

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 Text¹ *Student performance indicates the ability to:*

Above Proficient	Analyze how characters, structure, and language choices , such as symbolism or changes in tone, help show deeper meaning . For example, explain how the use of <i>darkness</i> in a scene shows a character’s fear or doubt. Explain the theme and point of view across more complex or layered stories.	MOST COMPLEX
Proficient	Explain how a character’s actions, relationships, or dialogue help show the theme . For example, show how a character’s decision to forgive a friend helps explain a theme about trust. Describe how the structure , such as pacing or more than one plot, helps the reader understand the story .	↑↑↑↑ RI.10/RL.10 – Read and comprehend appropriate texts independently.
Approaching Proficient	Describe important parts of a story , including how characters deal with problems. For example, describe how a character tries again after failing or how two characters learn to work together. Name a theme or message and explain how things like the setting or turning point help show it.	↑↑↑↑
Below Proficient	Name the characters, setting, and main events in a story. Answer questions about what happened or what a character did. For example, tell who the main character is, what problem they faced, or how the story ended, but may not explain how these details relate to the message.	LEAST COMPLEX Text Complexity

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 2: Reading Informational Textⁱⁱ *Student performance indicates the ability to:*

Above Proficient	Analyze how authors use structure, language, and evidence to shape how readers understand or react to a topic. For example, explain how one author builds trust by addressing counterarguments and using a calm tone, while another tries to persuade by focusing on one-sided facts and emotional words. Compare how two authors present the same issue to highlight differences in reasoning or bias.	MOST COMPLEX ↑↑↑↑
Proficient	Explain the main idea and supporting details, and describe how structure or features , such as charts, headings, or word choice, help the reader understand the text . Compare how two texts present information , such as differences in tone or organization.	RI.10/RL.10 – Read and comprehend appropriate texts independently.
Approaching Proficient	Identify the main idea and important details in an informational text. For example, tell what the text is mostly about and list facts that support it. Recognize features like bold words, captions, or diagrams, and describe basic relationships , such as cause and effect.	↑↑↑↑
Below Proficient	Identify key facts or visuals in a text. Answer simple questions about what the author says or shows, such as naming a main idea or listing a few important points. May not explain how the information fits together or what the author’s purpose is.	LEAST COMPLEX Text Complexity

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

Above Proficient	Explain how word choice changes tone, meaning, or impact , especially when reading texts with figurative or emotional language—for example, explaining that a situation described as <i>tense</i> instead of <i>serious</i> foreshadows the potential for conflict or drama. Carefully choose words that guide how the reader feels or understands an idea , such as using <i>opines</i> instead of <i>claims</i> or <i>says</i> in an argument.	MOST COMPLEX ↑↑↑↑
Proficient	Figure out unfamiliar words using strategies like context clues and word parts. For example, understanding that <i>photosynthesis</i> means <i>putting together using light</i> by recognizing <i>photo-</i> (light) and <i>-synthesis</i> (combine), and then connecting it to what plants do—using light to create their own food . Choose subject-specific words like <i>hypothesis</i> , <i>revolution</i> , or <i>imagery</i> to explain ideas clearly, and explain how stronger or more precise words improve meaning , such as saying <i>rapid</i> instead of <i>fast</i> to show intensity.	RI.10/RL.10 – Read and comprehend appropriate texts independently.
Approaching Proficient	Use clues in the sentence or word parts , like <i>un-</i> and <i>known</i> in <i>unknown</i> , to make reasonable guesses about meaning. Express ideas using common words but may choose general terms like <i>thing</i> or <i>stuff</i> instead of more specific ones like <i>tool</i> , <i>device</i> , or <i>machine</i> , which could make meaning clearer.	↑↑↑↑
Below Proficient	Recognize familiar words and use clues like word parts or nearby sentences to guess the meaning of a new word. For example, use the word <i>predict</i> to help understand <i>prediction</i> , or may use a picture with a <i>Caution</i> sign to guess that <i>cautiously</i> has something to do with being careful. May guess based on one word or idea but not use full context.	↑↑↑↑ 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 across multiple paragraphs or sections with a clear purpose and strong support. Use precise, vivid, or figurative language. For example, describing an outcome as <i>a ripple effect that spread through every part of the system</i> to show complexity. Control tone and pacing to match the task, and use transitions like <i>in contrast, for this reason, or more importantly</i> to guide the reader through a longer explanation or argument.	MOST COMPLEX ↑↑↑↑
Proficient	Write with a clear topic or claim across multiple paragraphs. Support ideas with reasons, examples, or evidence, and use transitions like <i>for example, in the end, or also</i> to connect ideas. Organize writing with an introduction, body, and conclusion that match the purpose and extend across a full-length response.	RI.10/RL.10 – Read and comprehend appropriate texts independently.
Approaching Proficient	Present a topic and related ideas with some organization. Use basic transitions like <i>then, next, or because</i> to connect parts. Include an introduction and conclusion, though one or both may be unclear, off topic, or too short. Writing may include only a few connected paragraphs or loosely organized sections.	↑↑↑↑
Below Proficient	Write short responses that introduce a topic or opinion with limited support. Ideas may be out of order or missing, and writing may rely on simple lists or statements. Sentences may be short, repetitive, or incomplete, and paragraph structure may be missing or unclear.	LEAST COMPLEX Text Complexity

Claim 5: Knowledge of Written Language and Conventions^v *Student performance indicates the ability to:*

Above Proficient	Apply grammar, punctuation, capitalization, and spelling correctly in extended writing, including precise control of complex and varied sentence structures (e.g., <i>Even though the results were surprising, the team stood by its conclusion.</i>). Revise writing for tone, cohesion, and flow, such as combining ideas to reduce repetition, adjusting punctuation for emphasis, or improving how paragraphs connect in an argument or explanation.
Proficient	Use conventions consistently across multi-paragraph academic writing, such as opinion pieces, explanations, or reports. Vary sentence types and structures to support meaning and tone—for example, combining two related ideas or posing a rhetorical question. Edit independently for common and noticeable errors in punctuation, grammar, or usage, especially where meaning or clarity could be affected.
Approaching Proficient	Write organized paragraphs using mostly complete sentences and basic punctuation. For example, use commas in a list or quotation marks for dialogue or evidence. Begin to revise or edit writing to fix noticeable grammar or spelling mistakes, though more complex errors may go uncorrected.
Below Proficient	Write short paragraphs or responses with simple sentence forms and some attempt at punctuation and capitalization. For example, use periods or capital letters, but may forget commas, overuse conjunctions like <i>and,</i> or write run-ons. May not recognize patterns of errors or how they affect the reader’s understanding.

ⁱ Includes standards RL 7.1, RL 7.2, RL 7.3, RL 7.5, RL 7.6, RL 7.7, RL 7.9, 7.10

ⁱⁱ Includes standards RI 7.1, RI 7.2, RI 7.3, RI 7.5, RI 7.6, RI 7.7, RI 7.8, RI 7.9, RI 7.10

ⁱⁱⁱ Includes standards RL 7.4, RI 7.4, L 7.4, L 7.5, L 7.6

^{iv} Includes standards W 7.1, W 7.2, W 7.3, W 7.4, W 7.5, W 7.6, W 7.7, W 7.8, W 7.9, W 7.10

^v Includes standards L 7.1, L 7.2, L 7.3, L 7.6, W 7.1