



**pennsylvania**  
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

# **The Pennsylvania System of School Assessment**

## **English Language Arts Item and Scoring Sampler**



**2023–2024**  
**Grade 3**

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## INTRODUCTION

### General Introduction

The Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) provides districts and schools with tools to assist in delivering focused instructional programs aligned with the Pennsylvania Core Standards (PCS). These tools include Academic Standards, Assessment Anchors and Eligible Content (AAEC) documents, assessment handbooks, and content-based item and scoring samplers. This Item and Scoring Sampler is a useful tool for Pennsylvania educators in preparing local instructional programs by providing samples of released test items, of test item types, and scored student responses. The item sampler is not designed to be used as a pretest, a curriculum, or any other benchmark for operational testing.

This Item and Scoring Sampler is available in Braille format. For more information regarding Braille, call (717) 901-2238.

### Pennsylvania Core Standards (PCS)

This sampler contains examples of test questions designed to assess the Pennsylvania Assessment Anchors and Eligible Content aligned to the PCS. The Mathematics, Reading, and Writing PSSA transitioned to PCS-based operational Mathematics and English Language Arts assessments starting with the spring 2015 PSSA administration.

The PCS-aligned Assessment Anchor and Eligible Content documents are posted on this portal:

- [www.education.pa.gov](http://www.education.pa.gov) [Hover over “Data and Reporting,” select “Assessment and Accountability,” and select “PSSA-PA System of School Assessment.” Then select “Assessment Anchors/Eligible Content” on the right side of the screen.]

### What Is Included

This sampler contains stimulus reading passages with test questions, Conventions of Standard English questions, and a short-answer (SA) question that have been written to align to the Assessment Anchors, which are based on the PCS. The sample test questions model the types of items that may appear on an operational PSSA. Each sample test question has been through a rigorous review process to ensure alignment with the Assessment Anchors prior to being piloted in an embedded field test within a PSSA assessment and then used operationally on a PSSA assessment. Answer keys, scoring guidelines, and any related stimulus material are also included. Additionally, sample student responses are provided with each open-ended item to demonstrate the range of responses that students provided in response to these items.

### Purpose and Uses

The items in this sampler may be used<sup>1</sup> as examples for creating assessment items at the classroom level. Classroom teachers may find it beneficial to have students respond to the short-answer question in this sampler. Educators may then use the sampler as a guide to score the responses either independently or together with colleagues within a school or district.

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<sup>1</sup> The permission to copy and/or use these materials does not extend to commercial purposes.

## Item Format and Scoring Guidelines

The 2023 PCS-based PSSA has multiple types of test questions. For grade 3, the types of test questions are multiple-choice (MC) questions, evidence-based selected-response (EBSR) questions, and short-answer (SA) questions.

**Multiple Choice:** Each of this type of test question has four answer choices. Some MC test questions are based on a stimulus reading passage, while Conventions of Standard English MC test questions are independent of a passage. Each correct response to an MC test question is worth one point.

**Evidence-Based Selected-Response:** Each two-part EBSR question is designed to elicit an evidence-based response from a student who has read either a literature or an informational text passage. In Part One, which is similar to an MC question, the student analyzes a passage and chooses the best answer from four answer choices. In Part Two, the student utilizes evidence from the passage to select one or more answers based on the response to Part One. Part Two is different from an MC question in that there may be more than four answer options and more than one correct answer. Each EBSR test question is worth either two or three points, and students can receive points for providing a correct response to Part One or for providing one or more correct responses in Part Two.

**Short Answer:** Each of this type of test question includes a short response space in which the student composes an answer based on the passage the student has read. An SA test question may include multiple tasks, and the student may be asked to provide a brief explanation. Each SA test question is scored using an item-specific scoring guideline based on a 0–3-point scoring guideline. In this sampler, every item-specific scoring guideline is combined with examples of student responses representing each score point to form a practical item-specific scoring guideline. This sampler also includes the *General Description of Scoring Guidelines for Short-Answer Questions* used to develop the item-specific guidelines. The general description of scoring guidelines should be used if any additional item-specific scoring guidelines are created for use within local instructional programs.

**Reading Non-score Considerations:** For SA items, responses can be designated as non-scorable (NS). While every effort is made to score each student response, a response may receive an NS designation if it falls into one of five categories:

- Blank** – Blank, entirely erased, entirely crossed out, or consists entirely of whitespace
- Refusal** – Refusal to respond to the task
- Off Task** – Makes no reference to the item or passage but is not an intentional refusal
- Foreign Language** – Written entirely in a language other than English
- Illegible** – Illegible or incoherent

**Testing Time and Mode of Testing Delivery for the PCS-Based PSSA**

The PSSA is delivered in a traditional paper-and-pencil format as well as in an online format. The estimated time to respond to a test question is the same for both methods of test delivery. The following table shows the estimated response time for each item type.

<b>English Language Arts Item Type</b>	<b>MC</b>	<b>EBSR</b>	<b>SA</b>
Estimated Response Time (minutes)	1.5	3 to 5	5


During an official test administration, students are given as much additional time as is necessary to complete the test questions.

**English Language Arts Grade 3**

This English Language Arts Sampler is composed of a passage, 2 passage-based MC questions, 2 EBSR questions, 1 SA question, and 3 Conventions of Standard English MC questions.

There is 1 passage in this booklet. The passage is followed by 2 passage-based MC questions, 2 EBSR questions, and 1 SA question. This booklet also contains 3 Conventions of Standard English MC questions.

Each question is accompanied by a table that contains the Assessment Anchor and Eligible Content coding, answer key(s), depth of knowledge, and testing data. Each question is followed by a brief analysis or rationale. The SA question is displayed with an item-specific scoring guideline or mode-specific scoring guideline and examples of student responses with annotations at each scoring level.

The PCS-based PSSA may be administered in paper-and-pencil format or online. As a result, this sampler includes samples of SA question responses in both formats. A sample online response is noted by the symbol .

**General Description of Scoring Guidelines for Reading Short-Answer Items****3 Points**

- The response provides a complete answer to the task (e.g., a statement that offers a correct answer as well as text-based support).
- The response provides specific, appropriate, and accurate details (e.g., naming, describing, explaining, or comparing) or examples.

**2 Points**

- The response provides a partial answer to the task (e.g., indicates some awareness of the task and at least one text-based detail).
- The response attempts to provide sufficient, appropriate details (e.g., naming, describing, explaining, or comparing) or examples; may contain minor inaccuracies.

**1 Point**

- The response provides an incomplete answer to the task (e.g., indicating either a misunderstanding of the task or no text-based details).
- The response provides insufficient or inappropriate details or examples that have a major effect on accuracy.
- The response consists entirely of relevant copied text.

**0 Points**

- The response provides insufficient material for scoring.
- The response is inaccurate in all aspects.

## Item and Scoring Sampler Format

This sampler includes the test directions and scoring guidelines that appeared in previous PSSA English Language Arts assessments. Each MC item is followed by a table that includes the item alignment, the answer key, the depth of knowledge (DOK) level, the percentage<sup>2</sup> of students who chose each answer option, and a brief answer-option analysis or rationale. The EBSR item is followed by a table that includes the item alignment, the answer key to Part One of the item, the answer key to Part Two of the item, the DOK level, the mean student score, and a brief answer-option analysis for each part of the item. The SA item is followed by a table that includes the item alignment, the DOK level, and the mean student score. Additionally, each of the included item-specific scoring guidelines is combined with sample student responses representing each score point to form a practical item-specific scoring guideline. The *General Description of Scoring Guidelines for Reading Short-Answer Questions* that was used to develop the item-specific scoring guidelines should be applied if any additional item-specific scoring guidelines are created for use within local instructional programs. The student responses in this item and scoring sampler are actual student responses; however, the handwriting has been changed to protect the students' identities and to make the item and scoring sampler accessible to as many people as possible.

**Example Multiple-Choice Item Information Table**

<b>Item Information</b>	
Alignment	Assigned AAEC
Answer Key	Correct Answer
Depth of Knowledge	Assigned DOK
p-value A	Percentage of students who selected option A
p-value B	Percentage of students who selected option B
p-value C	Percentage of students who selected option C
p-value D	Percentage of students who selected option D
Option Annotations	Brief answer-option analysis or rationale

**Example Evidence-Based Selected-Response Item Information Table**

<b>Item Information</b>	
Alignment	Assigned AAEC
Answer Key: Part One	Correct Answer
Answer Key: Part Two	Correct Answer
Depth of Knowledge	Assigned DOK
Mean Score	Average Score
Option Annotations	Brief answer-option analysis or rationale

**Example Short Answer Item Information Table**

<b>Alignment</b>	<b>Assigned AAEC</b>	<b>Depth of Knowledge</b>	<b>Assigned DOK</b>	<b>Mean Score</b>	<b>Average Score</b>

<sup>2</sup> All p-value percentages listed in the item information tables have been rounded.

**ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS TEST DIRECTIONS FOR READING PASSAGES AND QUESTIONS****Directions:**

On the following pages are the Reading passage and questions.

**Directions for Multiple-Choice Questions:**

Some questions will ask you to select an answer from among four choices.

For the multiple-choice questions:

- First, read the passage carefully.
- Read each question and choose the best answer.
- Only one of the answers provided is correct.
- You may look back at the passage to help you answer the question.
- Record your choice in the answer booklet.

**Directions for Evidence-Based Selected-Response Questions:**

Some questions will have two parts and will ask you to select one or more answers in each part.

For the evidence-based selected-response questions:

- Read Part One of the question and choose the best answer.
- You may look back at the passage to help you answer Part One of the question.
- Record your answer to Part One in the answer booklet.
- Only one of the answers provided in Part One is correct.
- Then, read Part Two of the question and choose the evidence to support your answer in Part One. If Part Two tells you to select two answers, be sure to select two answers.
- You may look back at the passage to help you answer Part Two of the question.
- Record your answer or answers to Part Two in the answer booklet.



**Directions for Short-Answer Questions:**

Some questions will require you to write your response.

For the short-answer questions:

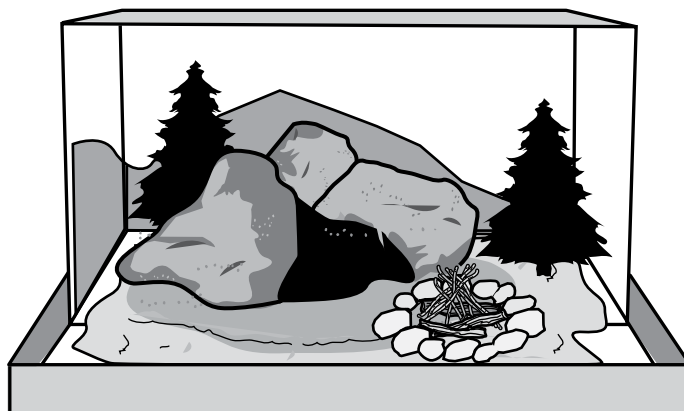
- Be sure to read each short-answer question carefully.
- You cannot receive the highest score for a short-answer question without completing all the tasks in the question.
- If the question asks you to do multiple tasks, be sure to complete all tasks.
- You may look back at the passage to help you answer the question.
- Write your response in the appropriate space in the booklet. If you use scratch paper to write your draft, be sure to transfer your final response to the booklet.

## PASSAGE 1

Read the following passage about a science project. Then answer questions 1 through 5.

## Family Science

by Nancy Viau



“Eeeww! Karly, get that slimy, disgusting piece of junk away from my doll!” Jessie hollered.

“It’s not slimy. It’s SHINY,” I said. “Look!” I pushed my rock under Jessie’s nose. “Rocks aren’t disgusting, especially this one. It’s called obsidian, and it’s from a volcano. Dad and I bought it at the Natural Science Museum.”

Jessie shoved my rock. “Who cares? Karly, you are clueless. Girls don’t play with that stuff.”

“I like rocks.” I let out a puffy sigh and put the rock in my pocket. “I may be a famous geologist one day. What will you be?”

“Leave me alone,” Jessie snapped.

I didn’t feel like arguing, so I stomped out the door, plopped on the ground, and dug a hole. “Karly,” Mom called from the potting shed. “Do you have to play in the dirt? Look at your clothes. They’re filthy.”

“Maybe I’ll be an archaeologist when I grow up,” I shouted. “They get paid to look for artifacts in the ground.” I dusted off my pants and marched to the porch. “Good dinosaur book?” I asked Dad, peering over his shoulder.

“Excellent, want me to read to you?” he asked.

“Not now. Sometime soon I want to get started on the book I got at the museum—the one that came with an awesome fish fossil and . . .”

Jessie interrupted and asked me, “What in the world would you do with a fossil?”

“I’d study a bunch of fossils and become a paleontologist. I might even discover a new dinosaur,” I replied.

My sister shook her head so hard I thought her braids would fly off. “Dad, we can’t possibly be twins,” she said. “Karly’s weird.”

Dad gave Jessie his don’t-mess-with-me look. “Not that again.”

Jessie took the hint. “I’m leaving. I have to find a shoebox and make a caveman diorama for school.”

“Wait!” I fished around in my pocket. “I found a chunk of granite earlier today. Do you want to use it?” I asked.

“Eeeww! You’ve got to be kidding.” Jessie grabbed my rock and threw it down the driveway. “I certainly don’t need that!”

I watched my sister disappear into the house, then wiped away an annoying tear. A scientist doesn’t cry, but I sure wished Jessie would see things my way sometimes. After lunch, I heard sobs coming from Jessie’s room. I was still upset, but I peeked around the door. Jessie was sitting on the floor in a heap of construction paper. “What’s wrong?” I asked.

Jessie sniffled. “I can’t think of any materials for this dumb diorama. Colored paper doesn’t look prehistoric.”

Jessie was right. An idea sizzled in my brain. I grabbed her hand and pulled her outside. I didn’t stop until we were next to Mom’s potting shed.

“What are we doing here?” Jessie whined. “I have a project to do.”

“Dig, just dig,” I said, “and no questions.”

My sister tickled the dirt with her fingertips. “Eeeww!”

“Dig deeper,” I said. Jessie scrunched up her face, closed her eyes, and clawed at the earth. She felt something. “What is it?” I asked.

Jessie picked up a piece of hardened red clay. “What good is broken pottery?”

“It could be part of your caveman diorama, Jessie. It looks like a tiny primitive bowl, don’t you think?”

“Well . . . I guess,” said Jessie as she grinned and looked at the ground. “Maybe there’s a cup in here too.” My sister pushed and pulled at the dirt. I couldn’t believe she was giggling! Jessie worked for an hour on her diorama. She arranged the pottery bits around a fireplace that was made from crisscrossed twigs. Then Jessie sifted through layers of earth to find the right size stones for benches. “Now I need a cave,” she said. Racing down the driveway and skipping back, she opened her hand. “How about this? You said I could have it.”

I took the chunk of granite from my sister’s palm and gently placed it in the shoebox. “A granite cave,” I replied, “it’s perfect. And I have just the thing that looks like a cave drawing.” I ran into the house and brought out my fish fossil.

“Try this,” I said.

“Your museum fossil?” Jessie asked.

“You can borrow it. I will need it back, though, if I become a paleontologist and not a geologist or an archaeologist.”

“My diorama still needs something. I know! I have a miniature boy doll I can dress up like a caveman!” Jessie exclaimed.

“A doll?” I rolled my eyes. “Eeeww!”

“Ok, I’ll do this part myself. Thanks for helping me. I won’t call you weird anymore. I’d be lost without you for my sister,” Jessie said as she gave me a hug.

I hugged her back and whispered, “Sister scientists save the day.”

## Multiple-Choice Questions

1. Read the sentence from the passage.

My sister tickled the dirt with her fingertips.

What does “tickled the dirt” mean in the sentence?

- Ⓐ lightly touched the dirt
- Ⓑ drew a picture in the dirt
- Ⓒ patted the dirt back into place
- Ⓓ dug in the dirt looking for things

2. Which sentence **best** tells what the sisters learn in the passage?
- Ⓐ Twin sisters see how they are alike.
  - Ⓑ Twin sisters respect one another's differences.
  - Ⓒ Twin sisters work together to make a diorama.
  - Ⓓ Twin sisters talk about what they will be when they grow up.

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INTENTIONALLY BLANK.**

**Evidence-Based Selected-Response Questions**

3. This question has two parts. Answer Part One and then answer Part Two.

**Part One**

What is the result of Karly helping Jessie with her school project?

- Ⓐ Jessie appreciates Karly's having different interests.
- Ⓑ Jessie decides to become an archaeologist.
- Ⓒ Jessie accepts Karly's offer to finish the diorama.
- Ⓓ Jessie decides to collect different types of dolls.

**Part Two**

Which evidence from the passage supports the answer in Part One? Choose **two** answers.

- Ⓐ “ ‘A granite cave,’ I replied, ‘it’s perfect.’ ”
- Ⓑ “ ‘I have a miniature boy doll I can dress up like a caveman!’ Jessie exclaimed.”
- Ⓒ “ ‘I won’t call you weird anymore.’ ”
- Ⓓ “ ‘I’d be lost without you for my sister,’ Jessie said as she gave me a hug.’ ”





4. This question has two parts. Answer Part One and then answer Part Two.

**Part One**

From which point of view is the passage written?

- Ⓐ third person through a narrator
- Ⓑ first person through Karly
- Ⓒ third person through Dad
- Ⓓ first person through Jessie

**Part Two**

Which sentence from the passage **best** supports the answer in Part One?  
Choose **one** answer.

- Ⓐ “ ‘Karly, get that slimy, disgusting piece of junk away from my doll!’ Jessie hollered.”
- Ⓑ “I pushed my rock under Jessie’s nose.”
- Ⓒ “ ‘Dad and I bought it at the Natural Science Museum.’ ”
- Ⓓ “Jessie scrunched up her face, closed her eyes, and clawed at the earth.”



**Short-Answer Question**

5. Read the sentences from the middle of the passage.

An idea sizzled in my brain. I grabbed her hand and pulled her outside.

How does Karly’s idea contribute to the sequence of events in the passage? Use evidence from the passage to support your answer.

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**After you have finished your work, close this booklet so your teacher will know you are finished.**

