



# PSSA

Pennsylvania System of School Assessment

# English Language Arts

## Grade 3

# Item Sampler Scoring Guide

2025–2026



Pennsylvania  
Department of Education

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# INFORMATION ABOUT ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS

## Introduction

### General Introduction

The Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) provides districts and schools with tools to assist in delivering focused instructional programs aligned with the Pennsylvania Core Standards (PCS). These tools include Academic Standards, Assessment Anchors and Eligible Content (AAEC) documents, assessment handbooks, and content-based online Item Samplers, and a Sampler Guide. The online Item Sampler is intended to be used in conjunction with this Sampler Guide as a useful tool for Pennsylvania educators in preparing local instructional programs by providing samples of test item types and scored student responses. The online Item Sampler and this Sampler Guide are not designed to be used as a pretest, a curriculum, or any other benchmark for operational testing.

The online Item Sampler is available in Braille format. For more information regarding Braille, call (717) 901-2238.

### Pennsylvania Core Standards (PCS)

The online Item Sampler and this Sampler Guide contain examples of test questions designed to assess the Pennsylvania Assessment Anchors and Eligible Content aligned to the PCS.

### What Is Included

The online Item Sampler contains stimulus reading passages with test questions, Conventions of Standard English questions, and a short-answer (SA) question that have been written to align to the Assessment Anchors, which are based on the PCS. The sample test questions model the types of items that may appear on an operational PSSA. Each sample test question has been through a rigorous review process to ensure alignment with the Assessment Anchors prior to being piloted in an embedded field test within a PSSA assessment and then used operationally on a PSSA assessment. Answer keys, scoring guidelines, and any related stimulus materials are also included. To access the Online Item Sampler, go to <https://portal.te.drcedirect.com/PA>. Select Item Samplers. Then, select the subject and grade levels as needed. Additionally, this Sampler Guide PDF provides sample student responses for each open-ended item to demonstrate the range of responses that students provided in response to these items.

## Purpose and Uses

The items in the online Item Sampler may be used<sup>1</sup> as examples for creating assessment items at the classroom level. Classroom teachers may find it beneficial to have students respond to the TDA prompt question in this online Item Sampler. Educators may then use this Sampler Guide as a model to score the responses either independently or together with colleagues within a school or district. This Sampler Guide also includes the *General Description of Scoring Guidelines for ELA TDA Questions* that students will have access to during a PSSA ELA administration. The general description of scoring guidelines may be distributed to students for use during local assessments and may also be used by educators when scoring local assessments.

## Item Format and Scoring Guidelines

**Multiple Choice:** Each test question of this type has four answer choices. Some MC test questions are based on a stimulus reading passage, while Conventions of Standard English MC test questions are independent of a passage. Each correct response to an MC test question is worth one point.

**Evidence-Based Selected-Response:** Each two-part EBSR question is designed to elicit an evidence-based response from a student who has read either a literature or an informational text passage. In Part One, which is similar to an MC question, the student analyzes a passage and chooses the best answer from four answer choices. In Part Two, the student utilizes evidence from the passage to select one or more answers based on the response to Part One. Part Two is different from an MC question in that there may be more than one correct answer. Each EBSR test question is worth either two or three points, and students can receive points for providing a correct response to Part One and/or for providing one or more correct responses in Part Two.

**Short Answer:** Each test question of this type includes a short response space in which the student composes an answer based on the passage the student has read. An SA test question may include multiple tasks, and the student may be asked to provide a brief explanation. The SA test question is scored using an item-specific scoring guideline based on a 0–3-point scoring guideline. In this Item and Scoring Sampler, every item-specific scoring guideline is combined with examples of student responses representing each score point to form a practical item-specific scoring guideline. This Item and Scoring Sampler also includes the *General Description of Scoring Guidelines for Short-Answer Items* used to develop the item-specific guidelines.

**Non-score Considerations:** For SA items, responses can be designated as non-scorable (NS). While every effort is made to score each student response, a response may receive an NS designation if it falls into one of five categories:

**Blank** – Blank, entirely erased, entirely crossed out, or consists entirely of whitespace

**Refusal** – Refusal to respond to the task

**Non-scorable** – In a language other than English, incoherent, illegible, insufficient, unrelated to the passage, or consisting solely or almost solely of text copied from the passage

**Off Topic** – Makes no reference to the item or passage but is not an intentional refusal

**Copied** – Consists of text copied from the item and/or test directions

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<sup>1</sup> The permission to copy and/or use these materials does not extend to commercial purposes.

## Testing Time and Mode of Test Delivery for the PSSA

The PSSA is delivered in an online format. The estimated response time for each item type is listed below.

- **Multiple-Choice:** 1.5 minutes
- **Evidence-Based Selected-Response:** 3 to 5 minutes
- **Short Answer:** 5 minutes

During an official test administration, students are given as much additional time as is necessary to complete the test questions.

## English Language Arts

The online Item Sampler is composed of 1 passage, 5 passage-based MC questions, 1 EBSR question, 1 SA question, and 2 Conventions of Standard English MC questions.

Each question is accompanied by a table that contains the Assessment Anchor and Eligible Content coding, answer key(s), depth of knowledge, testing data, and annotations.

## Item and Scoring Sampler Format

The online Item Sampler and this Sampler Guide include the test directions and scoring guidelines that appeared in the PSSA English Language Arts assessments. Each MC item contains a table that includes the item alignment, the answer key, the depth of knowledge (DOK) level, points possible, the percentage<sup>2</sup> of students who chose each answer option, and a brief answer-option analysis or rationale. The EBSR item is followed by a table that includes the item alignment, the answer key to Part One of the item, the answer key to Part Two of the item, the DOK level, points possible, the mean student score, and a brief answer-option analysis for each part of the item. The SA item is followed by a table that includes the item alignment, the DOK level, and the mean student score.

**Example Multiple-Choice Item Information Table**

Item-Specific Information	Item Statistics
Alignment:	<i>p</i> -value A:
Answer Key:	<i>p</i> -value B:
Depth of Knowledge:	<i>p</i> -value C:
Points Possible:	<i>p</i> -value D:

Option Annotations
Brief answer-option analysis or rationale.

**Example Evidence-Based Selected-Response Item Information Table**

Category	Answer Key	Item Scoring
Alignment:	Part One:	Points Possible:
Depth of Knowledge:	Part Two:	Mean Score:

Option Annotations
Brief answer-option analysis or rationale.

**Example Short Answer Item Information Table**

Category	Item-Specific Information
Alignment	Assigned AAEC
Depth of Knowledge	Assigned DOK
Points Possible	Number of Points
Mean Score	Average Score

<sup>2</sup> All *p*-value percentages listed in the item information tables have been rounded.

**Directions for Short-Answer Questions:**

Some questions will require you to write your response.

For the short-answer questions:

- Be sure to read each short-answer question carefully.
- You cannot receive the highest score for a short-answer question without completing all the tasks in the question.
- If the question asks you to do multiple tasks, be sure to complete all tasks.
- You may look back at the passage to help you answer the question.
- Write your response in the appropriate space in the booklet. If you use scratch paper to write your draft, be sure to transfer your final response to the booklet.

## **General Description of Scoring Guidelines for Reading Short-Answer Items**

### **3 Points**

- The response provides a complete answer to the task (e.g., a statement that offers a correct answer as well as text-based support).
- The response provides specific, appropriate, and accurate details (e.g., naming, describing, explaining, or comparing) or examples.

### **2 Points**

- The response provides a partial answer to the task (e.g., indicates some awareness of the task and at least one text-based detail).
- The response attempts to provide sufficient, appropriate details (e.g., naming, describing, explaining, or comparing) or examples; may contain minor inaccuracies.

### **1 Point**

- The response provides an incomplete answer to the task (e.g., indicating either a misunderstanding of the task or no text-based details).
- The response provides insufficient or inappropriate details or examples that have a major effect on accuracy.
- The response consists entirely of relevant copied text.

### **0 Points**

- The response provides insufficient material for scoring.
- The response is inaccurate in all aspects.

## English Language Arts—Summary Data

### Multiple-Choice and Evidence-Based Selected-Response Questions

An asterisk (\*) indicates the key.

Sample Number	Alignment	Answer Key	Depth of Knowledge	Points	p-value A	p-value B	p-value C	p-value D
1	A-C.2.1.1	C	2	1	20%	23%	43%*	14%
2	A-K.1.1.1	B	1	1	8%	74%*	8%	10%
3	A-K.1.1.2	A	2	1	63%*	13%	12%	12%
4	A-V.4.1.1	D	1	1	16%	14%	21%	49%*
5	A-V.4.1.2	B	2	1	23%	53%*	10%	14%
6	A-K.1.1.1	Part One: A Part Two: D	1	2	Mean Score: 1.19			
8	D.1.2.1	C	1	1	23%	11%	40%*	26%
9	D.1.1.8	C	1	1	5%	17%	63%*	15%

### Short-Answer Question

Sample Number	Alignment	Points	Depth of Knowledge	Mean Score
7	A-K.1.1.1	3	3	1.21

## English Language Arts Test Directions

Read these directions carefully before beginning the assessment. To look at these directions again, select the ? [Help] button and choose the **Test Directions** tab.

This section of the test has Conventions of Standard English questions that include multiple-choice questions, reading passage multiple-choice questions, and reading passage evidence-based selected-response questions. Each multiple-choice question has four answer choices. Each evidence-based selected-response question has two parts and will ask you to select one or more answers in each part.

### Answering Questions

Read each question carefully and choose your answer or enter your response.

1. For Conventions of Standard English multiple-choice questions, first, find the answer to the question. Then, select the correct answer using the **Pointer** tool.
  - Only one of the answer choices provided is correct.
  - To change an answer, use the **Pointer** tool to choose a different answer.
  - Select the **Flag** button if you are not sure of the answer to a question. It will mark the question so you know to go back and answer the question later.
2. For reading passage multiple-choice questions, first, read the passage carefully. Then read each question carefully and choose your answer or enter your response. Find the answer to the question. Then, select the correct answer using the **Pointer** tool.
  - Only one of the answer choices provided is correct.
  - To change an answer, use the **Pointer** tool to choose a different answer.
  - Select the **Flag** button if you are not sure of the answer to a question. It will mark the question so you know to go back and answer the question later.
3. For reading passage evidence-based selected-response questions, first, find the answer to **Part One**. Then, select the correct answer using the **Pointer** tool. **Next**, find the evidence in **Part Two** based on your answer to **Part One** and select each answer using the **Pointer** tool.
  - Only one of the answers provided in **Part One** is correct. **Part Two** will tell you how many correct answers there are.
  - To change an answer in **Part One**, use the **Pointer** tool to choose a different answer.
  - To remove a choice in **Part Two**, use the **Pointer** tool to click on the answer a second time.

4. For the short-answer question, use the keyboard and other online tools to enter your response in the areas provided.
  - An example of the scoring guidelines that professional scorers will use to evaluate your responses to the short-answer question can be found by selecting the ? **[Help]** button and choosing the **Scoring Guidelines** tab. You may refer to the **Scoring Guidelines** at any time while responding to the short-answer question.
5. Use tools such as the **Cross-Off**, **Highlighter**, **Notepad**, **Magnifier**, and **Line Guide** to assist you during the test.

### Navigation

1. Only one question at a time will appear on the screen. Use the **Next** and **Back** buttons to move from question to question or page to page.
2. When you have answered all the questions, select the **Review/End Test** button at the top-right of the screen.
  - Select questions from the list that appears on the screen to check your work.
  - When you have finished and have checked your answers, follow the directions on the screen to exit.

### Helpful Hints

- There is no time limit to finish the test.
- If you need to take a break from the assessment, select the **Pause Test** button. Select the **Resume** button to continue. If you are away from the assessment for more than 20 minutes, you will need to log back in.
- To see your progress on the test, select the **Review/End Test** button. You may go to any question by selecting it from the list that appears on the screen.
- Select the ? **[Help]** button to find more information.

# **PSSA ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS GRADE 3**

## **Short-Answer Scoring Guidelines**

### **#7 Item Information**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Item-Specific Information</b>
Alignment	A-K.1.1.1
Depth of Knowledge	3
Points Possible	3
Mean Score	1.21

### **Assessment Anchor:**

E03.A-K.1—Key Ideas and Details

### **Specific Assessment Anchor Descriptor addressed by this item:**

E03.A-K.1.1.1—Ask and answer questions to demonstrate understanding of a text, referring explicitly to the text as the basis for the answers.

### **Item-Specific Scoring Guideline**

<b>Score</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>3</b>	The response is a clear, complete, and accurate answer as to how Alex shows that he is “curious” throughout the passage. The response includes relevant and specific information from the passage.
<b>2</b>	The response is a partial answer as to how Alex shows that he is “curious” throughout the passage. The response includes limited information from the passage and may include inaccuracies.
<b>1</b>	The response is a minimal answer as to how Alex shows that he is “curious” throughout the passage. The response includes little or no information from the passage and may include inaccuracies.  OR  The response relates minimally to the task.
<b>0</b>	The response is totally incorrect or irrelevant or contains insufficient information to demonstrate comprehension.

**Sample Student Responses**

Item 7 – Score Point 3

**Student Response**

Alex shows that he is curious throughout the passage because he was wondering how he would keep all the turtles that were crossing the road safe. I know that because in the text it says “But he couldn’t stand there all day trying to stop the cars.” Another way I know that he was curious was because he really wanted to know if his sign would work. I know that because in the text it said “Alex grinned do you think it will keep cars from hurting the turtles?” That is how I know Alex was curious throughout the passage.

**Annotation**

The response is a clear, complete, and accurate answer as to how Alex shows that he is “curious” throughout the passage (*wondering how he would keep all the turtles that were crossing the road safe . . . he really wanted to know if his sign would work*). The response includes relevant and specific information from the passage (*“But he couldn’t stand there all day trying to stop cars.” . . . “Alex grinned do you think it will keep cars from hurting the turtles?”*).

**Student Response**

Alex shows he is curious because he keeps learning about animals. In the text it says, "Alex learned that turtles don't have warm blood like people do that's why they have to sit in the sun to warm themselves up." This shows he is curious because he learned about turtles. Another detail is, "one week when it was too rainy to go canoeing he and his dad went to the library to check out books on turtles." In conclusion Alex shows he is curious because he keeps learning about animals.

**Annotation**

The response is a clear, complete, and accurate answer as to how Alex shows that he is "curious" throughout the passage (*he keeps learning about animals . . . he is curious because he learned about turtles*). The response includes relevant and specific information from the passage ("*Alex learned that turtles don't have warm blood*" . . . "*one week when it was too rainy to go canoeing he and his dad went to the library to check out books on turtles.*").

## Item 7 – Score Point 2

**Student Response**

Because Alexes Dad would take him down to the pond. Then Alex and his Dad went to the library and Alex got a book about snapping turtes. Then he read the Book about snapping tutttles. so one day he saw a snapping turtle and he knew not to pick It up Becaus even thoe It Dosen't it have teeth It can still bit relly hard enethe that It can bit your thiner off. Alex waved his hands out to stob a oproching car which was his neighbor Mrs. Ramos.

**Annotation**

The response is a partial answer as to how Alex shows that he is “curious” throughout the passage (*Because Alexes Dad would take him down to the pond. . . . went to the libary*). The response includes limited information from the passage and includes inaccuracies (*read the Book about snapping tutttles. so one day he saw a snapping turtle . . . Alex waved his hands out to stob*).

**Student Response**

Alex is curious about turtles because he got a book about them from the library.

The text says, “And then, as Alex watched, the rock started to move. When he rode his bike up to get a closer look, he saw that it wasn’t a rock at all! It was a large turtle creeping its way across the road!! It had a bony, beak-shaped mouth and a long, jagged tail. Alex knew right away it was a snapping turtle!

This shows, Alex really knows a lot about turtles.

In conclusion, Alex is really! curious.

**Annotation**

The response is a partial answer as to how Alex shows that he is “curious” throughout the passage (*because he got a book about them from the library . . . This shows, Alex really knows a lot about turtles. In conclusion, Alex is really! curious*). The response includes limited information from the passage and may include inaccuracies (*“And then, as Alex watched, the rock started to move. . . . Alex knew right away it was a snapping turtle!*).

## Item 7 – Score Point 1

**Student Response**

Alex show that he is “curious” throughout the pasg age lik that he went to the library and panted a sign that says “Slow! Turtles crossing” and that shows that he is curious.

**Annotation**

The response is a minimal answer as to how Alex shows that he is “curious” throughout the passage. The response includes little information from the passage and includes inaccuracies (*he went to the library and panted a sign that says “Slow! Turtles crossing”*).

Item 7 – Score Point 1

**Student Response**

Alex was curious about the turtles he saw. One week, when it was too rainy to go canoeing, he and his dad went to the library to check out books on turtles. Alex learned that turtles don't have warm blood like people do.

**Annotation**

The response is a minimal answer as to how Alex shows that he is “curious” throughout the passage. The response includes little information from the passage consisting of only relevant copied text (*Alex was curious about the turtles he saw. One week, when it was too rainy*).

Item 7 – Score Point 0

**Student Response**

Alex show that he is curious by riding his dike.

**Annotation**

The response is totally incorrect and contains insufficient information to demonstrate comprehension (*Alex show that he is curious by riding his [b]ike*).

Item 7 – Score Point 0

**Student Response**

The Turtles walk slow and the turtes go to the oshen.

**Annotation**

The response is totally incorrect and contains insufficient information to demonstrate comprehension (*The Turtles walk slow and the turtes go to the oshen [ocean]*).

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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# **PSSA Grade 3 English Language Arts Item Sampler Scoring Guide**

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