

Connecting the SMARTER Balanced Assessment Consortium ELA & Literacy Content Specifications to The Common Core

This “Q and A” has been developed to address questions related to development of SBAC assessment targets for ELA & Literacy, making more explicit the connections to the Common Core.

Q: Is the SBAC content mapping a reorganization of the standards in the Common Core? Why don't the five claims exactly map to the strands in the CCSS document? Why use claims and not CCSS strands?

A: As with all standards documents, the Common Core (CC) was not created to be a summative assessment blueprint, nor is it a curriculum. Rather it is a standards document to guide curriculum development and instruction K-12. Many different types and formats of assessment – screening, diagnostic, progress monitoring, formative, interim, and summative - will be created over the next few years using the CC as the guide. Depending on the purpose and use of each assessment, different combinations of standards will be drawn upon to assess the intended scope and breadth.

Many critical aspects of the Common Core have been maintained in framing the overall SBAC summative assessment design, even if the specific organizational structure of the CC (e.g., strands, headings for anchor standards) is not explicit in aspects of the design.

Here is a brief summary of the development connections between the SBAC assessment design and the Common Core:

- Began with an in-depth analysis of each CC standard in every strand: All CC ELA and Literacy standards in each strand at each grade level were initially considered as the starting point for the large-scale, summative assessment. Both the content and implied cognitive demand of each standard was analyzed. Given the large number of standards to consider at each grade level (many more standards and a wider scope than any state has probably assessed in the past with a large-scale assessment), prioritization was needed to determine which standards should or could be emphasized and still provide meaningful assessment data to schools and teachers.
- Assesses reading abilities applied to two broad text types identified as the focus of two sub-strands in the CC: Reading assessment targets (Claim #1) address both literary and informational texts and make specific distinctions that align with CC standards for reading literature (RL) or reading informational (RI) texts. Attention to reading closely and reading text of increasing complexity at all grade levels – ideas stressed in the CC - have been incorporated into the wording of Claim #1 (*Students can read closely and critically to comprehend a range of increasingly complex literary and informational texts*) and applied to descriptions of what sufficient evidence of student performance should look like for this claim.

- Assesses writing of three specific text types (W1, W2, W3) identified as the focus in the CC: Writing assessment targets (Claim #2) address all three text types (opinion/argument, informational, and narrative) and their unique features and make specific distinctions that align with CC standards for each type at every grade level. The wording of Claim #2 (Students can produce effective writing for a range of purposes and audiences.) and applied to descriptions of what sufficient evidence of student performance should look like address all three writing genres and a range of purposes.
- Applies instructional emphasis stated in the CC to assessment emphasis, while considering what content would be appropriate and practical to include for a summative assessment: Prioritization criteria for selecting standards (or parts of standards) to be assessed at the end of each grade level included the following:
 - (a) **Content identified in the CC document as having greater/less emphasis** (e.g., shifting emphasis of reading literary or informational texts across grade levels; greater emphasis on writing arguments at high school than on narrative writing; writing opinions/arguments in response to reading texts, and conducting short research projects) was given highest priority. While close attention has been given to maintaining the instructional emphasis stated in the CC, being “true” to the CC emphasis does present some assessment challenges. For example, the CC states that at high school, students should devote 30% of their reading to literary texts and 70% to informational texts. However, the CC does not reduce the number of standards at high school for reading literary texts. The assessment design for high school has to consider how to address the same number of standards for each text type with this shifting balance of emphasis.
 - (b) **Content that *could be assessed* in an on-demand, large-scale setting was identified and compared with high emphasis content.** For example, asking students to explain how a series of chapters fits together to provide the overall structure of a particular story makes perfect sense within a 5th grade unit of study where full novels are read and discussed; but if assessed in a large-scale assessment, it would mean developing a required reading list for all fifth grade students prior to the large-scale summative assessment. An earlier document created by WestEd for SBAC identifying “eligible content” for assessment was also reviewed during the prioritization process.
 - (c) **Skills and concepts deemed critical for college and career readiness by the CC and sources outside of the CC were considered.** For example, SBAC state partners provided feedback that many careers in business, government organizations, and the military make use of both informational and narrative writing (not writing narratives) when completing work-related writing tasks, such as incidence reports. So while the CC places a much lower instructional emphasis on narrative writing than on writing arguments based on texts read, there are many real world applications of narrative writing expected after high school. And as aside, a 2011 National Public Radio (NPR) Morning Edition show featured interviews with the U.S. Supreme Court Justices, asking them what most influenced their own writing of court decisions. To a person, each Justice named examples of great literature (narrative writing) as his/her models of good writing. Thus, all writing types are included to some degree in the SBAC assessment design, even at high school.

(d) **Last, but certainly not least, practical constraints of the proposed SBAC assessment system (e.g., computer-adaptive, use of multiple item formats, time frames allotted for summative assessment) and critical elements required of any large-scale assessment needed to be addressed in the overall design.**

- The ELA committee also reviewed a related document written by the CC authors (Coleman & Pimentel (6/3/2011). Publisher’s criteria for the Common Core State Standards in English language arts and literacy, grades 3-12. This is also not an assessment document, but provided insights into what the authors felt was important to emphasize instructionally (e.g., short research projects).
- All CC strands, with the exception of Reading Foundational Skills K-5, are proposed to be sampled in some way in the SBAC summative assessment design. Attention was paid to establishing a range of depth in content and skills assessed with various item types and breadth of content across strands when developing assessment targets. The resulting assessment claims and assessment targets are more representative of instruction where there will be an integration of skills and concepts across strands (write *and* edit), rather than assessing isolated skills within only one strand. Overall coherence and the natural integration of skills across strands were several reasons that CC strands were not simply adopted as the overarching claims.

CC Strands	How each CC strand and standards are proposed to be addressed in the SBAC assessment system
Reading Standards: Foundational Skills K-5	Best assessed intensively at K-2 and then systematically at grade levels above grade 2. Assess locally with the many existing valid/reliable diagnostic & formative assessments to make instructional and remediation decisions.
Reading Standards for Literature	Assess both strands /and standards primarily under Claim #1 and generally apply the distribution of emphasis for text types recommended in the CC. Most or all of these items can be included in a computer-adaptive test (CAT).
Reading Standards for Informational Text	
Writing Standards	Assess 3 key writing types/standards (W1 - W6 & W9) under Claim #2 and generally apply distribution of emphasis recommended in the CC. Apply writing standards W4-W9 to content-related texts under Claim #4 (Research). Full compositions, involving planning and revision, would best be assessed with performance tasks.
Speaking and Listening Standards	Assess selected speaking and listening skills under Claim #3 .
Language Standards	Assess language acquisition and use as applied to varied reading, writing, speaking, and listening contexts. This should not simply be a test of memorized vocabulary lists. Draw upon word analysis skills, use of reading closely and resources to determine meanings in context and interpret figurative uses of language. Report under Claim #5 .
Reading Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies 6-12	Conducting short research projects (Research to Build and Present Knowledge: standards W7-W9) is included in the CC at all grades K-12. Research standards to build knowledge of topics would likely be applied in local curriculums in content areas of science, social studies, and technical subjects; and while not limited to those curricular areas, provides the opportunity to sample domain-specific reading and writing strands. Claim #4 , Conducting Research, was created as an integration of several CC strands and to apply research and inquiry as a way to demonstrate many important 21 st Century skills (e.g., use of technology) and to potentially produce a range of products (e.g., script for an oral presentation, oral presentation, PowerPoint, public service announcement), not simply written reports. Short research projects offer varied opportunities for demonstrating collaboration skills, as well as reading and writing skills, and would best be assessed with performance tasks.
Reading Standards for Literacy in Science and Technical Subjects 6-12	
Writing Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects 6-12	

Q: Why not just list the standards as the assessment targets? Why not use the CC Anchor Standards headings instead of the key words that now appear with each assessment target?

A: There are two basic reasons why the Common Core document (as organized and written) is not useful as a summative assessment blueprint:

- (1) The CC is not written as a summative assessment document. The CC provides guidance for K-12 curriculum and instruction and implies different levels and purposes of assessment (e.g., screening, diagnosis, progress monitoring). As with all standards documents, many decisions must be made to determine how the content and skills listed in each standard and strand can be meaningfully integrated and applied for instruction; and what skills and concepts should be assessed and when they should be assessed during the learning process. Instructional emphasis is provided in the CC as a starting point for the design of the entire assessment system, not simply the summative assessment.
- (2) The grain size of what is encompassed under each anchor standard (multiple standards) and the scope of content and skills described in each standard are not useful in articulating a single focus for an assessment item. To describe to an item developer what each item or task should include, more specificity and focus is needed than what is implied in the anchor standard headings or encompassed in the standards. Below is a description of the three levels of specificity (from more general to most specific – a test item): anchor standard heading, standard, and assessment targets with “key words” to indicate item focus.

- Sample Reading Anchor Standard heading: Key Ideas and Details (encompasses content of three reading standards, RI-1, RI-2, RI-3)
 - a. Sample Reading Standard RI-3 (grade 4): *Explain events, procedures, ideas, or concepts in a historical, scientific, or technical text, including what happened and why, based on specific information in the text.* (This single standard includes at least 3 possible contexts – use of historical, scientific, and technical texts; several possible areas of content focus of the texts: **events**, **procedures**, **ideas**, or **concepts**; and several possible ways to phrase the test questions: requiring explanations, what happened and why, providing supporting evidence from the text. The different ways to potentially write assessment items for this standard imply different cognitive demands placed on the reader. A focus on using details from the text can be applied with standard RI-1 (DOK 1 or 2) or to summarize the text RI-2 (DOK 2), or to support an interpretation (e.g., what happened and why) of the text (DOK 3). Because item developers must refer to the CC standards, text types are “a given” when aligning texts to targets and RI-3 items.

- i. Sample SBAC Assessment targets addressing three potential ways to assess content of RI-3 at grade 4
 - ✓ **KEY DETAILS:** Use **explicit details and implicit information** to support answers or inferences about texts **Standards: RI-1, RI-3** (DOK 1, 2) **“Key Details” and Central Ideas” items are most likely to be developed as selected response items.**
 - ✓ **CENTRAL IDEAS:** Identify or summarize central ideas/ **key events**, or **procedures** **Standards: RI-2, RI-3** (DOK 2)
 - ✓ **REASONING & EVIDENCE:** Use supporting evidence to justify or interpret how information is presented or integrated (author’s reasoning, type of account, visual information, **concepts, ideas**) **Standards: RI-3** (DOK 3) Note that other standards also apply to this assessment target. **“Reasoning” items are likely to be developed as short and longer constructed response items.**

A variety of items and item types could be included to assess the same standard (RI-3) using one or more different texts.

All assessment items and tasks described in SBAC assessment targets are aligned with one or more CC standard to be sampled (assessed). (The table below offers a detailed description of how assessment targets link to cognition/a theory of learning and how disaggregation of assessment results based on this design may be able to provide meaningful information to teachers.)

Assessment Target Anatomy – How Assessment Targets Can Provide Guidance for Item Development and Analysis of Assessment Data			
Claim #1			
Students can read closely and critically to comprehend a range of increasingly complex literary and informational texts.			
50% of text-related assessment evidence will come from reading literary texts. (Different standards may be applied to different passages or to multiple passages.)	How these targets link to CC standards, types of assessment items, and POSSIBLE test blueprints (not yet decided)	What these targets are designed to elicit in terms of cognition/learning theory and interpreting results	Possible Uses: describing achievement levels (performance level descriptors/PLDs)
<p>Target #1 - KEY DETAILS: Use explicit details and implicit information to support answers or inferences about texts Standards: RL-1, RL-3 (DOK 1, DOK 2)</p> <p>Target #2 - CENTRAL IDEAS: Identify or summarize central ideas/ key events Standards: RL-2, RL-3 (DOK 2)</p>	<p>All <u>literary passages</u> will include at least one item assessing reading targets #1 and #2. These items will likely be selected response (SR) items. These items can serve as a means to help all students find entry points into the texts.</p> <p>If two literary passages are included, this means a minimum of 4 SR items/and 4 total score points for literary texts for these targets. <i>(NOTE: Final test blueprints will determine the total number of items/assessment target.)</i></p> <p>Items for targets #1 & #2 will usually fall under the CC anchor standard heading: Key Ideas and Details (standards 1, 2, & 3)</p>	<p>Reading targets #1 & #2 focus on basic inference and general comprehension.</p> <p>--Learning theory research tells us that these skills are at the novice end of the learning continuum, forming the foundation for building deeper interpretations of text.</p> <p>--Students who are not able to answer these items successfully probably are still struggling with decoding and word attack skills and need more intensive remediation and support.</p> <p>--Students who are able to answer these items successfully, but do not perform well on other reading items likely demonstrate decoding, word attack, and comprehension skills, but have not yet generalized schemas (structures, features, etc.) about how information is organized and presented in a variety of literary texts.</p>	<p>Students who can only answer basic comprehension questions about key details and central ideas would likely not be considered “proficient” but their assessment results would help local educators to better target program deficiencies and instructional needs for some students.</p> <p>The types of items for these targets can provide descriptions of what students in the lower levels of achievement (below proficient) know and are able to do.</p>
<p>Target #4 - REASONING & EVIDENCE: Use supporting evidence to justify/ explain inferences (character development/traits, first or third person point of view, theme/author’s message) Standards: RL-2, RL-3, RL-6 (DOK 3, DOK 4 when using more than one text)</p>	<p>All <u>literary passages</u> will include at least one item assessing reading target #4. These items will probably be short or longer constructed response (CR) items.</p> <p>If two literary passages are included, this means a minimum of 2 items/6-8 score total points for literary texts. One item carries more weight in the overall score than targets #1 and #2 for the same passage.</p> <p>Items for target #4 may fall under several CC anchor standard headings: Key Ideas</p>	<p>Reading target #4 is more cognitively demanding because it requires a closer reading of texts, and the ability to make and support inferences about both implicit and explicit information. In some cases, evidence may be drawn from more than one text. For example at grade 4, RL-6 requires comparing/ contrasting points of view in 2 texts.</p> <p>-- Learning theory research tells us that these skills are closer to the expert end of the learning continuum. Students who are consistently able to “read between the lines” (infer) and apply deeper reasoning have generalized the strategies and schemas needed</p>	<p>Students who can answer basic comprehension questions and consistently apply reasoning are beginning to demonstrate skills of an expert reader. Depending on consistency of performance with multiple text types and other assessment tasks requiring deeper thinking, these students would likely be considered “proficient” or approaching proficient.</p> <p>The types of items for this target can provide descriptions and distinctions</p>

	and Details, Craft and Structure, or Integration of Knowledge and Ideas (standards 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, or 9)	to build upon when they encounter /more complex texts.	of what students in the upper levels of achievement (proficient/ advanced) know and are able to do.
<p>Target #5 ANALYZE RELATIONSHIPS: Specify or explain relationships within or across texts (e.g., compare/contrast, problem/solution, cause/effect) Standards: <u>RL-6, RL-7, RL-9</u> (DOK 2, 3, 4)</p> <p>Target #6 STRUCTURES/FEATURES: Relate knowledge of text structure or features (visual information) to gain, interpret, or explain information Standards: <u>RL-5, RL-7</u> (DOK 2, 3)</p>	<p>All <u>literary passages</u> will include 1or 2 items assessing reading targets #5 and #6 as appropriate to the texts selected. In many cases, more than one text is required for assessing most of these standards (<u>RL-6, RL-7, and RL-9</u> underlined to indicate use of more than one text). These items could include selected response and short or longer constructed response items.</p> <p>If two literary passages are included, this means from 2 - 4 items are possible. Depending on item type used, these items can generate from 2 – 16 possible total score points for literary texts. Items for these targets collectively carry the most weight in the overall score.</p> <p>Items for targets #5 and #6 may fall under several CC anchor standard headings: Key Ideas and Details, Craft and Structure, or Integration of Knowledge and Ideas(standards 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, or 9)</p>	<p>Reading targets #5 and #6 tend to be more cognitively demanding because they require a closer reading and analysis of one or more texts, and the ability to make and support interpretations of texts using text structures and text features, as well as the ideas presented. In some cases, evidence may be drawn from more than one text. At grade 4, RL-6 requires comparing points of view found in 2 texts.</p> <p>--Learning theory research tells us that these skills are closer to the expert end of the learning continuum. Students who are consistently able to “read between the lines” (infer) and apply deeper reasoning have generalized strategies and schemas to build upon when they come to new/more complex texts.</p>	<p>Students who can answer basic comprehension questions and consistently apply analysis to texts read demonstrate many skills of an expert reader. Depending on consistency of performance with multiple text types and other assessment tasks requiring deeper thinking, these students would likely be considered “proficient” or advanced (expert) readers.</p> <p>The types of items for these targets can provide descriptions and distinctions of what students in the upper levels of achievement (proficient/ advanced) know and are able to do.</p>
<p>Target #3 - WORD MEANINGS: Determine word meanings, multiple meanings, or shades of meaning based on word relationships (e.g., synonyms), word structure (e.g., common Greek or Latin roots, affixes), context, or use of resources (e.g., dictionary) Standards: <u>RL-4; L-4, L-5c</u> (DOK 1, DOK 2)</p> <p>Target #7 - LANGUAGE USE: Determine or interpret figurative meanings of words and phrases used in context Standards: <u>RL-4; L-5a, L-5b</u> (DOK 2, DOK 3)</p>	<p>All <u>literary passages</u> will include at least item assessing reading target #3 and may include one item assessing target #7 (as appropriate to the texts selected). --If two literary passages are included from 2 - 4 items are possible for these targets. Depending on item type used, these items may generate from 2 – 10 possible total score points under claim #5 (as indicated by shading of these targets). --Items for targets #3 and #7 fall under several CC anchor standard headings: (reading standard 4) Craft and Structure and (language standards 4, & 5) Vocabulary Acquisition and Use</p>	<p>-- Reading targets #3 & #7 assess a range abilities and require different strategies and varying levels of cognitive demand. Together they provide a more complete picture of where along the learning pathway students might be in their understanding and use of written language. --Learning theory research tells us that the skills needed to determine intended word meanings (using resources, word solving skills, words in context) are closer to the novice end of the continuum, while distinguishing literal from figurative uses of language and broader interpretations in a variety of contexts is typical of expert readers.</p>	<p>Students who can only answer target #3 vocabulary-based questions would likely not be considered “proficient” but their assessment results would help local educators to target program deficiencies and instructional needs for some students.</p> <p>The types of items for these targets can provide descriptions of what students at several different levels of achievement know and are able to do.</p>

September 13, 2011
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DINE & DISCUSS
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***Getting the “BIG PICTURE” of the SBAC ASSESSMENT
of the COMMON CORE STATE STANDARD***

CVEDC-ESA

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