

INTRODUCTION

Performance tasks integrate the Common Core English Language Arts standards with science or social studies content and span the grade levels of K through 12. Each task includes an overview page, grade appropriate research materials, three research questions, and a prompt for either an essay or a speech. Tasks may also incorporate a field investigation. Teacher directions are included along with scoring rubrics for the writing and research prompts from Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium.

INTEGRATING THE COMMON CORE ELA STANDARDS

The Common Core ELA standards demand a level of rigor that will challenge many students. Unlike previous curriculum reforms that were content specific, the Common Core expectations involve the integration of skills across content areas including social studies, science and language arts. Students must apply reading, writing, research, and speaking and listening to content provided through articles, speeches and videos. The English Language Arts performance tasks that are a key component of the Smarter Balanced Assessment System require research skills, note-taking abilities, and the difficult challenge of synthesizing ideas into well-written essays or speeches that explain, tell a story, or advocate.

In order to engage students in these rigorous expectations, teachers must find rich content for the students to explore. Students can practice and apply the ELA expectations using topics related to our environment. Resources supporting environmental issues are readily available on line in the form of articles, videos, and speeches. In addition, students can gather relevant data through outdoor learning experiences, a unique benefit of the science content area. Teachers can structure rich and relevant investigations that are similar to the performance tasks on the SBAC assessments, using the environment as a context for learning.

Environmental issues provide relevant topics and complex problems that invite analysis and research. Teachers can structure rich and relevant investigation, using the environment as a context for learning.

DESIGNING A PERFORMANCE TASK

The ELA performance assessments are designed to measure proficiency in reading, writing, research, and speaking and listening. The students are given a scenario that is grounded in a real-world context. Then they gather information about the topic or issue by reading and viewing pre-selected articles and videos. The students are expected to take notes on the information provided, keeping in mind the task they are given in the scenario.

All PEI performance tasks include research questions that require the students to draw information from the multiple sources in preparation for writing an essay or speech. These questions are measuring specific research skills.

The research skills include the following:

- The ability to locate information within and among sources
- The ability to select the best information including distinguishing relevant from irrelevant information and facts from opinions
- The ability to provide sufficient evidence to support opinions or explain ideas

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Students write their responses to the research questions using the notes that they have taken while reading the article or viewing the video. In addition, students may participate in an outdoor investigation to add more background knowledge to their understanding of the issue addressed in the task.

Part three involves writing a narrative, an essay or outlining and delivering a speech. The Common Core English Language Arts Standards require that students be skilled in their ability to write in three different modes: informative/ explanatory, opinion/argumentative, and narrative. Students must also be able to outline and deliver a speech on a given topic.

To demonstrate the CC ELA writing standards, students must use information from the various sources, clearly summarizing their information with text based evidence. They may also use information from any field investigation that is provided. Essays are scored using a five-trait rubric, which is included in the toolkits provided in the performance task resources.

SCENARIO-BASED PROBLEMS

Performance tasks require students to engage with a scenario-based problem, Selecting the content for these tasks is critical. The content must be relevant and problem based. Students practice and apply career and college ready skills including critical thinking and analysis. Topics connected to the environment provide real-world scenarios that can capture the interests of our students. Tasks included focus on issues like Invasive Plants, Ocean Acidification, Integrated Pest Management, and Stormwater Engineering.

Students can enhance their knowledge acquired through text-based research with outdoor experiences.

FIELD INVESTIGATIONS AND PERFORMANCE TASKS

Field investigations should be included in a PEI performance task. These investigations provide additional background knowledge around the topic. Scenarios may be developed that incorporate outdoor learning experiences where students reinforce their understanding of the topic through direct observation and data gathering. These investigations provide additional background knowledge about the topic. Example field experiences are identified for all of the performance tasks can be found in the Performance Task Overview.

DESIGNING ORIGINAL PERFORMANCE TASKS

In addition to using the PEI performance task library, teachers may select a topic appropriate to their grade level curriculum and locality, compose a scenario that is directly relevant to the student, and identify source material for student engagement. They can also incorporate field investigations that enhance understanding, promote enthusiasm for the environment, and add to the knowledge base.

By designing performance tasks using the environment as the context for learning, students work with relevant information, learn about the challenges we face, and practice critical thinking skills that will inform their future civic involvement. We can make content choices for our curriculum that are meaningful today and into the future.