhanced item (TEI)	Student uses an interactive interface to perform a task or provide a response	Use for tasks that cannot be accomplished via a multiple-choice format

	Types of TEIs include sorting, sequencing, completing graphic organizers, completing sentences, and highlighting text	Avoid TEIs that could be presented as multiple-choice items
	Scoring is based on the number of correct interactions	
	Partial credit should be available	

In addition, some item formats are generally avoided on high-quality assessments because of their inherent limitations in providing information about what a student knows or can do.

Table 2 describes item formats that should be avoided, and provides explanations of their limitations.

Table 2 — Item Formats to Avoid

Item Format	Limitations
True/False	Often measures lower-order thinking skills (memorization, recall)
	Student has a 50 percent chance of guessing the correct answer
	Provides no information about misconceptions that led to an incorrect response
MC with "all of the above" or "none of the above" as an answer choice	This answer choice may be perceived as a throwaway answer choice
	Item may provide little information about misconceptions that led to an incorrect response
	Use of "all of the above" may reward students for partial knowledge (if student realizes that two answer choices are correct, student may realize that "all of the above" must be correct)
	Cannot use "all of the above" in items that ask for the best answer
	Note: "None of the above" may be appropriate in limited circumstances (e.g., in grammar items that ask which sentence contains an error)
Matching	Often measures lower-order thinking skills (recall)
	May present a scoring issue, as a student who mismatches one pair is forced to mismatch a second pair

Multiple-Choice Items

Single-select multiple-choice (SSMC) items: The SSMC item is perhaps the most widely used item format. Variations are possible, but it is most common for a student to be asked to select a single correct response from among four possible responses (i.e., the answer choices consist of one correct response and three incorrect responses).

SSMC items must have one, and only one, correct answer. If the item has two or more potentially correct answers, the item stem and/or answer choices must be revised to ensure that there is only one defensible correct answer. If both answers are equally strong, the writer may also consider using the multiple-select multiple-choice format.

Multiple-select multiple-choice (MSMC) items: The MSMC format should be used if an item has two or more equally strong and meaningfully distinct correct answers. ELA MSMC items most commonly have two correct answers. To keep the scope of the item manageable, it is best for MSMC items to have no more than three correct answers.

To reduce the chance that a student provides a correct answer by guessing, the number of distractors should always be greater than the number of correct answers. An MSMC item with two correct answers might have three or (ideally) four distractors, while an MSMC item with three correct answers might have four distractors. Exceeding four distractors is likely to result in an unmanageably long item, and in any case, writing more than four strong distractors is often difficult.

The MSMC format should be reserved for situations in which it is truly warranted. All correct answers should be equally strong, and all should be meaningfully distinct. (See the grade 12 item exemplar on page 59.) Avoid situations in which one correct answer is noticeably stronger or weaker than the other(s), and avoid situations in which the correct answers convey similar information or ideas. In addition, the material must support the required number of distractors. All of the distractors must be plausible and passage-based (see the Distractors section on page 16).

If the material does not yield enough satisfactory correct answers and distractors to fulfill the requirements of an MSMC item, it is best for the item to use the SSMC format and to have one strong correct answer and three strong, plausible distractors.

Structure and wording of item stems: As a best practice, multiple-choice items should have closed stems. Most multiple-choice item stems should be phrased as questions, although it can sometimes be appropriate to phrase the stem as a command. While it is sometimes desirable to break up an item stem into multiple sentences, most item stems can and should be phrased as a single sentence.

Because they are potentially challenging for English language learners, open stems should be used only in the rare instances when a closed stem would be confusing or too wordy. (See the Accessible Language section on page 18 and the grade 4 item exemplar on page 35.)

Above all, the item stem should clearly convey the task that that the student is required to perform. To demonstrate strong alignment, the item stem may use language from the standard. However, the item writer's primary consideration should be whether the task is presented clearly and in a grade-appropriate manner. (See the Alignment section on page 13.)

Use of "best," "most," and other qualifiers: When other accurate responses may be possible, it is common practice to include qualifying language in the stem so that the student is instructed to select the best possible answer. Common qualifiers include, but are not limited to, *best, main, mainly, most,* and *most likely*.

This type of wording helps to ensure that strong distractors are not keyable. In the absence of language instructing the student to choose the best answer, a distractor that is partially correct might seem like a reasonable correct answer.

Wording of answer choices: Like item stems, answer choices should be clear and concise. The correct answer(s) should be the only keyable option(s).

It is also important for answer choices to be grammatically and logically compatible with the stem. For example, in an item that asks the student to identify which statement best supports an author's claim, the answer choices should be complete statements rather than grammatically incomplete phrases. (See the grade 7 item exemplar on page 43.)

Answer-choice balance: It is important to ensure that answer choices are visually and structurally parallel and that no one answer choice stands out from the others. (See the Cueing and Clanging section on page 19.)

Common causes of outliers include negative constructions, proper nouns, numerals, unusual punctuation, and unusual length.

Item writers should also consider whether answer choices contain key words that might make them attractive to test takers. For example, if the item stem names a character from a passage, that name should either appear in all answer choices or not appear in any answer choices. When answer choices are quotations from a passage, avoiding outliers can be particularly challenging.

If it is not possible to make all answer choices visually or structurally parallel, try to ensure that pairs of answer choices are parallel (e.g., that two answer choices in an SSMC item contain a numeral and the other two do not).

Answer choice order: Answer choices that are direct quotations from a passage should be arranged by order of appearance in the passage, unless doing so would give away the correct answer. It may be desirable to include parenthetical references to paragraph or line numbers. For other types of answer choices, it is considered a best practice to stack answer choices by length (either short-to-long or long-to-short).

Constructed-Response Items

Possible formats: The category of constructed-response (CR) items covers both short and extended writing tasks. Short-answer items may require a response of a few words, a couple of sentences, or a single paragraph, depending on the content that is addressed and the specifications of the assessment.

Because short-answer items are relatively simple to develop and score, this section focuses on longer writing tasks, variously known as extended-response or open-response items. (See the grade 6 item exemplar on page 40 for a discussion of a short-answer item.)

Constructed-response prompts: As with an MC stem, a successful CR prompt clearly and concisely sets up the task and conveys what is expected of the student. As part of describing the task, the prompt may indicate the text(s) or source(s) that the student should use to produce the response, the genre of the writing to be produced, and whether the student must include supporting details or evidence from the text(s).

Depending on the complexity of the writing task, some scaffolding may be incorporated into the prompt to guide the student's thinking. However, the scaffolding should not place unnecessary restrictions on possible responses, nor should it be so extensive as to provide the student with a ready-made outline.

The practice of including a series of questions in a prompt for students to address in a response is intended to be helpful, but may actually limit the response that a prompt elicits. Students may simply respond to the questions as discrete entities, rather than producing a single integrated, well-developed response that reflects the task's larger goals. (See the grade 10 item exemplar on page 52.)

If a writing task is reasonably straightforward (e.g., analyzing how the author develops a passage's theme), little else may be required in the prompt.

Read, think, write: For CR items that deal with multiple, relatively complex texts, consider using the "Read, think, write" approach. A prompt that uses this approach will briefly characterize what the student has read, focus the student's thinking on a particular aspect of the reading, and then charge the student with a writing task that is informed by the reading and thinking.

For example:

> You have read three passages about the development of solar energy.
>
> Think about each author's point of view about the costs and benefits of solar energy.
>
> Write an essay that analyzes how each author conveys his or her point of view about the costs and benefits of solar energy. Use details from each passage to support your response.

This approach can be modified to suit individual writing tasks. If the topic of the text(s) and the student's reason for reading them seem self-evident, the "read" portion of the item can be eliminated. Similarly, if the "think" and "write" portions convey redundant information, it may be best to eliminate the "think" component and proceed directly to the writing component. Only the "write" portion is truly essential. (See the grade 10 item exemplar on page 52.)

Scope of task: A good CR prompt should present a task that is substantial enough to merit an essay-length response. The task's scope can be tested by writing an exemplary response, or by compiling a list of information that an exemplary response should include. If an item writer finds it challenging to craft a robust response to a prompt, students will likely encounter the same difficulty, and the task likely needs to be revised to make it sufficiently complex.

At the same time, the writing task should be feasible for an average student. Consider the amount of time that students will have to respond to the prompt, including time for planning and pre-writing. If it seems unlikely that an average student will fully complete the task in the allotted time, the task should be streamlined.

A successful writing prompt will allow both higher- and lower-performing students to demonstrate what they know and can do. Higher-performing students should be able to provide sophisticated, substantial, well-written responses, while lower-performing students should at least be able to access the prompt and provide a response that addresses some aspect of the task. A writing prompt that is too simple or too challenging will not elicit a meaningful range of student responses.

Rubrics: All CR items must be scored using a rubric that describes the characteristics of responses at each score point. Though it is likely not a student-facing component, the rubric should be considered an essential part of a CR item.

The use of rubrics helps to document what the task requires, ensures consistency in scoring, and delineates the distinctions among score points. Though generic rubrics are sometimes used, it is preferable to create a customized rubric for each CR item. Generic rubrics may include material that is not relevant to a particular writing task, or may neglect to address essential features.

With that said, rubrics need not be overly complicated, and need not exhaustively document the features of every conceivable student response. Instead, the rubric should provide a stable framework for evaluating student responses.

Shorter CR items can often be scored on a simple two-point or three-point rubric. Full credit is awarded for responses that are correct and complete; partial credit is awarded for responses that are partially correct or partially complete; no credit is awarded for responses that are wholly incorrect, irrelevant, blank, or too brief to evaluate. (See the grade 6 item exemplar on page 40.)

A longer, more complex writing task requires a more complex rubric. Rubrics for items with higher point values should make finer distinctions among score points. For example, a four-point rubric may award full credit for a response that is not only accurate and complete but also strategically organized, sophisticated in reasoning, and insightful in its use of textual evidence. Three points may be awarded for a response that is considered adequate—generally correct and complete, but lacking in the organizational or interpretive sophistication of a top-score response. Two points may be awarded for a response that is not wholly adequate for the task but conveys some accurate interpretations or ideas, and a response that demonstrates minimal understanding or engagement would receive one point. Again, a zero-point response would be a response that is wholly incorrect, irrelevant, blank, or too brief to evaluate. (See the grades 10 and 11 item exemplars on pages 52 and 55, respectively.)

Evidence-Based Selected-Response Items

Evidence-based selected response (EBSR) items are usually two-part, two-point MC items. One-part EBSRs are also possible, though items of this type are less common than two-part EBSRs. For that reason, this section focuses on two-part EBSRs. (See the grade 4 item exemplar on page 35.)

What makes EBSRs unlike standard MC items is the requirement that students cite evidence to support their response. These items require students to both select a response to an item (most often in the first part of the item, or Part A) and select or indicate the textual evidence that led to that response (most often in the second part of the item, or Part B). In EBSRs that follow this

approach, Part A is known as the accuracy component, and Part B is known as the evidence component. Together, these two parts serve as a single item.

In a well-crafted EBSR, each answer choice in Part A has a related answer choice in Part B. Therefore, even if the student selects an incorrect response in Part A, Part B will appear to supply a plausible piece of supporting evidence for that response. This design prevents students from eliminating Part A answer choices on the basis of a lack of relevant evidence in Part B.

The two parts of an EBSR can use either a single-select format or a multiple-select format. However, it is best to avoid using the multiple-select format in both parts of an EBSR. An EBSR with two multiple-select components can easily become unwieldy, and there is no way of knowing which of the multiple correct answers in Part B is supposed to support which of the multiple correct answers in Part A.

To receive full credit for an EBSR, a student must answer both parts of the item correctly. Partial credit should be available if the student answers Part A (the accuracy component) correctly but answers Part B (the evidence component) incorrectly; however, no credit is awarded if the student answers the accuracy component incorrectly, regardless of whether the response to the evidence component is correct. Because the correctness of Part B depends on Part A, the answer to Part B can never be considered correct on its own.

Technology-Enhanced Items

Technology-enhanced items (TEIs) are designed for online administration and are intended to allow students to respond in ways that are not possible via traditional paper-and-pencil administration. If a TEI can be written as an MC item, the use of the TEI format may not be justified. For example, a TEI in which the student drags and drops a single correct answer into a box would be better presented as a standard MC item.

Tasks that are well suited for TEI functionalities include showing relationships among individuals, ideas, or events; sequencing and ordering; categorizing and sorting; analyzing the structures of texts; comparing and contrasting texts or features of texts; and locating relevant textual evidence.

A tremendous amount of variety exists within the category of TEIs, and the possibilities of this item format largely depend on the authoring platform that is used. However, the following best practices are relevant to the creation of nearly all TEIs:

Be aware of the scope of the task. Consider the number of interactions (actions that students are required to perform within the item) in each TEI, and weigh the number of interactions against the item's point value and the expected time that the task will take. If the point value of a TEI is the

same as that of an MC item, three to six interactions may be sufficient, depending on the complexity of each interaction.

Ensure that partial credit is available. One advantage of TEIs is that partial credit can be available. In order for this to be the case, TEIs need to have at least two interactions. A TEI with only one interaction results in "all or nothing" scoring and can likely work as an SSMC item instead; it also does not fully take advantage of this item type's available functionality.

Ensure that items can be scored. TEIs are almost always scored automatically. Therefore, asking students to type the theme or main idea of a passage into a box would usually not be viable for a TEI, since there are too many different ways to express the same theme or main idea. In some cases, this problem can be addressed by using a different TEI format that allows for a similar task to be completed but allows fewer ways in which the item can be answered correctly.

Consider using graphics, if appropriate. Depending on the authoring system, it may be possible for TEIs to incorporate simple graphics. This capability can be especially useful at lower grades and when dealing with passages or other stimuli that involve graphics (e.g., charts, graphs, or maps). Some TEIs might even ask students to use preset words or phrases to populate a graphic organizer.

Be aware of how items appear to students. A TEI that is difficult to navigate or view will likely introduce unnecessary demands on students and interfere with their abilities to demonstrate the knowledge, skills, and abilities that the item is attempting to assess. TEIs should measure the student's knowledge of the tested material, not the student's ability to interact with technology. (See the grade 5 item exemplar on page 37.)

Item Development Basics: Content and Language

Alignment

To the extent possible in a particular item format, items must robustly address the standard(s) to which they are aligned.

Because some standards are more complex than others, it is difficult to generalize about how much of the material within a standard must be addressed in order to achieve a strong item alignment. Writers must often use their professional judgment to discern the essential skill or knowledge that a standard is targeting, and must then evaluate whether an item allows for an adequate demonstration of that skill or knowledge.

It is usually simple to align an item to a standard that deals with one straightforward skill (e.g., describing a character). An item aligns to this standard if the student is required to describe a character; if the item does not meet this requirement, it does not align. If a standard is this straightforward, it must be addressed in its entirety in order to achieve a strong item alignment.

On the other hand, a standard may deal with a multilayered set of related skills (e.g., describing a character and explaining how that character affects the development of the plot). While it may be possible to craft a multiple-choice item that encompasses both components of the standard, the standard may be broken down: an item may be considered to align if it requires the student to describe a character or if it requires the student to explain how a character affects the development of the plot.

Particularly within the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), a standard may include multiple components that simply cannot be assessed together in a cohesive and well-designed item. In this case, an item must deal with a portion of a standard. This approach does not compromise the strength of the item's alignment to the standard.

For example, items aligned to RL.2 at grade 6 may address the theme or central idea of a text and how it is conveyed through relevant details, **or** may address summarization of the text:

Determine a theme or central idea of a text and how it is conveyed through relevant details; provide a summary of the text distinct from personal opinions or judgments.

To achieve strong alignment, the language of the standard can be incorporated into the wording of the item. For example, the stem of an item aligned to this standard might read:

*Which detail from the passage **best** conveys the theme that friends are loyal to each other?*

However, the language of the standard should not be used verbatim if doing so results in an item that is unclear or inaccessible for the targeted grade level. In such cases, items should be worded in a way that captures the essence of the standard, even if the exact language differs. While using the language of the standard can support strong alignment, it is more important to consider the essential skills and knowledge that the standard is targeting, and to craft the item in a way that presents the task clearly and at a grade-appropriate level.

Furthermore, using the language of the standard does not guarantee alignment. No matter their wording, items must reflect the true intent of the standard in order to align properly.

Depth of Knowledge

Depth of knowledge (DOK) is a system developed by Dr. Norman L. Webb[1] for categorizing the cognitive demands required to produce an acceptable response. These categories of elements reflect the different levels of cognitive expectation, or depth of knowledge, that are required in order for the student to complete the task. As the cognitive demands increase, so does the DOK, ranging from a low of DOK 1 to a high of DOK 4.

A DOK 1 item would be the least demanding task and would require little more than recall or reproduction, such as citing a date or recalling a concrete detail from a text passage. A DOK 4 item would demand extended thinking, involving analysis, synthesis, and planning, most likely over a period of time. As such, DOK 4 items are rare on assessments because test time is a critical factor; however, some extended-response tasks can reach this level of complexity.

High-quality standardized assessments have been moving away from the use of DOK 1 items. Given that testing time and test "real estate" are at a premium, DOK 1 items do not provide enough psychometric discrimination to help distinguish between the students who have the knowledge and abilities that assessments are measuring and those who do not. In addition, DOK 1 items rarely achieve the level of rigor that is desirable in high-quality assessments. Therefore, most high-quality assessment items are designated as DOK 2 or DOK 3.

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[1] Webb, N. L. (1997). *Research monograph No. 6. Criteria for alignment of expectations and assessments in mathematics and science education.* Washington, DC: Council of Chief State School Officers.

ELA DOK 2 items involve both initial comprehension and subsequent processing of a text. Items at this level may require the student to compare, interpret, or classify information. Almost all such items require a student to draw a meaningful inference about a text (even if drawing an inference is not the stated focus of the item), or to apply a skill to arrive at a correct answer (e.g., using context clues to determine the meaning of a word). Short constructed-response items that require explanations or simple interpretations are good examples of DOK 2 items, and many rigorous multiple-choice items are rated as DOK 2.

DOK 3 items require students to generalize, analyze, or connect ideas, both within and across texts. DOK 3 is often characterized as requiring students to "go beyond" the text, whether through discerning larger themes or ideas or through analyzing ideas or viewpoints that are subtly or implicitly conveyed. Most prompts that require a substantial written response are classified as DOK 3, in part because generating and presenting an extended response generally requires higher-level thinking skills than selecting from among several provided answer choices. However, some multiple-choice items that engage with complex or subtle ideas could also be designated as DOK 3, as could multiple-choice items that draw on relatively sophisticated aspects of two or more texts (e.g., an item that contrasts two authors' use of structural elements).

It is important to note that DOK is a measure of cognitive complexity, not a measure of difficulty. In the realm of assessment, difficulty is determined by the percentage of students who correctly answer an item. It is possible for a DOK 2 item to be very difficult and for a DOK 3 item to be relatively easy. (See the grades 6, 8, and 9 item exemplars on pages 40, 46, and 50, respectively.)

Rigor

The following best practices for ELA item development can help items attain an appropriate level of rigor.

Write questions that are worth asking. Assess content that is essential to the passage. Avoid items that focus on trivial information or minor details.

Write answer choices that are tied to the passage. Avoid generic, "cookie-cutter" answer choices. For example, avoid characterizing the author's purpose as "to inform," "to persuade," or "to entertain." Instead, provide plausible characterizations of what the author is informing the reader about, or how or why the author is attempting to persuade an audience.

Write distractors that are plausible. Students can easily eliminate answer choices that seem absurd or illogical at face value. Such answer choices not only make it easier for the student to arrive

at the correct answer, but also ensure that the student will not need to think back to the passage to eliminate a distractor. (Distractors are discussed in more detail in the following section.)

For more information on rigor, see the grades 4 and 6–12 item exemplars on pages 35 and 40, respectively.

Distractors

Incorrect answers, also known as distractors, are essential to the quality and rigor of an item. Weak distractors can be easily eliminated by test takers and do not provide useful information about misconceptions that a student may be struggling with. Strong distractors raise the rigor of an item by requiring the student to consider the merits of each answer choice, and can provide insight into misconceptions or misreadings of a text.

Weak distractors seem implausible and may have little or no basis in a passage. A distractor is weak if it can be automatically eliminated by a test taker who has not read the passage or mastered the skill or concept that is being assessed.

Strong distractors are plausible and passage-based, and reflect likely misconceptions about or misreadings of the passage. A strong distractor might seem appealing to a student who has only superficially comprehended a passage or who has only partially mastered a skill or concept.

If it is not possible to write three strong distractors for a single-select multiple-choice item, the targeted material may not be rich enough to yield a successful item.

Distractors should not be potentially keyable or deliberately misleading. Care must be taken to distinguish between strong distractors and weak correct answers. (See the grade 7 item exemplar on page 43.)

Construct-Irrelevant Sources of Challenge

While it is essential for items to be rigorous, it is important to differentiate between items that require complex thought and items that are merely complicated in their design.

In a well-crafted item, the source of the challenge should be essential to the construct that is being measured. In a poorly crafted item, construct-irrelevant sources of challenge may prevent the student from demonstrating the knowledge, skill, or ability that is being measured.

Construct-irrelevant sources of challenge often include:

High reading load: Items should be clear and concise. Remove unnecessary verbiage from item stems, prompts, and answer choices, and ensure that all vocabulary is on or (ideally) below grade level, with the exception of words whose meaning is being tested in context-clue vocabulary items, and is accessible. If the item uses material from a passage, ensure that quotations are robust enough to convey meaning but are not unnecessarily long. Students should be able to decode items with little effort. (See the grade K and grade 2 item exemplars, on pages 27 and 31, respectively.)

Idiomatic or figurative language: Construct-irrelevant instances of idiomatic or figurative language are particularly problematic for English language learners. If such language is not being assessed in an item, it should be replaced with wording that is more literal. In addition to enhancing accessibility, this practice ensures that the item is measuring what it is intended to measure.

The boldfaced following words or phrases are examples of potentially problematic language:

How does the author **illustrate** the central idea of the passage?

How does the setting **play a part** in developing the theme?

Which detail supports the theme that **love is blind**?

Unclear item directions: Providing clear directions is essential, particularly for multiple-select and technology-enhanced items. In multiple-select items, consider including in the stem the number of correct answers that a student must select. (See the grades 5 and 12 item exemplars on pages 37 and 59, respectively.) In technology-enhanced items, do not assume that students will intuitively know which steps to follow to complete the task. Provide directions that someone with little knowledge of the item format or the technology interface could successfully follow.

For items associated with a set of passages, it is essential to indicate which passage(s) each item deals with. The simplest approach might be to mention the title of the relevant passage in the item stem (e.g., "What is the theme of the passage from *Jane Eyre*?"). If a title is awkwardly long, consider abbreviating it within a stem (e.g., "Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey"

might be abbreviated as "Tintern Abbey"—or, if it is the only poem in a set, it could be referred to as "the poem").

Assumptions of prior knowledge: Ensure that items do not require or assume knowledge that a student might not possess. For example, it would not be appropriate to use an assessment item that asks how a modern work of fiction transforms the myth of Icarus and Daedalus unless the source material was also taught or assigned. Care must also be taken when making connections to other content areas. Under most circumstances, items about *A Tale of Two Cities* should not double as world history items assessing knowledge of the French Revolution.

Accessible Language

These additional best practices can help students from all populations access the material on an assessment.

Use familiar contexts. Consider whether students will be familiar with the key words and concepts that are used in an item. (In passage-based items, this is primarily a function of using a grade-appropriate passage.) For example, in a grammar item that deals with appropriate verb tense, students should not be distracted or confused by unfamiliar vocabulary or abstract concepts. Replace potentially unfamiliar, lower-frequency lexical items with more-familiar, higher-frequency lexical items. Additionally, care must be taken to ensure that the context is non-offensive and free of bias.

Use the present tense. Most items should be written in the present tense. Even items that deal with future events (e.g., the student writes a narrative that provides an ending to a story) can be written in the present tense: e.g., "Write a story that tells what happens next." rather than "Write a story that tells what will happen next."

Use the active voice. Passive verb constructions are more difficult for students, especially English language learners, to process and remember. Other languages use the passive voice much less frequently and/or in very limited situations, so English language learners may not have had much exposure to passive constructions.

Use closed stems. Closed stems are grammatically complete and are therefore easier for English language learners to interpret. It may not be immediately apparent to a student that the student is supposed to supply the ending to a grammatically incomplete open stem.

Use a positive frame of reference. Avoid stems that use negatives (e.g., "Which word does **not** describe the narrator?"). Students may not register the negative construction and may therefore respond incorrectly. Negative constructions are more difficult to process, and may introduce unnecessary confusion. In addition, using negative answer choices (e.g., "unhappy") with this example stem would create a double negative.

While it is generally preferable to use a positive frame of reference in all parts of the item, there may be instances in which it is desirable to use a negative construction in the answer choices. In these cases, ensure that the answer choices are balanced in this regard (e.g., two answer choices have negative constructions and two do not).

Ensure that pronouns and referents are clear. To minimize confusion about pronoun referents, use character names (or descriptions, such as "the father") instead of "he" or "she"; use "the speaker" (if the item refers to a poem or speech), "the narrator," "the author," etc. Never assume the gender of a character, narrator, speaker, or author unless it is made clear in the passage or is otherwise well known.

Cueing and Clanging

Cueing and clanging are related issues that can lead students to select or eliminate an answer choice for construct-irrelevant reasons. It is important to craft items so that cueing is avoided entirely and clanging is minimized. In addition, items that are administered together must be reviewed carefully for cross-item instances of cueing and clanging.

Cueing occurs when one item gives away the answer to another item, or when a certain element within an item reveals the answer to that item.

A subtler form of cueing occurs when the wording or construction of the item is likely to make a certain response seem especially attractive to a test-taker—in other words, when the student may select the right answer for the wrong reason.

It is also possible for students to be miscued, or led to select an incorrect answer, for construct-irrelevant reasons.

Clanging is the repetition of a word or phrase, within an item or across items, in a way that is likely to be distracting to a test taker.

Clanging is most problematic when it involves repetitions of key words from a passage, repetitions of quoted material from a passage, or other obvious repetitions that could otherwise be distracting or misleading to a test-taker.

Clanging can lead to cueing. For example, the use of a key word or phrase in the stem and in one answer choice might lead the student to select that answer choice.

Cueing and clanging are especially likely to occur in summary items, quotations in stems (or, less frequently, in answer choices), and items that identify a key element of a passage. For example, consider the following item stem:

> Which evidence from the passage **best** supports the theme that appearances
> can differ from reality?

This stem, which provides a statement of theme, might cue an item that simply asks the student to identify the theme of the passage. If such an item were administered along with this example item, it would need to focus on a completely different theme.

This stem would also cue a constructed-response item that required identification of the passage's theme. Students could simply look at the multiple-choice item stem to obtain that element of their response. Therefore, the constructed-response item does not necessarily measure whether students can determine the theme of the passage, since they may have determined the theme from the test itself. (For more information on cueing and clanging, see the Cueing and Clanging in Vocabulary Items section on page 23, and the grades 1 and 2 item exemplars on pages 29 and 31, respectively.)

Item Development Basics: Assessing Vocabulary

Developing successful vocabulary items presents a unique set of challenges. This section provides some suggestions and best practices for developing common types of vocabulary items. (Also see the grades 4 and 7 item exemplars on pages 35 and 43, respectively.)

Using Context Clues

Tested words and phrases should be above grade level but not inaccessible. A good rule of thumb is to select words that are two or three grades above grade level. Graded vocabulary references such as the *Children's Writer's Word Book* (CWWB) (grades K–6) and *EDL Core Vocabularies* (EDL) (grades K–12+) can be useful supplements to professional judgment.

The passage must provide a sufficient amount of context for the target word. A student who has never encountered the target word before should be able to determine the correct answer based on the context in the passage.

Roots and Affixes

Tested words should be at or slightly above grade level.

Not all words that contain a Greek or Latin root or affix may necessarily yield a successful root/affix item. Consider whether the meaning of the root or affix is truly essential and helpful in determining the meaning of the target word.

Multiple-Meaning Words

Tested words should be at grade level. Ensure that all answer choices for multiple-meaning words are syntactically similar and are contextually plausible.

Not all words with multiple meanings may necessarily yield a successful vocabulary item. Only test multiple-meaning words if an unusual sense of the word occurs in the passage and if the word is relevant to the topic of the passage.

Figurative Language

Low-rigor items require the student to identify instances of figurative language (for example, "Which type of figurative language is used in the sentence from the passage? A. simile; B. metaphor;" etc.).

Higher-rigor items require interpretation, either of the literal meaning of a figure of speech or of how the use of figurative language contributes to the meaning of the passage as a whole.

As with context-clue items, ensure that the context is robust enough to support a meaningful interpretation of the figurative language. It is best to avoid assessing instances of figurative language that contribute little to the passage as a whole.

Synonyms and Antonyms

Tested words and phrases should be at or just below grade level. Since the student is expected to describe a relationship between words, the meaning of the words should already be known.

Lower-rigor items simply require identification of the relationship between words. Higher-rigor items ask the student to identify the synonym or antonym of the target word. This latter approach is preferable because it tends to yield more plausible distractors, as opposed to a generic set of word-relationship descriptors that may not plausibly apply to the words in question.

In most instances, synonym and antonym items are classified as DOK 1 items, as these items rarely require more than simple identification or recognition.

Connotation and Denotation

Be careful to distinguish between connotative and denotative meanings. Meanings of the tested word that are listed in a dictionary are generally denotative (unless accompanied in the dictionary by "fig." or the like).

In items testing connotative meanings, all answer choices must be actual connotations of the word in question. Do not combine connotative and denotative meanings in an item's answer choices.

Cueing and Clanging in Vocabulary Items

Internal cueing and clanging is a particular concern with vocabulary items. Ensure that no single answer choice bears a strong visual or phonic similarity to the tested vocabulary word. For instance, in an item testing the meaning of "impertinence," "impatience" would stand out as a distractor unless it were balanced with another visually and phonically similar word.

As this example suggests, affixes are a common source of internal cueing and clanging in vocabulary items. If the tested word contains a particular affix (e.g., -less), then either all answer choices or no answer choices should contain that same affix. If this is not possible, then at least two answer choices should contain the affix, and the two other answer choices should omit it (or use a different affix).

Item Development Checklist
and Guiding Questions

Item Development Checklist

Item Set

- ✓ Item stems are closed.
- ✓ Cueing is avoided across the item set.
- ✓ Clanging is avoided across the item set.
- ✓ A range of standards is assessed across the item set.
- ✓ A range of complexity and difficulty is assessed across the item set.

Individual Items

- ✓ The question is important enough to ask; it is not trivial.
- ✓ The item aligns to the standard that it is intended to measure.
- ✓ The student's task is made clear in the stem.
- ✓ The stem is concisely worded and uses correct grammar.
- ✓ Material from the passage is accurately quoted.
- ✓ The level of difficulty is grade-appropriate.

Vocabulary Items

- The target word or phrase is appropriate for the grade level.
- For items testing context clues, the passage contains sufficient context.

Answer Choices

- ✓ There is only one correct answer (except in multiple-select items).
- ✓ Options are parallel and balanced, and outliers (e.g., use of key words from the stem, negatives, proper nouns, numerals) are avoided.
- ✓ Options are plausible and passage-based.

- ✓ Options are grammatically and syntactically compatible with the stem.

- ✓ Options are stacked short-to-long or long-to-short.

- ✓ Options that are direct quotes from the passage are ordered as they appear in the passage.

Technology-Enhanced Items

- ✓ The use of technology is justified (the item allows the student to respond in a way that is not possible or is not efficient via a traditional multiple-choice item).

- ✓ The technological aspects of the item do not introduce unnecessary demands on students.

- ✓ The standard that the item assesses lends itself well to the use of the format.

Item Development Guiding Questions

✓ Does the item **require close reading** of the text?

✓ Does the item require the student to **draw on evidence from the text** in order to respond correctly?

✓ Is the item **worthy of student attention**, and does it deliver rich insights about the text?

✓ Is the item **appropriately rigorous and complex** for the grade level?

✓ Does the item require the student to discern among **strong answer choices** in order to arrive at the correct answer?

✓ Is the item clearly and purposefully **aligned to the standard(s)**?

✓ Does the item **mirror the language of the standard(s)**, if feasible?

ELA Item Exemplars: Grades K–5

Grade K

<div align="center">Three Little Kittens</div>

Three little kittens, they lost their mittens, and they began to cry,

"Oh mother dear, we sadly fear that we have lost our mittens."

"What! Lost your mittens, you naughty kittens! Then you shall have no pie."

"Meeow, meeow, meeow, now we shall have no pie."

PASSAGE TITLE: Three Little Kittens			
ITEM FORMAT: Single-Select Multiple Choice (SSMC)		KEY: C	DOK: 2
PRIMARY STANDARD: RL.1.4 (Louisiana)	Identify words and phrases in stories or poems that suggest feelings or appeal to the senses.		
SECONDARY STANDARD: RL.1.1 (Louisiana)	Ask and answer questions about key details in a text.		

ORIGINAL ITEM:

Which word from the nursery rhyme **best** describes the way the kittens feel?

    A. Three

    B. cry

    C. sadly

    D. pie

COMMENTS AND NOTES:

Mechanics:
- Answer-choice balance: The original item contains an outlier; answer choice A is the only one that starts with an uppercase letter, so students—particularly at this grade level—might select this answer on the sole basis of the fact that it stands out visually.
- Wording of the stem: The construction of the stem is likely too complex for most students at this grade level.

Grade K (continued)

Content:
- Answer choices: Although the correct answer is the best choice ("sadly" more closely relates to a feeling, whereas "cry" is the effect of feeling sad), the distinction between the correct answer and distractor B is too subtle for students at this grade level.

Which word from the nursery rhyme tells how the kittens feel?

    A. lost
    B. began
    C. sadly
    D. have

Mechanics:
- Answer-choice balance: The answer choices in the edited item are balanced for length—no one choice stands out.
- Answer-choice balance: All four choices are parallel, beginning with a lowercase letter.
- Answer-choice order: Following best practice, the choices are arranged in the order in which they appear in the nursery rhyme, rather than by length.
- Wording of the stem: The language in the stem is simplified, making the item more appropriate for the grade level.
- Style: One- to two-word answer choices that are direct quotations from the text usually forgo quotation marks (per typical style guides). This is particularly a best practice at the lowest grade levels, in which students may be confused by the appearance of quotation marks in answer choices.

Content:
- Answer choices: The item contains only one correct answer. Answer choice A is a particularly strong distractor, as a misreading of the text. Answer choices B and D are plausible because students at a lower reading level might select either distractor on the basis of trying to construct a sentence (e.g., "The kittens began . . .").

Grade 1

Excerpt from *Kintaro, a folktale from Japan*[2]

One day Kintaro took a hatchet, climbed onto the bear's back, and went off into the mountains with his friends. On the way, they came to a cliff overlooking a big stream and found that there was no bridge across. "I'll knock a tree over and make us a bridge," said the bear. But even though he pushed and pushed, the tree didn't budge. "I'll give it a try," said Kintaro, and he began to push with all his might. When he pushed, the tree began to move, and with a loud crack it fell over and spanned the river. "Hooray!" shouted all of Kintaro's friends.

PASSAGE TITLE: Excerpt from *Kintaro, a folktale from Japan*		
ITEM FORMAT: Single-Select Multiple Choice (SSMC)	KEY: B	DOK: 2
PRIMARY STANDARD: RL.A.2.B (New Mexico)	Identify characters and simple story lines from selected myths and stories from around the world.	
SECONDARY STANDARD: CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.1.1	Ask and answer questions about key details in a text.	

ORIGINAL ITEM:

Which sentence tells about the **most** important event in the story?

        A. Kintaro climbs a mountain and finds a stream.
        B. Kintaro pushes a tree with all his might and makes a bridge.
        C. The bear helps Kintaro to build a bridge.
        D. The bear carries Kintaro on its back.

COMMENTS AND NOTES:

Mechanics:
- <u>Cueing and clanging</u>: The repetition of a key phrase from the passage ("with all his might") cues the correct answer.
- <u>Answer-choice balance</u>: The correct answer is an outlier due to length and due to the different grammatical construction (inclusion of the prepositional phrase "with all his might").
- <u>Answer-choice arrangement</u>: Because the answer choices are not arranged from long-to-short or short-to-long, choice B further stands out.

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[2] Source: http://web-japan.org/kidsweb/folk/kintaro/kintaro03.html.

Grade 1 (continued)

Which sentence tells about the **most** important event in the story?

      A. Kintaro climbs a mountain and finds a stream.
      B. Kintaro pushes a tree and makes a bridge.
      C. The bear helps Kintaro to build a bridge.
      D. The bear carries Kintaro on its back.

COMMENTS AND NOTES:

Mechanics:
- <u>Cueing and clanging</u>: The correct answer has been revised to omit the phrase "with all his might," thus eliminating cueing and clanging issues.
- <u>Answer-choice balance</u>: Answer choices are balanced and parallel. Note that all four choices include the proper name "Kintaro," while one pair also contains "the bear."
- <u>Answer-choice arrangement</u>: Answer choices are now arranged from long to short.

Grade 2

ITEM FORMAT: Single-Select Multiple Choice (SSMC)		KEY: C	DOK: 2
PRIMARY STANDARD: CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.2.7	Explain how specific images (e.g., a diagram showing how a machine works) contribute to and clarify a text.		
SECONDARY STANDARD: N/A	N/A		

ORIGINAL ITEM:

How does the image help the reader understand the experiment described in the passage?

      A. by showing the first step of the experiment
      B. by showing how to put the funnel into the bottle
      C. by showing what happens when vinegar is combined with baking soda
      D. by showing what happens when food coloring is added to the other ingredients

COMMENTS AND NOTES:

Mechanics:
- <u>Cueing and clanging</u>: The phrase "the experiment," which is used in the stem and repeated in distractor A, creates cueing (more specifically, a miscue, as option A is not the correct answer).
- <u>Answer-choice balance</u>: Distractor A is also problematic because it is not parallel with the rest of the choices. While choices B, C, and D all describe specifics of steps of the experiment, distractor A is the only one that describes the step generically.
- <u>Wording of the stem</u>: Special attention must be paid to stem wording when developing items for grades K–2, as the language used in item stems and answer choices must be accessible. In this example, though students might be familiar with the meaning of the individual words used in the stem, the structure of the question is too complex and is unnecessarily wordy.

EDITED ITEM:

How does the picture help the reader understand the experiment?

      A. by showing how to cover the bottle with clay
      B. by showing how to put the funnel into the bottle
      C. by showing what happens when vinegar is combined with baking soda
      D. by showing what happens when food coloring is added to the other ingredients

Grade 2 (continued)

Mechanics:

- <u>Cueing and clanging</u>: Distractor A has been revised to omit the phrase "the experiment," thus eliminating cueing and clanging issues.
- <u>Answer-choice balance</u>: Answer choices are balanced and parallel. Distractor A has been revised to describe what the first step of the experiment is, making it as specific as the rest of the answer choices. Note the parallel wording in answer-choice pairs: two answer choices include the phrase "how to," while two include "what happens when."
- <u>Wording of the stem</u>: The stem has been revised for clarity and concision. However, due to the complexity of the task that is presented in the item, this item might be best suited for use in mid- to end-of-year assessments.

Grade 3

ITEM FORMAT: Single-Select Multiple Choice (SSMC)		KEY: C	DOK: 2
PRIMARY STANDARD: CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.3.2	Recount stories, including fables, folktales, and myths from diverse cultures; determine the central message, lesson, or moral and explain how it is conveyed through key details in the text.		
SECONDARY STANDARD: N/A	N/A		

ORIGINAL ITEM:

What is the central message of the story?

> A. Rules can be broken.
> B. Nature can be beautiful.
> C. Wild things should be free.
> D. Friends should work together.

COMMENTS AND NOTES:

Mechanics:
- Answer-choice balance: Although it may not be immediately apparent, answer choice C is an outlier, as it is the only option that contains an adjective in the subject. Answer choice D is also an outlier, as it is the only choice without the verb "to be" in the predicate.

EDITED ITEM:

What is the central message of the story?

> A. Rules can be broken.
> B. Nature can be beautiful.
> C. Wild things should be free.
> D. Good friends should be helpful.

COMMENTS AND NOTES:

Mechanics:
- Answer-choice balance: Answer choice D has been revised for balance, adding an adjective to the subject in order to balance C. In answer choice D, "work together" has been replaced with the phrase "be helpful" in order for all four choices to have parallel construction.

Grade 3 (continued)

Content:
- <u>Alignment</u>: Since the standard contains a multilayered set of skills, the item assesses one of the central components of the standard. The item is considered to be strongly aligned to the standard.

Grade 4

<div align="center">

Fog

by Carl Sandburg[3]

</div>

The fog comes
on little cat feet.

It sits looking
over harbor and city
on silent haunches
and then moves on.

PASSAGE TITLE: Fog			
ITEM FORMAT: Evidence-Based Selected Response (EBSR)		KEY: B, C	DOK: 2
PRIMARY STANDARD: CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.4.5	Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.		
SECONDARY STANDARD: CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.4.1	Refer to details and examples in a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.		

ORIGINAL ITEM:

Part A
What does the metaphor in the poem **mainly** show?

      A. The metaphor shows that the fog is fast.
      B. The metaphor shows that the fog is quiet.
      C. The metaphor shows that the fog is curious.
      D. The metaphor shows that the fog is nervous.

Part B
Which word from the poem supports the answer to Part A?

      A. feet
      B. looking
      C. silent
      D. moves

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[3] Source: http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/174299.

Grade 4 (continued)

Part A

The metaphor in the poem **mainly** shows that the fog is

    A. fast.
    B. quiet.
    C. curious.
    D. nervous.

Part B

Which word from the poem supports the answer to Part A?

    A. feet
    B. looking
    C. silent
    D. moves

COMMENTS AND NOTES:

Mechanics:
- <u>Stem construction</u>: Open stems are generally avoided; however, there may be rare cases when their use is justified. In this example, the open stem in the edited item helps to eliminate the excessive repetition in the original item's answer choices, which, in turn, reduces the reading load. Note that each answer choice in Part A includes a period, as each choice completes the sentence in the stem.

Content:
- <u>Rigor</u>: In spite of the simplicity of the poem, the item presents a relatively high level of complexity; it does not merely ask the student to identify the figurative language, but requires both interpretation of the metaphor and support for such interpretation.
- <u>Answer choices</u>: Note that each answer choice in Part A has at least a tenuous correlation to each answer choice in Part B:

        fast – feet   curious – looking
        quiet – silent   nervous – moves

    Ideally, the answer choices in Part B (typically, the "evidence" part) of an EBSR item must provide plausible evidence for the distractors in Part A. This increases the validity of the item, as it prevents students from ruling out distractors in Part A solely based on the fact that they do not have plausible support in Part B.

Grade 5

ITEM FORMAT: Technology-Enhanced Item (TEI)		KEY: See below	DOK: 2
PRIMARY STANDARD: CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.5.2	Determine two or more main ideas of a text and explain how they are supported by key details; summarize the text.		
SECONDARY STANDARD: CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.5.1	Quote accurately from a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.		

ORIGINAL ITEM:

Drag and drop one option into the appropriate box in the table to identify two central ideas of the passage, two supporting details for each central idea, and a key individual related to each central idea.[4]

Central Idea 1:	Central Idea 2:
Supporting Detail:	Supporting Detail:
Supporting Detail:	Supporting Detail:
Key Individual:	Key Individual:

Options:

• Ken Burns, documentary filmmaker • John Augustus Roebling, bridge designer • The length of the Brooklyn Bridge is 5,989 ft. • The Brooklyn Bridge has become an icon of New York City. • The Brooklyn Bridge has towers built of limestone, granite, and cement.	• The Brooklyn Bridge opened for use on May 24, 1883. • The construction of the Brooklyn Bridge began in 1869. • The Brooklyn Bridge is one of the oldest bridges in the United States. • The Brooklyn Bridge has been featured in many television series and movies. • The majority of New York City tourist guides list the Brooklyn Bridge as one of the city's top attractions.

Key:

Central Idea 1: The Brooklyn Bridge is one of the oldest bridges in the United States.	**Central Idea 2:** The Brooklyn Bridge has become an icon of New York City.
Supporting Detail: The Brooklyn Bridge opened for use on May 24, 1883.	**Supporting Detail:** The Brooklyn Bridge has been featured in many television series and movies.
Supporting Detail: The construction of the Brooklyn Bridge began in 1869.	**Supporting Detail:** The majority of New York City tourist guides list the Brooklyn Bridge as one of the city's top attractions.
Key Individual: John Augustus Roebling, bridge designer	**Key Individual:** Ken Burns, documentary filmmaker

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[4] For TEIs, the text from the passage would typically appear on the left. The item would appear on the right. The student would drag and drop options from the box labeled "Options" into the table.

Grade 5 (continued)

Mechanics:
- The item is overly complex, and it places too many demands on students. The time that a student would take to navigate through this item is not consistent with the number of points that an item such as this is likely to award. The number of interactions (i.e., discrete tasks that a student must perform to answer the item) and the amount of text make this item cumbersome and potentially confusing.
- The wording of the stem is unclear (e.g., "Drag and drop **one** option . . . to identify **two** central ideas . . .").

Content*:*
- Alignment: The requirement to identify key individuals related to the central ideas is superfluous, as it does not align to standard RI.5.2 (instead, it aligns to RI.5.3).

EDITED ITEM:

Select two sentences that express the central ideas of the passage. Drag and drop each central idea into the appropriate box in the table. Then select one supporting detail for each central idea, and drag and drop each into the appropriate box in the table.

Central Idea 1:	Central Idea 2:
Supporting Detail:	**Supporting Detail:**

Options:

- The length of the Brooklyn Bridge is 5,989 ft.
- The Brooklyn Bridge has become an icon of New York City.
- The Brooklyn Bridge has towers built of limestone, granite, and cement.
- The construction of the Brooklyn Bridge began in 1869.
- The Brooklyn Bridge is one of the oldest bridges in the United States.
- The majority of New York City tourist guides list the Brooklyn Bridge as one of the city's top attractions.

Key:

Central Idea 1: The Brooklyn Bridge is one of the oldest bridges in the United States.	**Central Idea 2:** The Brooklyn Bridge has become an icon of New York City.
Supporting Detail: The construction of the Brooklyn Bridge began in 1869.	**Supporting Detail:** The majority of New York City tourist guides list the Brooklyn Bridge as one of the city's top attractions.

Grade 5 (continued)

Mechanics:
- The edited item has been revised to reduce the scope—instead of eight interactions, the item now requires four. Similarly, the number of options has been reduced from ten to six, decreasing the reading load.
- The stem has been edited for clarity. This is particularly important in TEIs, which typically consist of a series of steps.
- This item presents a relationship of ideas, thus using technology to assess a standard in a way that would be difficult to accomplish via a traditional multiple-choice item.
- Additionally, the use of technology allows for the item to assess more than one aspect of the standard; i.e., the item not only asks students to identify two central ideas, but also requires students to provide support for each central idea.

Content*:*
- <u>Alignment</u>: The edited item strongly aligns to the standard, addressing more than one aspect of it, without going beyond its specifications.
- <u>Scoring considerations</u>: In addition to technological aspects and limitations, scoring considerations must be taken into account when developing TEIs. In this case, scoring must allow for the placement of either (correct) central idea in either the box labeled "Central Idea 1" or the box labeled "Central Idea 2." In other words, the order of how these answers are arranged is unimportant. The correct supporting detail, however, must be placed underneath each central idea.

ELA Item Exemplars: Grades 6–12

Grade 6

ITEM FORMAT: Single-Select Multiple Choice (SSMC)		KEY: 1. B, 2. A, 3. A	DOK: 1
PRIMARY STANDARD: L.7.4.1G (Massachusetts)	Correctly use frequently confused words (e.g., to/too/two; there/their).		
SECONDARY STANDARD: N/A	N/A		

Select the word that correctly completes each sentence.

1. The climbers reached the _____ of the mountain.
>   A. peek
>   B. peak

2. The basket was skillfully woven with _____ knots.
>   A. loose
>   B. lose

3. Her decision had a powerful and long-lasting _____ on her family.
>   A. effect
>   B. affect

COMMENTS AND NOTES:

Content:
- <u>Alignment and rigor</u>: Although the item is aligned to the standard, the multiple-choice format does not lend itself well to effectively assessing this standard. This item is not rigorous enough to demonstrate what students are able to do—with only two answer choices, there is a 50 percent chance of a student correctly answering the item, regardless of whether the student possesses the skill that the standard is intended to assess. This format may be appropriate for students at the lower grades (K-2), but it lacks the rigor of typical grade 6 items.

Grade 6 (continued)

ITEM FORMAT: Constructed-Response Short-Answer (SA)		KEY: N/A	DOK: 2
PRIMARY STANDARD: L.7.4.1G (Massachusetts)	Correctly use frequently confused words (e.g., to/too/two; there/their).		
SECONDARY STANDARD: N/A	N/A		

Read the list of word pairs. For each word, write a sentence that correctly uses the word.

peek   _____.

peak   _____.

loose   _____.

lose   _____.

effect   _____.

affect   _____.

Sample Scoring Rubric:

Score Point	The student's response:
3	• demonstrates the correct use of all six target words. • may contain a few errors in spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and grammar, but these errors do not interfere with the reader's comprehension.
2	• demonstrates the correct use of at least three, but no more than five, target words. • contains a few errors in spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and grammar, but these errors do not substantially interfere with the reader's comprehension.
1	• demonstrates the correct use of at least one, but no more than two, of the target words. • contains several errors in spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and grammar that substantially interfere with the reader's comprehension.

Grade 6 (continued)

0	• does not demonstrate the correct use of any of the target words.
	• contains many errors in spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and grammar that impede the reader's comprehension.
	• is blank, incoherent, or irrelevant.

Content:
- <u>Rigor and DOK</u>: The edited item has been revised to increase rigor, making it more appropriate to this grade level. Even though the difficulty level of the item is relatively low, the item now requires the student to produce a series of original responses. This approach goes beyond mere knowledge of the correct use of each of the words—the item now requires that students apply such knowledge, thus raising the DOK from 1 to 2.

Grade 7

Excerpt from *Emma*
by Jane Austen[5]

Emma Woodhouse, handsome, clever, and rich, with a comfortable home and happy disposition, seemed to unite some of the best blessings of existence; and had lived nearly twenty-one years in the world with very little to distress or <u>vex</u> her.

She was the youngest of the two daughters of a most affectionate, indulgent father; and had, in consequence of her sister's marriage, been mistress of his house from a very early period. Her mother had died too long ago for her to have more than an indistinct remembrance of her caresses; and her place had been supplied by an excellent woman as governess, who had fallen little short of a mother in affection.

Sixteen years had Miss Taylor been in Mr. Woodhouse's family, less as a governess than a friend, very fond of both daughters, but particularly of Emma. Between them it was more the intimacy of sisters. Even before Miss Taylor had ceased to hold the <u>nominal</u> office of governess, the mildness of her temper had hardly allowed her to impose any restraint; and the shadow of authority being now long passed away, they had been living together as friend and friend very mutually attached, and Emma doing just what she liked; highly esteeming Miss Taylor's judgment, but directed chiefly by her own.

The real evils, indeed, of Emma's situation were the power of having rather too much her own way, and a disposition to think a little too well of herself; these were the disadvantages which threatened alloy to her many enjoyments. The danger, however, was at present so unperceived, that they did not by any means rank as misfortunes with her.

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[5] Source: www.gutenberg.org/files/158/158-h/158-h.htm.

Grade 7 (continued)

PASSAGE TITLE: Excerpt from *Emma*			
ITEM FORMAT: Single-Select Multiple Choice (SSMC)		KEY: A	DOK: 2
PRIMARY STANDARD: CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.7.4A	Use context (e.g., the overall meaning of a sentence or paragraph; a word's position or function in a sentence) as a clue to the meaning of a word or phrase.		
SECONDARY STANDARD: CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.7.4	Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of rhymes and other repetitions of sounds (e.g., alliteration) on a specific verse or stanza of a poem or section of a story or drama.		

ORIGINAL ITEM:

What is the meaning of the word <u>vex</u> as it is used in paragraph 1?

     A. worry

     B. inspiring

     C. satisfy

     D. boring

COMMENTS AND NOTES:

Mechanics:
- Two answer choices have opposite meanings (B and D).
- Answer choices B and D are adjectives, and thus are not grammatically compatible with the tested word, which is a verb.
- Answer choices are not in short-to-long or long-to-short order.

Content:
- <u>Rigor—word level</u>: "Vex" is classified as a grade 5 word (CWWB), so it is safe to assume that most grade 7 students are familiar with the word.
- <u>Rigor—context</u>: While vocabulary items that assess use of context must be supported by the passage, care must be taken to ensure that the context is rich enough to support strong distractors that will require students to critically discern the correct answer. In this case, the term "distress," which immediately precedes the tested word, gives away the correct answer. While the use of obvious context located in such close proximity to the tested word might be appropriate for lower grades, vocabulary items at this grade level should be more cognitively complex. Distractor D is weak because it is illogical in context; distractors B and C are implausible given the context in the paragraph.

Grade 7 (continued)

In paragraph 3, why is the word <u>nominal</u> used to describe Miss Taylor's role as governess?

> A. Miss Taylor has no real ability to discipline Emma.
> B. Miss Taylor has enjoyed working for the Woodhouse family.
> C. Miss Taylor has no responsibilities other than caring for Emma.
> D. Miss Taylor has spent much of her life with the Woodhouse family.

COMMENTS AND NOTES:

Mechanics:
- <u>Answer-choice balance</u>: Proper nouns are used in all answer choices (in the case of "Miss Taylor") and in answer-choice pairs (in the case of "Emma" and "Woodhouse"). Two answer choices are stated positively, while two contain negatives.

Content:
- <u>Rigor</u>: "Nominal" is classified as a grade 11 word (EDL), which may seem overly difficult for grade 7 students. However, the richness of the context in this passage provides ample support for the item's correct answer, while still requiring a certain level of inference from students (e.g., "the mildness of [Miss Taylor's] temper," which "had hardly allowed her to impose any restraint"; "the shadow of authority being now long passed away"; "Emma doing just what she liked" and being respectful of Miss Taylor's judgment, but being "directed chiefly by her own").
- Although the straightforward approach of the original item (i.e., asking for the meaning or definition of a particular word) is certainly acceptable, there are some cases when the passage lends itself to a richer, more substantial approach, as shown by the alternative item.
- In order to correctly answer the alternative item, students have to read and understand the passage, even if they have previous knowledge of what the word means. (Note: Because of the ample context in the passage, this item's approach would also be suitable for the EBSR format.)
- The distractors are either misreadings or plausible conclusions based on the text. Although plausible, they are definitely incorrect.
- <u>Accessibility and language-learner considerations</u>: Referents are clear in the answer choices: e.g., instead of using "she," the answer choices specifically refer to "Miss Taylor."

Grade 8

Excerpt from "Sally Ride and Valentina Tereshkova: Changing the Course of Human Space Exploration"[6]

One of six women selected in NASA's 1978 astronaut class, Sally Ride was the first of them to fly. When she rode aboard the space shuttle Challenger as it lifted off from Kennedy Space Center on June 18, 1983, she became the first American woman in space and captured the nation's attention and imagination as a symbol of the ability of women to break barriers. As one of the three mission specialists on the STS-7 mission, she played a vital role in helping the crew deploy communications satellites, conduct experiments and make use of the first Shuttle Pallet Satellite. Her pioneering voyage and remarkable life helped, as President Barack Obama said soon after her death last summer, "inspire generations of young girls to reach for the stars" for she "showed us that there are no limits to what we can achieve."

Sally Ride was born in Los Angeles, California, on May 26, 1951. Fascinated by science from a young age, she pursued the study of physics, along with English, in school. As she was graduating from Stanford University with a Ph.D. in physics, having done research in astrophysics and free electron laser physics, Ride noticed a newspaper ad for NASA astronauts. She turned in an application, along with 8,000 other people, and was one of only 35 chosen to join the astronaut corps. Joining NASA in 1978, she served as the ground-based capsule communicator, or capcom, for the second and third space shuttle missions (STS-2 and STS-3) and helped with development of the space shuttle's robotic arm.

After her selection for the crew of STS-7, and thereby becoming the first American woman in space, Ride faced intense media attention. But, Ride had no time for many of the questions the press asked her, questions like "Do you weep when things go wrong on the job?" She saw herself first and foremost as an astronaut and a scientist, and felt that "one thing I probably share with everyone else in the astronaut office is composure." Talking about her fellow astronauts in the class of 1978, she said, "We're all people who are dedicated to the space program and who really want to fly in the space shuttle. That's a common characteristic that we all have that transcends the different backgrounds." (It is worth noting that the astronaut class of 1978 also included the first three African-Americans and the first Asian-American to serve in the astronaut corps.) Her commander on STS-7, Bob Crippen, agreed that Sally was more than capable of flying in space, saying, "I wanted a competent engineer who was cool under stress. Sally had demonstrated that talent."

Ride continued her career with NASA after her historic flight, flying on a second shuttle mission (STS-41G) in October 1984. She later served on the presidential commission that investigated the Challenger accident and led NASA's strategic planning effort in the mid-1980s. Retiring from NASA in 1987, she became a science fellow at the Center for International Security and Arms Control at Stanford University and, in 1989, joined the University of California-San Diego as a professor of physics and director of the California Space Institute. In 2001, she founded her own company, Sally Ride Science, to pursue her passion for motivating girls and boys to study the STEM fields—science, technology, engineering and math. The company creates innovative classroom materials, programs and professional development training for teachers.

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[6] Source: http://www.nasa.gov/topics/history/features/ride_anniversary.html.

Grade 8 (continued)

In 2003 she also served on the presidential commission investigating the Columbia accident (the only person to serve on both commissions). In addition to this work, she wrote a number of science books for children, including *The Third Planet,* which won the American Institute of Physics Children's Science Writing Award in 1995. Following a 17-month-long battle with pancreatic cancer, Sally Ride died on June 23, 2012, leaving behind a heroic legacy.

ITEM FORMAT: Single-Select Multiple Choice (SSMC)		KEY: D	DOK: 2
PRIMARY STANDARD: CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.6	Identify aspects of a text that reveal an author's point of view or purpose (e.g., loaded language, inclusion or avoidance of particular facts).		
SECONDARY STANDARD: N/A	N/A		

Based on certain aspects of the text, what is the author's point of view about Sally Ride?

     A. Sally Ride wrote many award-winning books for children.
     B. Sally Ride founded a company to motivate children to study science.
     C. Sally Ride was an ambitious woman who pursued her goals with courage and determination.
     D. Sally Ride was a remarkable woman who made significant and long-lasting contributions to science.

COMMENTS AND NOTES:

Content:
- <u>Alignment and rigor</u>: Even though the item incorporates language from the standard, it does not align to the standard, as it merely asks students to identify the author's point of view. As worded, the stem is vague and ambiguous (e.g., the reader does not know which "aspects of the text" the stem refers to). Furthermore, the item is flawed in the interpretation of a point of view as reflected by the correct answer, which is more a central idea of the passage than the author's point of view. Answer choices A and B are weak distractors, as they are simply facts from the passage. Answer choice C is too closely related to the correct answer, arguably making it a second key.

Grade 8 (continued)

ITEM FORMAT: Single-Select Multiple Choice (SSMC)		KEY: C	DOK: 3
PRIMARY STANDARD: CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.6	Identify aspects of a text that reveal an author's point of view or purpose (e.g., loaded language, inclusion or avoidance of particular facts).		
SECONDARY STANDARD: N/A	N/A		

How is the author's point of view about Sally Ride **mainly** revealed?

    A. The author quotes Sally Ride only on specific topics.
    B. The author quotes political leaders on their thoughts about Sally Ride.
    C. The author describes Sally Ride's accomplishments using language that appeals to the reader's emotions.
    D. The author describes Sally Ride's childhood using factual information that engages the reader's interest.

COMMENTS AND NOTES:

Content:
- Alignment: The alternative item is tightly aligned to the standard.
- Rigor and DOK: Because a high level of inference is required to correctly answer this item, it is classified as DOK 3, as opposed to the original item's classification of DOK 2. This increased complexity derives from the nature of the task itself, as well as from the construction of the stem and the answer choices. The point of view is not explicitly stated in the stem, but instead has to be gleaned from the text. The student must then make the connection between the point of view and how it is revealed through subtle aspects of the text. Direct examples of these aspects are not presented in the answer choices either (i.e., the answer choices are not quotes from the text). Instead, the answer choices require an additional act of interpretation from the student.

Grade 8 (continued)

ITEM FORMAT: Single-Select Multiple Choice (SSMC)		KEY: A	DOK: 2
PRIMARY STANDARD: CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.6	Identify aspects of a text that reveal an author's point of view or purpose (e.g., loaded language, inclusion or avoidance of particular facts).		
SECONDARY STANDARD: CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.1	Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.		

Which evidence from the passage **best** reveals the author's point of view about Sally Ride?

    A. ". . . a symbol of the ability of women to break barriers." (paragraph 1)
    B. "Fascinated by science from a young age . . ." (paragraph 2)
    C. ". . . chosen to join the astronaut corps." (paragraph 2)
    D. "She saw herself first and foremost as an astronaut . . ." (paragraph 3)

COMMENTS AND NOTES:

Content:
- Alignment and rigor: Alternative item #2 shows a different approach to the standard. The level of cognitive complexity is slightly lower than that of the first alternative item; in this case, the answer choices (aspects of the text that reveal the author's point of view) are direct quotes from the passage, thus eliminating an additional layer of interpretation. Therefore, this item is classified as DOK 2. However, the item still maintains an adequate level of rigor, as distractors are plausible and attractive, and discerning the correct answer requires critical thinking and a thorough understanding of the entire text (e.g., distractor B could be misconstrued as the correct answer, as it expresses Sally Ride's, not the author's, point of view).

Grade 9

ITEM FORMAT: Single-Select Multiple Choice (SSMC)	KEY: A	DOK: 2
PRIMARY STANDARD: CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.2	Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze in detail its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text.	
SECONDARY STANDARD: N/A	N/A	

What is a theme of the passage?

      A. Respect must be earned.
      B. Hard work is its own reward.
      C. Change is a natural part of life.
      D. Greed will eventually be punished.

ALTERNATIVE ITEM:

ITEM FORMAT: Single-Select Multiple Choice (SSMC)	KEY: C	DOK: 3
PRIMARY STANDARD: CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.2	Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze in detail its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text.	
SECONDARY STANDARD: N/A	N/A	

How does the flashback scene help to develop the theme of the passage?

      A. It indicates the mistake Jenny makes in assessing Soo Lin.
      B. It establishes the fierce rivalry between Jenny and Soo Lin.
      C. It shows how Jenny established her leadership among her teammates.
      D. It explains why Soo Lin is so determined to win the state championship.

Grade 9 (continued)

Content:

- <u>Rigor and DOK</u>: Both the original item and the alternative item present valid approaches to assessing the same standard; however, the alternative item demands a more cognitively complex task, making it a DOK 3 item. It requires a high level of inference, as it asks the student to evaluate the significance of a particular scene in connection to the theme of the passage, which is never explicitly provided in the item.
- <u>Alignment</u>: While the original version of the item aligns to the standard, the alternative approach allows for the integration of more than one aspect of the standard. The student not only has to infer the theme, but also has to analyze its development through the flashback scene. In contrast, the more basic approach presented in the original item allows for only one dimension of the standard to be assessed. Following best practice for this particular standard, the themes in the answer choices of the original item are phrased as complete thoughts (e.g., "Respect must be earned."), rather than as single-word concepts (e.g., "respect").

Grade 10

ITEM FORMAT: Constructed Response (essay)		KEY: N/A	DOK: 3
PRIMARY STANDARD: CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.9-10.7	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.		
SECONDARY STANDARD: CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.9-10.1	Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.		

ORIGINAL ITEM:

You have read two passages and watched a video about the Civil War.

Write an essay about the Civil War. Compare the specific details presented in each source and how they reveal the point of view of the authors and the filmmaker. Discuss whether each source provides a truthful account of the facts, the level to which each source deviates from official historical accounts, and the effectiveness of each source in holding the reader's/viewer's interest. Which specific techniques should the authors and the filmmaker consider changing in order to make each account more engaging? Use evidence from all three sources to support your response.

COMMENTS AND NOTES:

Content:
- Although this type of item is intended to elicit a longer response, and although it is crucial that the required components of the response are clearly expressed in the prompt, care must be taken to ensure that all elements of the prompt are relevant to the standard and do not present unnecessary constraints. In other words, the prompt should be broad enough to allow students to demonstrate the full range of their performance, and should only be specific enough to align to the standard and to convey the information that the item intends to elicit in a response. The requirements of this item are too numerous, minute, and unrelated to each other, resulting in an overall lack of focus and going beyond what the standard is intended to measure.
- Another issue with the excessive specificity of this item is that it could very easily give away too much; it basically provides a writing outline of sorts for the student.
- The question near the end of the prompt ("Which specific techniques . . .") introduces possible confusion, as it is not clear whether the question is only an additional detail to be included in the writing, or whether it should be the focus of the essay.

Grade 10 (continued)

You have read two passages and watched a video about the Civil War.

Think about the similarities and differences in how the topic of women's roles in the Civil War is treated in the three sources.

Write an essay in which you analyze each source's account of women's roles in the Civil War, including which details are emphasized in each source. Compare the specific details presented in each source and how they affect the meaning of each account. Use evidence from all three sources to support your response.

SAMPLE SCORING RUBRIC:

Score Point	The student's response:
4	- is logically organized into several paragraphs, with a clear introduction and conclusion; - clearly and methodically analyzes each source's account of women's roles in the Civil War; - addresses all of the sources appropriately, including the details emphasized in each source, and cites relevant evidence from each; and - contains no errors in spelling, punctuation, grammar, and capitalization that interfere with the reader's ability to understand the ideas presented.
3	- is organized into paragraphs, with a generally clear introduction and conclusion; - partially analyzes each source's account of women's roles in the Civil War; - addresses most of the sources appropriately, including the details emphasized in each source, and cites relevant evidence from each; and - contains a few errors in spelling, punctuation, grammar, and capitalization, but these errors do not substantially interfere with the reader's ability to understand the ideas presented.
2	- shows limited organization, and may lack a clear introduction and/or conclusion; - weakly analyzes each source's account of women's roles in the Civil War; - addresses some of the sources appropriately, including the details emphasized in the source, and cites relevant evidence from each; and - contains several errors in spelling, punctuation, grammar, and capitalization that interfere with the reader's ability to understand the ideas presented.

1	- shows little or no organization; - minimally analyzes each source's account of women's roles in the Civil War; - addresses at least one source, including some details emphasized in the source, and cites little or no evidence from it; and - contains many errors in spelling, punctuation, grammar, and capitalization that substantially interfere with the reader's ability to understand the ideas presented.
0	is incoherent, irrelevant, too brief to evaluate, or blank.

COMMENTS AND NOTES:

- The edited item also incorporates the language of the standard, but it provides some scaffolding by using the "Read, think, write" approach.
- Aside from adhering to a specific topic (the roles of women in the Civil War), the edited item clearly specifies three requirements for full credit: inclusion of the different details presented in the passages and the video, discussion of how the different details affect the meaning of each account, and inclusion of textual evidence for support.
- Although it is possible that some students may choose to address some of the specifics mentioned in the original item (e.g., the differences in point of view), the prompt is broad enough to allow for this approach or other approaches.

Grade 11

ITEM FORMAT: Constructed Response (essay)		KEY: N/A	DOK: 3
PRIMARY STANDARD: CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.2	Determine two or more themes or central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to produce a complex account; provide an objective summary of the text.		
SECONDARY STANDARD: CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.1	Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.		

ORIGINAL ITEM:

You have read an excerpt from *The Catcher in the Rye* and an excerpt from *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Write an essay in which you determine two or more themes or central ideas of each text and analyze their development over the course of the texts, including how they interact and build on one another to produce a complex account. Use evidence from both excerpts to support your response.

EDITED ITEM:

You have read an excerpt from *The Catcher in the Rye* and an excerpt from *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Both passages deal with different experiences of the main characters as they grow up.

Select **one** of the excerpts. Identify **two** themes of that excerpt. Write an essay in which you analyze how the themes contribute to the excerpt's portrayal of adolescence. Use evidence from the excerpt to support your response.

SAMPLE SCORING RUBRIC:

Score Point	The student's response:
4	• is logically organized into several paragraphs, with a clear introduction and conclusion; • identifies two themes of the excerpt, and clearly and methodically analyzes how the themes contribute to the excerpt's portrayal of adolescence; • addresses the excerpt appropriately and cites the most relevant evidence from it; and • contains no errors in spelling, punctuation, grammar, and capitalization that interfere with the reader's ability to understand the ideas presented.
3	• is organized into paragraphs, with a generally clear introduction and conclusion;

	• identifies two themes of the excerpt and partially analyzes how the themes contribute to the excerpt's portrayal of adolescence; • addresses the excerpt appropriately and cites some relevant evidence from it; and • contains a few errors in spelling, punctuation, grammar, and capitalization, but these errors do not substantially interfere with the reader's ability to understand the ideas presented.
2	• shows limited organization, and may lack a clear introduction and/or conclusion; • identifies one or two themes of the excerpt and weakly analyzes how the theme(s) contribute(s) to the excerpt's portrayal of adolescence; • addresses the excerpt but cites limited evidence from it; and • contains several errors in spelling, punctuation, grammar, and capitalization that interfere with the reader's ability to understand the ideas presented.
1	• shows little or no organization; • fails to identify a theme or identifies only one theme, and minimally analyzes how the theme contributes to the excerpt's portrayal of adolescence; • minimally addresses the excerpt and cites little or no evidence from it; and • contains many errors in spelling, punctuation, grammar, and capitalization that substantially interfere with the reader's ability to understand the ideas presented.
0	• is incoherent, irrelevant, too brief to evaluate, or blank.

COMMENTS AND NOTES:

- The original item presents a case in which incorporating the language of the standard is detrimental to the prompt's clarity. The broadness of the prompt may result in unfocused responses at best, or in students not being able to understand precisely what they are being asked to write about. The edited item is still broad enough to allow for a variety of rich responses, but is prescriptive enough to provide focus by specifying the topic that should be addressed in the response (adolescence). Additionally, the edited item shows a closer alignment to the standard, as the standard does not require focusing on more than one text.

Grade 12

Directions: Read the excerpt from the play discussed in class.

<div align="center">

Excerpt from *The Child in the House*
by Marjorie Benton Cooke (1916)

</div>

CHARACTERS.
Mrs. Thorpe..... an authority on modern child study
Mrs. Lang
Miss Reeves
Mrs. Brown..... an old fashioned lady, 70 years young
Jenice Thorpe..... a modern child

Time—Present.
Place—Mrs. Thorpe's drawing room.
Costumes—Modern.

SETTING—*Mrs. Thorpe's Drawing-room. Mrs. Thorpe at center at tea table pouring tea as curtain rises. The other women are grouped about, Mrs. Brown at right down front, Miss Reeves near table, Mrs. Lang left center.*

MRS. LANG. [*Sipping her tea with a sigh.*] Oh—this is the pleasantest hour of the day—the tea hour. Thank Heaven, one can't take tea with an ulterior motive! I declare, I've had such a day—my reading club met this morning, and of course, I *had* to see that performance of "Ghosts" this afternoon—and the result is my cerebral remnants refuse to coordinate! [*All laugh.*]

MISS REEVES. You poor dear—why just sitting through "Ghosts" is effort enough for one week! [*Takes tea from Mrs. T. and goes to Mrs. Brown.*]

MRS. BROWN. Thank you, my dear. How hard you children do make it for yourselves!

MRS. THORPE. Do we not? Why, just being up to date is the work of a lifetime. You must have politics, literature, art, science at your finger ends—on your tongue's tip. Of course, we're artificial—life's too short to be anything else.

MISS REEVES. I just envy the woman of fifty years ago—she hadn't a problem on earth!

MRS. BROWN. My dear, don't delude yourself into thinking anything of the sort. Your grandmother's life wasn't any simpler than yours is. The only difference is, she was content to do one thing well, instead of dabbling in many. To be a good wife and a good mother was to her the paramount duty, and she did it without question!

MRS. LANG. And we question—and don't do it—there is a difference, isn't there? But do you really believe, Mrs. Brown, that she *did* do it without question?

MRS. BROWN. The average woman—yes—I think so.

Grade 12 (continued)

ITEM FORMAT: Single-Select Multiple Choice (SSMC)	KEY: C	DOK: 2
PRIMARY STANDARD: CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.5	Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure specific parts of a text (e.g., the choice of where to begin or end a story, the choice to provide a comedic or tragic resolution) contribute to its overall structure and meaning as well as its aesthetic impact.	
SECONDARY STANDARD: N/A	N/A	

How does the author choose to begin the play?

      A. with a complex analysis of a household event
      B. with an accurate portrayal of a historical period
      C. with a revealing conversation among characters
      D. with an intriguing focus on one of the characters

COMMENTS AND NOTES:

Content:
- Alignment and rigor: The item incorporates some language from the standard, but the item's stem is awkwardly worded and does not show proper alignment or rigor. The item uses language from the standard to disguise what is, in reality, a basic task: to identify the most accurate description of the scene.

Grade 12 (continued)

ITEM FORMAT: Evidence-Based Selected Response (EBSR) (Part B: Multiple-Select)		KEY: C; E, F	DOK: 3
PRIMARY STANDARD: CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.5	Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure specific parts of a text (e.g., the choice of where to begin or end a story, the choice to provide a comedic or tragic resolution) contribute to its overall structure and meaning as well as its aesthetic impact.		
SECONDARY STANDARD: CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.1	Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.		

Part A
Which sentence **best** analyzes how the opening scene affects the overall meaning and structure of the play?

   A. The details about certain customs reveal the historical context, which establishes the setting.
   B. The focus on a specific character conveys a sense of intrigue, which foreshadows the climax.
   C. The conversation among the characters reveals opposing points of view, which establishes the conflict.
   D. The description of an ordinary event in the household conveys a sense of routine, which foreshadows the resolution.

Part B
Select **two** pieces of evidence from the play that support the answer to Part A.

   A. "*Mrs. Thorpe at center at tea table pouring tea as curtain rises.*" (paragraph 3)
   B. "Oh—this is the pleasantest hour of the day—the tea hour." (paragraph 4)
   C. "Thank Heaven, one can't take tea with an ulterior motive!" (paragraph 4)
   D. "*Takes tea from Mrs. T. and goes to Mrs. Brown.*" (paragraph 5)
   E. "I just envy the woman of fifty years ago—she hadn't a problem on earth!" (paragraph 8)
   F. "Your grandmother's life wasn't any simpler than yours is." (paragraph 9)

Grade 12 (continued)

Content:
- <u>Alignment and rigor</u>: The alternative item successfully incorporates language from the standard and presents a rigorous approach to it. The answer choices in Part A are all statements of relationships and, thus, address the standard in its entirety by requiring the student to glean the most salient aspect of the opening scene as it relates to the play as a whole. (Note that the item is written for students who are already familiar with the play, as reflected in the directions preceding the excerpt.) The high level of cognitive complexity makes this item a DOK 3 item.

Mechanics:
- <u>Multiple-select format</u>: Part B of the item presents an example where the use of the multiple-select format is justified, as the two correct answer choices support the points of view of the different characters (Miss Reeves and Mrs. Brown).
- <u>Answer-choice balance</u>: The answer choices in Part B are balanced and parallel in formatting and punctuation: two choices are formatted in italics (following the formatting of the source passage), two choices end with exclamation points, and two choices include em dashes. The answer choices in Part B each have a connection to an answer choice in Part A. Not every passage will so strongly yield the textual evidence for strong distractors with this degree of balance and parallelism, but an item should be crafted with this goal in mind.