Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment-Series IV (MCA-IV)

Draft Test Specifications for Reading

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Based on the 2020 Minnesota K–12 English Language Arts Standards, Commissioner Approved Draft

The information contained in this document should **not** be used as a curriculum guide.

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MCA Purpose Statement

To ensure that all students have access to high-quality content and instruction, the Minnesota K–12 Academic Standards outline statewide expectations for student learning in Minnesota K–12 public and charter schools. Student mastery of the standards is best measured through a combination of classroom, school, district and state assessment tools. The Reading MCA-Series IV (Reading MCA-IV) is a set of assessment tools designed at the state level to measure effective implementation of the 2020 Minnesota K– 12 English Language Arts (ELA) Standards.

Federal law (Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)) and state law (Minn. Stat. 120B.30 [2022]) require that public school students be assessed annually in reading in grades 3–8 and once in high school. The Minnesota Department of Education (MDE), in collaboration with a committee of Minnesota educators, has selected grade 10 for the high school assessment.

The primary purpose of the standards-based accountability assessments is to measure achievement on the Minnesota Academic Standards, and the MCAs are aligned to these standards. The MCAs are criterion-referenced assessments, which means they measure performance against a fixed set of criteria: the Minnesota Academic Standards. Summative, criterion-referenced assessments are used to determine mastery of concepts and skills defined in the standards. While criterion-referenced tests may provide information about the extent to which students have learned certain concepts, they alone do not illustrate the whole picture of what a student has learned. The MCAs provide one data point that should be considered in the context of additional evidence of student learning, such as student projects and district and classroom assessments. Visit Testing 1, 2, 3 (testing123.education.mn.gov > Assess > Classroom Assessments) for more resources about standards-aligned classroom assessments.

Test Specifications Purpose

The Reading MCA-IV Test Specifications document provides information on the assessment of the 2020 Minnesota K–12 ELA Standards on the Reading MCA. The specifications were developed in collaboration with Minnesota educators during Reading MCA Test Specification Committee advisory meetings and during public review. The specifications provide a summary blueprint for test construction, specifying the quantity of questions for each reporting category. This summary blueprint outlines the essential features of the test design to provide consistency and transparency across test forms for the life of the Reading MCA-IV.

Cognitive Complexity

On the Reading MCA, questions will require students to use levels of cognitive complexity based on Webb's Depth of Knowledge scale. Webb's DOK – Categories of Engagement[1] is a tool used to evaluate the cognitive engagement students use to interact with tasks used in assessment. Questions will assess a range of knowledge, skills and abilities and will reflect the cognitive complexity called for by the Minnesota K–12 Reading Standards. Cognitive complexity refers to the cognitive demand associated with an item. The level of cognitive demand focuses on the degree of processing (or depth of thinking) the student needs to apply concepts and skills on a particular item.

Category 1: Recall and Reproduction – This category requires the recall of information or the reproduction of a simple procedure or skill. Tasks involve reading text(s) with basic comprehension, receiving and reciting facts acquired by processing text(s), and recognizing text features within one or more texts. Very basic comprehension of a text gained from knowledge of vocabulary and explicit structure of the text is essential to this category. Tasks require only a very basic understanding of ideas presented in the text and often consist of verbatim recall from text, slight paraphrasing of specific details from the text, or simple understanding of a single word or phrase. Students who answer direct questions about features stated explicitly in the text are performing at this category.

Category 2: Skills and Concepts – This category requires the application of skills or the comprehension of concepts. Category 2 tasks involve cognition beyond the literal or verbatim association with one or more texts. This cognitive level requires the engagement of some mental processing beyond recalling or reproducing a response; it requires both comprehension and subsequent processing of text or portions of text. Inter-sentence analysis and inference is essential. Category 2 involves drawing meaning from text by using organizational structure, evidence and context; summarizing main ideas, character traits, plots, themes and figurative use of words; following cause-effect sequences and multiple ideas through a text; distinguishing among hypotheses and givens as well as differentiating fact from opinion; and explaining differences among genres (poetry, expository materials, fiction, etc.). Category 2 tasks may require use of specific information from the text to explain given events and ideas. In this category, reading concepts (e.g., making inferences or predictions) are necessary for purposeful reading. Multiple features of text are processed to gain a deeper understanding of text, such as by organizing in a time sequence, outlining, contrasting fact from opinion and using graphic aides. Deciphering main ideas supported by key details or drawing on details to describe a feature in a narrative are stressed. In general, Category 2 items require the application of the skills and concepts that are needed for Category 1 items; however, Category 2 activities involve closer understanding of text, possibly through paraphrasing.

Category 3: Strategic Thinking – This category requires the use of reasoning, planning and higher-order thinking skills. Tasks typically involve analyzing, evaluating or synthesizing information. Tasks require more demanding and thorough understanding of ideas in text. Essential skills for Category 3 items include conducting analysis of

[1] "WebbAlign Resources DOK Definitions." WebbAlign. Accessed May 8, 2023. https://www.webbalign.org/resources/dok-definitions,

text to make inferences about the author's purpose and use of textual features (e.g., literary devices to support and convey the main message); engaging in critical reading to attest to the credibility of the message, the internal logic and the implied values, attitudes and biases; and comparing features and meaning with other texts, considering the impact of the time period and other conditions when the text was written, and raising valid alternative hypotheses and conclusions to those presented in the text. Students may be encouraged to explain, generalize or connect ideas while applying reasoning. Students must be able to support more sophisticated thinking. Category 3 activities may involve abstract theme identification and inference across an entire passage or passages and with multiple paragraphs. Activities may also involve identifying more abstract connections between texts.

Test Structure

The Reading MCA-IV is an adaptive assessment, which means passages and associated questions are selected based on student performance on questions taken earlier in the assessment. The adaptive model provides an individualized assessment that best measures each student's proficiency while also including items that meet the summary blueprint.

Even though the test will adapt to each student's performance, the material presented will correspond to the summary blueprint. Although students are not presented with the same questions, scores are comparable because each assessment measures the same content and the same standards.

Table 1 presents the minimum and maximum target item count percentages by reporting categories for the operational online adaptive test and the paper accommodated test. The reporting categories are divided into the reading strands.

Table 1. MCA-IV Item Targets by Reporting Categories in the Reading Strand

Reporting Category	Description	Percent of Items per Reporting Category
Themes, Central Ideas, Details, and Vocabulary (Standards 4 & 8)	In this category, students are assessed on their ability to closely read and comprehend the content and language of an on-grade-level text, including making inferences and conclusions; understanding central ideas, themes and details; and summarizing.	35%–45%
Structure, Author's Perspective, Arguments, Relevancy, and Credibility (Standards 5, 6, 7, 9)	In this category, students are assessed on their ability to understand how an author's identity and perspective influence the content, meaning and style of a text as well as analyze a text's structure, sources, claims and argumentation.	55%–65%

For information on administration details, visit PearsonAccess Next (minnesota.pearsonaccessnext.com). For information on the full test development process, visit Testing 123 (Testing 123 > Assess > Statewide Assessments (under Test Development)).

Passages

The ELA standards are organized into three strands: Reading; Writing; and Listening, Speaking, Viewing, and Exchanging Ideas. The Reading MCA-IV assesses the Reading strand, which addresses comprehension and use of information from a wide variety of sources through reading, listening and viewing. Passages are selected to allow students to engage with a wide variety of texts with an inclusive and diverse representation of perspectives, identities and cultures like and unlike their own.

Range of Text Types and Genres

- Students apply what they have learned from the reading standards to a wide variety of text types selected from a broad range of cultures and historical periods. Text types presented are both literary and informational. Literary nonfiction will be classified as either literary text or informational text based on the majority of content in each excerpt selected for use. The range of genres within the text types that may appear on the Reading MCA-IV is shown below.
- Adventure stories, folktales, legends, fables, fantasy, realistic fiction, historical fiction, mysteries, myths, science fiction, allegories, parodies, satire, graphic novels
- Short one-act plays, scenes from multi-act plays, stand-alone scenes, monologues, soliloquies

- Rhymed poems, free verse poems, narrative poems, lyrical poems, sonnets, odes, ballads, excerpts from epics
- Personal essays, speeches, opinion pieces, essays about art or literature, historical nonfiction, biographies, autobiographies, memoirs, journalism, exposition, argument
- Articles or excerpts from books on history, social studies, science, and the arts; technical texts, including directions, forms, information displayed in graphs, charts, or maps

Passage Selection

Several criteria are considered during the selection and development of passages for the Reading MCA-IV. Readability is the ease with which a reader can understand a written text. When determining readability and grade-level placement of passages, the Lexile text measure and Lexile range are used along with other readability formulas such as Flesch-Kincaid. Table 2 presents Lexile readability ranges by grade. Once grade placement has been made, a passage text complexity tool is used to specify whether the text is of low, moderate or high complexity within the grade level.

Table 2. MCA-IV Target Lexile Readability Ranges by Grade

Grade	Bottom Lexile Range	Middle Lexile Range	Top Lexile Range
3	300–445	450–790	795–860
4	450–765	770–980	985–1040
5	450–765	770–980	985–1040
6	770–950	955–1155	1160–1225
7	770–950	955–1155	1160–1225
8	770–950	955–1155	1160–1225
10	955–1075	1080–1305	1310–1400

Selections for a given grade should present a range of topics, themes, representations, genres and styles, with reading levels appropriate for the representative skills in a given grade. Passage length should vary within grade levels and will be appropriate to grade-level constraints.

Text sets will be included in the Reading MCA-IV. Text sets may include pairings that present one or more of the following features for comparison: authors, genres, themes, topics, literary elements, historical periods, opinions, etc. All benchmarks can be utilized for assessing single selections, and for comparing both selections, within a text set.

MCA-IV target word count ranges will be available in a future version of the Test Specifications draft.

The Reading MCA-IV Test Specifications will remain in draft form and be modified as needed to reflect lessons learned during test development and test construction until the first operational assessment of the MCA-IV in spring 2026.