Strategies for Reasoning through Language Arts

Integrating Reading and Writing

The ability to read and comprehend a variety of texts and to write clearly using standard written English are strong predictors of both career and college readiness. These important skills of reading and writing are universally required in all professions. Reading opens the door to learning about math, history, science, literature, geography, technology, the workplace, and much, much more. Writing in the workplace is often viewed as a "threshold skill" for hiring and promotion.

The relationship among reading, writing, and understanding is clear. Students who are engaged in reading-to-learn will also be prepared to write well. In turn, students who are engaged in writing-to-learn will become more effective readers. Through both approaches, students will gain a better understanding of material and a greater ability to demonstrate that understanding.

"A writer is nothing without a reader; a reader is nothing without a writer."

Anthony Liccione

Overview of Reasoning through Language Arts Test

The 2014 GED® Reasoning through Language Arts test assessment targets focuses on three essential skill areas:

- The ability to read closely
- The ability to write clearly
- The ability to edit and understand the use of standard written English in context

Reasoning through Language Arts integrates the reading and writing process through technology-enhanced items that assess the ability to read closely and to edit materials in context, as well as an extended response which assesses the test-taker's ability to write clearly.

The reading comprehension component measures two overarching reading standards, Common Core State Standards 1 and 10:

- Determine the details of what is explicitly stated and make logical inferences or valid claims that square with textual evidence
- Read and respond to questions from a range of texts that are from upper levels of complexity, including texts that are from the career- and college-ready level of text complexity

The writing component measures two high-level standards, Common Core Anchor Standards 9 and 6, provide an overview of the writing tasks:

- Draw relevant and sufficient evidence from a literary or informational texts to support analysis and reflection
- Use technology to produce writing, demonstrating sufficient command of keyboarding skills

The language component measures the test-takers ability to demonstrate command of standard English through editing items in various authentic contexts.

Resources

For additional information on the Reasoning through Language Arts Assessment Targets, access the Assessment Guide for Educators, Chapter 2:

- GED Testing Service® website
http://www.gedtestingservice.com/educators/assessment-guide-for-educators

2014 Extended Response Scoring Rubric

The 2014 Extended Response Scoring Rubric looks very different. Candidate responses are scored based on three traits that are adapted from the Anchor Standards in the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts. The traits are:

- Trait 1: Creation of arguments and use of evidence
- Trait 2: Development of ideas and structure
- Trait 3: Clarity and command of standard English conventions

These three traits in the rubric explicitly identify the qualities of test-takers' writing that are to be evaluated. Each of the three dimensions is scored on a 0 through 2. A non-scorable response is possible if the test-taker's response:

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

In Trait 1, three main qualities in test-takers' writing samples are being assessed:

- how well the test-taker establishes an argument and uses information from given source texts to support that stance,
- how well the test-taker analyzes the issue and/or validity of the argument presented in the source texts, and
- how well the test-taker integrates evidence from the source text with his or her own ideas about the topic.

Trait 2 also has multiple dimensions that readers must weigh in order to determine a score. No one dimension is weighted more than any other. Rather, these dimensions are considered together to determine the score of an individual response.

Effective writing is based on:

- Ideas and the development or elaboration of these ideas
- Logical progression or flow of ideas
- Organization so that the reader can easily follow the message conveyed
- Word choice that is appropriate to high school writing
- Awareness of the audience and purpose of the writing

For many students, standard English usage can be confusing. There are so many rules and so many exceptions to those rules. However, it's important that a test-taker exhibit clarity in writing, as well as a command of standard English conventions.

Trait 3 includes such things as:

- the application of standard English conventions (e.g., homonyms/ contractions, subject-verb agreement, pronoun usage, placement of modifiers, capitalization, punctuation);
- effective sentence structure (e.g., variety, clarity, and fluency - correct subordination, avoidance of wordiness, run-on sentences, awkwardness, usage of transition words, appropriate usage for formal structure); and
- ensuring few or no errors (mechanics/conventions and comprehension based on errors).

Resources

For additional information on the Reasoning through Language Arts Scoring Rubric, access the Assessment Guide for Educators, Chapter 3:

- GED Testing Service® website
  http://www.gedtestingservice.com/educators/assessment-guide-for-educators

For additional information on how to score the extended response in Reasoning through Language Arts, access the following tools:

- An Extended Response Scoring Guide
  http://www.gedtestingservice.com/uploads/files/949aa6a0418791c4f3b962a4cd0c92f4.pdf
- Educator Scoring Tool for GED Ready™ Reasoning Through Language Arts (RLA) Extended Response
  http://www.gedtestingservice.com/uploads/files/219d8206deb202d6c32b35aa264ed2ad.pdf

Standards-Driven Curriculum

Standards provide adult educators with a starting point – a method for increasing awareness and understanding of the skills and knowledge that adult learners must have to be successful as they pursue postsecondary education and training and employment. With the development of the Common Core State Standards, a focus has been placed on what is most important to demonstrate college and career readiness.

The *College and Career Readiness (CCR) English Language Arts (ELA)/Literacy Standards* were designed to identify what content is most important and most relevant for adult learners as they continue to pursue their educational and career goals. Although standards do not tell individual schools or instructors in the classroom what they must teach, standards do provide "a consistent, clear understanding of what students are expected to learn, so teachers know what they need to do to help their students." Strong standards coupled with effective curriculum, strategies, and practices lead to increased student achievement.

The *College and Career Readiness (CCR) English Language Arts (ELA)/Literacy Standards* identify three key shifts: complexity, evidence, and knowledge.[13]

Shift 1 – Complexity: Regular practice with complex text and its academic language.

This shift focuses on the need for classrooms to:

- integrate the reading and comprehending of more complex text, including nonfiction
- insure that readability of text is at the appropriate level, such as high school level text for GED® preparatory programs
- focus on addressing academic vocabulary of students
- shift from how students read to the complexity of texts that are read

Shift 2 – Evidence: Reading, writing, and speaking grounded in evidence from text, both literary and informational

This shift focuses on the need for classrooms to:

- place a priority on textual evidence
- focus on a student's ability to cite evidence from text in order to present careful analyses, well-defended claims, and clear information

Shift 3 – Knowledge: Building knowledge through content-rich nonfiction

This shift focuses on the need for classrooms to:

- Integrate literacy across all disciplines – English language arts, science, social studies, and technical subjects
- Shift to nonfiction text that constitutes the majority of what people read in postsecondary education and the workplace

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[13] *College and Career Readiness Standards for Adult Education. Chapter 4.* U.S. Department of Education, Office of Vocational and Adult Education, 2013

Strategies for the Classroom

Overview of Effective Reading Strategies

As students become proficient readers, they develop strategies for solving problems within the reading materials. The following are good practices to implement in the GED® classroom.

1. Deliver a balanced content reading program including oral, written, and reading materials from a variety of resources:

   - Teach students to read both orally and silently from a variety of fiction and non-fiction materials. Use diverse such as materials as technical manuals, literature, magazines, newspapers, textbooks, and business communications.
   - Have students use writing activities to increase their comprehension.
   - Use comprehension activities that include higher order skills of evaluation, synthesis, analyzing, inference and inquiry.
   - Teach students vocabulary building.
   - Use formal and informal assessments such as comprehension tests, portfolios, teacher observation of oral and silent reading, timed readings, and writing assignments.

2. Teach students, through demonstrations, how to use text organization to aid their comprehension.

   - Select an article and photocopy the selection for each student.
   - Read the selection through, paragraph by paragraph, and "think aloud" your own strategies for reading the selection. Have students write down your "think-alouds" in the margin.
   - After completing the reading demonstration, have students summarize the strategies that you used for reading the text.
   - Have students write their own summary of strategies.
   - Complete numerous demonstrations until students understand the strategies that you use.

3. Teach students how to use contextual clues, prefixes, suffixes, decoding skills, and high frequency words.

   - Have students identify main ideas, introductory, and conclusion sentences.
   - Have students review graphs, charts, lists, bold and italicized print, and symbolism in articles.

4. Integrate reading and writing instruction.

   - Have students read and write on a daily basis.
   - Use writing to critique a reading sample.

5. Use multiple resources to teach each individual student to better comprehend the written word, such as:
    - Libraries or media centers, internet, technology, real world situations

The following strategies are essential for students to gain greater proficiency in reading:

- Inference - reaching conclusions based on textual information
- Identifying Important Information - finding critical facts or details in the text regardless of the type of writing
- Monitoring - identifying difficulties and changing strategies to improve understanding
- Summarizing - pulling together important information from a lengthy article
- Question Generating - asking silent questions about the reading material in order to integrate information

It is important that teachers work with students to develop the skills they need to be proficient readers who have a better understanding of what they read and how to use the information they have read to answer questions developed on the various Depth of Knowledge levels.

Strategies for Timed Readings

The fluent reader is able to quickly review an article or excerpt with understanding. Many GED® students read in a slow and methodical fashion with decreased ability to comprehend. Use timed readings to increase a student's reading speed and comprehension. There are many commercial materials for timed reading; however, any type of fiction or non-fiction reading material can be used.

Initiate timed readings by providing a student with a single paragraph. Time the student for one minute. Divide the number of words the student has read by the number of minutes used in the timing. This is the student's rate of reading per minute. As the student becomes more fluent, increase the timed readings to five minutes. Add simple comprehension questions after the student is comfortable with the process.

Reading activities can also be located on the Internet. Use of a computer for timed readings provides a student with independence and a simple way to incorporate this strategy into the GED® classroom.

Students who are proficient readers have a heightened awareness and use of the organization and structure of texts. They know how to read in strategic ways to obtain important knowledge in diverse reading materials. The strategic reader knows how to preview an article in order to become familiar with the focus, scope,

Overview of Effective Writing Strategies

Just like in reading instruction, no single approach to writing instruction will meet the needs of every student. Instead, it's important that multiple strategies be used in the GED® classroom. Research-supported strategies include the following areas:

- **Writing strategies:** Explicitly teach students strategies for planning, revising, and editing their written products. This may involve teaching general processes (e.g., brainstorming or editing) or more specific elements, such as steps for writing a constructed response. When teaching a strategy, first model the strategy multiple times, provide assistance as students practice using the strategy on their own, and allow for independent practice with the strategy once they have learned it. Self-efficacy is important for students as they make strategies their own.

- **Summarizing text:** Explicitly teach students procedures for summarizing what they read. Summarization allows students to practice concise, clear writing to convey an accurate message of the main ideas in a text. Teaching summary writing can involve explicit strategies for producing effective summaries or gradual fading of models of a good summary as students become more proficient with the skill.

- **Collaborative writing:** Allow students to work together to plan, write, edit, and revise their writing. Provide a structure for cooperative writing and explicit expectations for individual performance within their cooperative groups or partnerships. For example, if the class is working on using descriptive adjectives in their compositions, one student could be assigned to review another's writing. He or she could provide positive feedback, noting several instances of using descriptive vocabulary, and provide constructive feedback, identifying several sentences that could be enhanced with additional adjectives. After this, the students could switch roles and repeat the process.

- **Goals:** Set specific goals for the writing assignments that students are to complete. The goals can be established by the teacher or created by the class themselves, with reviews from the teacher to ensure they are appropriate and attainable. Goals can include (but are not limited to) adding more ideas to a paper or including specific elements of a writing genre (e.g., in an opinion essay include at least three reasons supporting your belief). Setting specific product goals can foster motivation, and teachers can continue to motivate students by providing reinforcement when they reach their goals.

- **Word processing:** Using a computer for completing written tasks not only assists students in learning how to use technology, but improves the writing process. With a computer, text can be added, deleted, and moved easily. Furthermore, students can access tools, such as spell check, to enhance their written compositions. As with any technology, teachers should provide guidance on proper use of the computer and any relevant software before students use the computer to compose independently.

- **Sentence combining:** Explicitly teach students to write more complex and sophisticated sentences. Sentence combining involves teacher modeling of how to combine two or more related sentences to create a more complex one. Students should be encouraged to apply the sentence construction skills as they write or revise.

- **Process writing:** Implement flexible, but practical classroom routines that provide students with extended opportunities for practicing the cycle of planning, writing, and

reviewing their compositions. The process approach also involves: writing for authentic audiences, personal responsibility for written work, student-to-student interactions throughout the writing process, and self-evaluation of writing.

- **Inquiry:** Set writing assignments that require use of inquiry skills. Successful inquiry activities include establishing a clear goal for writing (e.g., write a story about conflict in the workplace), examination of concrete data using specific strategies (e.g., observation of an experiment and recording their reactions), and translation of what was learned into one or more compositions.
- **Prewriting:** Engage students in activities prior to writing that help them produce and organize their ideas. Prewriting can involve tasks that encourage students to access what they already know, do research about a topic they are not familiar with, or arrange their ideas visually (e.g., graphic organizer) before writing.
- **Models:** Provide students with good models of the type of writing they are expected to produce. Teachers should analyze the models with their class, encouraging students to imitate in their own writing the critical and effective elements shown in the models. [14]

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[14] Gillespie, A. & Graham, S. Evidence-based practices for teaching writing. (2011). Retrieved from the World Wide Web at: http://education.jhu.edu/newhorizons/Better/articles/Winter2011.html

Graham, S., & Perin, D. (2007). *Writing next: Effective strategies to improve writing of adolescent in middle and high schools – A report to Carnegie Corporation of New York.* Washington, DC: Alliance for Excellent Education.

Pennington, M. Twelve Tips to Teach the Reading-Writing Connection. (2009). Retrieved from the World Wide Web at:
http://penningtonpublishing.com/writing/teaching-essay-strategies.html

The Reading and Writing Project. Pathways to the Common Core: Videos from Inside Classrooms. Retrieved from the World Wide Web at: http://readingandwritingproject.com/resources/common-core-standards/ccs-videos.html

U.S. Department of Education, Office of Vocational and Adult Education. (2011). *Just Write! Guide.* Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from the World Wide Web at: https://teal.ed.gov/tealGuide/toc

Developing Constructed Response

When integrating reading and writing to develop a constructed response, it is important to ensure that students have specific strategies to use, as well as a writing process to follow.

Students need:

- reading strategies for different types of text – including before, during, and after reading strategies
- a process for unpacking the prompt where key words are identified
- skills and practice in developing thesis statements
- practice in identifying relevant details in the excerpt(s), using quotations, and paraphrasing
- methods for organizing their ideas and details logically
- strategies for drafting an effective answer
- skills in editing and revising

Steps for Drafting Constructed Responses

Although the steps for drafting a constructed response may look simple, the process requires numerous skills (and strategies) to produce effective writing. Often, instructors use a graphic organizer to assist students in drafting the information necessary to complete their answer.

1. **Read** the passage and question

2. **Unpack** the prompt (identify key words)

3. **Rewrite** the question and turn the question into a thesis statement

4. **Collect** relevant details from passage

5. **Organize** details into a logical order

6. **Draft** an answer

7. **Re-read** and **edit/revise** the answer making sure all parts of the question are answered

Structure to Answering a Constructed Response Question

Beginning

- States the main idea or position
- Develops a thesis statement
- Sets the stage to answer the prompt

Middle

- Answers the question first
- Provides important information the author(s) stated and/or inferred
- Provides examples/evidence and important details to support the answer
- Includes background information as required through the prompt

Ending

- Summarizes the position taken
- Restates the thesis statement in a different way

Twelve Tips for Integrating Reading and Writing Skills – The Connection

Although there may be specific reading or writing instruction that is taught independently, the reading and writing processes are interrelated.

"**1. Teach the Author-Reader Relationship**

Both reading and writing involve interactive relationships between author and reader. Reading really is about communication between the reader and the author. Now, it's true that the author is not speaking directly to the reader; however, readers understand best when they pretend that this is so. Unlike reading, writing requires the thinker to generate both sides of the dialog. The writer must create the content and anticipate the reader response. Teaching students to carry on an internal dialog with their anticipated readers, *while they write,* is vitally important.

Strategy: Write Aloud

2. Teach Prior Knowledge

What people already know is an essential component of good reading and writing. Content knowledge is equally important as is skill acquisition to read and write well. Reading specialists estimate that reading comprehension is a 50-50 interaction. In other words, about half of one's understanding of the text is what the reader puts into the reading by way of experience and knowledge. However, some disclaimers are important to mention here. Although prior knowledge is important, it can also be irrelevant, inaccurate, or incomplete which may well confuse readers or misinform writers. Of course, the teacher has the responsibility to fill gaps with appropriate content.

Strategy: KWHL

3. Teach Sensory Descriptions

Both readers and writers make meaning through their sensory experiences. Recognizing sensory references in text improves understanding of detail, allusions, and word choice. Good readers apply all of their senses to the reading to better grasp *what* and *how* the author wishes to communicate. They listen to what the author is saying to *them*. For example, good readers try to feel what the characters feel, visualize the changing settings, and hear how the author uses dialog. Applying the five senses in writing produces memorable "show me," rather than "tell me" writing.

Strategy: Interactive Reading

4. Teach Genre Characteristics

All reading and writing genres serve their own purposes, follow their own rules, and have their own unique characteristics. Knowing the text structure of each genre helps readers predict and analyze what the author will say and has said. For example, because a reader understands the

format and rules of a persuasive essay, the reader knows to look for the thesis in the introduction, knows to look for the evidence that backs up the topic sentence in each body paragraph, and knows to look for the specific strategies that are utilized in the conclusion paragraphs. Writing form is an important component of rhetorical stance. Knowing each genre (domain) also helps writers include the most appropriate support details and evidence. For example, persuasive essays often use a counterpoint argument as evidence.

Strategy: Rhetorical Stance

5. Teach Structural Organization

Readers recognize main idea, anticipate plot development or line of argumentation, make inferences, and draw conclusions based upon the structural characteristics of the reading genre. For example, readers expect the headline and introductory paragraph(s) of a newspaper article to follow the structural characteristics of that genre. For example, news articles include Who, What, Where, When, and How at the beginning, thus the informed reader knows to look for these components. Similarly, writers apply their knowledge of specific structural characteristics for each writing genre. For example, knowing the characteristics of these plot elements: problem, conflict; rising action, climax, falling action, and resolution will help the writer craft a complete narrative.

Strategy: Numerical Hierarchies

6. Teach Problem Solving Strategies

Good readers and writers act like detectives, looking for clues to understand and solve a case. In a persuasive essay, the reader should detect how a thesis is argued, how the variety of evidence is presented, and if the conclusions are justified in light of the evidence. In a narrative, the writer needs to clearly state the basic problem of the story and how that problem leads to a conflict. Through the elements of plot, the writer must deal with this conflict and resolve it to the reader's satisfaction.

Strategy: Evidence

7. Teach Coherency and Unity

For both reading and writing, the object is to make sense of the content. Recognizing the author's rhetorical organization, grammatical patterns, transition words, and use of writing techniques such as repetition, parallelism, and summary will facilitate comprehension. Knowing *how* the author communicates helps the reader understand *what* is being communicated. Applying an organizational pattern appropriate to the writing content and effective writing techniques will help the reader understand the content of the communication. Writing unity refers to how well sentences and paragraphs stay focused on the topic. For example, readers

need to train themselves to look for irrelevant (off the point) details. Similarly, writers need to ensure that their writing stays on point and does not wander into tangential "birdwalking."

Strategies: Coherency and Unity

8. Teach Sentence Structure Variety

Good readers are adept at parsing both good and bad sentence structure. They consciously work at identifying sentence subjects and their actions. They apply their knowledge of grammar to build comprehension. For example, they recognize misplaced pronouns and dangling participles, such as in "The boy watched the dog beg at the table and his sister fed it" and are able to understand what the author means, in spite of the poor writing. Good writing maintains the reader's attention through interesting content, inviting writing style, effective word choice, and sentence variety. Knowing how to use different sentence structures allows the writer to say what the writer wants to say in the way the writer wants to say it. Most professional writers plan 50% of their sentences to follow the subject-verb-complement grammatical sentence structure and 50% to follow other varied sentence structures. No one is taught, convinced, or entertained when bored.

Strategy: Grammatical Sentence Openers

9. Teach Precise Word Choice

Understanding the nuances to word meanings lets the reader understand precisely what the author means. Knowing semantic variations helps the reader understand why authors use the words that they do and helps the reader "read between the lines," i.e., to infer what the author implies. When writers use words with precision, coherency is improved. There is no ambiguity and the reader can follow the author's intended train of thought.

Strategies: Vocabulary Ladders and Semantic Spectrums

10. Teach Style, Voice, Point of View, Tone, and Mood

Good readers recognize how an author's writing style and voice (personality) help shape the way in which the text communicates. For example, if the style is informal and the voice is flippant, the author may use hyperbole or understatement as rhetorical devices. Recognizing whether the author uses omniscient or limited point of view in the first, second, or third person will help the reader understand who knows what, and from what perspective in the reading. Identifying the tone helps the reader understand how something is being said. For example, if the tone is sarcastic, the reader must be alert for clues that the author is saying one thing, but meaning another. Identifying the mood of a literary work will enable the reader to see how the plot and characters shape the feeling of the writing. For example, knowing that the mood of a poem is dark allows the reader to identify the contrasting symbolism of a "shining light." In addition to

applying the writing tools described above, good writers need to be aware of errors in writing style that do not match rules or format of certain forms of writing, such as the formal essay.

Strategy: Writing Style Errors

11. Teach Inferences

Both reading and writing is interpretive. Readers infer meaning, make interpretations, or draw logical conclusions from textual clues provided by the author. Writers imply, or suggest, rather than overtly state certain ideas or actions to build interest, create intentional ambiguity, develop suspense, or re-direct the reader.

Strategy: Inference Categories

12. Teach Metacognition and Critical Thinking

Reading and writing are thinking activities. Just decoding words does not make a good reader. Similarly, just spelling correctly, using appropriate vocabulary, and applying fitting structure to paragraphs does not make a good writer. Knowing one's strengths and weaknesses as a reader or writer helps one identify or apply the best strategies to communicate. Knowing how to organize thought through chronology, cause-effect, problem-solution, or reasons-evidence rhetorical patterns assists both reader and writer to recognize and apply reasoning strategies. Knowing higher order questioning strategies, such as analysis, synthesis, and evaluation helps the reader and writer see beyond the obvious and explore issues in depth.

Strategies: Self-Questioning and Reasoning Errors"[15]

 Resources

Although there are numerous resources to assist the classroom instructor, the following are a few websites to start with:

- Free Resources for Educational Excellence
  http://free.ed.gov/index.cfm

- PBS Teacher Source
  http://www.pbs.org/teachers

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[15] Pennington, M. Twelve Tips to Teach the Reading/Writing Connection (2009). Retrieved from the World Wide Web at: http://penningtonpublishing.com/writing/teaching-essay-strategies.html

- Purdue University's OWL
  http://owl.english.purdue.edu/

- RAFTS Northern Nevada Writing Project
  http://www.unr.edu/educ/nnwp/index.html

- Teaching That Makes Sense
  http://ttms.org/

- ReadWriteThink
  http://www.readwritethink.org/

- National Council for Teachers of English
  http://www.ncte.org/kits/nonfictionlessons