

Assessing Language Standards (Grammar and Conventions) for College and Career Readiness

This document offers guidance for assessing language standards for college and career readiness (CCR), based on the expectations outlined in Criterion B.6 of the [CCSSO Criteria for Procuring and Evaluating High-Quality Assessments](#) which focuses on “Emphasizing vocabulary and language skills: The assessments require students to demonstrate proficiency in the use of language, including vocabulary and conventions.”

Evidence Descriptor:

“Language is assessed within writing assessments as part of the scoring rubric, or it is assessed with test items that specifically address language skills. Language assessments reflect requirements for college and career readiness by

- Mirroring real-world activities (e.g., actual editing or revision, actual writing); and
- Focusing on common student errors and those conventions most important for readiness.”

TWO APPROACHES TO TESTING CCR LANGUAGE (GRAMMAR AND CONVENTIONS) STANDARDS

1. Assessing Language Skills via Student Writing

In regard to “real-world activities,” colleges and careers both require individuals to *write*; thus, assessing conventions through scoring of student writing is the most authentic way to test grammar and convention standards. To address this approach, the rubric used for scoring written responses should include points that can be attributed to the language skills outlined in CCR standards. A row from a sample rubric is provided below:

| | | | | |
|-------------|---|--|--|---|
| Conventions | • Reflects exceptional control of conventions; errors are few and minor | • Reflects control of most writing conventions; contains occasional errors that do not interfere with clarity of message | • Reflects limited control of conventions; contains frequent errors that may begin to interfere with understanding | • Reflects numerous errors that make the text difficult or impossible to read |
|-------------|---|--|--|---|

Assessing language within student writing naturally meets the Criteria’s requirement that language items “focus on common student errors,” as students will make (or not make) those errors that are common to their grade level, as part of their own writing.

The act of writing responses occurs in both college and careers and it naturally provides evidence of those errors that students are most likely to make; it is, therefore, the preferred method for assessing language skills.

2. Assessing Language Skills Via Embedded Error Passages and Associated Items

If, however, an assessment program does not include conventions as part of the writing rubric and/or a program needs additional score points to create a viable reporting category, embedded error passages and items can meet the expectations of criterion B.6.

This approach does not represent real-world activities as well as authentic writing does, but can provide useful information about mastery of convention skills. With this method, students read passages with embedded errors, and then answer multiple-choice (MC) and Technology Enhanced (TE) items in which they choose/type the option that corrects the error. Since, in college as well as in some careers, students frequently encounter errors within texts, these embedded error tasks are a viable option for assessment programs assessing language items.

This approach does allow for testing of “common student errors and those conventions most important for readiness.” Common errors may be crafted as distractors in MC items, for example. Additionally, the conventions students should have “control of” by grade level will be listed in the grade-level standards and the Language Progressions Chart (pages 30 and 56 of the Common Core State Standards) or similar documents in other CCR standards. Items can be written specifically to assess these standards, thus testing those “conventions most important for readiness.”

The purpose of these sample embedded error passages and items that follow is to present guidance around the expectations for crafting constructive embedded error passages and items.

The items included in this document are formatted to be paper/pencil assessments. You will observe a variety of styles/formats: numbered sentences vs. numbered paragraphs, underlined errors vs. culled sentences in stems, whole sentences in options vs. abbreviated options that include only the tested part of a sentence, etc. Choose the format best suited to your students, or mix the formats so students will have exposure to a variety of items they may encounter on other assessments. Educators can provide valuable insight into which formats are most appropriate for particular grade levels.

With the advent of technology, these items may become even more authentic in nature, allowing students to correct the errors within the text itself. In fact, many of the items shown on the passages that follow could be embedded in the passages, offering students drop-down menus with the options from which they could choose the correct answer.

EMBEDDED ERROR PASSAGE GUIDELINES

When considering texts appropriate for the testing of grammar and convention skills, commissioned passages are the only choice. Well-crafted, previously published texts are error-free and would not allow students the opportunity to correct errors, and it would be unethical to embed errors into a previously published text. It is also extremely unlikely one could get permission to do so from the original author or publisher. Therefore, the texts used to assess language skills must be written specifically for the assessment.

When creating these embedded-error texts, there are several factors to consider:

1. The readability level

To avoid creating construct irrelevance, care must be taken to make the tests accessible for all students; students should not have to demonstrate strong reading skills when being tested for language skills. Texts should also be of appropriate complexity for the grade level. A good rule of thumb is to use quantitative data (e.g., Flesch Kincaid) to check that the text is not above the grade band being tested. Furthermore, it is preferable that within the range established by research, the texts fall on the lower end of the range. Below, you will see the chart with allowable ranges by grade band.

Common Scale for Band Level Text Difficulty Ranges

| Common Core Bands | Text-Analyzer Tools | | | | | |
|-------------------|---------------------|-------|------------|-----------|-------------|------------|
| | ATOS | DRP | FK | Lexile | SR | RM |
| 2nd–3rd | 2.75–5.14 | 42–54 | 1.98–5.34 | 420–820 | 0.05–2.48 | 3.53–6.13 |
| 4th–5th | 4.97–7.03 | 52–60 | 4.51–7.73 | 740–1010 | 0.84–5.75 | 5.42–7.92 |
| 6th–8th | 7.00–9.98 | 57–67 | 6.51–10.34 | 925–1185 | 4.11–10.66 | 7.04–9.57 |
| 9th–10th | 9.67–12.01 | 62–72 | 8.32–12.12 | 1050–1335 | 9.02–13.93 | 8.41–10.81 |
| 11th–CCR | 11.20–14.10 | 67–74 | 10.34–14.2 | 1185–1385 | 12.30–14.50 | 9.57–12.00 |

Although the chart specifies Common Core, the research behind it applies to all CCR standards. When considering readability for a grade 7 language passage, for example, the range is 6.51–10.34, and the selected language passage should fall far short of the 10.34 to ensure students are able to read it easily.

2. Writing modes

Writing standards for college and career readiness include three writing modes: expository, argument/opinion, and narrative. Ideally, the conventions and grammar students are tested on would be embedded in passages that represent the modes students will encounter in writing. This approach allows students to practice editing the kind of writing that they, themselves, are expected to complete.

3. Interest level and quality

Clearly, it will be a rare occurrence for commissioned, short passages to rise to the quality of a richer, previously published text. However, there is no reason the texts can't be interesting and engaging for students. Students can learn about new subjects by reading these texts. For example, with informational texts, even short embedded error passages, students can learn snippets about new content-specific subjects like the arts, history, or science. The topics can be covered in a superficial way—not diving deeply into causal relationships, etc.—but still exposing students to interesting information. Another note about quality: these texts, just as with reading texts, should be worthy of student time and attention. There should be no errors other than those being tested. Having untested errors in a passage can distract and frustrate students, as well as model poor writing. Passages should undergo a thorough review to check for unintentional, untested errors. The sample texts below demonstrate this approach to quality, in that they are meant to be interesting to students and do not contain untested errors.

IMPORTANT: You will notice that no items in this document are aligned to writing standards. That is because writing should be tested in a way that requires students to actually write a *written* response.

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| Grade | Genre and Title | Sequence # in passage | CCR Skill Tested | CCSS | Key |
|---|---|-----------------------|--|--|-----|
| *Standards marked with an asterisk appear in the Language Progressive Skills Chart. | | | | | |
| 3 | Narrative – Picnic Word Count: 134 FK 3.9 | 1 | Use commas and quotation marks in dialogue. | L.3.2.c. Use commas and quotation marks in dialogue. | D |
| | | 2 | Explain the function of adjectives. | L.3.1.a. Explain the function of nouns, pronouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs in general and their functions in particular sentences. | B |
| | | 3 | Form and use irregular verbs. | L.3.1.d. Form and use regular and irregular verbs. | B |
| | | 4 | Form irregular plural nouns. | L.3.1.b. Form and use regular and irregular plural nouns. | C |
| | | 5 | Capitalize titles. | L.3.2.a. Capitalize appropriate words in titles. | D |
| 4 | Narrative - Hidden Kitten Word count: 174 FK 4.7 | 1 | Correct run-on sentences. | L.4.1.f. Produce complete sentences, recognizing and correcting inappropriate fragments and run-ons. | B |
| | | 2 | Use the progressive verb tense. | L.4.1.b. Form and use the progressive (e.g., <i>I was walking; I am walking; I will be walking</i>) verb tenses. | D |
| | | 3 | Use frequently confused words correctly. | L.4.1.g. Correctly use frequently confused words (e.g., <i>to, too, two; there, their</i>). | C |
| | | 4 | Use quotation marks to indicate direct speech. | L.4.2.b. Use commas and quotation marks to mark direct speech and quotations from a text. | C |
| 5 | Expository - The Moon Word count: 186 FK 5.9 | 1 | Use the perfect verb tenses. | L.5.1.b. Form and use the perfect (e.g., <i>I had walked; I have walked; I will have walked</i>) verb tenses. | D |
| | | 2 | Correct inappropriate shifts in verb tense. | L.5.1.d. Recognize and correct inappropriate shifts in verb tense. | B |

| Grade | Genre and Title | Sequence # in passage | CCR Skill Tested | CCSS | Key |
|---|-----------------|-----------------------|---|---|-----|
| *Standards marked with an asterisk appear in the Language Progressive Skills Chart. | | | | | |
| | | 3 | Use correct spelling. | L.5.2.e. Spell grade-appropriate words correctly, consulting references as needed. | C |
| | | 4 | Use a comma with an introductory element. | L.5.2.b. Use a comma to separate an introductory element from the rest of the sentence. | A |
| | | 5 | Choose words for precision. | L.4.3.a.* Choose words and phrases to convey ideas precisely. | D |
| | | 6 | Indicate titles of works. | L.5.2.d. Use underlining, quotation marks, or italics to indicate titles of works. | C |

Grade 3 Narrative – Picnic

Read the following passage from a student’s story about a special picnic. The passage has errors that need to be corrected. Answer the questions that follow the passage to correct the errors.

1) Today is the first warm day we’ve had in months, declared Grandma Claire. 2) “Let’s have a picnic in the park and soak up some of this sunshine.”

3) My little brother and I packed some goodies into a bag. 4) Kyle put in large red apples and some green grapes. 5) I added some crunchy oatmeal cookies and cold juice boxes. 6) My grandma found an old blanket we will throw on the ground.

7) It was a perfect first day of spring. 8) My brother and I played on the bars and swings for a while. 9) We played with some other childs, pretending to catch elfs hiding under rocks. 10) Grandma sat on a bench reading Trips around the World magazine. 11) We all had the greatest day ever.

12) After snacking and filling our stomachs with treats, we found out that old blanket came in handy. 13) We all took a nap!

1. How should sentence 1 be written?

- A. Today is the first warm day we’ve had in months, “declared Grandma Claire.”
- B. “Today is the first warm day we’ve had in months, declared Grandma Claire.”
- C. “Today is the first warm day we’ve had in months” declared Grandma Claire.
- D. “Today is the first warm day we’ve had in months,” declared Grandma Claire.

2. Read sentences 4 and 5 from the passage. What is the purpose of the adjectives in the sentences?

- A. They explain the way the boys moved as they started to pack.
- B. They describe how the snacks the boys packed look and feel.
- C. They describe which boy chose to pack which type of snack.
- D. They explain the specific actions the boys took to get the snacks in the bag.

3. In sentence 6, how should the underlined verb be written correctly?

- A. could threw
- B. could throw
- C. throw
- D. Correct as is.

4. Read sentence 9 from the passage. How should the underlined words be spelled?

- A. childrens, elves
- B. children, elfs
- C. children, elves
- D. Correct as is.

5. How should the title of the magazine mentioned in sentence 10 be written?

- A. Correct as is.
- B. **Trips Around the World**
- C. *Trips Around the World*
- D. *Trips Around the World*

Grade 4 Narrative – Hidden Kitten

Read the following passage from a student’s story about how she got a pet. The passage has errors that need to be corrected. Answer the questions that follow the passage to correct the errors.

A small meow rose from my backpack. My mother’s eyes met mine through the rearview mirror of the car I realized I’d been caught.

It all started when I was walking across the playground after school. I spotted a small, fuzzy kitten roaming around the swing sets. I immediately new there was a kitten who needed me, so I quickly made a plan to rescue it. I cleaned out all the old papers from my backpack and gently laid the kitten inside. I figured once I got home I could come up with a way to keep it hidden.

The seconds ticked by as I thought about what to say to my mother to convince her to let me keep the kitten. Then my mom surprised me! “Well, I guess we’ll need to run by the pet store to get a few things for our new family pet,” she sighed.

Sometimes plans work out in ways you would never expect. It’s been two years and Molly, our cat, seems to love Mom more than she loves me!

1. Which option below fixes the error in the first paragraph?

- A. My mother’s eyes met mine through the rearview mirror of the car, I realized I’d been caught.
- B. My mother’s eyes met mine through the rearview mirror of the car. I realized I’d been caught.
- C. My mother’s eyes met mine through the rearview mirror of the car and I realized I’d been caught.
- D. Correct as is.

2. In the second paragraph, how should I was walking be written correctly?

- A. I am walking
- B. I would have walked
- C. I would walk
- D. Correct as is.

3. In the second paragraph, how should new there be written correctly?

- A. knew their
- B. new their
- C. knew there
- D. Correct as is.

4. In the third paragraph, how should the underlined sentence be written correctly?

- A. Well, I guess we'll need to run by the pet store to get a few things for our new family pet, she sighed.
- B. "Well, I guess we'll need to run by the pet store to get a few things for our new family pet, she sighed."
- C. "Well, I guess we'll need to run by the pet store to get a few things for our new family pet," she sighed.
- D. "Well, I guess we'll need to run by the pet store to get a few things for our new family pet" she sighed.

Grade 5 Expository – The Moon

Read the following passage from a student's essay about the moon. The passage has errors that need to be corrected. Answer the questions that follow the passage to correct the errors.

Throughout history and even today, some people have stated that the Moon is so bright because it is larger than everything else we see, but that is not accurate. The Moon looks so bright because it is very close to the Earth.

The Moon does not produce any light. Instead, it reflected the light from the Sun. At various times of the month, the Moon seems to change shape. The explanation, tho, is that we are just seeing different amount of light being reflected. For example during the new moon phase we do not see any light from the moon at all, which means we cannot see the Moon. Later, we can see a bright moon that looks like a circle during the new moon phase.

The amount of light we see reflected from the Moon during the month is determined by the position of the Moon to the Earth and the Sun. As they move, the movement impacts the amount of light we see from Earth. To learn more about the Moon, you can read the book *The Moon Seems To Change* by Franklyn M. Branley.

1. In the first sentence, how should the underlined verb be written to be correct in the sentence?

- A. state
- B. stated
- C. will state
- D. Correct as is.

2. In the second paragraph, how should reflected be written to be correct in the sentence?

- A. reflecting
- B. reflects
- C. will reflect
- D. has reflected

3. In paragraph 2, how should explanation, tho be spelled?

- A. explanation, though
- B. explanashun, though
- C. explanation, though
- D. explanatin, thogh

4. In paragraph 2, how should For example during the new moon phase be written to be correct?

- A. For example, during the new moon phase,
- B. For example during the new moon phase,
- C. For example, during the new moon phase
- D. Correct as is.

5. How could As they move in the last paragraph be written more clearly?

- A. When everything circles around
- B. Those objects do not stay still
- C. Things in outer space are mobile
- D. As those bodies orbit in space

6. In the last sentence of the passage, how should the title of the book be written?

- A. *the Moon Seems To Change*
- B. *the Moon seems to change*
- C. *The Moon Seems to Change*
- D. *the Moon seems to Change*