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# STANDARDS BASED MCAS

## Secondary ELA (Middle School)

- You are viewing sample chapters.
- Review materials organized by curriculum standard.
- Instruction, not fill in the blanks.
- Basic skills practice.
- Internet resources aligned to curriculum standards.



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### An MCAS Mentor Production

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# TEST-TAKING TIPS

Students: Use these tips to help you prepare for the test.

## Before the test

- Develop a positive attitude. Tell yourself, “I will do my best on this test.”
- Get a good night’s sleep the night before the test.
- Get up early enough to avoid hurrying to get ready for school.
- Eat a good breakfast (and lunch, if your test is in the afternoon).

## During the test

- Stay calm.
- Listen carefully to directions from the teacher.
- Ask questions if you don’t understand what to do.
- Before you read a selection on the test, preview the questions that follow it to help focus your reading.
- After reading a selection, read the entire question and all the answer choices. Stop and think of an answer. Look to see if your answer is similar to one of the choices given.
- Read each test question carefully. Try to analyze what the question is really asking.
- Slow down and check your answers.
- Pace yourself. If you come to a difficult passage or set of questions, it may be better to skip it and go on. Then come back and really focus on the difficult section.

- The MCAS is **not** a timed test. If you need more time to finish the test, notify your teacher.
- If you are not sure of an answer to a question try these tips:
  - Get rid of the answers you know are not correct and choose among the rest.
  - Read through all the answers very carefully, and then go back to the question. Sometimes you can pick up clues just by thinking about the different answers you have been given to choose from.
  - Go back and skim the story or article to see if you can find information to answer the question. (Sometimes a word or sentence will be underlined to help you.)
- If you get stuck on a question, skip it and come back later.

## After the test

- Before you turn your test in, check it over. Change an answer only if you have a good reason. Generally it is better to stick with your first choice.
- Make sure you marked an answer for every question, even if you had to guess.
- Make sure your answer sheet is clearly marked with dark pencil. Erase any stray marks.
- Don’t worry about the test once it is finished. Go on to do your best work on your other school assignments.



**For Students Only: Your MCAS Mentor Persistence Quiz**

At MCAS Mentor, our teachers have been working with students who are preparing for MCAS tests for four years. One of our observations is that the test requires concentration and persistence. Students with an orderly routine and a disciplined approach to study will succeed on this exam.

So, along with the traditional Test Taking Tips we are going to provide a few extra words of advice. As you go through this course and you find yourself distracted or ready to quit on an especially difficult problem, force yourself to stick with it.

We have developed a "Persistence Quiz". This is a self-test to see how persistent you are. If you can raise your score on this quiz, you will be better able to face the exam.

Rate yourself on the following items. Be honest with yourself. Place a check mark in the box you think is the score that fits you now. Then, at the end of this course, come back and rate yourself again.

	Not so Hot	OK	Better	Great!
I set a routine for myself every day.				
I have a set time and place for study.				
I can study non-stop for at least an hour.				
I set goals for myself every day.				
I eliminate distractions when I work.				
Before an exam I pay special attention to what I eat.*				
My study space is orderly and neat.				
I'm developing an intense desire to do well.				
I believe in myself.				

\*Recent research shows that a morning meal high in protein and B vitamins can help a student before an exam by increasing attention span. Foods like milk, cheese, and leafy green vegetables (B vitamins) will be helpful. Veggies for breakfast? How about a bowl of vegetable soup or a big salad and a glass of milk? Fruit is good for energy too. The time for the starches and carbohydrates is the night before.

We also suggest a visit to the MCAS Mentor web site for games and puzzles that can help you improve your concentration and stick-to-itiveness.

[http://www.mcasmentor.com/8th\\_grade\\_mcas\\_information.htm#maze](http://www.mcasmentor.com/8th_grade_mcas_information.htm#maze)

### Scoring Guide for Topic/Idea Development

Score	Description
6 Points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rich topic/idea development</li> <li>• Careful and/or subtle organization</li> <li>• Effective/rich use of language</li> </ul>
5 Points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Full topic/idea development</li> <li>• Logical organization</li> <li>• Strong details</li> <li>• Appropriate use of language</li> </ul>
4 Points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Moderate topic/idea development and organization</li> <li>• Adequate, relevant details</li> <li>• Some variety in language</li> </ul>
3 Points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rudimentary topic/idea development</li> <li>• Basic supporting details</li> <li>• Simplistic language</li> </ul>
2 Points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limited or weak topic/idea development, organization, and/or details</li> <li>• Limited awareness of audience and/or task</li> </ul>
1 Point	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limited topic/idea development, organization, and/or details</li> <li>• Little or no awareness of audience and/or task</li> </ul>
Blank	No response.

### Scoring Guide for Standard English Conventions

Score	Description
4 Points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Control of sentence structure, grammar and usage, and mechanics (length and complexity of essay provide opportunity for student to show control of standard English conventions)</li> </ul>
3 Points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Errors do not interfere with communication and/or</li> <li>• Few errors relative to length of essay or complexity of sentence structure, grammar and usage, and mechanics</li> </ul>
2 Points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Errors interfere somewhat with communication and/or</li> <li>• Too many errors relative to the length of the essay or complexity of sentence structure, grammar and usage, and mechanics</li> </ul>
1 Point	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Errors seriously interfere with communication AND</li> <li>• Little control of sentence structure, grammar and usage, and mechanics</li> </ul>
Blank	No response.

\*Compositions were scored 1-6 on *Topic Development* and 1-4 on *Conventions*.

With your teacher you will learn to create your own scoring guides or rubrics. See if you can create your own composition scoring guide for the composition you will write for the pretest in this book. A blank rubric master is included for you to practice this self-evaluation skill.

# Rubric Master (develop performance assessments)

Your Name \_\_\_\_\_ Standard #: \_\_\_\_\_

	Failing	Needs Improvement	Proficient	Advanced	Score
	1	2	3	4	
Stated Objectives:					
Objectives:					
Objectives:					
Objectives:					
Objectives:					

## A writing rubric (checklist) for students:

When writing a composition or practicing an MCAS Writing Prompt exercise, does your writing match the scoring rubrics used by the test scorers and your teacher? The compositions are rated on a scale of 1 - 4, four is terrific:

Scenario: You just wrote a composition for your teacher. How well did you do? Fill in the checklist below and print it out. Keep it in your notebook. The next time you have a writing assignment come back to this page and fill in the checklist again. We bet your two point compositions will become four pointers in no time!

In my four point composition: (place a checkmark where you think you did well).

Organization and Content Checklist:	How's My Style:
<input type="checkbox"/> I used important details.	<input type="checkbox"/> I used many different and descriptive words.
<input type="checkbox"/> When I added details, I didn't wander from the main idea. I remembered my Topic Sentence and the subject of the Writing Prompt and stayed on course.	<input type="checkbox"/> I used words that helped people see my meaning. They could use all of their senses to feel and even hear my meaning.
<input type="checkbox"/> I organized my ideas in a logical way.	<input type="checkbox"/> I used different kinds of sentences and didn't start each one with the same word.
<input type="checkbox"/> My composition answered the question in the prompt.	<input type="checkbox"/> I made every effort to make my writing legible. My spelling and grammar were the very best.

My composition scored three points: My writing is good but I could improve. Maybe I needed to add more details or add information.

Organization and Content	How's My Style?
<input type="checkbox"/> I tried to explain my main idea, the one in my Topic Sentence, but I could have added more information or supporting detail.	<input type="checkbox"/> My choice of words was good. My vocabulary choices served a purpose. I didn't use too many extra or unnecessary words.
<input type="checkbox"/> Once in a while my thoughts wandered away from the subject or I didn't totally answer the question in the Writing Prompt.	<input type="checkbox"/> My sentences were pretty good, but they are mostly the same kind of sentence. The sentences could be shorter and more to the point.

<input type="checkbox"/> My story was a little bit disorganized.	<input type="checkbox"/> I could have been a little neater and I know I wasn't watching my spelling and grammar too carefully.
<input type="checkbox"/> My ideas needed to be connected. I don't think every idea I had fit with the topic.	<input type="checkbox"/> The reader can usually see my point.

My composition earned only two points: My writing wasn't very clear. My ideas didn't really support the Topic Sentence and some of my information wasn't accurate. I didn't pay attention to my spelling.

Organization and Content	How's My Style?
<input type="checkbox"/> I need to make my points more clearly. I needed to stay on the subject.	<input type="checkbox"/> My words need to be stronger and more effective.
<input type="checkbox"/> There weren't many details or supporting ideas in my composition.	<input type="checkbox"/> I sometimes repeated the same idea and my writing was choppy. My sentences could have been shorter and to the point.
<input type="checkbox"/> My paragraphs didn't have "flow". My ideas were choppy.	<input type="checkbox"/> My handwriting was sloppy and I didn't check over my spelling.

My composition scored only one point. I know I need to answer the question, stick to the point. I didn't add any details and my spelling and grammar were not up to par. I know I can do better.

Organization and Content	How's My Style?
<input type="checkbox"/> I didn't pay attention to the question. My story wandered.	<input type="checkbox"/> People couldn't tell what my ideas were about the subject.
<input type="checkbox"/> I need to get organized. I could have outlined my ideas before I started to write.	<input type="checkbox"/> I started all of my sentences the same way and didn't use descriptive words.
<input type="checkbox"/> I need to add details and more information.	<input type="checkbox"/> I had so many spelling and grammar mistakes that people were distracted and couldn't pay attention to what I was saying.

## English Language Arts

The English Language Arts tests implemented by the MCAS (Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System) have been developed over a long period of time. One of the most difficult hurdles school districts face is the increasing number of foreign languages to which they teach. Some districts teach to as many as 23 languages. This book is a course in basic skills, the skills you must master to pass the tests.

There are three traditional strands. Literature, Language and Composition disciplines have standards to which teachers have taught for decades. There is a fourth strand now, Media, which is relatively new. This standard teaches about electronic resources. It includes an expectation that you are well versed in using your school and public libraries. You should be able to use technology as a learning tool. Your media project for Standard 17 relates to this standard. You may want to flip ahead in your book to Standard 17 so you can see what is expected of you in that project.

Many studies have shown that one of the most reliable predictors of your success in school is the amount of reading your parents do with you at home. A great gift you can give yourself is to go to the library often, spend some time there. Librarians are a great resource for finding the best reading materials. Get to know the librarian in your school. The school Library Media Specialist is qualified as a teacher as well as in library science and technology. The school librarian is often the technology expert in a school and can provide individual help to you in all strands. There are wonderful Internet resources for you in this set of standards as well. A favorite is <http://www.childrensliterature.com/>. Full text kid's books and recommendations for reading materials can be found here. The American Library Association page is a good resource for book recommendations. Their page can be found at: <http://www.ala.org>.

The first four standards in the English Language Arts Curriculum Frameworks relate to oral language. They are not directly tested on the MCAS tests.

They are presented in this series because oral language provides the basis for all other language abilities. For example, here is our introduction to the first standard for you as you prepare to take the ELA tests.

## Learning Standard Number One:

### Informal and Formal Discussion Skills

You'll need a good dictionary. You will refer to it often throughout this course.

To begin any course of study, you need to know what's expected of you. The State of Massachusetts has put together a list of standards and expectations. There are certain skills you need to master to be ready for the world of work. Most jobs today require that you have the ability to communicate in writing. MCAS standards require good writing skills. This book will try to help you become a better writer and a more critical reader.

You can't do well on any test unless you know your subject. This seems obvious, but many students have no idea what the state standards are in English and Language Arts, and therefore don't know what's expected of them on the test. We'll begin at the beginning, with a look at MCAS expectations.

### The Standards

Learning Standard One: Students should be able to use agreed-upon rules for informal and formal discussions in small and large groups. You should be able to:

- apply your understanding of agreed-upon rules and individual roles in a variety of discussion formats.

An example of this might be a class assignment where you practice summarizing the previous speaker's main point before responding to it.

A good lesson to stress this skill would be to sit in a circle, give the first person next to you a little story (maybe four sentences) to whisper into his neighbor's ear. This student whispers the same to his neighbor and so on

all the way around. The last student reveals the story as he heard it. The story is invariably garbled and you can learn about listening.

To follow up on this exercise to really learn this standard, your teacher may give you a story to read. Your assignment is then to summarize the story for your class. This is a good presentation skills lesson, too. A media strand exercise might be to use Powerpoint or Hyperstudio to create the story summary. This is a good introduction to these software programs for the media presentation you will create at the end of this course. Another lesson would be to learn Robert's Rules of Order. Have a "Town Meeting" assignment that includes a revolving authority. Rotate mayors, rulemasters etc. every week and have meetings to establish class rules, etc. Maintain Robert's Rules at the meetings.

Learning Standard One is not easily tested and was not addressed in the 1999 test. Because it is a speaking and listening skill, there is no way to test this standard on a test like the MCAS. However, it is still a standard and needs to be practiced daily in the classroom. If you can summarize and speak well, you can write well. Get used to speaking in complete sentences, clearly and succinctly .

#### Practice Composition Standard #19, 22

To help you learn this skill, we'll ask you to write. Read the following short excerpt from Thomas Hardy's "The Return of the Native" and then summarize in only three sentences what you have read.

"Along the road walked an old man. He was white-headed as a mountain, bowed in the shoulders, and faded in general aspect. He wore a glazed hat, an ancient boat-cloak, and shoes: his brass buttons bearing an anchor upon their face. In his hand was a silver-headed walking-stick, which he used as a veritable third leg, perseveringly dotting the ground with its point at every few inches' interval. One would have said that he had been, in his day, a naval officer of some sort or other."

In the spirit of the standard, which is to develop discussion skills, imagine that someone read Thomas Hardy to you aloud and that you've been asked to summarize the excerpt for a younger audience; in three sentences. Write your sentences.

1.

2.

3.

If there were words in that selection that you didn't understand, use your dictionary to learn their meanings and origins.

## Language Strand: Standard Two

This is also a listening and discussion standard so it is not tested on the MCAS. But, if you can express yourself aloud, you can express yourself in writing, which *is* tested on the MCAS. Consider the work on standards 1,2,3 to be a prelude to the writing parts of the test.

In this Standard, students will pose questions, listen to the ideas of others, and contribute their own information or ideas in group discussions and interviews in order to acquire new knowledge. You will gather relevant information for a research project or composition through interview techniques.

Practice this exercise: The following report was heard on a radio station:

"Fire broke out today in an old warehouse in the center of town. Police and fire officials are worried about a spate of fires that have occurred in the same neighborhood in recent months. Gasoline sniffing dogs have been employed at the scene to find evidence of arson. No fatalities have been reported, but one firefighter was injured. Anyone who may have information about this fire, or who may have seen anyone leaving the scene of the fire at about 2:00 P.M. today, should contact police immediately."

### Practice Composition Standard #19,20

Your task as a newspaper reporter is to write a follow-up article on this brief radio report. You will interview the Fire Chief and you will construct six questions. Keep in mind that reporters need to know who, what, when, where, why, how.

## Language Strand: Standard Three

- Students will make oral presentations that demonstrate appropriate consideration of audience, purpose, and the information to be conveyed.

An example of an assignment in this standard is to present similar content for various purposes and to different audiences (peers, parents, teachers), showing appropriate changes in delivery (gestures, vocabulary, pace, visuals.) Think of a controversy about which you have a fixed opinion. Remember the principles you learn here for your final project.

If you have a computer at home or in the school lab with Microsoft Powerpoint, this is a good way to learn presentation skills. If you have a Macintosh computer, two good programs for this are Hyperstudio and Kid Pix Studio, a paint and draw program that lets you create animated slide shows.

With Powerpoint, you could prepare the report you wrote for Standard Two and deliver it to three different audiences. A Powerpoint or Kid Pix slide could be made with a brief report for other students, one for adults, and one for young children. Pay attention to word choices and approaches to each audience. There are some good tutorials on the Internet for using software like Powerpoint too. Pretend you're the news reporter and must deliver your report on the fire to a television audience of adults. Rewrite the story for a group of children. How would you say it differently for children?

### Practice Composition Standards 20, 21, 22

When you are speaking to a person, it's often a good idea to step back and think about what this person is all about. This goes for your written work as well as your speech. This standard is all about getting up in front of people and speaking, but there is an unspoken emphasis for your written work as well.

From your report on the fire, think about different ways you might write it addressing different audiences. Take a moment and rewrite that report as if you're going to deliver the report on Nickelodeon TV for children.

While we're here, we're going to give you some vocabulary words you should know. Look up the underlined words in this excerpt from Sir Thomas More's "Utopia". Make a habit of looking up words you don't understand as you read.

"In Utopia any man who campaigns for a public office is disqualified for all of them. Their civic life is harmonious, and their public officials are never arrogant or unapproachable. They are called 'fathers', and that indeed is the way they behave. Because officials never extort respect from the people against their will, the people respect them spontaneously, as they should. Not even the prince is distinguished from his fellow citizens by a robe or a crown; he is known only by a sheaf of grain carried before him..."

Don't forget those diacritical marks and word origins in the dictionary.

### Practice Composition Standards #19, 20, 21

Write a position paper, using the following guidelines:

- **Select:** choose the topic or controversy, the newspaper or CNN.com is a good source
- **Review** a bibliography from a non-fiction book to find a good subject.
- **Notes:** What do you already know about the subject? What do you want to find out? What did you learn? Do a learning web on the board.
- **Collect** facts and details. Select ideas that are persuasive.
- **Make** a list of things you learned while researching this paper. Decide what your position is. How can you persuade someone to believe in your position?
- **Write** a first draft. Fill in your supporting details. Revise your paper.