



## Text Dependent Analysis: The Need for a Shift in Instruction and Curriculum

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### Introduction

Many states have incorporated a *new* item type, *Text Dependent Analysis* (TDA), on their state test beginning in grade 3 (e.g., Nebraska State Accountability). This item expects students to read complex text(s), either literary or informational, and provide a critical response by drawing evidence from text(s) to “support analysis, reflection, and research” (CCSS) using effective communication skills to write an essay in response to a prompt. In their response, students need to make inferences about the author’s meaning, using both explicit and implicit evidence in order to support an overall analysis of the literary and informational elements or structure found within the text. Text dependent analysis prompts move beyond the general reading comprehension expectations associated with short-answer and multiple choice items previously found on state tests. TDA prompts ask students to explain and elaborate on the interaction of literary and informational elements, and/or structure, such as how the *theme* is revealed through the *characters*. These prompts require much more than simply locating text evidence to support a response to a question. They necessitate an understanding of the author’s craft, choices, and presence in the text as it relates to the specified elements identified or alluded to in the prompt. The literary and literary nonfiction elements and text structure, as reflected in the content standards associated with each grade level, are embedded within a text dependent analysis prompt.

Due to its cognitive complexity, text dependent analysis is viewed by state departments of education as a college and career ready item on their state test, but there is a lack of clarity by educators as to what constitutes “college and career readiness” and how an analytic response to text is a key component of this readiness pathway. This paper clarifies the characteristics of a text dependent analysis prompt, whether for the state assessment or as expected by the Common Core State Standards, describes the literacy research which supports the use of a text dependent analysis prompt as necessary for deeper learning, explains what is meant by college and career readiness and how an analytic response to text supports this readiness, and highlights some implications of text dependent analysis for instructional and curriculum decision-making.



## Characteristics of a Text Dependent Analysis Prompt

Prior to the introduction of the text dependent analysis prompt on some state tests, students in grades 3-8 responded to open-ended reading comprehension questions. Typically, these open-ended questions expected students to read a text and demonstrate basic understandings by responding to questions such as those identified in Table 1 below.

| <b>Reading Comprehension Skill</b>                             | <b>Sample Question</b>   |
|--|--|
| Understand the main ideas within a passage                     | <i>The passage is mainly about...</i>  |
| Understand supporting details within a text                    | <i>The author writes... what statement best supports this claim?</i>                                 |
| Understand the meaning of a word (or phrase) within a sentence | <i>What is the meaning for the word (phrase)... in the sentence?</i>                                 |
| Understand explicit information from the text                  | <i>Identify two challenges that the main character encountered...</i>                                |
| Infer information from the text                                | <i>State the theme or the author's message. Provide text evidence to support this theme/message.</i> |

Table 1. Basic understanding of a text

For open-ended reading comprehension questions, students were able to respond through either a paragraph with embedded evidence or by providing the evidence in a bulleted list. The scoring guidelines expected students to respond with complete knowledge of understanding that includes examples from the passage.

A text dependent analysis prompt expects students to be able to demonstrate three main skills: 1) reading comprehension; 2) analysis of an author's use of literary devices (elements), text structure, or other choices made by the author; and 3) a well-written essay to communicate this understanding. These underlying components (comprehension, analysis, essay writing) are measured using scoring guidelines which provide students with a single score (e.g., Pennsylvania System of School Accountability – PSSA – TDA Scoring Guidelines) or an analytic score for analysis of text, use of evidence, and writing skills (e.g., Nebraska State Accountability – NeSA – TDA Scoring Guidelines) relative to how they are able to demonstrate these underlying components in a coherent and cohesive manner. The scoring guidelines expect students to



demonstrate “analytic understanding of the text(s),” to provide an “analysis of explicit and implicit meanings from the text(s),” and to provide “direct reference to the text(s) using relevant details, examples, quotes, facts, and/or definitions,” as well as demonstrate an appropriate organizational structure, including an introduction with a controlling idea, use of precise and domain-specific vocabulary, and appropriate use of English language conventions ( PSSA-TDA Scoring Guidelines, 2014).

The demonstration of analysis is the most highly regarded component of this item as it is not developed through writing in any other aspect of the state test; however, analysis is also the most elusive instructional aspect for many teachers. Marchetti and O’Dell (2018) defined analysis as “a piece of writing that explores a text” and more broadly, identified that “analysis is a breaking up, a loosening, releasing” (p. 13). They further described analysis as exploring the nuances, tiny details, and contradictions within a text. This definition further contributes to the instructional elusiveness of understanding analysis. The Merriam-Webster dictionary (2018) defined analysis as “a detailed examination of anything complex in order to understand its nature or to determine its essential features.” More specifically for the purposes of the text dependent analysis prompt, analysis is defined as the

*“detailed examination of the elements or structure of text, by breaking it into its component parts to uncover interrelationships in order to draw a conclusion”*

(Thompson & Lyons, 2017, p. 4).

To successfully analyze text, students need to understand that authors make specific choices about literary and nonliterary elements, their craft and style, and text structures for particular reasons. Text dependent analysis responses should point out the author’s specific choices, describe “how” and “why” the author made those choices and for what particular reasons, to explain their significance and/or impact, then draw a conclusion about the author’s meaning or message. The response to a text dependent analysis prompt is intended to allow students to demonstrate an analytic understanding of the expectations identified in the reading standards through their writing.

### Literacy Research Supporting the Text Dependent Analysis Prompt

An analytic response to text has been emphasized throughout the history of education and is not a new requirement from the Common Core State Standards. In the mid-1900’s the New Criticism movement brought text analysis to the forefront by emphasizing that literature or text



functioned as a self-contained source of meaning. In other words, the meaning of the text was determined solely through the words on the page. Louise Rosenblatt (1988, 2004) however, suggested that as individuals read, they transact with the text, and she noted that reading is a “dynamic situation in which the meaning does not reside in the text,” but rather occurs when the reader brings the knowledge and experiences to the situation (2004, p. 5). The interpretation or analysis of a text stresses the underlying ideas that link the concepts or meaning of the text that are most in agreement with the author’s probable intent. Analyzing text does not claim that there is a single correct meaning of the text, but the response must follow from and be guided by the text, and adhere to generally agreed upon interpretations.

Judith Langer (1991, p. 10; 1994, p. 8) recognized that readers construct meaning through varied stances as they clarify ideas and use their “text understandings to reflect on their own lives, on the lives of others, or on human situations and conditions in general.” She described that the way we think about text depends on our purposes and expectations for reading it. As readers interact with text, interpretations unfold and understandings shift. Langer identified these shifting understandings as “envisionments” and described that the unfolding and shifting understandings occur based upon the different stance used. She has identified four stances in the process of making meaning of text. The stances are outlined in Table 2 below:

| Stances   | Strategies  |
|---|---|
| <i>Being out and Stepping into an Envisionment</i><br><br>This stance has also been referred to as <i>Step In</i> or <i>Global Stance</i>         | Readers form tentative questions and associations in an attempt to build text understanding. They consider: What is the big picture or main idea of the text?   |
| <i>Being in and Moving Through Envisionment</i><br><br>This stance has also been referred to as <i>Move Through</i> or <i>Interpretive Stance</i> | Readers explore possibilities and develop deeper understandings of words and structures, themes and characters, events and conflicts to contribute to an evolving interpretation of the entire text. They consider: How does the information in the text connect to various parts of the same text, to other texts, and to what I already know? |
| <i>Stepping Back and Rethinking What One Knows</i>  | Readers use their growing understandings to rethink previously held ideas, beliefs, or feelings. They consider: What prior  |



|   |   |
|---|---|
| This stance has also been referred to as <i>Step Out and Rethink</i> or <i>Personal Stance</i>  | knowledge do I have about this topic? How do I relate to this topic?  |
| <i>Stepping Out and Objectifying the Experience</i><br>This stance has also been referred to as <i>Step Out and Inspect</i> or <i>Critical Stance</i> | Readers distance themselves from the text for the purposes of analysis, evaluation, or critical examination. They consider: What is the author's style? |

Table 2. Stances of reading

Each of the stances identified by Langer anticipates a reader's interaction with a text, similar to Rosenblatt's transactional theory, when responding to text.

Recognizing the historical research of how individuals interact with text allows for a greater understanding of what is required in an analytic response to text, and specifically, a text dependent analysis prompt. Students must be able to demonstrate basic comprehension of the text (global stance), make inferences throughout the text using the information or evidence found in the text (interpretive stance), generalize their understandings through their own knowledge of the topic or text content (personal stance) in order to “expand their breadth of understanding, leaving room for alternative interpretations, changing points of view, complex characterizations, and unresolved questions” (Langer, 1994, p. 3), and by analyzing the topic, viewpoints, language, and other choices made by the author (critical stance). These expectations illustrate two of the underlying components of a text dependent analysis prompt, reading comprehension and analysis. In order to construct meaning from the text, students need to engage in collaborative interchanges and dialogue. Rosenblatt (1988) identified that “speech is a vital ingredient” in student achievement as they gain insight into their own reading and writing processes (p. 13). She further described that group interchanges, both between teacher and students and among students, about texts can develop insights and varied interpretations about the author's meaning, and thus lead students toward the development of a critical or analytic stance. Lave and Wenger (1991) further developed the need for individuals to learn through participation in “social practice” in order to “perform new tasks and to master new understandings” (p. 53). The concept of learning through social practice that requires participation, rather than independently making meaning, is necessary for students to be able to develop their ability to analyze.

A third underlying component of a text dependent analysis prompt is a well-written essay response. Engaging in the writing process moves students from the conversation during the close reading of text to communicating ideas in writing for specific readers. As Rosenblatt (1988) explained, “writing can become a learning process, a process of discovery” (p. 9). She further



explained that as writing about ideas occur, the writer determines how the information makes sense with preceding information ensuring that the intended meaning or purpose is communicated. In other words, the transactional relationship between the writer and what is being written deepens their understanding of what was read. Langer and Applebee (1987) explained that newer and better understandings of textual materials are likely to occur when students write in extended ways involving analysis or interpretation.

In the report, *Writing to Read* (2010), Graham and Hebert provided a meta-analysis of the research in support of writing as a means of improving reading comprehension and students' ability to analyze text. Their overall findings indicated that "writing about text enhances youngsters' comprehension of it. Teaching students how to write strengthens their comprehension, fluency, and word skills. Increasing how much students write improves how well they read" (p. 23). More specifically and with respect to a text dependent analysis prompt, they found that extended responses such as analyzing and interpreting text, consistently produced a positive impact on reading comprehension. This impact applied broadly to students in grades 2-12 and included positive effects in science and social studies, as well as English. A positive effect was also found for lower-achieving students. Furthermore, extended writing about what is read was found to be more effective than "just reading [the text], reading and rereading it, reading and studying it, reading and discussing it, and receiving reading instruction" (p. 14). These findings illustrate the importance of several aspects of a text dependent analysis prompt, including the combination of reading and writing as an English language arts expectation, the need for students to write about what they read, and the power of having students analyze text.

### Text Dependent Analysis as a Support for College and Career Readiness

The discussion above describes the characteristics and a brief historical review of an analytic response to text and consequently a text dependent analysis prompt. However, the question remains for many educators as to how TDA supports college and career readiness. This section provides a discussion of the definition of college and career readiness and draws a direct connection between the definition and the expectations underlying an analytic response to text.

The Common Core State Standards were created to support college and career readiness (CCSS Initiative, 2009). However, since their release as well as individual state standards, there has been much debate by school leaders and various education organizations across the country regarding the meaning of college and career readiness. There does not appear to be a common definition of what college and career readiness means for states and districts. However, there are some expectations related to English language arts and the cognitive strategies expected from the





standards that help to explain why text dependent analysis prompts and even more broadly, analysis, is a college-and-career-ready expectation.

David Conley (2007) described college and career readiness as not only mastering core content, but also the development of key cognitive strategies, which is a range of cognitive and metacognitive capabilities including analysis, interpretation, precision and accuracy, problem solving, and reasoning. He further identifies that “writing may be by far the single academic skill most closely associated with college success” along with the “big ideas” of the content area (p. 5).

Bragg and Taylor (2014) expanded Conley’s four dimensions of viewing this readiness which includes: 1) *key cognitive strategies* such as generating hypotheses and problem solving, analyzing and evaluating information and conflicting perspectives, and monitoring and confirming the accuracy of one’s work; 2) *key content knowledge* including how students interact with knowledge, how they perceive knowledge, and how they engage in learning; 3) *key learning skills* and techniques such as self-efficacy, motivation, collaborative learning; and 4) *key transition knowledge and skills*, specifically the information necessary to navigate the essentials needed for college and careers.

The National Center on Education and the Economy (2013) identified that students who are college and career ready are able to read complex texts and are able to make sense of complex and/or conflicting ideas. Students must be able to move beyond simple retrieval tasks in which the reader is expected to simply find information and make basic inferences or interpretations, but rather engage in analytic tasks that “require the reader to reflect on and evaluate what they have read” (p. 8).

Achieve (2013) identified college and career readiness as depending on “more than knowledge and skills in English and math but these core disciplines undergird other academic and technical courses and are considered essential by employers and colleges alike” (p. 1). The expectation that students have a grounded education in English language arts knowledge and skills is viewed as necessary for any postsecondary experience, whether job training or college. This includes content knowledge in reading, writing communications, and critical thinking.

Based on the definitions provided above along with the expectations of a text dependent analysis prompt and the iterative nature of reading and writing, it seems fundamental that an analytic response to text supports college and career expectations. An analytic response to text can be viewed as supporting aspects of the dimensions of college and career readiness. Instructional practice provided for a successful response to a text dependent analysis prompt engages students in a deep and close reading of complex texts. During these close reading



lessons students are provided opportunities to read and reread sections of the text for specific purposes which are driven by the expectations of a text dependent analysis prompt. Students participate in collaborative discussions where they orally identify the literary elements used by the author, describe what they notice about the author’s craft utilizing the content learned throughout their instruction, and make inferences about the author’s intended meaning. When students engage in these different aspects of close reading, they are poised to demonstrate an analysis of the text and more intentionally places them on the pathway to college and career readiness.

### Unpacking a Text Dependent Analysis Prompt

In general, a prompt or question that expects students to analyze text can be written in a variety of ways. On the PSSA, for example, the prompt is generally comprised of three statements identified in Figure 1 below:

**Statement 1:** Identifies or leads students to the reading element(s) they are expected to analyze,

**Statement 2:** The information describing the task, and

**Statement 3:** A clear expectation to use evidence from the text to support the analysis.

Figure 1. Anatomy of a TDA Prompt (Thompson, 2017)

Text dependent analysis prompts, whether for classroom instruction, classroom-based assessments, or state tests, expect students to address all parts of the task, thereby demonstrating an analytic understanding of the text(s). Figure 2 below, is an example of a classroom-based instructional prompt, which is clearly different than the expectations of an open-ended reading comprehension question previously described. The first sentence of the prompt states two reading or literary elements (characters and theme) that the author has chosen to develop the text. The second statement informs the student of the specific task which includes writing an essay, analyzing the interrelationship of the two reading elements (how the characters thoughts, words, and actions develop the theme of trust), and the third statement reminds students to support their analysis with text evidence.

*Authors use characters to develop a theme. Write an essay analyzing how the thoughts, words, and actions of Mrs. Jones and Roger develop the theme of trust. Use evidence from the text to support your analysis.*

*(Developed using the text, Thank You M’Am, by Langston Hughes, 1958)*





Figure 2. Sample classroom-based instructional TDA prompt

Throughout the course of instruction, the teacher should begin the gradual release of prescribing the explicit literary choices made by an author that students are expected to analyze. Complex texts have multiple reading elements and/or structures that are interrelated. As students are taught the reading elements and structures, and how to demonstrate their interrelationships, students should begin to independently notice and elaborate upon their connectedness and how they impact the meaning of the whole text.

Two examples of released state test items can be found below in Figure 3 and Figure 4.

*The passage “Paranka’s Dumplings” focuses on two cooks with different styles who work in the same kitchen. Write an essay analyzing the significance of Paranka’s and Olya’s different approaches to preparing dumplings. Use evidence from the passage to support your response.*

*(PSSA Grade 6 English Language Arts Item and Scoring Sampler—September 2017)*

Figure 3. Sample PSSA TDA prompt

*In the last sentence of “Highway of Water,” the author claims the Panama Canal is a phenomenon. Analyze how the author supports this claim throughout the passage. Write a well-organized, structured response using specific evidence form the passage to support your answer.*

*(NeSA Grade 6 English Language Arts Item and Scoring Sampler—September 2015)*

Figure 4. Sample Nebraska State Accountability TDA prompt

In the prompt found in Figure 3 above, the first statement guides the students to one reading element, characterization, as noted in the reference to the “two cooks”. In order to demonstrate analysis, there must be two elements or structures. This prompt does not identify the second reading element, but rather expects the student to select a reading element or multiple reading elements that will relate to the significance of the characters’ approaches. In this case, the significance could refer to the author’s message, theme, or plot, such as the turning point or conflict. In Figure 4, the first statement guides students to the claim made by the author about the Panama Canal. The prompt, similar to the one found on the PSSA, does not identify the second element, but expects students to draw from the literary and nonliterary elements in which they have been instructed on throughout the school year which would support the claim. The second element may be related to the setting or significance of individuals.



These examples illustrate several implications for reading comprehension and analysis, which includes the instruction of various reading elements and opportunities for students to consider how to select an appropriate reading element that could demonstrate analysis in relation to the characters or author's claim.

Additionally, based on some text dependent analysis scoring guidelines, students are expected to:

- determine relevant and precise details from the text that support the reading elements;
- make inferences about the selected pieces of evidence and explain how it supports the meaning or importance of the reading element; and
- elaborate on the interrelationship between the text evidence, inferences, and the reading elements providing a generalization that expands upon the deeper meaning of the text.

These expectations are related to the reading and writing instruction that occurs in the classroom and are not intended to require the use of a student's background knowledge extraneous to the instruction of the standards and comprehension of complex text. There is no denying that a reader's interpretation of a whole text will be influenced by his or her prior knowledge and experiences. Therefore, various instructional strategies which assist students in comprehending texts, such as text connections (text-to-text, text-to-self, text-to-world), use of organizers (story maps, character maps, cause-effect), or questioning strategies (Question-Answer-Relationship, question types: *Right There*, *Think and Search*, *Author and You*, and *On Your Own*) are still appropriate. However, these instructional strategies address only one underlying component of a text dependent analysis prompt – reading comprehension.

### Determining the focus of analysis in a text

Just as each text used for a reading comprehension lesson differs in the focus of meaning, strategies, or skills that are taught to students, each text offers different opportunities for demonstrating the analysis of reading elements or text structure. Although text dependent analysis prompts are often structured in a similar manner, the analysis expectations differ and should depend upon the text being used. To allow students to analyze, complex texts need to be chosen in order to allow for a detailed examination of the nuances and meaning of the author's choices to occur. If there is very little for the reader to uncover, examine, and explore for interrelationships between and among concepts, the text is likely not complex enough to support an analysis.

When planning for instruction, teachers often develop units and lessons considering a backward design process in which the standards and/or curriculum indicators are selected in



advance of choosing materials and resources. This practice is still necessary for effective instruction; however, it is critical that there is clarity as to which reading elements are significant within a text chosen for analysis. For example, in Figure 5 below, the excerpt from *Uncle Timothy's Ships* by Summer Woodford (1993) speaks to the characterization of Uncle Timothy, the symbolism of the ships, the figurative language that the author has chosen, and the mood of the story. This text would not appropriately fit into a unit in which the focus is on the setting or the author's craft of exaggeration, humor, or sarcasm. And although there may be multiple possible reading elements that could be analyzed from this text, the selection of the literary elements for the text dependent analysis prompt must have been previously taught in order for students to successfully demonstrate analysis. Specifically, if the mood of the story is expected to be analyzed, whether it is identified in the prompt or a possible choice for students to select for the analysis, students should have had access and opportunity to learn the reading element of mood through multiple texts prior to the analysis expectation.

“Those boats are restless.” I watched Uncle Timothy as his eyes rested on the glistening boats tied to the docks.

“Boats can't be restless,” I countered. “It's just the waves making them rock today.”

Uncle Timothy grasped a smooth and faultless stone in his hand and threw it forcefully into the water, “They're restless,”

I was silent.

“Look at them—all tied up,” he went on, his burly voice skimming the waves. “They want to be free. Free on the water. Free as the wind. Forever.”

I studied the dirt smudge on my shoe intently before replying, “I don't understand.”

Uncle Timothy looked at me then but didn't smile. He put his hand on my shoulder and let it rest there.

“Come back with me. I've been wanting to show you something.”

Uncle Timothy's house had character. A plain log cabin set atop a crumbling hill over the sea. That was all. It had character. His door squeaked rustily and without apology, revealing the essence of the man I so much admired. Just a couch at the window, its tasseled pillows tossed to one side. A rocker, forlornly rocking in the sympathetic wind. And the glass-bottle ships sitting proudly on the mantle—the only objects in the house that were free of dust.

“I love them,” he said quietly. He walked toward them, then stood there, his eyes gleaming in the vivid darkness—I could see that plainly. I drew closer, close enough to see the intricate layout of the ships inside the bottles. They were so old! I could tell by the yellow, gnawing at their framework. Yet so timeless. Trapped and still, forever in a bottle.

“They are . . .” Uncle Timothy paused and then said, “what I am. They are trapped. They haven't tasted freedom.”

Figure 5. Excerpt from *Uncle Timothy's Ships* by Summer Woodford (1993)



The development of a text dependent analysis prompt, which includes the determination of the expected reading elements to be analyzed, requires the teacher to: a) select a complex text, considering both the qualitative and quantitative complexity aspects of it; b) read the text in advance to support planning for instruction; c) annotate the text highlighting the reading elements or text structure that stands out; and d) identify evidence from the text that would support the analysis of those reading elements. Although authors may use various devices to communicate their message or to showcase a character, there must be enough evidence within the text for the student to use to demonstrate analysis and ultimately draw a conclusion and provide a generalization about the author’s meaning or message about the entire text.

### Teaching students to analyze

Teaching analysis requires providing students with the tools to draw from a knowledge base of what authors do when writing and to use that lens to make meaning of why authors made specific choices and how those choices impact the text as a whole. An important strategy for assisting students with analysis is through the use of multiple texts while focusing on the same reading element (e.g., characterization, symbolism, irony). This allows students to read comparatively and ask “why” one author used figurative language and why another author used imagery to convey a message or theme, for example. Using a reading program which jumps from one skill or reading element to another without deeply comparing and discussing causes a deficit in students’ ability to use this knowledge when they are expected to independently read a text and demonstrate analysis. Additionally, students need opportunities to discuss the texts they are reading with others. Individuals make meaning of new information through social interactions with adults and peers (Rosenblatt, 1988; Lave & Wenger, 1991), yet often information is simply given to students with the expectation that they understand and can replicate it with a different text. David Bleich, as quoted in Probst (2004), stated:

The practice of formulating [literature] response statements is a means for making a language experience (hearing, speaking, reading, or writing) available for conversion into knowledge. A response can acquire meaning only in the context of a predecided community (two or more people) interest in knowledge.

Close reading as a strategy for engaging students in analysis encourages collaborative discussions in which student thinking is made visible, allowing for students and teachers to be able consider the strength of the evidence and for students to formulate insights, ideas, and generalizations in a non-evaluative situation. Close reading has been defined as “reading to uncover layers of meaning that lead to deep comprehension” (Boyles, 2013, p. 4). More specifically the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC, 2011, p. 7) clarified this definition as:



*Close, analytic reading stresses engaging with a text of sufficient complexity directly and examining meaning thoroughly and methodically, encouraging students to read and reread deliberately. Directing student attention on the text itself empowers students to understand the central ideas and key supporting details. It also enables students to reflect on the meaning of individual words and sentences; the order in which the sentences unfold; and the development of ideas over the course of the text, which ultimately leads students to arrive at an understanding of the text as a whole.*

Text dependent analysis is a study of the text, requiring multiple readings to consider the author’s choices, to make inferences about these choices, to construct meaning and to generalize these inferences. Close reading is an ideal instructional vehicle for teaching analysis.

Responses to text dependent analysis prompts require the ability to make inferences prior to analyzing. There is a fine distinction between these two concepts and they are often confused. Inferences require students to collect evidence about a part or detail of the text and to draw their own conclusion about these details. When inferencing, students look for logical relationships between words and/or events or they seek to make a connection between events by filling in missing information. In other words, inferencing requires a “causal chain of underlying conceptualizations” (Trabasso, 1981, p. 3). The inferences that readers make allow for establishing an understanding of vocabulary, the context of the events, and ultimately for establishing a framework for interpretation and analysis. For example, in Figure 6 below, students would make an inference about the causal relationship between the two events:

John missed the bus.

He knew he would have to walk to school.

One inference could be that John missed the bus because he knew he would have to walk to school.

A second inference could be that John missed the bus so he had to walk to school.

Figure 6. Example of an inference (Trabasso, 1981)

Once students make inferences during the reading of a text, they are able to make predictions about characters’ actions, thoughts, feelings, and motivations, and about the author’s purpose for using figurative language, symbolism, or other literary choices made by the author. These inferences and predictions based on the evidence in the text will guide students to an analysis. Teaching students to make inferences leading to analysis requires posing questions



during close reading lessons which focus on the *how* and *why* rather than literal comprehension questions such as *what*, *who*, and *when*. There is no set number of questions that should be posed during the reading of a text or number of inferences that students need to make in order to successfully analyze a text. These decisions should be based upon the experiences of the students as well as the complexity of the text. Making inferences throughout the reading of a text is a necessary bridge between basic comprehension and analysis.

The goal of analysis is not simply to uncover parts within the whole, but to understand the connection of the parts to each other and as a whole. Once the parts are identified, analysis then seeks to determine how those parts are related by recognizing the relationship and patterns between them. In the analysis, the whole is seen as greater than the sum of its parts, and requires drawing a conclusion and generalizing the meaning of the text.

### Recognizing analysis in student writing

Locating the *analysis* in a response to a text dependent analysis prompt requires an understanding of what students are expected to demonstrate, as described in the sections above, as well as what is expected in their explanation. Analysis requires explanation and elaboration about how the provided text evidence supports the inferences, demonstrates an understanding of the connection between the reading elements or structure of the text, and demonstrates a deeper understanding of the entire text based on the patterns identified through the author's choices. The evidence provided needs to be accurate and precise rather than the copying of large sections of text with the assumption that it reveals how the pieces fit together. Selected evidence can be in the form of direct quotes or paraphrasing. The quotes should be brief, thoughtfully introduced and integrated within the response. Paraphrasing is also acceptable especially when specific details are needed rather than the actual words from the text. Whether quotes and/or paraphrasing are used, the analysis requires that students explain how the selected evidence supports the ideas about the reading elements, and how it confirms the generalizations made about the whole text.

### Implications of a Text Dependent Analysis Prompt on Teaching and Curriculum

Providing instruction is necessary for students to be successful in reading comprehension, analysis, and writing, but the need for improving literacy instruction is not new. There have been numerous reports and studies over the past two decades which focused on the need for high quality reading instruction and on preventing reading difficulties. The administration of a text dependent analysis prompt on a state test is not a panacea for improving students' literacy and





making them college-and-career ready, but it can have positive implications for curriculum and instruction if implemented thoughtfully by schools and districts.

### Curricular design

Unfortunately, even with the definitions of analysis, many teachers lack clarity as to what is expected from an analysis prompt, how to determine what should be analyzed in a given text, how to teach students to analyze, including the difference between making an inference and analyzing, and how to recognize analysis in student writing. To further complicate this lack of understanding, many districts and teachers are reliant upon reading anthologies to guide their curriculum and instruction, which typically do not systematically address the skill of analysis. Reading series or anthologies tend to focus primarily on comprehension, including strategies such as rereading and visualization, and on the teaching of reading elements, which are often identified as skills, such as author's point of view, main idea and key details, characters, setting, and plot. Teaching these strategies and skills are all necessary aspects of analysis, and consequently to responding to a text dependent analysis prompt; however, they are not sufficient. A reading series may also provide some guidance for teachers related to analysis when students are asked to write about text in response to questions such as, *How does the author help you understand how [the character] changes from the beginning of the story to the end?* Teachers are expected to ask students how the author shows a character's development, what the evidence tells about the character, and why it is important. These are appropriate questions when analyzing, but they are not the main focus of the reading lessons, nor are the questions always identified as analysis. Additionally, there is often no support to teachers regarding the expectations for student responses to these questions or samples of proficient student work. This leaves teachers without clear direction around what is expected in response to an analysis prompt. Furthermore, the expectations of a text dependent analysis prompt found on a state test may not coincide with the expectations developed by the publishers of the reading series, as they are not specific to any one state.

Teaching reading and writing is complex and unfortunately many school and district leaders purchase reading programs with the hopes that such programs will ensure that students are taught the critical strategies and skills necessary for effective reading, including phonemic awareness, decoding/word attack, reading fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. These reading series and programs should be carefully reviewed to identify where and how often students are provided the opportunity to analyze text and to write in response to an analysis prompt. In addition, curriculum directors, leaders, and teachers must ensure that there is a systematic plan for purposefully embedding the components of a text dependent analysis prompt throughout the reading units. This is not a simple task. When something is added into a unit, such as an





instructional text dependent analysis prompt and a close reading lesson that leads students to analyze the expected reading elements, it means something must come out of the unit. This requires educators to be able to develop a well-designed replacement unit (Marion and Shepard, 2010) that will address similar expectations (reading strategies and skills) but provide for deeper learning of these expectations by incorporating analysis. These replacement units should provide “coherently developed instructional tasks, sample formative questions for teachers to ask or things to look for in student work to get at key conceptual understandings and would serve as a basis for interim performance tasks and as a context for summative assessment” (p. 3).

The development of replacement units requires access to student texts that have the appropriate complexity necessary for analysis. Some texts within a reading program will lend themselves to analysis, but others will not. Consequently, educators will need to be able to locate appropriately complex text, considering both quantitative and qualitative aspects, obtain permission to use these texts, and to develop prompts and lessons without the aid of a teacher’s manual.

The implementation of text dependent analysis replacement units will help to eliminate surface-level practices such as *TDA Fridays* in which a text dependent analysis prompt is administered each week to allow students to practice writing in response to a prompt in preparation for the state test. Expecting students to deeply understand the underlying components and expectations of analysis by taking an assessment is futile and will not produce the anticipated results of better scores on the state test. Similar to any thoughtful instruction, teaching analysis requires direct instruction, modeling, scaffolding, and practice throughout the course of the year.

Additionally, these replacement units will also impact the unit assessments that are part of the reading program and are relied upon to gauge student progress. Educators will need to determine which aspects of unit assessments can be eliminated in order to include text dependent analysis in classroom-based summative assessments. As with any set of assessments, the student work should be analyzed for instructional decision-making and the scoring of the student work should be calibrated within and across grades.

### Analyzing student work

Student work analysis provides a window into how students construct meaning of key concepts and skills, and is often missing from the teaching-learning-assessment practice. By analyzing and interpreting student work, teachers can improve instructional decisions for individuals and groups of students, and ultimately impact student achievement. In addition, analyzing student work can provide a lens in which to determine the quality of the text dependent



analysis prompt that was administered and the unit in which the literary elements and analysis was taught. We know that a clear and cohesive unit is created when there is a progression of learning that advances knowledge and skills over time and assignments allow students to demonstrate these understandings with appropriate scaffolds and independence.

TDA scoring guidelines are intended to review student work in order to provide a single or analytic score relative to the expectations of a text dependent analysis prompt and their understanding of specific reading standards. This single score will not assist teachers with making a systematic diagnostic analysis that allows for determining instructional next steps. The shift from *scoring* student work to *diagnosing* student performance is critical for improving student performance. Text dependent analysis learning progressions (Thompson & Lyons, 2018) were developed as an instructional tool for teachers to illustrate the pathway in which students demonstrate their ability to integrate reading comprehension and analysis through a written essay. The TDA Learning Progressions are structured in grade spans (3-5 and 6-8) with 4 levels, *Beginning, Emerging, Developing, and Meeting*. The levels describe the typical path seen in student responses as they move toward demonstrating more sophisticated understanding. Although there are differences in student abilities between grades 3-5 and grades 6-8, the paths toward success are similar enough to negate the need for grade-specific TDA Learning Progressions. The levels described on the TDA Learning Progressions are not intended to coincide with the rubric scores, which provide a view of students' ability to demonstrate the criteria on TDA Scoring Guidelines. Rather, these levels provide the teacher with an indication of student strengths and needs based on what students can do at a specific point in time. The underlying components of a TDA (reading comprehension, analysis, essay writing) were used to establish the TDA Learning Progressions and are further delineated into more specific criteria, as outlined in Table 3 below, to provide the most information possible for the teacher.

| Underlying Component  | Criteria   |
|-----------------------|--|
| Reading Comprehension | <i>Focus on the prompt</i><br><i>Understanding of text</i>   |
| Analysis              | <i>Textual evidence</i><br><i>Inferences</i><br><i>Explanation and elaboration</i>                                 |
| Essay Writing         | <i>Organization</i><br><i>Word and sentence choice</i><br><i>Conventions of spelling, punctuation, and grammar</i> |

Table 3. TDA Learning Progression underlying components and criteria



## English language arts scheduling

Many schools and districts have created schedules in which reading and writing are taught separately, if writing is taught at all. Graham and Hebert (2010) reported that most elementary students spend only twenty minutes a day writing, assignments that involved writing more than a single paragraph occurred less than once a month in 50 percent of classes, high school writing instruction was infrequent, and students were rarely asked to complete writing assignments that involved analysis and interpretation. Given the results of the Writing to Read report (2010) and the implementation of text dependent analysis, educators and leaders will want to rethink in what way, how much, and how often writing is embedded into the instructional program. In order to appropriately teach text dependent analysis, reading and writing need to intersect within the school day and throughout the year. This intersection of reading and writing moves beyond just writing in response to a text dependent analysis prompt, but should also allow students to answer questions about text in writing and to respond to text by writing a personal reaction.

## Analysis writing in content areas

Analytic writing in response to text can and should extend beyond English language arts classes, but also be purposefully included in other content courses such as science and social studies. Graham and Hebert (2010) identified that writing instruction was “increasingly infrequent in social studies and science classes” and that “many teachers (60% of science teachers, for example) reported that they felt unprepared to teach writing” in their course (p. 24). Yet, there are multiple opportunities for analysis to occur in these content areas such as analyzing the results of science investigations or experiments or analyzing trends in current events. A text dependent analysis prompt as expected in English language arts is not appropriate in these classes; however, it is appropriate for a similar prompt to be developed that allows students to analyze the specific content that students are reading about and being taught in these classes. Given the shift that this would be for the majority of teachers, focused and high-quality professional development and coaching will be needed and should be provided within the different content areas.

## Conclusion

Although a text dependent analysis prompt may be an *item* on a state test, this item comes from a rich history of literary analysis and has direct implications for student success, as well as instructional programs, scheduling, teaching, and assessments. Some schools and districts have begun to make changes in these areas, but to ensure that the changes are systematic and are producing the expected results, they will want to evaluate their understanding of the expectations



of analysis and a text dependent analysis prompt, their plan of action, and their progress in these changes, thus far. Schools and districts will want to use these lenses as a means of creating a culture which embeds analysis into their day-to-day instructional and assessment practices.

In conjunction with the implications of a text dependent analysis prompt, the understanding that what gets measured is what gets taught is a concern with regard to writing expectations found in a response to text. Some states have removed or reduced the use of traditional writing prompts (narrative, informational, opinion/argumentative) on their state tests. This does not imply that direct writing instruction is no longer necessary; the modes of writing are still in the standards and should be taught. In fact, writing is a critical component for students to be college and career ready, and deeper and discerning thinkers. State standards should provide a framework for the development of local curriculum and assessment systems, and consequently what is taught in the classroom.



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