

New York State Teacher Certification Examinations™
(NYSTCE®)

Item Writing Guidelines

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NYSTCE ITEM WRITING GUIDELINES
TABLE OF CONTENTS

1	WRITING AND EDITING GUIDELINES	4
1.1	Elements of Test Items	4
1.1.1	<i>Basic Singleton</i>	4
1.1.2	<i>Singleton with Stimulus</i>	5
1.1.3	<i>Two-Item Set or Cluster</i>	6
1.1.4	<i>Basic Constructed-Response Item</i>	9
1.1.5	<i>Constructed-Response Item with Stimulus</i>	10
1.2	General Principles of Effective Item Construction	12
1.2.1	<i>Items Should Be Focused and Meaningful</i>	12
1.2.2	<i>Items Should Be Clear and Simply Worded</i>	12
1.2.3	<i>Items Should Focus on Higher-Order Thinking Skills</i>	12
1.2.4	<i>Items Should Be Job-Related</i>	12
1.3	Constructing Test Items	13
1.3.1	<i>Basic Items: SRI Singletons and CRIs without Stimulus</i>	13
1.3.2	<i>Stimuli for SRIs and CRIs</i>	13
1.3.3	<i>SRI Singletons with Stimulus</i>	17
1.3.4	<i>SRI Clusters with Stimulus</i>	17
1.3.5	<i>CRIs with Stimulus</i>	17
1.4	Writing Guidelines for Selected-Response Items: Item Stems	18
1.4.1	<i>Full-Question Stems</i>	18
1.4.2	<i>Clipped Stems</i>	19
1.4.3	<i>Eliciting Objective Responses</i>	21
1.4.4	<i>Writing Positively Worded Stems</i>	21
1.4.5	<i>Favoring the Active Voice</i>	21
1.4.6	<i>"Which of the following...," "It is most appropriate...": Stem Constructions to Avoid</i>	21
1.5	Writing Guidelines for Selected-Response Items: Response Options	23
1.5.1	<i>Response Options Should Be Unambiguous and Plausible</i>	23
1.5.2	<i>Response Options Should Be Independent and Mutually Exclusive</i>	23
1.5.3	<i>Response Options Should Be Consistent and Correctly Formed</i>	24
1.5.4	<i>Response Options Should Be Unrepetitious and Discrete</i>	24
1.5.5	<i>Response Options Should Be Logically Ordered</i>	26
1.5.6	<i>Response Options Should Use Gerunds and Avoid "False Imperatives"</i>	26
1.6	Writing Guidelines for Constructed-Response Items	28
1.6.1	<i>CRIs Should Be Equatable</i>	28
1.6.2	<i>CRIs Should Address Candidates Directly</i>	28
1.6.3	<i>CRI Should Be Clear and Unambiguous</i>	28
1.6.4	<i>Prompts and Stimuli Should Provide the Information Candidates Need to Complete the Assignment</i>	29
1.6.5	<i>Charges Should Be Specific and Measurable</i>	29
1.6.6	<i>Charges Should Align with the Scope Set in the Prompt</i>	30
1.7	Ensuring Freedom from Bias.....	31
2	FORMATTING	32
2.1	Fonts and Sizes and Other Formatting Basics	32
2.1.1	<i>Item Font</i>	32

2.1.2 *Handwriting Font*..... 32

2.1.3 *Math Equations and Special Characters*..... 32

2.1.4 *Graphics and Color* 32

2.1.5 *Image Width*..... 33

2.2 *Font Styles* 34

2.3 *Formatting for Various Types of Item Text*..... 35

2.3.1 *Dialogue*..... 35

2.3.2 *Direction Lines* 35

2.3.3 *Double/Complex Stimuli* 35

2.3.4 *Dramatic Excerpts* 36

2.3.5 *Lead-In Lines/Introductory Lines*..... 37

2.3.6 *Lists* 37

2.3.7 *References and Citations*..... 40

2.3.8 *"Sandwiching"* 40

2.3.9 *Scenarios*..... 41

2.3.10 *Tables* 41

2.3.11 *Text Boxes*..... 42

2.4 *Diagrams, Graphs, Charts, and Other Images* 45

2.4.1 *Diagrams*..... 45

2.4.2 *Graphs*..... 45

2.4.3 *Geometry Proofs* 46

3 *STYLE AND USAGE A TO Z* 48

4 *PUNCTUATION* 51

5 *NEW YORK-SPECIFIC TERMINOLOGY* 53

1 WRITING AND EDITING GUIDELINES

1.1 Elements of Test Items

Following are five examples of common types of items with their key components labeled. For item construction guidance, see sections 1.2 through 1.7. For detailed formatting specifications for various item content types, see section 2.

1.1.1 Basic Singleton

In the example of a basic singleton selected-response item (SRI) below, a stem with its four response options is presented as a stand-alone item.

A school librarian ensures that the library includes resources that present multiple perspectives on controversial issues. Which statement best explains why this practice is valuable?

Stem

- A. The library program must meet the academic needs of all students in all areas of the curriculum.
- B. Critical thinking skills and academic success can be fostered by access to a variety of materials.
- C. A choice of sources and formats promotes information literacy for individuals who process information in diverse ways.
- D. Intellectual freedom and access to information are essential for effective and responsible citizenship.

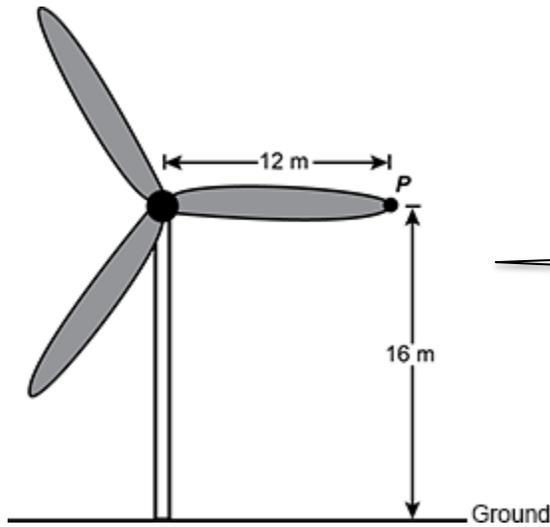
**Distractors
(Incorrect
responses)**

**Correct
Response**

1.1.2 Singleton with Stimulus

In the next example, a direction line and stimulus material (e.g., a literary excerpt, table, graphic) are included with a singleton SRI.

Use the diagram below to answer the question that follows.



Direction Line

Stimulus

The diagram shows a wind turbine on a vertical shaft. The height of the shaft is 16 m. The length of a wind turbine blade is 12 m. Point P is located at the tip of one of the wind turbine blades. The wind turbine rotates in the counterclockwise direction at a constant rate of 1 revolution per second. At $t = 0$, point P is located at a height of 16 m above ground. Which function models the height of point P above ground as a function of t ?

Stem

A. $f(t) = 12 \cos(2\pi t)$

Distractors

B. $f(t) = 16 \cos(\pi t)$

Correct Response

C. $f(t) = 12 \sin(2\pi t) + 16$

D. $f(t) = 16 \sin(\pi t) + 4$

Distractor

1.1.3 Two-Item Set or Cluster

As shown in the following example of a set or cluster, a direction line and stimulus material are presented before two SRIs that refer to the same stimulus.

Use the information below to answer the two questions that follow.

In January, a literacy specialist conducts a variety of informal reading assessments with a third-grade student who is experiencing reading difficulties. The student has received a series of Tier 2 interventions by her classroom teacher that emphasized explicit remedial phonics instruction and repeated-reading activities (e.g., rereading an assigned text up to four times, timing and graphing each reading). However, the teacher reports that the student is not making sufficient and meaningful progress toward grade-level goals in reading.

**Direction
Line**

In this particular assessment, the literacy specialist asks the student to read aloud from an unfamiliar grade-level passage (Flesch-Kincaid grade level 3.5). As the student reads, the specialist makes notes about her performance on a separate copy of the text. Immediately following the oral reading, the specialist has the student reread the passage silently and then asks the student several comprehension questions. The specialist's annotated copy of the passage appears below.

Stimulus

^{Shonda}
 As Shonda and her father neared the river, the girl thought something looked different.

Standing by the water, she wondered. Then she saw. Many trees were ^{gōn} gone! "Dad!

Someone chopped the trees down! How could this ^{cowd} happen?" she cried.

"It's very strange," replied her father.

Mean- while, their dog was following a trail. Suddenly he started barking. ^{Shonda}

quickly ran up to him. "Look what Patch found! Someone built a dam in the water out of

branches—out of the missing trees!"

"That explains the mystery," said her father.

"Look at the pile of twigs over there. I think it's a little house," Shonda added.

"I think we have a new neighbor. Sweetie. Let's watch awhile and see if he or she

shows up." ^{Shonda} Shonda grabbed Patch and the three sat down together, ^{to get her} ^{quickly} observing quietly.

Soon they heard a flapping sound and saw a black muzzle pop up through the water.

"Here is our lumberjack," her father whispered.

"Let's call her Flapjack," ^{Shonda} ^{rept} Shonda replied, delighted.

Oral Reading Fluency: 83 wcpm/87% accuracy

Key:
 ○ omission | short pause ^{eat}/_{cow} substitution
 ⊙ self-correction || long pause

Notes.
 -Winter 50th percentile benchmark is 92 wcpm (words correct per minute).
 -Student answered 50% of comprehension questions about the text correctly.

**Stimulus
(continued)**

1. Based on an analysis of the student's reading performance on this assessment, future interventions designed to improve the student's decoding skills should focus primarily on developing the student's:

Item 1 Stem

- A. knowledge of English inflectional endings and ability to segment morphologically complex words into their component parts.
- B. recognition of common long-vowel and short-vowel phonics/spelling patterns and basic letter combinations (e.g., consonant digraphs).
- C. knowledge of basic English syllabication patterns (e.g., closed, open, *r*-controlled) and ability to apply syllabic analysis skills.
- D. recognition of high-frequency irregular words and advanced phonics elements (e.g., complex vowel teams, medial consonant clusters).

Item 1 Distractors

Item 1 Correct Response

2. The assessment evidence most strongly suggests that instruction designed to improve the student's reading fluency should focus on which component of fluency *first*?

Item 2 Stem

- A. accuracy
- B. automaticity
- C. rate
- D. prosody

Item 2 Correct Response

Item 2 Distractors

1.1.4 Basic Constructed-Response Item

In the example of a basic constructed-response item (CRI) below, a direction line, prompt, and charges to the candidate are presented without a stimulus.

Use the information below to complete the task that follows.

**Direction
Line**

You are planning to teach a lesson as part of a unit on a personal performance activity. Using your knowledge of physical education concepts, principles, and practices, write a response of approximately 400–600 words in which you:

Prompt

1. Identify a specific grade level for this lesson.
2. Identify three measurable learning objectives for this lesson, one for each developmental domain (i.e., psychomotor, affective, and cognitive).
3. Specify one of those learning objectives and:
 - describe one instructional activity, including the use of relevant strategies and resources, that promotes student achievement of the learning objective;
 - explain how the instructional activity supports the learning objective and fosters students' knowledge and skills;
 - describe how you would assess student readiness for successful participation in the activity; and
 - explain how student performance and achievement related to the learning objective could be measured and evaluated.

Charges

1.1.5 Constructed-Response Item with Stimulus

CRIs often include one or more stimuli. When a stimulus is used in a CRI, as in the example below, the elements are structured much as an SRI singleton or cluster with a stimulus.

Use the information below to complete the exercise that follows.

**Direction
Line**

You are planning instruction for an eleventh-grade English language arts class that aligns with the following standard from the New York State P–12 Common Core Learning Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy (NYCCLS).

Prompt

NYCCLS RI.11–12.9 Analyze seventeenth-, eighteenth-, and nineteenth-century foundational U.S. documents of historical and literary significance (including The Declaration of Independence, the Preamble to the Constitution, the Bill of Rights, and Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address) for their themes, purposes, and rhetorical features.

You are planning to teach a lesson based on Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address.

Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent, a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.

Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure. We are met on a great battle-field of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field, as a final resting place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this.

Stimulus

But, in a larger sense, we cannot dedicate—we cannot consecrate—we cannot hallow—this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us—that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion—that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain—that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom—and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.

Using your pedagogical content knowledge of English language arts, write a response of approximately 400–600 words in which you:

**Prompt
(cont'd)**

- identify a specific learning goal that aligns with the given standard and is based on the given excerpt;
- describe an appropriate and effective way to assess student readiness for the specified learning goal;
- describe an instructional strategy you would use to connect students' prior understanding and experiences to new knowledge related to the specified learning goal and provide a rationale for using the strategy;
- identify one potential challenge associated with the specified learning goal, describe an instructional strategy to address the challenge you identified, and provide a rationale for using the instructional strategy;
- describe one instructional modification you would make to meet the needs of all learners; and
- describe an assessment to measure and promote student learning and growth related to the specified learning goal.

Charges

1.2 General Principles of Effective Item Construction

This section gives a broad overview of the principles to ensure the development of test items that best assess candidates' skills, knowledge, and abilities.

More detailed principles that apply to the main types of items are described in section 1.3. Sections 1.4, 1.5, and 1.6 present even more specific writing guidelines for the full range of stem types in selected-response items, response options, and constructed-response items, respectively.

1.2.1 Items Should Be Focused and Meaningful

Items should focus on a single issue, problem, or topic that is stated clearly and concisely in the stem. The focus of an SRI will be narrower than that of a CRI, which needs to be broad enough to elicit a full written response. Further, items should be meaningful, addressing important skills, knowledge, or abilities described in the Test Framework/Standards. SRIs function most effectively when candidates are required to compare specific alternatives related to the stem.

1.2.2 Items Should Be Clear and Simply Worded

Items should be written in direct and plain language, with terminology, vocabulary, and sentence structure kept as simple as possible to make the context/scenario clear. Generally, the important elements should appear early in the item stem of an SRI or the prompt of a CRI. The terminology used should be consistent with the Test Framework/Standards.

1.2.3 Items Should Focus on Higher-Order Thinking Skills

Items should assess candidates' understanding by requiring responses that show evidence of comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and/or evaluation. While these skills may seem self-apparent for CRIs, a well-constructed SRI should also require candidates to demonstrate depth of understanding and higher-order thinking skills.

For example, items should require candidates to carefully evaluate four plausible response options. Items can also require candidates to analyze complex information (e.g., a detailed scenario, one or more data tables, a complex reading passage) in order to determine which response option is correct. In addition, items can require candidates to complete two or more cognitive steps (e.g., analyzing stimulus material, synthesizing information from two or more stimuli, evaluating response options) in order to select the correct response.

In general, items should not focus exclusively on recall. Items that do focus directly on content knowledge should require candidates to demonstrate and apply a depth of knowledge appropriate for educators in New York State.

1.2.4 Items Should Be Job-Related

Items should measure skills and knowledge needed to perform the job of a New York State educator, as reflected in the Test Framework/Standards. The items should measure skills and knowledge at an appropriate level for the certificate(s) for which the test is required, as reflected in the Test Framework/Standards.

1.3 Constructing Test Items

This section describes selected-response items and constructed-response items and how they are constructed; sections 1.4, 1.5, and 1.6 give more detailed guidance on how to write stems and response options for SRIs and CRIs, respectively.

1.3.1 Basic Items: SRI Singletons and CRIs without Stimulus

Basic SRI Singletons

In a basic singleton, the stem is either a full question or clipped, and it is followed by the four response options (see 1.1.1 for an example). Lead-in lines or brief scenarios may be used in the stem (see section 2, "Formatting," for more details).

Basic CRIs

For NYSTCE exams, CRIs typically address content-specific pedagogy. In a basic constructed-response item, a direction line and prompt (typically a few sentences describing an instructional situation and/or goal) are followed by specific charges the candidate is expected to address in a response. The charges are presented as a bulleted list (see 1.1.4 for an example). Section 2, "Formatting," presents more guidelines on lead-in lines and scenarios that are used in CRIs.

1.3.2 Stimuli for SRIs and CRIs

Stimuli are sometimes used with both SRIs and CRIs (see 1.1.2, 1.1.3, and 1.1.5 for examples). A stimulus is different from a scenario included as part of the stem or from situational information included in a prompt in that it is extrinsic to the item. In other words, the stimulus could be selected or developed independently of the item it supports.

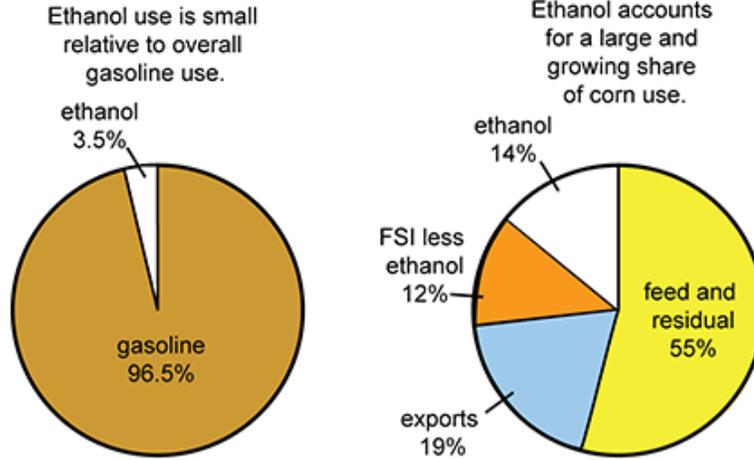
Examples of stimuli include, but are not limited to, graphs, charts, data tables, diagrams, photographs, illustrations, reading passages, and equations. (Several examples appear on pp. 14–16.) While brief scenarios are usually considered part of the item stem, longer, more detailed scenarios can be used as stimuli—most often in items for special education, pedagogy, and reading fields. They describe or explain a particular situation or context in which the reader must place himself or herself and then choose to use the most effective method, apply the most appropriate strategy, or take the most logical step.

When using stimulus material, it is best to use real or **authentic** data whenever possible. Invented data, if used, should be plausible. When using actual data or authentic passages, the stimulus should be cited in *Chicago* format.

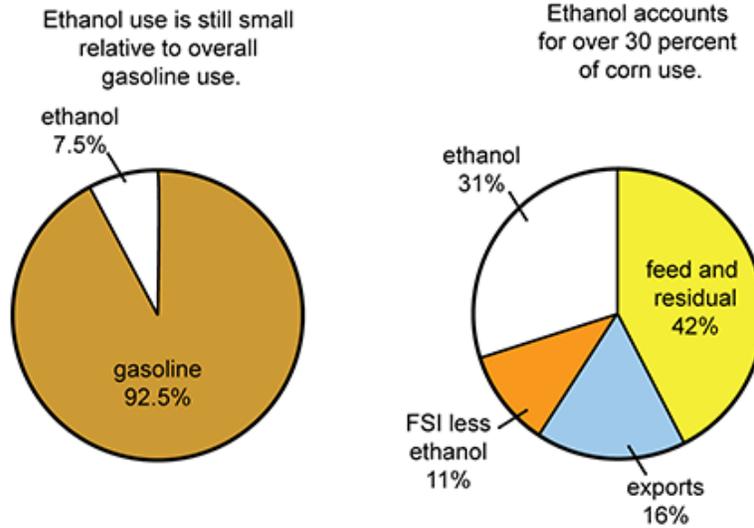
Examples: Graphs/charts (authentic data)

**United States Department of Agriculture
Ethanol's Role in Gasoline and Corn Markets**

2005/2006 Relationships



2016/2017 Relationships (projected)



Note: FSI = food, seed, and industrial

Westcott, P. C. (2007). *Ethanol expansion in the United States: How will the agricultural sector adjust?* (USDA Outlook No. FDS-07D01). Washington, DC: U. S. Department of Agriculture.

Examples: Data tables (invented data)

**State Assessment Results for All Students
Two-Year Comparison**

This table displays the percentage of students in all groups scoring at or above Level 3 ("meets proficiency standard").

Subject	School		District		State	
	2 Years Ago	Last Year	2 Years Ago	Last Year	2 Years Ago	Last Year
ELA	62%	67%	62%	60%	57%	58%
Math	48%	49%	47%	50%	49%	50%

**State Assessment Results, by Student Group
Two-Year Comparison**

This table displays the percentage of students, by group, scoring at or above Level 3 ("meets proficiency standard").

	Percent of School Population	2 Years Ago		Last Year	
		ELA	Math	ELA	Math
Female	51%	67%	44%	72%	44%
Male	49%	59%	52%	62%	54%
Grade 6	31%	64%	53%	72%	54%
Grade 7	33%	65%	50%	70%	51%
Grade 8	36%	61%	45%	64%	46%
Economically Disadvantaged	25%	50%	41%	53%	44%
Limited English Proficient	19%	40%	36%	36%	37%
Students with Disabilities	20%	41%	30%	44%	34%

Example: Passage

A certain light was beginning to dawn dimly within her,—the light which, showing the way, forbids it.

At that early period it served but to bewilder her. It moved her to dreams, to thoughtfulness, to the shadowy anguish which had overcome her the midnight when she had abandoned herself to tears.

In short, Mrs. Pontellier was beginning to realize her position in the universe as a human being, and to recognize her relations as an individual to the world within and about her. This may seem like a ponderous weight of wisdom to descend upon the soul of a young woman of twenty-eight—perhaps more wisdom than the Holy Ghost is usually pleased to vouchsafe to any woman.

But the beginning of things, of a world especially, is necessarily vague, tangled, chaotic, and exceedingly disturbing. How few of us ever emerge from such beginning! How many souls perish in its tumult!

—Kate Chopin, *The Awakening*

Example: Scenario

Ms. Finnegan is a new sixth-grade English language arts teacher whose class includes 34 students with diverse characteristics and needs. The majority of students come from one culture, which reflects the composition of the school population as a whole. Recently, the community has become home to a growing immigrant population. This shift in demographics has resulted in some tension at the school between groups of students. The principal asked teachers to make it a priority to create inclusive classroom environments and provided professional development sessions and faculty in-service training to support them in their efforts.

Ms. Finnegan has a goal of learning as much as possible about her students and their backgrounds, interests, and needs. During the first few weeks of school, Ms. Finnegan administers a student interest survey and each day she makes notes in her journal about classroom activities, student interactions, and students' responses to various instructional approaches. She also frequently reviews assessment data. Her review of data from students' most recent standardized reading assessment indicates that, of her 34 students, only 10 have achieved the level of proficient in English language arts.

Ms. Finnegan is planning a lesson on distinguishing fact from opinion in informational texts. She plans to have students work in small groups for some lesson activities. As part of the planning process, Ms. Finnegan is reflecting on the notes in her journal and considering various strategies for ensuring that instruction is culturally responsive and helps her students understand and apply their learning in future lessons.

1.3.3 SRI Singletons with Stimulus

Stimulus material are sometimes brief or simple enough to support just one stand-alone SRI. However, most stimuli are used to support two or more SRIs (as discussed in 1.3.4) or a CRI (as discussed in 1.3.5).

1.3.4 SRI Clusters with Stimulus

An SRI cluster is generally used instead of a singleton when the length and/or complexity of the selected stimulus, such as a reading passage, clearly supports two or more distinct test items.

Choosing Appropriate Stimuli

As described in section 1.3.2, a wide variety of source material can be used as a stimulus for an item cluster. In general, stimuli used in item clusters tend to be more detailed and lengthy than those used in singletons.

Organizing Items in a Cluster

Clusters should be arranged in a logical sequence, and each item should test different knowledge, understandings, and/or skills. The candidate's ability to answer an item in a cluster should not be dependent on a correct response to a previous item in that cluster. A series of items that is based on a common stimulus should lead the candidate through a logical progression of questions or tasks.

For example, the first question in the series might ask the candidate for a the central idea or theme of the passage, the second question might require the candidate to analyze details included in the first section of the passage, and the third question might require the candidate to connect the first section of the passage with an idea or argument presented in the second section.

1.3.5 CRIs with Stimulus

Stimuli are frequently used with CRIs. They present complex ideas and information the candidates must use to address the prompt and charges in their response. In some cases, a CRI may include two or more stimuli. For CRIs that focus on meeting the instructional needs of specific student populations, multiple stimuli can provide a more detailed overview of an instructional situation than one stimulus or a prompt alone can provide.

Choosing Appropriate Stimuli

As described in section 1.3.2, a wide variety of source material, such as reading passages or literary excerpts, can be used as a stimulus for a CRI. Because CRIs for NYSTCE exams typically address content-specific pedagogy, stimuli used with CRIs are generally related to classroom instruction in some way. Stimuli might include (but are not limited too) classroom scenarios, passages to be considered as material to be used in a lesson, or IEP excerpts or other student data. In all cases, stimuli used with CRIs must be directly relevant to the prompt and must provide sufficient material for the candidate to develop a full, strong response.

1.4 Writing Guidelines for Selected-Response Items: Item Stems

This section presents specific instructions for constructing full-question and clipped stems in sections 1.4.1 and 1.4.2, respectively, followed by style and usage guidelines for item stems in sections 1.4.3 through 1.4.7.

1.4.1 Full-Question Stems

As a general rule when writing full-question stems, be sure to eliminate any unnecessary or irrelevant details that could detract from the accurate measurement of candidates' skills, knowledge, or abilities described in the Test Framework/Standards. Sufficient information and context should be provided in the stem to enable a prepared candidate to answer a question, but excessive detail or window dressing should be avoided.

Examples (DOs):

- Graphic novels are characterized primarily by which feature?
- A school librarian ensures that the library includes resources that present multiple perspectives on controversial issues. Which statement best explains why this practice is valuable?
- A bottling company uses a machine to fill juice bottles. The quantity of juice that goes into each bottle is normally distributed, with a mean of 471.5 mL and a standard deviation of 1.75 mL. Approximately what percentage of the bottles receives less than 468 mL?
- A seventh-grade teacher regularly includes oral language and writing activities (e.g., small-group collaborative discussions, text-centered writing) as an integral part of literacy development in content-area reading. Which explanation provides the best rationale for the teacher's approach?

Examples (DON'Ts):

- Graphic novels are increasingly popular in contemporary publishing. This genre is characterized primarily by which feature?
- A school librarian ensures that the library includes resources that present multiple perspectives on controversial issues. While a small number of parents/guardians have raised objections to the inclusion of some materials, the librarian generally receives strong support from the school community. Which statement best explains why this practice is valuable?
- A bottling company uses a machine to fill juice bottles. Running at full capacity, the machine fills approximately 2000 recyclable glass bottles per hour. The quantity of juice that goes into each bottle is normally distributed, with a mean of 471.5 mL and a standard deviation of 1.75 mL. The retail price of the juice is \$2.95 per bottle. Approximately what percentage of the bottles receives less than 468 mL?
- A teacher includes oral language and writing activities as part of reading instruction. Which explanation provides the best rationale for the teacher's approach?

For other specific guidelines on writing stems, see sections 1.4.3 through 1.4.7. For more general principles of item construction, see section 1.2.

1.4.2 Clipped Stems

Forming Clipped Stems

A clipped stem ends with an incomplete (clipped) sentence and a colon, followed by four response options, each of which completes the clipped portion of the stem both conceptually and grammatically and ends with a period. A clipped stem may consist of the incomplete sentence only or the incomplete sentence preceded by one or more complete sentences.

The clipped portion of the stem should present a complete problem or provide a simple, clear direction for the item; that is, like a full-question stem, the clipped portion of a stem should signal exactly the nature/class/category of the four response options that follow.

Examples (DOs):

- . . . For the next step in the application process, the school counselor should ask the student to:
- In this excerpt, the author uses images of machinery to convey a mood of:
- The *Occupational Outlook Handbook* provides information about:
- . . . To meet this goal, the school principal should encourage teachers primarily to:

Examples (DON'Ts):

- The condensation that appears on the side of a glass is:
- During the civil rights movement, the Kennedy administration:
- According to Ohm's Law, when the voltage in an electrical circuit triples, the:
- Twain's sarcastic tone and use of "folksy" language are:

Ensuring Parallel Response Options

Item writers will often use an incomplete or ambiguous clipped stem because it makes writing the response options easier; it allows for response options that are only loosely related or roughly similar in kind or nature.

Examples (DON'Ts):

An EEG is used:

- A. to record brain activity.
- B. in trauma situations.
- C. to monitor heart rate.
- D. mainly by neurologists.

During World War II, the United States:

- A. attempted to annex African countries.
- B. provided financial support to Finland.
- C. and its allies defeated the USSR.
- D. fought on the same side as China.

To avoid having response options that are not parallel, such as the ones in the examples above, try including the key verb (and even a key noun) in the clipped portion of the stem. Doing so will force more parallel responses.

Examples (DOs):

An EEG is used to record:

- A. brain activity.
- B. heart rate.
- C. hormone levels.
- D. blood pressure.

During World War II, the United States fought on the same side as:

- A. Hungary.
- B. Japan.
- C. Romania.
- D. China.

Reducing Item Length

Pay attention to the combined length of the clipped portion of a stem and each response option. If they present a lengthy sentence, then the clipped portion of the stem or each response option or both should be reworked to reduce the overall length. This reduction makes comprehension of the item easier for candidates.

Example (DON'T):

. . . These teachers should be aware that effective instruction for students who are considered at high risk of dropping out of school should include a focus on learning opportunities that:

- A. emphasize the application of instructional content in ways that clarify its relevance to the students' own lives and needs.
- B. present students with readily achievable goals by modifying content to reduce academic rigor and increase accessibility.
- C. use instructional technology effectively to provide students with multiple high-interest points of access to course content.
- D. require students to work collaboratively with their peers inside and outside the classroom and build real-world skills.

Items such as the one above present cognitive challenges above and beyond what is appropriate for the candidate. Combining each response option with the clipped portion of the stem—conceptually and syntactically—becomes an unnecessarily trying and time-consuming task that distracts from the purpose of the item, which is (or should be) to test the skills and knowledge of a candidate on a topic in a particular subject area.

Examples (DOs):

In an animal cell, the function of the mitochondria is to:

- A. generate energy for the cell through cellular respiration.
- B. reinforce the cell's shape and help in cell movement.
- C. produce hydrogen peroxide in the cell and convert it to water.
- D. store and break down waste products in the cell.

The second, and longest, stage of mitosis is called:

- A. metaphase.
- B. prophase.
- C. telophase.
- D. anaphase.

Overusing Clipped Stems

Use clipped stems sparingly. Clipped stems tend to work best for short, straightforward, and objective items for which there is one discrete answer. The choice to use a clipped stem should be made deliberately, not randomly, and for reasons having to do with making the item easier for the candidate to read and understand, not easier for the item writer to conceive and write. When in doubt about which stem form would be best to use for a certain question/topic, use a full-question stem. Direct full-question stems are often more straightforward.

1.4.3 Eliciting Objective Responses

Write item stems that will elicit objective answers, not subjective opinions that a candidate may think is a correct answer.

Example (DO):

- Which factor most likely caused this change?

Example (DON'T):

- What do you think caused this change?

1.4.4 Writing Positively Worded Stems

The stem should be stated positively. Negative stems often confuse the candidate and should not be used. An item should never contain a double negative.

1.4.5 Favoring the Active Voice

When written in the active voice instead of the passive, stems tend to be shorter and more direct, which helps the candidate stay focused on the task at hand.

Example (DO):

- The passage describes threats to . . .

Example (DON'T):

- Threats were described in the passage. . .

1.4.6 "Which of the following..." "It is most appropriate . . . ": Stem Constructions to Avoid

Stems for selected-response items for NYSTCE exams should not use the phrase "which of the following." Options instead of using "which of the following [plural noun]" include using "which [singular noun]" or using a clipped stem.

Examples (DON'Ts):

- Which of the following instructional strategies would most likely improve student engagement?

- The teacher of the visually impaired should take which of the following actions *next*?
- The building leader would be most likely to achieve this goal by pursuing which of the following approaches?

Examples (DO):

- Which instructional strategy would be most likely to improve student engagement?
- The teacher of the visually impaired should take which action *next*?
- The building leader would be most likely to achieve this goal by:

In addition, avoid using constructions such as "It is most appropriate," "It is most important," "It is reasonable to assume," "It is permissible," "It is advisable," etc.

Examples (DON'Ts):

- In a classroom that includes . . . , it is most appropriate for a teacher to recognize that:
- . . . To ensure . . . , it most important for teachers to:
- . . . Before using . . . , it is most advisable for the teacher to:

Most often these constructions are used in clipped stems, and they are followed by response options that are not parallel. Another problem is that the "it" in "it is most appropriate" never clearly refers to anything in the rest of the item—stem or responses—which makes the item unclear.

Example (DON'T):

- . . . To ensure that the student is using effective criteria for selecting a resource, it is most important for the teacher to ask the student:

The construction above should be reworked to identify clearly the nature of the response options—in this case, questions. Frequently, reworking the construction involves converting a clipped stem to a full-question stem.

Example (DO):

- . . . Which question is most important for the teacher to ask the student to ensure that he or she is using effective criteria for selecting a resource?

Other variations on these constructions can be more difficult to fix, which usually signals a more significant problem in the item.

1.5 Writing Guidelines for Selected-Response Items: Response Options

This section presents guidelines for writing response options for selected-response test items.

1.5.1 Response Options Should Be Unambiguous and Plausible

An item has only one unambiguous correct response option, not two or more. "All of the above" and "None of the above" are not acceptable response options. In addition, items do not involve issues that are controversial and debatable.

The distractors should be plausible to candidates who lack the skills, knowledge, or understanding that the item assesses. They should be designed to reflect candidates' common errors or misconceptions—not to introduce ambiguity.

1.5.2 Response Options Should Be Independent and Mutually Exclusive

Response options that are synonymous or overlap in meaning often assist the candidate in eliminating distractors. Be careful not to repeat the same content using different terms in the response options. (See also section 1.5.4 on how to avoid repeating similar language in response options.)

Examples (DON'Ts):

Which constellation contains the star Polaris?

- A. Ursa Major
- B. Big Dipper
- C. Ursa Minor
- D. Gemini

In the item above, repetition occurs between the first two response options. Because the Big Dipper is part of Ursa Major, the responses are not discrete; therefore neither one is likely correct, leaving only two responses from which to choose.

(Potential fix: Change "Big Dipper" to "Orion.")

Which literary form seeks to challenge Eurocentric assumptions about race and identity and . . . ?

- A. local color literature
- B. regionalism
- C. postcolonial literature
- D. realism

In the item above, repetition occurs on two levels. First, local color literature and regionalism are two different terms for the same literary form/movement. Second, local color literature/regionalism is very closely related to realism; the former could be considered a subset or facet of the latter. None of these three response options is discrete; therefore, again, none of them is likely correct.

(Potential fix: Change "regionalism" to "transcendentalism" and "realism" to "neoclassicism.")

The attraction of . . . is due to the:

- A. destruction of [A] on the sunny side of the stem.
- B. destruction of [B] on the sunny side of the stem.
- C. redistribution of [A] to the shady side of the stem.
- D. redistribution of [B] to the shady side of the stem.

In the item above, a more egregious kind of repetition in response options has occurred. This kind is more extensive and requires a complete reworking of the item. The reason for such repetition could have as much to do with a poorly constructed stem (too narrow a focus) as with a dearth of material from which good, plausible distractors can be constructed.

1.5.3 Response Options Should Be Consistent and Correctly Formed

The response options should always be grammatically consistent with the stem and use similar terminology and language, including verb tense, nouns, singular/plurals, and statements.

Use a period at the end of a response option only if it completes the stem or if it is a complete sentence by itself.

The response options should also be parallel, with similar length, complexity, and specificity. For example, if the stem refers to a teaching strategy, then all of the response options must be a teaching strategy.

Avoid the use of absolutes such as *always* and *never* in phrasing response options.

1.5.4 Response Options Should Be Unrepetitious and Discrete

Avoiding Clues to the Correct Response Option

Any aspect of an item that provides an unintended clue that can be used by a candidate to select or eliminate a response option should be avoided. For example, any term that appears in the stem should not appear in only one of the response options.

Eliminating Repeated Words in Response Options

In all items, especially in items with clipped stems, try to eliminate any repeated words/phrases in response options by incorporating these common words/phrases into the stem.

Such repetition occurs most frequently with the words *a*, *an*, *the*, and *to*.

The words *a* and *an* may only be moved up into the stem when one or the other is used exclusively at the beginning of each response option; that is, each response must begin with *a* or each response must begin with *an*. When both are used (e.g., three *a*'s and one *an*), they must be retained in the response options.

Examples (DON'Ts):

The primary purpose of this excerpt is:

- A. *to explain* . . .
- B. *to persuade* . . .
- C. *to describe* . . .
- D. *to evaluate* . . .

(Fix: Move the word *to* up into the stem, after the word *is*.)

In the late thirteenth century, Japan endured a series of invasions by:

- A. *the* Vandals.
- B. *the* Romans.
- C. *the* Mongols.
- D. *the* Geats.

(Fix: Move the word *the* up into the stem, after the word *by*.)

The Long March is significant in Chinese history because:

- A. *it* ended Japanese occupation of China.
- B. *it* reinforced the concept of the Mandate of Heaven.
- C. *it* caused the Boxer Rebellion.
- D. *it* established Mao Zedong as a revolutionary leader.

(Fix: Move the word *it* up into the stem, after the word *because*.)

Example (DO):

What is the significance of the Long March in Chinese history?

- A. *It ended Japanese occupation of China.*
- B. *It* reinforced the concept of the Mandate of Heaven.
- C. *It* caused the Boxer Rebellion.
- D. *It* established Mao Zedong as a revolutionary leader.

Repeated words are acceptable when response options are stated as complete sentences.

Avoiding Repeated Terms with Same Meaning

Sometimes repetition in response options is disguised by using different words or phrases to convey essentially the same idea.

Example (DON'Ts):

Which method would likely be most effective . . . ?

- A. *developing* . . .
- B. *creating* . . .
- C. *generating* . . .
- D. *producing* . . .

In the item above, the four different gerunds used to begin each response option convey essentially the same idea.

(Potential fixes: Choose the most clear/accurate one and either try to incorporate it into the stem or keep it in a response option—probably the correct response—and change the other gerunds so that they begin three other discrete but plausible response options. If neither of these fixes is doable, then the item likely has more fundamental problems.)

1.5.5 Response Options Should Be Logically Ordered

When the response options consist of numbers or letters, they should be arranged in ascending or descending order: for example, (A) 1 (B) 2 (C) 3 (D) 4.

Example (DO):

What is the nuclear mass defect of the chlorine-35 nucleus?

- A. 0.31436 amu
- B. 0.32864 amu
- C. 0.32948 amu
- D. 0.34376 amu

An exception would be when the letter of a response option and the value of that response option are the same: for example, (A) E (B) B (C) G (D) D.

1.5.6 Response Options Should Use Gerunds and Avoid "False Imperatives"

Use gerunds (present participles) to begin response options and avoid using the imperative mood for a situation/scenario in which no actual direct command or request occurs (i.e., the so-called "false imperative"). Or rework the item, including the stem, so that the response options may be single words, complete sentences, or sentence fragments that do not begin with gerunds.

Examples (DON'Ts):

Which procedure is most appropriate for the teacher to take . . . ?

- A. Have students . . .
- B. Use a . . .
- C. Dispose of . . .
- D. Provide students with . . .

- or -

(even less desirable)

- A. have students . . .
- B. use a . . .
- C. dispose of . . .
- D. provide students with . . .

The imperative mood should be used only when a command is issued or a request is made and, in such cases, should usually be placed in quotes.

Example (DO):

Which instruction is most appropriate for the teacher to give . . . ?

- A. "Place the mass on your . . ."
- B. "Wear safety goggles when you . . ."
- C. "Heat the solution until you . . ."
- D. "Pour the residue into your . . ."

A clipped-stem format (see section 1.4.2) that simply states the subject and verb can provide a good fix for an item that uses a full-question stem followed by response options in the "false imperative."

Example (DON'T):

(full-question stem)

Which step would be best to take *first* to . . . ?

Examples (DOs):

(clipped stem)

- As a *first* step, the teacher should:
- The *next* step the teacher should take is to:
- In this situation, the teacher should [advise/direct/ask/tell] the student to:
- In this situation, the first guideline the teacher should observe is to:

1.6 Writing Guidelines for Constructed-Response Items

Following are a few key principles for writing constructed-response items.

1.6.1 CRIs Should Be Equatable

In general, NYSTCE candidates are assigned only one CRI in an exam. (For exams that have multiple types of CRIs, candidates are generally assigned one of each type.) For this reason, CRIs developed for a NYSTCE item bank should be *equatable*. Each CRI for an exam (or each specific type of CRI) should require candidates to demonstrate the same knowledge, skills, and abilities. A candidate who does well on one of the CRIs developed for the item bank should do well on other CRIs for the bank (or of the same type). Responses to equatable CRIs can be scored using the same rubric.

To maintain equatability, all CRIs developed for NYSTCE exams (or all CRIs of the same type) generally have parallel prompts and identical charges, except for minor wording changes as needed. For CRIs that include one or more stimuli, the stimuli will vary but should present the same type of information and be comparable in scope (e.g., a 3-paragraph scenario, a 250–300 word literary excerpt, a 1-page excerpt from an IEP).

Sections 1.3.3 and 1.3.4 explain how to construct the different components of a CRI. By developing CRIs consistently, equitability can be maintained.

1.6.2 CRIs Should Address Candidates Directly

CRIs for NYSTCE exams generally speak directly to the candidates and ask them to respond as the educator facing the situation described in the prompt and stimuli. Direction lines use imperative verbs, and prompts and (when included) scenarios address candidates in the second person.

Examples (DOs):

- You are planning to teach a unit on health risks and benefits associated with food and lifestyle choices. Using your knowledge of family and consumer sciences concepts, principles, and practices, write a response in which you...
- Using your knowledge of content and sound pedagogical practices in literacy and English language arts, analyze the information provided and write a response words in which you...
- You are planning to teach a unit on the topic of bullying prevention. Using your knowledge of health education concepts, principles, and practices, write a response in which you...

1.6.3 CRIs Should Be Clear and Unambiguous

As with SRIs, the language in CRIs should always be clear and concise. CRIs should always get to the point quickly, without unnecessary or needlessly complex words that might impede a candidate's understanding of the assignment. Use common words and relevant terminology, and avoid repetition.

Avoiding ambiguity in CRIs is imperative. All candidates should understand the CRI in the same way to preserve equitability and to ensure that they are being tested on the same knowledge, skills, and abilities. Avoid confusing instructions or subjective language that could be misinterpreted or interpreted differently by different candidates.

Being unambiguous may require additional words and even some repetition of key words, especially in charges.

Examples (DOs):

- identify a student learning goal related to bullying prevention
- describe a formative assessment method you would use to evaluate students' knowledge and skills in relation to the learning goal
- describe one learning activity or instructional strategy that would effectively address the student's identified need or build on the student's identified strength
- describe an instructional intervention that builds on the student's strengths and that would help the student improve in the identified area of need

Examples (DON'Ts):

- state a goal for bullying prevention
- describe a formative assessment method you could use with students as part of this lesson
- describe an activity or strategy that meets this student's needs or builds on the student's strengths
- describe something else that you would do as a teacher to build on the student's strengths and help the student improve academically

1.6.4 Prompts and Stimuli Should Provide the Information Candidates Need to Complete the Assignment

CRIs should provide sufficient information and context to enable a prepared candidate to build a strong response to the assignment. Because CRIs for NYSTCE exams typically address content-specific pedagogy, the necessary context and information may be limited to a brief description of the class and a New York state learning standard or a specific learning goal for a lesson. This information is generally provided in the prompt. Well-prepared candidates' pedagogical knowledge should allow them to respond successfully.

CRIs for many NYSTCE exams require candidates to explain how they would meet the learning needs of a specific group of students, respond to one student's work, use specific material in a lesson, etc. In these cases, one or more stimuli are needed to provide the information a candidate needs to develop a strong response. When a CRI includes multiple stimuli, candidates should be required to synthesize information across stimuli (e.g., connecting a description of a student in a scenario with details included in an excerpt from the student's IEP).

As with SRIs, irrelevant details or window dressing in CRI prompts and stimuli should be avoided. However, the prompt and stimuli should provide a range of information that allows different candidates to write fundamentally different but equally strong responses. For example, if a charge asks candidates to identify one significant strength and one area of need based on a description of a student's classroom performance and a work sample, these materials should represent at least two strengths and areas of need.

1.6.5 Charges Should Be Specific and Measurable

The **charges** indicate to candidates what, exactly, they need to cover in their responses. Each charge should describe a specific task the candidate can accomplish in a written response. The scope of each charge should also be clearly communicated. A charge that requires the candidate to describe instructional activities should specify how many instructional activities need to be described.

Examples (DOs):

- identify one significant strength the student demonstrates in the area of writing, citing specific evidence from the exhibits to support your assessment
- describe one instructional strategy and one resource you would use to promote students' achievement of the learning goal
- identify three areas of need in the instructional program, citing evidence to support each need
- describe an assessment that you would use to evaluate students' achievement of the learning goal and explain why this would be an effective assessment tool

Examples (DON'Ts):

- identify any significant strengths the student demonstrates in the area of writing, citing evidence to support your assessment
- describe one or more instructional strategies and resources you would use to promote students' achievement of the learning goal
- identify areas of need you see in the instructional program, citing evidence where appropriate
- describe how you would evaluate students' achievement of the learning goal and explain why

1.6.6 Charges Should Align with the Scope Set in the Prompt

In general, CRIs for NYSTCE exams include within the charge a suggested word count range for the response (e.g., "a response of approximately 400–600 words"). Responses are not scored based on word count, but the range communicates to candidates the expected scope of their response. A candidate should be able to successfully meet all of the charges within the stated word count range.

1.7 Ensuring Freedom from Bias

An important overarching principle when constructing material consistent with the Test Framework/Standards is to ensure that items are accessible to all candidates and free from any bias.

More specifically, items should be fair to all candidates regardless of their gender, race, nationality, national origin, ethnicity, religion, age, sexual orientation, disability, or cultural, economic, or geographic background. As a whole, test materials should include content that reflects the diversity of the New York State population.

In addition, to maintain neutrality, items should contain generic terms instead of proper nouns and brand names. Similarly, items should be free of language, content, or stereotypes that might potentially disadvantage or offend a candidate because of her or his gender, race, nationality, national origin, ethnicity, religion, age, sexual orientation, disability, or cultural, economic, or geographic background.

2 FORMATTING

This section presents guidelines for formatting all NYSTCE test bank item content, including stem and response text, tables, and charts and other graphics developed for use in CERTS banks.

2.1 Fonts and Sizes and Other Formatting Basics

2.1.1 *Item Font*

Use Arial, 11 point, for most body copy in item stems and response options for SRIs and in CRIs.

Exceptions:

- A handwriting font may be used to represent an authentic sample of a student's work. See section 2.1.2 for details.
- Certain text elements in dramatic excerpts and footnotes employ different point sizes. See section 2.3.4 and 2.3.7, respectively, for details.
- Most table text is set in 10-point Arial. See section 2.3.10 for complete table specifications.
- Most text in graphics/diagrams is set in 9-point Arial. See section 2.4 for complete graphic specifications.
- Symbols and mathematical elements may be set in different fonts and/or point sizes. See section 2.1.3 for more information.

2.1.2 *Handwriting Font*

A handwriting font (see an example in section 1.1) should only be used in items in which the "instructional context" or realism/authenticity is important. Handwriting fonts (e.g., Sher, in 10, 11, or 12 points for student writing) are used mainly in reading, early childhood, and elementary education fields and occasionally in science or math (e.g., to illustrate how a student solved a long-division problem). Do not use a handwriting font in items in which it is conceivable that a piece of text would be typed (e.g., a student's draft writing sample).

CBT Note: Since a handwriting font would only be used in a boxed "work product," any font can be used. It does not need to be CBT compatible.

2.1.3 *Math Equations and Special Characters*

Note that most mathematical operation symbols as well as subscripts and superscripts can all be entered in running text using Word tools and characters. Equations that cannot be set in running text are set using Microsoft Equation 3.0 (not MathType) and then must be snagged as images and either pasted inline or linked in with graphic references.

Special characters (e.g., accented letters, Greek letters, mathematical symbols) accessed through the character maps for CBT-approved fonts may be left in running text. Symbols/characters not available in the character maps for CBT-approved fonts may be entered in items but must be snagged as images.

See section 3, "Style and Usage A to Z," for more details on formatting text for math and science fields.

2.1.4 *Graphics and Color*

Graphics are created in Illustrator (or are TIFs) and are then PNG'd and linked into items with graphic references. Each graphic must therefore appear on its own line (i.e., it cannot have text or a table or another graphic to its left or right). Graphics default to left alignment in CERTS.

Any use of color in graphics must be approved in advance and follow specifications for ADA compliance.

See section 2.4 for more details on formatting graphics.

2.1.5 Image Width

For full-screen items, the maximum image width is approximately 6.5".

For vertically split screens, the maximum image width is approximately 4.25" for a 50/50 split or 5.25" for a 60/40 split.

2.2 Font Styles

Use font styles consistently when formatting items. See also section 2.3 for more specific guidelines for various types of test content.

Use italics for . . .

- titles of books, journals, and other works where appropriate according to the guidelines in *Chicago* (except in handwriting font, where underscore is used instead).
- words used as words.
- Latin names, such as genus and species in a scientific binomial (e.g., *Paramecium caudatum*).
- other foreign words used in English if they are not in *Merriam-Webster*.
- the words *first*, *initial*, and *next* in item stems.
- names of legal cases.
- names of speakers and nonverbal cues in dialogues.
- variables in mathematical equations.

Use bold for . . .

- direction lines.
- titles of graphs, data tables, and reading passages.
- column and row headings and subheadings in tables.
- vector labels (mathematical text).

2.3 Formatting for Various Types of Item Text

This section presents more specific instructions for formatting assorted types of test content. See section 1 for detailed guidelines for writing and editing item stems and responses, and CRIs.

2.3.1 Dialogue

Dialogue (transcripts of conversations or discussions) should be formatted as follows:

- names of speakers italicized
- colon after name of speaker (also italicized) plus two (nonitalic) spaces
- full line space between each line of speech
- nonverbal cues italicized; parentheses around nonverbal cues **not** italicized

Example:

Teacher: What did you do last night?

Student: I went bowling.

Teacher: (Enthusiastically) Oh! You went bowling!

2.3.2 Direction Lines

Direction lines should be short and succinct and should take the reader to the stimulus or the prompt as expeditiously as possible, without lengthy description or explanation.

Direction lines should always be used in SRI clusters and CRIs, and are always set in boldface.

Examples of direction lines:

- **Use the information below to answer the question that follows.**
- **Read the excerpt below from a short story; then answer the question that follows.**
- **Use the information below to complete the exercise that follows.**

Note that in items developed for CBT administration, "the question that follows" should be used in direction lines for both singletons and clusters. On CBT, only one item is seen with the stimulus per screen, so the singular direction line is accurate.

It is OK to use the word *below* in CBT direction lines in almost all cases. When developing an item, the editor should be involved in the process of determining whether specific stimulus material would **not** appear directly below a direction line.

2.3.3 Double/Complex Stimuli

When double/complex stimuli are used, they should be stacked (arranged vertically). In general, for double stimuli, the guidelines for boxing text are the same as noted in section 2.3.11, "Text Boxes," except if the lack of a box would make the stimulus unclear/difficult to read.

Example (sequence indicated/stimuli stacked):

A student reads silently the excerpt below from a short story.

When Penelope woke up on Saturday morning, it was so dark that she thought that it was still nighttime. She looked out the window at big storm clouds looming in the sky.

← *As an excerpt from a literary text, this would **not** usually appear in a box; however, without the box, the stimulus is potentially unclear.*

After the student finishes reading, the teacher asks the student questions, which appear in the transcript below.

Teacher: What is this story about?
Student: It's about a girl named Penelope.
Teacher: What is Penelope doing?
Student: She is waking up.

← *As an excerpt from a transcript, this too would **not** usually appear in a box; however, without the box, the stimulus is potentially unclear.*

2.3.4 Dramatic Excerpts

Excerpts from works of drama should be formatted as follows:

- names of speakers set in all caps, Arial 9 point
- period after name of speaker; double space after period
- half-inch hanging indent (regardless of length of speakers' names)
- no line space between each line of speech
- nonverbal cues italicized; parentheses around nonverbal cues **not** italicized
- other characters mentioned in text in parentheses set in all caps, Arial 9 point, no italics
- if material is verse (e.g., Shakespeare, Sophocles), preserve line breaks from source
- if background information is necessary, place after direction line and before the excerpt and italicize

Example:

BENEATHA. (*Sharply*) I just want to learn to play guitar. Is there anything wrong with that?
 MAMA. Ain't nobody trying to stop you. I just wonders sometimes why you has to flit so from one thing to another all the time. You ain't never done nothing with all that camera equipment you brought home—
 BENEATHA. I don't flit! I—I experiment with different forms of expression.

Note: Since CERTS cannot accommodate tabs or hanging indents, all excerpts from works of drama in which lines will wrap will need to be snagged as images before import into CERTS.

2.3.5 *Lead-In Lines/Introductory Lines*

Lead-in lines, like direction lines, serve to "set" the reader/candidate, providing a signal for what will appear next in the item. Lead-in lines may consist of a single sentence or multiple sentences.

A lead-in line (or lines) provides a scenario or explains a condition/situation. A lead-in line often identifies an agent who is the focus of the item (e.g., a teacher, a student, a reader, a writer).

When a lead-in line is used in a singleton, a direction line should not be used. A lead-in line often renders a direction line superfluous or redundant.

Examples of lead-in lines:

- A student takes the notes below while researching the subject of cultural diversity in U.S. schools.
- A writer develops the draft version of an introductory paragraph below as part of an analytical essay on *Romeo and Juliet*.
- A Web site designer uses the two clip art images below to create a logo for a home page.
- Step 1 of the partial mathematical proof below shows that the statement is true for $n = 1$.

It is OK to use the word *below* in CBT lead-in lines in almost all cases. When developing an item, the editor should be involved in the process of determining whether specific stimulus material would **not** appear directly below a lead-in line.

2.3.6 *Lists*

General and specific instructions for formatting bulleted and numbered lists are described below. Note that guidelines for numbered lists also apply to lists in which items are numbered with Roman numerals.

General Formatting Guidelines for Bulleted and Numbered Lists

Each line or item in a list, whether bulleted or numbered, should be separated by a line space. A list should appear in a text box **only** if the list meets one of the criteria for using a text box (see section 2.3.11).

Example (no text box necessary):

A teacher plans to teach students the steps below for crossing the street safely.

1. Stop.
2. Look.
3. Listen.
4. Walk.

Note that a list should be intentionally numbered or bulleted. For example, a list might be numbered when the sequence of items in the list is important.

SRI Stems / CRI Charges

- *Lists not in a box*
The default for a bulleted or numbered list is *not* boxed. In this case, lists should be set in running text and allowed to wrap naturally. For bulleted lists, use Alt+0149 to create a bullet. For numbered lists, key in each number. Then enter five spaces before the text (do **not** use auto bullets or numbering, or a hanging indent).

Examples of bulleted lists:

- the development of analytical, secular history
- the creation of a naturalistic art style
- the introduction of philosophical dialogue
- the development of systematic logic

Using your knowledge of life science:

- describe two ways that flowering plants are pollinated; and
- explain the process by which some genetic material from each of the two parent plants contributes to the genetic makeup of the offspring.

Example of a numbered list:

1. Draw a line segment from point *A* to point *B*.
2. Bisect line segment *AB* at point *M*.
3. Draw a line through *M* perpendicular to line segment *AB*.
4. Choose any point *C* on the perpendicular bisector of line segment *AB*.

- *Lists in a box*
If a list will appear in a box (e.g., because it meets one of the criteria described for using a text box or to match an existing bank style), use standard WP bullet or numbered list specs (including a hanging indent and one extra return between items), as appropriate. Boxed text is always snagged.

Example of a bulleted list:

- Patterns: Choose patterns with simple lines, such as an unstructured kimono. Avoid patterns with a lot of fine details.
- Layout/Cutting: Lay the pattern out with all the pieces going in the same direction as with napped fabrics.
- Marking: Use chalk or thread basting to mark the fabric.
- Interfacing: Use interfacing that bonds at low temperature.

Left & right indent (inside box) = 0.13". Hanging indent = 0.19".

Example of a numbered list:

1. the development of analytical, secular history
2. the creation of a naturalistic art style
3. the introduction of philosophical dialogue
4. the development of systematic logic

Left & right indent (inside box) = 0.13". Hanging indent = 0.38". Decimal align tab set at 0.31". Left align tab set at 0.5".

SRI Responses

List text in responses will always be snagged, regardless of length. Use standard WP bullet or numbered list specs (including a hanging indent), as appropriate. Note that for responses, there is no space between bulleted items. Remember to consider correct width before snagging.

Example of bulleted list:

- the development of analytical, secular history
- the creation of a naturalistic art style
- the introduction of philosophical dialogue
- the development of systematic logic

Tabs = 0.25". Hanging indent = 0.25".

Example of numbered list:

1. the development of analytical, secular history
2. the creation of a naturalistic art style
3. the introduction of philosophical dialogue
4. the development of systematic logic

Tabs = 0.25". Hanging indent = 0.25".

Formatting Em-Dash Lists

Em-dash lists appear almost exclusively in SRI responses. Lists in responses will always be snagged, regardless of length. Use Alt+0151 to create an em dash, and enter two spaces before the text. These lists should always have a hanging indent, and there is no space between list items.

Example of em-dash list:

- the development of analytical, secular history
- the creation of a naturalistic art style
- the introduction of philosophical dialogue
- the development of systematic logic

2.3.7 *References and Citations*

Footnotes may be used in items for reading and English fields to clarify notes or glossaries at the end of a passage. Style as follows:

- The reference number in the passage should be bold, 11 point, and superscripted.
- The passage should be followed by a return, a line of 25 underscores, and a full (11-point) line space.
- In the explanation, the reference number should be first (bold, 11 point, superscripted), followed by the defined word and a colon (bold, 10 point) and two spaces and the explanation (10 point).

Example of footnote:

Read the excerpt below from a work of nonfiction; then answer the question that follows.

This further experience also I gained. I said to myself, I will not plant beans and corn with so much industry another summer, but such seeds, if the seed is not lost, as sincerity, truth, simplicity, faith, innocence, and the like, and see if they will not grow in this soil, even with less toil and manurance¹, and sustain me, for surely it has not been exhausted for these crops.

¹**manurance:** cultivation

2.3.8 *"Sandwiching"*

An item formatted as a "full sandwich" consists of a lead-in line, a stimulus, and a full-question or clipped stem. The stimulus is sandwiched fully between the lead-in line and stem.

Example of a basic "full sandwich":

Gear A and Gear B rotate as indicated in the diagram below.

[graphical stimulus]

How many revolutions must Gear A make for the gears to align as indicated?

- A. 2
- B. 4
- C. 6
- D. 8

An item formatted as a "half sandwich" consists of a full-question stem (**not** a clipped stem) and a stimulus. The stimulus is sandwiched halfway (above only) by the stem.

Example of a basic "half sandwich":

Which word, if used to complete the sentence below, would link the ideas most clearly and coherently?

[text stimulus]

- A. likewise
- B. additionally
- C. instead
- D. consequently

Note that in the examples above, the stimuli may be textual or graphical. Also, note that a half sandwich works best when the stem is short/succinct (usually one sentence) and the text stimulus is short/small as well.

2.3.9 Scenarios

In an SRI singleton, a scenario—regardless of its length or level of detail—should be part of the stem. It should not appear in a text box, and it should not be preceded by a direction line. Also, in a singleton, a line space should not be inserted between a scenario and the stem proper (full-question or clipped); that is, the text for the scenario and stem should be run together, without a line break.

2.3.10 Tables

Tables are set to the specifications presented below.

Table Font, Size, Style, and Alignment

- Main headings: Arial 11 pt. bold, centered horizontally and vertically
- Secondary headings: Arial 10 pt. bold, centered horizontally and vertically
- Text: Arial 10 pt. Text in cells may be centered, left-aligned, indented, or decimal-aligned, according to context. Centered text should be centered both horizontally and vertically within the cell. Default left and right indents in the cell are 0.13".
- Capitalization: Headings use headline caps but there is no need to cap contents of interior cells. Also note that text within parentheses in headings is not capped unless it is a proper noun/adjective.

Table Width

Tables can vary in width to accommodate content. In general, make columns as narrow as possible so as to avoid excessive horizontal white space. The maximum width for a table depends on whether it is being used in a full-screen or split-screen item (see section 2.1.5).

Table Rules and Cell Spacing and Shading

- Table rule weights applied in a CERTS Writer RTF will not hold, so do not apply rule weights in CERTS Writer. Tables need to be created or formatted in a regular Word doc and may then be copied into CERTS Writer and manipulated as needed.
- Line tables: Line number column is 0.55" wide.

Examples of tables:

Line	Person or Thing	Characteristic	Achievement
1	text	phrase only here	Sentence about achievement here.
2	text	phrase only here	Sentence about achievement here.
3	text	text phrase only here	Sentence about achievement here.
4	text	text phrase only here	Sentence about achievement here.

	Column Heading	Column Heading	Column Heading	Column Heading
Row Heading	text	text	text	text
Row Heading	text	text	text	text
Row Heading	text	text	text	text

2.3.11 Text Boxes

Using Text Boxes

The use of text boxes should be minimized. Text boxes should be used for utilitarian, not aesthetic, reasons. In general, when used appropriately, text boxes serve to distinguish different kinds of stimulus material within an item. Text boxes are a clarifying device that can help indicate a transition from text that "tells" (e.g., "A teacher asks a fourth-grade student to read . . .") to text that "shows" (e.g., Before reading: looks at cover illustration . . . , After reading: recalls incorrectly that the dog . . .); the former should not appear in a box, whereas the latter should.

The following material should be placed in text boxes:

- student-produced material (e.g., journal entry, notes for an essay)
- teacher-produced material (e.g., worksheet/assignment sheet, skills checklist, notes on a blackboard)
- school-produced material (e.g., evaluation/assessment results, administrative report)
- documents used for business or administrative purposes (e.g., application form, letter, résumé)
- documents in which graphical presentation or layout is significant (e.g., table of contents, classified ad, nutritional information label)
- word problems that are not supposed to be solved

The following material should **not** be placed in text boxes:

- dialogue/transcript
- excerpts from literary and nonliterary texts
- work in progress (e.g., writer's rough draft of an essay, researcher's preliminary notes for an article)
- mathematical and scientific expressions/equations/formulas
- arguments/statements, whether mathematical or otherwise
- bulleted/numbered lists (e.g., steps in a process) that are **not** explicitly student-/teacher-/school-produced
- scenarios
- graphics

Text Box Font and Size

All boxed text should be set in Arial 11 point, **except** when a handwriting or other font is necessary to preserve the authenticity of stimulus material. For example, in a reading miscue analysis in a reading field Times New Roman is used for the text excerpt and a handwriting font is used for the teacher's annotations (see example in section 1.1.3).

Text Box Width

- Text boxes are always created using a single table cell (do **not** use "Insert / Text box").
- Rules for text boxes are always 3/4 pt. all the way around. Table rule weights applied in a CERTS Writer RTF will not hold, so do **not** apply rule weights in CERTS Writer. Text boxes need to be created or formatted in a regular Word doc and then may be copied into CERTS Writer and manipulated as needed.
- Text boxes should not automatically be set to maximum width.
- For text that does not extend to 4.25", make box just wide enough to comfortably accommodate text.
- Default text box width is 4.25" width. For text that extends beyond 4.25", text boxes may be made wider, but see maximum image width specifications in section 2.1.5.

Text Box Spacing and Alignment

- Text left and right spacing: Standard indents are left indent of 0.13" and right indent of 0.13".
- Text top and bottom spacing: Keep one full return (with space before or after paragraph) on top of text and another at bottom of text. The return should be the same point size as the running text of an item (so 11 pt. for Arial banks).
- Text is generally left-aligned within text boxes. If bullets or numbering are used, they should not be indented beyond the regular text margin.
- Text should be set at single line spacing with no padding before or after paragraphs. To create space between lines of text or bullets, use a full return.

Example of a text box:

When Penelope woke up on Saturday morning, it was so dark that she thought that it was still nighttime.

She looked out the window at big storm clouds looming in the sky.

2.4 Diagrams, Graphs, Charts, and Other Images

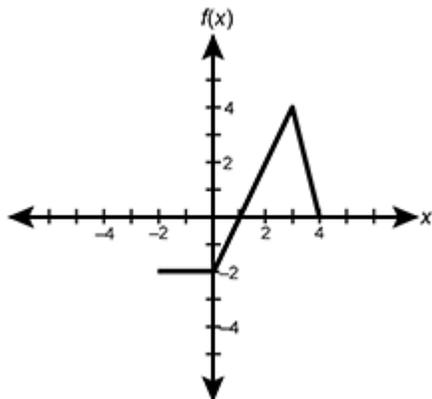
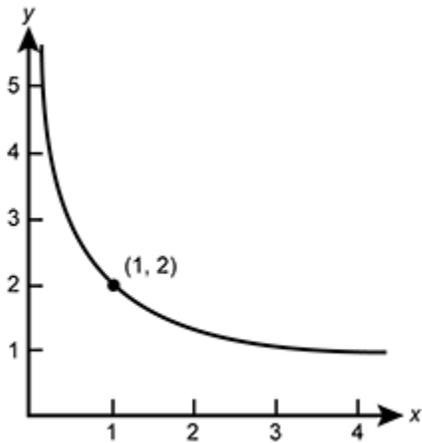
2.4.1 Diagrams

For more complex images, show processes, etc., use diagrams (plural). For example, "On the diagrams below, Diagram A shows a road map, and Diagram B is a topographic map of the same area."

2.4.2 Graphs

- Graph title should be bold and centered and address both axes/variables. Use 10 pt. Arial.
- 6 pts. between title and graph.
- Axis labels should be bold and centered, e.g., **Distance (m)**. Axis labels that are just variables are not bold and appear at the end of the axis (e.g., x , y). Use 9 pt. Arial.
- Numbers on axes are not bold.
- Label 0 if origin represents 0.
- For gridded backgrounds, rules are 1 pt. gray.
- Shaded areas are 20% gray.

Examples of graphs:



2.4.3 Geometry Proofs

Geometry proofs should generally be set up as follows (see section 2.3.10, "Tables," for related formatting specifications):

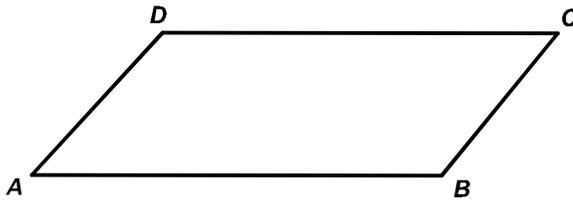
- "Given" and "Prove" text appears first (at top) in bold followed by a bold colon plus two spaces.
- Figure/graphic appears second (below or to the right of the "Given"/"Prove" text).
- "Statement" and "Reason" text appears last, in a table (below figure/graphic).
- Text boxes are **not** used to enclose all or any part of the original problem.

Example:

Use the incomplete proof below to answer the two questions that follow.

Given: Quadrilateral $ABCD$ is a parallelogram.

Prove: $AB \cong DC$; $BC \cong AD$



Statement	Reason
1. Draw BD	1. Between any two points there exists a line.
2. $BD \cong BD$	2. Reflexive property of equality
3.	3.
4. $\triangle ABD \cong \triangle CDB$	4.
5. $AB \cong CD$; $AD \cong BC$	5. Corresponding parts of congruent triangles are congruent.

Which statement and reason completes line 3?

A.

Statement	Reason
3. $\angle ADC \cong \angle CBA$; $\angle DAB \cong \angle DCB$	3. Definition of a parallelogram

B.

Statement	Reason
3. $\angle ABD \cong \angle BDC$; $\angle ADB \cong \angle CBD$	3. If two lines are parallel, alternate interior angles are congruent.

C.

Statement	Reason
3. $\triangle ADC \cong \triangle CBA$	3. SSS

D.

Statement	Reason
3. $\triangle ACD \cong \triangle CAB$	3. SAS

Which reason is missing for statement 4?

- A. SAS
- B. AAA
- C. SSS
- D. ASA

3 STYLE AND USAGE A TO Z

Refer to *The Chicago Manual of Style* and *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* for most spelling, capitalization, punctuation, and grammar rules. This section presents a few exceptions to the two sources and, for ease of reference, summary pointers for common style and usage rules.

Blank lines

- All blank lines for missing words/phrases (anything other than a full sentence) should be the length of 8 underscores. If followed by punctuation, there should be no space before the punctuation.
- All blank lines for missing sentences (CBT): These should be the length of 52 underscores. If the passage needs to be snagged, WP will adjust the wrapping of the blank line before snagging (i.e., at least one full line long and ending at end of line). However, note that the width of the snagged passage will depend on whether it will be presented in a full-screen or split-screen item.

Math and science fields (see also "Measurements" and "Numbers" below)

See the separate Math style sheets for more comprehensive guidelines for formatting technical text in math and science¹ fields. The following are general formatting guidelines:

- Any equations that cannot be entered in running text should be entered in Microsoft Equation. See the separate specs for Microsoft Equation.
- Use a single space before and after operation signs.
 $1 + 2 = 3$
 $4 \times 6 = 24$
- Insert a space after the comma in coordinates.
 $(3, 5)$, $(-6, 2)$
- Italicize all variables (but not Greek letters).
 $w^2 + 8w$
 $3x + y$
- Italicize the "f" and the "x" in $f(x)$ equations. Note that a "hair space" is required after an italic f to prevent crashing.
- Labels for polygons, angles, lines, line segments, points, planes, chords, rays, etc., are italicized.
 - $\angle M$
 - line segment AB
 - point A
 - quadrilateral $WXYZ$
- For a "measure of angle" symbol, use an italic m .
 $m\angle ABC$

¹ "Science" includes fields with significant science content, such as Agriculture.

- Use an en dash (ALT+0150) for minus/negative signs. Note that there is no space between the en dash and the numeral when used as a negative sign, although a "hair space" is required before the number 4 to prevent crashing.

1 – 2
–2
–4

- All text, including fractions, should be in the same font and point size as the items (11-point Arial), except in tables in which 10-point Arial is the style.
Exception: All Greek letters should be in Times New Roman a point larger than the Arial point size (i.e., 12-point Times New Roman for Arial banks).

- Superscript or subscript numbers and letters should be formatted as superscripts or subscripts in the regular text font and size. If extra space is needed between a character and a superscript or subscript, add a superscripted or subscripted space.

1³
1₃
1^N
1_N

- Do not spell out "%" in math or science problems. Note that there should be no space between the numeral and % (e.g., 100%).

Measurements (see also "Numbers")

Spacing

- For all measurements, there should be a space between the numeral and the measurement unit abbreviation (e.g., 3 Ω). *Exception:* For measurements of temperature in degrees, there should be no spaces around the degree symbol (e.g., 10°C, 50°F).
- For degrees of latitude or longitude, there should be a space between the degree symbol and the direction but **not** between the number and the degree symbol (e.g., 10° S, 30° E).

Hyphenation and abbreviation

- Use hyphens with units of measure that are spelled out when they appear before the noun being modified (e.g., 40-foot fence, 20-foot-high wall). *Exception:* Don't use hyphens with units of measure that are abbreviated (e.g., 18 ft. driveway).
- For math and science fields, always abbreviate units of measurement. Do not include a period at the end of the abbreviation (e.g., 18 in, 23 m).

Numbers (see also "Math and science fields," "Measurements," and "Time")

Numbers one through ten in the text are written as words, unless they are referring to measurements in math or science contexts, in which case numerals may be used.

Exceptions:

- If numbers above and below ten are combined and refer to **like** things, use numerals. Follow this rule only for like terms; the sentence "We counted 12 different animal species in the three weeks we were there" is correct as is.
- Spell out ordinal numbers for all grade levels (e.g., first grade, twelfth grade).
- Spell out all numbers that open sentences.

- In math and science fields, generally use numerals for numbers followed by a unit of measure (e.g., 5 grams, 2 ft., 8 inches, 9°C/m) and for quantities to be used by the candidate in computations (e.g., 5 students each with 2 pencils). Avoid line breaks between numerals and units.
- Use numerals with "percent" or "percentile" (e.g., "Unemployment during the Great Depression rose to over 20 percent," "His height and weight are in the 7th percentile for boys his age").

Other

- Four digit numbers (i.e., 1000 to 9999) should appear *without* a comma for math and science fields and *with* a comma for non-math and non-science fields.
- Numbers greater than four digits (i.e., 10,000 and greater) should always appear *with* a comma.
- Zeros should be used to hold places to the left of the decimal point (e.g., 0.56).
- In ordered pairs, there should be a space after the comma only (e.g., [6, 7]).
- There should be no space around the colon in ratios expressed in numerals (e.g., 1:10).

Percentages

- "Percent" is an adverb (e.g., 10 percent of the class) or, less commonly, an adjective (e.g., a 10 percent raise). "Percentage" is the noun form (e.g., a significant percentage of her income).
- Do not spell out "%" in math or science problems. Spell out "percent" in fields other than math or science.
Exception: Graphics may use "percent" or "%," depending on specific circumstances.
- Use numerals with "percent" or "percentile" (e.g., "Unemployment during the Great Depression rose to over 20 percent," "His height and weight are in the 7th percentile for boys his age").

Time

Spell out . . .

- the number if using the word *o'clock* (e.g., eleven o'clock).
- the decade if the century is not included (e.g., the sixties).
- the ordinal number designating a century (e.g., nineteenth-century literature).

Use numerals . . .

- for numbers followed by a.m. or p.m.
- when referring to the century and decade (e.g., the 1960s).
- for numbers preceded or followed by era designations (e.g., 55 BCE).

4 PUNCTUATION

Apostrophe

- Use "straight" apostrophes, not "curly" or "smart" apostrophes.
- Don't use contractions (such as don't, can't, etc.) except if they are included in authentic student writing samples.

Colon

Colons should be followed by two spaces in running text, and one space within a title. Whether the text after the colon begins with a lowercase or uppercase letter depends on context; see *Chicago*.

Comma

Introductory phrases

- Don't use a comma after a preposition & date phrase (e.g., "Before 1989 only 12 states . . . "; "In December of 1960 the Legislature passed . . . ") unless another numeral follows that phrase (e.g., "In 1960, 18 states . . . ").
- Do use a comma after all other introductory phrases.

Serial comma

- Always add it, unless it's quoted material or a foreign language.

Dates

- Month, day, and year. Always use a comma before and after the year when the month and day are included (e.g., "November 23, 1989, is the day . . . ").
- Holiday and year. Always set off the year with commas when the name of a holiday or other special day is given (e.g., "On Thanksgiving Day, 1971, we . . . ").
- Month and year. Never use a comma before the year when only the month is listed with it (e.g., November 1989).

E.g., etc., and i.e.

- E.g. ("for example") and i.e. ("that is") should always follow a comma or semicolon and be followed by a comma.
- Etc. ("and other things" or "and so forth") should always follow a comma and be followed by a comma (unless it is used at the end of a sentence).

Ellipsis points

Use three ellipsis points with one full space before and after each point, or use the ellipsis points character (ALT+0133) to prevent line breaks between points. If the break occurs after a complete sentence, there should be a period before the three ellipsis points. Note that there is only ever one space (not two) after ellipsis points, even when ending a sentence.

Em dashes

Em dashes can be used in place of commas, parentheses, or colons to set off an explanatory statement, separate a subject from a pronoun that introduces further discussion, or split a

dependent clause from an independent one. Close up to text on both sides of the dash. Note that specs for foreign languages may be different—en dashes may be used instead of em dashes, and/or there may be a space on one or both sides of the dash.

Example: "The Beatles are the best band—the absolute best—in the history of the universe."

Note: Use ALT+0151 to enter an em dash.

En dashes

En dashes are generally translated as "to" or "through" and used in number ranges. En dashes should also be used to separate references to times of day. Close up to text on both sides of the dash.

Examples:

"You have 15–20 guests waiting for you."

"Read chapters 3–5."

"Business hours are 7:30 a.m.–5:30 p.m."

Exceptions: Do not use an en dash in ranges introduced by "between" or "from," as in "She plans to arrive between 9:00 and 10:00 a.m." and "She worked in publishing from 1980 to 1990."

The en dash can also be used in place of a hyphen in a compound adjective when one of its elements consists of an open compound.

Example: "The post–World War II years were economically prosperous for the United States."

Also note that an en dash may be appropriately used in place of an em dash in some foreign languages.

Note: Use ALT+0150 to enter an en dash.

Hyphens (see also "Measurements" in section 3)

- Always check the field-specific style sheet before relying on *Chicago*.
- Follow the rules in *Chicago* if there is no style sheet for the field. Some general guidelines:
 - Age reference compounds are hyphenated as adjectives and as nouns (e.g., a three-year-old child, a group of 16-year-olds).
 - Use hyphens in other compound adjectives only when necessary to clarify meaning.
 - In general, do not hyphenate prefixes (e.g., co-, pre-, non-, multi-) except to avoid confusing meanings (e.g., re-sign vs. resign).

Quotation marks

Use "straight" quote marks, not "curly" or "smart" quotes. *Note:* Foreign languages may have different symbols and/or conventions for quotation marks.

Terminal punctuation

Periods and all other terminal punctuation should be followed by two spaces. *Exception:* Ellipsis points are always followed by only one space.

5 NEW YORK-SPECIFIC TERMINOLOGY

Academic Intervention Services (AIS)

behavioral intervention plan (BIP)

Blind or visually impaired

Related terminology:

Functional Vision Assessment (FVA)

Learning Media Assessment (LMA)

Orientation and Mobility Assessment

Orientation and Mobility Evaluation

orientation and mobility (O&M) skills, O&M specialist

Programs and Services:

- consultant teacher services
- integrated co-teaching services
- related services
- special class

Resource Center for the Visually Impaired (RCVI)

teacher of the visually impaired (TVI)

Boards of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES)

Career and Technical Education (CTE)

Committee on Special Education (CSE)

co-teach

e-mail

Data-Driven Instruction and Inquiry (DDI)

English Language Learners (all caps, formerly lowercase l's)

Related terminology:

Bilingual Education program

Classrooms in which English as a New Language instruction is provided to English Language Learners who are not enrolled in a Bilingual Education program:

- Stand-alone English as a New Language class (formerly ESOL class; students enrolled in this must also be enrolled in core content-area classes)
- Integrated English as a New Language class (a content-area class, such as an elementary multiple-subject class or secondary content-area class, taught by an ESOL teacher who holds dual certification in ESOL and a content area or a content-area class that is team-taught by an ESOL teacher and a content-area teacher)

English as a New Language program (formerly English to Speakers of Other Languages [ESOL] program)

English language proficiency levels:

- entering (formerly beginner)
- emerging (formerly low intermediate)
- transitioning (formerly intermediate)
- expanding (formerly advanced)
- commanding (formerly proficient)

ESOL teacher

Home Language Questionnaire (formerly Home Language Survey)

Language Proficiency Team

- Starting in the 2015-16 school year, this team determines whether a student with a disability will take the statewide English language proficiency identification assessment and whether a student with a disability should be identified as an English Language Learner; the LPT must minimally include a school administrator, a teacher with ESOL certification or a Bilingual extension, the special education director or his/her designee, and the parent/guardian; a qualified interpreter or translator of the home language of the parent/guardian must be present at every meeting.
- In 2016, the Language Proficiency Team will be replaced by the Committee on Special Education (CSE)

Newcomer English Language Learner (a student who has received English as a New Language instruction for three years or less)

Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC)

functional behavioral assessment (FBA)

home language [not primary language, native language]

individual evaluation process

individualized education program (IEP)

New York Dignity for All Students Act

New York Safe Schools Against Violence in Education (SAVE) Act

New York State P–12 Common Core Learning Standards

Regents diploma, Regents diploma with advanced designation

Regents Exam(s)

school counselor

Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM)

student with inconsistent/interrupted formal education (SIFE) (formerly, student with interrupted formal education)

Web site