

STAAR Alternate Guidelines for Choosing Grade-Appropriate Texts for Assessment Purposes

Students who meet the participation requirements for STAAR Alternate have unique learning styles and strengths. They may also have developmental delays and display characteristics that do not match their chronological age. These students often have interests and an experiential level similar to those of younger students. Students assessed with STAAR Alternate typically rely on their teachers to make decisions about their learning; therefore, texts used on STAAR Alternate assessment tasks must be chosen carefully.

Although it is important to keep student interests and experiences in mind when choosing texts, it is the intent of both federal and state law that students with significant cognitive disabilities receive grade-level or course curriculum instruction and assessment. To be compliant with the law, **all** texts used with students who meet the requirements for STAAR Alternate **must** be representative of the types of grade-level reading content that students encounter in general education classrooms.

Therefore, texts used for STAAR Alternate reading assessments **must** be grade-appropriate as defined below.

*Grade-appropriate text is any text that general education students at a particular grade level or course would be **interested in, read, and/or be required to read** by the state-mandated curriculum for that enrolled grade level or high school course.*

It is **not acceptable** to use text considered appropriate for a grade level lower than the student's enrolled grade level.

Once a grade-appropriate text has been chosen, the teacher may use the text as written or adapt the text to an accessible but challenging level for the student. Summaries of an entire book, a single chapter, or key points are examples of how grade-appropriate texts can be made accessible for students assessed with STAAR Alternate. To further enhance the student's understanding, pictures, objects, or representations can accompany the written text but not replace the written text. Providing opportunities to interact with text by using dialogue, dramatization, or special software are also effective ways to support understanding for students assessed with STAAR Alternate.

Teachers of students who meet the requirements for STAAR Alternate are encouraged to consult with general education teachers to determine what texts are appropriate at a student's enrolled grade level and what texts are currently being read in those grade-level classrooms. Appropriate text for the STAAR Alternate assessment may be found in:

- General education classrooms for a student's enrolled grade or high school course
- General education grade-level textbooks and ancillary materials
- Required reading lists at a student's enrolled grade (these are often prepared by campuses, districts, and publishing companies)
- Internet searches for grade-specific text
- School libraries

Teachers of students who meet the requirements for STAAR Alternate should become familiar with the genres and terminology used in the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) curriculum for English Language Arts and Reading. Students designated for STAAR Alternate should receive instruction using a wide variety of texts from different genres. Examples and definitions of the genres are described below.

Literary Texts (Grade-Appropriate): Literary texts are artistic works of fiction that may include some or all of the following elements – characters (main characters central to the story and others less central), plot (the sequence of events in a story that develops the author's basic idea), conflict (opposite forces, either internal or external, which tie one incident to another and develop the plot), setting (time and location in which a story takes place), and theme (lesson, moral, or central idea). Literary text includes:

- Fiction – works of prose shaped by the author's imagination, including realistic fiction, historical fiction, science fiction, and fantasy
 - Novels – lengthy stories with multiple characters, plots, and subplots
 - Short stories – brief stories that are less complicated than novels
- Poetry – rhythmic writing with imagery that typically evokes an emotional response from the reader
- Drama/Plays – stories written in verse or prose for theatrical performance; characters express emotion and conflict through dialogue and action
- Myths – legends or stories written about a supernatural being, ancestor, or hero which attempt to explain a belief or natural happening; based in part on historical events but still considered fictional
- Folk tales – stories based on beliefs that are unfounded and passed down through the generations originally by word of mouth
- Fables – stories that convey a message or moral which typically include animals that take on human characteristics, such as speech and mannerisms

Literary Nonfiction (Grade-Appropriate): Literary nonfiction uses literary style and elements to create narratives based on actual persons, places, and things. The author tells a story which entertains the reader, but also presents researched, factual information to expand a reader's knowledge of the subject. Forms of literary nonfiction text include:

- Biographies – written accounts of a person's life told by someone other than the person about whom the text is written
- Essays – literary compositions that reflect the author's outlook or point of view
- Autobiographies – written accounts that tell the chronological history of a person's life from birth to fame, written by that person
- Memoirs – written accounts of how a person remembers his or her own life

- experiences focusing on a time that was especially vivid or memorable
- Speeches – written accounts of a person’s words, typically delivered to a group in the form of an address, which express or describe the speaker’s thoughts, feelings, or perceptions on a topic
- Student- or teacher-generated compositions and journals – written accounts describing a person’s experiences

Informational: Informational text presents researched, factual information to expand a reader’s knowledge of a subject. Forms of informational text include:

- Expository Text– a type of informational text that clarifies or explains something typically found in the following:
 - Newspaper and magazine articles
 - Encyclopedia articles
 - Webpages
 - Textbooks (grade-appropriate)
- Procedural Text – a type of informational text that is written to explain the steps in a process or procedure typically found in the following:
 - Schedules
 - Recipes
 - Directions for making or doing something
- Persuasive Text – a type of informational text written to persuade or convince the reader of something typically found in the following:
 - Advertisements
 - Compositions or papers stating an author’s position on a topic
 - Critiques of movies and restaurants

Note: Many STAAR Alternate tasks begin by stating that a “grade-appropriate informational text” will be presented. It is important that a teacher review the skills in the task in order to select an appropriate informational text from the above list. Some informational texts would not be appropriate selections for some tasks. For example, although a recipe is an informational text, it would not be appropriate to use for a task measuring main idea and details.

Media Literacy

Media is defined as words, images, graphics, or sounds that work together to impact meaning. Media literacy is defined as connecting those words, images, graphics, or sounds to a text and understanding their impact. The following examples should be used in combination with text to clarify or extend the readers understanding. Some forms of media are:

- Flyers
- Advertisements
- Pamphlets
- Signs
- Captioned photographs/pictures/illustrations
- Video or video clips

Note: Texts such as signs, menus, recipes, flyers, advertisements, pamphlets, and job applications are not required to be grade-appropriate. Such texts exist as a part of our daily lives and are not grade specific. These texts may be incorporated into STAAR Alternate tasks, but only if the task does not already specify a particular genre and only if the task and predetermined criteria can be appropriately implemented with their use.

For further information on grade-appropriate text, you may refer to:

- a PowerPoint presentation titled, “Grade-Appropriate Text” located on the STAAR Alternate Resources webpage at <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/student.assessment/special-ed/staaralt>
- the definition and clarification of terms used in the assessment tasks located in the assessment task documents prior to each essence statement