

Understanding the Smarter Balanced Writing Extended Response Question

The purpose of this document is to increase understanding of the Writing Extended Response (WER) question in the performance task for the Smarter Balanced Assessments for English Language Arts/Literacy (ELA).

What Is a Performance Task?

Performance tasks measure a student's ability to demonstrate critical thinking and problem-solving by challenging them to apply their knowledge and skills to complex, real-world problems. The performance tasks are not computer-adaptive and may take students one to two test sessions to complete.

What Is the WER Question?

The performance task portion of the Smarter Balanced Assessment for ELA contains two questions. The first is a multiple-choice or short-answer question assessing a student's research skills. The second is the **WER question**, also referred to as the full-write or essay question. The WER requires students to read multiple sources and respond to a prompt with one extended written response.

Each student is randomly assigned one WER question aligned with one of the following writing purposes:

- **Narrative** for grades three through eight: The writing contains a story with plot, setting, and characters.
- **Opinion/Argumentative** for all grade levels: The writing presents a central opinion or claim and supports the opinion or claim with evidence.
- **Informational/Explanatory** for all grade levels: The writing contains a main and controlling idea or thesis which is explained and elaborated upon.

Where Can I Find Sample WER Questions and Responses?

Sample WER questions with student responses and scoring annotations can be found on the [Smarter Annotated Response Tool website](#). Sample tests with sample WER questions can be found on the [CAASPP & ELPAC Practice and Training Tests web page](#).

How Is the WER Scored?

Each essay is scored using a scoring rubric with three traits. Traits are different dimensions of a student response that educators evaluate when scoring an essay. For example, an educator will assess grammar and spelling as part of the Conventions trait (worth a maximum of two points) but not take grammar or spelling into account when assessing the other traits (worth a maximum of four points each). This approach ensures that scorers provide a comprehensive evaluation of student writing.

The scoring rubrics used for each writing purpose can be found on the [Smarter Content Explorer Test Development & Design web page](#).

My Student Received a ‘No Score’ in a Rubric Trait. What Does That Mean?

If a student receives a “No Score” in a rubric trait, it will be indicated with one of the following reasons:

- **Insufficient:** An insufficient response is one in which the essay rater cannot evaluate the student’s writing performance because the writing is too brief or may consist of the following:
 - Random keystrokes or undecipherable text
 - “I don’t know”, “IDK”, or “I like pizza!” (in response to a reading passage about helicopters)
 - Primarily text copied from the prompt and/or sources
- **Nonscorable Language:** To assess a student’s English language writing performance, written response items must be written in English to be scored.
- **Off-Topic:** An off-topic response is unrelated to the task or sources, or it shows no evidence that the student has read the task or the sources.
- **Off-Purpose:** An off-purpose response is clearly not written to the purpose (e.g., Narrative, Opinion, etc.) designated in the task. Off-purpose responses address the topic of the task but not the purpose of the task.
- **Field Test Essay:** Before a question can be added to the test, it must first be field tested to confirm that it is a valid question. Field test questions help improve future tests and do not contribute to a student’s score.