

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.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Grade	Genre and Title	Sequence # in passage	CCR Skill Tested	CCSS	Key
*Standards marked with an asterisk appear in the Language Progressive Skills Chart.					
6	Expository - National Park Service Word count: 175 FK: 8.3	1	Ensure that pronouns are in the proper case.	L.6.1.a. Ensure that pronouns are in the proper case (subjective, objective, possessive).	C
		2	Punctuate nonrestrictive/parenthetical elements correctly.	L.6.2.a. Use punctuation (commas, parentheses, dashes) to set off nonrestrictive/parenthetical elements.	A
		3	Correct inappropriate shifts in verb tense.	L.5.1.d.* Recognize and correct inappropriate shifts in verb tense.	A
		4	Use correct spelling.	L.6.2.b. Spell correctly.	B
		5	Use pronouns correctly.	L.6.1.b. Use intensive pronouns (e.g., <i>myself</i> , <i>ourselves</i>).	D
7	Argument - PE Schedule Word count: 212 FK: 7.9	1	Use commas to separate objects in a series.	L.5.2.a.* Use punctuation to separate items in a series.	A
		2	Use correct spelling.	L.7.2.b. Spell correctly.	D
		3	Correct misplaced modifiers.	L.7.1.c. Place phrases and clauses within a sentence, recognizing and correcting misplaced and dangling modifiers.	A
		4	Eliminate redundancy.	L.7.3.a. Choose language that expresses ideas precisely and concisely, recognizing and eliminating wordiness and redundancy.	C
8	Narrative - Summer Learning Word count: 178 FK: 10.1	1	Explain the purpose of infinitives.	L.8.1.a. Explain the function of verbals (gerunds, participles, infinitives) in general and their function in particular sentences.	C
		2	Use active rather than passive voice.	L.8.1.b. Form and use verbs in the active and passive voice.	D
		3	Use ellipses.	L.8.2.b. Use an ellipsis to indicate an omission.	B
		4	Use correct spelling.	L.8.2.c. Spell correctly.	A

Grade	Genre and Title	Sequence # in passage	CCR Skill Tested	CCSS	Key
*Standards marked with an asterisk appear in the Language Progressive Skills Chart.					
		5	Correct inappropriate shifts in verb tense.	L.5.1.d.* Recognize and correct inappropriate shifts in verb tense.	D

Grade 6 Expository – National Park Service

Read the following excerpt from a student's report on the National Park Service. The passage has errors that need to be corrected. Answer the questions that follow the passage to correct the errors.

A national park is a large area of land owned and protected by the government. Because government is for and by the people, the parks really belong to (1) we, the American people. (2) The National Park Service which was formed in 1916 takes care of the parks. This organization ensures that the public can enjoy the national parks and that the parks are safe places for the plants and animals native to the area.

The first national park was Yellowstone. It was established in 1872. (3) Over 4 million people visited Yellowstone each year to see its most famous feature, Old Faithful. Old Faithful is a geyser, a hot spring that sends up jets of water and steam into the air.

Although Yellowstone was the first park established, it was not the last. There are now over 400 national parks in the United States. (4) Each park features beautiful landscapes and fascinating wildlife, all protected by the National Park Service. The best way for us to appreciate the amazing national parks is visit them (5) myself.

1. For the sentence labeled 1, which pronoun should be used?

- A. we
- B. they
- C. us
- D. them

2. What is the correct way to punctuate the sentence labeled 2?

- A. The National Park Service, which was formed in 1916, takes care of the parks.
- B. The National Park Service which was formed in 1916 takes care of the parks.
- C. The National Park Service which was formed in 1916, takes care of the parks.
- D. The National Park Service, which was formed in 1916 takes care of the parks.

3. What is the correct way to write the verb in the sentence labeled 3?

- A. visit
- B. visiting
- C. visits
- D. have visited

4. In the sentence labeled 4, the student uses adjectives to describe things one would see in the park. How should these words be spelled?

- A. beutiful/fasinating
- B. beautiful/fascinating
- C. beautifull/fascinating
- D. beatiful/facinating

5. For the sentence labeled 5, which pronoun correctly completes the sentence?

- A. myself
- B. yourself
- C. yourselves
- D. ourselves

Grade 7 Argument – PE Schedule

Read the following argument, written by a student concerned about possible cuts to the PE program. The passage has errors that need to be corrected. Answer the questions that follow the passage to correct the errors.

Recently, the school board proposed that our district cut PE class from five to three days per week so that there would be more time for academic courses like reading math social studies and science. I believe that those classes are important, but I think that PE class should be kept all five days of the week.

Daily PE class is fun. Students can have the opportunitie to play different games and enjoy team sports. Students, when the weather is nice, can go outside and enjoy the sun. All students like getting outside of the classroom, even if it is to exercise.

Far more important than the fact that students enjoy PE is that daily PE class is good for our health. With daily PE, students can exercise more than they usually would. According to Sparkpe.org, daily PE can increase student activity by approximately 23 minutes every day. This daily exercise every day helps students stay healthy and fit, and students will be less likely to gain weight and be obese.

Our school has the chance to make sure that our curriculum helps students learn in the best way possible. Instead of cutting PE to make more time for academic classes, we should maintain the current PE schedule.

1. What is the correct punctuation of the underlined words in paragraph 1?

- A. academic courses like reading, math, social studies, and science.
- B. academic courses like, reading, math, social studies, and science.
- C. academic courses like reading, math social studies and science.
- D. academic courses like reading, math, social, studies, and science.

2. What is the correct spelling of the underlined word in the second sentence of paragraph 2?

- A. opertunity
- B. oppertunity
- C. oportunitty
- D. opportunity

3. Which option shows the **best** placement of the modifier in the third sentence of paragraph 2?

- A. When the weather is nice, students can go outside and enjoy the sun.
- B. Students can go, when the weather is nice, outside and enjoy the sun.
- C. When students can go outside and enjoy the sun, the weather is nice.
- D. Best as is.

4. What is the **best** way to revise the underlined sentence in paragraph 3 to eliminate redundancy without changing the meaning of the sentence?

- A. Exercise helps with health and weight.
- B. This exercise helps students stay healthy and reduces the chances of obesity because they will be working on fitness every day.
- C. This daily exercise helps students stay healthy and fit and reduces obesity.
- D. This exercise helps students stay fit and less obese as they work on their health each and every school day.

Grade 8 Narrative – Summer Learning

Read the following excerpt from a student’s report on her plans for the summer. The passage has errors that need to be corrected. Answer the questions that follow the passage to correct the errors.

Every summer I vow to improve myself somehow by gaining a new skill. Before I sign up for the free classes at the community center, I agonize over the catalog, trying to decide which skill I want to concentrate on.

Two summers ago I took a watercolor class where I learned to paint landscapes. The paintings created by me were so terrible it looked like they were colored by my baby brother. Last summer I took a course on making jewelry, which is actually harder than I thought it would be. This summer, I’m planning to learn how to create stained-glass pictures. The course description is long but the words that captured my attention were “create an entrancing art piece that . . . and become a family heirloom.”

I can pretty much gaurentee that none of my creations will ever be put on display in a museum. But I love the idea of passing something I created on to my kids someday and continuing to learn during the summer, especially when I focused on things that I don’t learn during the school year.

1. In the first sentence of paragraph 2, what is the main purpose of the infinitive?

- A. to indicate what something can or will be used for
- B. to serve as the subject of the sentence
- C. to indicate the purpose or intention of an action
- D. to establish the subject of the sentence

2. In paragraph 2, the second sentence uses passive voice. Which version below shows the sentence in active voice?

- A. My paintings were so terrible it looked like they were colored by my baby brother.
- B. The paintings I created were so terrible it looked like they were colored by my baby brother.
- C. The paintings I created were so terrible it looked like my baby brother had colored them.
- D. I created paintings that were so terrible it looked like my baby brother had colored them.

3. In the last sentence of paragraph 2, what do the ellipsis in the sentence tell the reader?

- A. that the writer has forgotten the actual words from the catalog description and is suggesting the words she uses might be accurate
- B. that there were more words in the catalogue description but the writer has chosen to omit them to focus on the words that impacted her
- C. that the writer has not completed the piece and she has inserted a placeholder so she can revise the section when she edits
- D. that the writer is pausing for effect, to signal to the reader how those specific words impacted her

4. In the last paragraph, how should the word gaurentee be spelled?

- A. guarantee
- B. garantee
- C. garentee
- D. guarentee

5. In the last sentence of the passage, which word introduces an error in usage?

- A. love
- B. passing
- C. learn
- D. focused