

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
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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.					
9	Expository -Georgia O'Keeffe Word count: 182 FK: 10.1	1	Use correct spelling.	L.9-10.2.c. Spell correctly.	A
		2	Use colons correctly.	L.9-10.2.b. Use a colon to introduce a list or quotation.	B
		3	Use consistent style.	L.6.3.b.* Maintain consistency in style and tone.	C
		4	Correct inappropriate shifts in verb tense.	L.5.1.d.* Recognize and correct inappropriate shifts in verb tense.	D
10	Argument -Supreme Court Word count: 239 FK: 10.7	1	Use colons correctly.	L.9-10.2.b. Use a colon to introduce a list or quotation.	D
		2	Use correct pronoun-antecedent agreement.	L.3.1.f.* Ensure subject-verb and pronoun-antecedent agreement.	A
		3	Use a semicolon correctly.	L.9-10.2.a. Use a semicolon (and perhaps a conjunctive adverb) to link two or more closely related independent clauses.	B
		4	Use correct spelling.	L.9-10.2.c. Spell correctly.	A
		5	Punctuate nonrestrictive/parenthetical elements correctly.	L.6.2.a.* Use punctuation (commas, parentheses, dashes) to set off nonrestrictive/parenthetical elements.	C
11	Expository -Special Effects Word count: 225 FK: 10.9	1	Use correct spelling.	L.11-12.2.b. Spell correctly.	D
		2	Correct misplaced modifiers.	L.7.1.c.* Place phrases and clauses within a sentence, recognizing and correcting misplaced and dangling modifiers.	C
		3	Use parallel structure.	L.9-10.1.a.* Use parallel structure.	D
		4	Eliminate redundancy.	L.7.3.a.* Choose language that expresses ideas precisely and concisely, recognizing and	D

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	Use hyphens correctly.	eliminating wordiness and redundancy. L.11-12.2.a. Observe hyphenation conventions.	C

Grade 9 Expository – Georgia O’Keeffe

Read the following excerpt from a student’s report on the artist, Georgia O’Keeffe. The passage has errors that need to be corrected. Answer the questions that follow the passage to correct the errors.

Known in the art community as “mother of American modernism,” Georgia O’Keeffe is best known for her unique and colorful paintings that featured close-up images of flowers. Her work is easily recognized because of her artistic style, which combines realism with abstraction.

Although she is most famous for her paintings of enlarged flowers, O’Keeffe works also include desert landscapes and prevalint objects from nature; rocks, shells, leaves, and even bones. Early in her career, she spent time in Manhattan creating paintings of cityscapes. She once said, “One can’t paint New York as it is, but rather as it is felt.” This says a lot about O’Keeffe’s thoughts. Despite the subject of the individual paintings, O’Keeffe’s distinctive style of focusing on the essential shapes rather than details shined through.

O’Keeffe passed away in 1986, leaving a legacy of hundreds of beautiful works behind. Those works are highly prized by museums and collectors alike, but it is likely that if asked today, O’Keeffe will have been most pleased by how her art makes the general public feel.

1. What is the correct spelling for the word prevalint in paragraph 2?

- A. prevalent
- B. prevelant
- C. previlent
- D. prevulant

2. In paragraph 2, how should nature; rocks, be punctuated?

- A. nature. Rocks
- B. nature: rocks
- C. nature, rocks
- D. Correct as is.

3. Which sentence below rewords the underlined sentence in paragraph 2 using the same style and tone as the rest of the passage?

- A. This sentence makes it crystal clear that she thought a lot about doing art.
- B. This thought gets to the heart of what made the artist tick.
- C. This quotation captures the essence of O’Keeffe’s approach to art.
- D. This intimation illustrates O’Keeffe’s proclivity germane to the creation of artistic masterpieces.

4. In the last sentence of the passage, how should the underlined verb be written?

- A. will have been
- B. was
- C. will be
- D. would be

Grade 10 Argument – Important Supreme Court Case

Read the following argument about a Supreme Court case. The passage has errors that need to be corrected. Answer the questions that follow the passage to correct the errors.

The Supreme Court, comprised of nine people, is the highest law in the United States. Some of the decisions made have been unpopular with American citizens. Many would argue that the worst decision the Supreme Court made was in the case of Dred Scott.

Mr. Scott, a slave under John Sanford, attempted to sue for his freedom. The Supreme Court ruled against Scott, saying he could not be a citizen because his ancestors were imported as slaves. The decision then added further detail. “And not being 'citizens' within the meaning of the Constitution, they are not entitled to sue in that character in a court of the United States, and the Circuit Court has not jurisdiction in such a suit.” The decision also implied that the federal government had no power to regulate slavery.

Justice Taney, who wrote the decision, thought the ruling would settle the issue of slavery, allowing each of the 31 states to make their own decision about whether the practice was legal. However, the decision caused even deeper dissent from those opposing slavery. _____, the Dred Scott decision has been cited as an eventual catalist for the Civil War.

If the right decision had been made in the first place granting Mr. Scott and other enslaved individuals citizenship and all its benefits and clarifying that slavery was a federal decision perhaps the Civil War could have been avoided. Instead, thousands of Americans died fighting over the issue, and many African Americans continued to live in slavery for many years to come.

1. What is the correct way to write the underlined section of paragraph 2?

- A. added further detail; “And
- B. added further detail, “And
- C. added further detail - “And
- D. added further detail: “And

2. In paragraph 3, how should each of the 31 states to make their own decision be written to correct the issue with pronoun-antecedent agreement?

- A. each of the 31 states to make its own decision
- B. each of the 31 states to make a decision themselves
- C. each of the 31 states to make her own decision
- D. Correct as is.

3. The writer wants to join the two closely related sentences in paragraph 3. How should the underlined section, slavery, be written in order to join the sentences and correctly clarify the relationship?

- A. slavery. Still,
- B. slavery; in fact,
- C. slavery; In fact
- D. slavery. Next

4. In paragraph 3, the word “catalist” is spelled incorrectly. How should the word be spelled?

- A. catalyst
- B. catilist
- C. catelyst
- D. catalest

5. What is the correct way to punctuate the underlined sentence in paragraph 4?

- A. If the right decision had been made in the first place granting Mr. Scott and other enslaved individuals citizenship and all its benefits and clarifying that slavery was a federal decision, perhaps the Civil War could have been avoided.
- B. If the right decision had been made in the first place, granting Mr. Scott and other enslaved individuals citizenship and all its benefits and clarifying that slavery was a federal decision perhaps the Civil War could have been avoided.
- C. If the right decision had been made in the first place, granting Mr. Scott and other enslaved individuals citizenship and all its benefits and clarifying that slavery was a federal decision, perhaps the Civil War could have been avoided.
- D. If the right decision had been made in the first place granting, Mr. Scott and other enslaved individuals citizenship, and all its benefits, and clarifying that slavery was a federal decision, perhaps the Civil War could have been avoided.

Grade 11 Expository – Special Effects

Read the following excerpt from a student’s report on the special effects in movies. The passage has errors that need to be corrected. Answer the questions that follow the passage to correct the errors.

Special effects in movies are used to create illusions or visual tricks. Although now common in cinema, special effects were once considered quite extraordinary.

The first use of a special effects scene in a movie dates back to the late 1800s. While filming a reenactment of the execution of Mary, Queen of Scots, special effects showed the act of the queen’s beheading. Alfred Clark created this trick through the use of a “stop trick.” This technique stopped the filming, had the actors freeze in position, with “Mary” stepping away from the set. The actress was replaced by a dummy in the same clothing and the filming resumed. This created the visual that a real person was beheaded.

Modern film today now relies heavily on computer generated imagery, which has advanced forward at a fast pace. Still, some credit must be given to early creative geniuses like Clark, who were able to stretch their imaginations and creativity to thrill audiences through the creation of the concept of special effects.

1. In the first sentence, how should the underlined word be spelled to match its intended use in the sentence?

- A. allusions
- B. elusions
- C. illusions
- D. illusions

2. Read this sentence from paragraph 2.

While filming a reenactment of the execution of Mary, Queen of Scots, special effects showed the act of the queen’s beheading.

How should this sentence be rewritten to correct the error and clarify meaning?

- A. Special effects showed the act of the queen’s beheading while filming a reenactment of the execution of Mary, Queen of Scots.
- B. Showing the special effects of a beheading, the execution of Mary, Queen of Scots, was filmed through a reenactment.
- C. While filming a reenactment of the execution of Mary, Queen of Scots, the director used special effects to show the queen’s beheading.
- D. While the director filmed Mary, Queen of Scots, beheading, he used special effects to record the execution.

3. How should the underlined sentence in paragraph 2 be rewritten to show parallel structure?

- A. This technique stopped the filming, froze the actors in position, and “Mary” steps away from the set.
- B. This technique required stopping the filming, calling for actors to freeze in position, and required “Mary” to step away from the set.
- C. This technique stopped the filming, had the actors freeze in position, and “Mary” stepped away from the set.
- D. This technique required filming to stop, actors to freeze in position, and “Mary” to step away from the set.

4. Which two excerpts from the passage contain unnecessary repetition and could be edited to remove redundancies?

- A. now common in cinema, special effects were once considered
- B. dates back to the late 1800s
- C. Modern film today
- D. which has advanced forward
- E. some credit must be given
- F. were able to stretch their imaginations

5. Which phrase from the text should be hyphenated?

- A. quite extraordinary
- B. real person
- C. computer generated
- D. early creative