

A GED Test for a CCSS World

A GED Test for a Common Core World: Understanding the Changes Coming in 2014

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Abstract

In 2014, administration of a much more rigorous GED Test will begin. This new test represents a departure from the 2002 Series GED Test, in that it both contains content derived from Common Core skills and will be delivered on computers for the first time. The test includes greater expectations for test-takers' reading abilities, a focus on higher order thinking skills, and an emphasis on more authentic texts and tasks. The adult basic education community must be ready for these changes, and researchers should prepare for the opportunities that the redesign of the test presents.

The GED Test dates back to the 1940's when it was introduced to provide returning GIs with the educational credential they needed to take advantage of the GI Bill. Tens of millions of students have taken the GED Test as one step along their path of educational self-improvement. More recently, GED test-takers (and GED credential holders) have been primarily minorities, low-SES, immigrants without education credentials, and/or the incarcerated (GED Testing Service, 2012b).

In January 2014, the fifth generation of the GED Test will be rolled out to the field. The launch represents a marked change to the GED Test. More than forty states (and 3 territories) have adopted the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) as their own ELA/Literacy and Mathematics curricular standards, creating for the first time a verifiable national consensus regarding the content expected to be understood by high school graduates. Participating states have each joined one of two consortia developing *next generation* assessments of the CCSS standards, PARCC and SBAC. The GED Testing Service has, therefore, based the content of the 2014 test on Common Core skills. However, these standards represent a higher bar for most states, one that the K-12 and adult basic education sectors are working hard to figure out how to teach and assess.

The 2014 GED Test will be the first of these *next generation* assessments aligned to the Common Core State Standards to be released.

Purpose

This paper presents the findings of an examination of GED Testing Service's 2014 GED Test as compared to the prior edition, the 2002 Series GED Test. It looks at the publicly released

documentation about the new test, the contents of the test in light of the claimed influences and goals, and the changes in the format and delivery of the new test.

The purposes of this paper are:

- To discuss a cross-walk between the 2002 Series GED Language Arts, Reading and Language Arts, Writing subtests and the 2014 GED Reasoning Through Language Arts (RLA) subtest to illustrate the major conceptual differences between the old and new GED Tests.
- To explore how the shifting meaning of literacy – as described in Common Core State Standards – informed changes throughout the 2014 GED Test.
- To consider how the focus on improved assessment of critical and analytical thinking (CAT) skills undergirds new items (i.e. test questions) in the 2014 GED Test.
- To provide adult literacy and education researchers a starting point for thinking about new research projects and opportunities that these changes and challenges offer them.

Perspectives

This study examines the GED 2014 test primarily through the frameworks and perspectives that its developers (i.e. GED Testing Service) used in the development of their Assessment Targets.

First, the 2014 GED Test is based upon the Common Core State Standards (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2010). Though CCSS do not include either science or social studies standards, the GED Science and Social Studies Assessment Targets are strongly informed

by the CCSS literacy and math standards (GED Testing Service, 2012)¹. Therefore, we consider the CCSS to be our primary lens.

Second, the term *high school equivalency* is often used in discussions of the GED Test, even though the meaning of this term is unclear (Achieve, 2011; Sizer, 1984). Education Week's 2010 *Diplomas Count* report, for example, displays in detail how the meaning of a high school diploma varies across states. Nonetheless, the GED Testing Service supports the expectation that a GED credential is a high school equivalent, at least in terms of the academic content domains typically taught in a 4-year high school course of study. Therefore, we also consider the GED Tests through the lens of high school equivalency.

Third, the GED Testing Service has been clear that the 2014 test is oriented towards “career and college readiness” (GED Testing Service, 2012; Setzer, forthcoming 2014). Again, this is an uncertain and contested goal (ACT, 2009; Conley, 2012), but as it is a significant consideration for GED test development, we include it as one of our perspectives.

Last, we also bring to bear the lens of the *evidence-centered design* (ECD) (Mislevy & Riconscente, 2006; Mislevy & Haertel, 2006; Mislevy, Steinberg & Almond, 2003) to understanding the shifts from the 2002 Series GED Test to the 2014 test. The ECD approach is intended to ameliorate many of the oldest concerns in assessment design (Lindquist, 1951), and helps to understand the differences between the 2002 Series and 2014 tests.

¹ The Science Assessment Targets are also strongly informed by *A Framework for K-12 Science Education: Practices, Crosscutting Concepts, and Core Ideas* (National Research Council, 2012). The Social Studies Assessment Targets are also strongly informed by *National Curriculum Standards for Social Studies: A Framework for Teaching, Learning, and Assessment* (National Council for the Social Studies, 2010) and *The National Standards for History Revised Edition* (National Center for History in the Schools, 1996).

Methods

Our central research question (Maxwell, 2005)/evaluation question (Rossi, Lipsey & Freeman, 2004) is *How does the 2014 GED Test assess different skills than the 2002 Series test?* Thus, we focus on both the differences in the nature of the items and the differences in the skills assessed.

This study adopts techniques from both qualitative academic (Maxwell, 2005) and evaluative research (Chatterji, 2002). By examining standards documents (Chrispeels, 1997), interviews (Seidman, 2006), and the actual items that are in development for the 2014 GED Test (Chatterji, 2003), we were able to leverage our status as insiders to ensure the accuracy of the study and to gain access to those with greater knowledge than us (Fitzpatrick, Sanders, Worthen, 2004).

Much of the analysis in this study has come out of after action reviews (Lipshitz, Friedman & Popp, 2007) in the test development process. These AARs have generated documentation of lessons learned and the creation of new practices (Cross & Israelit, 2000; Lipshitz, Friedman & Pop, 2007) and have allowed us to combine documents, interviews, and our own experience and knowledge (Weiss, 1998) to perform this study. This approach has also allowed us to create this work to be of maximum use to the field of adult basic education (Patton, 1997; Sanders, 2004).

Because the emphasis on reasoning skills came most directly from the CCSS Literacy Standards, we focused on the 2002 Series Reading and Writing/2014 Reasoning Through Language Arts (RLA) differences.

Data sources

This study has five primary data sources:

- The Common Core State Standards, both those for literacy and for mathematics (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2010).
- GED Testing Service's public documents describing the 2002 Series GED Test and the forthcoming 2014 GED Test. These include the *Assessment Guide for Educators* (GED Testing Service, 2012) and the *2002 Series Technical Manual* (American Council on Education, 2009), in addition to other documents.
- GED Testing Service's validity report on the assessment targets for the 2014 GED Test, *Development of the Career and College Ready Assessment Targets for the Next Generation GED Assessment* (Wine, Hall, Zimmerman & Gardner, 2012).
- Discussions with those involved in the design and development of the 2002 Series and 2014 GED Tests.
- The knowledge of the authors, gained through their own direct experiences working with the 2002 Series test and developing the 2014 GED Test.

New Standards (CCSS) and the GED Test

The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) Initiative – new K-12 Literacy and Math standards adopted by 40+ states – has been central to the GED 2014 test. Leaders at the GED Testing Service understand that a GED credential is considered a *high school equivalency* and

responded to the CCSS initiative by embracing the Common Core State Standards as a basis for their new test.

CCSS's inclusion of deeper reasoning skills and greater cognitive complexity as elements of *literacy* has greatly influenced the GED subtest for English Language Arts. In the 2014 GED Test, this subtest is called *Reasoning Through Language Arts* (RLA), and the new assessment targets demonstrate this focus. Throughout the development of these assessment targets (Wine, Hall, Zimmerman & Gardner, 2012), the GED Testing Service mirrored CCSS's focus on reading and writing for thinking and argument as literacy. This represents a different conception of literacy as from the traditional idea of reading simply for basic comprehension and writing for expression.

This section (and this paper) does not attempt to explore or explain the Common Core State Standards, in part because GED 2014 is *not* fully CCSS-aligned. Rather, the assessment targets for the 2014 edition of the GED Test are derived from the CCSS and represent a streamlined subset of CCSS standards that the GED Testing Service believes are most essential for GED test-takers to know and understand as they pursue a wide range of career and post-secondary pathways. This section examines the new RLA standards for the 2014 test, the issue of cognitive complexity within the GED 2014 test, and some of the challenges in adopting these new standards.

GED 2014 RLA vs. GED 2002 Series ELA Standards

While the new GED Test includes knowledge and skills that have not been required by the 2002 Series, it also includes many that have been. In this subsection, we summarize those areas of similarity and difference, for the *Reading*, *Language* and *Writing* skills. We also explain

how the new GED Test seeks to engage test-takers in more cognitively complex tasks than the previous test required.

Early in the test development process, the GED Testing Service developed a set of assessment targets and indicators for the RLA test based upon the Common Core State Standards for Literacy (see Appendix I). They are organized into twelve *assessment targets* (i.e. seven for *Reading*, three for *Writing*, and two for *Language*), each based upon master standards found in CCSS. Each *Reading* and *Language* assessment target has three to nine indicators, each of which lay out a precise skill that items (i.e. test questions) should attempt to assess. The three *Writing* assessment targets do not have indicators of their own, but are broken down in greater detail within the Multi-Trait Extended Response Scoring Rubric (explained below).

For example, assessment target R.3 (i.e. linked to CCSS’s third master standard for reading) has five indicators, as show in Table 1. Depth of Knowledge (DOK) levels correspond with Norman Webb’s Depth of Knowledge (Webb, 2002) model of cognitive complexity, and specify the range of cognitive complexity items for each indicator should address.

Table 1. Example of RLA Assessment and Indicators

Level	Code	Explanation	DOK
Assessment target	R.3	Analyze how individuals, events and ideas develop and interact over the course of a text.	1-2
Indicator	R.3.1	Order sequence of events in texts.	2
Indicator	R.3.2	Make inferences about plot/sequence of events, characters/people, settings, or ideas in texts.	2-3
Indicator	R.3.3	Analyze relationships with texts, including how events are important in relation to plot or conflict; how people, ideas, or events are connected, developed, or distinguished; how events contribute to theme or relate to key ideas; or how a setting or	2-3

		context shapes structure and meaning	
Indicator	R.3.4	Infer relationships between ideas in a text (e.g., a implicit cause and effect, parallel or contrasting relationship).	2-3
Indicator	R.3.5	Analyze the roles that details play in complex literary or information texts	2-3

Reading

As can be seen in Table 2, the 2014 RLA indicators subsume virtually all of the skills measured on the 2002 ELA *Reading* subtest, though they are described quite differently. The GED Testing Service worked to ensure that the 2014 RLA indicators both provide greater clarity in defining the targeted skill and greater guidance for item writers in aiming test questions at deeper critical thinking skills (e.g. analyzing *how* a textual structure helps an author develop meaning rather than the mere identification of textual structures the 2002 Series test required).

Table 2. Skills overlapping between 2002 Series Reading and 2014 RLA tests

2002 Series ELA	Select 2014 RLA Indicators
Restate or paraphrase information.	R.2.1 Comprehend explicit details and main ideas in a text.
Summarize main ideas.	R.2.2 Summarize details and ideas in text.
Explain the primary implications of the text.	R.2.4 Infer implied main ideas in paragraphs or whole texts.
Transfer concepts and principles from reading to a new context.	R.2.7 Make evidence based generalizations or hypotheses based on details in text, including clarifications, extensions, or applications of main ideas to new situations.
Draw conclusions and understand consequences.	R.2.8 Draw conclusions or make generalizations

	that require synthesis of multiple main ideas in text.
Make inferences and recognize unstated assumptions	R.2.3 Make sentence level inferences about details that support main ideas.
Identify elements of style and structure and interpret the organizational structure or pattern in a text.	R.5.4 Analyze how the structure of a paragraph, section, or passage shapes meaning, emphasizes key ideas, or supports an author's purpose.
Identify tone, word usage, characterization, use of detail and example, and figurative language.	R.4.3/L.4.3 Analyze the impact of specific words, phrases, or figurative language in text, with a focus on an author's intent to convey information or construct an argument. R.3.1 Make inferences about plot/sequence of events, characters/people, settings, or ideas in texts.
Identify cause and effect relationships.	R.3.4 Infer relationships between ideas in a text (e.g., an implicit cause and effect, parallel, or contrasting relationship).
Distinguish conclusions from supporting statements.	R.2.5 Determine which detail(s) support(s) a main idea.
Interpret tone, point of view, style or purpose of a work.	R.6.1 Determine an author's point of view or purpose of a text.
Make connections among parts of a text.	
Integrate information from outside a passage with elements within the passage	[Not Assessed]

The new 2014 RLA test will also assess a selection of reasoning skills that are beyond the scope of the 2002 Series Reading test. These skills include, among several others, the evaluation of complex argumentative texts and the analysis of information, as stressed in the Common Core State Standards. The 2014 RLA test's focus on these reasoning skills is clear in the language of the assessment targets. For example, R.8 (i.e., *Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, including the validity of the reasoning as well as the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence*) does not have *any* analogue in the 2002 Series content specifications. R.6 (i.e., *Determine an author's purpose or point of view in a text and explain how it is conveyed and*

shapes the content and style of a text) takes a more sophisticated and critical view of purpose and point of view – one that requires a closer examination of the individual text.

Most items on the 2014 test are each aligned to a single indicator² – a single sub-skill of an assessment target. Distinctions between particular reading indicators can be precise, though, and the GED Testing Service has been careful to honor those distinctions in the items. For instance, some indicators in the RLA assessment targets require test-takers to make an inference, while others require test-takers to cite evidence for an inference (e.g. identifying details which support a main idea or theme). Corresponding items match these distinctions.

Language³

The *Language* skills (i.e. mechanics, usage, and vocabulary) in the GED 2014 RLA test match those assessed on the 2002 Series Writing test even more closely than the *Reading* skills do, though they are grouped differently. This overlap and the shifts in grouping these skills can be seen in Appendix II (which fully compares the two sets of skills). The *Language* assessment targets measure a candidate's ability to demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English, including capitalization, punctuation, grammar, and usage that have been identified as most important for career- and college-readiness. The items that assess these skills are referred to as *editing item* on the 2014 test, whereas they were called *multiple choice writing items* on the 2002 Series. Though the new test measures essentially the same skills as the old test, it does in a slightly different format (*Item Types on the RLA Test* below).

²Assessment targets are higher level descriptions of skills, whose individual sub-skills are broken down and described in their indicators.

³ The 2002 Series includes these skills in the *Writing* test, but the Common Core State Standards break them out and calls them *Language* skills. The GED Testing Service has adjusted to the CCSS terminology.

The biggest differences in how *Language* skills are assessed on the 2014 GED Test are tied to the Extended Response (ER) task (discussed more fully in section *The Extended Response* below). First, *Language* skills, as evidenced in test-takers' writing samples, are evaluated independently from other skills demonstrated through written expression. Because the 2002 Series Essay was scored by a holistic rubric, in practice, *Language* skill problems only impacted test-takers' scores when they seriously impaired comprehension. Second, this separation of the *Language* component allows for a range of scores to be given for this trait, thereby allowing GED Testing Service to provide more information to test-takers about their performance on the ER task. Third, the rubric for scoring *Language* on the essay focuses exclusively on a small set of the most essential rules and skills (see Appendix III).

Taken together, the editing tasks and the scoring of *Language* skills in the ER task require test-takers to demonstrate their command of these skills in writing of their own *and* as applied to the writing of others.

Writing

Though the assessment targets for *Writing* may appear at first glance to be the least developed of the three areas, the GED Testing Service has given them deep attention. CCSS and the GED Testing Service view writing as integrated with reading and language skills, and therefore left some of the explanation of *Writing* assessment targets in the *Reading* and *Language* assessment targets rather than duplicate those details. Further development of the *Writing* assessment targets can be found in the rubrics used to score the ER task on the 2014 GED RLA test (see Appendix III). As can be seen in Table 3, all of the skills assessed in the 2002 Series Essay are still assessed in the 2014 extended response.

Table 3. 2002 Series Holistic Scoring Rubric and 2014 Trait 2 Rubric

2002 Series Holistic Rubric Dimensions	2014 Trait 2 Rubric Dimensions
Response to Prompt: Presents a clearly focused main idea that addresses the prompt.	Contains ideas that are well developed and generally logical; most ideas are elaborated upon
Organization: Establishes a clear and logical organization.	Establishes an organizational structure that conveys the message and purpose of the response; applies transitional devices appropriately
Development and Details: Achieves coherent development with specific and relevant details and examples.	Contains a sensible progression of ideas with clear connections between details and main points
Conventions of Edited American English: Consistently controls sentence structure and the conventions of EAE.	[Evaluated in Trait 3 (i.e., Clarity and Command of Standard English Conventions)]
Word Choice: Exhibits varied and precise word choice	Chooses specific words to express ideas clearly

As with the *Reading* and *Language* areas, there are also some additional skills that come from the Common Core State Standards, and they evince the same focus on reasoning and critical thinking. With *Writing*, these skills include the breaking down of another's argument, the presentation of one's own argument, and the use of textual evidence to support an argument. These skills are enumerated in Trait 1 of the Multi-Trait Extended Response Scoring Rubric used to score the 2014 ER task.

See *Scoring the 2014 RLA Extended Response*(below) for further discussion of the multi-trait scoring of the 2014 extended response.

Cognitive Complexity

The GED Testing Service has also focused on the cognitive complexity within the individual items and tasks on the 2014 GED Test. Recognizing that the Common Core State Standards have increased the rigor and expectations for K-12 students, the GED Testing Service has paid close attention to overall cognitive complexity of the new test. Note that this is *not* the same thing as difficulty. Memorizing a long string of numbers or the names of the presidents and vice presidents are not cognitively complex tasks, though they can be quite difficult. This focus has impacted assessment of both the *Reading* and the *Writing* skills on the 2014 GED RLA test.

The new GED assessment employs Webb’s Depth of Knowledge (DOK) (Webb, 2002) model of cognitive levels to evaluate test content (see Appendix IV). The DOK levels of individual items reflect the cognitive complexity of the tasks and are assigned to items on the basis of the cognitive demands of the individual item. For the new RLA test, roughly 80 percent of the items are being written to a DOK cognitive complexity level 2 or higher (GED Testing Service, 2012).

Because of the attention to the DOK model, the RLA items are more cognitively complex than their predecessors on the 2002 Series GED Test. While the 2002 Series GED Test included items focused on basic reading fluency and comprehension skills (e.g., recall of plot, etc.), the new GED Test backgrounds these foundational skills and is more focused on improved assessment of critical and analytical thinking skills (CAT) via close-reading and engagement with complex, authentic texts – significantly more cognitively demanding and complex tasks.

For example, indicator R.6.4 requires test-takers to analyze how an author uses rhetorical techniques, such as analogies, repetition, or qualifying statements to achieve his/her purposes,

and R.6.3 requires test-takers to recognize an author's purpose based upon detail in the text whether that purpose is stated explicitly or must be inferred by the reader. Of course, the new and more cognitively complex items subsume many of the foundational skills assessed on the 2002 Series GED Test, but they require test-takers to engage more deeply with texts so that they may recognize authorial intent and understand its relationship with the rhetorical techniques employed.

Challenges of assessing new standards

Aligning the new GED Test with these standards marks a distinct increase in rigor of the test content and also a new focus on the skills essential for success in the workplace and credit-bearing post-secondary courses. This shift shines a particularly bright light on a number of long-standing challenges to validity, and even creates some new ones. In an effort to ensure that the new 2014 GED Test properly assesses these skills, the GED Testing Service paid particular attention on content validity (i.e. the alignment between items and the skills they are supposed to assess). One of the greatest challenges for the GED Testing Service has been in communicating these changes to the wider community of GED stakeholders, including adult education program directors and educators.

To address issues of validity, the GED Testing Service adopted a number of evidence-centered design (ECD) principles (Mislevy & Riconscente, 2006; Mislevy & Haertel, 2006; Mislevy, Steinberg & Almond, 2003) to its test development process. As per Mislevy, et al., (2003, p. 4) "the ECD framework helps one understand the connections among an assessment's purpose, a conception of proficiency in the domain, the evidentiary argument, the design of the assessment elements, and operational processes." Measuring test-takers' skill level with regard to

close reading and critically analyzing idea-rich texts requires the creation of items aimed more closely at these types of skills – rather than more surface-level types of skills (such as identification of text features and literal readings of that which is explicitly stated in texts) that were measured on the 2002 Series Reading test.

To better enable the creation of RLA items with greater content validity, the GED Testing Service has incorporated two central questions into each step of their development process.

- Does the Item generate evidence as to whether the test-taker has mastered the indicated skill? (i.e., does the test-taker need to demonstrate some level of mastery of the indicator in order to differentiate the Key [i.e., the correct answer] from the Distractors [i.e., the incorrect answer]?)
- What is/are the thought process(es) that test-takers will have to go through to get from the Stimulus [i.e., the background information] and Stem [i.e., the question itself] to the Key [i.e., the correct answer]? (Note: This is not the same thing as why the Key is correct or how you know what the correct answer is. This is the specific thought process that you expect typical test-takers to follow to get through the Item.)

The first question was designed to help item writers, test developers and external content experts focus their attention on whether the item truly requires test-takers to engage with the *targeted skill*. Implicit in this question is the ECD idea that each item should produce *observable evidence* of test-takers' ability level with regard to each RLA indicator. To that end, this question has encouraged item writers and test developers to begin their writing and evaluation of items with an idea of what observable evidence of mastery over the indicated skills looks like.

On the other hand, the second question has encouraged item writers and reviewers to consider the items *through the eyes of a test-taker* rather than those of an expert in the content area. Because item writers and reviewers often actually work through the item themselves to determine a number of likely paths test-takers may take in order to arrive at their answers, making this question explicit helps elucidate ways in which items may be perceived in different ways by different groups of test-takers. Thus, item writers and reviewers can better identify items that may introduce elements irrelevant to the construct of the targeted skill. These construct-irrelevant elements often limit the measurement accuracy of the item in question, and by working to eliminate them, the GED Testing Service has tried to reduce some of the problems so often found in standardized test questions.

Taken together, these two key questions help to narrow the focus of each item in order to achieve greater fidelity and alignment to the indicators. As a result, items on the 2014 RLA test are built upon a very clear – even literal – interpretation of each indicator. For example, multiple choice items aligned to R.2.4 (i.e. “Infer implied main ideas in paragraphs or whole texts”) require test-takers to select their answers from four plausible implied main ideas. R.2.4 items do *not* ask test-takers to determine which of four details from a passage supports an implied main idea given in the stem. Because each item adheres as closely as possible to the explicit direction provided in the indicators, they are more likely to elicit the observable evidence of the test-takers’ level of mastery over the indicated skill than items which have appeared on the 2002 Series Reading test. Unfortunately, items on standardized tests do not always exhibit this level of fidelity to their indicators. They are always related, but they are sometimes flipped – or even depend upon construct-irrelevant skills in addition to the skill described in the indicator. This attention to item-indicator alignment has increased the evidentiary argument about *what*

specifically is being measured in each item (another central principle of evidence centered design), and increased the overall validity of the 2014 GED Test. This more precise examination has extended to DOK levels, as well. An ongoing challenge, the GED Testing Service has tried to ensure that the new test contains an appropriate level of cognitive complexity to assess the new ideas of literacy reflected in the Common Core State Standards.

Despite the GED Testing Service's efforts to make more transparent the link between the public assessment targets and indicators and the items and tasks on the 2014 GED Test, communicating these expectations to both adult educators and test-takers themselves has been a challenge. Though all of the guidelines for test content are spelled out in the *GED Assessment Guide for Educators* (2012), the nature of these changes has led to questions and pushback. Adult educators often lack the resources and training of the K-12 educational system. Their own work has been challenging enough, even before the Common Core State Standards Initiative pushed states to adopt more rigorous standards for every grade – including high school graduation. While the GED Testing Service continues to put forth great effort to answer these questions and respond to the pushback, it is aware that adult education program directors and educators still face considerable challenges in preparing for the new test.

Form and Format of the 2014 GED RLA Test

In addition to the new standards at the heart of the new 2014 GED Test, the form and format of the new test is quite different from the 2002 Series. Among these differences are that almost all test-takers will take the new GED Test on a computer, the test includes new item formats, item passages are quite different, and the Extended Response task (i.e., the essay) departs greatly from the 2002 Series Essay writing prompt.

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There are also basic structural differences between the 2002 Series GED *Language Arts, Reading* and *Writing* subtests and the 2014 RLA test. The old test included two separate subtests, whereas the new test has one integrated RLA subtest. The old *Language Arts, Reading* subtest (1 hour) focused primarily on surface-level reading comprehension skills, such as summarizing main ideas and identifying elements of style (e.g. figurative language). The *Language Arts, Writing* subtest (2 hours) included a multiple choice section in which test-takers edited passages for mechanics, usage and organization, and an essay section in which test-takers respond to an open-ended prompt. The new *Reasoning Through Language Arts* (RLA) test (2 hours, 30 minutes– including a 10 minute break) includes reading comprehension questions, editing tasks, and “writing about reading” tasks that all appear together. The difference in testing time is matched by a difference in the number of items (i.e. test questions) for test-takers to answer.

A Computer-Based Test

While the 2002 Series GED Test is already available as a computer-based test (CBT) in almost all states, the majority of test-takers still take it in a traditional paper-and-pencil format. This situation will be reversed for the 2014 test because paper-based tests will be administered in limited circumstances to accommodate certain subgroups (e.g., for test-takers with disabilities that prevent computer use or for test-takers who require a Braille format). However, that the test will be given on the computer does not mean that it will be available online or over the Internet. Test-takers will take the 2014 test in certified testing centers, just like those taking the 2002 Series GED Test on Computer.

This shift to CBT delivery comes with numerous benefits for the test and for test-takers. First, test-takers will receive score reports the same day that they complete their tests. Second,

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test-takers can better prepare for their test session, as the testing experience and conditions will be much more standardized. Third, the GED Testing Service will be able to more efficiently streamline the registration, scheduling, testing, and scoring processes, while also increasing test security (i.e., limiting the unauthorized release of test items and consequent inappropriate test preparation that undermines test validity).

While operational efficiency and an improved test-taking experience are part of the impetus for the change in delivery method, the transition to CBT also represents a clear acknowledgment that computer literacy skills are critical elements of career- and college-readiness (CCR). In fact, the Common Core State Standards includes computer literacy skills in its Writing Master Standard 6, "Use technology to produce writing, demonstrating sufficient command of keyboarding skills." (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2010) and its Mathematics Practices. The basic computer skills required for the GED 2014 test (e.g., the ability to scroll, click and drag, cut and paste, use an on-screen calculator and keyboarding/typing) are an element of CCR.

Figure 1. Split Screen Passage (With Tabs) and Item

LitSampler - Candidate Name

Question 1 of 10 (410168-10103)

Scratch Pad

Flag for Review

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Excerpt from *Anne of Green Gables*
by L. M. Montgomery



1 Marilla came briskly forward as Matthew opened the door. But when her eyes fell on the odd little figure in the stiff, ugly dress, with the long braids of red hair and the eager, luminous eyes, she stopped short in amazement.

2 "Matthew Cuthbert, who's that?" she exclaimed. "Where is the boy?"

3 "There wasn't any boy," said Matthew wretchedly. "There was only *her*."

In this passage, Anne asks Marilla to call her "Cordelia." What does this request reveal about Anne?

- ☐ A. She tries to make her life more interesting.
- ☐ B. She wishes she could fit in better with her peers.
- ☐ C. She feels confused about her own past.
- ☐ D. She hesitates to share personal details.

Navigator Next ➔

Another advantage of the CBT platform of the 2014 test is in the presentation of passages and items on the test. Takers of the 2014 GED RLA test will see a 60-40 split-screen approach (shown in Figure 1), with reading passages appearing on the left (spread across multiple tabs, as needed) and items appearing on the right, one at a time. Thus, test-takers will be able to see and move through the passage with the item on screen the whole time – in contrast to needing to flip pages in a test booklet to switch between the passage and an item. When test-takers complete an item, they can go on to the next item, which will take the place of the previous item on the right side of the screen.

Though the GED Testing Service offers a tutorial for CBT platform on its website⁴ and will update it for the 2014 test later this year, it has not been designed to serve as a robust preparatory tool. The tutorial merely provides an opportunity for test-takers to practice with GED-test-specific computer functionality. Adult education programs must consider the technological changes associated with the shift to CBT delivery and appropriately integrate computer literacy into classroom instruction in order to successfully prepare test-takers for this additional challenge.

The Cost of the GED Test

The cost of the new 2014 GED Test has garnered much attention. It is important to note that the increase in cost to jurisdictions predates the 2014 test (and is not tied to Pearson's investment in the GED Testing Service). Rather, the all-inclusive \$120 cost of the complete 2014 GED Test will be the same as the cost of the 2002 Series CBT test. The GED Testing Service announced that it will maintain this level at least through 2015 (GED Testing Service, 2013). Costs to test-takers are determined by jurisdictions, many of which have their own regulations, laws, and budgetary pressure.

Item Types on the RLA Test

The 2014 GED RLA test will feature a greater range of item types than the 2002 Series, primarily as a result of new options available through the CBT delivery platform. It will include multiple choice (MC) items, drag-and-drop items, drop-down items as well as the Extended Response (ER) task. Using a variety of item types allows for the assessment of targeted content

⁴<http://www.gedtestingservice.com/GEDTS%20Tutorial.html>

in a more interactive, more authentic modes that may provide opportunities for test-takers to apply different cognitive strategies to demonstrate proficiency with the content.

Multiple Choice Items

Like the 2002 Series GED Test, the new RLA test will include the traditional multiple choice item type, as the GED Testing Service sees it as a psychometrically reliable method for measuring skills and knowledge at a range of cognitive levels in a standardizable manner. These items will be used to assess virtually every indicator listed in the GED RLA *Reading Assessment* targets. Multiple choice items on the 2014 GED Test will have a total of four answer options, as shown in Figure 1, whereas the 2002 Series featured five-option MC items. This change should not have significant impacts, as research has well established that three answer options is actually optimal (Haladyna, Downing& Rodriguez, 2002; Rodriguez 2005) because additional options beyond the second distractor usually are so rarely selected.

Drag-and-drop Items

One technology-enhanced (TE) item format on the 2014 GED RLA test is the interactive drag-and-drop item. Because of the deeper engagement with the targeted skill and the greater time needed to complete, some of these items will be weighted twice as heavily as MC items. Drag-and-drop items require test-takers to move boxed words or phrases (i.e. *drag tokens*) by clicking and dragging them to one or more designated drop targets on the screen. Drop targets will appear in a variety of graphic representations, including tables, charts, webs, and timelines.

Figure 2 shows how a drag-and-drop item may be used to assess test-takers' ability to correctly sequence information from a text. (Note that the item stem (i.e. the question itself) is

not visible because the item has been scrolled down to make all the *drag tokens* visible.) Figure 3 shows how a drag-and-drop item can assess a test-taker's ability to identify distinctions between two passages that address similar themes. In the item displayed in Figure 3, the test-taker must determine which speech – President Truman's or Eleanor Roosevelt's – addressed the idea expressed in each *drag token*. This item type is used to assess myriad other skills, including analyzing arguments by classifying reasoning as fallacious or sound, matching supporting evidence with an author's claims, matching supporting details with corresponding main ideas, and delineating how an author's claims build upon one another to create an argument.

Figure 2. Drag-and-Drop Item for Sequencing Events

RLA - Candidate Name

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☒ Answer
 ☐ Explanation

Flag for Review

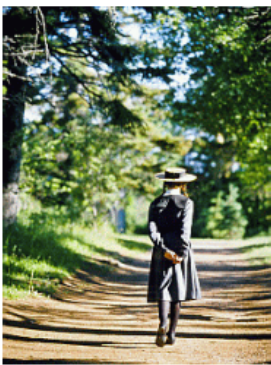
page 1

page 2

page 3

page 4

Excerpt from *Anne of Green Gables*
by L. M. Montgomery



1 Marilla came briskly forward as Matthew opened the door. But when her eyes fell on the odd little figure in the stiff, ugly dress, with the long braids of red hair and the eager, luminous eyes, she stopped short in amazement.

2 "Matthew Cuthbert, who's that?" she exclaimed. "Where is the boy?"

3 "There wasn't any boy," said Matthew wretchedly. "There was only *her*."

excerpt.

Order of Events

Marilla tells Anne not to cry.	Matthew explains Anne's presence.
Anne tells why she prefers a different name.	Marilla decides Anne can stay for the night.

Previous

Next

Figure 3. Drag-and-Drop Item for Distinguishing Between Passages with a Common Theme

RLA - Candidate Name Question 10 of 12

☒ Answer Flag for Review

page 1 page 2 page 3 page 4 page 5

Article 1: A Summary of Harry S. Truman's 1947 Speech on Civil Rights



Eleanor Roosevelt speaks with President Harry S. Truman in May of 1951. She is reporting on her work as a delegate of the United Nations Human Rights Commission.

President Truman's Speech	Eleanor Roosevelt's Speech

America should remain united in spite of social obstacles.

All nations should adhere to the principles of protecting human freedoms.

Racial tensions should be used as a catalyst for promoting positive change.

The International Bill of Rights should be used to reshape the laws of all nations.

← Previous
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Drop-down Items

One of the greatest advantages of shifting to the CBT platform is the availability of drop-down items to assess *Language* skills. The new editing tasks are designed to mimic the editing process in an authentic manner (GED Testing Service, 2012), as shown in Figure 4. Four of these items will be embedded in a passage (350-450 words), with each drop-down menu listing – in context – four possible ways to write a phrase, clause, or sentence. The three distractors (i.e. incorrect answer options) will represent common errors or specific misunderstandings of the indicator to which the item is aligned. Test-takers must select the correctly written version from

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each drop-down, and then their answer selections will appear directly within the passage. Two such passages (i.e. with eight total items) will appear on each RLA test.

Figure 3. Drop-Down Items for Editing Tasks

The screenshot displays a digital reading assessment interface. At the top, a blue header bar contains the text "RLA - Candidate Name" on the left and "Question 8 of 12" on the right. Below this, a light blue bar features a checked box next to "Answer Explanation" and a "Flag for Review" icon. The main content area shows a letter from "San Marte, CA 94656" addressed to "Dear Ms. Gardner:". The letter discusses the sender's long-term loyalty to Skyview computers and a recent issue with their laptop freezing. Two drop-down menus are embedded in the text. The first menu, following the phrase "The speed and power of our Skyview products have been", lists four options: "Select...", "outstanding your products are always well-suited to our needs.", "outstanding. Your products are always well-suited to our needs.", and "outstanding, they are always well-suited to our needs.". The second menu, following the sentence "I called Skyview again this morning.", also lists four options: "Select...", "The representative", "with whom I eventually spoke directed me to take our laptop to a repair facility 30 miles from our home. I mentioned the", and "information I had learned, and was told that there is a shortage of the parts necessary for repair. Because of this".

Reading Passages

The passages on the new GED RLA test will be quite different from those that have appeared in the 2002 Series ELA test. For example, passages on the new test may be as much as twice as long as those on the old test (i.e. 350-900 words vs. a 2002 Series maximum of 450 words), though there are far fewer of them. The major difference, however, is in the complexity

of these passages. Other differences can be found in the literary and the informational passages, though the editing passages are generally similar to those on the 2002 Series test.

Passage Complexity

The 2002 Series GED Test has included reading texts that are similar to passages found on most contemporary large-scale assessments in terms of content, complexity, and authenticity. These texts have served as fertile ground for traditional reading fluency and comprehension items. However, with the evolution of the GED Test to a CCSS-based assessment, these traditional texts are no longer robust enough to support the development of the cognitively complex items that assess the CCSS conception of literacy. The traditional assessment passages simply have lacked the authorial voice, argumentative edge, idea complexity, and overall authenticity at which CCSS skills are aimed. Therefore, passages on the new GED RLA test will be markedly more complex than their predecessors on the 2002 Series GED Test. This complexity is quite different than conventional measures of text difficulty (e.g., vocabulary level, sentence length, etc.). Instead, it refers to the depth of ideas and meaning within a text, their development, and the relationships between the ideas in the text.

Literary Passages

Literary passages will account for 25 percent of the texts on the RLA assessment, whereas they comprised a majority of passages on the 2002 Series Language Arts Reading test. The GED Testing Service has focused on passages (drawn from permissioned *and* public domain texts) that feature the conventions of good storytelling, such as characterization, thematic interest, and narrative thread. They have also tried to include more complex structure, allowing more flashbacks and other manipulations of time and sequence than the literary passages on the

2002 test possess. The increased passage lengths in the 2014 RLA test have allowed for passages that have multiple levels of meaning rather than a single idea shallowly developed. For example, passages that are more complex may have more subtle development of connections between events and characters and/or multiple themes interacting and possibly even conflicting. Excerpts from O Henry's "The Gift of the Magi" or Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* from Appendix B of the CCSS are typical of literary passages that will be found on the RLA assessment.

Informational Passages

Informational passages will account for 75 percent of the texts found on the RLA assessment. As the Common Core State Standards make clear that literacy skills must be applied across the curriculum and CCR is driving factor of the 2014 GED Test, the new RLA test will contain informational passages focused on science, on social studies, and on the workplace. Science passages will pertain to two main themes of human health and living systems (e.g. nutrition, genetics, etc.) and energy and related systems (e.g. conservation, modes of energy production, photosynthesis, etc.). Social Studies passages will relate to the theme of "the Great American Conversation" and may include excerpts from documents such as the Bill of Rights or the preamble to the U.S. Constitution. They may also be drawn from any number other writings that express important concepts about American civics. Workplace passages may include business letters, flyers for company-sponsored events, explanations of initiatives, memos, procedural documents, descriptions of activities, or changes in policies (GED Testing Service, 2012). These texts will reflect real-world situations and experiences and may be commissioned, permissioned, or come from the public domain.

One major aspect of the greater idea complexity in informational passages in the 2014 GED RLA test is in the authorial voice and purpose of these texts. While the 2002 Series test included intentionally objective and neutral passages, they are not appropriate for the new RLA assessment. Instead of texts that resemble textbook or encyclopedia entries, the new test will feature speeches, editorials, and primary source documents. Most passages will have an identifiable authorial voice and an authentic purpose that is more complex than simple explanation or strict reportage, even with multiple purposes and/or a primary purpose that is *not* explicitly stated in the text.

As with the literary passages, the greater length of informational passages on the 2014 test allows for greater complexity in these passages. Passages on the new RLA test may contain multiple ideas developed across paragraphs. The structure of the informational texts on the RLA assessment may be more subtle, with fewer signposts regarding transitions from one idea to the next than appeared on the 2002 Series test. The excerpt from “Winston Churchill Braces Britons to Their Task” and the American Scholar article “The Evolution of the Grocery Bag” by Henry Petroski from Appendix B of the CCSS are excellent exemplars of the types of informational texts that will be on the RLA assessment, as they possess the authenticity, the authorial voice, and the idea complexity necessary to develop high quality items that assess modern literacy skills.

Editing Passages

The editing passages on the 2014 will be the least different from the 2002 Series test. As before, editing passages will present test-takers with the type of language difficulty typical of high school-level texts. Although the ideas presented in editing passages are relatively complex,

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they are not as complex as those included in reading passages, allowing test-takers to focus on language issues and not be hindered by difficulties in comprehension. As before, these passages are exclusively set up as workplace documents and professional/consumer correspondence,—reflecting the types of texts that test-takers might encounter or create in real life (e.g., letters, memos, flyers and business email (GED Testing Service, 2012)). Unlike the literary and informational passages, editing passages will stay the same length as in the 2002 Series test (i.e., 350-450 words each).

The Extended Response

The Extended Response task(s) (i.e., the essays) on the 2014 test represent the greatest change to the GED Test. The writing prompts(s) are entirely different, they are scored entirely differently, and they require far more sophisticated writing skills to complete. Though the time limits are the same, the demands of the Common Core State Standards, new conceptions of literacy, and career- and college-readiness have made the 2014 Extended Response (ER) incredibly different from the 2002 Series Essay. The new ER tasks are designed not just to elicit evidence of test-takers' abilities to express themselves in writing, but also of their abilities to read, comprehend, and analyze a given text in their own words.

The 2002 Series Essay

To understand the magnitude of the changes to the writing portion of the GED Test, one must understand the old 2002 Series Essay. The essay on the 2002 Series GED Test has been consistent with traditional writing tasks included on large-scale assessments. The item consists of

a stand-alone prompt similar to the following:⁵ “Some trips or travels that we take are particularly meaningful. In your essay, describe one trip that you’ve taken that was meaningful to you. Explain what was so meaningful about this trip. Use your personal observations, experience and knowledge to support your essay.” These prompts were designed merely to elicit writing from the test-taker, and were scored on the basis of the quality of the test-takers’ expression alone (See Appendix V). Such prompts are not based upon a reading passage, and therefore, essay writers have not been required to engage with anything but the directive itself. This type of task has often elicited self-reflective/narrative-expository hybrid writing similar to the responses to writing prompts on common state and national assessments. Test-takers have drawn from their own experiences and have been assessed on their ability to organize, elaborate, and adhere to the rules of standard written English – their ability to write sentences and paragraphs on demand, given a maximum amount of freedom in crafting their responses.

There is certainly value in extracting a writing sample with this type of prompt. Test-takers are familiar with this mode of writing, as it has traditionally been taught and assessed in K-12 classrooms and is a mainstay of adult education programs, as well. The GED Testing Service believes that this familiarity tends to buoy confidence and may help to mitigate some of the performance anxiety associated with high-stakes tests. However, this traditional approach is not consistent with the CCSS focus on argument creation and text engagement as core elements of literacy,

⁵ This is not an actual prompt used on a GED 2002 test. Rather, it mirrors the form and style of real essay prompts.

The 2014 RLA Extended Response Task

Unlike the 2002 Series Essay, the ER on the 2014GED RLA assessment is an integrated reading, writing, and reasoning exercise (i.e. as opposed to a written response to a simple stand-alone prompt). It is, for all intents and purposes, the quintessential “reasoning through language arts” task on the RLA test, as test-takers must read and understand one or more source texts, reason through an evaluation of the argumentation within, and produce their own written argument supported with textual evidence.

Figure 4. Extended Response Passage and Prompt

RLA - Candidate Name Question 12 of 12

☒ Answer ☐ Explanation Flag for Review

page 1 page 2 page 3 page 4

Seeds of Change: How Humans Can Benefit from Influencing the Weather

Dr. Kathleen Silverton, meteorologist, speaking at a town hall meeting in Edwardsville, Iowa, July 17, 2010

- 1 It might seem more like science fiction than science, but a process called cloud seeding really can increase rainfall. Since 1946, scientists have been researching technology to change precipitation.
- 2 We are faced with water shortages, droughts, and increasing human populations. In response, many communities in the United States rely upon cloud seeding to increase rain and snowfall. Cloud seeding involves spreading silver iodide onto existing clouds. The silver causes moisture to condense more effectively, making bigger clouds and more rain.
- 3 Studies conducted by the Weather Modification Association and the American Meteorological Institute have shown increases in precipitation ranging from five to 100 percent! Coastal ranges have seen the highest increases.

Analyze the arguments presented in the speech and the editorial.

In your response, develop an argument in which you explain how one position is better supported than the other. Incorporate relevant and specific evidence from both sources to support your argument.

Remember, the better-argued position is not necessarily the position with which you agree. The task should take approximately 45 minutes to complete.

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On the new GED Test, test-takers are presented a 650-word stimulus, typically comprising two distinct texts. These commissioned stimuli are argumentative in nature and present opposing positions through authentic voices from real-world contexts. The shared topics of these passages are intentionally selected to be mildly hot-button in nature, but are sufficiently localized or situational that test-takers are compelled to rely upon the contents of the two passages as the basis for their analyses of the positions, their own arguments, and the evidentiary support for their own claims. Figure 4 demonstrates how the stimulus will appear, with its two passages spread across multiple tabs (in this case, labeled “page 1” through “page 4”). As mentioned, the relationships between the passages (or the arguments within a single passage) are always oppositional.

Having read the stimulus, test-takers must then engage with the writing prompt itself. Each prompt explains the task the test-taker must undertake: analyze the argumentation in the source text(s), decide which position is better supported, and use evidence from the passage(s) as support in the response. This language in each prompt is remarkably similar for *all* RLA extended responses tasks (i.e., across all forms for all test-takers), as they are all aimed at assessing the same set of skills. For example, as shown in Figure 4, the prompt first directs the test-taker to engage in analysis of the source texts: “Analyze the arguments presented in the speech and the editorial.” This is followed by a second instruction to the test-taker to tie his/her own writing to the stimulus: “In your response, develop an argument in which you explain how one position is better supported than the other. Incorporate relevant and specific evidence from both sources to support your argument.” Then, each prompt reminds test-taker that the written responses should focus on objective analysis of the arguments (rather than a subjective response laying out personal feelings about the central issue): “Remember, the better-argued position is

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not necessarily the position with which you agree.” Last, each prompt reminds the test-taker that s/he should develop the response as much as the time limit allows: “The task should take approximately 45 minutes to complete.”

This task requires test-takers to demonstrate their ability to analyze the argumentation in a text by developing *their own* evaluative argument. They must make an overall assertion regarding which of the two arguments presented in the source text(s) is better supported, and justify or support this claim. Test-takers must fully explain their claims and incorporate relevant and sufficient evidence from the source text(s) as support. This is a *markedly* more complex task than the one found on the 2002 Series GED Test. It requires the application of a constellation of skills – most notably the analysis of argumentation – that are at the heart of the Common Core State Standards and its conception of literacy. It is much more representative of actual professional workplace and college writing tasks than the 2002 Series Essay.

In order to best elicit the test-taker’s own thinking, the ER stimulus paired passages – and their associated arguments – are intentionally balanced as part of the development process. Each passage possesses strengths and weaknesses with regard to the validity of the claims, the reasoning, and the relevance or sufficiency of the support. In other words, neither side of the debate is set up to be right or wrong, better or worse. This then leaves it to the test-taker to select for him/herself a position, criteria, and appropriate evidence. There is no correct (or incorrect) position, but that presenting it well (or poorly) makes it so.

Scoring the 2014 RLA Extended Response

Scoring of the essay is quite different on the 2014 GED RLA test than it has been for the 2002 Series Essay. The least of these differences is the fact that automated essay scoring (AES)

takes the place of the human scoring of the 2002 Series Essays (GED Testing Service, in press). Far more important are the use of a multi-trait rubric, the skills examined, and the reporting of trait scores.

As mentioned above (i.e., in the Writing subsection), the ERs for the 2014 GED Test are scored with a multi-trait rubric (see Appendix III), as opposed to the single holistic score that 2002 Series Essays received. Though the 2002 Series Essay Scoring Rubric (see Appendix V) has included multiple dimensions (i.e., Response to the Prompt, Organization, Development and Details, Conventions of Edited American English and Word Choice), the fact that it has been scored holistically has meant that strengths in one dimension could compensate for (or even overwhelm) weaknesses in another. With a three-trait rubric (i.e., in practice, three separate rubrics each yielding its own score), essay's strengths (and weaknesses) can be recognized more fully because each essay receives a separate score for each of the three traits.

The second and third traits of the 2014 rubric contain similar elements to the 2002 Series rubric. As discussed above, much of the 2002 Series Essay Scoring Rubric has been rolled into Trait 2 of the 2014 Multi-Trait Rubric. To ensure that command of Conventions of Edited American English (found in the old *Writing* skills/new *Language* skills) is not overlooked, it is assessed in its own trait (i.e., Trait 3: *Clarity and Command of Standard English Conventions*). However, Trait 1 has no analogue in the 2002 Series Essay scoring.

The skills evaluated in Trait 1 (Creation of Arguments and Use of Evidence) go to the heart of writing skills in the Common Core State Standards and its conception of literacy. Test-takers will have to generate a central argument in their responses, incorporate specific textual

evidence, and break down the strengths and/or weaknesses of the arguments they have read to earn all the available credit on the 2014 RLA ER task.

Scoring of the 2014 ER will also be reported differently than those for the 2002 Series Essay. On the 2002 Series test, test-takers never received an independent score for their extended response, and the score contributed to their *Language Arts, Writing* subtest score – which has been reported separately from the *Language Arts, Reading* subtest score. The 2014 RLA subtest will be reported as a single score (i.e. without separate reading, writing and language scores), however score reports will also provide test-takers with scores for each of the three traits. (There will also be details of their performance on the score reports, but they will not be broken down by the reading, writing and language indicators.)

Social Studies Extended Response Task

For the first time, the 2014 Social Studies subtest will also feature an Extended Response task, scored with a similar multi-trait rubric and with scores reported similarly to those for the RLA ER task. Thus, the task, skills and scoring of the RLA ER task are not limited to the RLA test. However, discussion of the differences between these two essays is beyond the scope of this paper.

Discussion: An Opportunity for Researchers

There can be no question that the GED program is an important part of adult basic education (ABE) in the United States. The GED credential has historically and continues to be considered “the high school equivalency” diploma.

The changes described above to the GED Test which will be rolled out in 2014 mark a great challenge for GED education programs, GED program administrators, GED instructors, and potential GED test-takers. There can be no question about this. The Common Core State Standards pose such an enormous challenge to K-12 education that the consortia building the next generation tests for the K-12 sector (PARCC and SBAC) are warning of as pass rate on their tests *as low as 20%* in the early years.

The more sophisticated Common Core idea of literacy – particularly the focus on close reading, more complex texts, writing as an extension of critical thinking (as opposed to writing as expression) and writing *integrated with* reading (as opposed reading and writing being considered as two separate skill sets)– that the GED Testing Service has included in the 2014 GED Test are new to many adult basic education programs, educators, and test-takers. This marks a change, and a challenge.

Though we are loath to resort to hackneyed clichés, the supposed similarity between the Chinese symbols for crisis and opportunity is an appropriate guide here. These changes pose the danger of a real crisis for both K-12 education and adult basic education programs. However, they also mark an opportunity for researchers and scholars of adult education and adult literacy.



We know that these changes are coming. We know that programs are trying to develop new approaches to meet the new challenges of preparing their students for this more challenging material. This is the ideal time to think about and design new research programs.

Whether a quantitative or a qualitative researcher, studying change is exciting and fruitful. The field of adult education is in an era of innovation. New curricula and approaches are required, and programs may have to reconsider many of the assumptions behind their program designs. Perhaps programs need to be more intensive, or longer. Perhaps programs need to establish new requirements or certification for their instructors. Perhaps potential students need to be screened differently, to determine whether they are even ready for the final GED preparation programs.

The social significance of the GED credential is also under pressure. What has in the past stood as an achievable first step along a resolute path of investment in oneself and one's capacities may gain even greater prestige and value, but may also leave a void for a societally recognized first step. Communities most reliant upon the GED credential will have to come to terms with the new test as well, even those who never even consider taking the new GED Test.

New York's decision to give its own high school equivalency test instead of using the 2014 GED Test marks the first time in generations that there will not be a single common determiner of high school equivalency certification. The impact of this on other states, and on the federal government, is unknown. Different states have different regulations about passing along testing costs to test-takers, and different room in their budgets to absorb the cost of CBT and standardized testing centers. Far more than ever before, there will *need* to be significant

differences in how adult education works in different states – another incredible opportunity for researchers.

We literally (i.e., literally literally!) cannot see any limits to the research opportunities that the 2014 GED Test offers to researchers. Practitioners, educators, administrators, bureaucrats, and policy-makers face a seemingly endless series of questions and challenges as they prepare for the new assessment and support the students who depend on adult education programs. So, here is not merely an opportunity for research, but actually a *need*.

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Appendix I: 2014 Reasoning through Language Arts Assessment Targets

Reading Assessment Targets

Common Core Connection: R.2

Determine central ideas or themes of texts and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.

- R.2.1 Comprehend explicit details and main ideas in text.
- R.2.2 Summarize details and ideas in text.
- R.2.3 Make sentence level inferences about details that support main ideas.
- R.2.4 Infer implied main ideas in paragraphs or whole texts.
- R.2.5 Determine which detail(s) support(s) a main idea.
- R.2.6 Identify a theme, or identify which element(s) in a text support a theme.
- R.2.7 Make evidence based generalizations or hypotheses based on details in text, including clarifications, extensions, or applications of main ideas to new situations.
- R.2.8 Draw conclusions or make generalizations that require synthesis of multiple main ideas in text.

Common Core Connection: R.3

Analyze how individuals, events, and ideas develop and interact over the course of a text.

- R.3.1 Order sequences of events in texts.
- R.3.2 Make inferences about plot/sequence of events, characters/people, settings, or ideas in texts.
- R.3.3 Analyze relationships within texts, including how events are important in relation to plot or conflict; how people, ideas, or events are connected, developed, or distinguished; how events contribute to theme or relate to key ideas; or how a setting or context shapes structure and meaning.
- R.3.4 Infer relationships between ideas in a text (e.g., an implicit cause and effect, parallel, or contrasting relationship).
- R.3.5 Analyze the roles that details play in complex literary or informational texts.

Common Core Connection: R.4/L.4

Interpret words and phrases that appear frequently in texts from a wide variety of disciplines, including determining connotative and figurative meanings from context and analyzing how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.

R.4.1/L.4.1 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining connotative and figurative meanings from context.

R.4.2/L.4.2 Analyze how meaning or tone is affected when one word is replaced with another.

R.4.3/L.4.3 Analyze the impact of specific words, phrases, or figurative language in text, with a focus on an author's intent to convey information or construct an argument.

Common Core Connection: R.5

Analyze the structure of texts, including how specific sentences or paragraphs relate to each other and the whole.

R.5.1 Analyze how a particular sentence, paragraph, chapter, or section fits into the overall structure of a text and contributes to the development of the ideas.

R.5.2 Analyze the structural relationship between adjacent sections of text (e.g., how one paragraph develops or refines a key concept or how one idea is distinguished from another).

R.5.3 Analyze transitional language or signal words (words that indicate structural relationships, such as *consequently, nevertheless, otherwise*) and determine how they refine meaning, emphasize certain ideas, or reinforce an author's purpose.

R.5.4 Analyze how the structure of a paragraph, section, or passage shapes meaning, emphasizes key ideas, or supports an author's purpose.

Common Core Connection: R.6

Determine an author's purpose or point of view in a text and explain how it is conveyed and shapes the content and style of a text.

R.6.1 Determine an author's point of view or purpose of a text.

R.6.2 Analyze how the author distinguishes his or her position from that of others or how an author acknowledges and responds to conflicting evidence or viewpoints.

R.6.3 Infer an author's implicit as well as explicit purposes based on details in text. 2

R.6.4 Analyze how an author uses rhetorical techniques to advance his or her point of view or achieve a specific purpose (e.g., analogies, enumerations, repetition and parallelism, juxtaposition of opposites, qualifying statements).

Common Core Connection: R.8

Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, including the validity of the reasoning as well as the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence.

R.8.1 Delineate the specific steps of an argument the author puts forward, including how the argument's claims build on one another.

R.8.2 Identify specific pieces of evidence an author uses in support of claims or conclusions.
1-3

R.8.3 Evaluate the relevance and sufficiency of evidence offered in support of a claim.

R.8.4 Distinguish claims that are supported by reasons and evidence from claims that are not.

R.8.5 Assess whether the reasoning is valid; identify fallacious reasoning in an argument and evaluate its impact

R.8.6 Identify an underlying premise or assumption in an argument and evaluate the logical support and evidence provided.

Common Core Connection: R.7/R.9

Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics

R.9.1/R. 7.1 Draw specific comparisons between two texts that address similar themes or topics or between information presented in different formats (e.g., between information presented in text and information or data summarized in a table or timeline).

R.9.2 Compare two passages in similar or closely related genre that share ideas or themes, focusing on similarities and/or differences in perspective, tone, style, structure, purpose, or overall impact.

R.9.3 Compare two argumentative passages on the same topic that present opposing claims (either main or supporting claims) and analyze how each text emphasizes different evidence or advances a different interpretation of facts.

R.7.2 Analyze how data or quantitative and/or visual information extends, clarifies, or contradicts information in text, or determine how data supports an author's argument.

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R.7.3 Compare two passages that present related ideas or themes in different genre or formats (e.g., a feature article and an online FAQ or fact sheet) in order to evaluate differences in scope, purpose, emphasis, intended audience, or overall impact when comparing.

R.7.4 Compare two passages that present related ideas or themes in different genre or formats in order to synthesize details, draw conclusions, or apply information to new situations.

Writing Assessment Targets

Common Core Connection: R.1

W.1 Determine the details of what is explicitly stated and make logical inferences or valid claim that square with textual evidence.

Common Core Connection: W.1, W.2 and W.4

W.2 Produce an extended analytic response in which the writer introduces the idea(s) or claim(s) clearly; creates an organization that logically sequences information; develops the idea(s) or claim(s) thoroughly with well-chosen examples, facts, or details from the text; and maintains a coherent focus.

Common Core Connection: W.5 and L.1, L.2 and .L3

W.3 Write clearly and demonstrate sufficient command of standard English conventions.

Language Assessment Targets

Common Core Connection: L.1

Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.

L.1.1 Edit to correct errors involving frequently confused words and homonyms, including contractions (passed, past; two, too, to; there, their, they're; knew, new; it's its).

L1.2 Edit to correct errors in straightforward subject-verb agreement.

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- L.1.3 Edit to correct errors in pronoun usage, including pronoun-antecedent agreement, unclear pronoun references, and pronoun case.
- L.1.4 Edit to eliminate non-standard or informal usage (e.g., correctly use try to win the game instead of try and win the game).
- L.1.5 Edit to eliminate dangling or misplaced modifiers or illogical word order (e.g., correctly use to meet almost all requirements instead of to almost meet all requirements.)
- L.1.6 Edit to ensure parallelism and proper subordination and coordination.
- L.1.7 Edit to correct errors in subject-verb or pronoun antecedent agreement in more complicated situations (e.g., with compound subjects, interceding phrases, or collective nouns).
- L.1.8 Edit to eliminate wordiness or awkward sentence construction.
- L.1.9 Edit to ensure effective use of transitional words, conjunctive adverbs, and other words and phrases that support logic and clarity.

Common Core Connection: L.2

Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization and punctuation when writing.

- L.2.1 Edit to ensure correct use of capitalization (e.g., proper nouns, titles, and beginnings of sentences).
- L.2.2 Edit to eliminate run-on sentences, fused sentences, or sentence fragments.
- L.2.3 Edit to ensure correct use of apostrophes with possessive nouns.
- L.2.4 Edit to ensure correct use of punctuation (e.g., commas in a series or in appositives and other non-essential elements, end marks, and appropriate punctuation for clause separation).

Appendix II: Language Standards old and new

2002 Series ELA	2014 RLA
Create effective text divisions (within or among paragraphs., and Combine paragraphs to form a more effective document. Form new paragraphs within multi-paragraph documents. Create topic sentences.	L.1.9 Edit to ensure effective use of transitional words, conjunctive adverbs, and other words and phrases that support logic and clarity. Note: Paragraph development and organizational skills are measured through Trait 2 of the Extended Response Scoring Rubric and will not appear in editing tasks on the 2014 RLA test.
Edit to eliminate sentence fragments, run-on sentences, and comma splices.	L.2.2 Edit to eliminate run-on sentences, fused sentences, or sentence fragments.
Edit to eliminate improper coordination and subordination, modification, and parallelism.	L.1.5 Edit to eliminate dangling or misplaced modifiers or illogical word order (e.g., correctly use to meet almost all requirements instead of to almost meet all requirements). L.1.6 Edit to ensure parallelism and proper subordination and coordination.
Edit to eliminate subject-verb agreement (including agreement in number, interrupting phrases, and inverted structure).	L.1.2 Edit to correct errors in straightforward subject-verb agreement. L.1.7 Edit to correct errors in subject-verb or pronoun antecedent agreement in more complicated situations (e.g., with compound subjects, interceding phrases, or collective nouns).
Edit to eliminate verb tense errors (including sequence of tenses, word clues to tense in sentences, word clues to tense in paragraphs, and verb form).	[Assessed via Extended Response Scoring Rubric Trait 3 only.]
Edit to eliminate pronoun reference errors (including incorrect relative pronouns, pronoun shift, vague or ambiguous references, and agreement with antecedents).	L.1.3 Edit to correct errors in pronoun usage, including pronoun-antecedent agreement, unclear pronoun references, and pronoun case. L.1.3 Edit to correct errors in pronoun usage, including pronoun-antecedent agreement, unclear pronoun references, and pronoun case.
Edit to eliminate errors in capitalization (including proper names and adjectives, titles, and months/seasons).	L.2.1 Edit to ensure correct use of capitalization (e.g., proper nouns, titles, and beginnings of sentences).
Edit to eliminate errors in punctuation (including commas in a series, commas between independent	L.2.4 Edit to ensure correct use of punctuation (e.g., commas in a series or in appositives and other

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clauses joined by a conjunction, introductory elements, appositives, and the overuse of commas).	non-essential elements, end marks, and appropriate punctuation for clause separation).
Edit to eliminate errors in spelling (restricted to errors related to possessives, contractions, and homophones).	L.1.1 Edit to correct errors involving frequently confused words and homonyms, including contractions (passed, past; two, too, to; there, their, they're; knew, new; it's its). L.2.3 Edit to ensure correct use of apostrophes with possessive nouns.
[Not assessed on the 2002 Series test.]	L.1.4 Edit to eliminate non-standard or informal usage (e.g., correctly use try to win the game instead of try and win the game)

Appendix III: 2014 Extended Response Scoring Rubrics for Social Studies

Score	Description
Trait 1: Creation of Arguments and Use of Evidence	
2	- generates text-based argument(s) and establishes a purpose that is connected to the prompt - cites relevant and specific evidence from source text(s) to support argument (may include few irrelevant pieces of evidence or unsupported claims) - analyzes the issue and/or evaluates the validity of the argumentation within the source texts (e.g., distinguishes between supported and unsupported claims, makes reasonable inferences about underlying premises or assumptions, identifies fallacious reasoning, evaluates the credibility of sources, etc.)
1	- generates an argument and demonstrates some connection to the prompt - cites some evidence from source text(s) to support argument (may include a mix of relevant and irrelevant citations or a mix of textual and non-textual references) - partially analyzes the issue and/or evaluates the validity of the argumentation within the source texts; may be simplistic, limited, or inaccurate
0	- may attempt to create an argument OR lacks purpose or connection to the prompt OR does neither - cites minimal or no evidence from source text(s) (sections of text may be copied from source) - minimally analyzes the issue and/or evaluates the validity of the argumentation within the source texts; may completely lack analysis or demonstrate minimal or no understanding of the given argument(s)

Non-storable Responses (Score of 0/Condition Codes)

Response exclusively contains text copied from source text(s) or prompt

Response shows no evidence that test-taker has read the prompt or is off-topic

Response is incomprehensible

Response is not in English

Response has not been attempted (blank)

Score	Description
Trait 2: Development of Ideas and Organizational Structure	
2	- contains ideas that are well developed and generally logical; most ideas are elaborated upon - contains a sensible progression of ideas with clear connections between details and main points - establishes an organizational structure that conveys the message and purpose of the response; applies transitional devices appropriately - establishes and maintains a formal style and appropriate tone that demonstrate awareness of the audience and purpose of the task - chooses specific words to express ideas clearly
1	- contains ideas that are inconsistently developed and/or may reflect simplistic or vague reasoning; some ideas are elaborated upon - demonstrates some evidence of a progression of ideas, but details may be disjointed or lacking connection to main ideas - establishes an organization structure that may inconsistently group ideas or is partially effective at conveying the message of the task; uses transitional devices inconsistently - may inconsistently maintain a formal style and appropriate tone to demonstrate an awareness of the audience and purpose of the task - may occasionally misuse words and/or choose words that express ideas in vague terms
0	- contains ideas that are insufficiently or illogically developed, with minimal or no elaboration on main ideas - contains an unclear or no progression of ideas; details may be absent or irrelevant to the main ideas - establishes an ineffective or no discernable organizational structure; does not apply transitional devices, or does so inappropriately - uses an informal style and/or inappropriate tone that demonstrates limited or no awareness of audience and purpose - may frequently misuse words, overuse slang or express ideas in a vague or repetitious manner

Non-scorable Responses (Score of 0/Condition Codes)

Response exclusively contains text copied from source text(s) or prompt
 Response shows no evidence that test-taker has read the prompt or is off-topic
 Response is incomprehensible
 Response is not in English
 Response has not been attempted (blank)

Score	Description
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Trait 3: Clarity and Command of Standard English Conventions	
2	- demonstrates largely correct sentence structure and a general fluency that enhances clarity with specific regard to the following skills: - varied sentence structure within a paragraph or paragraphs - correct subordination, coordination and parallelism - avoidance of wordiness and awkward sentence structures - usage of transitional words, conjunctive adverbs and other words that support logic and clarity - avoidance of run-on sentences, fused sentences, or sentence fragments - demonstrates competent application of conventions with specific regard to the following skills: - frequently confused words and homonyms, including contractions - subject-verb agreement - pronoun usage, including pronoun antecedent agreement, unclear pronoun references, and pronoun case - placement of modifiers and correct word order - capitalization (e.g., proper nouns, titles, and beginnings of sentences) - use of apostrophes with possessive nouns - use of punctuation (e.g., commas in a series or in appositives and other non-essential elements, end marks, and appropriate punctuation for clause separation) - may contain some errors in mechanics and conventions, but they do not interfere with comprehension; overall, standard usage is at a level appropriate for on-demand draft writing.
1	- demonstrates inconsistent sentence structure; may contain some repetitive, choppy, rambling, or awkward sentences that may detract from clarity; demonstrates inconsistent control over skills 1-5 as listed in the first bullet under Trait 3, Score Point 3 above - demonstrates inconsistent control of basic conventions with specific regard to skills 1 – 7 as listed in the second bullet under Trait 3, Score Point 3 above - may contain frequent errors in mechanics and conventions that occasionally interfere with comprehension; standard usage is at a minimally acceptable level of appropriateness for on-demand draft writing.
0	- demonstrates consistently flawed sentence structure such that meaning may be obscured; demonstrates minimal control over skills 1-5 as listed in the first bullet under Trait 3, Score Point 3 above - demonstrates minimal control of basic conventions with specific regard to skills 1 – 7 as listed in the second bullet under Trait 3, Score Point 3 above - contains severe and frequent errors in mechanics and conventions that interfere with comprehension; overall, standard usage is at an unacceptable level for on-demand draft writing. OR - response is insufficient to demonstrate level of mastery over conventions and usage

*Because test-takers will be given only 45 minutes to complete Extended Response tasks, there is no expectation that a response should be completely free of conventions or usage errors to receive a score of 3.

Non-scorable Responses (Score of 0/Condition Codes)

Response exclusively contains text copied from source text(s) or prompt

Response shows no evidence that test-taker has read the prompt or is off-topic

Response is incomprehensible

Response is not in English

Response has not been attempted (blank)

Appendix IV: Webb's Depth of Knowledge Model (DOK) for ELA⁶

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
Requires students to recall, observe, question, or represent facts or simple skills or abilities. Requires only surface understanding of text often verbatim recall or slight paraphrasing. Use conventions of Standard English.	Requires processing beyond recall and observation. Requires both comprehension and subsequent processing of text. Involves ordering, classifying text as well as identifying patterns, relationships and main points. Connect ideas using simple organizational structures. Requires some scrutiny of text.	Requires students to go beyond text. Requires students to explain, generalize, and connect ideas. Involves inferencing, prediction, elaboration, and summary. Requires students to support positions using prior knowledge and to manipulate themes across passages. Students develop compositions with multiple paragraphs.	Requires extended higher order processing. Typically requires extended time to complete task, but time spent not on repetitive tasks. Involves taking information from one text/passage and applying this information to a new task. May require generating hypotheses and performing complex analyses and connections among texts.
Examples: • Support ideas by reference to specific details in text • Use dictionary to find meaning • Use punctuation marks correctly • Identify figurative language in passage • Identify correct spelling or meaning of words	Examples: • Use contextual clues to identify unfamiliar words • Predict logical outcome • Construct or edit compound or complex sentences • Identify and summarize main points • Apply knowledge of conventions of standard American English • Compose accurate summaries	Examples: • Determine effect of author's purpose on text elements • Summarize information from multiple sources • Critically analyze literature • Edit writing to produce logical progression • Compose focused, organized, coherent, purposeful prose	Examples: • Analyze and synthesize information from multiple sources • Examine and explain alternative perspectives across sources • Describe and illustrate common themes across a variety of texts • Create compositions that synthesize, analyze, and evaluate

⁶ Adapted from Webb (2002).

Appendix V: 2002 Series Essay Scoring Rubric for ELA

Dimension	Score Point				
		1	2	3	4
		Inadequate: Reader has difficulty identifying or following the writer's ideas	Marginal: Reader occasionally has difficulty understanding or following the writer's ideas	Adequate: Reader understands the writer's ideas	Effective: Reader understands and easily follows the writer's expression of ideas
	Response to the Prompt	Attempts to address prompt but with little or no success in establishing a focus	Addresses the prompt, though the focus may shift	Uses the writing prompt to establish a main idea	Presents a clearly focused main idea that addresses the prompt
	Organization	Fails to organize ideas	Shows some evidence of an organizational plan	Uses an identifiable organizational plan	Establishes a clear and logical organization
	Development and Details	Demonstrates little or no development; usually lacks details or examples or presents irrelevant information	Has some development but lacks specific details; may be limited to a listing, repetitions or generalizations	Has focused but occasionally uneven development; incorporates some specific detail	Achieves coherent development with specific and relevant details and examples
	Conventions of Edited American English	Exhibits minimal or no control of sentence structure and the conventions of EAE	Demonstrates Inconsistent control of sentence structure and the conventions of EAE	Generally controls sentence structure and the conventions of EAE	Consistently controls sentence structure and the conventions of EAE
	Word Choice	Exhibits weak and/or inappropriate words	Exhibits a narrow range of word choice, often including inappropriate selections	Exhibits appropriate word choice	Exhibits varied and precise word choice