

Washington Comprehensive Assessment Program

Performance Level Descriptors

Performance Level Descriptors give teachers, parents/guardians and students more information about a student's strengths and areas for improvement after taking our state assessments. Performance Level Descriptors are broken down by grade and by the score levels students can earn: Basic (Level 2), Proficient (Level 3) and Advanced (Level 4). There are no descriptors for Below Basic (Level 1).



Reading Performance Level Descriptors

High School

Basic Reading Behavioral Characteristics

- Students are basic readers.
- Students are uncomfortable with a wide range of texts; they struggle particularly with sophisticated fiction and poetry and are intimidated by informational selections with rigorous vocabulary.
- Students have little context or background from which to develop a “reader’s” understanding or perspective.
- Students possess a working vocabulary that is functional in nature.
- Students find reading difficult, but most are able to relate to the text on a literal level.
- Students may use mental imagery techniques to help support a comprehension of the text.
- Students may be unable to finish reading a whole text or may decode the text without capturing the essential meaning of the selection.
- Students need additional time to revisit the text more often and rely on visual aids to guide understanding.
- Students may have enough skills to “muddle through” a text, but they can benefit from the use of graphic organizers to “scaffold” text understanding.
- Students have a limited ability to apply strategies to extract meaning from text with a minimal level of metacognitive strategies.

Basic Reading Skill Characteristics

- Students struggle to achieve fluency; they focus primarily on decoding which means that they read all words at the same rate and assign the same importance to all words instead of determining essential purpose.
- Students have a basic recognition of tone, but are frequently unable to recognize literary devices such as alliteration, personification, metaphor, or simile.
- Students struggle to read for meaning and have great difficulty breaking down questions into manageable tasks.
- Students can identify setting, characters, and plot, but have a more difficult time with conflict and resolution.
- Students stay “literal” and within the text.
- Students give very literal answers and additional support may be vague or missing, if prompted to answer questions about a text.
- Students, have difficulty seeing implied meanings or connections in terms of themes and main ideas.
- Students’ summaries may consist of a list of unconnected details, and it appears they fail to understand the concept or construction of a summary.

Reading Performance Level Descriptors

High School

- Students struggle to find the information to support their inferences or predictions, and they appear unable to identify the author's purpose or bias towards the materials.
- Students treat comparison, contrast, and interpretation as separate skills as opposed to synthesizing them together to support an extended understanding of a text.

Reading Performance Level Descriptors

High School

Proficient Reading Behavioral Characteristics

- Students are motivated, independent, and self-directed.
- Students attack different kinds of text with confidence.
- Students follow directions and push through selections to achieve success.
- Students are able to prioritize information.
- Students use their understanding of context and vocabulary to make connections to a new text.
- Students take a “read to learn” attitude towards reading material.
- Students are “fluent readers”—they read smoothly, with expression, and can adjust for the purpose and type of material.
- Students identify genres and types of informational texts.
- Students have a wide range of metacognitive strategies to aid in comprehension and analysis.
- Students can visualize and use other sensory images to construct meaning, especially with literary texts.
- Students are willing to persevere with text due to their bank of strategies to support their understanding.

Proficient Reading Skill Characteristics

- Students possess a wide range of reading skills including the ability to comprehend, interpret, and evaluate texts, both informational and literary.
- Students use text features as “signs” to help them find their way in texts and they are able to summarize by selecting significant main ideas.
- Students are able to employ a solid working vocabulary including an understanding of root words, suffixes, and prefixes; they can also use context syntactical cues/organizational patterns to figure out vocabulary and meanings.
- Students read the entire question, identify the task, search for evidence and construct a response when they write in response to what they read.
- Students are able to understand and identify themes.
- Students are able to connect different text with similar themes.
- Students are able to compare/contrast texts and parts of text, identify and apply literary elements to text, and understand purpose and bias of author in text.
- Students are able to differentiate the distinctions between fact and opinion while also clarifying what they’ve read.
- Students are able to infer and draw conclusions about characters due to the actions or the dialogue of characters.
- Students are able to recognize and provide some explanation for a text’s mood or tone.

Reading Performance Level Descriptors

High School

- Students demonstrate a solid ability to extract meaning from text and then use the evidence for support.
- Students are able to read informational texts and identify most main points by using details from the text to support answers.
- Students recognize and apply plot elements and metaphors, similes, personification, alternation; they understand, interpret and infer information from text features (maps, timelines, charts, headings, pictures, and graphs).
- Students are able to demonstrate a cause and effect understanding by selecting evidence that supports both positions.
- Students can make connections between fiction/non fiction/informational texts.
- Students are able to state the purpose of the author and use details to explain why they achieved their goal.
- Students are able to use evidence from the text to evaluate reasoning and ideas.

Reading Performance Level Descriptors

High School

Advanced Reading Behavioral Characteristics

- Students are “natural” readers.
- Students have an instinctual understanding of the relationship between text, meaning, and ideas.
- Students understand the importance of text in shaping ideas, attitudes, issues, and events locally and globally.
- Students are highly motivated and strongly self-directed.
- Students have experience with literature and easily make connections between narrative and informational texts.
- Students attack different kinds of text with supreme confidence and look forward to attacking unknown text in order to gain new knowledge.
- Students quickly understand directions and reorganize the text during their reading process.
- Students are able to prioritize information and discard unimportant material.
- Students use their deep understanding of context and vocabulary to make connections to a new text.
- Students take a “read to learn” attitude towards reading material.
- Students are “fluent readers”—they read smoothly, with expression, and can adjust for the purpose and type of material.
- Students have a natural sense of text construction and how it functions; they immediately identify genres and subgenres of narrative texts as well as many types of informational texts.
- Students have a wide range of metacognitive strategies to aid in comprehension and analysis.
- Students always persevere with difficult text.

Advanced Reading Skill Characteristics

- Students know how to apply prior knowledge and historic context to reading.
- Students possess a wide range of reading skills including an advanced ability to comprehend, interpret, and evaluate texts, both informational and literary.
- Students use text features as “signs” to help them find their way in texts and they are able to summarize, literally and abstractly, by selecting significant main ideas.
- Students are able to employ a solid working vocabulary including an understanding of root words, suffixes, and prefixes; they can also use context, syntactical cues, and organizational patterns to figure out vocabulary and meanings.
- Students read the entire question, identify the task, search for evidence and construct a top-level response when they write in response to what they read.

Reading Performance Level Descriptors

High School

- Students are able to easily understand and identify themes.
- Students are able to connect different texts with similar themes in a sophisticated and complex way.
- Students compare and contrast texts and parts of text, identify and apply literary elements to text, and understand purpose and bias of the author in text in a focused and purposeful manner.
- Students are able to differentiate the distinctions between fact and opinion while clarifying what they've read and transforming it into a strong synthesis.
- Students capably infer and draw conclusions about characters due to the actions or the dialogue of characters.
- Students are able to recognize and provide strong analysis of a text's mood or tone.
- Students demonstrate a solid ability to extract meaning from text and then use the evidence for support.
- Students recognize and apply plot elements and metaphors, similes, personification, alternation; they understand, interpret, and infer information from text features including maps, timelines, charts, headings, pictures, graphs.
- Students are able to demonstrate a cause and effect understanding by selecting evidence that supports both positions.
- Students can make connections between narrative and informational texts.
- Students are able to use evidence from the text to evaluate reasoning and ideas.