

2011 Grade 8

New York English Language Arts Test Specifications

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

Standards Assessed

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

On the 8th grade test, the approximate percentage of questions assessing each of the standards is as follows:

Standard		Grade 4
1.	Reading, Writing, Listening, and Speaking for Information and Understanding	39%
2.	Reading, Writing, Listening, and Speaking for Literary Response and Expression	39%
3.	Reading, Writing, Listening, and Speaking for Critical Analysis and Evaluation	22%

Genres

The eighth grade ELA, along with all other grades, will have literary and informational reading passages.

“Literary passages” may include: short stories, folktales, poetry, or other forms of literary writing. “Informational passages” may include: articles, excerpts from biographies or autobiographies, essays, or other forms of informational writing.

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

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

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

Structure of Grade 8 ELA for 2011

In 2011, the ELA Tests in all grades will have more reading passages and more multiple-choice questions in Book 1. In the 8th grade, there will be 57 questions on the 2011 test. In 2010, there were only 34 questions. This reflects **an increase of 68%** for 2011. According to an email from the office of State Assessment, “in addition to more pages, there will also be **more higher order thinking questions to mirror the NAEP.**”

There will be two days of testing and three books.

However one fairly big difference is that *writing mechanics* (grammar, punctuation, and word usage) will now be addressed through multiple-choice questions **only**. In prior years, writing mechanics was assessed through the editing paragraph and two extended responses (Guide to the Grades 3–8 Testing Program, 15).

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

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

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

Day	Section	Subject	Number of Multiple-Choice Questions	Number of Short-Response Questions	Number of Extended-Response Questions	Total Number of Questions	Approximate Testing Time
One	1	Reading	41	0	0	41	80 minutes
Two	2 and 3	Listening/Writing Mechanics	8	3	0	11	30 minutes
		Reading/Writing	0	4	1	5	60 minutes
Total			49	7	1	57	160 minutes

Day One/Book 1	Day Two/Book 2	Total
7-8 passages (literary and informational) 41 multiple-choice questions	1 listening selection (informational) 5 multiple-choice questions 3 short-response questions 3-5 multiple-choice (writing mechanics questions) 2 paired passages (literary and informational) 4 short-response questions 1 extended-response question	10 -11 passages 46-51 multiple-choice questions 7 short-response questions 1 extended-response question
80 minutes	90 minutes (excluding reading the listening selection)	170 minutes

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

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

- There will be 7-8 passages on the first day.
- The students will have 80 minutes to read the passages and answer 41 questions.

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

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

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

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

- Which sentence contains two complete thoughts and should be written as two sentences?
 - A. Of all the months in the year, July is my favorite.
 - B. My sister went to a fun camp in the city this summer; I want to go next summer.
 - C. This summer, we traveled to several different cities to visit family.
 - D. We tried to go to the beach last weekend, but it was closed because a storm was expected.

Scoring for the 8th Grade test:

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

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

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

Short-Response and Extended-Response Scoring

The short response questions will be scored individually, each question scores a 0,1,2. The extended response will be scored holistically 0,1,2,3,4.

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

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

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

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

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

8th Grade Reading Standards and Performance Indicators

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

Apply thinking skills, such as define, classify, and infer, to interpret data, facts, and ideas from informational texts. **(You might notice the following skills are addressed:** finding the main idea, determining the author’s purpose.)

- The author states that games “translate life into exciting dramas.” This most likely means that games...
- According to the article, what is the main reason the rescue of Newman was considered extraordinary?

Use indexes to locate information and glossaries to define terms. **(You might notice the following skills are addressed:** using context clues to find meaning.)

- The article says that a player “has just covered his stealth vehicle with a cloaking device rendering it invisible.” The word “rendering” means about the same as...

Distinguish between relevant and irrelevant information. **(You might notice the following skills are addressed:** inferring.)

- What makes e-Sports competitions unique?

Identify missing, conflicting, or unclear information. **(You might notice the following skills are addressed:** identifying “right there” answers.)

- Which of these important game playing skills is not mentioned in the article?
- The partial outline below contains information about the Pea Island Station.
 - Responding to the Newman
 - Observed red light
 - Moved equipment to beach
 - Tied themselves together with rope
 - Recognition of the crewBased on the information in the article, which detail best completes the outline?

Draw conclusions and make inferences on the basis of explicit and implied information. **(You might notice the following skills are addressed:** identifying “right there” answers, inferring, determining the author’s purpose, comparing and contrasting)

- How is the way the author wears her bindis different from the way they are traditionally worn in India?
- Which sentence from the article **best** illustrates the author’s feelings about her mother’s bindi?

- The author **most likely** wrote this article...
- According to the article, winning in the Olympics can be inspiring especially to countries that are...
- The author most likely provides the description of the crew's training experiences to...

Make, confirm, or revise predictions. (**You might notice the following skills are addressed:** predicting.)

- Based on the information from the article, the reader can predict that...

Identify a Purpose for Reading. (**You might notice the following skills are addressed:** inferences and drawing conclusions)

- The article would be most helpful to a student researching...

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

- Read this sentence from the article:
Hindus have adorned their bodies with bindis for thousands of years.
The word "adorned" means about the same as...
- Read this sentence from the article:
In the early twentieth century, bindis became more of a fashion statement.

Now read the dictionary entry below.

state-ment *noun* **1.** A written fact or intention. **2.** A bill for an amount due. A special announcement made to the public. **4.** An expression of an idea or concept, especially by means other than words.

- Read the sentence from the article.
"One of the most poignant images of the games is watching a gold medal winning athlete stand on the podium as his or her national anthem is played."
What does the word "Poignant" most likely mean?

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

- Interpret characters, plot, setting, theme, and dialogue, using evidence from the text. (**You might notice the following skills are addressed:** determining sequence, inferring, determining cause and effect, noticing what time period it is, looking at characters' behavior.)

- Which of these events happens **first** in the passage?
- How does Jamie change from the beginning of the passage to the end of the passage?
- The events in this passage can **mostly** be described as...
- When does this passage take place?
- Which sentence from the passage includes a metaphor used by the author to describe Belle?
- Brady Tugs on Steve's Jeans because...
- Where does Brady Lead Steve and Zach?
- According to information in the passage, it is most important to the mother that she...
- Which word best describes the narrator's behavior toward her mother?

Identify the author's point of view, such as first-person narrator and omniscient narrator. **(You might notice the following skills are addressed:** determining whose point of view the text is told from and who is talking.)

- This passage is told from the point of view of...
- This poem is written from the point of view of a speaker who...
- This passage is told by...

Determine how the use and meaning of literary devices, such as symbolism, metaphor and simile, illustration, personification, flashback, and foreshadowing, convey the author's message or intent. **(You might notice the following skills are addressed:** determining the author's purpose, finding meaning using context clues, comparing and contrasting, inferring, using literary devices to help find meaning in a text.)

- Read these lines from the poem:
**those pure rivers
which have known
no will, no purpose
but their own.**
These lines contain an example of...
- Read this sentence from the passage:
By now, the flames behind me had crawled through the rocky area, sprinted through thick grass, and now were halfway to the big ditch.
This sentence suggests that the flames are...
- The author refers to the Brooklyn Bridge as "Brooklyn Belle" to help the reader...
- What is the most likely reason the author writes that the pine branches "snapped from the burning trees with a cannon like sound"?
- The narrator says the avenue is ordinarily "swarming with human traffic." This means that usually ...

- The poet probably compares the moon to a comma because of its...
- The poet compares various sources of light to...

Recognize how the author’s use of language creates images or feelings. (**You might notice the following skills are addressed:** identifying author’s craft, identifying author’s purpose.)

- Read this sentence from the passage:

“Not far from them fire was licking at underbrush and old logs before rearing up into the trees.”

With this sentence, the author creates a feeling of...

- The poet’s main purpose in writing this poem is probably to make the reader...

Identify social and cultural contexts and other characteristics of the time period in order to enhance understanding and appreciation of text. (**You might notice the following skills are addressed:** identifying the author’s culture.)

- Which sentence from the article **best** informs the reader about the author’s culture?

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

- Read this sentence from the passage:

At one spot, rocks and sparse grass slowed the fire’s pace up the slope, and I made good progress.

The word “pace” means about the same as...

In the passage, the narrator refers to the bridge renovation project. Based on information in the passage, the “renovation” project **most likely** refers to...

- Read this sentence from the passage:

“Okay madam,” I agree in a happy jocular tone. “How about today? Let’s have our first lesson this evening!”

The word “jocular” most likely mean that the narrator is being

8th Grade Reading Standards and Performance Indicators

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

Evaluate the validity and accuracy of information, ideas, themes, opinions, and experiences in texts.

Evaluate examples, details, or reasons used to support ideas. (**You might notice the following skills are addressed:** inferring, determining point of view, finding the main idea and supporting details, determining cause and effect.)

- What are the narrator's favorite sketches?
- What is the speaker's attitude toward wilderness rivers?
- The speaker says that there are no farms, cattle, or millwheel near the river in order to show...
- What is a **main** reason e-Sport games are played by so many people?
- The poet probably associates streetlights with periods to suggest that streetlights...
- Which sentence from the article best supports the author's claim that the men of the Pea Island Station were heroes?
- The account of the life saving Service's efforts is historically significant because it tells about...

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