

# **STATE OF TEXAS ASSESSMENTS OF ACADEMIC READINESS (STAAR™)**

## **Grades 4 and 7 Writing**

**Victoria Young  
Director of Reading, Writing, and  
Social Studies Assessments  
Texas Education Agency**

# New Prompt Page Design



## **WRITTEN COMPOSITION #1: Expository**

**READ** the following quotation.

A famous businessman once said, “Players win games; teams win championships.”

**THINK** carefully about the following statement.

Sometimes you can accomplish good things by yourself but better things with other people.

**WRITE** an essay explaining whether it is better to work by yourself or with a group.



# Behind the STAAR Writing Design

- **Provides a broader snapshot of students as writers**
  - **Can 4<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> graders write a personal narrative and an expository piece equally well?**
  - **Are instructional programs coherent at the campus and district levels? Are they designed to enable all students to demonstrate at least a satisfactory performance across purposes for writing? If not, why not?**

# Behind the STAAR Writing Design

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- Provides a more accurate assessment of the degree to which students are internalizing skills inherent in the writing process.
- Is developmentally based in that the weight of the revision and composition sections increases incrementally from grade 4 to grade 7 to high school (English I, II, III).
  - Are students better able to think conceptually about a piece of writing during revision to make it more effective?
  - Are students better able to apply writing skills in the context of actual writing tasks?

# STAAR Writing Performance Labels Based on the Rubric

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- **Score Point 1—VERY LIMITED**
- **Score Point 2—BASIC**
- **Score Point 3—SATISFACTORY**
- **Score Point 4—ACCOMPLISHED**

**The goal: moving *all* students from the lower half of the score-scale range to the upper half of the range**

# 2012 STAAR Writing

## Grade 4 Statewide Distributions

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Personal Narrative Summed Scores		Expository Summed Scores	
1/1 = 2	13%	1/1 = 2	15%
1/2 = 3	13%	1/2 = 3	16%
2/2 = 4	34%	2/2 = 4	38%
2/3 = 5	19%	2/3 = 5	17%
3/3 = 6	14%	3/3 = 6	10%
3/4 = 7	5%	3/4 = 7	2%
4/4 = 8	2%	4/4 = 8	1%

# 2012 STAAR Writing

## Grade 7 Statewide Distributions

Personal Narrative Summed Scores		Expository Summed Scores	
1/1 = 2	6%	1/1 = 2	14%
1/2 = 3	9%	1/2 = 3	18%
2/2 = 4	30%	2/2 = 4	39%
2/3 = 5	22%	2/3 = 5	17%
3/3 = 6	21%	3/3 = 6	9%
3/4 = 7	8%	3/4 = 7	2%
4/4 = 8	4%	4/4 = 8	1%



# Observations—Expository Writing

- **Effect of weak or inappropriate organizing structure or lack of responsiveness to the topic specified in the prompt**
- **Formulaic approaches (e.g., 5-paragraph essays) → essays lack thoughtfulness, individuality, depth**
- **Negative effect of weak or evolving central/controlling idea on focus, coherence, and development.**
  - **Central/controlling idea can't be implicit—it must be explicit. The earlier in the paper, the better.**

# Observations—Expository Writing

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- **Ineffective use of space**
  - **Introductions that repeat prompt, incorporate an unnecessary framing device, or include preview statements (average 5–9 lines)**
  - **Conclusions that simply repeat introduction**
  - **Use of “filler”**
    - **Adjectives and adverbs that don't improve the quality of the idea**
    - **Unnecessary, inappropriate, or disruptive rhetorical questions or questions that directly address the reader**

# Observations—Expository Writing

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- **Lack of transitions or reliance on perfunctory transitions (e.g., First, Second, Third; Reason 1, Reason 2, Reason 3. Due to my 3 reasons, I hope you can see...) negatively affects development.**
- **Clusters of ideas are linked to the prompt but not to each other—important in all cases but especially if ideas are different “grain sizes.”**
- **A roadblock to substance/depth/ thoughtfulness because writer does not “build” from one idea to the next.**

# Observations—Expository Writing

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- **Development is often weak because students attempt to base their essay on ideas that are too complicated or abstract for their writing skills.**
- **Ideas/development can be based on students' own lives/experiences and on their knowledge of the world and modern culture, which includes what they've read, seen, and discovered through books, movies, television, news, and history.**

# Observations—Expository Writing

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**BUT...**

- **Development is most effective when it is based on what students TRULY know and understand.**
- **For young and inexperienced writers, the “closer” and more first-hand the development is, the more effective it tends to be.**

# Observations—Expository Writing

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- **Pronoun use—1<sup>st</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> person (or even 2<sup>nd</sup> person) can work as long as students are clearly explaining what they think about something.**
- **Pronoun shifts are sometimes necessary, though many 4<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> graders are shifting randomly from sentence to sentence or paragraph to paragraph.**

# Observations—Expository Writing

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- **I believe that we can always accomplish bigger and better things if we work together.**
- **I believe that people can always accomplish bigger and better things if they work together.**
- **I believe that you can always accomplish bigger and better things if you work together.**

# Observations—Personal Narrative

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- **All personal experiences are not created equal. The best experiences are ones that students**
  - **find important, meaningful, or memorable**
  - **remember well enough to write about in detail**
  - **are able to retell/recapture/recreate effectively in one page**



# Observations—Personal Narrative

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- **Lack of responsiveness to the purpose or topic specified in the prompt. Problems with responsiveness most often occur when**
  - **students write fiction, fantasy, or science fiction instead of a personal narrative**
  - **students write only a description of the photograph or picture**
  - **students focus on the extension/ reflection without including any account of the actual experience**

# Observations—Personal Narrative

- **Personal narratives should not include details or events that do not further the reader's understanding of the experience. Extraneous details and events (e.g., unnecessary adjectives and adverbs, events that are not actually part of the narrative, and “bed to bed” narratives) always weaken the story line.**
- **Personal narratives should be written in first person, since they are based on an actual personal experience.**

# Observations—Personal Narrative

- **Personal narratives must be realistic with regard to the writer's age.**
- **Personal narratives must have some type of story line and move through time (even if that story line captures only a small piece of time).**
- **Personal narratives at grade 7 must have an extension of the experience.**
- ★ **Communicating the importance of the experience is not required at grade 4 but often contributes to the effectiveness of the personal narrative.**

# Observations—Personal Narrative

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- **Having an extension/reflection creates depth in the personal narrative by**
  - **communicating the importance of the experience or the motives for or consequences of actions**
  - **demonstrating that students can “step back” from the details of an experience to consider/evaluate/reflect on the implications of that experience**

# Observations—Personal Narrative

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- **The best extension is one that is woven into or reflected in the story line, not one that is an “add on” to the story line.**
- ★ **Remember, though, that students do not have to give equal space/treatment to the story line and the extension/reflection.**

# CONTACT INFORMATION

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**Victoria Young**  
**Director of Reading, Writing, and Social  
Studies Assessments**  
**Texas Education Agency**  
**512-463-9536**  
**[victoria.young@tea.state.tx.us](mailto:victoria.young@tea.state.tx.us)**