



Reading Framework for the 2009
National Assessment of Educational Progress

ABRIDGED





INTRODUCTION

The ability to read well is the cornerstone of a child's education and a prerequisite for a successful life. In their early years, children draw meaning and pleasure from the words on a page, a process that gives them a sense of accomplishment. And in their later years, reading is the skill critical to all learning. It is also a source of enjoyment and an essential way to connect with the world. The ability to read critically and analytically is crucial for effective participation in a democratic society.

The 2009 National Assessment of Educational Progress in Reading, the ongoing nationwide indicator of what students know and can do, regularly collects achievement information on this vital skill. It measures meaning vocabulary and reading comprehension by having students read passages of English text and answer questions about what they have read. In some cases, the questions deal with facts in the text or vocabulary. In other cases, a complete answer requires a clear analysis or coherent argument supported by evidence. Students respond to both multiple-choice and constructed-response items.

In accordance with the federal No Child Left Behind Act, the test is given every 2 years to representative samples of students in grades 4 and 8 and every 4 years to students in grade 12. The results are reported as average scores for groups of students on a 1–500 scale and as percentages of students who attain each of the three achievement levels: Basic, Proficient, and Advanced.

The Reading Assessment measures achievement on national, regional, state, and subgroup levels, but it is not designed to report the performance of individual students or schools. The results help educators, policymakers, and the public understand strengths and weaknesses in student performance and make informed decisions about education.

The 2009 Reading Framework takes a more systematic approach to vocabulary assessment than previous frameworks. Vocabulary assessment now occurs in the context of a passage; that is, vocabulary items function as both a measure of passage comprehension and a test of the readers' knowledge of the word's meaning as intended by the author.

The 2009 Framework employs the following cognitive targets—or behaviors and skills—for assessment items: locate/recall, integrate/interpret, and critique/evaluate. These cognitive targets illustrate the complex nature of the reading process, whereas the corresponding behaviors highlight the different behaviors elicited by different text types. To measure these cognitive skills, students respond to multiple-choice and constructed-response items to varying degrees, depending on their grade level. Students in grades 8 and 12 spend a greater amount of time on constructed-response items than do fourth graders.

Through a contract with the American Institutes for Research, the National Assessment Governing Board conducted the framework development process in cooperation with hundreds of individuals and organizations. The Reading Framework Steering

and Planning Committees included teachers, reading researchers, local and state policymakers, testing experts, and business and public representatives. In addition, the Board convened an independent external review panel of eminent reading scholars, authors, and curriculum specialists to analyze the framework draft, including its research base and design. The Board also received comments on the draft framework through Internet reviews; a public forum held in Washington, D.C.; and numerous meetings with state and local educators and policymakers across the country.

The development process was guided by scientifically based literacy research that conceptualizes reading as a dynamic cognitive process that involves the following skills:

- **Understanding written text.** Readers attend to ideas and content in a text by locating and recalling information and by making inferences needed for literal comprehension of the text.
- **Developing and interpreting meaning.** Readers integrate the sense they have made of the text with their knowledge of other texts and with their outside experience.
- **Using meaning.** Readers draw on the ideas and information they have acquired from text to meet a particular purpose or situational need.

The 2009 Reading Framework replaces one developed for the 1992 assessment. The new framework honors many aspects of the previous one, but it also introduces some changes that can lead to better measurement and more precise reporting of results:

- Consistency with the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001
- Extensive use of international reading assessments and exemplary state standards

- Explicit measurement of vocabulary for the first time
- Assessment of poetry in grade 4 in addition to grades 8 and 12
- Inclusion of multiple-choice and constructed-response items in all grades
- Reporting of achievement across grades, showing the development of reading skills throughout years of schooling as well as the variations in particular grades
- Reporting of separate subscales for literary and informational text
- Measurement of reading behaviors (cognitive targets) in a more objective manner than previous assessments

The assessment does not specify how reading should be taught; nor does the Governing Board endorse any particular instructional approach. The Board believes that the assessment will provide a rich and accurate measure of the reading and analytical skills that students will need for the rest of their lives. It also hopes that the assessment will serve as a catalyst for improving student achievement, both for the benefit of the students and for the nation.

TYPES OF TEXTS TO BE ASSESSED

The 2009 NAEP Reading Assessment includes two distinct types of texts: literary and informational. Each is marked by distinctly different structural characteristics. Stories and novels are characterized by a coherent text structure known as a “story grammar.” Informational or expository texts possess different organizational patterns, such as sequence or comparison/contrast, that help readers organize their emerging sense of what the text is trying to say. The nature of texts affects comprehension, and different types

must be read in different ways. Good readers adjust their reading behaviors to accommodate different kinds of text, paying attention to different aspects as they seek to comprehend. Research shows that students in the United States have scored higher on assessments of literary texts than on those that use informational texts, further underscoring the differences in strategies needed to comprehend each.

Literary Texts

The 2009 Assessment presents reading passages drawn from three categories of literary texts:

Fiction. Stories categorized as *fiction* (i.e., short stories and novels) generally consist of a setting, a plot showing a problem to be solved, a problem or conflict that requires characters to change in some way, and a reaction that expresses the protagonist's feelings or relates to broader consequences. This structure is often referred to as a *story grammar*. Characters populate each story; themes or major ideas are stated either implicitly or explicitly.

Literary nonfiction. Literary *nonfiction*, such as essays, speeches, and biographies, may not only present information and ideas but also employ distinctly literary devices. Biographies, for example, usually follow a structure that mirrors that of fiction. Literary essays may be structured differently but also draw on literary devices. The Gettysburg Address, for example, might be viewed simply as an argumentative text or eulogy, but it is more appropriately seen as a sophisticated literary text. Readers approach texts of this type not only to gain enjoyment and information, but also to appreciate the craft behind the author's choices of words, phrases, and structural elements.

Poetry. *Poetry* is a highly imaginative form of communication in which poets try to compress their thoughts into very few words. Poets use picturesque and evocative words, as well as similes, metaphors, and other devices that

convey ideas, emotions, and actions. Poetry often involves a high level of abstraction and requires critical thinking skills not required of other types of literary works.

Informational Texts

The assessment presents reading passages drawn from the three categories of informational texts:

Exposition. Expository text presents information, provides explanations and definitions, and compares and contrasts. Textbooks, news stories, and informational trade books are examples of expository text.

Argumentation and persuasive text. Argumentation seeks to influence readers through appeals that direct them to specific goals or try to win them over to specific beliefs. Authors of persuasive writing must establish their credibility and authority. Examples of persuasive text are political speeches, editorials, and advertisements.

Procedural text and documents. Procedural texts convey information in the form of directions for accomplishing a task. Examples include manuals and product support materials. Documents include graphical representations that require readers to draw on information presented as brief, continuous prose.





FEATURES OF TEXT TO BE ASSESSED

Fiction

Students in elementary and middle schools read many different kinds of stories for enrichment and enjoyment. At grades 8 and 12, students read more complex genres, including satire, science fiction, and allegory. Several aspects of text structures and features, as well as the “author’s craft,” may be assessed. These components become increasingly sophisticated as students move through the grades: themes may be more abstract; plots may involve internal or external conflicts; characterization may develop with antagonists, protagonists, and narrators with intertwined motives, beliefs, and traits; the theme and setting may be more integral to one another; the plot may consist of a series of rising and falling actions within episodes; and the author’s point of view becomes more sophisticated or shifts.

Authors select from a range of stylistic devices to enhance their presentation. At grade 4, the author’s craft includes figurative language such as symbolism, simile, metaphor, word choice, dialogue, and exaggeration. More abstract elements, such as flashback and imagery, are part of the author’s craft at grade 8. Fictional passages for grade 12 are complex and may include dramatic irony, character foils, comic relief, and unconventional use of language.

Literary Nonfiction

Examples of literary nonfiction at grade 4 include biographical sketches and personal essays. At grade 8, they may include character sketches, memoirs, and speeches; at grade 12, classical essays. Classical essays may interweave personal examples with factual information to explain, present a perspective, or describe an event.

Literary nonfiction selected for NAEP conforms to the highest standards of literary quality, combining structures from both literary and informational texts. At grade 4, structures and features include description, cause and effect, comparison, chronology, point of view, themes and central ideas, and supporting ideas. Text features such as transitions are also listed. At grades 8 and 12, increasingly complex structures are noted.

A range of literary devices and techniques are also present in literary nonfiction. Examples of the author’s craft at grade 4 include diction and word choice, various ways to introduce characters, exaggeration, and figurative language. At grade 8, increasingly complex techniques are used: voice, tone, imagery, metaphoric language, and irony. Denotation and connotation are listed at grade 12.

Poetry

Basic poetic forms at grade 4 are narrative, lyrical, and humorous, as well as free verse. At grade 8, odes, songs, and epics are included, and in grade 12, sonnets and elegies are introduced.

Students at grade 4 may be expected to be familiar with simple organizational patterns such as verse and stanza, along with the basic elements of rhyme scheme, rhythm, mood, and themes. At grades 8 and 12, increasingly complex poetic organizational patterns and elements are included. Students are also expected to understand the use of “white space” as a structural feature of poetry.

Understanding a poet’s choices also aids in the understanding poetry. Language choice is of particular importance because meaning is distilled in as few words as possible. Poets choose from among a range of rhetorical structures and figurative language, using, for example, repetition, dialogue, line organization, and shape. Increasingly complex application of figurative language, rhetorical devices, and poetry arrangements are included at grades 8 and 12.

Expository Text

Expository forms that may be assessed at grade 4 include trade books, textbook passages, news stories, and encyclopedia entries. At grade 8, expository genres include historical documents, essays, and research reports. More complex essay formats, such as political, social, historical, or scientific essays, are included at grade 12.

The major organizational structures of exposition are description, sequence, cause and effect, problem and solution, and comparison and contrast. Exposition may also include lists as a structural component, with lists of descriptions, causes, problems, solutions, and views presented within other structures.

Exposition generally combines several structural formats. Specific elements within these structures signal meaning to the reader. Sequence, point of view, central and supporting ideas, and evidence are listed at grade 4; at grades 8 and 12, the structural organization and elements are assessed at increasingly complex levels. Other textual features can be categorized as reflecting the author’s craft; these features guide the reader with transitional words, signal words, voice, figurative language, and rhetorical structures.

Argumentative Text

Many forms of informational text pose an argument or attempt to persuade readers toward a particular viewpoint. Various logical fallacies and forms of bias may be found. There is considerable similarity in structure, literary features, and elements among exposition, argumentation, and persuasive text. The real distinction lies in the author’s purpose for writing; exposition seeks to inform and educate, whereas argumentation and persuasive texts seek to influence their readers’ thinking.

At grade 4, such texts include journals, speeches, simple essays, and trade books that argue a position. However, the 2009 NAEP Assessment does not assess these types of texts at grade 4 due to difficulty of finding high-quality material appropriate for this grade level. At grade 8, the assessment uses more complex forms of argumentation and persuasive texts: letters to the editor, editorials, and essays. At grade 12, texts are more complex; they include political commentary, historical accounts, campaign literature, and advertisements.

The differences between exposition and argumentation and persuasive text lie not in the structural organization, but rather in the way they are elaborated through contrasting viewpoints, shaping of arguments, appeals to emotions, and other manipulations of language. The organizational structures

at all levels are the same as in exposition.

Elements include the author's perspective, central ideas, supporting ideas, contrasting viewpoints, and the presentation of the argument. At grade 12, students may be asked about the structure of an argument; connections among evidence, inferences, and claims; and the structure of a deductive versus an inductive argument. Twelfth graders also may be asked about the quality of evidence, logical fallacies, false premises, loaded terms, caricature, leading questions, and faulty reasoning.

Procedural Texts and Documents

Documents use text sparingly. For the NAEP Assessment, graphic features include titles, labels, headings, subheadings, sidebars, photos and illustrations, charts and graphs, and legends.



CHARACTERISTICS OF TEXT SELECTED FOR INCLUSION

Passages selected for the 2009 NAEP Reading Assessment must meet rigorous criteria. They are high-quality, authentic texts that are appropriate for each grade level. Passages are engaging and drawn from familiar contexts. The material also includes recognized works from various historical periods. Most texts are presented in their entirety, although, as in the case of novels, some are carefully excerpted.

The test material aims to be as similar as possible to what students actually

read. Unlike many tests that use short passages, NAEP presents longer material that challenges students to use their strategic reading skills in ways that reflect the sort of reading they really do. Longer passages, marked by clear structural patterns, can support the development of multiple items that cover a range of content.

Selection of Literary and Informational Passages

Passages selected for inclusion in the Reading Assessment are easily comprehensible because they are well-organized, use appropriate vocabulary, and, where needed, define technical terms or topographical features. Ideas marked by italics and signal words (such as *first*, *second*, *third*) tend to be processed more easily and recalled longer than unmarked information.

Especially with informational text, content elaboration is an important criterion for passage selection. Sufficient elaboration of new concepts is needed if students are to gain enough information to respond to questions. Tersely written informational text tends to be more difficult for students to comprehend.

Selection of Poetry

Poems selected for NAEP present themes rather than stress the melodic or stylistic aspects of language. Especially at grades 4 and 8, the theme should be implicitly presented in terms that are not too abstract. Words should be used economically to support and amplify the text's meaning. The style should be distinguished by the author's craft and project the poet's feelings. The ideas presented must be accessible to students, and it must be clear that poetry, rather than prose, is the best mode for presenting them. A good question to ask in selecting poetry is: Does the poetry, through its expression of theme and ideas, carry children beyond their immediate experiential level to extensions where language and imagination meet?

CONCLUSION

The Governing Board would like to thank the hundreds of individuals and organizations whose time and talents contributed to the Reading Framework. We believe it will provide a rich and accurate measure of the reading comprehension and analytical skills that students need both for their schooling and for their lives. Development of these reading skills is the responsibility of all teachers—not only English

teachers but teachers across the curriculum—and also involves the instilling of expectations by parents and society.

The Board hopes that this reading framework will serve not only as a significant national measure of how well students read, but also as a catalyst to improve reading achievement for the benefit of students themselves and our nation.

The National Assessment Governing Board is an independent, bipartisan board whose members include governors, state legislators, local and state school officials, educators, business representatives, and members of the general public. Congress created the 26-member Governing Board in 1988 to set policy for the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).

To view the complete **Reading Framework** please visit www.nagb.org or call us at **202-357-6938**.

