

Constructed-Response Questions

This chapter provides specific examples and helpful strategies that you can use to approach the constructed-response questions on three of the five Praxis II English Subject Area Assessment tests. Constructed-response questions appear on the following Praxis II tests:

- Test 0043: English Language, Literature, and Composition: Pedagogy
- Test 0048: Teaching Foundations: English
- Test 0049: Middle School English Language Arts

If you are required to take one of these tests, you will benefit from a careful review of this chapter. If not, you may want to skip this chapter and turn to Chapter 2 or Chapter 3 to learn more about the types of questions you'll find on your specific test.

How to Approach the Constructed-Response Questions

The constructed-response format requires that you carefully and quickly read a short passage and then write a short-answer response to one or more questions about the passage. Let's take a look at a generic constructed-response question:

Directions: For this question, you will read an excerpt from a novel and then write a brief response.

Passage:

The remainder of my schooldays were no more auspicious than the first. Indeed, they were an Endless Project that slowly evolved into a Unit, in which miles of construction paper and wax crayon were expended by the State of Alabama in its well-meaning but fruitless efforts to teach me Group Dynamics.

Question:

Chapter 4 of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, a novel by Harper Lee, opens with these lines. Explain how the author uses metaphor and word choice to help us better understand Scout, the narrator of the novel.

As you can see, a constructed-response question is made up of three parts: directions, a passage, and one or more questions about the passage. In the next section, I suggest specific strategies for you to try out on the sample constructed-response questions that appear later in this chapter and again on the practice tests in Part III.

Strategies for the Constructed-Response Questions

Here are some suggested strategies that I recommend you employ as you approach the constructed-response questions:

1. **Read the question(s) first.** Most test-takers would naturally read the passage first and then move to the question(s). I did! But remember, you are reading the passage in order to get the answers to the questions right. Before you spend time reading the passage, read the question(s) you'll be required to answer so that you can think about *why* you are reading it. Reading specialists call this practice "setting purpose for reading." I suspect that you'll find this a more efficient and effective approach than reading the passage first.
2. **Actively read each passage.** As you read the passage, take notes, keep your mind on the question(s) you'll have to answer, and think about your response as you read. It's fine for you to make notes, underlines, or other marks in your test booklet.

- 3. Reread each question and then make a brief plan or sketch of the points of your response.** For example, a brief plan for the sample question above might look like this:
 - *Metaphor:* Formal schooling is a never-ending unit plan.
 - *Meaning:* Scout views her formal school experience as unchallenging, ineffective, and boring. In addition, her school experiences have not taught her how to get along with others.
 - *Word choice:* Auspicious, expended, fruitless.
 - *Meaning:* Word choice demonstrates that Scout is bright, literate, and clever and suggests that she is clearly learning to think critically outside of her formal school experiences.
- 4. Review the passage and question(s).** Make sure that you have referred specifically to the passage and have addressed all the question requirements with examples and details.
- 5. Review your response.** Were you clear, concise, specific, and accurate? Did you base your response on principles of learning and teaching English? Did you answer all parts of the question?

Here is a sample response to our generic question on *To Kill a Mockingbird*:

Harper Lee opens Chapter 4 of To Kill a Mockingbird with the metaphor that school is a never-ending unit plan. By this, the author is showing the main character's view that formal schooling is pointless drudgery. The narrator, Scout, sees formal schooling as ineffective in its attempts to teach her to get along with others—in her words, “Group Dynamics.” Furthermore, the author's word choices, such as auspicious, fruitless, and expended, provide the reader with the idea that Scout may be finding her formal experiences ineffective and unchallenging because she is learning more outside of school than during school. Lee presents our young narrator as a character who appears to be a bright, reflective, and critical thinker.

Of course, I have the opportunity to use spell-check and word-processing tools to edit and revise this sample response. You will not have this opportunity, and the test scorers will take this into account. You may have noticed that I underlined the title of the novel. You can't italicize when you handwrite your answers, but you can underline book titles to show that you know this convention of written English. As you'll see when we look at the scoring guide for your particular test in the last section of this chapter, you will need to demonstrate “facility with conventions of standard written English,” but not perfection.

- 6. Beware of the multiple-part constructed-response questions!** These questions have two or more parts rather than just one, and you need to make sure that your response addresses all parts of the question.
- 7. Remember that this is not an essay test.** In general, you will write a one- to two-paragraph response for each part of the question, although the length of your response will vary depending on the question as well as on the amount of testing time you have allotted to each question. This is not an essay-test format, so it is okay for you to use bulleted lists or brief examples. You do not have to have “perfect paragraphs” or use essay format to earn a high score. The most important aspect of your response is the content you write and the accuracy of the examples you provide.
- 8. Be mindful of your testing time.** Depending on which Praxis II test you take, you will have between one and four hours to complete your test. Each test-taker will need a different amount of time to respond to a constructed-response question accurately and thoroughly, so I cannot give you a specific time to spend on each constructed-response question. I have provided general guidelines in the Introduction to this book to give you the test publisher's suggested pacing. You'll have to practice your timing before the actual exam. Many of my students report that their timing was more of a problem than content knowledge was, especially on the constructed-response questions. Several of my students simply ran out of time to fully answer one or more questions. Constructed-response questions are likely to take more of your testing time, so practice the full-length tests at the back of this guide with your watch in hand. Be sure to check your watch at the start of the test and then every 30 minutes into the testing session. Remember, you are in charge of your pacing on the entire test. The sections of the Praxis II are not independently timed by the proctor.

How to Read the Passage

Now that you better understand the format of the constructed-response questions, let's take a closer look at the passage itself and develop a strategy for reading the passage actively and efficiently.

The remainder of my schooldays were no more auspicious than the first. Indeed, they were an Endless Project that slowly evolved into a Unit, in which miles of construction paper and wax crayon were expended by the State of Alabama in its well-meaning but fruitless efforts to teach me Group Dynamics.

1. Remember to read the questions first.

2. Read the passage carefully, closely, and actively. By *carefully*, I mean read slowly enough to comprehend what you've read. By *closely*, I suggest that you consider the literary elements the author uses. By *actively*, I mean to make margin notes, underline key points, and think about why this information is included. As you can see in the passage from *To Kill a Mockingbird* above, some recollection of this literary work is expected if you are to earn a higher score on this question.

3. Ask questions as you read. What issues about teaching and learning English language arts does this passage raise? How might the teacher help the student(s) achieve a learning goal or understand this passage? What literary elements does this passage feature? Keep in mind that all information in the passage is included on the test for a reason. Reading and knowing the questions *before* you read the passage really pays off here. You can read the passage actively and efficiently to get ideas for your constructed response. This should save you time as well.

As you know, three of the five Praxis II tests use the constructed-response question format, but each of the tests contains a slightly different topic for the passage and constructed-response question. In the next section, we'll look at sample constructed-response questions test by test. When you're finished reviewing the format of *your test's* constructed-response questions, I suggest that you practice completing your answer to the question using notebook paper. I have included answers and explanations at the end of this chapter for you to review after you complete your responses.

English Language, Literature, and Composition: Pedagogy (0043)

There are two types of constructed-response questions on test 0043: Teaching Literature and Responding to Student Writing.

Teaching Literature—Sample Question

Directions: Assume that you are teaching literature to a tenth-grade class. Your overall goal is to help your students recognize and understand key literary features of the works they read. Your choices of literary works to use as parts of this unit are listed below.

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- Ray Bradbury, *Fahrenheit 451*
 - Tennessee Williams, *The Glass Menagerie*
 - J. D. Salinger, *The Catcher in the Rye*
 - F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*
 - Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*
 - William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*

1. Choose ONE of the works in the preceding list. Choose a work that you know well enough to identify and to cite examples of its key literary features. For example, you may identify and cite examples of specific characterization and narration methods, characteristics of the genre or subgenre, specific literary devices, or specific poetic techniques. Once you have chosen one of the literary works, answer the following three-part question.
2. Identify and describe TWO literary features key to the work that you have chosen for your tenth-grade literature unit. In your response:
 - Be specific about what you want your students to know about each literary feature.
 - Include specific examples from the literary work that are relevant to each feature.
 - Describe how knowledge of these literary features is appropriate to teach in a tenth-grade classroom.

3. Identify and describe TWO challenges to understanding this work that you anticipate your tenth-grade students might have. In your response:
 - Explain why each challenging aspect of this text is likely for tenth-grade students.
 - Include specific examples from the literary work that are relevant to each challenging aspect.
4. Describe TWO instructional activities that you would use to teach this literary work to your tenth-grade literature students. Be sure to incorporate either the literary features you described in part 2 and/or the challenging aspects you described in part 3. In your response:
 - Offer clear, well-formulated activities that actively involve students.
 - Explain how each activity helps students understand the literary features (from part 2) and/or the challenging aspect of the work (from part 3).
 - Describe activities that are appropriate for tenth-grade students.

Responding to Student Writing—Sample Question

Directions: In this exercise, you will answer questions about a student’s writing sample. Some questions will ask about strengths, weaknesses, and errors in conventions of standard written English. Below are some examples of how you should understand these terms for the purpose of this test question. You may find it helpful to refer to these examples when you write your response, although you may introduce your own examples.

Examples of strengths and weaknesses in writing:

- Sense of voice
- Paragraph organization
- Essay organization
- Sentence variety and complexity
- Sense of audience

Examples of errors in conventions of standard written English:

- Misplaced semicolons or commas
- Unparallel construction
- Run-on sentences
- Sentence fragments
- Subject-verb agreement errors
- Verb tense inconsistency
- Pronoun-antecedent agreement errors

Question

A ninth-grade English class was assigned to write a personal narrative from another person’s point of view. What follows is a student response to this assignment. It is a final draft. Read this response carefully.

Broken Bones

I’m good friends with Jimmy. I live right next to him and on days school is canceled we usually hang out. On this day, school was cancelled due to too much snow on the roads. So I called Jim and we came to consensus that we would go to the mall at about 11:00 am. He came down to my house and we were ready to go at 11:15.

The snow that has fallen slowly last night had continued into the morning. The sky was filled with gray clouds. Jim said he wanted to go sledding too. *We live right near Monsignor Clark School, and they have a good sledding hill.* I said I wanted to go to the mall, so we made an agreement to go to the mall first and then the sledding hill second. *I got my way.*

Jim didn’t have a sled, and he liked using his boogie board as a sled anyway, so he brought that. He took some other snow gear with him to stay warm. I had a sled, but really wasn’t planning on going sledding. Jim was way into this stuff.

We walked over the hill toward the mall, saw Monsignor Clark School, and kept walking towards the Wakefield Mall. Jim jumped down a small hill near the Paul Baileys' car dealership. He was laughing the whole time. He sprung up and looked at me with the biggest smile on and his eyes were as wide the night sky. Then Jim sprinted to a hill that a snow plow had made on the side of the road. The plow had come to a little three-way intersection and just went straight, right up to the grass. All I could see was a mound of snow about 10 or 12 feet high and Jim disappear over it. I walked a bit further so I was parallel with the hill and could see that on the other side it was straight down and lead to a hill that was more like 15 or 16 feet high.

Jim did a "dropping in" motion two or three times on his stomach and said this was the coolest ever. Then he said what I figured he would eventually say, "You think I'll do it standing up?" and of course I said that I didn't think he would. *I knew he would get up there but I wasn't sure if he would actually drop in.* He got on top with boogie board in hand, and tried to place it under his feet and almost fell. He finally got his feet set and leaned forward. He was all good, going straight down the slope very fast. That's until he hit the bottom. At that moment the sky turned even grayer.

It looked like Jim was going to try to stand up when he slipped violently to his left side. Jim hit the ground with way too much force, and to make things worse, he didn't get up. I couldn't discern what had happened. Then Jim yelled, "I didn't know the ground was that hard!"

Jim picked up his boogie board and walked away to leave, without the smile on his face. Jim's face was hard to read, no expressions, which is how he usually is. He was quiet on the walk home, and then he said he couldn't move this left arm. When we got back to my house, my mom, who is a nurse, helped him get his coat off and looked at his arm. Jim's elbow was sticking out. "It's not supposed to look like that, huh?" Jim said. "No, Jim, ha-ha, it's not" my mom mumbled with a nervous laugh.

Jim's dad took him to the hospital. He had broken his ulna, and would have to wear a cast for awhile. I thought of how ironic it was that on a day we planned to have lots of fun sledding, Jim ended up breaking his arm. At least I will get to sign his cast! I hope he is resilient and bounces back soon. I think the lesson he learned is not to be a fool and do something zany without the proper equipment and protection. Maybe next time he'll replace the boogie board with a sled!

1. Identify ONE significant strength (give specific examples and line references) and explain how this strength contributes to the paper's effectiveness. Do NOT discuss the student's ability with conventions of standard written English (e.g., grammar, punctuation).
2. Identify ONE significant weakness (give specific examples and line references) and explain how this weakness interferes with the paper's effectiveness. Do NOT discuss the student's ability with conventions of standard written English (e.g., grammar, punctuation).
3. Identify TWO specific errors in the conventions of standard written English in the student's writing (quote from the narrative and give specific line references). For each error, identify the type of error being made.
4. Based on this student's writing sample, describe ONE follow-up assignment you would give to help improve this student's writing ability. Explain how you would address the strength (from part 1 of this question) and/or the weakness (from part 2) of this question. Your follow-up assignment should NOT address errors in conventions of standard written English (e.g., grammar, punctuation).

Teaching Foundations: English (0048)

There are two types of constructed-response questions on test 0048: Teaching Methods for the Middle/Junior High Level English classroom and Teaching Methods for the High School Level English Classroom.

Teaching Methods for Middle/Junior High Level English Classroom—Sample Question

Directions: There are FOUR parts to this constructed-response question. Given the student learning goal and grade level indicated, you are to develop an appropriate instructional sequence (i.e., lesson plan) and then analyze specific elements of your lesson plan. The suggested amount of time for this constructed-response question is 80 minutes.

Student learning goal: Evaluate the structural elements of the plot (e.g., subplots, parallel episodes, climax), the plot's development, and the way in which conflicts are (or are not) addressed and resolved across multiple literary works (Grade 8, Reading, 3.2).

Grade level: Grade 8

The class is made up of 26 students: 13 boys and 13 girls.

Part 1: Instructional sequence

Describe a lesson plan that you would use to help students meet the student learning goal stated above. You can use a bulleted list or outline form. Be certain that the content and the instructional approaches you suggest are appropriate for the grade level stated above. Your instructional sequence can be structured for a single class day or for a span of a few days. In your lesson plan:

- Include one group activity that requires active student participation.
- Identify one reading skill or strategy that students must use to be successful in the lesson, and include an activity in your lesson plan to help students improve this reading strategy or skill.
- Include three assessment activities: 1) prior to instruction, 2) during instruction, and 3) after instruction to evaluate whether students achieved the learning goal.

Part 2: Group activity

Describe ONE of the group activities from your lesson plan. Be sure to provide sufficient detail in your description and to explain what the teacher will do, what the students will do, and why the activity contributes to the student learning goal.

Part 3: Strengthening reading abilities

Describe why you chose the reading skill or strategy included in your lesson plan. Be sure to explain why this reading strategy or skill is important to the students' achievement of the lesson goal and why your activity would be effective for improving the skill.

Part 4: Assessment

Describe ONE of the three assessment activities that you included in your lesson plan (prior to instruction, during instruction, after instruction). Be sure to describe how the assessment would provide evidence of the degree to which students have achieved the learning goal.

Teaching Methods for the High School Level English Classroom—Sample Question

Directions: There are FOUR parts to this constructed-response question. Given the student learning goal and grade level indicated, you are to develop an appropriate instructional sequence (i.e., lesson plan) and then analyze specific elements of your lesson plan. The suggested amount of time for this constructed-response question is 80 minutes.

Student learning goal: Students will structure their writing ideas and arguments in a sustained, persuasive, and sophisticated way and support ideas and arguments with precise and relevant examples (Grades 11–12, Writing, 1.3).

Grade level: Grade 11

The class is made up of 30 students: 15 boys and 15 girls.

Part 1: Instructional sequence

Describe a lesson plan that you would use to help students meet the student learning goal stated above. You can use a bulleted list or outline form. Be certain that the content and the instructional approaches you suggest are appropriate for the grade level stated above. Your instructional sequence can be structured for a single class day or for a span of a few days. In your lesson plan:

- Include one group or participatory activity that requires active student participation.
- Identify one writing skill that students must use to be successful in the lesson, and include an activity in your lesson plan to help students improve this writing skill.
- Include three assessment activities: 1) prior to instruction, 2) during instruction, and 3) after instruction to evaluate whether students achieved the learning goal.

Part 2: Group or participatory activity

Describe ONE of the group activities from your lesson plan. Be sure to provide sufficient detail in your description and to explain what the teacher will do, what the students will do, and why the activity contributes to the student learning goal.

Part 3: Strengthening writing abilities

Describe why you chose the writing skill included in your lesson plan. Be sure to explain why this writing skill is important to the students' achievement of the lesson goal and why your activity would be effective for improving the skill.

Part 4: Assessment

Describe ONE of the three assessment activities that you included in your lesson plan (prior to instruction, during instruction, after instruction). Be sure to describe how the assessment would provide evidence of the degree to which students have achieved the learning goal.

Middle School English Language Arts (0049)

There are two types of constructed-response questions on test 0049: Literary Analysis and Rhetorical Analysis.

Literary Analysis—Sample Question

Directions: This short-answer, or constructed-response, question requires you to interpret a piece of literary or nonfiction text. Plan to spend approximately 15 minutes of your testing time on this constructed response.

The Prologue

Enter Chorus.

Chorus. Two households, both alike in dignity,
 In fair Verona, where we lay our scene,
 From ancient grudge break to new mutiny,
 Where civil blood makes civil hands unclean.
 From forth the fatal loins of these two foes
 A pair of star-cross'd lovers take their life;
 Whose misadventur'd piteous overthrows
 Doth with their death bury their parents' strife.
 The fearful passage of their death-mark'd love,
 And the continuance of their parents' rage,
 Which, but their children's end, naught could remove,
 Is now the two hours' traffic of our stage;
 The which if you with patient ears attend,
 What here shall miss, our toil shall strive to mend.
 [Exit.]

In this prologue from Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet, describe how the author uses imagery and poetic devices to introduce the play.

Rhetorical Analysis—Sample Question

Directions: This short-answer, or constructed-response, question requires you to discuss the rhetorical elements of a piece of writing. Plan to spend approximately 15 minutes of your testing time on this constructed response.

The following passage is an excerpt from “Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl” by Harriet Jacobs (a.k.a. Linda Brent):

Such were the unusually fortunate circumstances of my early childhood. When I was six years old, my mother died; and then, for the first time, I learned, by the talk around me, that I was a slave. My mother’s mistress was the daughter of my grandmother’s mistress. She was the foster sister of my mother; they were both nourished at my grandmother’s breast. In fact, my mother had been weaned at three months old, that the babe of the mistress might obtain sufficient food. They played together as children; and, when they became women, my mother was a most faithful servant to her whiter foster sister. On her death-bed her mistress promised that her children should never suffer for any thing; and during her lifetime she kept her word. They all spoke kindly of my dead mother, who had been a slave merely in name, but in nature was noble and womanly. I grieved for her, and my young mind was troubled with the thought who would now take care of me and my little brother. I was told that my home was now to be with her mistress; and I found it a happy one. No toil-some or disagreeable duties were imposed on me. My mistress was so kind to me that I was always glad to do her bidding, and proud to labor for her as much as my young years would permit. I would sit by her side for hours, sewing diligently, with a heart as free from care as that of any free-born white child. When she thought I was tired, she would send me out to run and jump; and away I bounded, to gather berries or flowers to decorate her room. Those were happy days—too happy to last. The slave child had no thought for the morrow; but there came that blight, which too surely waits on every human being born to be a chattel.

Describe the major organizational features of the paragraph. Refer directly to the excerpt to support your description of its organization.

Constructed-Response Scoring Guides

This section of the chapter helps you focus on how to earn the highest score. It also helps you better understand what makes a less effective response. You’ll see that your answers need to be *complete, relevant, appropriate, thorough, and specific to the literary work or other works in the passage*. While an appropriate response must be legible and accurate, note that you are not required to use perfect spelling, grammar, or handwriting. Let’s begin with a look at the scoring process itself, and then move to the specific scoring guides for the constructed-response items on your Praxis II test.

How Is an “Appropriate Response” Determined?

The Educational Testing Service (ETS) uses the term *appropriate* in its scoring guide. It’s important that you consider how the ETS scorers determine “appropriate responses”:

- Two or three education experts are asked to read case histories and answer the questions.
- Benchmark papers are selected from individuals who have agreed to participate in a pilot test. In other words, your test is not used to train scorers!
- The test writer uses the experts’ “model answers” to develop a specific scoring guide for each case history and its questions. These models become examples of correct answers, not *the* correct answers.
- Next, the specific scoring guide is used to select model answers that serve as “benchmark papers” for training scorers for your exam.
- During the training session and when reading benchmark papers, scorers can add new answers to the scoring guide as they see fit.
- Training sessions are designed to train scorers to use benchmark papers and the specific scoring guide, not their own opinions or preferences.

While test experts generally agree that the ETS has set up a reliable and valid way to score test-takers’ written responses, you may have concerns about how your own constructed responses are scored. If this is the case, you can request and pay

for your score to be verified. See the website www.ets.org/praxis for more information about the score-verification process and fees.

How to Use the Scoring Criteria to Assess Your Own Practice Test Responses

As you'll see in this section, each of the Praxis II tests that includes constructed-response questions has different scoring criteria. This section presents each test's scoring criteria. After you review this section, you may want to share your constructed-response questions from the sample test items earlier in this chapter with an experienced teacher or educator and ask him or her to use the scoring guide to provide feedback to you. You also may want to compare your own constructed responses to the answers and explanations provided. This way, you are making sure that you are addressing all the important aspects of each question.

English Language, Literature, and Composition: Pedagogy (0043)

There are two constructed-response questions on test 0043 that are made up of three or four parts each. The scoring range for each question is between 0 and 6. While each test's scoring criteria may vary, the points are generally distributed as follows.

Teaching Literature

Part 1—2 points awarded for the identification of two key literary features and clear connections to specific examples in the text.

Part 2—2 points awarded for the identification of two challenges to understanding this passage and an accurate explanation as to why these challenges would likely pose a problem for student understanding. Specific examples from the text are included.

Part 3—2 points awarded for the description of two instructional activities that are appropriate for the given grade level and that address the literary features and/or challenges cited in parts 1 and 2. The activities are designed to help students understand specific elements of the knowledge.

Responding to Student Writing

Part 1—1 point for the identification of one significant strength and a detailed explanation of how it contributes to the paper's effectiveness.

Part 2—1 point for the identification of one significant weakness and a detailed explanation of how it interferes with the paper's effectiveness.

Part 3—2 points: 1 point for the correct identification of each of the two errors.

Part 4—2 points for a clear, concise discussion of the follow-up assignment that connects clearly to the strengths or weaknesses of the student's paper and also contributes to the student's development as a writer.

Teaching Foundations: English (0048)

There are two constructed-response questions on test 0048 that are made up of four parts. The scoring range for each constructed-response question on this test is between 0 and 4. Points are distributed as follows:

Score of 4

The candidate's response includes most or all of the following:

- Answers to all parts of the questions are clear and appropriate.
- Instructional activities are presented in a logical sequence related to the students' learning goal.

- Instructional activities are appropriate for the grade level.
- The response demonstrates strong understanding of subject matter and pedagogy.
- The response contains sufficient and well-chosen examples and supporting details.

Score of 3

The candidate's response includes most or all of the following:

- Answers to most parts of the questions are clear and appropriate.
- Instructional activities are appropriately sequenced and relate to the instructional goal.
- The response demonstrates adequate understanding of content and pedagogy.
- The response contains some appropriate examples and supporting details.

Score of 2

The candidate's response includes most or all of the following:

- Responses to some parts of the question are appropriate.
- Activities do not follow in a logical sequence and do not relate clearly to the instructional goals.
- Activities may be appropriate for the grade level but some may be clearly inappropriate.
- The response shows an incomplete understanding of subject matter and pedagogy.
- The response includes few appropriate examples and supporting details.

Score of 1

The candidate's response includes most or all of the following:

- Answers to very few parts of the question are appropriate.
- Activities do not flow in a logical sequence and do not relate clearly to the instructional goals.
- Activities, overall, are inappropriate for the given grade level.
- The response shows a weak understanding of subject matter and pedagogy.
- The response includes no appropriate examples or supporting details.

Score of 0

The candidate's response contains no strategies, examples, or details that appropriately address the question.

Middle School English Language Arts (0049)

There are two constructed-response questions on test 0049. The scoring range for each constructed-response question on this test is between 0 and 3. Points are distributed as follows:

Score of 3

The response is strong in the following ways:

- Candidate demonstrates the ability to analyze the constructed-response question thoughtfully and in depth.
- Candidate demonstrates strong knowledge of the subject matter relevant to the question.
- Candidate responds appropriately to all parts of the question.
- Candidate demonstrates facility with the conventions of standard written English.

Score of 2

An acceptable response demonstrates some understanding of the topic but is limited in one or more of the following major ways:

- Candidate indicates a misreading of the constructed-response question or material and/or provides superficial analysis.
- Candidate demonstrates only superficial knowledge of the relevant subject matter.
- Candidate responds to one or more parts of the questions inadequately or not at all.
- Response may contain significant writing errors.

Score of 1

An unacceptable response is seriously flawed in one or more of the following ways:

- Candidate demonstrates a weak understanding of the subject matter or of the writing task.
- Candidate fails to respond adequately to most parts of the question.
- Response may be incoherent or severely underdeveloped.
- Response may contain severe and persistent writing errors.

Answers and Explanations

English Language, Literature, and Composition: Pedagogy (0043)

Teaching Literature—Sample Response

The following response earned a score of 6 on a 6-point scale:

1. One literary feature of Fahrenheit 451 is Bradbury’s use of symbolism to convey meaning. The author uses book burning as a symbol of the power censorship holds in this futuristic society that employs “firefighters” who obediently set fire to books, not extinguish the fires, or censorship, in this society. Another symbol used throughout this novel is “the book,” an enemy of the state. Books represent knowledge and intellectualism, which are forbidden in this culture. In this opening excerpt from the novel, Montag compares book pages to pigeon wings. This allusion symbolizes books as freedom, a theme the author will develop throughout the novel.

Another important literary feature of Fahrenheit 451 is the use of its genre, science fiction, as a vehicle for social criticism. The author suggests that an unchecked oppressive government causes irreparable damage to society. Written in the early 1950s, after WWII and during the rise of McCarthyism, the use of the science-fiction genre to raise apprehension about the United States becoming an oppressive, authoritarian society was incredibly popular and well-received. The notion of a dystopia, a futuristic and technocratic society that requires order, harmony, and obedience at the expense of personal rights and individuals’ creative expression, is a specific element of the science fiction genre that Bradbury uses successfully in Fahrenheit 451.

2. One challenge to understanding this novel that I anticipate tenth-graders might have is identifying the themes in the text. Identifying theme requires high-level reading skills, such as analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. Not all tenth-graders are reading at grade level and some may be challenged to think critically, as required by this task. For example, one central theme in the novel is censorship. In the futuristic setting of this book, buying and owning books is illegal and if one is found with books, the books are burned and the owner is arrested. Another theme Bradbury develops is the dichotomy of knowledge and ignorance. In the novel, a main character, Montag who is a fireman, has the responsibility to burn books, or knowledge. As the story progresses, Montag finds himself questioning the status quo, and experiencing more satisfaction in his life when it is filled with knowledge.

A second challenge to understanding that tenth-graders might experience is identifying and understanding the use of symbolism in Fahrenheit 451. Students at this grade level may miss the subtlety of the author’s meaning by reading or even skipping sections of the text that include important symbols. For example, the Phoenix plays a key role and symbolizes fire and flight. A second symbol that tenth-graders may not immediately understand is the symbol of the Mechanical Hound that represents a manipulation of nature which causes death and destruction.

3. One instructional activity I would use to teach Fahrenheit 451 to tenth-grade students is activating and developing prior knowledge. Prior to reading the novel, I would engage the students in a discussion about banned books, censorship, and the right to freedom of speech in the United States. After this discussion, I would provide the students

with an outline of the historical context of this novel and check for understanding of McCarthyism, communism, the First Amendment, WWII, Hitler, and post-WWII events, such as the Cold War. This activity would help students to more deeply understand the symbolism and to identify the major themes in the novel.

A second instructional activity I would use to teach this novel is cooperative learning. For example, the tenth-grade students would work in groups of four and take individual responsibility for finding the theme or symbolism in a portion of the text. Next, the group would discuss its findings and support each other in reaching higher level understanding of the novel. Finally, the group would present its interpretation of the novel's symbols and identified themes in the format of a poster presentation. This activity would help students to reach higher levels of understanding of literary features through active involvement, speaking and listening, as well as individual accountability.

Responding to Student Writing—Sample Response

The following response earned a score of 6 on a 6-point scale:

1. One significant strength of this student's writing is its sense of voice. The reader can imagine Jimmy's enthusiasm on a snow day with no school, as noted in lines 10–11, "Jim was way into this stuff," and in line 14, when the author describes Jimmy's smile "as wide as the night sky." The author's voice is that of an adolescent, perhaps one who is a bit older than Jim and sees Jim as a younger brother. This older adolescent voice is noted in line 10, "I had a sled, but really wasn't planning on going sledding," and lines 28–29, in which the narrator talks about Jim's expressions being hard to read "which is how he usually is." The sense of voice this young author creates draws the reader in to learn more about the broken bones incident and lets the reader know these adolescent boys have a brotherly, caring, yet competitive, relationship. This makes the reader wonder if the older friend causes the broken bones and how the boys will handle an accident. Voice is a significant strength of this piece.
2. One significant weakness of the student's writing is the inclusion of unnecessary events leading up to the "broken bones" incident in the story. Furthermore, the student author tends to overuse sequence of events as the rationale for inclusion of events. For example, the author includes details about why school was cancelled (line 3) and the snow gear that Jim brought (line 10). The result of this weakness is a loss of the reader's interest from time to time. In addition, the time order of going to the mall and then sledding seems important in the opening but is not clearly developed at the close of the piece. The narrator talks about the irony of the day's events, but misses the opportunity to revisit who got his way—Jimmy or the narrator (line 8), a more significant and subtle bit of irony in the piece.
3. One specific error in the conventions of standard written English is comma use. For example, in line 2, the author does not use a comma before a coordinating conjunction joining independent clauses. There are several other examples of not understanding this convention in line 14 ("He sprung up and looked at me with the biggest smile on and his eyes were as wide as the night sky.") and line 17 (I walked a bit further so I was parallel with the hill and could see that on the other side it was straight down and lead to a hill that was more like 15 or 16 feet high). The author appears to understand this convention in line 9 (" . . . , so we made an agreement) and line 10 ("I had a sled, but . . ."). In addition, the author does not use a comma when needed in the nonrestrictive adjective clause in line 25 (It looked like Jim was going to try to stand up when he slipped violently to his left side.)

A second specific error in the conventions of standard written English is verb tense. In line 5, the young author attempts to use rich, descriptive language to describe the snowy day, but these attempts are ineffective when an intrusive error in verb tense occurs in the sentence. "The snow has fallen slowly last night had continued into the morning." The student chooses the present perfect tense "has fallen," when he needed to choose the past perfect tense "had fallen" to agree with the tense in the remainder of the sentence "had continued into the morning."

4. One follow-up assignment I would give to this student writer is an author study of works that include sequential events that are important to the development of a narrative, as well as examples of other ways to organize a narrative, such as flashback, journal format or carefully selecting events to return to later in the narrative. Flowers for Algernon, The Catcher in the Rye, and To Kill a Mockingbird all could provide excellent models for this study. Next, I would ask the author to re-examine this piece of writing in order to suggest one paragraph to revise. Specifically, I will help the student see the inclusion of unnecessary events and contrast this with the inclusion of necessary events that are important to the piece.

Teaching Foundations: English (0048)

Teaching Methods in English, Middle/Junior High Level—Sample Response

The following response earned a score of 4 on a 4-point scale:

Part 1: This lesson plan is designed for eighth-grade learners' ability to evaluate the structural elements of plot, plot development, and the ways conflicts are resolved, or not resolved, in multiple literary works.

Opening: Tell the students that they are going to be viewing and reading texts to evaluate the important parts of a story's plot—climax, subplots, and conflicts. Explain that this is an important reading skill to help students remember the story line and to be able to write or to discuss a summary of a film or a text.

Show a film clip from Holes that demonstrates a climactic moment in the plot. Stop the film and discuss the key elements of the event. Students will be assessed prior to instruction during this opening section of the lesson to determine if they understand the structural elements of plot, subplot, conflicts, and climax. The teacher will ask the students what made the event exciting, interesting, or suspenseful and try to elicit students' prior knowledge of these story elements.

Next, read aloud the same plot event from the literary work. Ask the students to elaborate on the features of this climactic moment in the story. Next, collaboratively write a definition of climax and ask all to take notes.

Proceed in a similar way, alternating the use of film and literary work, to help students to identify, define, and describe subplots and conflicts.

Middle: Organize the students in small, heterogeneous groups to read one of four texts in a text set. Have each member of the group become an "expert of the day" on finding climax, main events, subplots or conflicts, and then alternate this role each day to ensure students have experience identifying each structural element. The students first read independently, taking margin notes (using stick-on notes) on examples of the structural elements. Then the students reconvene their small group to discuss, correct, or enrich understanding of today's reading. The teacher will conduct a "during reading" assessment by sitting in on small group discussions and evaluating individual student participation and level of understanding. In addition, she will randomly collect student books to review stick-on notes.

Closing: The class reconvenes whole group to plot the story's structural elements on a large, bulletin-board size graphic organizer.

The students continue with this sequence of activities until the story is read completely and all chapters have been charted on the graphic organizer. After the graphic organizer is complete, the students will work in their small groups to practice orally summarizing the plot of the literary work.

Follow-up activity: Students write a summary of the literary work. The students have been taught in previous lessons about the format of a summary. This summary will act as the summative assessment to determine if each individual student has achieved the learning goal.

Part 2: As briefly stated in the lesson plan, the eighth-graders will work in small, cooperative groups to read and identify structural elements of the plot in a literary work. The students will take turns becoming an "expert of the day" in identifying examples of the plot's climax, subplot, main events, and conflicts. The students will be held individually accountable by having to write margin notes, which will be randomly checked by the teacher. In addition, the student will be individually accountable to the group and the class when the group reports to the whole class at the end of the lesson. The teacher will also sit in to assess the level of performance of each group. The students will work simultaneously to read and identify structural elements of the plot and then discuss their findings with the small group. This activity contributes to the students' achievement of the learning goal by requiring reading, writing, speaking, listening, and thinking as individuals and as a group member. The cooperative nature of the group activity offers all students an opportunity to learn.

Part 3: The reading strategy—comprehending structural elements of plot in a literary work in order to summarize—was chosen because it is a real-life and important comprehension strategy adolescents must practice and master. In addition, this reading strategy was chosen because it usually still needs to be *taught* to eighth-graders. The inclusion of film to activate students' prior knowledge is designed to motivate and engage all adolescent readers to open them to examining more challenging literary works for the same structural elements.

Part 4: The assessment planned for the middle of the lesson occurs during reading and provides a formative assessment of the student learning goal. The teacher will observe the students' participation in their small, cooperative groups and evaluate each student's level of participation and accuracy of contributions. In addition, the teacher will randomly collect the students' books to more carefully review the margin notes on plot elements to assess students' individual contributions and content knowledge. This assessment helps to hold students individually accountable in the small groups, provides the students with ongoing feedback about their progress, and allows the teacher to plan for closing discussion questions and future lessons, as needed.

Teaching Methods in English, High School Level—Sample Response

The following response earned a score of 4 on a 4-point scale:

Part 1: This lesson plan is designed for 11th-grade learners' ability to structure their writing ideas and arguments in a sustained, persuasive, and sophisticated way. In addition, students will support ideas and arguments with precise and relevant examples.

Lesson instructional sequence:

Opening: Explain real-life connections and purpose for the lesson and why they are learning this writing strategy. Tell the students that they are going to be arguing in class for the next few weeks—reading arguments, critiquing arguments, engaging in arguments, and finally writing an argument. Clearly, we argue all the time in real life—in court we have closing arguments, at home we argue for more privileges or respect for our privacy, we criticize the President's argument for tax-hikes or engaging in war, and we read arguments on the editorial page in the newspaper.

Next, engage the whole class in a discussion about a recent policy change for professional athletes that requires them to wear “business dress” while traveling to games. The teacher will seek student prior knowledge (prior to instruction assessment) on this topic to provide more historical context for this policy, or she will provide information as needed. After discussion, the teacher will poll the class on its support or lack of support for this policy. Split the class based on its views (it's okay if it's not evenly divided) and have the students write as many reasons as they can in five minutes for their view on this issue. Reconvene the class and have student representatives of each view report their argument. The teacher will take notes on the students' points to be used in the middle of the lesson.

Middle: Using an overhead projector, blank overhead transparencies, and projector pens, the teacher will provide a brief lecture on the format of an argument essay and define premises, thesis, and conclusions. She will incorporate the views of the students on both sides of the “business dress for professional athletes” argument to demonstrate the variety of ways one can organize a cohesive and persuasive argument. Next, the teacher will provide photocopies of editorials from the newspaper that contain models for writing an argument. She will ask the students to work in pairs to identify and critique the arguments in published editorials, labeling the argument's conclusion, thesis, premises, weaknesses, and strengths. During this time, the teacher will circulate among the students to informally assess students' understanding of the elements of an argument during instruction assessment.

Closing: The class will reconvene and discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the arguments they have read in pairs. Last, the teacher will review the assignment for students to write their own argument with a sustained, persuasive, and sophisticated effort. This assignment will serve as the summative assessment of the learning goal. The teacher will provide assignment criteria and set deadline for topic, first draft, peer conference feedback, and final copy. In the next day's lesson (described in part 3), the teacher will provide explicit modeling and guiding practice on how to write an effective argument.

Follow-up assignment: Students will be encouraged to send their argument essays to the school or local newspapers for possible publication.

Part 2: One of the group activities in this lesson is designed for students to work in pairs to identify and critique the written arguments in published editorials. This activity is designed to help students see multiple models of arguments and the real-life purposes for writing an argument. During the students' work in pairs, the teacher will circulate among her students to assess students' individual ability to identify the arguments' premises, thesis, and conclusion. If students are experiencing difficulty, the teacher can provide instructional supports, as needed. This activity contributes directly to the students' achievement of the learning goal by giving the students opportunities to discuss written arguments and consider authentic purposes for writing their own arguments.

Part 3: The writing skill chosen for this lesson involves writing a persuasive essay in the form of an argument. During pre-writing, the students will review the editorials they read and what makes a persuasive argument and which topics interest the students. The teacher will write elements of a strong argument and topics of interest on the chalkboard and students discuss. Next, the teacher will ask the students to select one or two topics to research in order to gather details. The students will be encouraged to use credible Internet sources and reference materials. The students will bring detailed notes to class the next day and work in pairs to generate two or more opinion statements as possible thesis statements for their arguments. Then, students will be required to select one topic for their argument and to write an outline of the argument's premises and conclusion(s). Next, the students will write a draft in class so the teacher can monitor progress. The teacher will require students to share their arguments with their partners for peer review. Finally, students will write a final copy for a summative grade and for possible publication in a local newspaper.

Part 4: One assessment in this writing lesson plan for 11th-graders is the summative writing assessment—the final persuasive essay. This assignment demonstrates a student's individual ability to demonstrate the stated learning goal: to structure arguments in a sustained, persuasive, and sophisticated way. This assignment was modeled in class, taught with guided practice, and individually assessed in the format of an editorial. Students were given a rubric for scoring and criteria for successful completion of the task prior to assessment. Students who meet or exceed the standard for success on this assignment will be encouraged to submit this work for possible publication. Students who do not will be required to meet with a peer reviewer, read the teacher's comments, and resubmit the argument for a possible grade change and to demonstrate competency on this task.

Middle School English Language Arts (0049)

Literary Analysis—Sample Response

The following response earned a score of 3 on a 3-point scale:

Shakespeare uses imagery and the English sonnet form to set the context for the play Romeo and Juliet. Specifically, he uses imagery in the prologue to cleverly introduce the main characters as well as the primary conflict in the play. He also opens the tragedy with a poetic form traditionally used to express deep love.

The sonnet is performed by the Chorus, which tells the audience to attend carefully to this two-hour play, set in Verona. Two young lovers, from noble families that share a longstanding rivalry, take their lives, which serves only to deepen their families' rage and anger rather than help them learn from the deaths of their children. Shakespeare uses phrases such as "civil blood makes civil hands unclean" and "From forth the fatal loins of these two foes" to conjure images of two noble families responsible for their children's demise because of their longstanding feud. In the latter phrase, the author uses alliteration; in the former phrase, he uses repetition of the word civil. Each of these phrases contains poetic elements that raise the reader's level of interest in listening carefully to the performance.

Shakespeare uses the sonnet form to introduce this tragic play about two "star-cross'd" young lovers. The prologue, a sonnet, is written in iambic pentameter, comprised of three quatrains and one couplet, for a total of fourteen lines. The rhyming scheme is formal—each quatrain has its own rhyming pair (abab, cdcd, efef), and the two lines of the couplet contain the end rhyme pattern gg. This apparent contradiction of using a love sonnet to set the stage for a tragedy serves to heighten the reader's interest and to foreshadow the depth of love and loss about to be portrayed in the play.

Rhetorical Analysis—Sample Response

The following response earned a score of 3 on a 3-point scale:

This excerpt from Harriet Jacobs' essay is organized sequentially, in the context of personal and historical information. The author opens the essay with a seemingly contradictory statement in which she uses the phrase "unusually fortunate" to describe her childhood. She then describes her status as a six-year-old slave living in the home of her deceased mother's mistress. Next, the author offers personal context as to why her circumstances as a slave are unusually fortunate, describing activities such as sewing by her mistress' side and happily picking berries as one would expect a free white six-year-old would be allowed to do. Jacobs then begins to close the paragraph with foreshadowing: "Those were happy days—too happy to last." She steps out of her personal narrative and changes to the third-person perspective with her closing reflective statement, "The slave child had no thought for the morrow; but there came that blight, which too surely waits on every human being born to be a chattel." The reader can anticipate that the next years of Jacobs' life as a slave child will be filled with hardship and bleakness.