



PSSA

Pennsylvania System of School Assessment

English Language Arts

Grade 6

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 text-dependent analysis (TDA) prompt 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 TDA prompt 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 used¹ 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.

Text-Dependent Analysis Prompt: The TDA prompt is a text-dependent analysis prompt based on a passage or passage set that each student has read during the test event. There are three response pages in the paper-and-pencil format and up to 5,000 characters in the online format. Both literature and informational text passages are addressed through this item type. Students use explicit and implicit evidence to make inferences leading to a conclusion or generalization in response to the task stated in the prompt. Students construct a well-written analytical essay to communicate inferences and connections to the evidence using grade-appropriate writing skills. The TDA response is scored using a holistic scoring guideline on a 1–4-point scale.

Non-score Considerations: For TDA 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

¹ 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
- **Text-Dependent Analysis Prompt:** 45 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 2 passages, 5 passage-based MC questions, 2 EBSR questions, 1 TDA prompt, and 3 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 percentage² 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 TDA prompt 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 Text-Dependent Analysis Prompt Information Table

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

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

Directions for Text-Dependent Analysis (TDA) Prompts:

The English Language Arts TDA prompt will ask you to analyze the passage and use evidence from the passage to write an essay.

For the TDA Essay:

- Be sure to read the passage and the TDA prompt carefully.
- Review the Writer's Checklist to help you plan and organize your response.
- You may look back at the passage to help you write your essay.
- Write your essay in the appropriate space in the answer booklet. If you use scratch paper to write a rough-draft essay, be sure to transfer your final essay to the answer booklet.
- Be sure to check that your essay contains evidence from the passage to support your response.
- Be sure to check your essay for errors in capitalization, spelling, sentence formation, punctuation, and word choice.

Writer’s Checklist for the Text-Dependent Analysis Prompt

PLAN before you write

- Make sure you read the prompt carefully.
- Make sure you have read the entire passage carefully.
- Think about how the prompt relates to the passage.
- Organize your ideas on scratch paper. Use a thought map, outline, or other graphic organizer to plan your essay.

FOCUS while you write

- Analyze the information from the passage as you write your essay.
- Make sure you use evidence from the passage to support your response.
- Use precise language, a variety of sentence types, and transitions in your essay.
- Organize your paper with an introduction, body, and conclusion.

PROOFREAD after you write

- I wrote my final essay in the answer booklet.
- I stayed focused on responding to the prompt.
- I used evidence from the passage to support my response.
- I corrected errors in capitalization, spelling, sentence formation, punctuation, and word choice.

Text-Dependent Analysis Scoring Guideline

Score Point	Description
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effectively addresses all parts of the task demonstrating in-depth analytic understanding of the text(s) • Effective introduction, development, and conclusion identifying an opinion, topic, or controlling idea related to the text(s) • Strong organizational structure that effectively supports the focus and ideas • Thorough analysis of explicit and implicit meanings from text(s) to effectively support claims, opinions, ideas, and inferences • Substantial, accurate, and direct reference to the text(s) using relevant key details, examples, quotes, facts, and/or definitions • Substantial reference to the main idea(s) and relevant key details of the text(s) to support the writer’s purpose • Skillful use of transitions to link ideas • Effective use of precise language and domain-specific vocabulary drawn from the text(s) to explain the topic and/or to convey experiences/events • Few errors, if any, are present in sentence formation, grammar, usage, spelling, capitalization, and punctuation; errors present do not interfere with meaning
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adequately addresses all parts of the task demonstrating sufficient analytic understanding of the text(s) • Clear introduction, development, and conclusion identifying an opinion, topic, or controlling idea related to the text(s) • Appropriate organizational structure that adequately supports the focus and ideas • Clear analysis of explicit and implicit meanings from text(s) to support claims, opinions, ideas, and inferences • Sufficient, accurate, and direct reference to the text(s) using relevant details, examples, quotes, facts, and/or definitions • Sufficient reference to the main idea(s) and relevant key details of the text(s) to support the writer’s purpose • Appropriate use of transitions to link ideas • Appropriate use of precise language and domain-specific vocabulary drawn from the text(s) to explain the topic and/or to convey experiences/events • Some errors may be present in sentence formation, grammar, usage, spelling, capitalization, and punctuation; errors present seldom interfere with meaning

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Score Point	Description
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inconsistently addresses some parts of the task demonstrating partial analytic understanding of the text(s) • Weak introduction, development, and/or conclusion identifying an opinion, topic, or controlling idea somewhat related to the text(s) • Weak organizational structure that inconsistently supports the focus and ideas • Weak or inconsistent analysis of explicit and/or implicit meanings from text(s) that somewhat supports claims, opinions, ideas, and inferences • Vague reference to the text(s) using some details, examples, quotes, facts, and/or definitions • Weak reference to the main idea(s) and relevant details of the text(s) to support the writer’s purpose • Inconsistent use of transitions to link ideas • Inconsistent use of precise language and domain-specific vocabulary drawn from the text(s) to explain the topic and/or to convey experiences/events • Errors may be present in sentence formation, grammar, usage, spelling, capitalization, and punctuation; errors present may interfere with meaning
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimally addresses part(s) of the task demonstrating inadequate analytic understanding of the text(s) • Minimal evidence of an introduction, development, and/or conclusion • Minimal evidence of an organizational structure • Insufficient or no analysis of the text(s); may or may not support claims, opinions, ideas, and inferences • Insufficient reference to the text(s) using few details, examples, quotes, facts, and/or definitions • Minimal reference to the main idea(s) and/or relevant details of the text(s) • Few, if any, transitions to link ideas • Little or no use of precise language or domain-specific vocabulary drawn from the text(s) • Many errors may be present in sentence formation, grammar, usage, spelling, capitalization, and punctuation; errors present often interfere with meaning

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	B-C.2.1.3	A	2	1	54%*	15%	22%	9%
2	B-C.3.1.1	B	2	1	6%	71%*	11%	12%
3	B-K.1.1.1	C	2	1	12%	13%	67%*	8%
4	B-K.1.1.3	D	2	1	18%	7%	11%	64%*
5	B-C.2.1.2	D	3	1	10%	16%	23%	51%*
6	B-C.2.1.1	Part One: B Part Two: A, B	3	3	Mean Score: 1.67			
7	B-K.1.1.3	Part One: D Part Two: C	3	2	Mean Score: 0.88			
9	D.1.2.1	B	1	1	40%	29%*	20%	11%
10	D.1.1.6	D	2	1	33%	10%	10%	47%*
11	D.2.1.2	A	2	1	59%*	7%	22%	12%

Text-Dependent Analysis Prompt

Sample Number	Alignment	Points	Depth of Knowledge	Mean Score
8	B-C.2.1.1	4	3	2.02

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 text-dependent analysis prompt, 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 text-dependent analysis prompt 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 text-dependent analysis prompt.
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.

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Text-Dependent Analysis Scoring Guidelines

#8 Item Information

Category	Item-Specific Information
Alignment	B-C.2.1.1
Depth of Knowledge	3
Points Possible	4
Mean Score	2.02

Assessment Anchor:

E06.B-C.2—Craft and Structure

Specific Assessment Anchor Descriptor addressed by this item:

E06.B-C.2.1.1—Determine an author’s point of view or purpose in a text and explain how it is conveyed in the text.

Item-Specific Scoring Guideline

Score Point	Description
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effectively addresses all parts of the task demonstrating in-depth analytic understanding of the text(s) • Effective introduction, development, and conclusion identifying an opinion, topic, or controlling idea related to the text(s) • Strong organizational structure that effectively supports the focus and ideas • Thorough analysis of explicit and implicit meanings from text(s) to effectively support claims, opinions, ideas, and inferences • Substantial, accurate, and direct reference to the text(s) using relevant key details, examples, quotes, facts, and/or definitions • Substantial reference to the main idea(s) and relevant key details of the text(s) to support the writer’s purpose • Skillful use of transitions to link ideas • Effective use of precise language and domain-specific vocabulary drawn from the text(s) to explain the topic and/or to convey experiences/events • Few errors, if any, are present in sentence formation, grammar, usage, spelling, capitalization, and punctuation; errors present do not interfere with meaning

Score Point	Description
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adequately addresses all parts of the task demonstrating sufficient analytic understanding of the text(s) • Clear introduction, development, and conclusion identifying an opinion, topic, or controlling idea related to the text(s) • Appropriate organizational structure that adequately supports the focus and ideas • Clear analysis of explicit and implicit meanings from text(s) to support claims, opinions, ideas, and inferences • Sufficient, accurate, and direct reference to the text(s) using relevant details, examples, quotes, facts, and/or definitions • Sufficient reference to the main idea(s) and relevant key details of the text(s) to support the writer’s purpose • Appropriate use of transitions to link ideas • Appropriate use of precise language and domain-specific vocabulary drawn from the text(s) to explain the topic and/or to convey experiences/events • Some errors may be present in sentence formation, grammar, usage, spelling, capitalization, and punctuation; errors present seldom interfere with meaning
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inconsistently addresses some parts of the task demonstrating partial analytic understanding of the text(s) • Weak introduction, development, and/or conclusion identifying an opinion, topic, or controlling idea somewhat related to the text(s) • Weak organizational structure that inconsistently supports the focus and ideas • Weak or inconsistent analysis of explicit and/or implicit meanings from text(s) that somewhat supports claims, opinions, ideas, and inferences • Vague reference to the text(s) using some details, examples, quotes, facts, and/or definitions • Weak reference to the main idea(s) and relevant details of the text(s) to support the writer’s purpose • Inconsistent use of transitions to link ideas • Inconsistent use of precise language and domain-specific vocabulary drawn from the text(s) to explain the topic and/or to convey experiences/events • Errors may be present in sentence formation, grammar, usage, spelling, capitalization, and punctuation; errors present may interfere with meaning
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Sample Student Responses

Item 8 – Score Point 4

Student Response

This text supports the author's purpose by adding important key ideas that Buhrman-Deever uses to convey the overall purpose, insects are small but they make a lot of noise, they use this noise to survive. To summarize, insects produce vibratory sounds that travel through the air and how the sounds travel through our ears and to our brains. Insects use their noise for survival, defense mechanisms, mating, etc. The author uses connotative word choice to convey the main idea/author's purpose. The author even uses the title of the story as well as many different aspects in this informative writing.

In the passage "Small Bugs Big Sounds" the author uses connotative word choice to convey to the reader what Buhrman-Deever's purpose is. Under the subheading "Who's Calling?" it states, "So at night, listen up—they might be small, but they know a lot about sound." This evidence explicitly states that insects are small but they make a lot of loud noise, "they know a lot about sound" shows that they know how to use their sound and when to use it. In this citation the author speaks in second person to show that waking up because of insects happens and the author wants you to think more about insects and why and how they produce this noise.

The author's purpose, insects are small but they make a lot of noise, they use this noise to survive. This implicitly and explicitly shows that insects make noise for a reason. To survive. In the text cited in the paragraph above uses different techniques to convey the author's purpose. As stated in paragraph two, "The culprits are often no larger than your little finger-crickets, cicadas, and other insects hiding in the trees and grass." In this text it explicitly states a bunch of small insects that use this noise for their survival, mating, and for food. Having said in the text cited above, "... they might be small ..." this evidence shows that there can be insects so small but still use loud sounds to live.

The citation used from the last sentence of the 25th paragraph uses key ideas and main information that really conveyed the author's purpose, insects are small but they make a lot of noise, they use this noise to survive. Within writing this piece Buhrman-Deever used connotative word choice and scientific facts. As written in the introductory paragraph, the author even uses the title of the story to convey the author's purpose.

Annotation

This response effectively addresses all parts of the task, demonstrating in-depth analytic understanding of the text. The organizational structure is strong and effectively supports the response's focus and ideas. The response's analysis begins by means of an effective introduction that addresses the task (*This text supports the author's purpose by adding important key ideas that Buhrman-Deever uses to convey the overall purpose, insects are small but they make a lot of noise, they use this noise to survive*). Next, the student demonstrates a thorough understanding by digesting text information (*To summarize, insects produce vibratory sounds that travel through the air and how the sounds travel through our ears and to our brains. Insects use their noise for survival, defense mechanisms, mating, etc.*) and extending the introduction with analysis that addresses the author's purpose (*The author uses connotative word choice to convey the main idea/author's purpose. The author even uses the title of the story as well as many different aspects in this informative writing*). In the first body paragraph the student focuses on the controlling idea (*In the passage "Small Bugs Big Sounds" the author uses connotative word choice to convey to the reader what Buhrman-Deever's purpose is*). Verbiage from the prompt (*"So at night, listen up-they might be small, but they know a lot about sound"*) is employed to set up in-depth analysis focused on the author's purpose (*This evidence explicitly states that insects are small but they make a lot of loud noise, "they know a lot about sound" shows that they know how to use their sound and when to use it. In this citation the author speaks in second person to show that waking up because of insects happens and the author wants you to think more about insects and why and how they produce this noise*), with the student taking note of the author's use of the second-person point of view. The next body paragraph maintains the focus on connotative word choice with more thorough analysis, even employing a purposeful fragment for emphasis (*The author's purpose, insects are small but they make a lot of noise, they use this noise to survive. This implicitly and explicitly shows that insects make noise for a reason. To survive*). Well-chosen text support (*As stated in paragraph two, "The culprits are often no longer than your little finger-cricket, cicadas, and other insects hiding in the trees and grass"*) is then followed with additional strong analysis (*In this text it explicitly states a bunch of small insects that use this noise for their survival, mating, and for food. Having said in the text cited above, "... they might be small ..." this evidence shows that there can be insects so small but still use loud sounds to live*). The conclusion deftly connects back to the introduction (*The citation used from the last sentence of the 25th paragraph uses key ideas and main information that really conveyed the author's purpose, insects are small but they make a lot of noise, they use this noise to survive. Within writing this piece Buhrman-Deever used connotative word choice and scientific facts. As written in the introductory paragraph, the author even uses the title of the story to convey the author's purpose*). The student skillfully uses transitions (*To summarize, The author uses, the author even uses, In the passage, Under the subheading, This evidence explicitly states, In this citation, and, The author's purpose, In the text, As stated, In this text, Having said in the text cited above, this evidence shows, The citation used, Within writing this piece, As written in the introductory paragraph*) throughout the response. An effective use of precise language and domain-specific vocabulary (*the author's purpose, important, convey/conveyed, survive, summarize, vibratory sounds, survival, defense mechanisms, mating, connotative word choice, aspects, informative, evidence, explicitly, citation, implicitly, cited, different techniques, scientific facts*) is also evident. The errors present in spelling (*mechanisms, connotative/conitative*) and punctuation (missing commas) seldom interfere with meaning.

Student Response

In the short, nonfiction text called, “Small Bugs Big Sounds,” by Susanna Buhrman-Deever, the passage describes how and why insects make their shrill calls. The statement is related to the purpose of the passage because it helps to restate the questions asked in previous parts of the passage. It also helps to summarize the text and leave the reader thinking.

The statement quoted earlier helps to restate the questions asked by the author in previous parts of the passage. Some text evidence of this proclaims, “How do tiny bugs make such LOUD sounds?” Another piece of evidence states, “So why do insects sing?” These snippets of evidence show that the author was trying to restate how and why insects make these noises! She uses the statement as a tool to restate what has already been asked. If the author didn’t restate the questions at the end of the text, it would have less of an impact on the reader.

This statement also helps to summarize the introduction. Some evidence of this declares, “step outside on a warm summer night, and the air is alive with sound. Chirping, buzzing, whining, humming. What’s making all that racket? The culprits are often no longer than your little finger— crickets, cicadas, and other insects hiding in the trees and grass.” This bit of evidence shows that the statement is summarizing what is said in the introduction and tying up the passage. If the statement didn’t summarize the introduction, the passage wouldn’t really be as closed off and finished as it is with the statement.

In conclusion, this statement is heavily related to the purpose of the story. It helps summarize the introduction, and restate important questions. If the statement wasn’t included in the passage, the text would be extremely different, and not as impactful on the reader.

Annotation

This response effectively addresses all parts of the task, demonstrating in-depth analytic understanding of the text. The organizational structure is strong and effectively supports the focus. The introduction begins with analysis (*In the short, nonfiction text called, "Small Bugs Big Sounds," by Susanna Buhrman-Deever, the passage describes how and why insects make their shrill calls. The statement is related to the purpose of the passage because it helps to restate the questions asked in previous parts of the passage. It also helps to summarize the text and leave the reader thinking*) to outline an effective approach focused on the author's purpose. In the first body paragraph, the student breaks down an idea from the introduction (*The statement quoted earlier helps to restate the questions asked by the author in previous parts of the passage*), adding pertinent text references for support (*Some text evidence of this proclaims, "How do tiny bugs make such LOUD sounds?" Another piece of evidence states, "So why do insects sing?"*). More strong analysis further clarifies the author's purpose (*These snippets of evidence show that the author was trying to restate how and why insects make these noises! She uses the statement as a tool to restate what has already been asked. If the author didn't restate the questions at the end of the text, it would have less of an impact on the reader*) and addresses the effect on the reader. The next body paragraph builds on the previous analysis (*This statement also helps to summarize the introduction*), adding text support (*Some evidence of this declares, "step outside on a warm summer night, and the air is alive with sound. Chirping, buzzing, whining, humming. What's making all that racket? The culprits are often no longer than your little finger—crickets, cicadas, and other insects hiding in the trees and grass"*) and extending the development with more thorough analysis (*This bit of evidence shows that the statement is summarizing what is said in the introduction and tying up the passage. If the statement didn't summarize the introduction, the passage wouldn't really be as closed off and finished as it is with the statement*). The effective conclusion reiterates the student's ideas, maintaining the focus on the author's purpose and the effect on the reader (*In conclusion, this statement is heavily related to the purpose of the story. It helps summarize the introduction, and restate important questions. If the statement wasn't included in the passage, the text would be extremely different, and not as impactful on the reader*). There is a skillful use of transitions (*In the short, nonfiction text, the passage describes, The statement is related to, because, It also helps, The statement quoted earlier, Some text evidence of this proclaims, These snippets of evidence show that, If the author didn't restate, This statement also, Some evidence of this declares, This bit of evidence shows that, If the statement didn't summarize the introduction, In conclusion, If the statement wasn't included in the passage*) throughout the response, and an effective use of precise language and domain-specific vocabulary drawn from the text (*nonfiction, shrill, restate, summarize, leave the reader thinking, evidence, proclaims, snippets, tool, impact/impactful, declares, finished, heavily related, important, extremely different*) is employed to explain the topic. The few errors present in spelling (*important, different*) and punctuation (unnecessary comma between *introduction, and*) do not interfere with meaning.

Student Response

The statement relates to the author's purpose for writing the passage because of how and why they make sounds. An example of this is when the author stated that, "[the] sound is all about getting the night vibrations into the air" (Small Bugs Big Sounds). This shows the importance that if a bug wants to make a "chirp or whine" it has to get the exact vibrations to get the noise loud enough. This also shows that if the insect's noise does not make enough sound it will most likely not be able to get a partner since the female wants the mate with the loudest noise. Another example of how they make noise is when she stated that, "to avoid short-circuiting, an insect has to make very fast vibrations – it's a race to send out a wave before the last wave can run into it. But a bug's tiny muscles can't vibrate fast enough on their own to do this" (Small Bugs Big Sounds). Despite the bugs not having enough strength, they still know a lot about creating and using sounds.

Another purpose for writing the passage is to learn why they make sounds. The author states why they make sounds when she say, "Mostly they're trying to attract mates" (Small Bugs Big Sounds). This show that most sounds insects make is to bring mates to them. They make so many vibrations that more air is getting compressed so they make the loudest noise for partners. Another reason they make sounds is to tranfer information. This reveals that when they are singing they are tranfering information about them like having a conversation. If the insect is singing slowly the female can learn that he could be sick. Therefore, a purpose to write this passage is to see why bugs make noises.

In conclusion the evidence refers to the author's purpose for writing the passage so we can know why and how insects make noise.

Annotation

This response adequately addresses all parts of the task, demonstrating sufficient analytic understanding of the text. The organizational structure is appropriate and supports the student's focus. The clear introduction begins by establishing the controlling idea (*The statement relates to the author's purpose for writing the passage because of how and why they make sounds*). The student follows this with text support addressing how insects make sounds (*"[the] sound is all about getting the night vibrations into the air"*) and clear analysis (*This shows the importance that if a bug wants to make a "chirp or whine" it has to get the exact vibrations to get the noise loud enough. This also shows that if the insect's noise does not make enough sound it will most likely not be able to get a partner since the female wants the mate with the loudest noise*) showing the sounds' importance. The response then includes another text reference (*"to avoid short-circuiting, an insect has to make very fast vibrations – it's a race to send out a wave before the last wave can run into it. But a bug's tiny muscles can't vibrate fast enough on their own to do this"*) that connects to more clear analysis (*Despite the bugs not having enough strength, they still know a lot about creating and using sounds*), all of which reinforces the author's statement. The next body paragraph focuses on why insects make sounds (*Another purpose for writing the passage is to learn why they make sounds*). The student begins with relevant text (*The author states why they make sounds when she say, "Mostly they're trying to attract mates"*) and clarifying analysis blended with additional text references (*This show that most sounds insects make is to bring mates to them. They make so many vibrations that more air is getting compressed so they make the loudest noise for partners. Another reason they make sounds is to tranfer information. This reveals that when they are singing they are tranfering information about them like having a conversation. If the insect is singing slowly the female can learn that he could be sick. Therefore, a purpose to write this passage is to see why bugs make noises*). The brief conclusion smoothly ties back to both the introduction and the task (*In conclusion the evidence refers to the author's purpose for writing the passage so we can know why and how insects make noise*). There are an appropriate use of transitions to link ideas (*because, An example, This shows, This also shows, since, Another example, Despite, Another purpose, The author states, Another reason, This reveals that, If, Therefore, In conclusion, so*) and an appropriate use of precise language and domain-specific vocabulary drawn from the text (*author's purpose, importance, chirp, whine, exact vibrations, partner, female, Despite, strength, creating, mates, compressed, tranfer/tranfering, information, reveals, singing, conversation, Therefore, evidence, refers*) to explain the topic. The errors present in usage (*say for "says," show for "shows"*), spelling (*tranfer/tranfering*), and punctuation (*missing commas*) seldom interfere with meaning.

Student Response

In the informational short story, “Small Bugs Big Sounds” by Susannah Buhrman-Deever, the author relates to the sentence “So the next time noisy insects keep you awake at night listen up – they might be small, but they know a lot about sound” throughout the story.

The statement, “So the next time noisy insects keep you awake at night, listen up – they might be small, but they know a lot about sound,” relates to the text because the statement explores how the insects know so much about sound, and it can help people learn. The author wrote, “Even a short chirp contains a surprising amount of information. It can reveal what species the singer is, whether it’s male or female, how big it is, and how healthy. It can even tell the temperatures.” This matters because it is telling people what is happening outside, so people can learn more about what is happening in an insect’s life.

The author writes “So the next time noisy insects keep you awake at night listen up – they might be small, but they know a lot about sound,” relates to how they find mates. In the story it states, “Some insects have have resonating chambers inside their bodies. Others raise their wings as they sing to reflect ad focus sound. Some bugs even build concert halls. Male mole crickets dig a trumpet-shaped burrow.” This matters because it shows what hard work insects go throughout to get the perfect sound, which helps them attract mates.

To conclude, the story told how smart bugs were with sound. If bugs weren’t so good with sound what could happen to the small insects?

Annotation

This response adequately addresses all parts of the task, demonstrating sufficient analytic understanding of the text. The organizational structure is appropriate and supports the student's focus of addressing the task (*the author relates to the sentence "So the next time noisy insects keep you awake at night listen up – they might be small, but they know a lot about sound" throughout the story*) by means of a clear controlling idea (*because the statement explores how the insects know so much about sound, and it can help people learn*). Next, a relevant text reference (*The author wrote, "Even a short chirp contains a surprising amount of information. It can reveal what species the singer is, whether it's male or female, how big it is, and how healthy. It can even tell the temperatures"*) is employed, along with clear analysis (*This matters because it is telling people what is happening outside, so people can learn more about what is happening in an insect's life*), to support the controlling idea. The next body paragraph begins with the quote from the prompt followed by analysis (*relates to how they find mates*) that both connects to the controlling idea and supports the author's purpose for writing the passage. Relevant text support extends the development (*"Some insects have have resonating chambers inside their bodies. Others raise their wings as they sing to reflect ad focus sound. Some bugs even build concert halls. Male mole crickets dig a trumpet-shaped burrow"*), while additional clear analysis (*This matters because it shows what hard work insects go throughout to get the perfect sound, which helps them attract mates*) ties back to the controlling idea. The response concludes with a rhetorical question to engage the reader and complete the development (*To conclude, the story told how smart bugs were with sound. If bugs weren't so good with sound what could happen to the small insects?*). Transition use is appropriate (*In the informational short story, The statement, relates to the text because, The author wrote, This matters because, so, The author writes, In the story it states, To conclude, If*), as is the use of precise language and domain-specific vocabulary drawn from the text (*relates, throughout, explores, can help people learn, matters, happening in an insect's life, mates, matters, hard work, perfect sound, attract*). The few errors present in usage (duplicate word *have*) and spelling (*chrip, tempetures*) do not interfere with meaning.

Student Response

The statement relates to the author’s purpose because it says “they might me small, but they know a lot about sound,” and the author’s purpose is how and why do bugs make loud sounds.

The text says “When a cricket chirps, sound waves spread out from its body in all directions, like ripples on a pond.” This shows that the author’s purpose is to inform readers how bugs make loud sounds.

The author also states “they are trying to attract mates.” which is telling us why bugs make sounds. Telling us why bugs make sounds is another part of the author’s purpose.

In conclusion, the statment the author makes is refering to how and why bugs make sounds.

Annotation

This response inconsistently addresses some parts of the task, demonstrating partial analytic understanding of the text. The organizational structure is weak, with a weak introduction, weak development, and a weak conclusion. The weak introduction addresses the author’s purpose, in limited fashion, and provides a controlling idea (*The statement relates to the author’s purpose because it says “they might me small, but they know a lot about sound,” and the author’s purpose is how and why do bugs make loud sounds*). The student then uses vague text support from the passage (*“When a cricket chirps, sound waves spread out from its body in all directions, like ripples on a pond”*) and an inference (*This shows that the author’s purpose is to inform readers how bugs make loud sounds*) to connect to the controlling idea. Next, another text selection (*The author also states “they are trying to attract mates.”*) is employed, along with weak analysis (*which is telling us why bugs make sounds. Telling us why bugs make sounds is another part of the author’s purpose*), to clarify why bugs make loud sounds. The somewhat simplistic conclusion reiterates the controlling idea (*In conclusion, the statment the author makes is refering to how and why bugs make sounds*), maintaining the focus on the author’s purpose. There are some transitions to link ideas (*The statement relates, because, and the author’s purpose, The text says, This shows, The author also states, which is, In conclusion*) but little precise language or domain-specific vocabulary to explain the topic (*inform, refering*). Errors present in spelling (*statment, refering*) and punctuation (missing commas) do not interfere with meaning.

Item 8 – Score Point 2

Student Response

In the passage “Small Bugs Big Sounds” I learned that even the tiniest of bugs can make the loudest sounds.

The statement relates to the author’s purpose for writing this story because it tells you how the tiniest bugs make the loudest sounds.

In the text it states “Even a short chirp contains a suprising amount of information. It can reveal what species the singer is, whether it’s male or female, how big it is, and how healthy.”

In conclusion, that is how the statement relates to the author’s purpose for writing the passage.

Annotation

This response inconsistently addresses some parts of the task, demonstrating partial analytic understanding of the text. The organizational structure is weak and only inconsistently supports the student’s focus and ideas. The introduction, development, and conclusion are all weak and somewhat repetitive. The response begins with a weak introductory statement (*In the passage “Small Bugs Big Sounds” I learned that even the tiniest of bugs can make the loudest sounds*). The student then draws a very weak inference (*The statement relates to the author’s purpose for writing this story because it tells you how the tiniest bugs make the loudest sounds*) that connects weakly to the author’s purpose. Next, the student provides a quote to support the inference (*In the text it states “Even a short chirp contains a suprising amount of information. It can reveal what species the singer is, whether it’s male or female, how big it is, and how healthy”*), but the connection is vague. Finally, the student attempts to tie the ideas together with a concluding statement (*In conclusion, that is how the statement relates to the author’s purpose for writing the passage*); however, it is simplistic and doesn’t connect to any higher-level thinking. The student uses some basic transitions to link ideas (*In the passage, I learned, The statement, because, In the text it states, In conclusion*), but there is a little use of precise language or domain-specific vocabulary to explain the topic (*learned, tiniest, loudest*). Errors present in spelling (*suprising*) and punctuation (missing commas) do not interfere with meaning.

Student Response

Even though small doesn't mean they can't make a lot of noise like crickets they're small but still make a lot of noise so a lot of other bugs make little noise. They make a lot of noise mostly at night it's really annoying. But they're bugs what to expect

Annotation

This response minimally addresses part of the task, demonstrating inadequate analytic understanding of the text. There is minimal evidence of an organizational structure; the introduction, development, and conclusion are all minimal at best. The response begins with a very weak inference (*Even though small doesn't mean they can't make a lot of noise like crickets*) that does little to address how the statement relates to the author's purpose for writing the passage. The response continues in simplistic fashion (*they're small but still make a lot of noise so a lot of other bugs make little noise. They make a lot of noise mostly at night it's really annoying*) before concluding with a vague rhetorical question (*But they're bugs what to expect*). The student uses few transitions (*Even though, like, but, so*) that only minimally link ideas. There is little use of precise language or domain-specific vocabulary drawn from the text to explain the topic (*crickets, mostly at night, annoying*). The errors present in sentence structure (*But they're bugs what to expect*) and punctuation (missing or incorrect) sometimes interfere with meaning. Holistically, a score of 1 is appropriate for this response.

Item 8 – Score Point 1

Student Response

If there are noisy bug just put head phone's on and then you won't hear them at all.

Annotation

This response minimally addresses part of the task, demonstrating inadequate analytic understanding of the text. There is no evidence of an introduction, development, a conclusion, or of any sort of an organizational structure. The response consists of a minimal text reference (*If there are noisy bug*) followed by a simplistic directive (*just put head phone's on and then you won't hear them at all*) that does not connect with the task. There are a minimal use of transitions (*If, just, and*) and no use of precise language or domain-specific vocabulary drawn from the text. The errors present in usage (*bug* for “bugs,” *head phone's* for “headphones”) and punctuation do not interfere with meaning but seem significant given the length of the response. Holistically, a score of 1 is appropriate.

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PSSA Grade 6 English Language Arts Item Sampler Scoring Guide

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