ISTEP+ Performance Level Descriptors
English/Language Arts—Grade 10

Grade 10 Pass+

Tenth-grade students performing at the Pass+ level demonstrate advanced understanding when reading, comparing, and responding to a range of grade-level appropriate texts, including literature and nonfiction. Students display advanced writing skills using appropriate Standard English conventions when producing different writing forms.

When reading literature, such as fiction and poetry, specific knowledge, skills, and abilities for Grade 10 students scoring at the Pass+ level include:

• analyze in detail how two or more themes or central ideas are shaped and refined over the course of a text;
• analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone;
• analyze how dynamic characters advance the plot or develop theme; and
• analyze and evaluate how works of literary and cultural significance draw on themes, patterns of events, or character types to render material anew.

When reading nonfiction, such as historical or scientific texts and articles, specific knowledge, skills, and abilities for Grade 10 students scoring at the Pass+ level include:

• analyze in detail how two or more central ideas interact and build on one another over the course of a text;
• evaluate the effectiveness of specific word choices on meaning and tone;
• analyze how the author unfolds an analysis or series of ideas or events and the connections among them;
• analyze how specific parts of a text make clear or refine the claims and ideas;
• analyze how an author uses rhetoric to advance perspective or tone; and
• evaluate the argument and assess if reasoning is relevant, sufficient, accurate, and/or fallacious.

When writing, students craft well-organized, clearly focused, and detailed argumentative, informative, and narrative compositions, including a response to a literature or nonfiction text, using varied word choices and appropriate Standard English conventions. Specific knowledge, skills, and abilities for Grade 10 students scoring at the Pass+ level include:

• use effective and varied transitions to create cohesion and clarify relationships of ideas in writing and
• create conclusions that effectively follow from and support the argument, exposition, or narrative.
Tenth-grade students performing at the Pass level demonstrate proficient understanding when reading, comparing, and responding to a range of grade-level appropriate texts, including literature and nonfiction. Students display proficient writing skills using mostly appropriate Standard English conventions when producing different writing forms.

When reading literature, such as fiction and poetry, specific knowledge, skills, and abilities for Grade 10 students scoring at the Pass level include:

• cite the textual evidence that most strongly and thoroughly supports analysis of inferences and interpretations drawn from a text;
• analyze the development and introduction of two or more themes or central ideas over the course of a text;
• analyze the meaning of words and phrases, including figurative and connotative meanings;
• analyze the development and interactions of dynamic characters over the course of a text;
• analyze how the author impacts a text through differences in points of view; and
• analyze how a text of literary or cultural significance uses themes, patterns of events, or character types from myths and traditional stories.

When reading nonfiction, such as historical or scientific texts and articles, specific knowledge, skills, and abilities for Grade 10 students scoring at the Pass level include:

• cite the textual evidence that most strongly and thoroughly supports analysis of inferences and interpretations drawn from a text;
• analyze the development of two or more central ideas over the course of a text;
• analyze the development and introduction of an analysis or series of ideas or events in a text;
• identify and correctly use patterns of word changes that indicate different meanings or parts of speech (e.g., analyze, analysis, analytical; advocate, advocacy);
• evaluate how the author’s ideas or claims are developed by particular portions of a text;
• delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text;
• analyze seminal texts, including how they address related themes and concepts; and
• analyze how media include or exclude information to achieve a desired result.

When writing, students craft proficient argumentative, informative, and narrative compositions, including a response to a literature or nonfiction text, using varied word choices and mostly appropriate Standard English conventions. Specific knowledge, skills, and abilities for Grade 10 students scoring at the Pass level include:
• write compositions to convince, explain, or describe, providing developed details and facts that connect to the purpose and acknowledge other points of view;
• use precise words, phrases, sensory language, and content vocabulary and maintain a style and tone that is appropriate to the purpose and audience;
• write focused and detailed compositions with varied, appropriate word choices, logically organized ideas, and well-developed thoughts to create cohesion; and
• create concluding paragraphs.

Grade 10
Did Not Pass

Tenth-grade students performing at the Did Not Pass level demonstrate limited understanding when reading, comparing, and responding to a range of grade-level appropriate texts, including literature and nonfiction. Students display limited writing skills using basic, appropriate Standard English conventions when producing different writing forms.

When reading literature, such as fiction and poetry, specific knowledge, skills, and abilities for Grade 10 students scoring at the Did Not Pass level include:
• cite textual evidence that supports analysis of a text;
• use context to determine the meaning of words and phrases;
• analyze how an author’s choices create structure and order in a text; and
• recognize how dynamic characters develop over the course of a text.

When reading nonfiction, such as historical or scientific texts and articles, specific knowledge, skills, and abilities for Grade 10 students scoring at the Did Not Pass level include:
• cite textual evidence to support analysis of a text;
• use context to determine the meaning of words and phrases;
• determine an author’s perspective or purpose in a text; and
• analyze how a specific section of a text corresponds with an idea or claim.

When writing, students craft limited argumentative, informative, and narrative compositions, including a response to a literature or nonfiction text, using varied word choices and basic, appropriate Standard English conventions. Specific knowledge, skills, and abilities for Grade 10 students scoring at the Did Not Pass level include:
• write compositions that convince, explain, and/or describe with minimal textual support, some sense of audience and purpose, and minimally developed thoughts and
• assess the credibility and accuracy of sources.