

## Assessment Design in EL Education Grades 3-8 ELA Curriculum

This document outlines EL Education’s step-by-step process for designing effective assessments aligned to the Common Core State Standards. It uses the backwards design approach, as suggested by Wiggins and McTighe (1998), who suggest that planning classroom lessons and activities should be the final stage in the process after goals have been clarified and assessments have been designed. This approach requires that standards have already been mapped out across a year, and that teachers work with a set of given and focused set of standards for a module. The curriculum maps created by EL for the ELA CCSS modules are one such example of this and were the fundamental basis for the assessments designed.

As the teachers and leaders who designed and wrote the 3-8 curriculum modules worked to create assessments and curriculum that was then aligned to assessments, they following the following process:

### 1. Thoroughly understand the organization of the CCSS

Read through the CCSS documents including the introduction, the anchor standards and the Appendices in order to fully understand how they have been put together. True backwards design begins with the end, the standards that we want students to achieve.

#### Questions to consider about the organization of the CCSS:

- Why does each strand of the standards (Reading Literary – RL, Writing – W, Language – L) start with the College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards?

The Anchor Standards throughout the document reinforce the idea of “starting with the end in mind” or backward design: knowing the desired outcome that each standard, regardless of grade is designed to achieve.

- What is the purpose of the “Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Other Technical Subjects?”

These standards provide guidelines so that all teachers of content areas have clear expectations for the quality and rigor of the reading and writing required of students comparable to those practiced in the ELA Standards. These standards foster inquiry and critical thinking, practices which students should engage in across content areas throughout the school year. In addition, the writing standards enable students to demonstrate a deep understanding of content and allow teachers to assess that understanding.

- What useful information is contained in Appendix A?

This appendix contains the research basis for determining and raising the complexity of texts read, a list of Foundational Skills, expanded definitions of the 3 types of writing (particularly *argument*), Speaking and Listening, and the importance of vocabulary acquisition (particularly Tier 2 academic vocabulary).

- How can I use Appendix B?

As a guideline for an examples of the appropriate complexity level for specified grade level bands.

## 2. Thoroughly read, analyze, and understand specific grade level standards and what they require of students

Annotate the standards highlighting skills that are named and key words that help to explain what is required of students. Notice words like “and”/”or.” Look at the standards from the grade levels above and below to identify how the rigor increases and what is unique to each grade level.

### Questions to consider when reading and analyzing the standards in order to understand what they require of students:

- Which skills are called out in the standard?
- Which words stand out as being words that highlight what is required of students? Why?
- Are there any “and”/“or” words?
- What are the standards requiring of students?
- What is unique to this grade level? What is different about the standards for the grade level above? Below?

### Example:

<b>RL.6.4</b>	Determine the meaning of words <b>and</b> phrases as they are used in a text, <b>including</b> figurative <b>and</b> connotative meanings; analyze the impact of <b>specific word choice</b> on meaning <b>and</b> tone.
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In analyzing this standard it is important to note the use of the word “and,” which means that students must be assessed on each of the items listed. An assessment of this standard requires students to:

- Determine the meaning of words and phrases in an excerpt of text.
- Determine the meaning of connotative and figurative language in an excerpt of text.
- Describe the tone certain words in an excerpt of text suggest and why.
- Describe the meaning certain words in an excerpt of text suggest and why.

<b>RL.6.6</b>	<b>Determine</b> an author’s point of view or purpose in a text and <b>explain</b> how it is conveyed in the text.
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In analyzing this standard it is important to note the use of the word “or,” which means that students must be assessed on either point of view or purpose, not both at the same time. An assessment of this standard requires students to:

- Determine an author’s point of view or purpose in an excerpt of text.
- Explain how that point of view or purpose is conveyed.

### 3. Bundle Standards Strategically

Certain standards work well to be assessed together because they require similar skills or complementary skills.

#### Questions to consider when bundling the standards:

- Do various standards require students to use similar skill sets?
- Do various standards require complementary skills sets?
- Am I able to thoroughly and effectively assess each of the standards OR am I trying to assess too many standards to the point that this assessment could be overwhelming?

**Example - The following ELA standards were determined in the curriculum map to be part of a module**

<b>RL.6.4</b>	Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of a specific word choice on meaning and tone.
<b>RL.6.5</b>	Analyze how a particular sentence, chapter, scene, or stanza fits into the overall structure of a text and contributes to the development of the theme, setting, or plot.
<b>RL.6.6</b>	Explain how an author develops the point of view of the narrator or speaker in a text.
<b>RI.6.3</b>	Analyze in detail how a key individual, event, or idea is introduced, illustrated, and elaborated in a text (e.g., through examples or anecdotes).
<b>RI.6.4</b>	Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings.
<b>RI.6.6</b>	Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text and explain how it is conveyed in the text.
<b>RI.6.7</b>	Integrate information presented in different media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively) as well as in words to develop a coherent understanding of a topic or issue.
<b>W.6.2</b>	Write information/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas, concepts, and information through the selection, organization, and analysis of relevant context. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Introduce a topic; organize ideas, concepts, and information, using strategies such as definition, classification, comparison/contrast, and cause/effect; include formatting (e.g., headings, graphics (e.g., charts, tables), and multimedia when useful to aiding comprehension.</li> <li>b. Develop the topic with relevant facts, definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples.</li> <li>c. Use appropriate transitions to clarify the relationships among ideas and concepts.</li> <li>d. Use precise language and domain-specific vocabulary to inform about or explain the topic.</li> <li>e. Establish and maintain a formal style.</li> <li>f. Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from the information or explanation presented.</li> </ul>
<b>W.6.7</b>	Conduct short research projects to answer a question, drawing on several sources and refocusing the inquiry when appropriate.
<b>SL.6.2</b>	Interpret information presented in diverse media and formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) and explain how it contributes to a topic, text, or issue under study.
<b>L.6.2</b>	Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.

<b>L.6.2</b>	Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Use punctuation (commas, parenthesis, dashes) to set off nonrestrictive/parenthetical elements.</li> <li>b. Spell correctly.</li> </ul>
<b>L.6.3</b>	Use knowledge of language and its conventions when writing, speaking, reading, or listening. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Vary sentence patterns for meaning, reader/listener interest, and style.</li> <li>b. Maintain consistency in style and tone.</li> </ul>

**“Think Aloud” about Bundling These Standards:**

These standards include reading literature, reading informational texts and writing, so therefore it makes sense to bundle the literature standards together to assess with a literary text (RL.6.4, RL.6.5 and RL.6.6) and to bundle the informational standards together separately to assess with an informational text (RI.6.3, RI.6.4 and RI.6.6).

Since both of the language standards (L.6.2 and L.6.3) relate to written conventions, it is logical to bundle those standards with the writing standards (W.6.2, L.6.2 and L.6.3).

W.6.2 requires students to write an informative/exploratory piece. Since students need some thinking and analysis to write *about*, W.6.2 could be bundled with either the RL or RI standards and require students to write an informative piece about either/both of the literary and informational texts they have read. (RL.6.4, RL.6.5, RL.6.6, W.6.2, L.6.2 and L.6.3 or RI.6.3, RI.6.4, RI.6.6, W.6.2, L.6.2 and L.6.3).

W.6.7, RI.6.7 and SL.6.2 could be bundled together, since all three of these standards require some sort of synthesis. W.6.7 requires students to perform a research project, RI.6.7 requires students to integrate information presented in different media or formats and SL.6.2 requires students to talk about information presented in different media and formats. Students could research using information presented in different media and formats and then talk about their research (W.6.7, RI.6.7 and SL.6.2).

**4. Analyze texts to identify appropriate excerpts**

Once the standards to assessed are identified and bundled, texts must be chosen that allow for students to demonstrate mastery of those specific standards. It seems obvious, but, for example, if you’re attempting to assess students’ capacity to determine connotative meanings, then the text chosen must offer ample opportunities for students to do so.

Texts should also be analyzed for engagement, complexity, sensitivity and bias. Bias and sensitivity issues are crucial to address when choosing a text to ensure that students are provided with balanced points of view on an issue, and that the ideas presented in the text will not overtly offend cultures, traditions or beliefs.

When analyzing the complexity a balance needs to be found between choosing text that is complex enough for students to show mastery of texts within the expected complexity band, but also of a level that normally-progressing students will be able to access independently. When assessing reading standards, students should be presented with an excerpt of text that they haven’t seen before in order to ensure that they are working from the text, not from their memories.

For additional information, see the New York State Passage Selection Guidelines for Assessing CCSS ELA (a downloadable PDF that can be found at the bottom of this webpage: <https://www.engageny.org/resource/new-york-state-passage-selection-resources-for-grade-3-8-assessments>).

**Questions to consider when analyzing texts to identify appropriate excerpts to be used in assessment:**

Compelling content:

- Is the text engaging for this age group of students? Will students be interested in the content?
- Does this text present a balanced point of view?
- Does this text contain any content that may be considered to be offensive?
- Do students need exceptional background knowledge to understand the meaning of this excerpt?

Text complexity:

- What is the quantitative measure of the text? Is the level appropriate for this grade level?
- Is the vocabulary and language demand of this text appropriate for this grade level?
- Is the text structure appropriate for this grade level?
- Will students who are progressing at a normal rate be able to comprehend this text or excerpt of text independently?
- Is it possible to make the text accessible to more students by chunking text or with supporting materials like a glossary?

Standards and scaffolding:

- Where specifically in the text is there an opportunity to assess this standard? Which paragraphs?
- How can this excerpt be used to assess student achievement of the standard?
- If using a longer central text (e.g., a novel, play, memoir, literary nonfiction, etc...) where in that text will students be when the assessment will take place? Does the position of this excerpt in the longer text fit in the anticipated number of lessons and the reading schedule?
- Is it an excerpt of a text they haven't seen before?
- Are there multiple excerpts of text presenting assessment opportunities that can be used in lessons leading up to the assessment to scaffold students learning?

**Example:**

<b>RI.6.3</b>	Analyze in detail how a key individual or idea is introduced, illustrated, and elaborated in a text (e.g., through examples or anecdotes).
<b>RI.6.4</b>	Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings.
<b>RI.6.6</b>	Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text and explain how it is conveyed in the text.

These standards are for Grade 6, so the quantitative measurement of the text(s) to assess these standards should be between or very close to 860 to 920L. In addition to applying the quantitative measure, analyzing a text for the qualitative criteria will assist in a more complete analysis of complexity. This bundle of RI standards require that the informational text(s) have the following characteristics:

- Contains figurative, connotative and technical language
- The author’s point of view or purpose is very clear and the techniques he or she has used to convey their point of view or purpose are also very clear
- Describes a key individual, event or idea.

There should be multiple opportunities for this to ensure scaffolding opportunities, such as vocabulary in context, paraphrasing and summarizing, and text-dependent questions for small chunks of text for students to practice before the assessment and to have a new excerpt of text to use in the assessment.

For additional information, see Selection of Authentic Texts for Common Core Instruction (<https://www.engageny.org/resource/selection-of-authentic-texts-for-common-core-instruction-guidance-and-a-list-of-resources>).

**5. Determine which assessment item types are most appropriate for assessing the standards**

There are a variety of assessment item types that could be used including selected response, short constructed response, graphic organizers, oral presentations, and extended writing prompts. The intent of the standard will guide the choice of assessment item. See examples below.

In addition, when determining which assessment items to use, consider the items students will encounter on Common Core assessments and, where appropriate, build in opportunities for students to practice responding to those items.

**Questions to consider when determining which assessment items are most appropriate for assessing standards:**

- What does the standard require of students?
- Does it require students to show mastery of a particular writing skill?
- What assessment items are present on Common Core assessments that students need to practice independently under assessment conditions?

**Example:**

<b>RI.6.3</b>	Analyze in detail how a key individual, event, or idea is introduced, illustrated, and elaborated in a text (e.g., through examples or anecdotes).
<b>RI.6.4</b>	Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings.
<b>RI.6.6</b>	Determine an author’s point of view or purpose in a text and explain how it is conveyed in the text.

In order for students to demonstrate that they can achieve RI.6.3, the assessment item needs to provide opportunities for students to **analyze (in other words, examine in detail and methodically)** how an individual, event or idea is introduced, illustrated and elaborated on. In order for students to analyze, they need an assessment item that prompts them to write, for example a constructed response, a graphic organizer or a writing prompt.

In order for students to demonstrate that they can achieve RI.6.4, the assessment item needs to provide opportunities for students to **determine** the meaning of words and phrases. In preparation for Common Core assessments, students have to be able to answer selected response questions about word and phrase meaning; therefore it would be logical to assess students using selected response items as often as possible.

In order for students to demonstrate that they can achieve RI.6.6, they need to first show that they can **identify** an author's point of view or purpose and then **explain** how that point of view or purpose is conveyed. Identification can be assessed in a selected response question, such as multiple choice, but in order for students to explain, they need an assessment item prompting them to write, for example a constructed response, a graphic organizer or a writing prompt.

See the New York State Guidelines for Item Review Criteria (a downloadable document that can be found at the bottom of this page: <https://www.engageny.org/resource/new-york-state-item-review-criteria-for-grade-3-8-english-language-arts-tests>) for additional information.

In addition, the Annotated 2013 assessments provide some models of Common Core-aligned assessment questions. (Find downloadable documents at the bottom of this page: <https://www.engageny.org/resource/new-york-state-common-core-sample-questions>.)

## **6. Craft engaging assessment questions/prompts**

Once the assessment item types have been determined, engaging questions or prompts need to be crafted relevant to the chosen text(s). Both questions and prompts need to get to the intent of what the standards require of students and the opportunities presented in the text(s). They need to be engaging to capture student interest, clear enough for students to be able to answer them independently and there should be enough of them to ensure that all of the standards or parts of a standard are assessed.

Where possible and appropriate, assessments should contain a variety of assessment items to ensure different levels of rigor and keep students engaged.

### **Questions to consider when crafting engaging assessment questions/prompts:**

- What skills do students need to demonstrate in the assessment? How can you make that clear in the questions/prompt?
- What engaging opportunities does the text(s) present to assess these standards? How can you guide students to the relevant parts of the text in the questions/prompt?
- How do the questions/prompts prepare students for state tests?
- Looking across the questions/prompts in the assessment, are there differing levels of rigor?

**Example:**

<b>RI.6.3</b>	Analyze in detail how a key individual, event, or idea is introduced, illustrated, and elaborated in a text (e.g., through examples or anecdotes).
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Q. How does Emma Burke introduce, illustrate, and elaborate on the relief camps? Fill out the table providing evidence from the text in quotation marks.

<b>Introducing</b>	<b>Illustrating</b>	<b>Elaborating</b>

This graphic organizer breaks up each of the parts of the standard (introduced, illustrated and elaborated on), allowing students to focus on one part at a time. It requires students to provide evidence from the text.

<b>RI.6.4</b>	Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings.
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Text: *Morning came, and my husband was detailed to take charge of the water distribution at the entrance to the Park. Water was now more precious than gold, and not a drop must be wasted. Many of the mains were broken, and no one knew how the reservoirs were.*

Q. Emma Burke uses the figurative language, “Water was now more precious than gold.” What does she mean by this?

- a) Water cost as much as gold.
- b) People needed and wanted water more than anything else.
- c) People needed and wanted gold more than they wanted water.
- d) The price of gold dropped to be as cheap as water.

This question is selected response to give students practice answering selected response questions and addresses the figurative language part of standard RI.6.4.

<b>RI.6.6</b>	Determine an author’s point of view or purpose in a text and explain how it is conveyed in the text.
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Q. What is Emma Burke’s point of view of the relief camp? How do you know? How does she convey that point of view?

<b>What is Emma Burke’s point of view of the relief camp?</b>	<b>How do you know?</b> (specific words, phrases, and sentences from the text)	<b>How does the author convey her point of view?</b> (Does she state it directly? Is it inferred from her descriptions of her actions? Is it inferred from her use of language? Etc.)

This graphic organizer separates each of the parts of the standard allowing students to focus on one part at a time. One column asks them to make a claim about point of view, the next column asks them to cite evidence from the text to support that claim and the final column requires them to explain how that point of view has been conveyed.

### 7. Test-drive/Pilot the questions/prompt /texts

Test-driving the assessment questions will:

- Highlight any issues with the questions or prompt.
- Ensure students will be able to answer the questions or respond to the prompt using content from the texts that have been selected.
- Highlight the skills and knowledge students will require to complete the assessment, providing insight into the scaffolding required in lessons leading up to the assessment to ensure students are ready for the assessment.

#### Questions to consider when test-driving:

- Are the questions/prompts clear? Will students know what they have to do? How could it be made clearer?
- Will students demonstrate mastery of the standards by answering the questions/responding to the prompt?
- Do the questions/prompts get at all parts of the standard?
- Does the selected text(s) provide the information students need in order to answer the question/respond to the prompt?
- What is an answer expected to include/look like?

#### Example:

<b>RI.6.6</b>	Determine an author’s point of view or purpose in a text and explain how it is conveyed in the text.
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Q. What is Emma Burke’s point of view of the relief camp? How do you know? How does she convey that point of view?

What is Emma Burke’s point of view of the relief camp?	How do you know? (specific words, phrases, and sentences from the text)	How does the author convey her point of view? (Does she state it directly? Is it inferred from her descriptions of her actions? Is it inferred from her use of language? Etc.)
<i>It was comfortable.</i>	<p><i>“My husband and son had spread a mattress under the protecting branches of some bushes ...”</i></p> <p><i>“... my long coat kept me snug and warm”</i></p> <p><i>“all was soon quiet”</i></p>	<p><i>It is inferred from her use of language. She describes the branches as “protecting;” she describes how her long coat “kept me snug and warm;” and she describes how “all was soon quiet”—all of which suggest comfort.</i></p>

### 8. Plan the reading and writing lessons that lead to the assessment

Test-driving the questions or prompt provides an insight into the skills and knowledge students will require in order to successfully demonstrate mastery of the standards. Lessons leading up to the assessment should be planned to scaffold in such a way as to ensure students have gathered the knowledge they need through reading, have thought about and discussed what they have read, and are able to express and organize their ideas in writing. They should also guide the formative assessment strategies and information/data required to inform/adjust further instruction.

#### Questions to consider when planning the scaffolding of lessons:

- What knowledge do students need?
- Which parts of the text do students need to have read to acquire that knowledge? What skills do the students need to have practiced?
- Which graphic organizers do students need to have practiced using?

#### Example:

<b>RI.6.3</b>	Analyze in detail how a key individual, event, or idea is introduced, illustrated, and elaborated in a text (e.g., through examples or anecdotes).
<b>RI.6.4</b>	Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings.
<b>RI.6.6</b>	Determine an author’s point of view or purpose in a text and explain how it is conveyed in the text.

Lesson 1: Read an excerpt text for gist. Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text through selected response questions.

Lesson 2: Reread the excerpt of text from Lesson 1. As a class, analyze the author's point of view in a text using a graphic organizer. Create three-column anchor chart for how the idea is introduced.

Lesson 3: Read a new excerpt of text for gist. Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text through selected response questions.

Lesson 4: Reread the excerpt of text from Lesson 3. In pairs, analyze the author's point of view in a text using a graphic organizer. Continue filling out anchor chart for how the idea is introduced, illustrated and elaborated on.

Lesson 5: Read a new excerpt of text for gist. Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text through selected response questions.

Lesson 6: Reread the excerpt of text from Lesson 5. Independently analyze the author's point of view in a text using a graphic organizer. Fill out an exit ticket for how the idea is illustrated and elaborated on.

Lesson 7: Assessment.