



Understanding Text-Dependent Analysis (TDA)

The Pennsylvania Department of Education incorporated a “new” item type, *Text Dependent Analysis* (TDA), on their state test, Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA), in 2014-2015 for grades 4-8. This item expects students to read complex text(s), either narrative or informational, and provide a critical response by drawing evidence from text(s) to “support analysis, reflection, and research” using effective communication skills to write an essay in response to a prompt. In their response, a student needs to make inferences about the author’s meaning, using both explicit and implicit evidence in order to support an overall analysis of the reading elements (literary and literary nonfiction) found within the text. Text dependent analysis prompts move beyond the general reading comprehension expectations associated with the open-ended items previously found on the PSSA in these grades. TDA prompts ask students to explain and elaborate on the interaction of reading elements, 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 reading elements identified or alluded to in the prompt. The reading or literary elements, as reflected in the content standards and assessment anchors and eligible content associated with each grade level, are embedded within a text dependent analysis prompt. Due to its cognitive complexity, text dependent analysis is viewed by the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) as a college and career ready item on their state test.

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 the PSSA scoring guidelines (2014) which provide students with a single score 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 language and domain-specific vocabulary", and appropriate use of English language conventions.

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 reading expectations identified in the reading standards through their writing.

The demonstration of analysis is the most highly regarded component of this item as it is not expected in any other aspect of the PSSA. We define analysis 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*". 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 reading expectations identified in the reading standards through their writing. 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.

As a result of the text dependent analysis item type, schools and districts will want to consider how reading and writing instruction needs to shift. Expecting students to deeply understand the underlying components and expectations of analysis will require teaching analysis through direct instruction, modeling, scaffolding, and practice throughout the course of the year. This instructional shift will also have implications for curriculum and instruction which will need to be considered.

