

2011 Grade 6

New York English Language Arts Test Specifications

The New York State Education Department redesigned the 2011 Grades 3-8 English Language Arts tests. The intent of the redesign is to assess a wider range of performance indicators for each grade level. To accomplish this, the state changed the format, time, and administration dates for the tests.

Standards Assessed

The 2011 (and 2012) tests will continue to address the New York State Learning Standards, based on the 2005 ELA Standards. Specifically, the ELA tests will assess standards for listening, reading, and writing. After 2011-12, tests will be based on the Common Core Standards and State Standards (http://www.p12.nysed.gov/ciai/common_core_standards/ccstimeline.html).

On the 6th grade test, the approximate percentage of questions assessing each of the standards is as follows:

Standard	Grade 6
1. Reading, Writing, Listening, and Speaking for Information and Understanding	36%
2. Reading, Writing, Listening, and Speaking for Literary Response and Expression	44.5%
3. Reading, Writing, Listening, and Speaking for Critical Analysis and Evaluation	19.5%

Genres

The Sixth Grade ELA, along with other grades, will have literary and informational reading passages. “Literary passages” may include: short stories, folktales, poetry, or other forms of literary writing. “Informational passages” may include: articles, excerpts from biographies or autobiographies, essays, or other forms of informational writing.

A **minimum of four genres** will be used on each test for interest and literary diversity. Possible genres for the 2011 grades 3-8 tests include:

- Folktales
- Reports
- Letters
- Stories
- Informative pieces
- Poems
- Literary pieces
- Interviews
- How-to pieces
- Classical works
- Plays

Higher-order thinking skills will be required on some of the questions that accompany the reading passages. These skills include: summarizing, analyzing, inferring, interpreting, predicting, and evaluating information.

Structure of Grade 6 ELA for 2011

In 2011, the ELA Tests in all grades will have more reading passages and more multiple-choice questions in Book 1. In the 6th grade, there will be 57 questions on the 2011 test. In 2010, there were only 34 questions. This reflects **an increase of 68%** for 2011. According to an email from the office of State Assessment, “in addition to more pages, there will also be **more higher order thinking questions to mirror the NAEP.**”

There will be two days of testing and three books.

However this year one fairly big difference is that *writing mechanics* (grammar, punctuation, and word usage) will now be addressed through multiple-choice questions **only**.

In past years, writing mechanics had been assessed through the editing paragraph and two extended responses (Guide to the Grades 3–8 Testing Program, 15).

Writing mechanics questions may test any of the skills found in the **NY State Core Curriculum** including the following:

- 1) the elements of a complete sentence
- 2) subject-verb agreement
- 3) capitalization and punctuation
- 4) combining of sentences
- 5) separation of sentences

The length and complexity of test questions and answer choices will vary with the grade. Specific performance indicators concerning writing mechanics for each grade are listed in the next section.

Day	Section	Subject	Number of Multiple-Choice Questions	Number of Short-Response Questions	Number of Extended-Response Questions	Total Number of Questions	Approximate Testing Time
One	1	Reading	41	0	0	41	80 minutes
Two	2 and 3	Listening/Writing Mechanic	5	3	0	8	30 minutes
		Reading/Writing	0	4	1	5	60 minutes
Total			46	7	1	54	170 minutes

Grade 6

Day One/Book 1	Day Two/Book 2	Total
6-7 passages (literary and informational) 41 multiple-choice questions	1 listening selection (literary) 5 multiple-choice questions 3 short-response questions 3-5 multiple-choice (writing mechanics) questions 2 paired passages (literary and informational) 4 short-response questions 1 extended-response question	9-10 passages 49-51 multiple-choice questions 7 short-response questions 1 extended-response question
80 minutes	90 minutes (excluding reading the listening selection)	170 minutes

Day One: Reading – 41 points, 59-61% of score

On the first day the students will be asked 41 multiple-choice questions. These questions will all be based on reading passages, both literary and informational.

- There will be 6-7 passages on the first day.
- The students will have 80 minutes to read the passages and answer 41 questions.

Day Two: Listening/Writing Mechanics and Reading/Writing - 26-28 points, 39-42% of score

On day two there will be 5 multiple-choice questions asked on the listening, 3 short-response questions based on the listening, and 3-5 multiple-choice writing mechanics questions. The listening section will be followed by the reading/writing section which will involve 2 paired passages followed by 4 short-response and 1 extended-response.

- The listening passage will be literary.
- The paired passages will be literary and informational.
- Students will have ninety minutes to answer 16 questions (8-10 multiple-choice, which include writing mechanics, 7 short-response, and 1 extended-response).

The sixth grade example of a multiple choice writing mechanics question (from the NYSED's *Guide to the 2011 Grades 3-8 Testing Program*) addressed the elements of a complete sentence (see below):

- Which of these is not a complete sentence?
 - A. Pat hit the ball as hard as she could.
 - B. No one could catch the ball.
 - C. Into the outfield while the crowd cheered.
 - D. Pat kept running until she reached home plate.

Scoring for the 6th Grade test:

- Multiple-choice questions - 1 point each.
- Short-response items - 2 points each.
- Extended-response items - 4 points each.

There will be 49-51 multiple-choice questions (49 - 51 points, 71-74% of total score), 7 short-response questions (14 points, 20-21% of total score), and 1 extended-response (4 points, 6% of total score), for a total of 67-69 points.

It's possible that the multiple choice questions may be weighted differently. We won't know if this is the case until the item analysis is revealed after the test has been scored.

Short-Response and Extended-Response Scoring

Each constructed-response question will be scored individually; there will be holistic scoring, but no cluster scoring.

Scores for *all* of the constructed responses are based on evidence of the following qualities:

- **Meaning**—the extent to which the response exhibits sound understanding, interpretation, and analysis of the task and text
- **Development**—the extent to which ideas are supported through the use of specific, accurate, and relevant evidence from the text

Scores for the extended responses are *also* based on evidence of the following qualities:

- **Organization**—the extent to which the response exhibits direction, shape, and coherence
- **Language Use**—the extent to which the response exhibits clear and effective use of vocabulary and sentence structure

The short-response and extended-response questions in the Listening and Reading sections of the test are scored individually with holistic rubrics. The short-response rubric allows for the scoring of meaning and development. The extended-response rubric allows for the scoring of meaning, development, organization and language use.

6th Grade Reading Standards and Performance Indicators

Standard 1: Students will read, write, listen, and speak for **information and understanding**.

Use the table of contents and indexes to locate information. (**You might notice the following skills are addressed:** identifying “right there” answers.)

- Look at the excerpt below from a table of contents in a book about toys.

Table of Contents	
Chapter	Page
The Art of Toymaking	94
The History of Windup Toys	107
Entertaining Royalty with Toys	118
Learning to Build Windup Toys	121

The article “Windup Toys and Automaton” would **most likely** be found in the chapter beginning on page...

Read to collect and interpret data, facts, and ideas from multiple sources. (**You might notice the following skills are addressed:** inferring, identifying “right there” answers, determining cause and effect.)

- How does Zhu Li care for the water buffalo each day?
- How do crows open walnuts?
- How do crows use twigs as tools?
- According to the article, the first Dutch “olykoek” may have been invented because...
- According to the article, Elizabeth Gregory improved doughnuts in the 1800s when she replaced the uncooked center section with...
- According to the article, what was **most** dangerous about the conditions under which the Doughnut Girls worked?
- According to the article, which natural structure is a model for Bryan’s card structures?
- What was Bryan’s first world record?
- Bryan’s hobby is the result of combining which two boyhood interests?
- Why was it a challenge for Bryan to build card structures in his family’s farmhouse?
- What problem is Ryan working to solve?
- How did Ryan first learn about the problem he is trying to solve?
- How did Ryan begin his project to build wells?

Use text features, such as headings, captions, and titles, to understand and interpret informational texts. (**You might notice the following skills are addressed:** finding the main idea, evaluating, inferring.)

- Why is the water buffalo referred to as a “gentle giant”?
- The title of the article “A Boy Who Makes a Difference” suggests that...

Identify missing, conflicting, unclear, and irrelevant information. (**You might notice the following skills are addressed:** finding the main ideas and supporting details.)

- If information were to be added to the article, which of these statements would **best** support the main idea of the article?

Distinguish between fact and opinion. (**You might notice the following skills are addressed:** identifying opinions.)

- Which statement from the article expresses an **opinion**?

Identify information that is implied rather than stated. (**You might notice the following skills are addressed:** identifying character traits, identifying literary devices, determining the author's purpose)

- Zhu Li can **best** be described as...
- Read this sentence from the passage.
He has massive horns that are curved like crescent moons, and he weighs nearly a ton.
In this sentence, the water buffalo's horns are compared to crescent moons because of their...
- The author describes pet crows pulling keys from their owners' pockets to show that crows are...

Compare and contrast information about one topic from multiple sources. (**You might notice the following skills are addressed:** determining importance, evaluating.)

- Why is the fable about the crow and the jar a good introduction for this article?

Draw conclusions and make inferences on the basis of explicit and implied information, with assistance. (**You might notice the following skills are addressed:** identifying "right there" details, drawing conclusions, identifying character traits.)

- According to the passage, why do some people guess that Alejandra is an art major rather than a drama major at school?
- What has made Alejandra feel more confident?
- What fact about Dr. Metcalf **best** explains why he understands the importance of food safety?
- Which conclusion about solar cookers is supported by the article?
- If the women in Nyakach, Kenya, wanted to make a solar cooker, what would they need?
- Which word **best** describes Amelia Atwater-Rhodes?

Determine the meaning of unfamiliar words by using context clues, dictionaries, and other classroom resources. (**You might notice the following skills are addressed:** using context clues to find meaning.)

- Read this sentence from the article.
The building, which tapered to a high, narrow point, had 131 stories. In this sentence, the word "tapered" means the top of the building was...
- Read this sentence from the article.
He punched out the center, and the outcome was the first hole in a doughnut. In this sentence, the word "outcome" means...
- Read this sentence from the article.
To make tools, crows cut off leaves or twigs with their beaks, shape them, and use them to probe for bugs in wood or plants. In this sentence, the word "probe" means about the same as...

Standard 2: Students will read, write, listen, and speak for **literary response and expression**.

Read, view, and interpret texts from a variety of genres. (**You might notice the following skills are addressed:** determining importance, determining sequence.)

- What had Hank's father planned to do after moving into the cabin?
- What does the cliff swallow want the **most**?

Define characteristics of different genres. (**You might notice the following skills are addressed:** identifying the genre, identifying similarities and differences.)

- How can the reader tell this passage is realistic fiction?
- This story is an example of a **folktale** because it...
- This story is **most** like...

Identify literary elements, (e.g., setting, plot, character, rhythm, and rhyme) of different genres. (**You might notice the following skills are addressed:** indentifying the character's problem, finding the setting, describing the character, determining cause and effect, inferring.)

- Where does this passage take place?
- What is the setting for most of the events in the passage?
- Which **best** describes the koala's problem in the passage?
- Stephen can **best** be described as...
- How is the koala's problem solved in the passage?
- At the beginning of the story, the birds have no feathers because...
- Which statement **best** describes why the birds are unsure about giving Pi-coo a feather?
- Which statement **best** describes how Pi-coo feels about herself at the end of the story?
- What is the setting of this story?
- Why do the townspeople cut down the trees?
- The townspeople are worried about the king's visit because he will...
- What do the first two children who own the cliff swallow promise to do?
- Which word **best** describes the sick girl's father in this story?

Identify the ways in which characters change and develop throughout a story. (**You might notice the following skills are addressed:** noticing how characters' feelings change in the passage.)

- After Martine first sees the koala, her emotions quickly change from...
- How do Hank's feelings about the wolf change from the beginning of the story to the end?

Determine the meaning of unfamiliar words by using context clues, dictionaries, and other classroom resources. (**You might notice the following skills are addressed:** using context clues to see how the character is feeling.)

- Read this sentence from the story.
After a hard day's work, he wearily searches for a cheerful gift for his young daughter, who has been at home with a fever.
The word "wearily" means that the man is...

Standard 3: Students will read, write, listen, and speak for **critical analysis and evaluation**.

Evaluate information, ideas, opinions, and themes by identifying: (**You might notice the following skills are addressed:** finding the main idea, drawing conclusions, inferring, finding the theme, determining cause and effect)

- Based on the story, why might the townspeople be considered wise?
- What is the passage **mainly** about?
- “The Owl and the Painted Bird” was **most likely** written to explain why...
- The theme of this story is **mainly** about...
- Why are Hank and his father in the mountains?
- Which statement **best** expresses the main idea of the article?
- What is the **most likely** reason the cliff swallow flies by the girl’s window every night?

Identify different perspectives, such as social, cultural, ethnic, and historical, on an issue presented in one or more than one text. (**You might notice the following skills are addressed:** comparing and contrasting.)

- How is Zhu Li’s life probably **different** from most children in the United States?

Note: the testing specifications in this document were compiled from the NYSED’s *Guide to the 2011 Grades 3-8 Testing Program in English Language Arts and Mathematics*, which can be found in its entirety at:
<http://www.p12.nysed.gov/osa/ei/ela-math-guide-11.pdf>