

## **ISTEP+ English/Language Arts Sample Items Updated February 2011**

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this Item Sampler is to provide teachers and students with examples of the different types of questions that appear on the English/Language Arts portions of the ISTEP+. Each grade-level ELA assessment consists of four (4) item types: multiple-choice, constructed-response, extended-response and a writing prompt.

### **Applied Skills Item Types:**

#### **Constructed-Response (CR)**

All ELA constructed-response items will be passage-based.

#### **Extended-Response (ER)**

ERs include a stand-alone prompt preceded by a small stimulus (that will act as a springboard for student writing).

#### **Writing Prompt (WP)**

Like the ER, the writing prompt is followed by a planning page (for prewriting) and lined pages for the student's final draft.

Students must respond in writing to all open-ended items, and it is important that students complete each item. It is possible, however, for students who have attempted to complete an item to receive partial credit for their work on that item.

Constructed-response items require students in grades 3 through 8 to delve deep into the accompanying text and provide rich responses in order to demonstrate reading comprehension and receive full credit.

### **Prewriting/Planning Space for ER and WP Items:**

Each extended-response item and each writing prompt is accompanied by a **blank** prewriting/planning space for students at all grade levels to use in preparation for their final drafts. The prewriting/planning space is intended to allow students to use a variety of prewriting techniques. As always, teachers will be able to provide additional blank planning paper at students' request.

**Note:** Only writing on the lined pages will be scored.

The table on the following page identifies the ELA standards assessed during each of the two assessment windows.

ISTEP+ Testing Windows and Content (ELA, Grades 3-8)			
Assessment	Window	Standards Assessed	Item Types
Writing Assessment	March	2 and 3	CR
		5 and 6	ER, WP
Progress Assessment	Late April/Early May	1-6	MC

**Holistic Rubrics for Scoring Applied Skills Items**

**Constructed-Response**

- Each CR item is scored for reading comprehension using a 2-point holistic rubric.

**Extended-Response**

- 4-point Writing Applications rubric
- 4-point Language Conventions rubric

**Writing Prompt**

- 6-point Writing Applications rubric
- 4-point Language Conventions rubric

## Grade 6 Sample Items

Read “The Greatest Runner of All Time”. Then answer questions 1-4.

### The Greatest Runner of All Time

First one person stood up and then another and another. Someone in the crowd began to applaud, and soon everyone else joined in as Glenn Cunningham made his final lap around the track. He was about to break a world record in the mile. As he made his victory lap around the track, one might wonder how he could walk, much less run.

In 1916, when Glenn was seven years old, his legs were so badly burned in a fire that his doctor thought he would never walk again. But Glenn thought otherwise. After spending weeks in bed he got up and started using crutches to get around. When his legs got stronger, he tried walking without the crutches but it was very painful. Glenn would say later, “It hurt like thunder to walk, but it didn’t hurt at all when I ran. So for five or six years, about all I did was run.”

With all the practice he had running, it was natural for Glenn to join his school’s track team. While he was in high school, he became a track star and set record times in the mile run. After he graduated high school he went to the University of Kansas. Glenn Cunningham became known as “The Kansas Flyer,” and he won the National College Amateur Track championships in 1931 and 1932.

Glenn went on to run on the U.S. Olympic Team in 1932, received the Sullivan Award for outstanding amateur athletes in 1933, and won a silver medal in the 1936 Olympic games. The boy who was never supposed to walk again won two National College Amateur Athlete titles in track, was named the most outstanding track performer in the 100-year history of Madison Square Garden in 1978, and was inducted into the National Track and Field Hall of Fame in 1979.

It was never easy for Glenn. It took him nearly an hour to prepare for a race. But he never let that stop him or slow him down. He ran just as hard as he could with his bruised lungs and scarred legs and he won. So if determination and spirit lead a runner to greatness, one could say that Glenn Cunningham was the greatest runner of all time.

1. Why does the author refer to Glenn Cunningham as the “greatest runner of all time”? Support your answer with details from the passage.

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2. What is one word that could describe Glenn Cunningham? Support your answer with details from the passage.

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3. **Read this statement from the passage.**

It hurt like thunder to walk, but it didn't hurt at all when I ran.

**The phrase "it hurt like thunder" MOST LIKELY means**

- A. Glenn ran very quickly wherever he went.
- B. Glenn crashed into things when he walked.
- C. Glenn was in great pain when he walked.
- D. Glenn was afraid of walking to places.

4. **Read this sentence from the passage.**

The boy who was never supposed to walk again won two National College Amateur Athlete titles in track, was named the most outstanding track performer in the 100-year history of Madison Square Garden in 1978, and was inducted into the National Track and Field Hall of Fame in 1979.

**Which of these words MOST LIKELY means the same as *inducted*?**

- A. visited
- B. rejected
- C. imitated
- D. accepted

5. **Choose the sentence that is written correctly.**

- A. Kat and Amber was the winners of the essay contest.
- B. Jevon was excited about the science fair.
- C. We was waiting for the bell to ring.
- D. They was late to the meeting.

6. Read the first couple of paragraphs of a 6<sup>th</sup> grade girl's letter to a friend. Then complete the writing activity that follows.

**Saying Goodbye**

Dear Amy,

I still find it hard to believe you and your family are moving so far away. I can't imagine not walking home from school with you and staying up late watching movies on the weekends. I wish things could stay the same as they have always been, with my best friend living next door.

Whenever I get sad, I will try to think of a happy memory we share. Do you remember a couple of years ago when we had that great snow day?

Write an original story in which you describe an experience the two friends shared on the snow day and how it was memorable.

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**NOTE:** Each extended-response item will be accompanied by a **blank** prewriting/planning space for students at all grade levels to use in preparation for their final drafts. **Only the writing on the lined pages in the test book will be scored.**

## Grades 7 Sample Items

**Read this excerpt from a student paper about a summer program that the student attended. Then answer questions 1 and 2.**

1) It was a hot summer morning, and the heat was coming up off the pavement. 2) You could see it. 3) I had butterflies in my stomach as I approached the doors of the theater. 4) I didn't know anyone here even though I had been in plays before and not knowing anyone here made me feel uncomfortable. 5) I pulled the door open slowly and looked around at the faces that greeted me. 6) I breathed a sigh of relief as I saw the familiar nervousness in their eyes. 7) It seemed I wasn't the only one.

**1. Which of the following is the BEST way to combine Sentences 1 and 2?**

- A. It was a very hot that day, so hot that I could see it with my own two eyes.
- B. The heat coming off the pavement that summer morning was so powerful I could see it.
- C. The hottest day of summer so far, you could see the warmth coming off the pavement.
- D. Summer morning was a hot and warm one and you could see it coming off the pavement all the heat.

**2. Choose the BEST way to write Sentence 4 to make it clear and concise.**

- A. I did not know anyone here feeling uncomfortable even though I had been in plays before.
- B. I did not know anyone here and I had been in plays before so I felt uncomfortable.
- C. Even though I had been in plays before, I felt uncomfortable because I did not know anyone here.
- D. Uncomfortable was how it made me feel because I did not know anyone here, even though I had been in plays before.

**3. Read the prompt below and complete the writing activity.**

**Historical Figure**

Suppose you could meet any person from history. Perhaps this person made important decisions that changed the world. Whom would you choose to meet and why?

Write an original story in which you describe your encounter with this person. Be sure to include a detailed account of the events in the story, as well as a description of this person and the setting in which the story takes place.

Be sure to include:

- the name and description of the person you would like to meet
- a description of the setting of the story
- a narrative account of the events that take place in your story
- a beginning, a middle, and an end to your story

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**NOTE:** Each writing prompt will be accompanied by a **blank** prewriting/planning space for students at all grade levels to use in preparation for their final drafts. **Only the writing on the lined pages in the test book will be scored.**

**4. Read the following paragraph.**

1) My favorite game at summer camp is called Capture the Flag. 2) My friend James prefers volleyball. 3) Two teams hide a flag on their side of the field while the other team tries to steal it and carry it back to their own side. 4) If you are on the other team's side and they tag you, you have to wait in their "jail" until someone from your side breaks you out. 5) The first team who finds the other's flag and carries it back to their own side wins.

**Which sentence does NOT belong in this paragraph?**

- A. Sentence 2
- B. Sentence 3
- C. Sentence 4
- D. Sentence 5

Read “Sammy’s Adventure”. Then answer questions 5 and 6.

### Sammy’s Adventure

When they reached the river, Sammy splashed cold water on his face; he was hot and scratched from the journey through the thick brush. Sammy noticed that Tina and Robert had already forgotten the **tedious** climb and were busy skipping flat stones across the river. Since his cousins had lived in the rugged Jackson Mountains all their lives, they were used to hiking. After resting for a few minutes, Sammy started upstream to search for the rapids that Tina said they would swim across. By the time Sammy found the white, splashing water, Tina and Robert had joined him.

The river was considerably narrower and deeper here, and the swift water gushed around giant boulders. Sammy was an excellent swimmer, but he had never before attempted to swim across a current. As he waded in and then swam quickly into the current, he wondered if he would make it. He approached the first boulders and pulled past them with strong, **decisive** strokes. It was thrilling because he felt as if he were testing his strength against the strength of the current.

Sammy could see that the river formed a pool just ahead of him. It looked a bit calmer; he could probably catch his breath there. Suddenly, the current grabbed him and pulled him under. The river was far deeper here than he had realized. As he hit bottom, he felt his pant leg snag on a branch. Sammy struggled desperately because he knew he would soon be out of air. Finally, he was able to kick himself clear, and with a few vigorous strokes, he emerged near the opposite shore.

He climbed out and flopped on the bank, exhausted but safe. His cousins, beaming, waved to him, obviously unaware of his narrow escape in the river. Sammy just took in a deep breath and smiled back.

**tedious:** tiring

**decisive:** firm

5. Describe what happened in the story that put Sammy in danger. Support your answer with details from the story.

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6. Explain why Sammy's cousins have an easier time on the trip than Sammy. Support your answer with details from the story.

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## Grade 8 Sample Items

1. Read the first two paragraphs of a student’s report about what it’s like to have a job as a baker. Then do the writing activity that follows.

### What It Takes to Be a Baker

Waking up early in the morning to go to work is probably not part of everyone’s idea of the perfect job. Dragging yourself out of bed at 4:00 a.m., even on the coldest winter day, is not for everyone. For those of you who have chosen a career in baking, it is just part of the day-to-day routine.

Bakers must also understand how to choose the right ingredients, how to combine them, how to measure very precise quantities of materials, and they must also understand chemistry. Though it is not listed in any recipe, love and care are what makes the baker’s products so sweet. A cinnamon roll made with love will always taste better than one made without!

After reading the report, do you think that you would like to have a job as a baker? Why or why not? Explain the qualities that would make you a good baker, or what qualities you have that would prevent you from being a good baker.

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**NOTE:** Each extended-response item will be accompanied by a **blank** prewriting/planning space for students at all grade levels to use in preparation for their final drafts. **Only the writing on the lined pages in the test book will be scored.**

**Read the poem. Answer question 2.**

**Smokey Mountain Morning**

Mist, white and cotton-wet,

Threads the willow branch and strums the rocky stream with  
chilly fingers,

Playing a tune of murmured good mornings.

The trail carries me upward, over ant-blistered logs and  
a quilt of burnished autumn's leaves

That glimmer with dew and welcome the first swirls of  
morning's light through the canopy of poplar branches.

Bird's songs tangle in the air, the shrill, the sweet;  
various melodies vying for center stage.

A breeze stirs the spiders' webs in the rhododendrons,  
tossing filament and fuzzy legs about like gossamer  
sails and fearless topsmen.

Leaves spin and flutter, some leap free in a spray, others  
await their turn,

Tomorrow.

Eyes in the shadows follow my trek,

White-tailed deer and trundling woodchuck, slimy salamander  
and chipmunk;

Children of the Wood, keepers of the secrets of the pine and  
oak.

Up I trudge, stamping the path with the tip of my hiking cane,

Pressing the earth with my mark,

Knowing a simple mountain shower will wash it away and leave  
no trace of my visit

Save the echoes of my wonder,

The whisper of my awe.

**2. Read these lines from the poem.**

Knowing a simple mountain shower will wash it away and leave

no trace of my visit

Save the echoes of my wonder,

The whisper of my awe.

**These lines from the poem show that the speaker**

- A. is tired from his climb up the mountain
- B. hopes no one will notice he is there
- C. appreciates the beauty around him
- D. wishes it wouldn't rain

**3. Read this sentence.**

*By the time they arrive, I was finished cooking.*

**Choose the word or group of words that BEST replaces the underlined part of the sentence.**

- A. finish
- B. will finish
- C. have finished
- D. will have finished

4. Read the prompt below and complete the writing activity.

**Classroom Technology**

Your school was granted money to buy new technology for classrooms. The principal suggested buying laptops, and the student council proposed buying electronic readers.

Choose one of these two suggestions or come up with your own idea for spending the technology grant money. Then write a persuasive essay expressing which idea is best and why. Include a description of how the technology would be used and how it would benefit students.

Be sure to include:

- a description of how the technology you picked would be used
- how the technology would benefit students
- an introduction, a body, and a conclusion to your persuasive essay.

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**NOTE:** Each writing prompt will be accompanied by a **blank** prewriting/planning space for students at all grade levels to use in preparation for their final drafts. **Only the writing on the lined pages in the test book will be scored.**

Read “Gold Rushes of the American West”. Then answer question 5.

### Gold Rushes of the American West

Two of the most exciting events in the settlement of the American West were gold rushes in California and Alaska. Gold was first discovered in California in 1848 at John Sutter’s sawmill, located near what is now Sacramento. Thousands of prospectors, known as 49ers, descended on California in hopes of striking it rich. Although a few prospectors made as much as \$2,000 a day, most people found little or no gold. Nevertheless, the gold rush fueled a population boom in California, leading it to statehood in 1850.

Nearly fifty years later, in 1897, another gold rush began in Canada’s Yukon Territory. It soon moved west to Alaska. More than 100,000 people made the journey to the frozen, unsettled territory. Searching for gold in Alaska proved to be much more dangerous than searching in California. The Alaskan wilderness was guarded by mountains, and winter temperatures regularly dropped to -50 degrees Fahrenheit. As a result, Alaska grew more slowly than did California. Alaska did not become a state until 1959.

5. Describe the challenges that people faced when searching for gold. Support your answer with details from the article.

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**Read “Pompeii”. Then answer the question 6.**

### **Pompeii**

In 79 AD a Roman city named Pompeii was destroyed by the eruption of the volcano Mount Vesuvius. The city and many of its inhabitants were buried under layers of sediment from the eruption. It remained undisturbed for more than 1,700 years. The excavation of the city revealed a snapshot of Roman history frozen in time. Homes, roads, and even graffiti on walls have been preserved by this natural disaster.

Historians discovered a prosperous, lively city. Pompeii had a complex aqueduct system that supplied water to the city. Most people got their water from public fountains, but some people were able to afford to have it piped directly into their homes.

Pompeii had a thriving market place that sold food, wine, pottery, and other household goods. Even advertisements for shops and suppliers of products were found on the walls of buildings.

Also discovered in the city was a large amphitheater, where people gathered to watch special events and games. One of the most popular events was the gladiator fights. A building where gladiators were housed and trained was found near the site of the amphitheater.

6. How was life in Pompeii similar to modern life? Support your answer with details from the article.

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## Grade 6 Answer Key

### 1. Constructed-response Item (Nonfiction/Informational Text)

- **Scored with:**
  - **2-point Constructed-response Rubric**
- **Sample Top-Score Response:**

The author probably calls Cunningham the “greatest runner of all time” because Cunningham overcame many challenges to become a very successful athlete. People nicknamed him the “Kansas Flyer” years after doctors told him he would never walk again. Cunningham went on to win many awards, including an Olympic medal in track, and was even inducted into the National Track and Field Hall of Fame. Cunningham was a great athlete because he worked hard and always did his best, no matter what.

### 2. Constructed-response Item (Nonfiction/Informational Text)

- **Scored with:**
  - **2-point Constructed-response Rubric**
- **Sample Top-Score Response:**

One word that describes Glenn is driven. The doctors thought he would never walk again but he tried walking with crutches anyway and was eventually able to walk on his own. Since walking hurt him, he ran. He focused on becoming a good enough runner to set records in high school and win the National College Amateur Track championships twice. He took his running career as far as he could by winning a medal in the Olympics. His drive to succeed is what helped him overcome the obstacle of his injury and become the best he could be.

3. **C** (Vocabulary)

4. **D** (Vocabulary)

5. **B** (Language Conventions)

### 6. Extended-response Item (Writing Applications, Language Conventions)

- **Scored with:**
  - 4-point Writing Applications Rubric
  - 4-point Language Conventions Rubric
- **Responses will vary.**

## Grade 7 Answer Key

1. **B** (Writing Process)
2. **C** (Writing Process)
3. **Writing Prompt Item (Writing Applications, Language Conventions)**
  - **Scored with:**
    - 6-point Writing Applications Rubric
    - 4-point Language Conventions Rubric
  - **Responses will vary.**
4. **A** (Writing Process)
5. **Constructed-response Item (Literary Text)**
  - **Scored with:**
    - **2-point Constructed-response Rubric**

**Sample Top-Score Response:**

Sammy wasn't used to swimming against the current, and it pulled him underwater. He swam into the current without knowing how deep the water was or if he could make it through to safety. Sammy also had trouble when his pants got caught on a branch while he was underwater.

6. **Constructed-response Item (Literary Text)**
  - **Scored with:**
    - **2-point Constructed-response Rubric**
  - **Sample Top-Score Response:**

Sammy's cousins grew up in the Jackson Mountains and were used to hiking. They had probably gone on that hike before since Tina knew where the rapids were that they were going to swim across.

## Grade 8 Answer Key

1. **Extended-response Item (Writing Applications, Language Conventions)**

- **Scored with:**
  - 4-point Writing Applications Rubric
  - 4-point Language Conventions Rubric
- **Responses will vary.**

2. **C** (Literary Text)

3. **D** (Language Conventions)

4. **Writing Prompt Item (Writing Applications, Language Conventions)**

- **Scored with:**
  - 6-point Writing Applications Rubric
  - 4-point Language Conventions Rubric
- **Responses will vary.**

5. **Constructed-response Item (Nonfiction/Informational Text)**

- **Scored with:**
  - **2-point Constructed-response Rubric**
- **Sample Top-Score Response:**

Searching for gold was not as easy as everyone had hoped it would be. Many who mined for gold in California didn't find much. Prospectors who decided to look for gold in Alaska realized that it was dangerous because Alaska's winters were so cold. Another reason that digging for gold was so difficult was because mountains surrounded Alaska's wilderness.

6. **Constructed-response Item (Nonfiction/Informational Text)**

- **Scored with:**
  - **2-point Constructed-response Rubric**
- **Sample Top-Score Response:**

There are several similarities between life in Pompeii and modern life. First of all, some people in Pompeii had water delivered to their homes by pipes like we do today. They also had market places to shop for items they would need daily similar to the way we do. People even advertised their products. They also had an amphitheater they could go to for public events the same way we go to stadiums for concerts and games.