

# Frequently Asked Questions About Virginia's 2010 English Standards of Learning

## Introduction

This document was prepared by Virginia Department of Education English Instruction staff with assistance from the Student Assessment staff in response to questions asked by educators during the implementation of the 2010 *English Standards of Learning*. Updates will be made on an as needed basis.

## Reading: Vocabulary

- 1. How will vocabulary be tested on the Standards of Learning (SOL) tests?**
  - Vocabulary will be tested both in reading passages in context and also in stand-alone items. Sample test items can be found on the [Vocabulary Resources Web page](#).
- 2. What differentiates SOL 3.4c (The student will expand vocabulary when reading by applying meaning clues, language structure, and phonetic strategies.) from a vocabulary item that uses context to clarify meaning of unfamiliar words (3.4d)?**
  - Although, there may be no apparent difference between a 3.4c test item and a 3.4d test item, instruction should look different. SOL 3.4c addresses patterns of structure, patterns of phonetics and other meaning clues for words, sentences and paragraphs while SOL 3.4d addresses the use of context for clarifying the meaning of unknown words. Additional instructional resources for vocabulary can be found on the [Vocabulary Resources Web page](#).
- 3. Are there resources for K-5 school-wide activities that can be used to improve vocabulary skills?**
  - The [Enhanced Scope and Sequence Sample Lesson Plans](#) provide vocabulary lessons that are readily accessible. In addition, resources are available on the [Vocabulary Resources Web page](#).
- 4. Are there specific Greek/Latin roots that students need to know?**
  - There is not a Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) specific list of common roots; however students should know common Greek and Latin roots appropriate for their grade level in order to determine or clarify the meanings of words. Sample test items and links to resources can be found on the [Vocabulary Resources Web page](#).
- 5. What does “authentic text” mean in the vocabulary standards?**
  - Authentic text refers to reading material that students encounter in their everyday lives such as newspapers, labels, advertisements, etc. Teachers should provide students with opportunities to study vocabulary found in authentic texts as well as words in passages from reading material. Studying vocabulary from authentic texts also strengthens nonfiction reading skills.

## Reading: Fiction/Nonfiction

### *Specific SOL Content*

#### **6. Is there an approved reading list for Virginia?**

- While Virginia’s SOL incorporate all types of literature, there is not a prescribed state-level reading list. The choice of specific titles to be taught is left to local school divisions. Students should read a variety of fiction and nonfiction from both classic and recent works during the course of any academic year.

#### **7. Will all grades have paired passages on the test? Will paired passages always be fiction/nonfiction?**

- Pairing passages is an effective instructional tool. Instruction using paired passages is recommended for all grades levels. For classroom instruction, pairing passages should be fiction with nonfiction, fiction with poetry, nonfiction with media, such as pairing a passage about the New Deal with images of Works Progress Administration (WPA) posters; or any other combination. Currently, the testing of paired passages is on the Grade 8 and EOC (End-of-Course) tests. In the future paired passages may also be used on the Grades 6 and 7 reading tests. Teachers should review the [Tabbed Reading Passages Demonstration](#) with students prior to the test.
- Other resources available for paired passages are:
  - i. [Sample text dependent questions](#)
  - ii. [SOL Institute Presentations and Lessons](#)
  - iii. [Reading Progression Chart](#)
  - iv. [SOL Practice Item Guide-Grade 8](#) beginning on page 10

#### **8. SOL 5.5f states that students will "identify and ask questions that clarify points of view". Is it saying that students should be aware of points of view with characters or is it asking students to be aware of the author's point of view?**

- Students should be aware of how the author uses characters to communicate point of view. Therefore instruction should be similar to that which uncovers author’s purpose. In the grade 5 classroom, discussions about texts such as, "Why did the author have this particular character tell the story?" and "How would the story have been different had another character told the story?" are the types of questions students should encounter. An example of a question that could be used to test SOL 5.5f includes but is not limited to: Which question could have been answered if the story had been told from \_\_\_\_'s point of view?

**9. How is narrative nonfiction defined?**

- As noted in the Grade 6 [English Curriculum Framework](#), narrative nonfiction includes biography, autobiography, personal essay, and memoirs. If the passage follows the structure or has the elements of fiction (plot, setting, conflict, etc), it is referred to as narrative nonfiction. The National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP) uses this same classification for narrative (literary) nonfiction in its [Reading Framework](#).

**10. Is poetry eligible to be tested?**

- Poetry is eligible to be tested. Instruction should include comprehension, characteristics, and language of poetry.

**11. Where is information on specific text structures and organization patterns on the VDOE Web site?**

- The information on text structures and organization patterns begins within the Grade 6 [Curriculum Framework](#) and continues throughout the grade levels.

**Writing Strand**

*Writing Test Window*

**12. When is the SOL Writing test?**

- [Supt’s Memo #089-12](#) announced the spring 2013 statewide online SOL writing test window scheduled for **Monday, March 11, to Friday, April 12, 2013**. In December 2012, each Division Director of Testing identified when the school division will administer the spring 2013 grade 5, grade 8, and EOC SOL writing tests online within the statewide online writing test window. Additional information is available in the Supt’s memo.

*Specific SOL Content*

**13. Will students be tested on research?**

- At grade 3, research is tested on the reading assessment (SOL 3.7 a, b). Beginning at grade 5, research is tested on the grades 5, 8 and EOC writing assessments. Additional information is available on the [Research Skills Progression Chart](#).

**14. Will sentence diagramming be tested?**

- Diagramming sentences will not appear on the SOL assessments. Sentence diagramming is an instructional strategy that provides a graphic representation of how the parts of a sentence work together to create meaning.

**15. How will dictionary skills be tested?**

- Dictionary skills as well as use of other word-reference materials are taught as part of vocabulary instruction and are tested on the Reading assessment as multiple choice and TEI items only. Examples of the types of questions which may be asked can be found in the [Reading Practice Items and Guides](#).

**16. Will graphic organizers be tested?**

- Graphic organizers will not be tested. Students must have an understanding of graphic organizers for both the reading and writing SOL assessments. Examples can be found in the [SOL Practice Items](#).

*SOL Test Format and Administration*

**17. Why do the Grade 5 Writing Test Blueprint and the Grade 3 Reading Test Blueprint list subsumed skills, while the Grades 4, 5, and 6 Reading Test Blueprints do not?**

- The [Grade 3 Reading Test Blueprint](#) and the [Grade 5 Writing Test Blueprint](#) are written slightly different than the other test blueprints for reading and writing because these are the first tests that are administered to students in those content areas and are therefore cumulative. The [Curriculum Framework](#) notes that students are expected to continue to apply knowledge, skills and processes from SOL presented in previous grades.

**18. May students use dictionaries and/or thesauruses on the SOL Direct Writing Assessment? Will there be a drop down menu for spelling?**

- Students may not use a dictionary or thesaurus on the SOL Direct Writing Assessment. A Spell Check tool is provided on the direct writing assessment. Teachers should provide students with opportunities to use the [Online Writing Practice Tool](#) so that they become familiar with the functionality of the TestNav™ writing platform. The Spell Check tool underlines in red the word that may be misspelled. Certain proper nouns may be identified as incorrectly spelled when, in fact, they are spelled correctly. A drop-down list of replacement words is offered. Students may choose to activate the Spell Check tool prior to typing their draft or after completing the writing. The directions for using the Spell Check tool are in the [Writing Practice Tool Guide](#) on page 21. Additional information on the functionality of the Online Writing Practice Tool is also available in the [Writing Resources PowerPoint Presentation](#).

**19. What accommodations are made for LEP students on writing?**

- Information on all accommodations is provided in the [Spring 2013 Writing Test Implementation Manual in Appendix D](#). The Division Director of Testing (DDOT) may also be able to provide additional clarification.

- 20. Will the students have a choice of prompts on the writing test?**
- No, the assigned prompt will appear in the exhibit window of the test.
- 21. Will the make-up writing tests also use the released prompts?**
- All the SOL direct writing prompts will come from the list of released prompts.
- 22. How much space does a student have in the direct writing portion of the test?**
- There are 52 lines of text available in the response area, which corresponds to what students had in the answer document on the paper-pencil version of the SOL direct writing test.
- 23. Should students skip lines on the direct writing portion of the writing test and does that affect how much available space remains?**
- Any line breaks that a student inserts will count against the total number of 52 lines available on the direct writing portion of the writing assessment.
- 24. May students use scratch paper on the writing test?**
- Scratch paper may be used on the multiple choice, technology-enhanced items, and the short-paper component. Scratch paper must be of a single color and blank. Examiners must keep track of all scratch paper, ensure that it is all collected and accounted for before students are dismissed from the testing session. A complete description of the types of scratch paper permitted can be found in the [Writing Test Examiner's Manual](#) on page 8.
  - The planning and drafting follow the same guidelines as before. Students can plan using blank paper which is collected by the test administrator before students leave the classroom.
- 25. Can students draft and revise?**
- Drafting is an integral part of the writing process. Students may draft using scratch paper or compose online.
  - Students may also plan using the electronic notepad, which is on the toolbar at the top of the screen in the direct writing component of the test. The practice writing tool has this notepad available as well.
  - Revision is also a vital part of the writing process. After drafting, students should revise and edit their drafts. Teachers should provide many opportunities for students to peer and self edit their writing. The [Instruction Anchor Sets](#) include annotations, examples of questions and writing checklists that teachers can use to assist students in the revision and editing process, as well as color overlays that align to the Instructional Writing Checklists.

### *Test Scoring*

- 26. What happens if students write their direct writing in one long paragraph? Will they be marked down?**
- Failure to paragraph correctly will impact a student's score. There is not a required number of paragraphs on the test. Paragraphing is an expectation under formatting, which is a part of the Usage/Mechanics domain.

**27. How will students be scored if they write in language used for text messaging? If it is used in the correct manner of conversation, is this viewed as voice from the author or in a negative construct?**

- Using “texting language” falls under the Usage/Mechanics Domain of correct sentence formation, fragments, run-ons, control of usage and mechanics. Use of “texting language” would count against the Usage/Mechanics domain.

## **Communication Strand**

**28. Will the Communication Standards be tested?**

- Communication Standards will not appear on the SOL assessments.

**29. Which persuasive techniques should be focused on in media?**

- Examples of persuasive techniques in Media Literacy can be found in the Grade 11 [Curriculum Framework](#).

## **Questions on SOL Technology-Enhanced Items (TEI)**

**30. Is there a video explaining TEI items for ELA tests?**

- Yes, there are narrated demonstrations for both the [Reading TEI](#) and [Writing TEI](#) items. In addition, VDOE has several tools to assist teachers and students with TEI items:
  - [Resources video](#)
  - [Catalog of Resources](#)
  - [SOL Practice Items](#)

**31. Will TEI items have a specified number of answers?**

- Some of the TEI items specify the number of answers needed and some do not. Teachers should provide additional examples of practice items that mirror the TEI for students prior to the tests to help prepare them for the wording/functionality of items requiring more than one answer. Practice items can be created on interactive white boards or using paper/pencil. Students should prepare using the [SOL practice items](#) provided by VDOE.

**32. Will students have fill-in-the-blank questions (TEI) on the English SOL tests?**

- Students will not have fill-in-the-blank questions (TEI) on the 2013 English SOL tests. They will need instruction and practice on manipulating Hot Spots and Drag and Drop items using the [SOL practice items](#).

**33. Will all of the multiple-choice test items (not the technology-enhance items) be labeled A-B-C-D or will there continue to be the options of F-G-H-J?**

- A-B-C-D- will be used in online assessments. Both will still be used in paper-pencil version.

## Questions on Other Topics

### 34. How will LEXILE™ be used?

- Lexile™ scores will be reported for the new Grades 3-8 and EOC SOL Reading assessments on the Student SOL Report beginning in fall 2013. For information about Lexile™ scores for the new reading tests administered in spring 2013, please contact your Division Director of Testing. Lexiles™ measure a student's reading level and difficulty of text on a single scale. More information on Lexiles™ is available on the VDOE Web site at <http://www.doe.virginia.gov/testing/scoring/lexile/index.shtml>.

### 35. What is the best way to print from the Writing Practice Tool?

- The Writing Practice Tool gives two options after the Save and Exit button is clicked. If SAVE is selected, the paper will be saved in HTML format. If PRINT is selected, the paper will print what is shown on the screen. In order to edit the draft, students would need to copy and paste their drafts into Word format.

### 36. Are there any resources to review for the new EOC test formats?

- Yes, all materials that are currently available are posted in links from the [English SOL Web page](#) in the Resources for Instruction & Assessment column.

### 37. When will Understand Scoring be updated?

- The *Understand Scoring* application has been updated to provide information about the new grade 5, grade 8, and end-of-course writing assessments that are based on the 2010 *English Standards of Learning (SOL)*. *Understand Scoring* provides educators with information about the SOL writing assessments, including the rubrics and anchor papers that illustrate each score point on the *composing/written expression* and *usage/mechanics* domains used to score the short paper components of the writing tests. The application is intended to assist teachers in preparing students for the SOL writing tests. The link to *Understand Scoring* can be found on the [SOL Online Writing Resource Web page](#).
- This site will be updated again in August 2013 to include sets of student papers that individuals can use to practice scoring and to evaluate the accuracy of the scores they assign. Notification will be sent to divisions when the update occurs.

### 38. Cursive handwriting was included in the 2010 *English Standards of Learning* for the following reasons:

- Students learn cursive in order to be able to read primary source documents.
- Cursive helps students distinguish letters. For example, the letters "b" and "d" can be confusing. With cursive, writing those letters requires different movements.
- Cursive writing facilitates the reading of words and sentences. The student reads what he or she writes as "whole words" rather than as individual letters.

### 39. Where are the answers for the practice items?

- The answers are found on the last pages of the [practice item guides](#).

**40. Can the WorkKeys Writing still be used as a substitute for the End-of-Course SOL Writing test?**

- Yes, WorkKeys writing is a substitute test for the End-of-Course (EOC) SOL Writing Assessment for the 2013 test administration.

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