

## **Redesign of the STAAR English I and English II Assessments**

The development of the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR<sup>®</sup>) English I and English II reading and writing assessments included extensive public scrutiny and input from Texas teachers, administrators, curriculum staff, faculty and staff at Texas colleges and universities, education service center personnel, and national content-area experts. Educators recommended which Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) should be eligible for assessment and which TEKS should be considered readiness as opposed to supporting standards. Educators also provided valuable input on the reporting categories, the test design and blueprint, the prototype questions, the reading and writing rubrics, and the reading and writing selections and questions developed each year.

To reflect the intent of House Bill (HB) 5, the STAAR English I and II assessments have been redesigned to combine reading and writing into a single measure with a single test score, but the goal has been to maintain the fidelity of the original design since it was developed in close collaboration with Texas educators. To accomplish this, Texas Education Agency (TEA) staff made a proportional reduction of the blueprint across the six reporting categories to ensure that the reading and writing strands were equally represented, that no reporting category was unduly impacted (i.e., either overrepresented or underrepresented on the test), and that the combined assessments could be administered in spring 2014, as required by HB 5. No changes were made to the TEKS eligible for assessment, the readiness and supporting standards, the reporting categories, the rubrics, or the types of selections and questions included on the assessment. Both the rigor of the assessments and the performance required for student success remain the same.

### **Five-hour time limit in relation to the blueprint reduction**

The length of the English I and II assessments has been reduced by eliminating the following:

- an entire reading selection and the questions associated with it
- an entire writing selection and the questions associated with it
- one essay (the literary essay for English I and the expository essay for English II)
- 19 multiple-choice questions (across reading and writing)

The new blueprint for English I and II reflects a reduction of 50% of the essays and 26.5% of the multiple-choice questions that count toward a student's score. When combined with the reduction in multiple-choice questions, reading two fewer selections and writing one less essay significantly decreases the testing burden on students and the time they need to complete the test. The reason for this is that the amount of actual reading and writing required on the assessments greatly affects testing time because these tasks represent the most time-consuming parts of the test.

To address the needs of students who might work more slowly than the average general education student, TEA has established a five-hour time limit for English I and II, although only a small number of students are likely to require this amount of time to complete the test.

For students served by special education, 504 students (e.g., those who have been identified with dyslexia), and English language learners, TEA allows extended time beyond the established time limit. Students who have multiple or severe disabilities may be allowed to complete the test over two days if their district submits an accommodation request form that is approved.

### **The number of field-test questions**

Two needs have to be balanced when field testing is conducted: minimizing burden on students and districts and administering tests that meet recommended industry standards. Practically, it is important to minimize stand-alone field testing so that time can be spent on instruction. Statistically, it is imperative that Texas collect enough field-test data from a representative sample of students to have reliable information to evaluate the quality, difficulty, and fairness of questions. Having accurate performance data is critical to building high-quality tests and ensuring that these tests are legally defensible as graduation requirements.

Thirteen field-test multiple-choice questions (7 in reading and 6 in writing) and one field-test short answer question are embedded in the English I and English II spring tests, but they are not part of the calculation of a student's score. However, field-test questions are embedded only on the spring tests; no field testing is done during the summer and fall administrations of English I and II.

Beginning in spring 2015, the field-test prompts have been removed from the tests and will be field-tested in a separate prompt study that will be administered every three years beginning in 2017. The prompt study is being initiated to minimize the field-test burden on students during the operational administration so that students are required to write only one essay during the assessment rather than two. Removing the field-test prompt from the tests should make them more manageable, especially for students who struggle in writing.

## Weighting of Components for the English Assessments

The English I and English II tests have been redesigned so that writing and reading each contribute equally (50%) to the total test score. Each multiple-choice question, whether it assesses reading or writing, counts one point toward the score—a total of 50 points (of 92 points). The two short answer reading responses and the essay are each weighted by three so that they contribute 18 points (20% of total score) and 24 points (26% of total score) respectively. While more than half the total test score is based on multiple-choice questions, assessment of reading and writing skills in the context of actual performance tasks is also considered extremely important at the high school level.

<b>% of Total Score by Section</b>	<b>Multiple Choice Component</b>	<b>% of Score</b>	<b>Performance Component</b>	<b>% of Score</b>	<b>Total Points</b>
Reading Section <b>50%</b>	28 questions (1 point each) <b>28 points</b>	<b>30%</b>	2 Short Answer Responses (9 points each) <b>18 points</b>	<b>20%</b>	<b>92</b>
Writing Section <b>50%</b>	22 questions (1 point each) <b>22 points</b>	<b>24%</b>	1 Composition <b>24 points</b>	<b>26%</b>	

The STAAR English I and II rubrics for expository and persuasive writing require students to write well-crafted essays to achieve high scores. Scoring criteria for the essays include a strong match between structure/form and purpose, the inclusion of an explicit thesis or position statement, sustained focus, a logical progression of sentences and ideas, specific development that adds substance to the essay, specific use of language and appropriate tone for the purpose, and strong conventions. However, the short answer reading section of each assessment is not scored on these same expectations for writing. On the short answer section of the English I and II tests, students are required to answer two questions: one on a single reading selection and one on a thematically linked pair of selections. For each question, students must generate a reasonable idea and confirm the validity of that idea by using specific evidence from the text. Students are scored on the content of their answers and the text evidence they use, not on the quality of their writing. This section of the reading test is actually assessing the degree to which students can critically read on-grade-level texts.

Because only one score is reported for each assessment, performance in reading can compensate to a small degree for performance in writing or vice versa. In addition, although the test blueprint for each assessment has been reduced, the assessments continue to support broad coverage of and alignment to the TEKS curriculum, and the length of the tests remains psychometrically sufficient to maintain their validity and reliability as a graduation requirement.