ILLINOIS STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS GRADE 6

Theory of Action: Academic standards represent a collective commitment around what students should learn each year. The state assessment asks students to demonstrate their knowledge, skills, and understanding related to these standards using a common measure. The resulting data allows us to see patterns in performance that should guide school and district improvement, helping identify areas of strength and opportunity.

Role of Performance Level Descriptors in Defining Proficiency: Performance level descriptors bridge the state assessment to classroom instruction and the systems of formative assessments that guide local instruction and choices about individual students. *Academic proficiency represents a range of observable student performance characteristics*. There are multiple pathways to proficiency, and students rely upon their strengths differently within that range of performance.

Proficiency and Difficulty: A student's ability to demonstrate proficiency is influenced by the complexity of the texts or stimuli presented, tasks they're asked to complete, and the contexts in which they are engaged. As student performance improves, students are typically able to handle more challenging texts/stimuli, tasks, and contexts, and are able to demonstrate their skills and knowledge more accurately and consistently.

Claim 1: Reading Literary Text[i] *Student performance indicates the ability to:*

Above Proficient	**Analyze how characters, plot, and language choices** (such as figurative language or tone shifts) work together to reveal deeper meaning. **Use evidence,** like patterns, contrasts, or symbolic details, to explain how the author develops theme or point of view.	**MOST COMPLEX** ↑↑↑↑ RI.10/RL.10 – Read and comprehend appropriate texts independently. ↑↑↑↑ **LEAST COMPLEX** **Text Complexity**
Proficient	**Explain how characters and events develop** the theme or message of a story. **Use specific details,** such as dialogue or turning points, to describe how the author structures the story and shapes the reader's understanding.	
Approaching Proficient	**Describe key elements of a story**, including character traits, setting, and main events. **Identify a theme or lesson** and **compare how characters respond** to challenges or change throughout the story.	
Below Proficient	**Identify characters, settings, and major events** in stories that may be longer or include chapters. **Answer questions** about what happened and how a character acted or changed but may not explain how events are connected or why they matter to the theme or plot.	

Claim 2: Reading Informational Text[ii] *Student performance indicates the ability to:*

Above Proficient	**Analyze how authors use structure, evidence, and language** to shape ideas and support a point of view. For example, explain how one article uses a timeline and quotes from experts, while another highlights facts using bold font and uses emotional language to make its case. **Compare two texts** to evaluate how they explain, emphasize, or interpret the same topic or issue.	**MOST COMPLEX** ↑↑↑↑ RI.10/RL.10 – Read and comprehend appropriate texts independently. ↑↑↑↑ **LEAST COMPLEX** **Text Complexity**
Proficient	**Explain the main idea and supporting details**, and **describe how structure and features**—such as timelines, headings, or sidebars—help the reader understand the text. **Compare how two texts present similar information** or ideas.	
Approaching Proficient	**Identify the main idea and important details** in a passage. **Recognize features** like bold print, headings, or diagrams, and **describe basic relationships** such as cause and effect or steps in a process.	
Below Proficient	**Find key facts, ideas, or visuals** in a passage, including in texts with longer paragraphs or more sections. **Answer simple questions** about what the passage is mostly about but may not connect ideas or understand how the structure helps explain them.	

Test questions can measure a single skill or a set of knowledge and skills. The ELA test differs from other subjects in that it has fewer items overall, but each item assesses multiple skills or knowledge by asking students to demonstrate skills through performance, such as writing a prose-constructed response. Therefore, what differentiates the levels of performance are the degree to and quality with which a student performs.

Claim 3: Reading Vocabulary (In both literary & informational texts)[iii] *Student performance indicates the ability to:*

Above Proficient	**Analyze how word choice affects meaning, tone, or mood**, including **figurative language, connotation**, or precise vocabulary. For example, explaining how the word *snapped* suggests both a sudden sound and a strong emotional reaction in a character's voice. **Use vocabulary deliberately** to shape the meaning and feel of writing.
Proficient	**Use context clues and word parts,** like prefixes, suffixes, and base words, to determine the meaning of unfamiliar words. For example, figure out that *transportation* means *the act of carrying something across* by recognizing *trans-* (across), *port* (carry), and *-ation* (the act of). **Explain how word choice shapes meaning** and **use subject-specific and academic vocabulary** to communicate clearly.
Approaching Proficient	**Figure out new words** using strategies such as breaking the word apart. For example, understand that *unfriendly* means *not friendly* or *disappear* means *to go away*. **Recognize topic-specific vocabulary** and **describe simple relationships** between words, such as synonyms or opposites.
Below Proficient	**Recognize familiar words** and make reasonable guesses about new words using **pictures, context clues, or known word parts**. May understand simple vocabulary in a passage but **struggle with more precise or unfamiliar terms**.

MOST COMPLEX

↑↑↑↑

RI.10/RL.10 – Read and comprehend appropriate texts independently.

↑↑↑↑

LEAST COMPLEX

Text Complexity

Claim 4: Written Expression (Using both literary & informational prompts)[iv] *Student performance indicates the ability to:*

Above Proficient	**Develop well-organized writing** with a clear purpose and well-developed ideas. **Use precise language, sensory or figurative details**, **and varied sentence types** to engage the reader. For example, describe a scene using phrases like *fog wrapped the street in silence* or explain a claim with carefully chosen facts. **Use transitions** like *in contrast*, *for this reason*, or *meanwhile* to guide the reader through ideas and relationships.
Proficient	**Write with a clear opinion, focus, or purpose** across paragraphs. **Support ideas** using reasons, facts, or detailed examples, and **use transitions** like *for example*, *on the other hand*, or *finally* to connect ideas. **Organize writing** with an introduction, body, and conclusion that fit the task.
Approaching Proficient	**Write with a clear topic or story focus** and include related ideas. **Use simple transitions** like *then*, *next*, or *also*. May include an introduction or conclusion, but parts of the writing may be uneven or underdeveloped.
Below Proficient	**Write short responses** that include a topic or opinion and a few supporting details. May have some structure, such as a beginning or end, but ideas may be out of order or missing. Sentences may be short or repetitive.

MOST COMPLEX

↑↑↑↑

RI.10/RL.10 – Read and comprehend appropriate texts independently.

↑↑↑↑

LEAST COMPLEX

Text Complexity

Claim 5: Knowledge of Written Language and Conventions[v] *Student performance indicates the ability to:*	
Above Proficient	**Use grammar, punctuation, and spelling accurately** in a range of sentence types, including compound and complex (e.g., *Although it was late, we kept walking.*). **Revise multi-paragraph writing** to improve clarity, tone, and flow, such as combining short sentences, replacing vague language, or varying sentence length for effect.
Proficient	**Apply grammar, capitalization, punctuation, and spelling rules** across multi-paragraph writing. **Use a variety of sentence types purposefully**, such as, *He turned the page and began again,* or *Why did they ignore the warning?* **Check for errors or awkward phrasing** to make writing clearer and easier to follow.
Approaching Proficient	**Write organized paragraphs** using mostly correct sentence structure. **Use punctuation and capitalization** with growing accuracy, including commas in a series or quotation marks. **Edit writing to fix frequent errors**, such as run-ons, fragments, or confusing wording, though some may remain.
Below Proficient	**Write short paragraphs** with mostly complete sentences, though some may be run-ons or fragments. **Use basic punctuation and capitalization** but may leave out commas in lists or connecting words in longer sentences. **Attempt to revise or correct errors** but may not recognize patterns like repeated sentence openings or missing subjects.

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[i] Includes standards RL 6.1, RL 6.2, RL 6.3, RL 6.5, RL 6.6, RL 6.7, RL 6.9, 6.10
[ii] Includes standards RI 6.1, RI 6.2, RI 6.3, RI 6.5, RI 6.6, RI 6.7, RI 6.8, RI 6.9, RI 6.10
[iii] Includes standards RL 6.4, RI 6.4, L 6.4, L 6.5, L 6.6
[iv] Includes standards W 6.1, W 6.2, W 6.3, W 6.4, W 6.5, W 6.6, W 6.7, W 6.8, W 6.9, W 6.10
[v] Includes standards L 6.1, L 6.2, L 6.3, L 6.6, W 6.1