

Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL)
Test and Item Specifications for Grades 3-High School Reading WASL
Grades 4, 7, 10 originated in 1996; updated April 2003 to include Grades 3, 5, 6, 8
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1. TEST PURPOSE

The 2001 federal No Child Left Behind law mandates that each state receiving federal funding for education conduct statewide tests in grades 3 through High School that assess students in reading and mathematics. The purpose of the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) in reading is to measure Washington students' level of proficiency in Washington's Essential Academic Learning Requirements (EALRs) and Grade Level Expectations (GLEs) in reading.

The Reading WASL will contain literary and informational reading passages. All reading passages range in total number of words and written difficulty level appropriate to their audience, and will be accompanied by test items that assess proficiency in the components of the Grade Level Expectations in reading. The Test Specifications for the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) for reading in grades 4, 7, and High School were first developed in 1996. The Test Specifications for grades 3, 5, 6, and 8, developed in 2003, used the grades 4, 7, and 10 Test Specifications, the EALRs and the GLEs as the reference point for development.

Test items on the Reading WASL will be of the following types:

- Multiple Choice: Student chooses from three (grades 3–5) or four (grades 6–High School) responses provided (worth 1 point each)
- Short-answer: Student constructs short response – phrases or sentences – to items regarding comprehension of the passage read (worth 2 points each)
- Extended-response: Student constructs longer, more sustained response – longer phrases, sentences, or paragraphs – to items regarding comprehension of the passage read (worth 4 points each)

II. STRANDS AND TARGETS ASSESSED ON THE READING WASL

Strands and targets are the identified skills that can be captured in paper and pencil assessments. Not every skill stated in the EALRs or the GLEs, are assessable on a large-scale assessment such as the WASL.

The following are the grades 3–High School reading targets assessed on the WASL and their corresponding Grade Level Expectations:

**GRADES 3, 4, AND 5 READING TARGETS ASSESSED ON THE READING WASL
and Their Corresponding Grade Level Expectations**

Literary Targets	Informational Targets
LC01 Demonstrate understanding of theme or message and supporting details (Reading GLE 2.1.3)	IC11 Demonstrate understanding of major ideas and supporting details (Reading GLE 2.1.3)
LC02 Summarize with evidence from the reading (Reading GLE 2.1.7)	IC12 Summarize with evidence from the reading (Reading GLE 2.1.7)
LC03 Make inferences or predictions based on the reading (Reading GLE 2.1.5)	IC13 Make inferences or predictions based on the reading (Reading GLE 2.1.5)
LC04 Interpret vocabulary critical to the meaning of the text (Reading GLE 1.3.2)	IC14 Interpret vocabulary critical to the meaning of the text (Reading GLE 1.3.2)
LC05 Order steps, sequence, and/or events from the reading (Reading GLE 2.2.1)	IC15 Order steps, sequence, and/or process from the reading (Reading GLE 2.2.1)
LA06 Demonstrate understanding of literary elements (genres; story elements such as plot, character, setting; stylistic devices; problem/resolution) and graphic elements/illustrations (Reading GLEs 2.2.2, 2.2.3, 2.3.3)	IA16 Demonstrate understanding of text features (titles, headings, and other information divisions, table of contents, captions) and graphic features (Reading GLE 2.2.2)
LA07 Compare and contrast elements of text (Reading GLEs 2.3.1, 2.4.5, 2.4.6)	IA17 Compare and contrast information presented in text (Reading GLEs 2.3.1, 2.4.5, 2.4.6)
LA08 Make connections (cause and effect) within a text (Reading GLE 2.3.1)	IA18 Make connections (cause and effect) within a text (Reading GLE 2.3.1)
LA09 Analyze author's purpose and evaluate effectiveness for different audiences (Reading GLEs 2.4.2, 2.4.3, 2.4.4)	IA19 Analyze author's purpose (including distinguishing between fact and opinion) and evaluate effectiveness for different audiences (Reading GLEs 2.4.2, 2.4.3, 2.4.4)
LA10 Extend information beyond text—apply information, give a response to reading, express insight gained from reading (Reading GLEs 2.4.1, 2.4.5)	IA20 Extend information beyond text—apply information, give a response to reading, express insight gained from reading (Reading GLEs 2.4.1, 2.4.5)

**GRADES 6-HIGH SCHOOL READING TARGETS ASSESSED ON THE READING WASL
and Their Corresponding Grade Level Expectations**

Literary Targets	Informational Targets
LC01 Demonstrate understanding of theme or message and supporting details (Reading GLE 2.1.3)	IC11 Demonstrate understanding of major ideas and supporting details (Reading GLE 2.1.3)
LC02 Summarize with evidence from the reading (Reading GLE 2.1.7)	IC12 Summarize with evidence from the reading (Reading GLE 2.1.7)
LC03 Make inferences or predictions based on the reading (Reading GLE 2.1.5)	IC13 Make inferences or predictions based on the reading (Reading GLE 2.1.5)
LC04 Interpret vocabulary critical to the meaning of the text (Reading GLE 1.3.2)	IC14 Interpret vocabulary critical to the meaning of the text (Reading GLE 1.3.2)
LA05 Demonstrate understanding of literary elements (genres; story elements such as plot, character, setting; stylistic devices) and graphic elements/illustrations (Reading GLEs 2.2.2, 2.2.3, 2.3.3)	IA15 Demonstrate understanding of text features (titles, headings and other information divisions, table of contents, indexes, glossaries, prefaces, appendices, captions) and graphic features (Reading GLE 2.2.2)
LA06 Compare and contrast elements between and within texts (Reading GLEs 2.3.1, 2.4.6)	IA16 Compare and contrast information between and within texts (Reading GLEs 2.3.1, 2.4.6)
LA07 Make connections (cause and effect) within a text (Reading GLE 2.3.1)	IA17 Make connections (cause and effect) within a text (Reading GLE 2.3.1)
LT08 Analyze author's purpose and evaluate effectiveness for different audiences (includes fact/opinion, author's point of view, tone, and use of persuasive devices) (Reading GLEs 2.4.2, 2.4.3, 2.4.4)	IT18 Analyze author's purpose (including distinguishing between fact and opinion) and evaluate effectiveness for different audiences (Reading GLEs 2.4.2, 2.4.3, 2.4.4)
LT09 Evaluate reasoning and ideas/themes related to the text (Reading GLEs 2.4.1, 2.4.5)	IT19 Evaluate reasoning and ideas/themes related to the text (Reading GLEs 2.4.1, 2.4.5)
LT10 Extend information beyond text (make generalizations beyond the text to a broader idea or concept, draw conclusions, or apply information to other texts or situations) (Reading GLEs 2.4.1, 2.4.5)	IT20 Extend information beyond text (make generalizations beyond the text to a broader idea or concept, draw conclusions, or apply information to other texts or situations) (Reading GLEs 2.4.1, 2.4.5)

For grades 3, 4, 5 four strands and twenty targets are assessed:

Name of Strand	Grade 3 Number of Targets	Grade 4 Number of Targets	Grade 5 Number of Targets
Literary Comprehension (LC)	5	5	5
Literary Analysis with Thinking Critically (LA)	5	5	5
Informational Comprehension (IC)	5	5	5
Informational Analysis with Thinking Critically (IA)	5	5	5

For grades 6, 7, 8 and High School, six strands and twenty targets are assessed:

Name of Strand	Grade 6 Number of Targets	Grade 7 Number of Targets	Grade 8 Number of Targets	High School Number of Targets
Literary Comprehension (LC)	4	4	4	4
Literary Analysis (LA)	3	3	3	3
Literary Thinking Critically (LT)	3	3	3	3
Informational Comprehension (IC)	4	4	4	4
Informational Analysis (IA)	3	3	3	3
Informational Thinking Critically (IT)	3	3	3	3

III. READING PASSAGES

Passages used on the Reading WASL will be drawn from published sources, and may include the following:

TYPES OF PASSAGES	
Literary Passages	Informational Passages
Stories Poems Novel Excerpts Biographies/Autobiographies Literary essays	Magazine articles Newspaper articles Excerpts/articles as in a social studies text Excerpts/articles as in a science text Historical documents Nonfiction narratives (In all selections we attempt to incorporate text features such as timelines, text boxes, charts, graphs, maps, diagrams, pictures, and captions.)

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Passages should not exhibit cultural or other forms of bias that might disadvantage any group (or groups) of students, and should avoid subject matter that might prompt emotional distress on the part of some students. It is critical that reading passages used be well written, of interest to students, and, in all appropriate cases, factually correct. Reading WASL passages should also reflect Washington's cultural diversity. The passages should contain enough material that allows them to support items that address the Reading targets. Permission to use selections from copyrighted material will be obtained. The reading difficulty of the passages will be validated using traditional readability formulas, and most importantly, teacher judgment. The passages' overall suitability will be judged by the Washington teacher committees.

Five separate committees review the passages and their items before they ever become part of the WASL. A Bias and Fairness Committee reviews all passages for potential bias or fairness issues. Committees of teachers work with Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) staff to determine if passages are appropriate for particular grade levels and to develop the passages' test items. A Content Review Committee, made up of educators who have not previously worked on the passages and items, reviews them for appropriateness. A second Bias and Fairness review occurs. This time, the committee reviews the written items for Bias and Fairness issues that may impact student performance on the WASL. After the items have met the criteria for Bias and Fairness review, they are now eligible to be placed on the assessment as pilot items. A Data Review Committee examines the pilot data for the passages and their items to see if passages or items meet psychometric parameters before they are placed in a test bank.

While most of the learning targets remain the same across grade levels, it is the complexity of the passages students are required to read on the Reading WASL that increases, along with the number of items students are asked to respond to on the Reading WASL.

IV. TEST ITEMS AND GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR TEST ITEMS

Reading test items should always focus on what is essential and consequential in a given text.

Test item construction for both multiple-choice and constructed-response items will follow these general guidelines:

- Test items are varied and address as many learning targets as the passages allow.
- Items are worded precisely and clearly. The better focused an item, the more reliable and fair it is certain to be, and the more likely all students will understand in the same way what is required of them.
- The learning target assessed is specified for each item.
- Items are reviewed to eliminate unfair representations of gender, race, individuals with disabilities, or cultural or religious groups.
- Care is taken that all items avoid language that shows bias or is otherwise likely to be offensive to or to disadvantage a particular group of students.
- Test items are tied closely and particularly to the passage from which they derive, so that the impact of outside (prior) knowledge, while never wholly avoidable, is minimized.

- Order of presentation of items will be dictated by logic.

Test item construction for multiple-choice items will follow these general guidelines:

- Each multiple-choice item for grades 3 through 5 contains a question with three answer options, only one of which is correct. Correct answers are distributed as evenly as possible among A's, B's, and C's. For grades 6 through High School, each multiple-choice item contains four answer options, only one of which is correct. Correct answers are distributed as evenly as possible among A's, B's, C's, and D's.
- The three or four choices are approximately the same length, have the same format, and are syntactically and semantically parallel; students should not be able to rule out a wrong answer or identify a correct response simply by virtue of its looking or sounding different.
- Distracters adopt the language and sense of the material in the selection so that students must think their way to the correct answer rather than simply identify incorrect responses by virtue of a distracter's obviously inappropriate nature.
- Distracters should always be plausible (but of course incorrect) in the context of the selection.
- To the greatest extent possible, no item or response choice "clues" the answer to any other item.

Test item construction for constructed-response items will follow these general guidelines:

- Constructed-response items are of two types: short-answer and extended-response.
- All constructed-response items must clearly indicate what is expected in a response and must help students focus their responses.
- Each short-answer or extended-response item gives clear indications of what is required of students; an item-specific scoring guide is developed for each short-answer and extended-response item, and information from the pilot is used to refine these scoring guides for use with the final forms of the test.
- Short-answer items are scored with a 3-level scoring guide (2, 1, or 0).
- Extended-response items are scored with a 5-level scoring guide (4, 3, 2, 1, or 0).
- Extended-response items generally require longer, more detailed responses providing more evidence, information, or examples. Each session of testing will feature one extended response.
- The two types of constructed-response items are also differentiated by the number of lines available for the response. (9 lines for short answers and 18 lines for extended responses).
- When an item has two parts, the parts sometimes appear separately (scaffolded), with lines following each part. This encourages students to notice and answer both parts of the item.

Note: With paired passages, items for each follow each passage. The items requiring comparison between the passages appear last, after both passages. There should always be more than one item that compares the two passages. Constructed-response items should be asked about individual passages in addition to the passages as a pair.

Sample WASL stems and scoring rubrics on the Grades 3-High School Reading WASL may be downloaded from the following OSPI Web site:

<http://www.k12.wa.us/assessment/WASL/ReadingAssessment.aspx>

V. DISTRIBUTION OF READING SELECTIONS AND TEST ITEMS

On every Reading WASL at every grade level, each test form includes six passages-50% literary passages and 50% informational passages. Each Reading WASL will always have one “pair” that can be a poem and a story, an informational passage and another informational passage or a literary passage and an informational passage. Whatever the pairing, the two passages are all linked by a similar subject or idea. Students are then asked to compare and contrast ideas across texts.

The remaining four passages will ideally be comprised of:

- a story or a biography/autobiography
- a poem (counts as a literary passage)
- one informational passage that focuses on science content
- one informational passage that focuses on social studies content

The following test characteristics matrix outlines the number of points, items and passages on each Reading WASL:

READING WASL TEST CHARACTERISTICS							
Test Characteristics	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Grade 8	High School
# of total items (MC, SA, ER) on test	28	29	31	32	34	35	37
# of total points possible on test	40	42	44	46	48	50	52
Number of operational passages on each test	6	6	6	6	6	6	6
Number of strands assessed per test	4	4	4	6	6	6	6
Minimum # of points per strand per test	6	6	6	6	6	6	6
# of multiple choice (MC) items on test	20	20	22	22	24	24	26
# of short answers (SA) on test	6	7	7	8	8	9	9
#of extended responses (ER) on test	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Percent of multiple choice in total score	50%	48%	50%	48%	50%	48%	50%
Percent of constructed response in total score (short answer and extended response)* *Percentages vary across grade levels due to total points possible and total number of items on the test.	50%	52%	50%	52%	50%	52%	50%
Number of embedded pilot items placed on test** **This may be a combination of multiple choice and constructed response items. Performance on pilot items does not impact overall score; pilot passage and items are not considered part of the operational test; and all pilot items are linked to one passage.	7	7	7	7	7	7	7

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