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Selected pages from

STAAR MASTER®

Student Practice Book

Writing, Grade 7

for the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness

Teacher Guide

Lori Mammen

Editorial Director

ISBN: 978-1-60539-749-8

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STAAR MASTER® Student Practice Book, Teacher Guide—Writing, Grade 7

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What's Inside the Student Practice Book?

The STAAR MASTER® Student Practice Book provides practice and review material for the Grade 7 Writing portion of the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR® assessment).

- The writing selections reflect the kinds of passages students might encounter on the actual STAAR assessment. These include the following types of selections: fiction, literary nonfiction, expository, and persuasive.
- The writing selections cover a broad range of topics and ideas of interest to seventh-grade students.
- The writing selections mimic authentic student writing, containing multiple errors.
- The questions that follow a selection focus on the 2010 STAAR-eligible ELA-R Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills writing standards (Texas Education Agency, 2010c).
- Several questions throughout the book address the same standard/expectation, providing repeated practice for students in a variety of contexts.

Items in the STAAR MASTER Student Practice Book address the following writing concepts:

- audience
- purpose
- point of view
- organization of ideas
- idea development
- sentence construction
- standard English usage
- word choice
- mechanics

Open-ended writing prompts in the Student Practice Book provide an opportunity for student practice in the following types of writing:

- personal narrative
- expository

Labels of Practice-Item Reporting Category

Each column of practice items is clearly labeled with the appropriate reporting category (see Figure 1, below) for easy identification of the TEKS-based content area addressed in the question.

This Teacher Guide includes—

- Overview of the Student Practice Book and key characteristics of the STAAR program
- Explanation of increased rigor in the STAAR program
- Descriptions of STAAR MASTER complexity levels
- Strategies for test preparation and writing instruction (revision, editing, and composition)
- Master list of STAAR-eligible ELA-R TEKS writing standards
- Complete Answer Key (with corresponding complexity levels for the items for each selection)
Readiness vs. Supporting Standards

The TEKS are divided into "readiness standards" and "supporting standards," with greater emphasis on the former. Readiness standards address broader, deeper ideas and are deemed more critical for students to know. Supporting standards address more narrowly defined ideas and will still be assessed, although not emphasized. The STAAR MASTER Student Practice Book mirrors this balance of readiness and supporting standards to provide meaningful, authentic student practice for the STAAR® assessment.

Increased Rigor

The STAAR program is described as "significantly more rigorous" (Texas Education Agency, 2010a) than the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS). But what does rigor mean in assessment? For the STAAR program, it means the cognitive complexity of items will increase to assess skills at a greater depth. The STAAR MASTER Student Practice Book provides items written at varying levels of complexity to accommodate this increase in rigor. (Refer to the "Depth of Knowledge" section on this page and Box 1 on page 5 for more information about the complexity levels of practice items.)

Changes to the Writing Assessment

In addition to changes that affect rigor of assessment, some changes will affect the administration of the writing assessment. First, the "Revision" and "Editing" portions will be assessed separately. The STAAR MASTER Student Practice Book clearly presents the practice items by reporting category to help teachers and students conduct targeted practice in each area. Second, in the "Composition" portion of the writing assessment, students will respond to two writing prompts rather than one. The two types of writing assessed each year are personal narrative and expository. A variety of open-ended writing prompts are included in the Student Practice Book for student practice in skills required for the "Composition" portion. Third, the assessment will be administered over the course of two days instead of one.

Alignment

According to the mandate of No Child Left Behind (2001), states are required to develop assessments that tightly align to their content standards. To ensure that this requirement is met, states and districts often conduct alignment studies. In such a study, an assessment is compared to the state's content standards. If an assessment is rigorous, the study will not yield large disparities between the cognitive demands of the expectations and those of the assessment.

Depth of Knowledge

Norman Webb’s (2002a) "Depth of Knowledge" model is currently one of the most influential alignment models in the field of education. "Depth of knowledge" describes the degree of complexity of knowledge a curricular item requires. Webb identifies four levels of depth of knowledge: recall (Level 1), skill or concept (Level 2), strategic thinking (Level 3), and extended thinking (Level 4). Distinct cognitive demands occur during each activity, or thinking process, level. The items in the STAAR MASTER Student Practice Book were aligned to the TEKS using a modified version of the "depth-of-knowledge" model (see Box 1, "Descriptions of STAAR MASTER® Complexity Levels," page 5). During the alignment process, the complexity level of each item (designated "Low," "Moderate," or "High") was determined. The level of each practice item can be found in the Answer Key.

This page may not be reproduced.
Descriptions of STAAR MASTER® Complexity Levels

The following descriptions provide an overview of the three complexity levels used to align the STAAR MASTER® Student Practice Book items to the eligible ELA-R TEKS writing standards. Each explanation details the kinds of activities that occur within each level. However, they do not represent all of the possible thought processes for each level.

Low Complexity (L)

Low-complexity items align with the TEKS at Level 1 of the Webb (2002a) model. Items of low complexity may involve writing or recalling—but not analyzing—simple facts or ideas. An item may ask students to apply basic rules or formats. Items of this complexity may require identifying misspelled words in a written passage. Some major writing performances represented at this level include brainstorming ideas, selecting appropriate vocabulary, and writing simple sentences. A low-complexity item may ask students to recite, identify, list, locate, or define information and concepts.

Moderate Complexity (M)

Moderate-complexity items align with the TEKS at Level 2 of the Webb model. Items of moderate complexity require some mental processing. Students begin to connect ideas using a simple organizational structure for a limited number of purposes and audiences. At this cognitive level, students move beyond writing simple sentences to constructing a variety of sentence types. Items of this complexity may involve editing final drafts of compositions for grammar, punctuation, and capitalization. A moderate-complexity item may ask students to predict, organize, classify, compare, interpret, distinguish, relate, or summarize. Some items also require students to apply low-complexity skills and concepts.

High Complexity (H)

High-complexity items align with the TEKS at Level 3 and/or Level 4 of the Webb model*. Items of high complexity require students to use strategic, multi-step thinking. At this cognitive level, students should show an understanding of audience and purpose. Students are asked to organize their ideas into multi-paragraph compositions and incorporate supporting details. Items may require students to revise to improve the quality, organization, and overall effectiveness of the composition. For example, students may need to improve fluency by combining related sentences, improve word choice by substituting a more precise or vivid word. Student writing should reflect flexible thinking and an analysis of complex ideas and themes. A high-complexity item may ask students to plan, reason, explain, hypothesize, compare, differentiate, draw conclusions, cite evidence, synthesize, apply, or prove. Some items also require students to apply low- and/or moderate-complexity skills and concepts.

*Note: Although state standards may include expectations that require extended thinking, many large-scale assessment activities are not classified as Level 4. Performance and open-ended assessment may require activities at Level 4.

Box 1: Descriptions of STAAR MASTER® Complexity Levels

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How to Use This Book

Effective Test Preparation

What is the most effective way to prepare students for any writing competency test? Experienced educators know that the best test preparation includes three critical components—

• a strong curriculum that is aligned with the content and skills to be assessed
• effective, relevant, and varied instructional methods that allow students to learn content and skills in many different ways
• targeted practice that familiarizes students with the specific content and format of the test

Obviously, a strong curriculum and effective, relevant, and varied instructional methods provide the foundation for all appropriate test preparation. Contrary to what some might believe, merely “teaching the test” performs a great disservice to students. Students must acquire knowledge, practice skills, and have specific educational experiences that can never be included on tests limited by time and in scope. For this reason, resources like the STAAR MASTER® Student Practice Book should never become the heart of the curriculum or replace strong instructional methods.

Targeted Practice

The STAAR MASTER® Student Practice Book does, however, address the final element of effective test preparation (targeted test practice). This book familiarizes students with—

• the specific content of Texas’ competency test
• the general format of competency tests

When students become familiar with both the content and the format of a test, they know what to expect on the actual test. This, in turn, improves their chances for success.

Using STAAR MASTER® Products

Used as part of the regular curriculum, the STAAR MASTER® Student Practice Book allows teachers to—

• pretest skills students need for the actual test
• determine students’ areas of strength and/or weakness
• provide meaningful test-taking practice for students
• ease students’ test anxiety
• communicate test expectations and content to parents

Other Suggestions for Instruction

The STAAR MASTER® Student Practice Book can serve as a springboard for other effective instructional activities that help with test preparation.

Group Work

Teachers and students work through selected practice exercises together, noting the kinds of questions and the range of answer choices. They discuss common errors for each kind of question and strategies for avoiding these errors.

Predicting Answers

Students predict the correct answer before reading the given answer choices. This encourages students to think through the question rather than focus on finding the right answer. Students then read the given answer choices and determine which one, if any, matches the answer they have given.

Developing Test Questions

Once students become familiar with the format of test questions, they develop “test-type” questions for other assigned reading (e.g., science, social studies).

Vocabulary Development

Teachers and students foster vocabulary development in all subject areas through the use of word walls, word webs, word games, synonym/antonym charts, analogies, word categories, “word-of-the-day” activities, etc. A fluent writer can select appropriate and diverse vocabulary to convey an intended meaning. General vocabulary development will improve students’ precision of language.
## Answer Key

Note: Complexity levels appear in parentheses. L = Low, M = Moderate, H = High

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*All Web sites listed were active at time of publication.


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Read the selection and choose the best answer to each question.

Brandon read about the rediscovery of the Bornean Bay Cat, which was thought to have been extinct. He wrote this report to share what he had learned. Read Brandon's report carefully and look for any corrections and improvements that he should make. When you finish reading, answer the questions that follow.

Extinct No More

(1) Every year, thousands of species take a step toward extinction. (2) Many species actually do become extinct; many more were discovered for the first time. (3) Some are even rediscovered. (4) As it happens, "extinct" doesn't always mean extinct.

(5) One of the most recently rediscovered animals is the Bornean Bay Cat, a small reddish or gray wildcat. (6) It was considered extinct in 2003 but was photographed seven years later in the wild. (7) In fact, two or three Bornean Bay Cats were photographed at once. (8) Now, people which help protect nature, called conservationists, even have hope that the species can thrive again.

(9) Another species mistakenly labeled as extinct is the pygmy tarsier. (10) This animal weighs less than half an apple and looks like a tiny lemur with very big eyes. (11) For over 80 years, scientists thought that the pygmy tarsier was extinct. (12) Then, a pygmy tarsier was accidentally trapped and killed by scientists who were catching rats in Indonesia. (13) That news prompted two Texas scientists to travel to Indonesia. (14) There, the scientists found two males and two females. (15) Three of the pygmy tarsiers were fitted with tracking collars, which are helping scientists learn more about these creatures.

(16) An Asian food market is probably the last place a person would expect to see an extinct animal. (17) Yet, that is exactly where the Arakan forest turtle was rediscovered in 1994. (18) Most Asian turtles are used for home remedies and food. (19) The Arakan forest turtle is no exception. (20) Consequently, this little creature might soon become extinct.

(21) Rediscoveries of “extinct” animals are not rare. (22) In fact more than one-third of the species ever classified as extinct have been found again.
Reporting Category 2: Revision

1. Brandon would like to add the following sentence to the third paragraph (sentences 9–15).

Where is the BEST place to insert this sentence?
A At the beginning of the paragraph
B After sentence 11
C At the end of the paragraph
D This sentence should not be added to the paragraph.

2. Brandon wants to add a conclusion to his report. Which of the following could BEST follow sentence 22 and close this report?
A You never know; you might make a discovery of your own one day!
B The review process for declaring an animal extinct follows high standards.
C Animals become extinct for many reasons, including habitat destruction, disease, and hunting.
D Therefore, many scientists believe it is worth making an effort to rediscover animals that are feared to be extinct.

Reporting Category 3: Editing

3. What change should be made in sentence 2?
A Change actually to actual
B Change the semicolon to a comma
C Insert while after the semicolon
D Change were discovered to are discovered

4. What change, if any, should be made in sentence 8?
A Delete the comma after Now
B Change which to who
C Change thrive to thriving
D Make no change

5. What change, if any, should be made in sentence 22?
A Insert a comma after fact
B Change than to then
C Change one-third to one third
D Make no change

Gathering data from tracking collars, scientists have learned about the behaviors of many endangered species, such as polar bears.
Prompt 1

Personal Narrative

Look at the picture below.

Sometimes, our days do not go as planned.

Write a personal narrative about a day when you had to change your plans. Be sure to write in detail about why you had to change your plans and describe what happened as a result of your change in plans.
Prompt 8
Expository Writing

READ the following quotation.

“If I have seen farther, it is by standing on the shoulders of giants.”
- Isaac Newton (1642–1727)

THINK carefully about the following statement.

Sometimes, we are better able to reach our goals or understand new things when we use others’ experience as a resource.

WRITE an essay explaining how another person’s knowledge or experience can be a valuable resource.

Be sure to—
• clearly state your controlling idea
• organize and develop your explanation effectively
• choose your words carefully
• use correct spelling, capitalization, punctuation, grammar, and sentences
Prompt 9
Expository Writing

READ the information in the box below.

An adaptation is a special characteristic that a plant or animal develops to help it survive in a particular environment. Sometimes, adaptations help a plant or animal to endure a temporary condition. Other adaptations allow a plant or animal to meet its needs despite a permanent condition.

THINK carefully about the following statement.

Sometimes, people have to adapt to their environments to survive.

WRITE an essay explaining why a person might need to adapt to his or her environment to survive.

Be sure to—
• clearly state your controlling idea
• organize and develop your explanation effectively
• choose your words carefully
• use correct spelling, capitalization, punctuation, grammar, and sentences
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