

CHALLENGE
TO LEAD

SREB



*MAKING
MIDDLE GRADES
WORK*

*MAKING SCHOOLS
WORK*

Getting Students Ready for College-preparatory/ Honors English:

*What Middle Grades Students
Need to Know and Be Able to Do*

Southern
Regional
Education
Board

592 10th St. N.W.
Atlanta, GA 30318
(404) 875-9211
www.sreb.org

Foreword

The Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) at its 2002 annual meeting committed to 12 regional goals designed so that SREB states can lead the nation in educational progress. One of these 12 goals specifically addresses getting middle grades students ready to do challenging high school studies:

Achievement in the middle grades for all groups of students exceeds national averages and performance gaps are closed.

In 2002, 75 percent of the nation's eighth-grade students were at or above the Basic level in reading as measured by the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP). Students in only five of 16 SREB states had a similar percentage at this level. Thirty-three percent of the nation's eighth-graders scored at or above the Proficient level. Only two SREB states had a similar percentage at that level.

In the 2002 NAEP writing assessment, 84 percent of the nation's eighth-graders were at or above the Basic level. Eighth-graders in seven SREB states scored at the same level. Twenty-seven percent scored at or above the Proficient level in the nation. This was true in eight SREB states.

Visits in the last several years to over 150 middle grades schools indicate that goals and priorities often are unclear to teachers, students and the community. While states have set content and performance standards in core academic areas, these standards now need to be translated into daily classroom work. **Identifying readiness indicators for college-preparatory/honors high school English courses is one way to establish solid middle grades classroom reading and language arts content standards.** It is also a way to guide high schools in planning and implementing catch-up courses for incoming ninth-graders.

Making Middle Grades Work (MMGW) convened a panel of teachers and experts from the Educational Testing Service (ETS) to develop a set of high school readiness indicators. Based on their objective judgments, panel members developed descriptors of the Basic, Proficient and Advanced levels of reading, writing, speaking and listening proficiency to define what students should know and be able to do to be successful in high school English courses. The panel used NAEP as a reference for reading and writing. Standards by states and national advisory groups served as references for speaking and listening. The panel used its definitions of Basic, Proficient and Advanced to determine the proficiency level for each item in the proficiency progression charts, learning activities and sample assessment items in this report. The process used was less complex than the process NAEP uses; therefore, **the panel's determinations of the proficiency levels are not to be construed as equivalent to the NAEP process.**

This report is a tool to help middle grades leaders and teachers set goals and priorities for reading and language arts that will get all students ready for high school. It is not intended to answer all curriculum-related questions or to serve as a complete teaching plan. Instead, it is designed to assist curriculum planners, principals and teachers in developing frameworks, course syllabi, lesson plans, assignments, assessments and staff development activities that will enable students to meet the demands of high school college-preparatory English courses.

High Schools That Work (HSTW) and *MMGW* are committed to assist all member schools in addressing five school-wide literacy goals that are aligned with the indicators in this report. Strategies for reaching the literacy goals are contained in an SREB publication, *Literacy Across the Curriculum: Setting and Implementing Goals for Grades Six to 12*.

This report defines a rigorous reading and language arts program in the middle grades aimed at preparing more students by the end of grade eight to perform at the Proficient and Advanced levels in reading and writing and to be competent speakers and listeners.

Gene Bottoms
Senior Vice President
Southern Regional Education Board

Why Develop Readiness Indicators for Rigorous High School English?	2
How Were the Readiness Indicators Developed?	3
How the Report Is Organized	4
How Can Educators Use this Report?	5
Performance Descriptors for Grade Eight Reading and Writing	6
Process Readiness Indicators	7
1. Reading	8
2. Writing	10
3. Speaking	12
4. Listening	13
Content-specific Readiness Indicators	14
<i>Language</i>	
Indicator 1: Develop vocabulary appropriate to reading, writing and speaking proficiency	16
<i>Reading Comprehension</i>	
Indicator 2: Summarize, paraphrase and categorize information	18
Indicator 3: Compare and contrast information, ideas and structures to clarify the meaning of various materials	20
Indicator 4: Make inferences and predictions	22
Indicator 5: Connect what is read to personal experience and the world beyond the classroom ..	24
Indicator 6: Identify and interpret literary structures, elements, devices and themes	26
Selections for Reading Proficiency Level Illustrations	28
<i>Writing</i>	
Indicator 7: Use an appropriate process to prepare to write	32
Indicator 8: Compose writing that conveys a clear main point with logical support	34
Indicator 9: Edit and revise writing for the strongest effect	36
Indicator 10: Use English language structure and grammar appropriately to communicate effectively	38
<i>Research</i>	
Indicator 11: Use research skills to locate, gather, evaluate and organize information for different purposes	48
<i>Speaking</i>	
Indicator 12: Use appropriate organization, language, voice, delivery style and visual aids to match the audience and purpose of oral presentations	52
<i>Listening</i>	
Indicator 13: Use active listening strategies to organize and respond to information presented in different formats for different purposes	54
Answers to Proficiency Level Illustrations	56

Why Develop Readiness Indicators for Rigorous High School English?

The 2001 No Child Left Behind Act and state accountability programs provide a compelling need to improve reading achievement. All states and schools are now expected to work toward getting all students to perform at the state-defined proficient level in reading. Many states also assess writing proficiency.

To reach eighth-grade proficiency and readiness for high school college-preparatory English, students need a set of intensive experiences with a wide variety of increasingly complex texts. Yet many middle grades students do not have the intensive experiences necessary for success. *MMGW* has identified eight experiences that raise students' reading achievement: reading an hour outside of school each day, reading at least 11 books annually, completing short writing assignments weekly, revising written work often to improve quality, using word-processing software, writing a major research paper, writing about how to solve mathematics problems and making oral presentations. Only 22 percent of the *MMGW* eighth-graders reported having six to eight of these experiences at the recommended level. One-third reported reading at least 10 books and 21 percent said they completed short writing assignments at least once a week. The message is clear: most middle grades students do not have the quality and quantity of experiences necessary for success in high-level high school courses.

In the 2001 middle grades follow-up study, some schools did a much better job of placing students in rigorous courses in ninth grade than did others. In the entire group of 44 schools, only 25 percent of the students enrolled in ninth-grade college-preparatory English. However, a subgroup of these schools enrolled 56 percent of students in college-preparatory English. Even with more than twice as many students enrolled in the high-level courses, there was little difference in the success rate of students (91 percent in all schools compared to 86 percent in the subgroup). The finding is clear: enrolling significantly more ninth-graders in higher-level classes has a minor impact on failure rates and increases student achievement significantly.

According to the same study, students who took the eighth-grade reading test and scored in the lowest two quartiles were about twice as likely to fail ninth-grade English if they were placed in a low-level English course rather than in a college-preparatory course. Just 20 percent of the students in the lowest two quartiles made a "D" or "F" in the college-preparatory class. Of the ninth-graders scoring in the same quartiles who were placed in low-level English, 39 percent made a "D" or "F." This shows that when students are enrolled in high-level English, they are not more likely to fail. Given quality teaching, extra time and help, even more of these students could succeed.

Language skills and competencies gained in the middle grades transfer to high school and to the world beyond. *HSTW* research shows that 72 percent of high school career/technical graduates go on for further learning within 15 months of graduation; however, only 41 percent completed college-preparatory English. In some states almost one-half of the students needed remedial English courses after high school. According to SREB's Educational Benchmarks 2000 Series, in Arkansas, Kentucky, Louisiana and Tennessee, more than half of the students entering two-year colleges needed at least one remedial course in reading, writing or mathematics.

In the SREB states where most high school seniors take the ACT, the percentage of students who scored below 19 (common standard for remedial work) ranged from 37 to 58 percent. Nationally, 44 percent of students scored below 19 in English on the ACT.¹ This calls for immediate changes in what and how students are taught English/language arts and reading in the middle grades and in high school.

Similarly, in the workplace, employers are giving high school graduates low marks in language arts skills. According to *Reality Check 2002*, 73 percent of employers give students fair or poor ratings in grammar, spelling and writing clarity.² Reading requirements have changed dramatically. For example, in 1963, auto mechanics needed to understand 5,000 pages of service manuals to repair any car on the road; today they must be able to decipher 465,000 pages of technical text — the equivalent of 250 big-city phone books!³ The conclusion is obvious: success in college-preparatory English courses in high school leads to more opportunities after high school. **High school success is not likely to occur without a correspondingly rigorous reading and language arts curriculum in the middle grades targeted to prepare students for college-preparatory English in grade nine.**

In many middle grades classrooms, teachers are unsure how to prepare students for a rigorous high school English program. There are numerous documents at the national and state levels that provide a plethora of standards and frameworks, but they give little guidance about the depth of understanding students need on essential readiness indicators. As a consequence, too many teachers repeat sixth-grade language arts in seventh and eighth grades rather than focusing on developing proficiency in these indicators.

¹ *Reducing Remedial Education: What Progress are States Making?*, Educational Benchmarks 2000 Series, SREB.

² *Reality Check 2002*, Public Agenda at www.publicagenda.org.

³ David Boesel, *Technical Literacy: Definition, Role and Measurement*, unpublished paper for SREB.

How Were the Readiness Indicators Developed?

Building a rigorous middle grades reading/language arts curriculum begins with two questions:

- **What are the essential language arts skills and concepts (Readiness Indicators) that students must master by the end of the middle grades or in a catch-up course in grade nine to be successful in a high school college-preparatory English curriculum?**
- **What are some examples of assignments and assessment items that students must know and be able to do for each of the identified Readiness Indicators?**

Answers to these two questions are based on a review of major reading and language arts curriculum documents and on the judgment of a panel of curriculum developers and expert teachers of high school English. These documents included:

- the frameworks for the reading and writing portions of the NAEP,
- the Council for Basic Education's *Standards for Excellence in Education*,
- the International Reading Association and National Council of Teachers of English's *Standards for the English Language Arts* and
- the curriculum frameworks from member states of the SREB Middle Grades Consortium and selected other states.

An analysis of curriculum frameworks and documents yielded a lengthy list of standards for middle grades reading and language arts. The expert panel selected from this list those standards representing the most essential skills and concepts for success in high school college-preparatory English. Identifying curriculum standards that are most important for high school success ensures that essential material does not fall through the cracks — either for lack of time or because it is too challenging. Panel members narrowed their selections by considering the following questions:

- What deficiencies in knowledge, skills and experiences in reading and language arts are most common for students entering high school?
- What skills, knowledge and experiences in reading and language arts separate students who enter and succeed in a rigorous high school English curriculum from those who do not?
- What skills and knowledge in reading and language arts that students should acquire in the middle grades take the most time to reteach?
- What deficiencies in knowledge and understanding are most difficult to remedy and which ones continue to plague students in later courses?

After submitting their responses, panel members met and began discussions to identify the set of essential reading and language arts skills and concepts. Over the course of several weeks of numerous telephone conferences and e-mail communications, the panel reached consensus regarding these essential skills and concepts for success in high school — the 17 Readiness Indicators in this report. Then, with the help of ETS and SREB staff, the panel developed definitions of Basic, Proficient and Advanced levels of reading performance at grade eight. (See page 6.) NAEP reading and writing performance-level descriptors and state standards for reading, writing, speaking and listening guided the panel and staff in developing the Benchmark Proficiency Progression charts for each Readiness Indicator. Panelists reviewed various assessment items, including publicly released NAEP items, and made judgments about items that best illustrated their definitions of the proficiency levels. These judgments are not to be construed as equivalent to the NAEP standards of Basic, Proficient and Advanced. The panel also created test items to supplement the publicly released examples at each proficiency level. Then panel members and other English experts reviewed the final draft of the report and offered suggestions for making it more useful to educators.

How the Report Is Organized

The report is organized around 17 Readiness Indicators separated into two major groups. **The first set of four Process Readiness Indicators represents the overarching areas of the communications arts: reading, writing, speaking and listening.** They address the quantities and frequencies of these experiences that all students should have in the middle grades. **The second set of 13 Content Readiness Indicators addresses the skills and knowledge that prepare students for college-preparatory/honors English.** These indicators are clustered as language, reading, writing, research, speaking and listening. Each Readiness Indicator is described and includes examples of how the indicator relates to high school language arts, as well as suggestions to help teachers prepare students with the necessary skills and knowledge.

A Benchmark Proficiency Progression chart listing major skills and knowledge that students should know and be able to do at each proficiency level follows each description. These charts help teachers and administrators identify what students need to master for success in high school college-preparatory English. **The intention is not to argue against teaching skills and knowledge at the Basic level, but to ensure that instruction not end there and to make clear when students are truly doing Proficient and Advanced work.**

The goal is to get most students to achieve at the Proficient and Advanced levels. Students at the Proficient level *will* be prepared for a high school college-preparatory English program. Students at the Basic level, with quality teaching, extra time and help, also can be successful in college-preparatory English courses.

Following each Benchmark Proficiency Progression chart is a list of Learning Activities and Applications that represent suggestions for Basic, Proficient and Advanced assignments. Each of the suggested activities goes beyond the traditional practice worksheets, questions at the end of chapters or academic essays. **Too often, only the best and brightest have been given the opportunity to read and**

write frequently, discuss what they have learned, develop their own meaning or make oral presentations. The suggested activities present opportunities for all students to engage in activities that help them learn to think critically and present their ideas in a variety of ways to multiple audiences. Sample assignments are written for the language arts class although they can easily be adapted to other content areas.

The section containing the 13 Content Readiness Indicators includes assessment-item examples called Proficiency Level Illustrations. Sample items show how the Readiness Indicators translate into assessment items at each proficiency level. Some reading items are taken directly from NAEP assessments and are noted. Others are modeled after NAEP items and still others were created by the panel. The samples of student writing are from the Kentucky Department of Education's Kentucky Marker Papers and the NAEP Writing Assessment. The Evaluations of how the work meets the various proficiency levels were created by the panel. In some areas, such as speaking and listening, it is impossible to re-create student work for this report. In this case, rubrics provide descriptions of student work that meets the criteria at each proficiency level.

Benchmark Proficiency Progression

*Basic

Reached by all students at some point during the instructional process. Students at this level may succeed in college-preparatory English if given enough extra help and time.

*Proficient

Reached by most students in the middle grades if they are exposed to the knowledge, material and assignments associated with it. Students at this level will succeed in college-preparatory English if they apply themselves.

*Advanced

Reached by some students by the end of the middle grades. Students meeting this level should continue to succeed at the advanced level in college-preparatory English 9 if given challenging assignments.

* These three proficiency levels are based on the categories used by the NAEP-based assessment of student progress.

How Can Educators Use this Report?

The 17 Readiness Indicators can guide curriculum planners, principals and teachers in examining what they currently teach, how they teach it and how much time they spend engaging students with these skills and knowledge. They can compare the Readiness Indicators with the topics in their local curriculum frameworks and in their teaching plans and ask these questions:

- Are these essential topics in reading and language arts given the time and depth of coverage necessary to prepare students for a high school college-preparatory English program?
- Are there other topics that are given too much attention so that topics crucial for success in high school college-preparatory English are not fully developed or not included at all?

Educators can examine current standardized test results to see which items their students are not answering correctly. This analysis and a comparison to the Readiness Indicators provide information to help them target content areas to improve achievement and prepare students for high school. The Benchmark Proficiency Progression charts help educators bring focus to the goal that all students achieve at least at the Basic level and most students at the Proficient and Advanced levels. Without a clear and consistent understanding of what does and does not meet standards, it is possible to claim that students are meeting standards when they have only the most basic skills.

The sample assessment items at each proficiency level can help curriculum planners, principals and teachers analyze how their students perform on the various indicators. Educators can gather a sample of their assessments from reading and language arts classes to determine what proportion are below the Basic level or at the Basic, Proficient or Advanced levels. **If students are not assessed in class at the Proficient level and above, then they cannot be expected to perform at these levels on high-stakes tests.**

Curriculum planners, principals and teachers can use the Learning Activities and Applications to help them evaluate student assignments. By collecting a sample of assignments around one or more of the Readiness Indicators, they can determine the levels of assignments given. For each indicator, they should ask these types of questions:

- What is the most frequent level of assignments given? What percentage of assignments is at the Basic level or below? What percentage of assignments is at the Proficient level or above?
- As a result of looking at the level of assignments, have teachers been more purposeful in giving students higher-level assignments?
- Are assignments limited to drill-type exercises that students have already mastered or are they designed to have students practice new concepts and strategies to read and write at a higher level?

Even struggling students need to be challenged by rigorous materials — especially longer and more complex texts. If students, however, are never expected to read and respond to more complex texts in class and for homework, then they cannot be expected to succeed on high-stakes assessments or to perform grade-level work. **If students are never given Proficient-level assignments or higher, then they cannot be expected to achieve at higher levels.**

Educators need to examine how each of these indicators is taught by asking the following:

- Are students assigned reading and language arts work that engages them in doing at least Proficient level work?
- Are the texts complex enough to force students to use logical reasoning and a variety of skills?
- Are students sharing their ideas with their classmates? Are they explaining their interpretations to the class? Are they conferencing with the teacher and fellow students to improve their writing?
- Are students using technology to aid them in the reading and writing process?
- Are students given “real-world” reading, writing and speaking assignments that engage and motivate them in challenging learning?

Finally, high school educators can use this report to develop assessments and scoring guides to determine the Readiness Indicators students have mastered and those they have not. Because some students will not reach the Proficient level on all indicators by the end of eighth grade, they may require a specially designed summer school program or a freshman catch-up course to improve their chances of success in college-preparatory English classes.

Students need to be challenged by a variety of interesting materials and provided the extra time and help necessary to improve their achievement. Rather than experiencing low expectations by practicing skills they have already mastered, students need to complete progressively more challenging work that helps them meet and exceed higher expectations.

Grade Eight Performance Descriptors

Reading*

Writing**

Basic

Students performing at the *Basic* level are able to:

- demonstrate understanding of explicitly stated information;
- make simple inferences and predictions;
- identify a character's emotions or recognize their cause;
- use context clues to recognize the definition of a phrase;
- use surface details from a poem to draw a logical conclusion;
- identify the reason why information is included in an article;
- recognize the purpose of a title and illustration; and
- form an opinion in response to text.

Proficient

Students performing at the *Proficient* level are able to:

- identify and summarize the main idea of a text using both explicitly and implicitly stated information;
- extend text ideas to formulate an appropriate question or make a relevant connection to real-life experience;
- use surface details to make a comparison;
- demonstrate some knowledge of literary elements and devices;
- recognize poetic imagery;
- use details to explain the meaning of a symbolic phrase; and
- provide general support from the text when discussing a title's appropriateness or expressing an opinion.

Advanced

Students performing at the *Advanced* level are able to:

- demonstrate a thorough understanding of theme, point of view and characterization by using specific ideas from across a text and by connecting ideas between two texts;
- explain the relevance of a question formulated by extending text ideas;
- support a connection between the text and real-life experience;
- derive meaning from whole texts to make overarching evaluations; and
- provide specific support when analyzing content or expressing text-based opinions.

Basic

Students performing at the *Basic* level are able to:

- demonstrate appropriate response to the task in form, content and language;
- use some supporting details;
- demonstrate organization appropriate to the task; and
- demonstrate sufficient command of spelling, grammar, punctuation and capitalization to communicate to the reader.

Proficient

Students performing at the *Proficient* level are able to:

- create an effective response to the task in form, content and language;
- express analytical, critical and/or creative thinking;
- demonstrate an awareness of the purpose and intended audience;
- have logical and observable organization appropriate to the task;
- show effective use of transitional elements;
- use sufficient elaboration to clarify and enhance the central idea;
- use language (e.g., variety of word choice and sentence structure) appropriate to the task; and
- have few errors in spelling, grammar, punctuation and capitalization that interfere with communication.

Advanced

Students performing at the *Advanced* level are able to:

- express analytical, critical and/or creative thinking;
- have well-crafted, cohesive organization appropriate to the task;
- show sophisticated use of transitional elements;
- use varied and elaborated supporting details in appropriate, extended response;
- begin to develop a personal style or voice;
- demonstrate precise and varied use of language;
- use a variety of strategies such as analogies, illustrations, examples, anecdotes and figurative language; and
- enhance meaning through control of spelling, grammar, punctuation and capitalization.

* These performance-level descriptors are an adaptation of the grade eight reading performance standards of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).

** These performance-level descriptors are the grade eight writing performance standards of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).

Process Readiness Indicators:

The quantity, variety and frequency of materials to be read, written, spoken and listened to by students

The four Process Readiness Indicators address the broad categories of language arts and form the basis of effective communication. They are the skills necessary both for any language arts class and for success in other classes and the world beyond school. This set of indicators defines the quantity and variety of materials to be read, written, spoken and listened to by students. They focus on the amount of student effort required to make gains in achievement levels. As students are expected to apply reading, writing, speaking and listening strategies to a range of increasingly complex and stimulating materials and topics, they develop the skills necessary to reach proficiency and beyond. **The achievement gap will continue to grow if less is expected of some students while more is required of others.**

Students begin with the foundational skills of reading. To become fluent readers, students need enhanced practice in reading and comprehending various types of materials, from novels to biographies, from short stories to how-to manuals, from poetry to reference books. Middle grades students move from simple narrative texts to those requiring greater comprehension skills — to texts that are more difficult and contain more complex organizational patterns. Reading well independently is the hallmark of an educated person. To help students reach that goal of being independent competent readers, expect them to read approximately one million words a year, roughly equivalent to 25 books. While teachers require students to read in every class, the English/language arts class provides the basis for about 40 percent of the required reading each year.

Students learn to write effectively by writing daily for many different audiences and purposes under the direction of skilled teachers. Communicating effectively on paper requires students to organize their thoughts and share them with larger audiences. In addition to writing-to-demonstrate-learning, students also will prepare real-world writing to communicate with others outside the classroom. Students practice this skill every day; some of the writing is short, such as taking notes, and other writing is part of a process to produce a longer piece, such as a research paper or proposal. To become proficient, students write more often and to higher standards. **Expect students to produce a short paper (one to three pages) for grading each week.**

Process Readiness Indicators:

1. **Reading:** Read the equivalent of 10-12 books of various types and lengths each year.
2. **Writing:** Write every day, including a paper to be graded each week.
3. **Speaking:** Speak and present information frequently in a variety of formats.
4. **Listening:** Listen to presentations frequently for a variety of purposes.

Once thoughts are organized, they can be presented verbally. Organizing and presenting an effective message for a specific purpose is a skill many middle grades students lack. To prepare students for a rigorous high school English curriculum, have them express themselves frequently in informal settings, such as organized group discussions, as well as in formal situations, such as persuasive speeches. Teachers provide guidance for students to develop these skills in addition to frequent opportunities requiring students to improve their skills.

Students need to acquire a variety of good listening behaviors — they spend more time listening than speaking in the classroom. Listening skills are critical for developing good study skills and habits.

Reading, writing, speaking and listening skills promote higher-level thinking and are invaluable tools in developing and communicating an in-depth understanding of the content in all subject areas. These skills are essential to solidify understanding and increase retention of content in all courses so students can advance to at least the Proficient level.

The skills and concepts listed in the Benchmark Proficiency Progress charts in this section are general in nature. Each of these four Process Readiness Indicators is defined in further detail in the content indicator section later in this report.

1 Read the equivalent of 10-12 books of various types and lengths each year.

In language arts classes, middle grades students are expected to read the equivalent of 10 to 12 books per year representing a variety of materials. While there is no hard and fast rule for the number of pages that constitute a book, 100 pages of technical or instructional text is generally acceptable as equivalent to a book. The chart below illustrates the amount of each type required to reach the goal of 10 to 12 books.

To accomplish this goal, teachers expect all students to complete a summer reading assignment — at least one or two books and a written piece related to their reading. Students might select from an approved list or read assigned books. Students who read over the summer have higher achievement than those who “take a vacation” from reading.

Middle grades English teachers are responsible for engaging all students — not just the honors students — in reading a range of materials beyond the great works of literature. The English class is the primary place where students will learn about novels, poetry and drama because of their impact on language development. Also, students read nonfiction materials similar to what they will encounter in the real world. Newspapers, magazines, essays, historical accounts and other media such as the Internet require specialized reading skills that must be taught. All of these materials enrich students’ experience and provide them with skills they need to be successful in school and in the world beyond.

Different reading strategies are required for nonfiction text, for instance, than for poetry. As students read nonfiction materials, they learn to identify organizational patterns through various kinds of graphic representations, to summarize and paraphrase through practice in identifying main and supporting ideas and to learn effective ways of determining the meaning of technical terms through context clues. In fiction, students can use graphic organizers to chart plots, char-

acter studies to understand motivation and relationships and language study to appreciate an author’s style. Extensive suggestions for teaching reading strategies are included in SREB’s guide, *Literacy Across the Curriculum: Setting and Implementing Goals for Grades Six Through 12*.

There are benefits in reading both full-length texts and shorter pieces. Struggling readers lack endurance — they rarely read an entire book. Building that endurance is critical in helping students get ready for high school.

Middle grades teachers need to avoid diluting the reading curriculum for struggling readers by limiting them to short pieces, selections at lower grade levels or selections with limited vocabulary. Struggling readers will never become good readers unless they read widely and extensively. Teachers need to provide these students with strategies and supports to help them make sense of grade-level text. For instance, good readers pose questions to themselves as they read. To help students learn how to do this, teachers can model “think-alouds” by sharing aloud their thoughts as they read. Helping students learn to synthesize meaning only happens when teachers regularly assign paired texts and ask higher-order questions about relationships. Struggling readers rarely visualize what they read; teachers plan activities to help students “see” what the author means until those activities develop into strategies for the reader.

Students need to read for both enjoyment and for learning. Teachers select some materials simply because they are fun and are engaging for students. Other texts that have stood the test of time and are recognized for their literary merit can help young readers understand more about the world and about the structure of good writing.

Type of material	Amount per year
Novels	6
Short stories	15
Nonfiction texts	4
Poems	20-30
Technical reading (e.g., instructional manuals)	5
Magazine or newspaper articles	1 per week

Benchmark Proficiency Progression

Basic

- Write book reports on two high-interest, young adult novels.
- Read one biography and complete a time line on the person's life.
- Read aloud three narrative poems in class.
- Read a newspaper or magazine article monthly.
- Read a book during the summer and answer questions on the content.

Proficient

- Select, read and reflect independently on two novels and one non-fiction text each semester.
- Report on the content of a current events article each week.
- Read one novel with the class each semester.
- Read nonfiction texts as part of a research project.
- Read two books during the summer and write short summaries.

Advanced

- Read extensively on a topic (e.g., space travel, baseball) by selecting works of all genres and synthesizing information from all reading.
- Respond to a technical journal article each week.
- Read three books during the summer and write reviews.

Learning Activities and Applications

- Students select a novel from a list of grade-appropriate choices. After reading the novel, they choose one way to present a brief book talk that includes a plot summary and their opinion of the book. **(Basic)**
- Students deliver “electronic book talks” on books they read. Using PowerPoint or video, students give a brief plot summary and critique the author's style, literary elements and audience appeal. **(Proficient)**
- Students select a topic (e.g., war, moving to a new home, getting along with parents) and read different works to see how it is treated. The reading includes a short story, poem, novel, magazine article and play. They create a presentation, using excerpts from each, that includes a critique of which genres are most useful for various purposes and how styles change by type. **(Advanced)**

2 Write every day, including a paper to be graded each week.

For students to become proficient communicators, they need daily practice in all forms of writing and a weekly opportunity to develop a short paper to be graded. Teachers provide activities that allow students to write in different formats, for multiple audiences and for various purposes. Students need to learn the process for writing and when particular types of writing are more appropriate.

Students will participate in writing activities each day, although they may not submit a paper each day to be graded. Many longer papers will take several days or even weeks to complete. However, teachers will expect students to submit at least one paper each week for grading. These papers may result from an extended project and have gone through many revisions. They may also be shorter pieces that demonstrate what students have learned that week. Teachers can collect work on an unannounced schedule so that students are prepared any day to submit writing and can have students select their “best” writing to be graded periodically. Checklists and scoring guides reduce the amount of time required for grading.

The chart below illustrates the type and amount of writing necessary for students to be prepared for college-preparatory level English/language arts in grade nine.

Middle grades English/language arts teachers may need to spend time reviewing the basic writing process (pre-writing, drafting and revision), even though this pattern now is taught to elementary students. Students will learn to write in additional forms, develop a stronger sense of audience and purpose and apply the writing process more efficiently and effectively.

To develop middle grades students’ thinking and writing skills, English/language arts teachers will address three kinds of writing in their classes: **writing-to-learn, writing-to-demonstrate-learning and authentic or real-world writing.** Language arts teachers will assist other teachers in having students do all three types of writing in all classes, thus advancing students’ skills to become clearer thinkers and master the content of all classes.

- *Writing-to-learn* such as double-entry journaling, is specifically for students’ own benefit. It helps them explore topics in a variety of ways that lead to deeper understanding. All teachers will expect some form of this writing daily.
- *Writing-to-demonstrate-learning* allows students to present their understanding of what they have been studying in forms such as academic essays and open-response questions. It is a tool to help teachers assess students’ knowledge, identify weaknesses in students’ mastery of topics studied and revise instruction to address identified needs. Writing-to-demonstrate-learning is expected at least once each week in every class. This graded writing usually is one to three pages long.
- *Authentic writing* allows students to write pieces targeted to real-world audiences for specific purposes. It is designed to give students experience in the kinds of writing they are most likely to encounter in the work world and in other life roles. Some writing in the classroom will be “like” writing that students encounter in the real world. While it is preferable that students actually produce writing that is published to authentic audiences for real purposes, sometimes classroom constraints require teachers to simulate such writing by providing situations similar to what students will encounter as adults without the final publication phase. The goal is to have middle grades students complete at least one authentic writing assignment each month in their English/language arts classes and at least four annually in each of their other classes. It is the primary responsibility of the English/language arts teacher to engage students in the process for developing these pieces and for developing their skills. These pieces are graded after they have been revised several times.

Type of writing	Amount per year
Response to reading, listening or viewing	Daily
Short paper of one to three pages	Weekly
Longer paper (over five pages), including a variety of fiction, persuasive, technical, practical and reflective pieces	Monthly
Research paper with appropriate documentation (at least five pages)	Annually

By the time they leave the middle grades, students understand that authentic or real-world writing is a process including the steps of planning, composing and rewriting. Language arts teachers provide practice in using the writing process to prepare written outlines of compositions, identify missing information and ways of obtaining it, use a set of criteria for editing and revising work, and integrate and incorporate suggestions from several sources into a final draft.

Some types of authentic or real-world writing that students will use the writing process to prepare include

- short stories, research papers, book reviews, articles and letters in language arts;
- essays, research reports and position papers in social studies;

- laboratory reports, summaries of journal articles, research reports and descriptions of processes in science;
- research reports and extended project descriptions in mathematics; and
- presentations on techniques, methods and innovations in technology and in family and consumer science.

Before they leave the middle grades, all students can use a computer to draft, format and revise written compositions; create tables and graphs to enhance compositions; develop multi-slide presentations; and search electronic databases, including the Internet.

Benchmark Proficiency Progression

Basic

- Complete short statements of what they have learned daily.
- Write a paragraph demonstrating to the teacher that the student has learned a concept.
- Write a poem, newspaper article, editorial or other real-world writing in response to a teacher prompt.
- Research and write a report on a teacher-assigned topic.

Proficient

- Develop a response journal with daily responses to writing prompts.
- Write a five-paragraph essay on a teacher-assigned topic with the teacher as audience.
- Use the writing process to develop real-world writing (e.g., how-to articles, letters, proposals, memoirs).
- Write a research paper on a topic of choice with appropriate documentation.

Advanced

- Keep a writer's notebook with a variety of types of writing and pre-writing activities.
- Write a five-paragraph theme that connects new learning to previous learning or the world beyond the classroom.
- Use the writing process and research to develop authentic writing.
- Write a research paper on a self-selected topic with appropriate documentation that connects to learning beyond the classroom.

Learning Activities and Applications

- Students read a patterned poem (e.g., haiku, limerick, ballad, sonnet) and write a poem in the same pattern. **(Basic)**
- Students identify something they would like to change about their school (e.g., starting times, mascots, course offerings). They explore how and why other schools have done what they propose. They then prepare a proposal and cover letter to present to the school council, school board or other decision-makers. **(Proficient)**
- Students research the occupations of their family members back two or three generations. They trace the kind of work done and how family members prepared for the occupations. They then project forward by identifying a career in which they are interested, develop questions about how well that career suits them, interview a professional in that field, read a novel or short story about someone in that profession and research the requirements for entering the field. They write a first-person narrative about the profession and how well suited they are to that career. **(Advanced)**

3 Speak and present information frequently in a variety of formats.

Middle grades students need the opportunity to deliver individual presentations. These performances require an understanding of audience, purpose and content. Further, they require students to know how they present themselves — their language choices, mannerisms and posture.

The chart below illustrates an amount of each type of speaking that students do in the English/language arts class so that they learn how to speak and present information in a variety of formats.

Speaking gets less attention — even in the English/language arts classroom — than reading and writing. Sometimes English/language arts teachers do not allow students to make oral presentations because they fear that students may have stage fright or that it simply takes too much time. When students are frightened to speak before their peers, less intimidating assignments such as choral reading or

creative dramatics can help. As they build confidence and skills, additional performances can be added.

One of the most effective ways of learning new concepts is to organize and participate in small group discussions. The give-and-take of informed and intellectual conversations is a learned skill. Having students participate in organized group discussions every week and regularly serve as facilitators will improve learning in all disciplines.

While teachers often have students take turns reading roles in one or two plays each year, rarely do they give students an opportunity to assume the character and interact with other actors. Assuming the role of another character enhances the student's ability to understand how other people react in situations, increases empathy and improves appreciation of language.

Type of speaking	Amount per year
Individual speech or presentation	3-5 per year
Reading aloud or acting in a play	2-3 per year
Leading discussion or delivering instructions	monthly
Group discussion	weekly

Benchmark Proficiency Progression

Basic

- Read aloud a role in a play, using a clear, loud voice.
- Present a demonstration of a common task.
- Participate in a group discussion of something that has been read or viewed.

Proficient

- Recite poems, sections of speeches or dramatic soliloquies expressively to enhance meaning.
- Deliver an informative or persuasive talk to classmates.
- Participate in a Socratic seminar.

Advanced

- Perform a role in a play, assuming appropriate character traits.
- Prepare and deliver a speech tailored for a specific purpose and audience.
- Lead a group to consensus on a common concern.

Learning Activities and Applications

- Students select a common everyday task (e.g., preparing a meal, planting a window box) and demonstrate it to the class. **(Basic)**
- After compiling a list of favorite poems, students present a coffeehouse performance of their favorite poems for parents. Creating a “set,” using appropriate props and providing refreshments can enhance the student recital. **(Proficient)**
- In small groups, students write dramatic adaptations of Aesop's fables. They design costumes and sets to take their presentations to a local elementary school. Each writer also performs. **(Advanced)**

4 Listen to presentations frequently for a variety of purposes.

In their language arts classes, middle grades students participate in a variety of listening activities. Students develop different listening skills — from responding to presentations to using information gained from listening as a study guide. The chart below illustrates an amount of each type of listening activity recommended for students in the English/language arts class.

English/language arts teachers can structure learning activities to address both the listening and speaking proficiencies at the same time. As students perform, their classmates become critical listeners and, with rubrics or listening guides, they provide feedback to others.

High school students frequently take notes then organize them into a useful format for studying. English/language arts teachers help students learn to organize their notes in ways to be more efficient and effective learners and to work with other teachers so that students use these skills as a way to advance mastery of the content of all classes.

Type of listening	Amount per year
Respond to live or recorded presentations.	3-5 per year
Take notes.	weekly
Organize information from listening.	weekly

Benchmark Proficiency Progression

Basic

- Follow simple oral directions.
- Use a graphic organizer to take notes from presentations.

Proficient

- Write reviews of presentations based on teacher-given criteria.
- Use a structured method (e.g., two-column notes) to organize information from presentations into main and supporting ideas.

Advanced

- Write a critique of all aspects of a performance.
- Take notes daily and combine them into a study guide for a week or unit.

Learning Activities and Applications

- After attending a live theatre performance or watching a video, students write to the actors, producer or set designer about their responses to the performance. **(Basic)**
- Each student takes a turn at being the “scribe for the day” for class. In the daily notes, students identify the main topic, any important explanations given by the teacher and the assignment. **(Basic)**
- Small groups of students take notes from each day’s activities for each unit of study in a class. Based on the content of the unit, they select appropriate categories for their notes (e.g., rules, examples, textbook references, definitions). **(Proficient)**
- Each student researches some aspect of a novel (e.g., time period, setting, author’s background) being studied by the whole class. Students make three-to-five-minute presentations on their research. Students take notes from the presentations and prepare a test for their classmates on the important ideas from the presentations. **(Advanced)**

Content-specific Readiness Indicators: What students need to know and be able to do

These 13 Content-specific Readiness Indicators define what the *MMGW* initiative believes are the essential content to prepare students for college-preparatory/honors English. The indicators are arranged by topics. However, the order of topics in the list is not a teaching sequence, nor is it a ranking of topics from most important to least important. The topics are not discrete or sequential and are not taught one at a time. An assignment or assessment item can address more than one indicator at a time so as to advance skills in more than one skill area.

Content-specific Readiness Indicators

Language

1. Develop vocabulary appropriate to reading, writing and speaking proficiency.

Reading Comprehension

2. Summarize, paraphrase and categorize information.
3. Compare and contrast information, ideas and structures to clarify meaning of various materials.
4. Make inferences and predictions.
5. Connect what is read to personal experience and the world beyond the classroom.
6. Identify and interpret literary structures, elements, devices and themes.

Writing

7. Use an appropriate process to prepare to write.
8. Compose writing that conveys a clear main point with logical support.
9. Edit and revise writing for the strongest effect.
10. Use English language structure and grammar appropriately to communicate effectively.

Research

11. Use research skills to locate, gather, evaluate and organize information for different purposes.

Speaking

12. Use appropriate organization, language, voice, delivery style and visual aids to match the audience and purpose of oral presentations.

Listening

13. Use active listening strategies to organize and respond to information presented in different formats for different purposes.

This section of the report contains the following for each indicator:

- explanation of how the indicator relates to success in college-preparatory/honors English,
- guidance for teaching the indicator,
- Benchmark Proficiency Progression chart,
- proficiency level Learning Activities and Applications and
- Proficiency Level Illustrations of test items or rubrics.

Most of the Proficiency Level Illustrations are from two outside sources, but some were written by the panel for this report. In most cases, the items from the outside sources appear as originally published, but in some cases, discussions of how the items were scored have been modified to match the indicators. The two outside sources used are

- The National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP), Eighth Grade Writing Assessment, 1998, National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education, <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard>; and
- Marker Paper Training Materials, Division of Curriculum Development, Kentucky Department of Education, Frankfort, Kentucky, 2001.

It should be noted that all reading and language questions are asked within the context of a passage that students would not have seen before. All suggested questions would not be asked for that one passage, but are given as examples of questions that could be asked.

1 Language

Develop vocabulary appropriate to reading, writing and speaking proficiency.

Students' success in high school is dependent upon having developed habits and skills to monitor their understanding of key words and terms to ensure comprehension of what they read and to provide clarity in their written work. Vocabulary is important not only for receiving messages, but also for sending them. Simply put, if students cannot understand the words they read, they cannot comprehend the meaning of a passage. If they do not have the language to express their ideas, the thoughts will be lost.

Essential skills to identify and clarify unfamiliar words and phrases include looking up words in a dictionary; examining how the word or phrase might connect to

known words and phrases; looking for familiar roots, suffixes and prefixes; and breaking apart long sentences into component clauses to isolate unfamiliar words in a particular context.

Students need frequent assignments and critiques of their work to help them learn how to use clear and concise language to enhance the message they are sending through writing or speaking and to help them develop habits of finding appropriate synonyms when writing or speaking.

Benchmark Proficiency Progression

Basic

- Use context clues to determine meaning.
- Use a dictionary or glossary to determine meaning, spelling or pronunciation.
- Recognize how a word is used in a phrase or sentence.
- Use correct language to express an idea.

Proficient

- Use common prefixes, suffixes and roots to determine meaning.
- Select appropriate synonyms for the context.
- Use diacritical marks to correctly pronounce unfamiliar words.

Advanced

- Use knowledge of word origins to determine meaning.
- Recognize and use words to elicit specific responses.
- Identify how common phrases (e.g., oxymoron, hyperbole) alter the meaning of language.

Learning Activities and Applications

- Students develop their own glossary of substitutes for common words in their learning logs. On a chart that lists common words in their writing (e.g., “very,” “said,” “went,” “then”), students identify synonyms located during their reading. For each synonym, students write a sentence showing the word used correctly for the context. **(Basic)**
- Students use a highlighter to mark all common verbs (e.g., “said,” “walked,” “sat”) in a piece of their writing. With a revision partner, students then discuss which “vivid verbs” would provide a better description of the action and mood. The writer makes the final choice about the word selected, based on the message and style. Similar activities can be completed for adverbs (e.g., “very”) and adjectives (e.g., “pretty”). **(Proficient)**
- Students listen to a political speech, making a list of words or phrases that are exaggerated or intended to cause listeners to react. They substitute synonyms that are not as inflammatory (e.g., “said” for “ranted,” “walk” for “stride”) and analyze how the vocabulary changes impact meaning. **(Advanced)**

Proficiency Level Illustrations for Content Indicator 1

The following sample test items refer to the selections on pages 28-31. Unless otherwise indicated, items were either adapted from publicly-released NAEP assessment items or written by the panel.

“A Pair of Silk Stockings”

1-1 Use a dictionary to write a definition of “porte-monnaie.”

“Letter to the School Board”

1-2 In the first sentence, the writer uses the word “rule.” Identify the part of speech that this word serves in this sentence.

- (A) verb (B) noun (C) adjective (D) conjunction

Basic**“A Pair of Silk Stockings”**

1-3 Based on the context in the first paragraph, which of the following words would be an appropriate synonym for “porte-monnaie?”

- (A) shoe (B) purse (C) bureau (D) bank

“Letter to the School Board”

1-4 The author describes the flower garden as “beautiful” in the fourth paragraph. Identify two synonyms that could be more descriptive.

Proficient**“A Pair of Silk Stockings”**

1-5 At the end of the story, Mrs. Sommers goes into the theatre and sees women “who had gone there to *kill time*.” Explain how this choice of words gives a different impression than if the author had chosen to say, “who had gone there to *enjoy the play*.”

“Letter to the School Board”

1-6 In the last paragraph, the author says that teachers “need to be put in their places.” Explain what this phrase means.

Advanced

2 Reading Comprehension

Summarize, paraphrase and categorize information.

Summarizing, paraphrasing and categorizing information are ways that students demonstrate comprehension of something they have read or heard. By the end of the middle grades, students are able to work with more complex materials such as those with multiple key ideas or ideas implied rather than explicitly stated. These are essential skills for succeeding in college-preparatory courses in high school.

Middle grades students need experiences in which they take key ideas and put them into their own words. They need practice in classifying information from various parts of a text into logical categories using graphic organizers or outlines. Proficient readers and listeners can also “read between the lines” to identify key ideas that have not been explicitly stated. Teachers need to provide students with plenty of varied practice in these skills.

Benchmark Proficiency Progression

Basic

- Identify explicitly stated main and supporting points.
- Restate the topic sentence of a paragraph in their own words.
- Categorize writing by format and purpose (e.g., letter to inform, essay to entertain, editorial to persuade).

Proficient

- Outline main and supporting points, using both explicit and implicit information.
- Paraphrase an author’s quote to make the same point.
- Use graphic organizers to summarize or organize information.

Advanced

- Write a one-paragraph summary of a two- to three-page article.
- Identify relevant but unanswered questions.
- Determine categories and classify information within an article.

Learning Activities and Applications

- After students write editorials about issues that affect them (e.g., dress codes, graduation requirements), other students develop an index card summary, identifying and paraphrasing the main idea and key arguments. **(Basic)**
- Students write a position paper that includes the views of three famous people on an issue. After locating the quotes through Internet research, students paraphrase each to include in their papers. **(Proficient)**
- Within larger research assignments, students gather and review descriptions of Web sites generated from an Internet search. For each site, they write a one-sentence summary of information on the site and then use a graphic organizer to categorize it as irrelevant, informative, speculative, reliable and/or unreliable. Students use their lists to assist in their research assignments. **(Proficient)**
- Students role play as advisers to prominent politicians. For a given issue, they identify and read at least three news articles they judge would be of interest to their bosses. They write a one-paragraph briefing paper for each article, providing key information and any actions they think their bosses should take. Students share their briefing papers with the class. **(Advanced)**

Proficiency Level Illustrations for Content Indicator 2

The following sample test items refer to the selections on pages 28-31. Unless otherwise indicated, items were either adapted from publicly-released NAEP assessment items or written by the panel.

“A Pair of Silk Stockings”

2-1 From the choices below, select the one that Mrs. Sommers did not do in the story. Then indicate the order of the remaining items according to the order in which she did them:

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="radio"/> A admires her foot and ankle | <input type="radio"/> D makes plans to spend the money on her children |
| <input type="radio"/> B has tea with a woman she meets at the theater | <input type="radio"/> E eats lunch |
| <input type="radio"/> C buys a pair of silk stockings | |

2-2 In your own words write the main idea of paragraph five (the one that begins, “Mrs. Sommers was one who knew the value of bargains...”)

“Letter to the School Board”

2-3 What is the author’s purpose for writing the letter? (NAEP)

2-4 List two arguments the author makes to support the main point. (NAEP)

Basic

“A Pair of Silk Stockings”

2-5 Use a comparison/contrast matrix to contrast Mrs. Sommers’s priorities on this afternoon.

2-6 Choose the letter of the answer that best completes the statement and explain why, using evidence from the text.

This story takes place in:

- A a large department store
- B a large department store and in several separate buildings nearby
- C different cities

“Letter to the School Board”

2-7 In your own words paraphrase the following: “If you spend all spring planting a beautiful flower garden, how do you feel when you see a weed among your roses?” Then use the paraphrase to make the same point the writer makes.

Proficient

“A Pair of Silk Stockings”

2-8 Choose two words (with different meanings) to describe Mrs. Sommers’s character. For each, provide evidence from the text to support your description.

2-9 List three different emotions, moods or states of mind Mrs. Sommers has at different points throughout the story. Provide evidence from the text to support your choices.

“Letter to the School Board”

2-10 After the school board members receive this letter, what are two possible questions they might ask the writer that are not answered in the letter?

Advanced

3 Reading Comprehension

Compare and contrast information, ideas and structures to clarify the meaning of various materials.

Once students leave the middle grades, they are expected to use multiple texts to find information, compare ideas and styles of others and to develop their own opinions. They need practice in recognizing different purposes for writing and how those purposes impact both what is said and how it is presented. As readers mature, they need assignments to help them identify different types of structures and organizational patterns they will encounter. Tables and charts are embedded in texts and provide essential information to understanding the processes and ideas presented. Even fiction becomes more complex with flashbacks, multiple narrators and subplots.

As middle grades students face more difficult materials that mix fact and opinion such as editorials or advertisements, they need frequent assignments and assessments to help them become more discerning readers of ideas in order to determine whether the claims are valid. While students leaving the middle grades may not be able to identify all instances of bias, they can at least recognize the potential for it, the type of works where it is likely and how to look for key words or phrases that indicate it.

If students are to understand the author's purpose and ideas, they need practice in identifying whether presented information is relevant. Students develop the skill of identifying relevant and irrelevant information by completing exercises relating to brief paragraphs or passages. Students also need experiences in looking skeptically at longer and more complex pieces in which authors sometimes embed information that is not relevant to their primary purpose. This skill enhances a student's own writing when they recognize which points, examples or evidence are relevant to their main ideas.

In the middle grades, students compare structures and styles in different literary works. A poem and short story, for instance, may contain the same ideas or themes, but the structures will be very different. Some authors such as Mark Twain or Ernest Hemingway have distinct styles that can be identified and compared with other writers. To be successful in high school, students need to learn to recognize these styles and analyze how the style impacts the message.

Benchmark Proficiency Progression

Basic

- Identify paragraphs or sentences answering specific questions.
- Answer questions about material contained in charts, graphs and tables.
- Make general statements about the relevance of material to specific tasks or questions.
- Differentiate between statements of fact and opinion.
- Identify similarities and differences between pieces in general terms.
- Use graphic organizers to identify structure, audience and content of various materials.
- Identify the author's point of view.

Proficient

- Use titles, headings, subheadings, footnotes and sidebars to create an outline of main ideas and supporting details.
- Recognize irrelevant information in compositions.
- Differentiate between fact and opinion in materials where they are mixed.
- Analyze how authors appeal to specific audiences through detail selection.
- Identify obvious bias.
- Compare organizational patterns of various materials.
- Identify how different formats (e.g., brochure, ad) and media (e.g., print, television) impact an author's message.

Advanced

- Explain how information in sidebars (e.g., tables, illustrations, biographical sketches) relates to information in the text.
- Locate original source material in endnotes and bibliographic citations.
- Distinguish between degrees of relevance when reading.
- Identify situations with a potential for bias and provide evidence of whether any actually exists.
- Identify when the validity of facts should be questioned.
- Compare points of view in multiple passages.

Learning Activities and Applications

- Students read an editorial and a news article on the same topic. Students determine whether the pieces include the same facts. They use a Venn diagram or comparison/contrast matrix to compare the structure, content and style of the pieces. **(Basic)**
- Students find two opposing position statements or editorials on an environmental topic in newspapers, magazines or on Web pages of interest groups. They make lists of factual statements and compare how each author selects and interprets facts differently. **(Proficient)**
- Students read an opinion piece or letter to the editor written by a famous person or a representative of a well-known group. Students research the author’s or group’s background and earlier positions on similar issues and discuss how they are reflected in the piece they read. **(Advanced)**

Proficiency Level Illustrations for Content Indicator 3

The following sample test items refer to the selections on pages 28-31. Unless otherwise indicated, items were either adapted from publicly-released NAEP assessment items or written by the panel.

“A Pair of Silk Stockings”

- 3-1 Develop a short profile of Mrs. Sommers by choosing one or two sentences from the story to describe each of the following: physical appearance, personal history, family and personality. Explain what each says about Mrs. Sommers.

“Letter to the School Board”

- 3-2 Would this letter be a good source of information about how the students in the school feel about their uniforms? Why or why not? (NAEP)
- 3-3 In the letter, identify a passage that represents an opinion. Briefly state what makes this an opinion. (NAEP)

Basic

“A Pair of Silk Stockings”

- 3-4 Authors choose titles to appeal to their readers. Why is “A Pair of Silk Stockings” a better title for the story than “A Pair of Polished, Pointed-tip Boots” or “A Pair of Kid Gloves?”

“Letter to the School Board”

- 3-5 In the second-to-last paragraph (the one that begins with, “The other problem...”) identify a statement you feel does not support the author’s argument and explain your reasoning. (NAEP)

Proficient

“A Pair of Silk Stockings”

- 3-6 Describe the events in paragraph 14 (where Mrs. Sommers buys the boots and that begins, “She was fastidious...”) from the point of view of the shoe salesman.

“Letter to the School Board”

- 3-7 The author claims to have conducted “scientific research.” Is this research reliable? Explain. (NAEP)

Advanced

4 Reading Comprehension

Make inferences and predictions.

As students enter college-preparatory English in high school, they need to be able to read beyond what is literally stated in the text. When reading essays or persuasive pieces, they are able to identify the author's point of view or unstated beliefs from evidence in the piece. In fiction, they can provide fairly detailed descriptions of characters and settings that go beyond directly stated information. The student can make inferences about a character's personality, for instance, by looking at a description of how the character dresses and predicting what point the author might make next or what a character might do.

Questioning is the teacher's most important tool in helping students learn to infer and predict. Teachers cannot be satisfied with answers that are directly stated in the text, rather they help students answer questions such as

- Why did the author say that?
- How do you know what will happen next?
- Why did the character behave that way?
- What does the writer believe about this topic?
- What would this author likely say about a related topic?
- What were the clues to solving this mystery?
- What would this character likely to do in another situation?

Benchmark Proficiency Progression

Basic

- Identify an author's stated position.
- Make simple inferences about events and actions that have already occurred, characters' backgrounds and setting.
- Predict the next action in a sequence.

Proficient

- Use evidence from text to infer an author's unstated position.
- Identify cause and effect in fiction and nonfiction.
- Predict a character's behavior in a new situation, using details from the text.
- Formulate an appropriate question about causes or effects of actions.

Advanced

- With evidence from a nonfiction piece, predict an author's viewpoint on a related topic.
- Describe the influence of an author's background upon his/her work.
- Recognize allusions.

Learning Activities and Applications

- Students write comic strips to reflect a story they have read. The final panel of the strip should go beyond the end of the story. **(Basic)**
- Students write a sequel to a short story or narrative poem with the same main character. **(Proficient)**
- After reading several articles by the same columnist, students predict the columnist's positions on other related issues. They write an article on one of those issues from the columnist's viewpoint and then verify their predictions with other material. **(Advanced)**

Proficiency Level Illustrations for Content Indicator 4

The following sample test items refer to the selections on pages 28-31. Unless otherwise indicated, items were either adapted from publicly-released NAEP assessment items or written by the panel.

“A Pair of Silk Stockings”

4-1 What does the following sentence imply about Mrs. Sommers and the events of her life?

“The neighbors sometimes talked of certain ‘better days’ that little Mrs. Sommers had known before she had ever thought of being Mrs. Sommers.”

“Letter to the School Board”

4-2 Is the author a

- (A) teacher? (B) student? (C) parent? (D) member of the community?

Use evidence from the letter to explain your answer.

Basic

“A Pair of Silk Stockings”

4-3 Imagine Mrs. Sommers arriving home later that same day. How will she feel about the purchases she made? Use evidence from the text to support your answer.

4-4 If you could ask Mrs. Sommers one question about her actions this afternoon, what would it be?

“Letter to the School Board”

4-5 Do you think the author likes the teachers in the school? Explain your answer using evidence from the letter. (NAEP)

Proficient

“A Pair of Silk Stockings”

4-6 The author of this story was considered a proponent of women’s rights. How does this story show that she thought women had the right to make decisions for themselves?

“Letter to the School Board”

4-7 Do you think the author would support a dress code for teachers instead of a uniform requirement? Explain your answer. (NAEP)

Advanced

5 Reading Comprehension

Connect what is read to personal experience and the world beyond the classroom.

As students enter a college-preparatory high school English program, they need to be able to connect and apply what they read to something beyond the text and to something relevant in their lives or in the world. Students can, for instance, read about the decline of an ancient civilization and compare that process to a modern society. They can connect a character's reactions to a new school year to how they and their classmates have reacted.

Using paired texts is one strategy teachers can use to build this skill. For example, *The Red Badge of Courage* may be compared to Lincoln's "Gettysburg Address" for a fuller understanding of war's impact and then compared to news reports and feature stories about modern war victims' experiences.

Teachers can help students learn how to examine persuasive text. Making connections from the appeal to real life helps students identify the credibility of advertising or a political point of view.

Benchmark Proficiency Progression

Basic

- Identify basic similarities between plot, characterization and theme in a story and real-life events.
- Complete a graphic organizer comparing a written description with a visual (e.g., picture, drawing, video).
- Identify the target audience for a piece of persuasive writing and its type of appeal.

Proficient

- Compare a character's motivation to a real-life situation.
- Relate information from an article to a real-life purpose.
- Explain why a piece of persuasive writing (e.g., ad, brochure) appeals to certain audiences.

Advanced

- Analyze how changing the plot, characters or setting of a story would make it appeal to a different audience.
- Contrast how reports from different sources relate to the student's own experience.
- Analyze persuasive techniques.

Learning Activities and Applications

- Students role play casting directors for a movie based on a book or story they have recently read. For the role of one of the main characters, they recommend a friend, relative or celebrity. They base their choice on similarities to the character and provide reasons for their recommendations to share with the class. **(Basic)**
- Students read a variety of advertisements for a particular product aimed at different audiences. They compare the language, details and design of the ads, then write an essay identifying the differences and speculating on the writer's reasons for the changes. **(Proficient)**
- Each student reads an outstanding political speech in history (e.g., Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "I Have a Dream," Chief Joseph's "I Will Fight No More"). After an analysis of the techniques, language and style, they use the same techniques to write a speech on a different topic. **(Advanced)**

Proficiency Level Illustrations for Content Indicator 5

The following sample test items refer to the selections on pages 28-31. Unless otherwise indicated, items were either adapted from publicly-released NAEP assessment items or written by the panel.

“A Pair of Silk Stockings”

- 5-1 The things Mrs. Sommers ends up buying are very different from the things she planned to buy. Imagine that the story is about you and not Mrs. Sommers (and that it takes place in the present day and the amount of money is \$250, not \$12). What would be on your original list? Imagine also that you have a similar change of heart about how to spend the money. What would you buy?

“Letter to the School Board”

- 5-2 If students in your school wear uniforms, how are their feelings about them similar to those expressed by the author? If students in your school do not wear uniforms and a new rule were passed requiring them to do so, would they react the same way the students in the author’s school have? Explain.

Basic

“A Pair of Silk Stockings”

- 5-3 By buying new stockings, boots and gloves, Mrs. Sommers was able to feel a sense of belonging in situations where she might otherwise feel as if everyone were watching her. If you were to walk into a 12th-grade English class at your high school, what would it take for you to fit in the way Mrs. Sommers did? Which would be more difficult: Mrs. Sommers fitting in with “the well-dressed multitude” or you fitting in with a group of high school seniors? Why?

“Letter to the School Board”

- 5-4 Explain why or why not this letter appeals to the school board.

Proficient

“A Pair of Silk Stockings”

- 5-5 If you were writing this story and focused on a young father as the main character, how might it be different? What things might he do or buy that would be different? Explain your answer.
- 5-6 In the United States today, some economists are worried that the economy will be harmed by too many people spending more money than they can afford. Based on the description of Mrs. Sommers and her behavior in the story, do you think she is a careful consumer or a careless one? Explain your choice.

“Letter to the School Board”

- 5-7 Do you think the author was successful in the attempt to get the school board members to change this policy? Were the arguments and techniques successful?

Advanced

6 Reading Comprehension

Identify and interpret literary structures, elements, devices and themes.

Students need to develop the ability to identify literary elements such as characterization, theme, setting, symbolism, plot and language in the works they read. To be ready for college-preparatory high school English, students need experience in describing the influence these aspects have on the overall work and in identifying cases where authors' choices are unique or significant. They need assignments enabling them to understand the concept of symbolism, recognize situations where it is likely and be able to interpret cases where the underlying meaning is fairly transparent.

By the end of eighth grade, students can analyze classical literature using the same techniques that they have used to analyze popular adolescent fiction. For instance, students can examine how a character reacts to others' help in solving an environmental problem in Carl Hiassen's *Hoot* before considering similar problems in *The Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*.

Benchmark Proficiency Progression

Basic

- Identify the characteristics of literary genres.
- Use explicitly stated information to identify the causes of characters' emotions.
- Identify theme and point of view.

Proficient

- Use graphic organizers to identify literary elements.
- Identify literary devices (e.g., figurative language, dialogue).
- Use details to explain the meaning of symbolic phrases.
- Describe themes of short stories and novels.

Advanced

- Identify and describe characterization methods.
- Describe the impact of setting and characters on plot and theme.
- Identify ways in which authors use language to appeal to audiences.
- Describe abstract themes and ideas.

Learning Activities and Applications

- After reading several types of fiction (e.g., short story, play, narrative poem), students compare the characteristics of each in a Venn diagram. Categories might include language, length, characters, plot and structure. **(Basic)**
- Students read poems with highly symbolic language such as William Carlos Williams's "The Red Wheelbarrow" or Langston Hughes's "From Mother to Son." Students identify the key symbols, present illustrations and explain what they represent in a PowerPoint presentation, "What Symbols Really Mean." **(Proficient)**
- Students role play movie producers and directors making a film based on a book or story they have read. The directors write proposals to change the setting of the film while maintaining the original theme. The producers respond to the proposals by evaluating how the different proposals impact the plot and theme. **(Advanced)**

Proficiency Level Illustrations for Content Indicator 6

The following sample test items refer to the short story on pages 28-30. Unless otherwise indicated, items were either adapted from publicly-released NAEP assessment items or written by the panel. There are no questions for “Letter to the School Board” because it is not a literary selection.

“A Pair of Silk Stockings”

6-1 List two reasons why you would classify this selection as a short story.

6-2 The last sentence describes Mrs. Sommers’s wish as “a powerful longing that the cable car would never stop anywhere, but go on and on with her forever.” Why did Mrs. Sommers feel this way?

Basic

6-3 Identify two similes in the story. For one of the similes you identify, explain why it is appropriate for the situation.

6-4 What is the theme of this selection?

Proficient

6-5 Twice the author describes the main character as “little Mrs. Sommers.” Mrs. Sommers’s stocking size and the description of her face at the end of the story also indicate that she is a small person. Why do you feel the author chooses to emphasize the fact that Mrs. Sommers is small?

6-6 Do you think the author intends the reader to like Mrs. Sommers, dislike her or have no particular feelings about her? Support your answer with evidence from the text.

Advanced

Selections for Reading Proficiency Level Illustrations

The following two selections are used as a basis for the reading questions following Reading Comprehension Indicators 2-6. The first selection is “A Pair of Silk Stockings,” a short story by Kate Chopin that was selected by the panel. The second is a persuasive letter by an anonymous writer that was used on a NAEP assessment.

A Pair of Silk Stockings by Kate Chopin

Little Mrs. Sommers one day found herself the unexpected possessor of fifteen dollars. It seemed to her a very large amount of money, and the way in which it stuffed and bulged her worn old porte-monnaie gave her a feeling of importance such as she had not enjoyed for years.

The question of investment was one that occupied her greatly. For a day or two she walked about apparently in a dreamy state, but really absorbed in speculation and calculation. She did not wish to act hastily, to do anything she might afterward regret. But it was during the still hours of the night when she lay awake revolving plans in her mind that she seemed to see her way clearly toward a proper and judicious use of the money.

A dollar or two should be added to the price usually paid for Janie’s shoes, which would insure their lasting an appreciable time longer than they usually did. She would buy so and so many yards of percale for new shirt waists for the boys and Janie and Mag. She had intended to make the old ones do by skilful patching. Mag should have another gown. She had seen some beautiful patterns, veritable bargains in the shop windows. And still there would be left enough for new stockings — two pairs apiece — and what darning that would save for a while! She would get caps for the boys and sailor-hats for the girls. The vision of her little brood looking fresh and dainty and new for once in their lives excited her and made her restless and wakeful with anticipation.

The neighbors sometimes talked of certain “better days” that little Mrs. Sommers had known before she had ever thought of being Mrs. Sommers. She herself indulged in no such morbid retrospection. She had no time — no second of time to devote to the past. The needs of the present absorbed her every faculty. A vision of the future like some dim, gaunt monster sometimes appalled her, but luckily to-morrow never comes.

Mrs. Sommers was one who knew the value of bargains; who could stand for hours making her way inch by inch toward the desired object that was selling below cost. She could elbow her way if need be; she had learned to clutch a piece of goods and hold it and stick to it with persistence and determination till her turn came to be served, no matter when it came.

But that day she was a little faint and tired. She had swallowed a light luncheon — no! when she came to think of it, between getting the children fed and the place righted, and preparing herself for the shopping bout, she had actually forgotten to eat any luncheon at all!

She sat herself upon a revolving stool before a counter that was comparatively deserted, trying to gather strength and courage to charge through an eager multitude that was besieging breastworks of shirting and figured lawn. An all-gone limp feeling had come over her and she rested her hand aimlessly upon the counter. She wore no gloves. By degrees she grew aware that her hand had encountered something very soothing, very pleasant to touch. She looked down to see that her hand lay upon a pile of silk stockings.

A placard near by announced that they had been reduced in price from two dollars and fifty cents to one dollar and ninety-eight cents; and a young girl who stood behind the counter asked her if she wished to examine their line of silk hosiery. She smiled, just as if she had been asked to inspect a tiara of diamonds with the ultimate view of purchasing it. But she went on feeling the soft, sheeny luxurious things — with both hands now, holding them up to see them glisten, and to feel them glide serpent-like through her fingers.

Two hectic blotches came suddenly into her pale cheeks. She looked up at the girl.

A Pair of Silk Stockings by Kate Chopin continued

“Do you think there are any eights-and-a-half among these?”

There were any number of eights-and-a-half. In fact, there were more of that size than any other. Here was a light-blue pair; there were some lavender, some all black and various shades of tan and gray. Mrs. Sommers selected a black pair and looked at them very long and closely. She pretended to be examining their texture, which the clerk assured her was excellent.

“A dollar and ninety-eight cents,” she mused aloud. “Well, I’ll take this pair.” She handed the girl a five-dollar bill and waited for her change and for her parcel. What a very small parcel it was! It seemed lost in the depths of her shabby old shopping-bag.

Mrs. Sommers after that did not move in the direction of the bargain counter. She took the elevator, which carried her to an upper floor into the region of the ladies’ waiting-rooms. Here, in a retired corner, she exchanged her cotton stockings for the new silk ones which she had just bought. She was not going through any acute mental process or reasoning with herself, nor was she striving to explain to her satisfaction the motive of her action. She was not thinking at all. She seemed for the time to be taking a rest from that laborious and fatiguing function and to have abandoned herself to some mechanical impulse that directed her actions and freed her of responsibility.

How good was the touch of the raw silk to her flesh! She felt like lying back in the cushioned chair and reveling for a while in the luxury of it. She did for a little while. Then she replaced her shoes, rolled the cotton stockings together and thrust them into her bag. After doing this she crossed straight over to the shoe department and took her seat to be fitted.

She was fastidious. The clerk could not make her out; he could not reconcile her shoes with her stockings, and she was not too easily pleased. She held back her skirts and turned her feet one way and her head another way as she glanced down at the polished, pointed-tipped boots. Her foot and ankle looked very pretty. She could not realize

that they belonged to her and were a part of herself. She wanted an excellent and stylish fit, she told the young fellow who served her, and she did not mind the difference of a dollar or two more in the price so long as she got what she desired.

It was a long time since Mrs. Sommers had been fitted with gloves. On rare occasions when she had bought a pair they were always “bargains,” so cheap that it would have been preposterous and unreasonable to have expected them to be fitted to the hand.

Now she rested her elbow on the cushion of the glove counter, and a pretty, pleasant young creature, delicate and deft of touch, drew a long-wristed “kid” over Mrs. Sommers’s hand. She smoothed it down over the wrist and buttoned it neatly, and both lost themselves for a second or two in admiring contemplation of the little symmetrical gloved hand. But there were other places where money might be spent.

There were books and magazines piled up in the window of a stall a few paces down the street. Mrs. Sommers bought two high-priced magazines such as she had been accustomed to read in the days when she had been accustomed to other pleasant things. She carried them without wrapping. As well as she could she lifted her skirts at the crossings. Her stockings and boots and well fitting gloves had worked marvels in her bearing — had given her a feeling of assurance, a sense of belonging to the well-dressed multitude.

She was very hungry. Another time she would have stilled the cravings for food until reaching her own home, where she would have brewed herself a cup of tea and taken a snack of anything that was available. But the impulse that was guiding her would not suffer her to entertain any such thought.

There was a restaurant at the corner. She had never entered its doors; from the outside she had sometimes caught glimpses of spotless damask and shining crystal, and soft-stepping waiters serving people of fashion.

A Pair of Silk Stockings by Kate Chopin continued

When she entered her appearance created no surprise, no consternation, as she had half feared it might. She seated herself at a small table alone, and an attentive waiter at once approached to take her order. She did not want a profusion; she craved a nice and tasty bite — a half dozen blue-points, a plump chop with cress, a something sweet — a creme-frappee, for instance; a glass of Rhine wine, and after all a small cup of black coffee.

While waiting to be served she removed her gloves very leisurely and laid them beside her. Then she picked up a magazine and glanced through it, cutting the pages with a blunt edge of her knife. It was all very agreeable. The damask was even more spotless than it had seemed through the window, and the crystal more sparkling. There were quiet ladies and gentlemen, who did not notice her, lunching at the small tables like her own. A soft, pleasing strain of music could be heard, and a gentle breeze, was blowing through the window. She tasted a bite, and she read a word or two, and she sipped the amber wine and wiggled her toes in the silk stockings. The price of it made no difference. She counted the money out to the waiter and left an extra coin on his tray, whereupon he bowed before her as before a princess of royal blood.

There was still money in her purse, and her next temptation presented itself in the shape of a matinee poster.

It was a little later when she entered the theatre, the play had begun and the house seemed to her to be packed. But there were vacant seats here and there, and into one of them she was ushered, between brilliantly dressed women who had gone there to kill time and eat candy and display their gaudy attire. There were many others who were there solely for the play and acting. It is safe to say there was no one present who bore quite the attitude which Mrs. Sommers did to her surroundings. She gathered in the whole — stage and players and people in one wide impression, and absorbed it and enjoyed it. She laughed at the comedy and wept — she and the gaudy woman next to her wept over the tragedy. And they talked a little together over it. And the gaudy woman wiped her eyes and sniffled on a tiny square of filmy, perfumed lace and passed little Mrs. Sommers her box of candy.

The play was over, the music ceased, the crowd filed out. It was like a dream ended. People scattered in all directions. Mrs. Sommers went to the corner and waited for the cable car.

A man with keen eyes, who sat opposite to her, seemed to like the study of her small, pale face. It puzzled him to decipher what he saw there. In truth, he saw nothing — unless he were wizard enough to detect a poignant wish, a powerful longing that the cable car would never stop anywhere, but go on and on with her forever.

Letter to the School Board

Dear School Board Member,

It has been one year since your rule requiring students to wear uniforms was started. At first, my friends and I didn't like it, but now we don't mind. We miss being able to choose our clothes and wearing clothes that express who we are, but the uniforms don't look so bad and we don't have to spend any time thinking about what to wear.

The problem is that not everyone in the school wears uniforms. Yes, there are still some people in the school who wear what they like. Some spend a lot of time and money on clothes, some compete with each other about who looks best, but most of them don't dress well. And some even make fun of those of us who do wear uniforms. The people I'm talking about are the teachers.

Last Tuesday my friends and I did some scientific research. We looked at the way 20 teachers were dressed. Six teachers had outfits that were too casual, such as jeans, T-shirts, and sweatshirts. Four had outfits that were too dressy or were wearing too much makeup. (How does that make the other teachers feel?) That leaves ten teachers who weren't too casual or too dressy, but even they had issues. A few were sloppy, like shirts hanging out, and many didn't match. For instance, some teachers wore sneakers with dress pants and others didn't know about how to match colors and patterns. But the worst problem is that they don't have any style. I haven't done this, but I think if we looked in a yearbook from 10 or 15 years ago, the teachers would look the same. Same clothes, same hairstyles.

Why is this a problem, you ask? First, because of school spirit. Now, with the student uniforms, students are doing something together. No one wanted to say it at first, but on the first day that everyone wore uniforms, it looked really good. You could tell things were different. If you are a teacher, I think that when you see a class full of students wearing uniforms it gives you confidence. "If they all wear the uniforms, then they care about the school rules, and if they care about the rules, then they might care about studying too." But if you are a student, how does it make you feel when you and your friends make an effort to show pride and you have to look at a teacher who wears the same brown wool blazer with two buttons missing and a torn patch in the elbow EVERY DAY, no matter what else he is wearing and no matter what season it is?! If you spend all spring planting a beautiful flower garden, how do you feel when you see a weed among your roses?

The other problem is now because we have to wear uniforms and the teachers don't, it gives some of them an attitude. Yes, they are adults and we aren't, but just because we wear uniforms doesn't mean we are soldiers or workers they can order around. There is one teacher at the school who always makes fun of us because of our uniforms. "You'll have to give me the name of your tailor." "If you don't behave I'll call a uniform inspection." Or, "Is my car ready?" (He thinks our uniforms look like the uniforms at Qwik Lube.) This teacher also gives too much homework and gives too many D's and F's. There are already so many things that teachers can do that we can't, like smoking. If it's good for us, it's good for them, I say.

Don't get me wrong, we like our teachers. But many need help when it comes to how to dress and some need to be put in their places. So, as the School Board, you should require them to wear uniforms, just like the students. Even if they object, remember, we objected last year and you made the rule anyway.

7 Writing

Use an appropriate process to prepare to write.

Succeeding in college-preparatory English in high school requires students to use writing as a means of planning and organizing their thoughts and as a way of learning in all classes. In the middle grades, students need to progress from finding short answers to questions to planning how they will gather information to explore extended topics. They can ask the right questions, gather information from an appropriate set of sources and organize it as they prepare to write. They need opportunities to learn how to frame their messages to address particular audiences, what style to use, and which organizational pattern and what language are most appropriate.

Too often teachers give writing assignments without giving students assistance in preparing to write. English/language arts teachers help students learn the process good writers use to develop their work by providing tools such as graphic organizers and by holding students accountable for completing this preparatory stage. In the periodic NAEP writing assessment, evidence of pre-writing is collected in addition to the final product.

It is important to challenge students to apply the writing process to a variety of writing assignments requiring different styles and language such as news articles, letters, proposals, editorials, essays, laboratory reports and research papers. It is also important for students to learn how to tailor their writing to a given purpose.

Benchmark Proficiency Progression

Basic

- Write general statements about the purpose of a composition and the points to be made.
- Use graphic organizers for planning writing.
- Make a list of questions requiring outside information and possible sources.
- Recognize different formats (e.g., essay, report, letter, memo) and select the appropriate format for a particular task.
- Demonstrate awareness that writing is intended to be read by an audience.

Proficient

- Develop a thesis statement (or main point) and supporting evidence or points.
- Select and use appropriate graphic organizers for pre-writing.
- Select information to support an argument or make a point.
- Recognize different styles (e.g., direct, subtle, poetic, persuasive, objective) and make appropriate choices for a situation.
- Recognize different types of language (e.g., formal, technical, conversational) and make appropriate choices for a situation.
- Analyze and address a specific audience.

Advanced

- Develop a written plan for writing a longer paper that lists the major steps and gives a time line.
- Make choices of language and details to address a particular audience and purpose.
- Develop a personal style or voice.
- Use a variety of strategies such as analogies, illustrations, examples, anecdotes and figurative language.

Learning Activities and Applications

- Before writing, students use the acronym RAFT to set the plan for their writing. They determine their Role, Audience, Format and Topic. Students should be specific in their identification. For example, instead of identifying the audience as “students,” they should use “freshmen” or “students at my school.” (**Basic**)
- After reading several articles on a current events topic, students prepare to write position papers about their own opinions for specific audiences that might not share their views. For instance, a local manufacturing plant manager may have different views on water pollution or a parent may have different views on curfews. Students role play different viewpoints and identify how their key arguments might be phrased to address a particular target audience. (**Proficient**)
- Students create a new product or service to sell and design an advertising campaign that includes a variety of strategies appropriate to different audiences. Students may sell the product by comparing it to others (analogies), explaining how it has worked for someone (anecdotes) or giving ways it can be used (examples). Students make presentations that explain which techniques they used and why they selected those techniques as the most appropriate. (**Advanced**)

Most aspects of the pre-writing process cannot be evaluated through a finished product alone. Teachers often have students document their pre-writing process through submitting their brainstorming and organizational papers. A sample rubric for this indicator follows.

Rubric for Content Indicator 7

Pre-Writing

Criteria	Proficiency Levels		
	Basic	Proficient	Advanced
Setting a Purpose	General statement identifies the purpose and main ideas of the paper.	Thesis statement is correctly stated and supported by a list of points to be made.	Proposal includes a thesis statement, supporting points and a plan to complete the paper.
Audience Analysis	Statement identifies intended audience.	Statement identifies audience and lists traits of that audience.	Statement identifies language and details to address a particular audience and purpose.
Gathering Information	List of questions identifies information needed for the paper.	List of questions identifies information needed and resources to find the answers.	Plan identifies the types of information needed and the potential sources for the information.
Organization of Information	A graphic organizer is completed.	Appropriate graphic organizers are selected and used. Information to support an argument or make a point is selected.	A variety of examples and information to support the main points are identified. An organizational plan with an outline or appropriate graphic organizer is developed.

8 Writing

Compose writing that conveys a clear main point with logical support.

Being able to do challenging work in high school requires developing students' abilities to reason and present their thoughts in a logical manner. Students need assignments that require them to state their points as directly as possible and use a wide variety of information to support them. Whether they are preparing letters, research reports or essays, good writers help their readers by making points clear. Students need encouragement to experiment with more indirect and creative ways of making points such as gradually leading a reader to the main point or using symbolism and metaphors. They also need experiences in using word processing or desktop publishing software to develop and enhance their writing.

By the time students leave the middle grades, they need to recognize and use various techniques for presenting ideas and information. This can begin by having students create compositions and presentations with very clear structures such as "five-paragraph" essays. As they progress, they need to learn to use other organizational patterns that are not as explicit. Students' development in this area is supported by assignments that engage them in reading and analyzing works that use a variety of organizational structures.

Benchmark Proficiency Progression

Basic

- Write a paragraph conveying a single thought, supported by details.
- State the main point and supporting details.
- Demonstrate a simple organizational pattern appropriate to the task.
- Use obvious transition words such as next, first and last.
- Use word processing software to create, save and re-open documents; cut, copy and paste text; and check spelling and grammar.

Proficient

- Write multi-paragraph pieces focusing on a single topic and purpose.
- Develop a thesis statement with supporting evidence or points.
- Use a variety of appropriate information (e.g., outside evidence, personal experience, logical reasoning) to support the main point.
- Use a logical organization (e.g., time, importance) to convey the desired message.
- Show obvious and effective uses of transitional elements (clearly stated references to preceding, ideas, sentences or paragraphs).
- Use word processing software to create headings, subheadings and simple tables in the manuscript.

Advanced

- Write multi-paragraph pieces focusing on a single purpose and targeted toward specific audiences.
- Address logical counter-arguments to the thesis statement.
- Use varied approaches to make points.
- Use varied organizational strategies appropriately and effectively.
- Show subtle and sophisticated uses of transitional elements that move the reader through the text without obvious signposts.
- Use desktop publishing software to create a newsletter or other publication requiring layout of text and graphics, including basic tables and spreadsheets.

Learning Activities and Applications

- Students write and publish a children’s book relating an historical event or scientific concept. **(Basic)**
- Students research why a particular person or place has been important to their community. Using their research, they compose editorials that support an awards ceremony. Each editorial begins with a clear thesis that identifies the significance of the proposed honoree and provides strong supporting evidence such as anecdotes, statistics, quotes and testimonials. **(Proficient)**
- After gathering data through a survey, students develop a proposal to address a school or community concern (e.g., lunch menus, class schedules, bus schedules). The proposal should include tables of survey results and proposed changes. **(Proficient)**
- In pairs, students write “point-counterpoint” editorial columns. The paired pieces present both sides of a current issue and include a *USA TODAY*-style graphic that demonstrates a key point. **(Advanced)**

Note: Proficiency Level Illustrations and Evaluations for Content Indicator 8 are on pages 40-47.

9 Writing

Edit and revise writing for the strongest effect.

Success in high school college-preparatory English requires that students have the skills to evaluate their own writing. They need assignments that require them to revise their work, not with just grammar, spelling and punctuation in mind, but to present their ideas more clearly for a targeted audience.

At the middle grades level, there is a balanced focus on editing and revising. Students learn to focus on audience needs through experiences causing them to look beyond editing to become revisers by changing order, eliminating extraneous details, adding descriptive language and refining sentence structure.

Students develop as revisers and editors by having experiences that cause them to practice these skills within the context of their own writing. Teachers provide many opportunities and much guidance for students to re-visit their own writing, rather than just using editing worksheets. Seeing teachers revise their own work on an overhead transparency, for example, provides a model of how writers re-think their work. Peer revision groups help students talk through their concerns about getting the message “just right” for their audience.

Benchmark Proficiency Progression

Basic

- Use a dictionary to find correct spelling, capitalization and hyphenation for words.
- Use a thesaurus to find synonyms to aid rewriting.
- Use word processing software to check spelling and grammar.
- Use revision guides to review their own and others' work.

Proficient

- Identify and correct grade-appropriate mistakes in spelling, grammar and punctuation.
- Integrate suggestions from various sources to improve writing, (e.g., clarifying meaning, adding details, reordering or re-sequencing topics, strengthening themes, drawing conclusions).

Advanced

- Use words that enhance the impact of the writing.
- Self-evaluate compositions using a rubric to address logic, clarity, strength of argument and mechanics.

Learning Activities and Applications

- After writing a description of a person or place based on a picture, students work with a partner to ensure that the best descriptive words are used. They highlight each adjective and then use a thesaurus to find the most precise word for the concept (e.g., synonyms for big can range from colossal to prominent to important). Students then revise their writing by inserting the most precise words. **(Basic)**
- Students sit in the “author’s chair” to invite revision suggestions. Students read drafts of their writing and respond to questions and suggestions from their classmates by clarifying meaning, adding details, reordering sequence or strengthening introductions and conclusions. **(Proficient)**
- Students brainstorm resolutions to the points of difficulty identified in a piece by their peers. They might respond to such questions as: “Do you understand what Minnie looks like?” “Does the transition between these two paragraphs work?” “Is there another kind of example that would work better here?” **(Proficient)**
- “After students are assigned to write pieces in a specific genre (e.g., editorials, memoirs, business proposals), they read several models of that type. Using these models, the class generates the characteristics of a quality piece. After converting the characteristics into a rubric, students use the rubric and exemplars to revise their own writing. **(Advanced)**

The final paper is the best indicator of whether students have continued to revise their papers until they are ready for publication. However, teachers will want to evaluate the revision process. One way teachers evaluate revision and editing is by having students submit evidence of multiple drafts. The rubric below provides guidance on evaluating a revision process in which students make multiple revisions.

Rubric for Content Indicator 9

Editing and Revising

Criteria	Proficiency Levels		
	Basic	Proficient	Advanced
Organization	Arrows indicate how paragraphs could be re-organized.	Transition words are added.	Marks indicate that ideas have been re-organized for clarity and smooth flow.
Language	Most passive verbs and inexact pronouns have substitutes.	Vivid and precise adjectives and adverbs have been added.	Precise language is substituted to make specific points.
Voice/Tone	Paper is corrected to be in the same tense and person.	Paper shows signs of revision for style.	Revisions indicate choices of consistent tone or voice.
Format	Corrections are made to format so that it fits the main features (e.g., letter, brochure).	Corrections show that the format is correct.	Formatting shows the paper has been customized for audience and purpose (e.g., adding charts, boldface print).
Response to Peer Review	Paper shows where suggestions were made.	Paper shows check marks to indicate where changes were made in response to corrections.	Student has notes about suggested revisions and how they were addressed.

10 *Writing*

Use English language structure and grammar appropriately to communicate effectively.

In the middle grades, students learn appropriate grammar, punctuation, capitalization and spelling rules and are given many opportunities to apply them in all types of writing and speaking situations. Middle grades instruction prepares them for clear and effective communication that includes strong sentences, organized paragraphs and application of grammar rules.

Recognizing that little writing, even when professionally produced, is perfect, the primary concern in the middle grades is that mistakes in grammar, punctuation, capitalization and spelling not interfere with the meaning of student work. It is important that students be required to correct their work to reflect mastery of the fundamental points of grammar, such as writing in complete sentences, capitalization and spelling. The fact that students may be considered “bad spellers” does not excuse numerous spelling errors, especially in work that students have the opportunity to edit and revise.

The common but faulty remedy for students who struggle with grammar or spelling is to require more drill-and-practice sheets, rather than contextual writing. While it is appropriate to have students learn and practice such activities as capitalizing proper nouns, these activities in isolation have shown little positive correlation with applying those skills in writing. To learn the appropriate rules and practices, students need numerous opportunities to apply them in speaking and writing.

Nothing can really replace proofreading actual writing. Often, students rely on spelling- or grammar-check features of software programs. These programs are worthwhile tools that can help writers identify simple errors in copy such as misspelled words, subject-verb disagreement or misplaced punctuation. While these programs frequently have assisted writers to produce correctly written pieces, they need to be used with an understanding of the basic rules of writing. No spell-check program can identify a correctly-spelled word in the wrong context or a word that is so badly spelled that the program cannot offer suggestions. Grammar features call for even more caution. Students learn to use these tools as supplements, not authorities. English/language arts teachers can help students learn not to merely accept the program’s first suggestion, but to make decisions based on a thorough reading and editing.

Benchmark Proficiency Progression

Basic

- Write complete sentences.
- Write paragraphs in the same tense.
- Demonstrate sufficient command of spelling, grammar, punctuation and capitalization so that the reader, with only minor effort, can understand the writer’s intent.
- Use standard English.

Proficient

- Use correct and varied sentence types and structures.
- Use parallel structure (e.g., tense, number).
- Have few errors in spelling, grammar, punctuation and capitalization.
- Identify and use correct homonyms (their/there) and apostrophes (its/it’s).
- Modify language (e.g., slang, formal) for the situation.

Advanced

- Use punctuation marks (e.g., colons, semi-colons) to provide a variety of sentence structures appropriate to the writing.
- Produce writing with no errors that interfere with the reader’s comprehension.
- Select and use elements for the greatest effect (e.g., fragments, dialect, slang).

Learning Activities and Applications

- Students interview each other about an experience. Each writes a narrative of his/her partner's experience making sure that it is told in the correct tense, using complete sentences and correct spelling and punctuation. **(Basic)**
- Students learn to use a variety of sentence structures through sentence-combining activities. Two, three or four short sentences are shown to the entire class. Students combine the ideas to create one sentence. With more practice, students can be instructed to combine sentences to fit particular patterns such as introductory clauses, appositives or compound/complex sentences. **(Proficient)**
- Students transcribe a recorded conversation between middle grades students, using appropriate punctuation and spelling. Students will then “translate” the conversation into standard English. They then analyze when it would be appropriate to use the different forms of the same conversation in their writing or speaking. **(Advanced)**
- Students select a scene from a “classic” book or play they have read (e.g., *Romeo and Juliet*, *Gulliver's Travels*) and “translate” it into modern-day English. They use some quotes from the original material, correctly punctuated, and include a variety of sentence elements. **(Advanced)**

Note: Proficiency Level Illustrations and Evaluations for Content Indicator 10 are on pages 40-47.

Proficiency Level Illustrations and Evaluations for Writing Content Indicators 8 and 10

The four sets of Proficiency Level Illustrations on pages 40, 42, 44 and 46 are from two sources. The first two are taken from the Kentucky Department of Education's set of marker papers used to illustrate grade-level work in writing. **Evaluations follow each sample of student writing explaining how it meets the proficiency levels of Writing Content Readiness Indicators 8 and 10. These evaluations are adapted from Kentucky's proficiency-level discussions — for Novice, Apprentice, Proficient and Distinguished levels. No prompts exist for these student papers.**

The second two sets of student writing samples are taken from the 1998 NAEP writing assessment. The Evaluations at each proficiency level are adapted from the NAEP Scorer's Commentary for the sample of student writing. An individual paper may have characteristics of more than one proficiency level and these examples are noted. It is important to note that students who wrote the Kentucky marker papers had extended time to compose and revise their work and may have had assistance in the revision process. In comparison, students taking the NAEP writing assessments only had 20 minutes to plan, draft and revise their compositions and had no assistance.

It is important to establish proficiency expectations for both on-demand, timed writing and for pieces developed over time. One difficulty in using timed work to illustrate proficiency is that the time limit may have restricted the quality of some students' work. Furthermore, very brief compositions may not provide enough material to evaluate student proficiency in grammar, spelling, punctuation and capitalization. Evaluations will reflect these differences when appropriate.

Although these samples are presented as completed products, students were engaged in pre-writing and revision activities for each. Because examples of these processes are not available, Evaluations only address aspects that are evident in the finished products. See the rubrics on pages 33 and 37 for possible evaluation criteria for the processes described in the Writing Content Readiness Indicators 7 and 9.

Illustration A of Student Writing: Editorial*

How Old Do You Have to Be to See Blood?

There has been much debate over the subject of V.G.V. (video game violence), yet none ever taken seriously. Blood, gore, and violent fighting are found in almost every popular game. But that doesn't mean it's right!

Parents should be more aware of what they buy their kids, and stores that carry games could help too. A violent game wouldn't "hurt" a kid, but could alter a child's thinking on how to solve everyday personal problems and make him/her lean more toward violence as a solution.

Example:

Wrestling moves are extremely popular, and known by kids around the world. Some know them and even practice them. So picture it! A kid is being made fun of; everyone is laughing at him. He doesn't know what to do. Another kid steps up, and calls him a name. He's so mad. All he can think of is getting that kid back. So what does he do? He tries what Nash did to Hogan on the game he played the night before, Clothesline!!!

Or, two kids are roughhousing around, and one makes a clumsy attempt of the limb-breaking move off of "Mortal Kombat". A careless move like this could be fatal.

All I'm saying is more concern should be concentrated on the welfare of video game playing for children. According to Scope magazine, about 70% of video game fans and players are under the age of 18. This is the usual age limit of the most violent games, yet kids much younger play the same sort of gory games. I have a few suggestions on what could be done.

- First** — The age recommendation on labels should be enlarged. Something as important as this should not be barely noticeable.
- Second** — Stores should start a policy which would keep kids under the age limit from buying a game that has an overage rating.
- Third** — Parents should keep up-to-date with the games that are being sold on the market. Their child or children could be playing something totally out of character from what they want them playing.

In conclusion, this could be stopped if parents, game industries, and stores that carry games would wise up! Remember this for the future; the next time you go to buy a game, please, read the label. You never know what you're going to get!

* Kentucky Department of Education's set of marker papers (*No prompt exists for this student paper.*)

Proficiency Level Evaluations for Illustration A

Content Readiness Indicator 8:
Compose writing that conveys a clear main point with logical support.

This paper meets some criteria for the **Basic** level because it:

- uses a format appropriate for task;
- presents the main point, supporting examples, suggested remedies and concluding statement in logical fashion that is easy to understand; and
- states two points clearly (that video game violence is harmful and that steps can be taken to reduce young children’s exposure to it) and supports the first with examples and the second with specific recommendations.

Content Readiness Indicator 10:
Use English language structure and grammar appropriately to communicate effectively.

This paper meets some criteria for the **Basic** level because it:

- words are spelled correctly and
- it uses complete sentences.

Basic

This paper meets some criteria for the **Proficient** level because it uses

- direct style to make points and intensity of feelings behind them clear;
- transitional phrases to connect ideas; and
- different types of evidence to support arguments (hypothetical examples and facts gained from research).

This paper meets some criteria for the **Proficient** level because it:

- uses a variety of verbs such as “alter” and “roughhousing” and
- contains no spelling or capitalization errors and no glaring errors in grammar and punctuation.

Proficient

A composition on the same topic at the **Advanced*** level would:

- use less conversational language (“All I’m saying is…” and, “...this could be stopped if parents, game industries, and stores that carry games would wise up!”);
- organize ideas effectively within paragraphs;
- cite research more specific to the point (e.g., that media violence has a harmful influence on children); and
- acknowledge and address likely criticisms and possible shortcomings of recommendations (e.g., that larger warnings would make games even more attractive or that overly violent video games are not appropriate for anyone).

A composition on the same topic at the **Advanced*** level would:

- use more varied word selection to appeal to the adult audience being addressed (e.g., instead of “a kid is being made fun of,” “classmates are ridiculing another student”) and
- not be so dependent upon exclamation points and rely on language to make points.

Advanced

* These Evaluations were written by the Panel.

Illustration B of Student Writing: Memoir*

Typical Sisters

“Beep! Beep!” my play plastic cash register squealed as my sister pulled cans of green beans, corn, and everything else we took out of the kitchen cabinets over the scanner. When her five turns to be the “check out woman” as we referred to it was over, I would scream with delight, “It’s my turn! It’s my turn!”

With a disgusted, evil, like grin on her face she would reply, “I don’t feel like playing anymore!” And as little kids do, I would run and get my mom. Mom would make her play until my turns were over and the whole time she would call me, “Whinny baby!” or “tattle tail!”

We played many more games, such as dentist and house. Of course when we played house, guess who was the mom all of the time; Ashley, go figure! One time while we were playing house, she wrapped me up in a blue, white, and pink striped knit blanket and carried me around with a little bitty plastic baby bottle in my mouth. She sat me on the record player and said, “Don’t move! I’ll be right back!”

Being the naïve little kid I was, I layed there, waiting. Every once in a while I’d raise up to see if she was coming. I had been abandoned! After laying there for a while, I got up and started searching for her. When I found her, she was in the living room with Mom and Dad, watching TV. I confronted her in an impolite way, “Why didn’t you come back!” I shouted.

Her simple reply was, “I forgot!” To this day, I still don’t believe that she “forgot.” My theory is, she got tired of playing and she accidentally-on-purpose left me lying there.

When I became a little older, and not so gullible, she couldn’t trick me as easy, but she still got in a good laugh every once in a while. When I was about five or six, one of my front top teeth was loose. My sister called me into her room and said, “Let’s play dentist!” With me being the one with the loose tooth I was the patient. “You can surprise mom after I pull your tooth!” It took a little bribing before I said yes, but she knew exactly how to trick me so she could get her way. She quietly went and got a wet washcloth, trying to make the least amount of noise possible so it would be a secret. She came back and before I had enough time to change my mind about her crazy idea, she yanked on my tooth a couple of times and it came right out. When it had just about stopped bleeding, Mom hollered, “What do you girls want for lunch?” I ran into the kitchen and said, “Grilled cheese please!” putting the

biggest grin on my face possible. Even though I liked Ashley’s idea and surprising Mom, I didn’t like the pain!

Now my sister is eighteen and I’m thirteen. It goes without saying that we don’t play store or house anymore. I think our favorite thing to do together is fight (when she isn’t teasing me!). We can’t agree on the simplest of things anymore. Our times together went from all of the time, to a few hours in the afternoons, if we’re lucky. What has happened to us? I guess we both grew up. The most drastic change in our relationship was when she was a freshman in high school. She started liking Anthony _____ and can you believe it, she still does! The little extra time she has she spends it with him. I knew it was going to happen sooner or later, but it just happened so fast.

There are a few good things about our relationship such as, she helps me with my homework when I don’t understand it, and she takes me places with her, even when her and “the brother I never asked for” (Anthony) as I refer to him go somewhere. This year on my mom and dad’s anniversary, Ashley and I went to Taco John’s in _____ to eat. We stopped and picked Anthony up at his house because he wanted to go with us. When we got there I moaned and groaned, “Now I have to get in back!”

“No you don’t,” she replied in a spontaneous sort of way. “You can sit up front. It won’t hurt him to sit in the back!”

“He’ll pull me out of the car though!” I replied, getting ready to get in the backseat.

“No he won’t. Just lock your door.”

Satisfied, I sat back and locked my door. Her letting me sit up front made me feel privileged. “Ha!” I said when he climbed in the back seat.

I love my sister very much, and not just because she’s my sister. She has been one of my role models since I’ve been able to walk and talk.

Now, after all this time has passed, I regret all of the arguments we had. I wish I could turn back time and do it all over again. The time flew by so fast. It just seems like yesterday that we were playing all of those games. What happened to those two little girls? But, it could be worse, and it probably will get worse, especially when she moves out. Hopefully, that’s a long way.

* Kentucky Department of Education’s set of marker papers (*No prompt exists for this student paper.*)

Proficiency Level Evaluations for Illustration B

Content Readiness Indicator 8:
Compose writing that conveys a clear main point with logical support.

This paper meets some criteria for the **Basic** level because it:

- uses an appropriate memoir format to relate personal events and feelings.

But if this composition were *only* at the **Basic*** level, it would:

- be more simplistic in describing the relationship (“My sister has done many bad things to me, for example..., but I love her anyway because she....”).

Content Readiness Indicator 10:
Use English language structure and grammar appropriately to communicate effectively.

This paper meets some criteria for the **Basic** level because:

- almost all words are spelled correctly and
- it contains no errors that interfere with the author’s ability to communicate.

Basic

This paper meets some criteria for the **Proficient** level because it:

- uses a narrative style and conversational language to relate personal events and feelings;
- uses transitional elements to connect ideas (e.g., “When I became a little older, and not so gullible,...”); and
- uses several different examples to describe her relationship with her sister.

This paper meets some criteria for the **Proficient** level because:

- the word choice is appropriate for middle grades, with several synonyms for said (e.g., squealed, scream, shouted, call) and
- it contains only minor errors in grammar (The author uses “raise” instead of “rise,” “laying” instead of “lying,” and “easy” instead of “easily.”); punctuation (“With a disgusted, evil, like grin....”); and spelling (“whinny” instead of “whiny” or “whiney” and “tattle tail” instead of “tattletale”); and no errors in capitalization.

Proficient

A composition on the same topic at the **Advanced*** level would:

- exhibits a personal style and
- uses an appropriate chronological ordering of events to show how the relationship has evolved (as opposed to opening with a statement of purpose or main point).
- provide more support for the idea that the author loves her sister — the author states that she does, and that her sister is even a role model for her, but she says that there are only a “few” good things about the relationship and does not provide examples as rich and varied as those illustrating how her sister teases her

A composition on the same topic at the **Advanced*** level would:

- use sentences correctly and purposefully for effect. For example, replace “Being the naïve little kid I was, I layed there, waiting. Every once in a while, I’d raise up to see if she was coming.” with “I was so naïve; I just waited, occasionally raising up to see if she was coming.” and
- not contain the errors it does. (See examples in **Proficient** evaluation.)

Advanced

* These Evaluations were written by the Panel.

Comment: This paper is written in a narrative style and uses conversational language appropriate for this type of writing, which comes most naturally to many students. Therefore, the fact that the student uses them here does not completely demonstrate that the student has reached the Proficient level. Examples of the student’s writing requiring the use of more formal styles and language are necessary for a complete assessment.

Although this example has a clear purpose, to describe the relationship between the author and her sister, it does not have a main point such as the author loves her sister despite the way her sister treats her sometimes.

Illustrations C.1, C.2 and C.3 of Student Writing — Lengthening the School Year*

Prompt: Many people think that students are not learning enough in school. They want to shorten most school vacations and make students spend more of the year in school. Other people think that lengthening the school year and shortening vacations is a bad idea because students use their vacations to learn important things outside of school.

What is your opinion?

Write a letter to your school board either in favor of or against lengthening the school year. Give specific reasons to support your opinion that will convince the school board to agree with you.

Response C.1

Dear, School Board

I think that we should keep the school length just like it is. I think that we need to the vacations to learn about other stuff outside the school, other than just stuff in school. I think we need to get away from school for a while. If the vacations are shorten the people will get tired of school, and will not pay attention in school. They would start doing stuff so they could get out of school and stay home, such as fighting, breaking things, arguing with the teachers, and ect. They would get like this because they wouldn't have a break from school. People would have a lot of stress on them, and would start doing stuff to take the stress away. That is what I think about extending the school year.

Response C.2

Dear school Board,

I think that we should stay in school for a longer part of the year. I believe this would help us to remember more of what we learned the year before and we would have more time to have classes that begin to teach a trade (for example) in younger years.

Even though I treasure having time off during the summer I don't think that I accomplish anything or need that time. It puts me out of the habit of studying and I lose a lot of knowledge.

If we did stay in school year round we would have some of that extra time to spend on learning a trade as an exploratory. This would give us experience and an idea of some things we might enjoy doing as a profession later in life.

These are my thoughts on the year round schooling and man of my peers would argue with and complain if the year round school idea was used but I feel it would be best.

Response C.3

To whom it may concern, dear sir or madame of the school board,

I am concerned about the idea of shortening vacations and lengthening the school year. As an eighth grade student I know the value of school education. However, as an individual I cannot help but feel that the most important things in life are not learned in school.

Can a teacher teach a child values? No. Can a teacher even guess at what a child really thinks? Of course not. The best a teacher can do is look at what a child shows to her/his classmates and teachers, and try to help the child along with only that as a guide. I'm not saying that teachers don't do a great job, but no one is one-dimensional.

At home is where a child really shows her/his true feelings and thoughts. This is where a child can be loud or quiet, messy or clean, and (as long as they clean up after themselves) no one makes a fuss. School is a place where children are prepared to survive in the world their parents created. Home is where children find out what kind of life is the right one for them.

I know that some people think that school is what shows you the kind of job you want, and in a way this is true. The subjects introduced at school may help students discover where their interests lie. At home, however, is where children find their beliefs about life, values, and themselves. Home is where we learn to be strong.

And so, sir or madame of the school board, I hope you will agree that time spent at home is just as valuable, if not more so then time spent in the classroom.

* 1998 NAEP writing assessment

Proficiency Level Evaluations for Illustrations C.1, C.2 and C.3

Content Readiness Indicator 8:
Compose writing that conveys a clear main point with logical support.

Response C.1 is considered **Basic** because it:

- uses elements of letter format, but uses language that is imprecise (e.g., “stuff” five times);
- uses clear introduction and conclusion and attempts to support them with reasons, but little thought given to order, transition or building upon one another;
- clearly states a main point (“I think we should keep the school length just like it is”); and
- offers numerous reasons for not lengthening the school year, but does not develop them.

Content Readiness Indicator 10:
Use English language structure and grammar appropriately to communicate effectively.

Response C.1 is considered **Basic** because it:

- contains several conspicuous errors (“Dear, School Board,” “shorten,” “attension,” “and ect.”) and
- contains no errors that interfere with ability to communicate and exhibits control of sentence boundaries.

Basic

Response C.2 is considered **Proficient** because it:

- uses letter format, sentences appropriate for persuasive writing (“Even though...” and “If...”) and language that is clear but not overly simplistic (“I treasure having time off...,” “peers”);
- has a deliberate structure (introduction, supporting points, conclusion);
- uses transitional words and phrases;
- clearly states a main point (“I think we should stay in school for a longer part of the year”) and supporting reasons (more time to learn and less knowledge lost due to long breaks); and
- develops supporting points.

Response C.2 is considered **Proficient** because:

- word choice is appropriate and, in some cases, precise (e.g., “treasure,” “profession”) and
- contains no errors in capitalization, only one spelling error (“profesion”) and no conspicuous errors in grammar or punctuation (although the final sentence clearly needs rewriting).

Proficient

Response C.3 is considered **Advanced** because it:

- uses letter format and varied sentence types appropriate for persuasive writing, including rhetorical questions (“Can a teacher teach a child values?”) and point-counterpoint (“Home is where....School is where....Home is where....”);
- contains sentences of varying length and style;
- is organized logically to build an argument;
- clearly states a main point (“I cannot help but feel that the most important things in life are not learned in school”) and supporting reasons (home is better place for students to learn about themselves);
- develops supporting points (limitations of school teachers and advantages of home environment); and
- identifies and counters opposing arguments (by acknowledging the value of an education, but then saying that “the most important things in life are not learned in school”).

Response C.3 is considered **Advanced** because it:

- uses a variety of sentences correctly to enhance the writing and
- it contains only minor errors in capitalization (“To whom it may concern”), minor spelling errors (“eigth,” “survieve,” “madame,” and “then”) and no conspicuous errors in grammar or punctuation despite additional length of piece and greater sophistication of sentences.

Advanced

Illustrations D.1, D.2 and D.3 of Student Writing — Public Television*

Prompt: A public television network is seeking ideas for a new series of shows that would be educational for teenagers. The series will include 10 one-hour episodes and will be shown once a week. Some of the titles under consideration are:

“Great Cities of the World”
“Women in History”
“Nature Walks”
“American Legends”

Choose one of these titles. Write a letter to the network president describing your ideas for a new educational series. In your letter, describe what one episode might be like. Use specific examples of what information you would include in the episode so the network president will be able to imagine what the series would be like.

Response D.1

Dear television network:

I think that a good education program for children is “American Legends.” You could have episodes about many great American Legends that would be interesting to watch. You could do a program on great American baseball players, and have Babe Ruth as the star. You could have a timeline of his life, his greatest accomplishments and about baseballs and playing cards that he signed; and what they would be worth today. I think “American Legends” would be an interesting and informative television show for all age groups.

Sincerely,
[Student Name]

Response D.2

Dear Network President,

I have an Idea for a television series that I think would be very educational for teenagers. What I had in mind was a series about nature that could be called “Nature Walks”. This series could show how teenagers react and respond to the wild life on nature hikes and camping trips. They can begin different on each series. The first series can show how five teenagers who are students at the same high school go on these nature hikes for different subjects each time. The first time they can go to collect bugs for a science project they might have to see what kind of organisms live in the wild. The second time they might go to collect dead organisms such as dried flowers and plants that they might not see in their regular garden or yard. From there the students can find different things to talk about on each series. They can also show how the living creatures protect themselves and shelter themselves. I think this would be a very educational series for all teenagers, children, and adults of all ages. Not only is it educational its fun!!

Response D.3

Dear Network president,

Hello! I am a young teenager and I think that teenagers these days would like to see something educational. I think a good idea for a t.v. show would be “Great Cities of the World.

For example, one episode could be about Chicago and tell famous places you could visit. One place could be the Sears Tower in which a camera could show people going up in an elevator and then seeing the view of downtown Chicago.

Another place the t.v. show could go to is the shed Aquarium. In it are many types of ocean life that interesting to see up close. They could also go to the art museum and look at famous paintings.

Just for fun, the show could go to F.A.O. Schwartz, a large toy store with many toys you can play with. As a matter of fact, you could just go shopping period. Chicago is known for its many stores.

Then you could take a trip to a restaurant such as Ed Debevic’s or Planet Hollywood, just to spice up the show a bit.

Now that I’ve explained where to go in Chicago, I’ll tell you a little more about the set-up of the show. I think that you should have a host who is young, around fifteen, energetic, and a spunky personality. She or he could act as the tour guide and show the viewers around each city. She could also explain the city’s trademarks, such as the Sears Tower. I think that if you use a young person, it would attract young viewers.

And last of all, I think the camera should look at the city as if it was the viewer’s eyes. For example, when you look around, you see things as you would see them, as if you were really there in Chicago, sight-seeing.

Well, I hope you enjoy my input and put it into consideration. I’ll be looking forward to seeing a new t.v. show about “Great Cities of the World.”

* 1998 NAEP writing assessment

Proficiency Level Evaluations for Illustrations D.1, D.2 and D.3

Content Readiness Indicator 8:

Compose writing that conveys a clear main point with logical support.

Response D.1 is considered **Basic** because it:

- uses letter format and expresses thoughts clearly but uses simple sentences;
- presents thoughts in an organized fashion (introduction, description, conclusion) but does not contain enough text to demonstrate higher proficiency levels (e.g., connected multiple paragraphs, transitions); and
- clearly states a proposal (“American Legends” focusing on baseball players) and lists possible elements *but* does not provide enough detail to develop image of episode or series (e.g., host, location).

Content Readiness Indicator 10:

Use English language structure and grammar appropriately to communicate effectively.

Response D.1 is considered **Basic** because it:

- contains several sentence punctuation errors for its length;
- contains no misspelled words; and
- contains no errors that interfere with communication.

Basic

Response D.2 is considered **Proficient** because it:

- uses letter format and language intended to persuade (“Not only is it educational its [sic] fun!”);
- presents ideas in an organized and connected fashion (“first time,” “second time,” “from there”) to support the main idea;
- chooses a style appropriate for the audience;
- clearly states a proposal and gives several examples to create images of different episodes; and
- identifies a specific theme for the show (teenagers’ interactions with nature) and connects examples to the theme (exploring nature for science project, looking for plants not found in their yards).

Response D.2 is considered **Proficient** because:

- word choice is appropriate and, in some cases, precise (“living creatures protect themselves and shelter themselves”) and
- contains only minor punctuation errors.

Proficient

Response D.3 is considered **Advanced** because it:

- identifies needs of the audience (for people to watch the show) and addresses them directly (“I think if you use a young person, it would attract young viewers.”);
- contains clear and deliberate transitional elements;
- selects several points to support the thesis;
- clearly states a proposal and provides vivid detail on several important aspects of the show (locations, host, camera angle); and
- makes conscious attempt to persuade by emphasizing quantity and variety of interesting places (“As a matter of fact, you could just go shopping period.” “Then you could take a trip to a restaurant ..., just to spice the show up a bit.”).

Response D.3 is considered **Advanced** because it:

- uses a variety of sentences correctly to enhance the writing;
- uses words to enhance the message (e.g., “spunky,” “spice up”); and
- contains occasional errors, but also contains a large amount of text.

Advanced

11 *Research*

Use research skills to locate, gather, evaluate and organize information for different purposes.

By the end of the middle grades, students have learned to acquire, process and organize information around a topic. This process includes identifying questions to be researched, gathering relevant information from an appropriate set of resources, organizing and using research information to strengthen compositions and making appropriate references to sources.

English/language arts teachers have students apply research skills to produce a formal research paper each year and give them assignments requiring them to gather and use information to support other writing and speaking assignments. Students often are more excited to conduct research when they see applications beyond the traditional research paper. As students write historical fiction, they research events and people in history. When they write editorials or prepare persuasive speeches, they will accumulate research to support their opinions. Students also need to base advertisements on research about products and consumers.

Differentiating research papers by grade level requires evaluating the complexity of the task, not the length of the paper. Students will consult more and different resources as they progress from simple Internet or text searches to surveys, interviews and action research. By the conclusion of the middle grades, a student will develop a position in their research paper and support it, rather than simply include a collection of facts.

Students leaving the middle grades need to be able to use a computer to search electronic databases, including the Internet. Students need to learn how to evaluate the validity and reliability of the information they find and to give appropriate credit for information or ideas generated by others.

In the area of research, the tasks will often be the same; however, the complexity of the research will change. For example, the complexity can differ in type of research question, variety and quantity of sources, use of primary and secondary sources and type of conclusion.

Benchmark Proficiency Progression

Basic

- Design a plan to answer a specific research question.
- Identify types of materials useful for different purposes.
- Use common reference materials (e.g., dictionary, encyclopedia, atlas, almanac) to locate factual information.
- Conduct simple searches on electronic databases and the Internet.
- Take notes from sources.
- Organize notes to answer research questions.
- Refer to sources in text.

Proficient

- Design a research plan that uses main questions and component parts.
- Use library card catalog and databases to locate relevant materials.
- Use electronic databases and the Internet to locate materials relevant to a particular research need.
- Evaluate the usefulness of specific materials for specific tasks.
- Identify answers to general questions relating to authors' opinions, beliefs and theories.
- Summarize a short article.
- Organize summaries and quotes to answer research questions.
- Document sources using accepted methods.

Advanced

- Develop a research plan, including purpose, appropriate questions, possible sources and time line.
- Locate information in newspapers and periodicals using associated indexes and databases.
- Conduct advanced searches on electronic databases and the Internet.
- Conduct action research (e.g., interviews, market research).
- Develop criteria for evaluating materials.
- Synthesize information from various sources.
- Organize information from multiple sources to address purpose and audience.
- Use a recognized documentation style for bibliography, end notes and in-text documentation as required.

Learning Activities and Applications

- Students take notes from several sources on color-sorted index cards. Each card is labeled with the research question the information addresses and organized by using one color for all notes related to the same question. Cards include information from the source, including any direct quotes, and reference information to identify the source. **(Basic)**
- Groups select a topic to research. With the same information, each student prepares to write a piece for a different purpose and audience. For example, research on an environmental issue can result in a persuasive letter to the editor, a brochure for parents, a children's book or a business proposal. Students write one-page proposals for the teacher on why their audience and format is appropriate for the information and include an outline of the piece they will write. **(Proficient)**
- Each student in a group searches the Internet for a different article on the same topic. Group members evaluate the usefulness of the articles based on the amount of actual information contained, identify the author and any bias, identify any persuasive elements and compare information given in the various articles for accuracy. They share their results with the class. **(Proficient)**
- Students gather information on a specific local issue and then develop a carefully structured questionnaire to survey community members on the issue, determine the guidelines for an unbiased sample and the number of respondents needed for statistically significant results. They compile their results and display the data in an appropriate format. They create a PowerPoint presentation for the appropriate local government agency. **(Advanced)**

Research skills can be assessed through knowledge of the process as in the assessment items on page 50 or by evaluating a finished product. A sample rubric for a research paper is on page 51.

Proficiency Level Illustrations for Content Indicator 11

Note: NAEP does not assess the process of research or the research paper. To help assess student work, the panel created sample test items for the research process and a rubric to score the research paper.

Basic

11-1 If you were looking for the date on which the Mayflower Compact was signed, which would be the best resource?

- (A) almanac (B) Readers Guide (C) encyclopedia (D) dictionary

11-2 Which of the following would be the best research question for a five-page report?

- (A) Why do some animals live on water and some on land?
(B) How do some mammals survive in water?
(C) How is a seal different from a fish?
(D) How are plants different from animals?

Proficient

11-3 Explain how each of the resources below would be helpful if you were to write an editorial on dress codes.

- newspaper articles
- internet research
- surveys
- court decisions
- school board policies

11-4 After reading two opposing editorials on the same topic, compare the author's opinions and their proposed solutions.

Advanced

11-5 Your school has decided to invite one fast food vendor to provide lunch one day each week. The food service planner has asked for your help in determining which vendor should be invited. Write five questions that you could use to survey fellow students to make the selection.

11-6 It is now time for your annual research paper. Write a two-page proposal that outlines the topic you want to research and your plan to conduct this research. Make sure that you include your research question, possible sources and a timeline to complete the project.

Rubric for Content Indicator 11

Research Paper

Criteria	Proficiency Levels		
	Basic	Proficient	Advanced
Reader Awareness	<p>Has some evidence of a purpose, communicated to the reader in the beginning paragraphs of the paper, but may have lapses</p> <p>Attempts to engage the reader at first, but the context or reason for the information that follows may not be entirely clear</p>	<p>Has a focused purpose, communicated to the reader in a clear thesis statement</p> <p>Engages the reader with an interesting beginning</p> <p>Addresses a real-life purpose for the audience</p>	<p>Focuses on a clear purpose, communicated to the reader in the beginning paragraphs and maintained throughout the piece</p> <p>Engages the reader with an interesting beginning that gives a context or reason for the information</p> <p>Anticipates the reader's needs by addressing counter-arguments</p>
Content Development	<p>Demonstrates some research and understanding of the topic</p> <p>Attempts to use some idea development strategies and supporting evidence, including paraphrases, summaries and direct quotations from source material but does so in a general, superficial way</p>	<p>Demonstrates research and understanding of the topic</p> <p>Uses sufficient elaboration to clarify the central idea</p>	<p>Demonstrates careful, comprehensive research that synthesizes information from various sources</p> <p>Uses a variety of idea development strategies and supporting evidence, including illustrations, examples and anecdotes</p>
Documentation	<p>Provides documentation of most sources, though some may not adhere precisely to the specified form</p> <p>Adheres to some of the conventions of the assigned research form</p>	<p>Provides documentation of sources, though may not always adhere precisely to the specified form</p> <p>Adheres to most of the conventions of the assigned research form</p>	<p>Provides careful, thorough documentation of sources</p> <p>Adheres to the conventions of the assigned research form (e.g., MLA, APA)</p>
Organization	<p>May have lapses in transition</p> <p>Shows some evidence of providing the reader with a sense of closure at the end but may do so abruptly</p>	<p>Moves the reader through the piece with obvious and effective transitional statements</p> <p>Provides a sense of closure at the end by leaving the reader with something to think about</p>	<p>Moves the reader through the piece with subtle and sophisticated transitions</p> <p>Illustrates a well-crafted and cohesive pattern</p>
Grammar and Spelling, Conventions	<p>Uses simplistic sentence structure and language</p> <p>Attempts to adhere to manuscript rules (title page specifications, correct margins, spacing, numbering of pages) though there may be some violations</p> <p>May have some misspelled words, punctuation or capitalization errors.</p> <p>May have sentence fragments or run-on sentences</p>	<p>Uses correct and varied sentence types and structures</p> <p>Uses language appropriate for the subject matter and the audience</p> <p>Adheres to manuscript rules (title page specifications, correct margins, spacing, numbering of pages) though there may be a few violations</p> <p>Contains headings, subheadings and tables</p> <p>May have a few misspelled words, punctuation or capitalization errors that do not interfere with meaning</p>	<p>Uses a variety of sentence types and structures to enhance the message</p> <p>Uses language that enhances the impact of the message to the particular audience</p> <p>Adheres to manuscript rules (title page specifications, correct margins, spacing, numbering of pages)</p> <p>Contains graphic elements that enhance the message</p> <p>Has no misspelled words, punctuation or capitalization errors</p>

12 *Speaking*

Use appropriate organization, language, voice, delivery style and visual aids to match the audience and purpose of oral presentations.

Middle grades students learn to prepare their own materials, to speak in front of a group and to read aloud appropriately as they prepare for various high school experiences. Speaking is an important way to enhance student learning and motivation. When students go on stage, they make the effort to master more deeply the content they learn so they can talk to others about it. Students have greater confidence as learners when they know how to organize and present their ideas to others.

Types of oral presentations appropriate for middle grades students include

- persuasive speeches,
- presentations of research or laboratory findings,
- explanations of processes or proofs and
- how-to demonstrations.

Good speakers begin by preparing for presentations. Teachers need to give assignments requiring students to use a process for analyzing their audiences and reasons for addressing them. Then students organize their ideas and evidence in an appropriate style for the situation. They plan appropriate nonverbal techniques and select visual aids to enhance their message. Oral presentations do not need to be long — three to five minutes are sufficient for middle grades students.

Benchmark Proficiency Progression

Basic

- Write a speech with introduction, body and conclusion.
- Identify a particular audience for a presentation.
- Read materials aloud with expression.
- Speak with sufficient volume and at a clear pace.
- Make eye contact with the audience.
- Use an object or poster to demonstrate a point.

Proficient

- Prepare a speech outline based on a chosen pattern of organization.
- Match the content of a presentation with an appropriate audience.
- Deliver prepared speeches aloud without reading them word-by-word.
- Use appropriate inflections, facial expressions and gestures.
- Deliver presentations with no distracting mannerisms.
- Identify and use appropriate visual aids, including technology.

Advanced

- Organize information to achieve particular purposes.
- Analyze an audience to identify the most effective message and method of presentation.
- Deliver a presentation using only notes or without relying on any written materials.
- Use pacing, voice and physical presentation to enhance the message.
- Integrate visual aids with spoken words.
- Use audience feedback to modify organization or language to clarify meaning.

Learning Activities and Applications

- After writing and illustrating children's stories, students read their stories aloud to younger children. **(Basic)**
- The class can select a mascot by having students prepare and deliver two- to three-minute persuasive speeches asking their classmates to vote for their choice. Mascots or pictures of the mascot should accompany each presentation. **(Proficient)**
- Students present a demonstration of how to complete a process (e.g., making cookies, conducting a science experiment, tying a scarf). A poster, PowerPoint slide or overhead transparency including the steps in the process are the only notes used by the student. **(Advanced)**

The only way to determine whether students reach speaking proficiency is to hear them make several presentations. The rubric below is a sample for assessing the quality of student oral presentations.

Rubric for Content Indicator 12

Speaking

Criteria	Proficiency Levels		
	Basic	Proficient	Advanced
Organization	Introduction, body, conclusion are present, although organization may be awkward.	Recognizable introduction, body and conclusion	Well-crafted introduction, body, conclusion — well-organized presentation
Language	Speech patterns are inexact, using expressions such as “like” and “you know.”	Speech includes some pauses and repetition of some words that do not distract from the overall presentation.	Language flows smoothly, using words that are precise and colorful and paint pictures for the audience.
Voice	Spoken with clear and sufficient volume	Spoken clearly with appropriate inflection	Spoken clearly with inflection to enhance important points
Delivery Style	Read directly from notes, made eye contact, used some gestures and stood firmly on both feet	Referred to notes, used appropriate facial expressions and gestures and appeared confident	Did not read from notes, used physical mannerisms to enhance the message, appeared confident and relaxed
Visual Aids	Used simple visual aids to make a specific point	Used visual aids relevant to the main ideas	Integrated visual aids with spoken words to enhance the message

13 *Listening*

Use active listening strategies to organize and respond to information presented in different formats for different purposes.

Middle grades students need to become good listeners. Success in high school is aided by students developing good note-taking skills that include the ability to hear accurately, determine the relevance and credibility of the message and record important information for later use. The lack of these skills keeps many students from succeeding in all of their classes.

Too often middle grades and high school teachers simply write all the important notes on the board and have students copy them down or even give them a copy of the important notes. Middle grades teachers need to use strategies for engaging students in developing active listening, note-taking and study skills that they can use in both present and future situations.

Students who struggle with listening profit from guided practice in these skills. A two-column note-taking procedure works well. As students learn the process, the teacher prepares the left-hand column with the main ideas and students complete the right side with details. The teacher reviews by verifying which important details should appear on the chart.

Middle grades students need practice in recording notes from classroom lectures to demonstrate understanding of the main ideas and supporting details. Students need opportunities to conduct interviews to develop their ability to listen for information that is relevant to their research. Students need practice not only to hear what others are saying, but also to connect that with their own knowledge, research and experiences in order to be a full participant in the discussion.

Benchmark Proficiency Progression

Basic

- Take notes of the main ideas from an interview or presentation.
- Listen to a message and determine its purpose (e.g., entertainment, persuasion).
- Score effectiveness of presentations on a simple four-point scale.

Proficient

- Use a two-column format to take notes.
- Summarize main ideas and supporting evidence from oral presentations.
- Identify audience, techniques and language from persuasive presentations.
- Evaluate classmates' presentations using a teacher-made rubric.

Advanced

- Paraphrase a speaker's purpose and point of view.
- Ask relevant questions concerning a speaker's content, delivery and purpose.
- Evaluate the credibility of a speaker (e.g., hidden agendas, slanted or biased material).
- Develop criteria to evaluate presentations for specific purposes.

Learning Activities and Applications

- At the beginning of a study of *The Miracle Worker*, students develop a set of questions about personal experiences with a special teacher. They interview five people using these questions and write the main ideas of their responses. **(Basic)**
- Students view a series of commercials for the same type of product but for different audiences (e.g., soft drinks, automobiles). For each they complete a three-column chart identifying the intended audience, persuasive techniques and any "buzz" words appropriate to that audience. From these charts, students compare the appeals of the various products and services. **(Proficient)**
- Students listen to political debates or interviews with candidates. Students critique the relevance of candidates' responses to the questions asked and analyze the credibility of the candidates based on their responses. **(Advanced)**

Proficiency Level Illustrations for Content Indicator 13 *

*Note: NAEP does not assess listening skills. Therefore, the panel created sample test items that could be asked after students have listened to speeches and a rubric to score student notes from a teacher presentation. This rubric is a simple way to measure the degree of proficiency in listening for main ideas and supporting evidence.

13-1 You have just listened to a tape of a speech by a candidate for mayor. What specifically was she trying to get you to do or believe? What were her main ideas?

Basic

13-2 From the speech you have just heard, categorize each of the following as a main idea or supporting point:

- (A) We need more community parks.
- (B) Last year 3,600 people visited one of the city's parks.
- (C) Parks cost money.
- (D) The budget for the parks and recreation department has been cut.

Proficient

13-3 When the mayoral candidate spoke, was she credible? Was any of her evidence distorted to make only the point she wanted to make? What questions did she leave unanswered?

Advanced

Rubric for Content Indicator 13

Note-Taking from Listening

Criteria	Proficiency Levels		
	Basic	Proficient	Advanced
Organization	Stated main idea in teacher's exact words Organized in the same sequence as given by teacher	Stated main ideas and supporting points in teacher's exact words Organized in simple pattern such as numbering	Paraphrased main ideas and supporting points Organized by category regardless of the order in which they were presented
Format	Legible	Included main ideas without extraneous materials	Included questions for items that were unclear

Answers to Proficiency Level Illustrations

1-2 B

1-3 B

2-1 B; D, E, C, A

2-6 B

4-2 B

11-1 C

11-2 C

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Southern Regional Education Board Goals for Education

1. All children are ready for the first grade.
2. Achievement in the early grades for all groups of students exceeds national averages and performance gaps are closed.
3. Achievement in the middle grades for all groups of students exceeds national averages and performance gaps are closed.
4. All young adults have a high school diploma — or, if not, pass the GED tests.
5. All recent high school graduates have solid academic preparation and are ready for postsecondary education and a career.
6. Adults who are not high school graduates participate in literacy and job-skills training and further education.
7. The percentage of adults who earn postsecondary degrees or technical certificates exceeds national averages.
8. Every school has higher student performance and meets state academic standards for all students each year.
9. Every school has leadership that results in improved student performance — and leadership begins with an effective school principal.
10. Every student is taught by qualified teachers.
11. The quality of colleges and universities is regularly assessed and funding is targeted to quality, efficiency and state needs.
12. The state places a high priority on an education system of schools, colleges and universities that is accountable.