

Testing Form and Function

Tests come in all sorts of shapes and sizes, so here's a reference guide to help supervisors, administrators, and teachers choose Common Core-aligned assessments

A common complaint amongst educators and administrators is that testing formats are often foreign to students, resulting in lower scores. With this guide, we aim to help administrators make the right choices of assessments to suit their teaching structures and methodologies, while giving teachers a quick guide to what testing methodologies they should be concentrating upon.

Writing Assessment

WrAP by ERB

WrAP (Writing Assessment Program) is for grades 3–12. This direct assessment of writing has provided a powerful, objective lens allowing schools and teachers to look deeply into the writing skills of their students with an on-demand performance task requiring students to respond to an engaging prompt. WrAP prompts have always called for well-organized and well-developed compositions that include multiple paragraphs and complex sentence structures. Focused on essential traits that outline the qualities seen in outstanding writing, WrAP allows teachers to weave the language, processes, and expectations for great writing into their instruction.

WrAP invites readers to engage with complex, authentic informational and literary texts, presenting real-world issues, significant and thematically relevant historical events, important scientific processes and phenomena, and narratives of artistic and thematic merit. WrAP readers must “think on their feet” as they are prompted to navigate the complexity of ideas, information, structures,

and literary elements presented, carefully weighing and balancing textual evidence in order to construct their own analyses, arguments, and narratives in writing. While a command of facts and details is certainly important, WrAP's focus clearly moves beyond any simple regurgitation of basic comprehension. WrAP mirrors what will be expected of students in college, their careers, and the real world. We live in an ever more demanding and dynamic environment, where critical and higher-order thinking skills are required for achievement, success, and a modern outlook and understanding of the world. WrAP provides a microcosm of this expected engagement, building, step by step, the tools students will need for college and career readiness.

Format: WrAP assessments present readers with pairings of complex, authentic informational texts, which are selected to support the development of extended writing analyses and/or arguments. Following each text, readers are presented with either a short constructed-response item or two-part multiple-choice item that is designed to support the relevant skills and expectations assessed in a culminating extended-response task, which follows the pairing. The extended-response task prompts students to analyze across the pairing and construct extended and well-developed analyses and/or arguments. WrAP also provides a narrative writing assessment, which follows the same mixed-item type format as the paired text assessments. For WrAP, ERB has two assessment cycles: fall and spring. For each assessment cycle, up to three genres are available at

every level, with a choice of stimulus-based and non-stimulus prompts for each genre. Each prompt/genre pair can only be used once per assessment cycle. Based on in-classroom instructional needs, schools can choose to assess once or more than once per assessment cycle.

Considerations for ELLs: Prompts are reviewed by ELL specialists to ensure use of clear and accessible language that avoids colloquial or regional language and unfamiliar terms that can cause misunderstanding. Vocabulary used is grade appropriate and widely accessible to all students. In instances in which an authentic text contains language that is above grade level or may not be understood by ELLs, footnotes are added to define words or explain the meaning of the referenced words. Directions are clear and precise.

Why teachers like it: Teachers can modify prompts according to course content and class needs. Prompts are specifically aligned with standards such as the CCSS. Software grades writing for syntax and language errors, so teachers can focus on lesson planning and teaching.

Literacy Assessment

Fountas & Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System

The Fountas & Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System is designed to be administered to all students during a one-on-one, student-teacher assessment conference. Because the BAS is conducted on a student's reading of continuous text, phonemic

awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension are all assessed. The extensive information gathered through the standard Benchmark Assessment procedures provides clear direction for instruction, but teachers may also wish to gather more diagnostic evidence about a particular student's literacy knowledge through the 100 optional assessments.

Since BAS is a one-on-one assessment, the teacher is able to gain a true and accurate picture of each student's specific literacy strengths and weaknesses to more precisely guide instruction. BAS is an in-depth, comprehensive formative and summative reading assessment comprising 58 high-quality, original books, divided evenly between fiction and nonfiction. Each book is accompanied by a recording form that captures a composite of factors research shows contribute to reading success for students: accuracy, fluency, and comprehension.

Format: For about 20 to 30 minutes, the student reads aloud and talks about a series of benchmark books while the teacher observes and notes the student's behaviors on the carefully constructed recording forms. Using established scoring conventions and procedures for analysis, the teacher not only establishes optimal learning levels, but also gathers valuable information about each individual's processing strategies, fluency, and comprehension — all of which provide insights about how to target teaching. Immediately after the oral reading, before the scoring is complete, the teacher engages the reader in a comprehension conversation about the benchmark book. Too often, comprehension is assessed by asking a student a series of questions, which are checked against a series of answers provided in a teacher guide, thus prompting students to regurgitate facts. This can lead to student's thinking that their purpose for reading is to answer teachers' questions correctly. For the Benchmark Assessment System, a different process/format has been constructed — one that will allow teachers to gather evidence of comprehension while engaging in a conversation with the student about the text. Depending on the school's requirements, it can be administered one to four times per year. Typically, the Benchmark Assessment System is administered three times a year: at the beginning of the school year, in the middle of the school year (about January), and at the end of the school year. Teachers administer the assessment at the beginning of the

year to know where to start teaching with each student. The observations and time spent with each student help the teachers get to know their new students as readers. The middle-of-the-year assessment allows teachers to take stock of the progress of their students. The end-of-the-year assessment provides a final record of the students' growth across the year.

Considerations for ELLs: If the Benchmark Assessment System is being used with an ELL, the teacher will need to be sure that the student speaks English well enough to understand the directions and the book introduction, enter into conversation with the teacher, process the print, and understand the text. Teachers can estimate the level to begin the assessment and move down if necessary. If the student seems confused, the teacher can read the introduction again. The teacher can also paraphrase directions as well as the comprehension conversation to support greater understanding. As the teacher engages in the comprehension conversation with ELLs, he or she should make an effort to draw them into a conversation, keeping in mind that they may understand more than they can explain in English. Since it is a one-to-one interaction, the teacher can adapt to meet the needs of the ELL.

Why teachers like it: The one-to-one format gives teachers the chance to assess students individually and conferencing can give students more opportunities to demonstrate understanding than multiple choice or short answer. Bilingual educators also love the Spanish-language assessment, Fountas & Pinnell *Sistema de evaluación de la lectura* (SEL).

Scholastic Reading Inventory

Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI) College & Career is a K–12 adaptive assessment that measures both foundational reading fluency and reading comprehension. SRI tracks reading skills from early sight words through college and career level texts. Using the Lexile Framework for Reading, SRI College & Career helps educators forecast a student's trajectory to grade-level proficiency and college- and career-readiness, differentiate instruction, plan targeted interventions, and demonstrate accountability with actionable data.

SRI's latest edition, College & Career, has newly recalibrated performance ranges that are modeled after the study of real world college and career texts, as are the CCSS. This edition offers a balance of literary and nonfic-

tion passages.

SRI provides an accurate measure of reading ability and text difficulty on a single vertical scale. With this clear and immediate view of what students can do and are positioned to learn next, educators can set rigorous goals, as recommended by the Common Core State Standards.

Format: The format of SRI is entirely multiple choice because it is designed to be a fast universal screening tool. Ideally, students take SRI three times per year.

Considerations for ELLs: None specifically for ELLs, but SRI identifies areas where students need improvement to guide interventions.

Why teachers like it: Multiple-choice reading tests are easy to proctor, and the results are instantaneous. Teachers appreciate the simplicity of SRI as a measurement tool. It brings them a wealth of information in a very concise format. Showing all students' placement along a single continuum, the Lexile Framework makes it easy to understand students' progression as a reader. SRI's design allows it to provide an optimal amount of data without interfering in precious instructional time any more than absolutely necessary. Scholastic prides itself on efficient measurement, and SRI leads its portfolio by providing just the right amount of instructional data from a minimal amount of administration time.

Questar Degrees of Reading Power

The Degrees of Reading Power (DRP) program assesses reading-comprehension ability for students in grades 2–12 and adult learners. The DRP tests provide holistic and analytic criterion-referenced measures of how students read closely and deeply in order to comprehend informational reading passages of increasing complexity.

With the knowledge provided by the DRP program, teachers can decide where and what form of extra assistance may be needed. When the text is within range of the student's instructional reading level, strategies focusing on vocabulary and text structures of the text may be sufficient. When the gap between ability and text difficulty is larger, more extreme measures and scaffolding may be required. DRP->BookLink, a database of DRP values for books, can be used as a resource in building a multisourced and multi-leveled curriculum. It allows teachers to select books in general as well as specific topic areas, and perhaps most importantly, teachers and students can select books that

are matched to each student's ability as well as to his or her interests. The importance of student motivation and interest for tackling challenging texts cannot be overstated.

Format: Each DRP test form is a "power" test consisting of several increasingly difficult expository passages with embedded probes that determine how well students understand the surrounding text. The DRP item format remains the same from the easiest to most-difficult DRP test forms across all grades. The value of DRP's stable and consistent measurement of comprehension ability over time cannot be overestimated; because the construct of reading is the same on all levels and forms, the DRP tests can be used year after year to reliably measure and monitor reading growth. Students should be assessed three to four times annually with the DRP assessment. Screening students at the start of the school year, then testing again mid-year and at the end of the school year is the most typical assessment regimen to measure growth and monitor student progress.

Considerations for ELLs: DRP tests are

untimed. In addition, all content information necessary to answer questions correctly is provided within the DRP paragraph or passage. Choosing the right answer on these tests does not depend on having had particular extra-linguistic background experiences in English-speaking cultures. Students are not required to make close discriminations or subtle inferences about the relative merit of response options. Therefore, lack of experience with English-speaking culture is not the disadvantage on DRP tests that it may be on tests, which call for fine discriminations among the available response options. Results from DRP tests can be used to inform a variety of decisions that must be made about ELLs. First, they can be used to inform the placement decision to ensure that students with comparable reading abilities are placed in appropriate instructional groups. Second, performance can be used to monitor students' progress. This progress can be measured against CCSS text-complexity expectations, local standards, the materials students are expected to read, the normative reading ability of students in mainstream

classrooms, or all of the above. Third, the information provided by DRP tests can be used to inform instruction. In addition to adjusting instruction to accommodate the range of ELL students' abilities, teachers can select materials that are more consistent with students' reading abilities. And finally, a student's DRP reading ability can be used to inform the exit decision. Given the importance of reading competence to success in the mainstream classroom and the wide differences in ability that often separate the native-English-speaking and ELL populations, the consideration of DRP test information in the ELL exit decision may be its most critical use.

Why teachers like it: DRP tests evaluate a student's performance on a fundamental comprehension task and report the results on a scale of text difficulty or complexity. The information provided by DRP tests allows educators to set standards for reading achievement in terms of the materials students are expected to read (e.g., textbooks, newspapers, recreational reading), to monitor student progress toward achieving those standards, to adjust instruction to accommodate student

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ability, and to select materials appropriate to the ability of each student. All of this can be done for English language learners and students with special needs, as well as for mainstream native English speakers.

Independent Reading Level Assessment (IRLA) by American Reading Company

The IRLA is a formative assessment framework that supports students, teachers, parents, and administrators by mapping the reading process from a pre-reading stage to college and career readiness. As each student works, in a variety of meaningful contexts, teachers use the lens of the Common Core to give immediate, appropriate, and targeted feedback, and to determine and suggest the next learning goal and actions which provide a clear direction for each student. The IRLA can be used to support existing reading instruction or to provide an action-planning framework for school reform. The web-based eIRLA has dashboards to allow administrators to track the rate of reading growth, in real time, in each classroom.

Format: The IRLA is administered on an

individual basis; different students take different groups of items. It is divided into 13 reading levels, PK–12. Each level is defined by the skills/strategies a reader must control in order to handle text at that level.

Considerations for ELLs: The IRLA can determine students' baseline reading levels, including that of ELL students. Once identified, their individual action plan is designed. ELLs in bilingual or dual-language schools can also take the Spanish version, *Evaluación del nivel independiente de lectura*.

Why teachers like it: Teachers report that the IRLA empowers students to take control of their learning. In a survey, teachers overwhelmingly praised IRLA for fostering individualized instruction and even for its merits as a professional development tool.

Language Proficiency

LAS Links by McGraw-Hill

Schools use LAS Links, an English language proficiency (ELP) test, to connect language to learning. CTB/McGraw-Hill understands the needs of the English language

learner (ELL) student and has the expertise and experience to meet and exceed educators' expectations for an internationally well-known, valid, and reliable English language proficiency assessment. LAS Links is consistently used across the nation to meet several requirements, such as identifying ELL students, exit criteria, Title III reporting, and monitoring the progress of ELL students to ensure students are moving through the stages of language acquisition.

LAS Links can be used for annual accountability testing programs. Additionally, with the introduction of Forms C and D and Español B, LAS Links can be used to help students meet the academic-language demands of the Next Generation Content Standards and the Common Core State Standards. The new LAS Links forms are designed to help educators determine if a student has sufficient proficiency in English to participate fully in the classroom by being able to "interact" with academic-text demands of the Common Core State Standards and content-area vocabulary. The items in LAS Links Forms C, D, and Español

Earn Reading & Literacy Authorization Online

CCTC-Approved Reading and Literacy Added Authorization

UCSD Extension offers the Reading and Literacy Added Authorization (previously referred to as the Reading Certificate) which is a comprehensive program of study that provides students with a solid foundation in the research and methods of reading instruction. The Reading and Literacy Added Authorization program is geared towards teachers with the potential to become leaders and mentors in the area of reading. It will provide educators with the right tools to improve student achievement.

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B are carefully designed to measure the student's ability to interact with grade-level academic language and content without relying on the student's knowledge of the underlying subject matter. LAS Links is designed to provide Next Generation Content and Common Core items that challenge students to demonstrate their language abilities in an academic context

Format: All of the LAS Links assessments are available in a paper-and-pencil format or with LAS Links Online, CTB/McGraw-Hill's online test-administration and delivery platform. LAS Links Online meets the requirements for technology-based assessments by providing a digital experience to students, enabling ongoing assessments, delivering new item types, and maintaining ELP assessment credibility by supporting ongoing form creation. LAS Links can be used for English language development and progress monitoring by using a combination of the LAS Links assessments. Depending on program need and intent, LAS Links provides schools and districts with the option of measuring student progress up to five times per year.

Considerations for ELLs: LAS Links is an integrated suite of English language proficiency assessments and instructional tools designed to strengthen an English language learning (ELL) program. Teachers can use LAS Links to accurately and quickly place students into the appropriate bilingual and ELL programs, where they can make progress right away and better enjoy the learning process. LAS Links also helps teachers monitor progress, develop optimal instruction plans, and determine when students are ready to exit the program and meet Title III reporting requirements. Educators can move their ELL students ahead quickly in the classroom — and in the world — with LAS

Links. CTB's LAS Links carefully considers the various language-use tasks that a student may encounter in academic situations.

Why teachers like it: LAS Links is the first ELL assessment that is fully supported online. With LAS Links Online, administrators and educators can manage the test setup process, administer the test, and view the reports fully online. Furthermore, LAS Links provides a built-in distributed scoring feature that teachers can use to score their students' writing and speaking responses. LAS Links Online offers customization of certain features during implementation for ease of use and in alignment with customer testing-program requirements. LAS Links Online supports both PC and MAC environments and provides a secured and locked-down testing environment that is accessible over the internet.

Multiple Subjects

onTRAC by Interactive Achievement

onTRAC is an instructional improvement system (IIS) that consists of an assessment management system (AMS) and a longitudinal data system (LDS). The system is designed for K–12 teachers, principals, and central office leadership. The system assesses essential knowledge and skills as outlined in state and national standards across all grades and subjects. onTRAC AMS allows the teachers to use assessment data to inform themselves about what the students have mastered and the areas where they need more instruction. This student- and skill-specific data helps teachers select the appropriate instructional methodology to address student needs.

onTRAC is grounded in the formative teaching and learning cycle where data generated by items and assessments provides

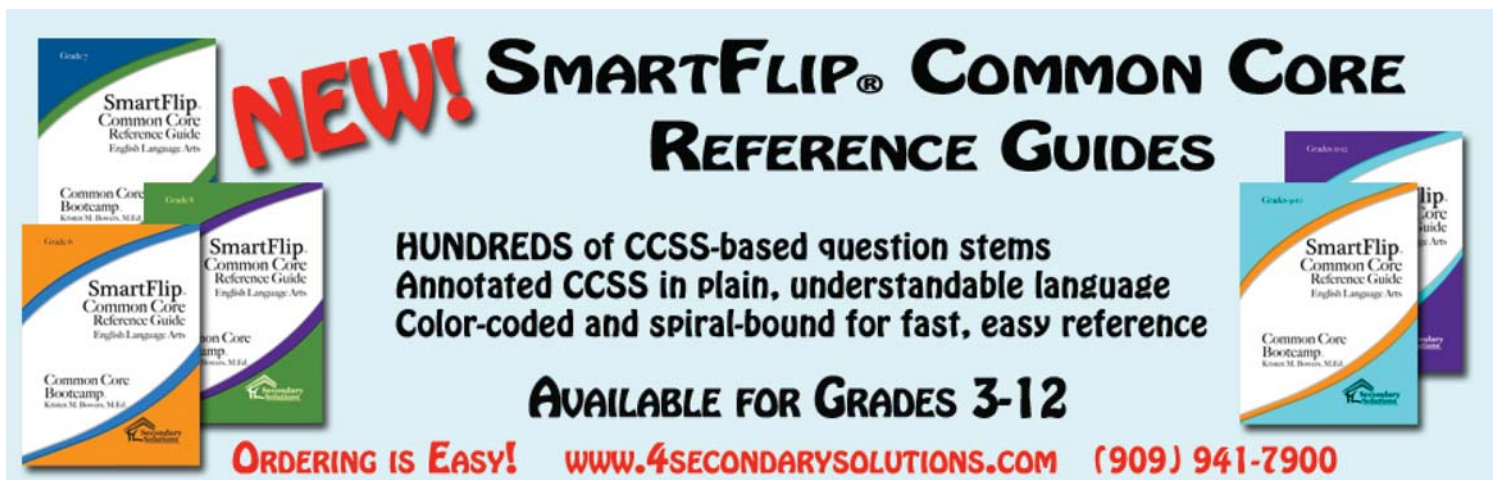
specific insights into student learning to guide instructional practice. In addition, onTRAC assessment items provide data at the CCSS indicator level, thereby providing focused and descriptive feedback on individual student strengths and areas for improvement. Scaffolded instruction is based on this indicator-level data, which can support an instructional map for teachers.

Format: onTRAC includes a comprehensive item bank with technology-enhanced items in a variety of formats designed specifically to get students engaged in assessment items that cover the range of cognitive complexity. These item types are multiple choice with more than four answer choices, fill in the blank, and hot spot. In addition to these technology-enhanced item types, the system also offers constructed-response items that consist of prompts requiring students to generate text to answer those questions. The onTRAC item bank is replete with items that include real-world scenarios and examples. In addition, every item in onTRAC is assigned a level of cognitive complexity in either Bloom's Taxonomy or Webb's Depth of Knowledge to ensure that students are given every opportunity to engage in rigorous items that go well beyond memorization and recall facts.

Students may be assessed as frequently as desired.

Considerations for ELLs: Teachers can modify existing items or write items to meet the needs of English language learners. For example, this might include reducing the number of distracters, changing the level of difficulty of vocabulary, and reducing distracting language.

Why teachers like it: Assessment items are exhaustive, and computer-grading allows teachers to focus more on teaching. It can be aligned with CCSS or with other state standards. **X**



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