



PARCC Assessment Blueprints and Test Specifications Frequently Asked Questions April 2013

1. What are assessment blueprints and test specifications?

Blueprints are a series of documents that together describe the content and structure of an assessment. These documents define the total number of tasks and/or items for any given assessment component, the standards measured, the item types, and the point values for each.

2. What are evidence statements and tables?

Evidence tables and evidence statements describe the knowledge and skills that an assessment item or a task elicits from students.

3. Why are the ELA/literacy and mathematics releases different in format?

There are essential differences in the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for English Language Arts/literacy (ELA/literacy) and for Mathematics and consequently in the format and design of the blueprints for the PARCC Assessments for ELA/literacy and mathematics.

One of the most essential differences in the contents from an assessment perspective is grounded in the integral relationship of the ELA/literacy CCSS to texts. One key blueprint difference then is the need for more specifications documents than in mathematics. These additional specifications ensure that test developers have clear guidelines around the selection of passages/texts for the ELA/literacy assessment, around the relationship of reading to writing, and on how to assemble passages/texts with questions together to form cogent performance-based tasks.

For mathematics, knowing which evidence statements are eligible for the performance-based assessment (PBA) and the end-of-year assessment (EOY) with accompanying content clarifications and limits is essential. Also essential in mathematics is to demonstrate the coherent nature of the standards. As such, some evidence statements include more than one standard.

4. What was the process used to develop the blueprints and test specifications? And will the blueprints and test specifications continue to be revised?

In spring 2010 and at the start of 2011, state content leaders met to discuss design considerations for the PARCC assessments. In spring 2011, PARCC contracted with two university research teams to develop prototype items and the initial blueprints for the PARCC assessments based on these design considerations. The Dana Center from the University of Texas, Austin developed baseline draft materials for the mathematics assessments, while the Institute for Learning (IFL) from the University of Pittsburgh did this work in ELA/literacy.

These beginning draft materials developed were revised in conjunction with staff from Achieve and Student Achievement Partners. State content and assessment leaders from the PARCC states then came back together to discuss and revise the materials. Several rounds of state review allowed for rough blueprints to be shared with ETS and Pearson, the two companies contracted to develop PARCC's items for the summative assessment. Working together, ETS and Pearson staff, staff from Achieve and Student Achievement Partners, and state content leaders made additional revisions to the blueprints prior to the start of item development. As item development proceeds, in the spirit of continuous improvement, these same four groups will work together to apply needed changes to the blueprints.

5. Did higher education have a role in developing the blueprints and test specifications?

Yes! All state content work (initial design meetings and the many review teams) included higher education faculty. Additionally, the teams from the Dana Center and from IFL contained faculty from institutions of higher education.

6. Did classroom teachers have a role in developing the blueprints and test specifications?

Yes! All state content work (initial design meetings and the many review teams) included classroom teachers. Additionally, the teams from the Dana Center and from IFL contained classroom teachers from across the PARCC states.

7. How do the blueprints and test specifications relate to PARCC's reporting categories?

The blueprints identify the number of score points that will be possible for students to earn on the PARCC assessments overall and broken down into various categories. For example, in ELA/Literacy, the blueprints indicate the number of score points for the test overall, for the sub-claims of reading and writing, and for various categories within the sub-claims. For mathematics a table is provided that indicates for each assessment component (PBA and EOY) and by grade level, the number of items by item type, as well as the number of points associated with each item. While the categories used to report the results of PARCC assessments are still under discussion, they will include the sub-claims as well as certain categories within the sub-claims. Metrics used for reporting categories will include performance level scores and scaled scores for ELA/Literacy, and Mathematics, scaled scores for reading and writing, and raw scores (e.g., percent of points in the category earned) for other categories.

8. There is so much material here to process. As a classroom teacher, do I really need to read and understand all of these materials for my students to be successful on the PARCC assessments?

The most important materials a teacher needs to help students prepare for the PARCC assessments are the CCSS themselves. The materials provided here may be useful in demystifying the design of the assessments. To help determine which materials will be most useful to you as a classroom teacher, listen to the [narrated PowerPoint overviews in ELA/literacy and mathematics](#) of the

materials released. These overviews should give you an understanding of what is included in the materials, so you can choose which materials are most relevant for the work you are doing.

9. Should I use these materials to design my own classroom tests and assessments?

You may find the PARCC evidence statements useful as a tool to guide questions for classroom tests and assessments. The released ELA/literacy rubrics may guide thinking about classroom rubric use and design. The ELA/literacy passage selection guidelines and worksheets should also be helpful tools to guide text selection for classroom instruction and assessments. For mathematics, the evidence tables show how the content and the mathematical practices go hand-in-hand and should not be thought of as separate standards. Many of the other materials released help one understand the intricacies of the PARCC assessment design, but they may be less useful for design of classroom-based tests and assessments.