



# TEKS-BASED ASSESSMENTS

## READING

Supporting documentation for the development of  
**TEKS-Based Assessments: Reading/Writing**



## TEKS-Based Assessments: Reading/Writing

The development of state standards for K–12 English Language Arts was adopted by the State Board of Education in 2017 for Texas schools. Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) for English Language Arts (ELA) identify what students should know and be able to do at every grade. More specifically, the English Language Arts/Reading TEKS measure student proficiency in the acquisition of knowledge and skills covered by the curriculum at the specified grade level. The review of literature suggests that students should not be compared to each other but rather evaluated on how well they are individually meeting grade-level standards. These standards provide a consistent framework to prepare all students for success in K–12 educational years and as they advance to college and careers. Texas measures how well students are progressing in reading with the statewide assessment, the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR™).

Researchers indicate the importance of a balanced approach to assessments (Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshall, and Wiliam, 2003; Garrison and Ehringhaus, 2007). This approach focuses on summative assessments, interim assessments, and formative assessments. A comprehensive system is a balanced approach, with all assessments having a relatedness intended to improve achievement. *TEKS-Based Assessments: Reading/Writing* are interim assessments that measure student progress in reading at two different points during the year and in writing at two different times during the year.

The 2015 Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) requires that academic assessments for “math and reading or language arts must be administered annually in grades 3–8 and at least once in grades

9–12; science tests not less than once during grades 3–5, 6–9, and 10–12.” to be administered” (Mandlawitz, 2016, p.1). The critical issue of accountability will continue with this federal law ESSA, but assessments will be used to help improve schools and inform instruction. The law allows the state and local levels the opportunity to create systems for accountability, resources, interventions and teacher evaluation systems. The federal requirements of *Every Student Succeeds Act (U.S. Department of Education, 2016)* and the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* of 2004 mandate all students participate in the state assessment program with all students being tested in reading content at their respective grade levels. The law does allow the states to have more flexibility in developing assessments as long as they meet specified criteria.

Summative and formative assessments are necessary and used for developing an accurate picture of a student’s overall academic achievement. Herman, Osmundson, and Dietel (2010) attest to interim assessments occupying a space in the middle yet play an important role in a balanced assessment system. The National Research Council recognize a comprehensive assessment system as one that is coherent, comprehensive, and continuous (NRC, 2001). Classroom interim assessments correlated to the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills provide teachers ongoing interval measurements of student progress, thus the rationale for *TEKS-Based Assessments: Reading/Writing*.

Interim assessments should be well aligned with curriculum to validate improved learning. Utilization of formative assessments and interim assessments provide a continuous, comprehensive



flow of information with which to plan and guide instruction. When teachers are provided time to adequately analyze assessment data relative to their content, weaknesses in individual students or within the curriculum or instruction can be addressed. Thus, there is a definite need to include interim assessments as part of the accountability plan for a campus and district. These assessments are designed to measure student acquisition of the knowledge and skills specified in the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills at different intervals. The primary purpose of *TEKS-Based Assessments: Reading/Writing* is to provide a valid measure of the quality of reading education and writing in the classroom or across the campus. Research shows that students score higher on standardized tests when they experience focused, aligned practice.

*TEKS-Based Assessments: Reading/Writing* measure how well students have acquired the knowledge and skills taught during reading/writing instruction. The assessments are designed to ensure students are learning at their grade level. Furthermore, *TEKS-Based Assessments: Reading/Writing* provide data to teachers, schools, and school districts to support improved instructional decisions. The *TEKS-Based Assessments: Reading/Writing* serve as accountability measures to help gauge or predict future performance that might occur on state assessments which are part of the requirements of the federal *ESSA*. With the summative assessment data, educators can pinpoint areas that require additional attention and focus.

Periodic exposure to interim assessments provides students with opportunities to experience a variety of assessment items and formats for each standard. These experiences will benefit students prior to facing state assessments. When assessment is an integral part of reading/writing instruction, the literature indicates that assessment contributes significantly to students' learning. Assessment

should inform and guide teachers as they make instructional decisions. During the school year, practice tests provide students opportunities to evaluate their own work and progress. As a result, *TEKS-Based Assessments: Reading/Writing* arm teachers with essential data or information that helps in the preparation of high-quality instruction.

Results of the *TEKS-Based Assessments: Reading/Writing* provide information about the academic achievement of students. This information is used to identify individual student strengths, determine areas of challenge, and measure the quality of reading/writing across the campus. Utilization of results from various interim assessments helps teachers monitor student progress in order to determine future plans for instruction. Students can use the Chart Your Success charts located in the back of the student assessment booklets to chart assessment data, self-monitor individual progress over time in reading, and compare the knowledge and skills to previous assessments. The involvement of students in assessment promotes student engagement in individual learning targets. Students need to know what learning targets they are responsible for mastering and at what level (Stiggins, 2007). Marzano (2005) states, "students who can identify what they are learning significantly outscore those who cannot." Access to online platform assessment reports will be available to educators. After the analysis of assessment data, findings may indicate students require additional instruction to address deficits in order to achieve skill mastery and close learning gaps. If skill deficits exist, then teachers are encouraged to explore different strategies in order to improve student achievement. Teachers may design learning experiences to revise their curricula, develop formative assessments, examine instructional methods of delivery, target specific populations for remediation and enrichment, create student academic assistance interventions, and/or develop individual plans for student improvement.



Available for Levels 2–8 for reading and Levels 4 and 7 for writing, *TEKS-Based Assessments: Reading/Writing* are diagnostic and prescriptive in nature. These practice assessments provide educators with detailed information on student progress as well as promote flexibility of use in a variety of classroom settings. For each grade level, there are two different versions of the assessments (Form A and Form B) bound into one student assessment booklet and online. STAAR Resources were available to guide the development team in their creations of assessments (TEA, 2017). Each form of the fourth and fifth grade assessments feature four single reading selections and one paired selection. Each form of the second and third grade assessments has four single selections. The selections incorporate complex text that are of grade-appropriate difficulty and fall within the prescribed ranges of text complexity as detailed by national best practices. Selections are appropriate for student interest and integrate content from science, social studies, and the arts. Selections include all genres of as required by the Texas Education Agency (TEA, 2017). For Levels 2 and 3, the single selections contain 34 selected response assessment items. A total of 36 assessment items are offered for both forms in Levels 4 and 38 items in both forms for Level 5. For the Writing assessments, the two forms for Levels 4 and 7 feature one composition and two revising/two editing selections. Each Level 4 form contains 24 items and both Level 7 forms are comprised of 30 assessment items. In conclusion, the selected-response items will challenge students to move beyond factual knowledge as they analyze the meaning of texts and locate evidence for support of chosen responses. The assessment items in *TEKS-Based Assessments: Reading/Writing* will measure the depth, rigor, and complexity of comprehension required by the standards. Students should be familiar with such questions since classroom formative assessments should

contain questions that engage students in dialogue that alerts the teacher to the degree and depth of student understanding prior to the administration of interim assessments. According to researchers (Black et al., 2003), it is crucial that time be allotted for teachers to design and ask questions that probe for deeper thinking within students.

The student book includes a Chart Your Success tool for students to record individual results on the selected-response items. *TEKS-Based Assessments: Reading/Writing Online* also features a print-to-digital transition using the same content. Campuses will have digital access to the interim assessments if using Internet-connected computers. While these assessments are online versions, the assessment items are not computer-adaptive but are fixed-form and offer randomized assessment items. According to Davis (2012), testing experts caution educators that fixed-form assessments do not allow teachers to see the extent of learning gaps for struggling students or the extensive range of knowledge for higher-achieving students. Thus, educators cannot rely on a single fixed-form assessment as the sole determiner of learning gaps.

Earlier in 2012, the United States Department of Education and the Federal Communications Commission announced a blueprint to invite schools to transition to digital materials by the end of the next five years. While not mandated, the initiative encourages schools to make the switch from print-to-digital based on the projected cost-savings and the academic improvement. Some school districts appear to be making an effort to transition to digital materials and tools for students. Digital literacy in assessments appears to be a much needed 21st century skill. Technology seems to be an accepted or known behavior in schools today. Certainly, technology is how communication takes place more times than not in college and in the workplace. Today's students are expected to



demonstrate specific digital communication skills in order to show they are digitally literate. Academic excellence is the goal for all students. Acquisition of this goal within the context of a technological environment prepares students to survive within the Digital Age. Thus, performance data must yield evidence that students are successfully prepared to live in a technological society. As students study and learn core curriculum of the 21st century, technology skills, digital literacy, and higher-order thinking will be a focus.

The Administration Manual and Answer Key include directions for administering all portions of the assessment. As shared by the United States Department of Education (2016), *ESSA* noted the importance of assessments that align with the depth and breadth of the academic content standards. Therefore, all assessment items in the *TEKS-Based Assessments: Reading/Writing* are coded with the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills, English Language Proficiency Standards (ELPS), the Depth of Knowledge Levels (DOK), and the Bloom's Revised Taxonomy Levels. Karin Hess (2009; 2010) designed the Cognitive Rigor English Language Arts Matrix to integrate Revised Bloom's Taxonomy with Webb's Depth of Knowledge model. The ELA Curriculum Development team applied Hess' matrix to assessment items to promote depth, complexity, and rigor in student thinking.

The model Depth of Knowledge (DOK) was developed by Norman Webb (Webb, 2002; 2006). Dr. Webb advocates the necessity of assessment items matching the standard. Webb also wanted educators to be aware of the level of demonstration required by a student when a test item was developed, thus the development of his four levels of DOK. Level 1 assessment items have students recall information. Level 2 items ask students to think beyond reproduction of responses. Students use more than one cognitive

process or follow more than one step. Students at Level 3 demonstrate higher levels of thought than the previous levels require as these items are more complex. Responses may have multiple answers, but students must choose one and justify the reasoning behind the selection. Assessment items at Level 4 require students to form several connections with ideas. Typically, performance assessments and open-ended responses are written at this level of thought.

Students can be assisted in organizing the content of their thinking to facilitate complex reasoning. According to Sousa (2006), students are not actually taught to think because children are born with the brain organizational structure that originates thinking. Sousa supports Bloom's Taxonomy as an organizational structure that is compatible with the manner in which the brain processes information to promote comprehension. Bloom, Englehart, Furst, Hill, and Krathwohl (1956) developed this classification system for levels of intellectual behavior in learning. Bloom's Taxonomy contains three domains: the cognitive, psychomotor, and affective. Within the cognitive domain, Bloom identified six levels: knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. The taxonomy was revised by Anderson and others (2001) to focus on thinking as an active process. The original and revised taxonomies continue to be useful today in developing and categorizing the critical thinking skills of students. Webb's DOK framework, Bloom's Taxonomy, and Hess' ELA Cognitive Rigor Matrix were all utilized by the ELA Curriculum Development Team to develop assessment items that reflect rigor, depth, and complexity of thought.

The national and State of Texas shift towards preparing students to survive in the global market impact the type assessments undertaken by students. Assessments that focus precisely on the State Standards will not only demonstrate if



students can succeed in school but also in the real world. Assessments will indicate if students are both college and career ready. For the purpose of the *TEKS-Based Assessments: Reading/Writing*, the various DOK and Bloom's coding is utilized to reflect the rigor and depth in levels of thought required by students on the interim assessments. Assessment items displaying rigor require students to use higher levels of thought, exhibiting a more challenging 21st Century learning environment. Students may be asked to use cognitive processes such as examine, prioritize, decide, assess, or classify, as well as provide evidence to support given responses.

Over the past years, changes in accountability and testing have led to data playing a major role in the education of students. The United States Department of Education advocates the importance of using data for guiding instruction and improving student learning. Schools are strongly encouraged to respond to assessment data, using it to identify students' academic strengths and needs (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). As educators face increasing accountability pressure from federal, state, and local entities to improve student achievement, the data appear to be the central element in how students' academic progress is monitored and how instructional practices are evaluated. Research seems to indicate there is no single assessment that provides a complete picture of student performance. *TEKS-Based Assessments: Reading/Writing* offer two forms in order to keep a pulse on the progress of student performance, rather than a single snapshot assessment. Each assessment plays a prominent role in determining if quality teaching and learning are occurring. As correct and incorrect assessment answers are analyzed, teachers are able to observe the patterns of thought in which students experience difficulty or exhibit success. This data is informative

in that teachers may appropriately adjust and revise instruction to more appropriately address the diversity of needs within classrooms. Thus, assessments have important implications for teaching and learning. Research indicates it is essential that assessment data be used to make well informed instructional decisions (Armstrong and Anthes, 2001; Feldman and Tung, 2001; Forman, 2007; Liddle, 2000).

Interim assessments yield student achievement data on grade-specific and eligible for testing TEKS throughout the school year, including the ability to report student achievement approaching, falling below, or exceeding the standards. With two forms of interim assessments per subject and per grade, these assessment instruments can provide data to measure reading/writing progress and proficiency at two different intervals throughout the year. *TEKS-Based Assessments: Reading/Writing* Forms A and B can be used in different ways: as practice, as a diagnostic instrument, and as a teaching tool. Students need opportunities to practice and develop test-taking skills. These tests focus on the skills students will be expected to demonstrate on assessments of Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills. Although interim assessments are not formative assessment tools, the data is informative to annual learning goals. With access to online assessment reports, educators can glean insight into students' strengths and deficit areas. Data from the assessments will guide the teacher in identifying possible areas where adjustments in future instruction may be necessary, thus, using the assessments as teaching tools.

Studies support the use of several measures from which to gauge student achievement. The English Language Arts Curriculum Development Team recognized that assessment systems should include a balance of formative and summative data to be most effective in improving outcomes and in making a significant impact on reading education.





For *TEKS-Based Assessments: Reading/Writing*, selected-response items were developed for all forms with all items aligned to the English Language Arts-Reading (ELA/R) TEKS. The format for *TEKS-Based Assessments: Reading/Writing* will be paper-pencil fixed-form or an online version of each form with randomized items. As the school year progresses, the students who are proficient on the various interim assessments can determine how they might perform on the state assessments in reading. The two forms offered at each grade provide flexibility in planning by enabling educators to spread out the interim assessments over the course of a year, leaving a window of time for the state assessments to be administered. As the *TEKS-Based Assessments: Reading/Writing* data are examined, teachers can identify students who are performing at the grade-specific standard level, those who are exceeding the standards, and those who are approaching or are functioning below the standard. Teachers can also determine and chart the data for the various subgroups (i.e., ethnicity, disadvantaged, special education, and English Language Learners).

The Texas Education Agency (TEA) released information regarding the assessment of reading and writing. This information was considered by the English Language Arts Curriculum Development Team in order to design assessment items that measure a deeper understanding and reflect the requirements and expectations for STAAR™. The developers of *TEKS-Based Assessments: Reading/Writing* reviewed English Language Arts/Reading TEKS, studied the released item specifications, examined the range of sample items, and perused the STAAR Blueprint prior to developing the *TEKS-Based Assessments: Reading/Writing*.

The interim assessments address all Readiness and many Supporting student expectations of the English Language Arts/Reading Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEA, 2011b) that are eligible for testing. While being assessed, students must display a beyond literal understanding of texts as they use their critical and analytical skills. All students must demonstrate sufficient skill in making connections within texts, using evidence to justify or form conclusions and make real-life applications; fourth and fifth graders must also show sufficient mastery of making connections across texts using evidence to justify or form conclusions and make real-life applications. Student results will indicate if students are prepared to apply rigor and complexity of thought as they respond to the assessments emphasizing the existing Reading/Writing Standards.

As previously stated, *TEKS-Based Assessments: Reading/Writing* reflect test items that align with the assessed standards. The alignment results in appropriate and effective assessment items based on current information. Webb's Depth of Knowledge and Bloom's Taxonomy were the basis for designing items that stimulated students' higher order thinking skills, encouraging rigor and depth in thinking. With grade-specific and eligible for testing ELA/R TEKS (TEA, 2017) as the key focus for designing assessment items, the Mentoring Minds Curriculum Development Team developed *TEKS-Based Assessments: Reading/Writing* as a resource for assessing and strengthening education in English Language Arts/Reading.



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