

About the Standardized Assessment Tasks for STAAR Alternate

OVERVIEW

Students assessed on STAAR Alternate perform assessment tasks that are observed and evaluated by a test administrator. The assessment tasks are developed by content and special education experts and reviewed by Texas educator committees comprised of teachers from both the general and special education fields. Assessment tasks are developed for each tested grade, subject or high school end-of-course, and essence statement. The essence statements summarize the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) statements and student expectations for each STAAR-tested reporting category. For each essence statement, three tasks have been provided at varying levels of complexity—i.e., application, basic recall, and beginning awareness. Each assessment task includes a state-selected prerequisite skill from the TEKS curriculum and three predetermined criteria designed to measure the student's performance on the skill. The student must perform all actions requested in each predetermined criterion to receive credit for successfully completing the task. The assessment tasks, prerequisite skills, and predetermined criteria are components of standardized test items and cannot be revised. Additionally, the predetermined criteria must be implemented in the order presented to maintain the integrity of the assessment task.

For mathematics, science, and social studies, process skills have been identified for individual tasks, when appropriate, to indicate the process the student will use from the TEKS curriculum to demonstrate the academic skill for the task. Tasks identified as "Transition" require the student to demonstrate academic tasks in a manner that directly links to how the skill will be used when the student transitions to the community after leaving public school.

COMPLEXITY LEVELS

Three assessment tasks for each essence statement were written in descending order of complexity, as described below. It is critical that teachers have a clear understanding of what is expected of the student at each complexity level. The verbs used in each assessment task are important in distinguishing between the three complexity levels as they establish whether the student will be required to perform skills at an application level, recall level, or beginning awareness level.

Level 3: Application

Level 3 assessment tasks are the most complex and involve applying knowledge. Level 3 assessment tasks require the student to internalize skills beyond basic recall, use higher-level thinking skills, and arrive at answers on his or her own. Some of the skills students at this level are expected to demonstrate include determining distinguishing features, organizing information, comparing components, generating ideas, making inferences, or justifying answers.

Students assessed on Level 3 assessment tasks cannot be provided choices from which to select correct answers; however, a wide array of materials may be appropriate for students who have limited communication skills or difficulty generating language. For STAAR Alternate purposes, a wide array of materials is defined as a presentation or display of *abundant* materials including a variety of both appropriate and inappropriate materials. These materials cannot be presented to the student as choices, but rather as available resources that can be used if so initiated by the student.

Level 2: Basic Recall

Level 2 assessment tasks are moderately complex and involve recalling or reproducing information that has just recently been presented or is right in front of the student. Level 2 assessment tasks require the student to demonstrate only a basic understanding of information and arrive at answers when at least three choices are provided. Some of the skills students at this level are expected to demonstrate include identifying or sorting elements, assisting in procedures, choosing options, examining features, or matching or replicating components.

At Level 2, at least three choices must be provided of which only one is the correct answer. The incorrect answer choices must be as equally attractive and plausible as the correct answer to ensure the student is choosing the answer for the right reason, and the teacher can feel confident that the response is authentic.

Level 1: Beginning Awareness

Level 1 assessment tasks are the least complex and involve responding to knowledge at the beginning awareness level. Level 1 assessment tasks require the student to be aware of the task as it is occurring, be aware of a change in stimuli but not be required to act on the stimuli, and be aware of information but not make choices or decisions based on the information. Level 1 assessment tasks most often involve sensory input and exposure to stimuli through experiences, objects, or representations. Some of the skills students at this level are expected to demonstrate include acknowledging features, responding to stimuli, participating in processes, exploring materials, or anticipating outcomes.

At Level 1, students are provided information through statements and/or materials, presented one at a time, which expose the student to the academic content. The student must demonstrate an authentic response to what is being shown or experienced. Students assessed at Level 1 should not be provided choices or asked questions as these imply the student is able to recall or make decisions. If students are able to answer questions, they should be assessed on Level 2 tasks.

SELECTING APPROPRIATE ASSESSMENT TASKS

The teacher is responsible for determining the most appropriate assessment task based on the complexity level or combinations of complexity levels determined by the ARD committee. To do this, the teacher must consider the student's current level of performance, the targeted prerequisite skills, the expectations for the verbs used in the predetermined criteria, and the importance of challenging the student.

Current Level of Performance

The teacher should review how the student is performing in each of the tested subjects or courses. This review should include identifying skills the student already possesses and the skills the student is currently working on. The teacher should also consider how the student typically processes information to determine if the student is best described by the parameters that define one of the complexity levels. A student whose performance is best described by one of the complexity level descriptions should be assessed on that complexity level for all tasks. However, student performance is not always clearly indicated by the student characteristics associated with each complexity level. Some students may display characteristics indicating progress beyond the parameters that define each complexity level. Students displaying indicators of progress fall between two complexity levels and should be instructed and challenged with the higher complexity level task if that complexity level option was selected by the ARD committee. To help teachers determine which complexity level task is the most appropriate choice for a student, the "Student Characteristics for the STAAR Alternate Complexity Levels" document has been developed and may be accessed from TEA's STAAR Alternate Resources webpage. If a test administrator feels that the ARD committee complexity level selections are no longer the best option for the student after reviewing the tasks, the ARD committee should reconvene to review the student's progress and make new decisions for assessment.

Targeted Prerequisite Skills

The grade-level information and the prerequisite skill presented with each essence statement provide the academic context from which the task was developed. The teacher should review the grade-level information and the prerequisite skills associated with each assessment task. The teacher should think about how each of the prerequisite skills relate to the student's current instruction and determine what skill might be the most appropriate or the most logical next step in the student's instructional program. The standardized assessment tasks include a document preceding each of the essence statements that provides teachers assistance in understanding the academic context for the skills being measured and suggestions on materials and processes for how the task can be presented.

Verb Expectations

The teacher must also consider the verbs used in each predetermined criteria for the assessment tasks. Specific verbs are used in the predetermined criteria at each complexity level and help define the complexity of what the student is expected to do. The teacher needs to understand the verb expectations and consider how the student might be able to respond to demonstrate each skill. The state has developed the "Ways to Demonstrate the Verbs Used in the STAAR Alternate Assessment Tasks" document to assist teachers in understanding the verb expectations. This document provides

defining characteristics of each verb at each complexity level, as well as examples of ways students might respond to demonstrate performance at each complexity level.

Challenge Your Student

The assessment task chosen should always present a challenge for the student. The ultimate goal in instruction is to promote progress which can be achieved only by providing challenging opportunities. Providing instruction and appropriate access to tasks may allow the student to perform the more challenging task. The student does *not* have to be able to perform *all* three of the predetermined criteria in order to be assessed at that level.

Combinations of assessment tasks from Levels 3 and 2 and Levels 2 and 1 can be made for students whose performance is best described by one of the indicators of progress boxes in the “Student Characteristics for the STAAR Alternate Complexity Levels” document. Taking these factors into account, the test administrator must select the task that will most likely reflect student success after instruction.

STUDENT ACCESSIBILITY TO ASSESSMENT TASKS

The assessment tasks have been written broadly enough to allow access for a wide range of student abilities. Thus, it is critical that teachers make the tasks accessible for each student through the careful use of presentation supports and materials and the identification of appropriate student response modes that allow the student to demonstrate what has been learned. This preplanning ensures that a student’s disability is not a factor in his or her performance. The teacher must think about how the task can be set up so that the student has the best chance to make an independent response given the preplanned supports. The supports and response modes a teacher identifies must be routinely used with the student during classroom instruction and must be preplanned.

The teacher should plan the task so well that the student is able to perform the predetermined criteria independently given the preplanned supports. However, due to the inconsistent nature of students in this population, a student may not always perform as expected. Cueing and prompting may be necessary. Cueing and prompting for STAAR Alternate refers to the additional assistance needed by a student beyond the preplanned supports. This additional assistance is recorded as Level of Support when documenting the student’s performance and is factored into the student’s score.

USE OF MATERIALS

The same supports that were effectively used during instruction are used during the assessment observations. However, materials used for the assessment observation must be different than those used during instruction. The materials must vary enough from instruction so that the student is not just rote repeating an answer or response from a previous instructional session without truly demonstrating the skill. The change in materials, therefore, should be related to the content being measured. During the assessment observation a student must provide a different answer or respond to a different experience to the predetermined criterion than was observed during instruction. Student performance can only be considered valid if the assessment task has not been previously practiced. Therefore, teachers must review the assessment tasks prior to beginning instruction to ensure the task is not duplicated which will compromise the authentic response required during the assessment observation. The state has developed the document “Task Specific Change in Materials/ Approach from Instruction to Assessment” to provide assistance in determining appropriate changes in the materials or approaches when moving from instruction to the assessment observation.

MAINTAINING THE COMPLEXITY LEVEL

Although students are provided supports and materials to access the assessment tasks, it is important that the supports and materials maintain the integrity of the complexity level for the chosen task. That is, the planned access cannot modify the assessment task so much that the complexity level becomes easier or harder than the one selected for use. After planning the task, the teacher should review the supports and materials to determine if the planned task is still reflective of the task’s designated complexity level. In all cases, the preplanned supports and materials must ensure that the student is the one demonstrating the skill, that the verb in the predetermined criteria still meets the state definition for implementation, and that the student is not being given the answer.

STANDARDIZATION

Standardization is an important component of STAAR Alternate. Although teachers plan supports and materials to aid student access, the assessment tasks are standardized test items and cannot be changed or rewritten. Additionally, the verbs used in the state-developed predetermined criteria are specific to each complexity level and must be interpreted and implemented according to the verb definitions provided by the state. Also defined by the state are the cueing and prompting terms used to describe the types of additional assistance that may be provided. For STAAR Alternate, the terminology and definitions used for cueing and prompting are consistent across the state to ensure standardized evaluation of student performance.

GENERALIZATION

Students assessed with a Level 3 or Level 2 assessment task who demonstrate the skill for all three predetermined criteria without prompting, earn the opportunity to generalize the skill. Generalization is the ability to transfer knowledge and learned skills to new contexts. When a student with a cognitive disability demonstrates that he or she has internalized a skill by applying the skill or using the skill in a different way at a later time, this is true mastery. Giving students an opportunity to generalize is an important part of STAAR Alternate. Students who earn generalization must be evaluated on a different day using new materials. The change in materials must require the student to provide a different answer to the predetermined criterion than was observed during the primary assessment observation. The state has developed the "Change in Materials from Primary to Generalization" document to assist test administrators in making the appropriate changes in materials required for generalization.

DOCUMENTATION OF STUDENT PERFORMANCE

The state has developed STAAR Alternate Documentation Forms of Student Performance which must be used to document final assessment observations. The documentation forms serve as a record of the student's performance. The documentation forms are required before the observation to record the preplanned supports, materials, and student response modes. The documentation forms are then used by the test administrator during or immediately after the observation to record the student's performance (Demonstration of Skill), any additional assistance in the form of cueing and prompting (Level of Support), and, if earned, the student's performance on the generalization observation (Generalization of Skill). After the observation, the test administrator must use the documentation forms to evaluate and enter the student's performance in the Texas Assessment Management System, delivered through PearsonAccess. Documentation forms completed by the test administrator are the recorded evidence of a student's performance and score and can be compared with the student's Confidential Student Report, the computer-generated report provided to the parents.

RESOURCES

TEA has developed numerous resources to help teachers better understand each component of the STAAR Alternate assessment. These resources may be accessed from TEA's STAAR Alternate Resources webpage.