Cognitively-Based Assessment of, for, and as Learning (CBAL)

WRITING SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENTS
SAMPLE ITEMS

Overview
The CBAL Writing Project has developed summative-assessment prototypes in four domains:

♦ Writing about literature
♦ Research-based writing
♦ Persuasive writing: Recommendation
♦ Persuasive writing: Argumentation

These assessments have been pilot tested with eighth-grade students. Although each presents a different purpose and context for writing, uses different item formats, and assesses a different set of skills, the four tests share the following features.

♦ Each presents a scenario that establishes a purpose and context for writing.
♦ As the scenario unfolds, students answer questions in a variety of formats by either selecting or writing a response.
♦ The first three tasks lead students through a process of becoming informed about the content that they will need to write about in the fourth (and final) task. Students read articles and other texts, evaluate arguments or ideas from different sources, and give feedback to peers as they prepare for the culminating task.
♦ The lead-in questions and resources (e.g., guidelines, tips, rubrics) also scaffold the particular cognitive and writing skills that students will need to display in the final task.
♦ All of the lead-in questions are scored for critical thinking/content. Most are selected response, but a few are short constructed response (one sentence to a paragraph). They are administered in one 45-minute class period.
♦ For the longer (45-minute) culminating task, students write an essay or other piece of extended text appropriate for the writing context and audience.
♦ The final piece of writing is evaluated on two separate sets of criteria: one for critical thinking/content and one for surface-level features (syntax, grammar, spelling, etc.)
♦ Formative-assessment materials support the array of skills assessed throughout each test.
♦ The summative and formative tasks align to the CBAL Writing Competency Model and to state and national standards, although the CBAL tasks tend to place greater emphasis on critical thinking than is usually explicit in current state standards.
Question 1: Research-based Writing Skills (Selected Response)

Introductory Screen

Task 2
Organize Information for the Pamphlet

Others on your team found additional sources and prepared note cards about their content. Now you need to decide how to organize this information according to the team’s research questions:

- What is the definition of invasive species?
- How are invasive plant species introduced?
- What kinds of environmental and economic problems can invasive plant species cause?
- What are the best ways to prevent and/or control invasive plant species?
- Can invasive plant species ever be beneficial?

Sample Question

Note Card


- If you grow only native plants, you will reduce the need for harmful pesticides and herbicides that people often use to stop invasive plants.

Read the information on the note card. Then click on the research question that you think it best answers.

- What is the definition of invasive species?
- How are invasive plant species introduced?
- What kinds of environmental and economic problems can invasive plant species cause?
- What are the best ways to prevent and/or control invasive plant species?
- Can invasive plant species ever be beneficial?

What is being assessed: The ability to classify and organize information for research-based expository writing

The task: Read a student’s note card and decide which research question the information answers

Scoring: Each correct answer (1 of 5 options) receives 1 point.

Comments: This task simulates an important step in the research process: gathering and organizing information. This and other questions lead students to a culminating task in which they will write sections for a pamphlet that will be distributed at a school science fair.
**Question 2: Summarizing Skills (Selected Response)**

**Worries about Advertising Aimed at Children**

The advertising industry spends $2 billion per year on ads aimed at children. According to studies, the average child experiences more than 4,000 TV commercials a year. Ads are reaching children through new media (the Internet, for example) and even in schools. Companies sponsor educational materials and sell products in students' backpacks.

Advertising's power of persuasion is certainly compelling, according to the American Psychological Association. Studies have shown that after watching just one commercial, children can recall the message and want the product. In addition, research has shown that ads try to get children to eat unhealthy foods are less successful when children also see or hear ads for snack foods.

In fact, some researchers think that children's advertising for sugary cereals, candy, and fast-food restaurants may lead to poor health by encouraging children to eat junk food. Studies suggest that eating habits formed during childhood can persist throughout life.

Another worry about advertising is that many young children are using the Internet and watching television in their bedrooms, where no one is present to explain what they are seeing or reading. Children may ask their parents to buy products, especially when they are advertised by popular celebrities or characters from kids' shows such as SpongeBob SquarePants or Blues Clues.


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**What is being assessed:** The ability to evaluate a summary and select accurate feedback.

**The task:** Students read an article and then evaluate a peer’s summary of the article in relation to a set of guidelines. Each guideline appears as a separate question.

**Scoring:** Each correct Yes/No answer is worth ½ point.
Comments: This set serves two additional functions: it helps students become more informed about the topic, and it introduces them to the guidelines that they will soon need to apply to their writing as they summarize the articles in subsequent tasks.

Question 3: Persuasive Writing (Constructed Response)

What is being assessed: The ability to construct an argument on an issue (justify a position)

The task: Write a persuasive essay on a complex issue. Several resources are available: articles the student read in earlier tasks, graphic organizers for planning the essay, and criteria for writing a successful persuasive essay.

Scoring: Each essay is evaluated on a 0-5 scale according to two different rubrics – one for content/critical thinking and the other for surface-level features. To provide instructional feedback, we are using an ETS core-scoring approach, in which readers begin by focusing on the criteria that define a “Clearly Competent” response (Score 4) and then identify specific ways in which the response might meet, exceed, or fall short of those requirements.

Comments: Because this is a culminating task, students will have read several articles and evaluated several arguments about the issue. They should therefore be well prepared to write an extended piece – in this case, an essay for the local paper – explaining their own views on the issue. In addition, teachers are encouraged to go over the graphic organizers as a formative exercise so that students do not have to decide during the test which tool, if any, to use. In addition, students might have used the “Writer’s Checklist: Persuasive Writing” in their classroom work. These resources pertain to all persuasive-essay-writing assignments, regardless of topic or context.
Question 3 Scoring Criteria

Critical Thinking/Content Features of a “Clearly Competent” Persuasive Essay

CLEARLY COMPETENT (4)
The response demonstrates a competent grasp of argument construction and the rhetorical demands of the task by displaying all of the following characteristics:

Command of Argument Structure
♦ States a clear position on the issue
♦ Uses claims and evidence to build a case in support of that position
♦ May also consider and address obvious counterarguments

Quality and Development of Argument
♦ Makes reasonable claims about the issue
♦ Supports claims by citing and explaining relevant reasons and/or examples
♦ Is generally accurate in its use of evidence

Awareness of Audience
♦ Focuses primarily on content that is appropriate for the target audience
♦ Expresses ideas in a tone that is appropriate for the audience and purpose for writing

Surface-level Writing Features of a “Clearly Competent” Essay

CLEARLY COMPETENT (4)
A CLEARLY COMPETENT response typically displays all of the following characteristics:

It is adequately structured.
♦ Overall, the response is clearly organized.
♦ Clusters of related ideas are grouped appropriately and divided into sections and paragraphs as needed.
♦ Transitions between groups of ideas are signaled appropriately.

It is coherent.
♦ New ideas are introduced appropriately.
♦ The sequence of sentences leads the reader from one idea to the next with few disorienting gaps or shifts in focus.
♦ Connections within and across sentences are made clear where needed by the use of pronouns, conjunctions, subordination, etc.

It is adequately phrased.
♦ Ideas are expressed clearly and concisely.
♦ Word choice demonstrates command of an adequate range of vocabulary
♦ Sentences are varied appropriately in length and structure to control focus and emphasis.

It displays control of Standard Written English.
♦ Grammar and usage follow the conventions of Standard Written English, but there may be minor errors.
♦ Spelling, punctuation, and capitalization follow the conventions of Standard Written English, but there may be minor errors.