

ELA/Literacy Claim #4

Students can engage in research/ inquiry to investigate topics and to analyze, integrate, and present information.

Rationale for ELA/Literacy Claim #4

The Common Core standards reflect the fact that inquiry and critical thinking are essential attributes of a student who is college and career-ready, enabling students to produce new insights, perspectives, solutions, and products. The standards include a number of references to the kinds of research and investigation in which students should be prepared to engage. These include both the ability to gather, synthesize, and evaluate information from multiple texts and, if presenting their research orally, the ability to build on the ideas of others through collaboration and explorations of diverse perspectives. Today, a myriad of both print and non-print information is available globally. Students need to know how to filter information, evaluate the credibility of sources, detect and challenge the underlying assumptions, and make thoughtful decisions based on their analysis of what is relevant to the topic, issue, or problem being explored. These skills are important for college success, as students are asked to move past obvious or surface-level interpretations and use literacy skills to make sense of and respond to the written, visual, and verbal information they encounter. The ability to conduct short research projects provides opportunities to integrate reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills across content areas through focused inquiry.

In *How People Learn* (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 1999), the authors state that to develop competence in an area of inquiry, students must: (a) have a deep foundation of factual knowledge, (b) understand facts and ideas in the context of a conceptual framework, and (c) organize knowledge in ways that facilitate retrieval and application. This principle emerges from research on learning and transfer. Experts, regardless of the field, always draw on a richly structured information base; they are not just “good thinkers” or “smart people.” The ability to plan a task, to notice patterns, to generate reasonable arguments and explanations, and to draw analogies to other problems, are all more closely intertwined with factual knowledge than was once believed (Pellegrino, 2002).

What sufficient evidence looks like for ELA/Literacy Claim #4

Research and inquiry tasks are a means by which students can demonstrate their ability to think critically, analyze and synthesize information, and communicate effectively. At each grade level, students will explore a topic, issue, or complex problem that may involve working with peers to gather and /or interpret information from multiple sources. Sources will be varied in terms of types, format, and content area. (Some tasks are likely to involve use of a simulation or an

Internet search controlled by an individual student.) Individual students then select, analyze, and synthesize information in order to craft a coherent response to the problem or prompt using supporting evidence. In these multi-step performance tasks, students demonstrate their ability to apply literacy skills across content areas - history/social studies, science, and technical subjects, as well as the language arts.

Presentation formats for short research-related performance tasks will take one of three forms as appropriate to the grade level and prompt. Response formats may include: a written response with supporting textual evidence; an oral presentation or an outline or script for an oral presentation with enough detail to demonstrate organization and development of ideas with supporting textual evidence; or a visual/graphic presentation of findings (such as a PowerPoint or storyboard) with enough detail to demonstrate organization and development of ideas with supporting textual evidence. All research tasks will be scored using common criteria: these are likely to include (but may not be limited to) effective investigation, identification and evaluation of sources, synthesis of ideas/information, and accurate and appropriate documentation. Research tasks are likely to contribute some measures to Claim #1 (Reading), Claim #2 (Writing), and Claim #3 (Speaking/Listening) scores; use of domain-specific language/vocabulary will also be assessed as part of these claims.

Collaborations with peers during the information-gathering stage of these assessment tasks may also provide authentic ways for students to build on ideas of others while formulating and expanding their own knowledge and thinking. Collaboration with peers will not be required for all research-related performance tasks; but will be built into specific tasks where appropriate. Evidence from collaborative activities that are part of the research process - while not currently anticipated to be part of the summative evidence for large-scale assessment - supports formative assessment and instruction for short research projects that result in individual reports or presentations. Evidence from collaborative discussion activities may be collected locally and used for formative/instructional purposes, also assessing speaking and listening standards.

Examples of what to expect with short research performance tasks:

- At grades 3-5, students might read/view and discuss a short informational article about a science topic, such as static electricity. Then they will conduct a designed experiment with a partner to collect data about how static electricity behaves under certain conditions. Individually, students prepare and present their results to show that they can draw conclusions that integrate or compare what they read about and what they observed (using data collected and text evidence as support). Related to social studies, elementary students might read and discuss short personal accounts of US citizens who immigrated to this country when they were children (firsthand accounts) and an article (secondhand account) dealing with different immigration patterns across US history, and then be asked to respond to a research question posed (e.g., comparing or integrating information from firsthand and secondhand accounts).

- At middle school, students might explore a variety of potential digital and print resources that can be used to respond to a research question about the social and economic impact of the Transcontinental Railroad or to a problem with which they are presented such as how to control the spread of invasive plant species. Students would consider the credibility of sources located and relevance of information to the topic. Then, they would prepare and present their results to one another to show that they can draw conclusions that integrate or analyze information (using data and/or text evidence as support).
- Using a document/media library provided, high school, students might read and discuss texts and speeches or media messages all of which present different points of view about an issue from a period in history (e.g., World War I, Civil Rights era). Students may be asked to select appropriate sources, and then analyze and present information (academic writing/explanation) or critique perspectives/potential biases as they relate to the issue and craft a response (critique or argument). Student responses will demonstrate the ability to analyze and synthesize information, as well as evaluate sources used (primary, secondary, media, etc.) for credibility, bias, quality of evidence, and/or quality of reasoning. As follow-up, students might discuss collaboratively their research and findings.

Accessibility & Claim 4: Collaboration and independent inquiry are important skills for all students as they move toward college and career. Students' engagement in collaborative inquiries provides heightened learning opportunities for them. Yet, for some students with disabilities, interactions with others and collaborative work are affected by their disabilities. These include individuals with autism, for example, and some with emotional/behavioral disabilities. Alternative approaches to collaborative activities may be needed. Yet, these approaches should be like those used by successful adults with disabilities who work alongside their peers in work and collegiate situations.

Research has also shown that, due to language barriers, ELL students are often less involved in collaborative academic efforts. Even if they try to engage, their teachers may not have enough confidence in them to involve them in classroom activities due to concerns about their possible language insufficiencies (see for example, Abedi & Herman, 2010). As assessments include collaborative elements, teachers should be made aware of these issues and seeks ways to engage ELL students in collaborative and independent inquiries. Teachers should have access to diagnostic information regarding ELL students' level of English proficiency through benchmark and/or formative assessments that evaluate communication proficiency, so that they can properly evaluate how best to include students in collaborative activities. In addition, formative tools, professional development, and instructions for administration of summative tasks should all provide teachers with guidance about strategies to support this engagement.

Source: SBAC Content Specifications for ELA and Literacy, pages 61-63 (December 26, 2011)