

ISTEP+

**Indiana Statewide Testing
Educational Progress—Plus**

Passage Specifications

English Language Arts

Updated 09/25/20

The Purpose of ISTEP+ Assessments in Grades 3–10

This document was historically used from 2015-2018 for students in grades 3-8. Beginning in 2019, the ILEARN Passage Specs have been utilized for students in grades 3-8 as Indiana shifted from ISTEP+ to ILEARN.

The purpose of the Indiana Statewide Testing for Educational Progress-Plus (ISTEP+) program is to measure student achievement in the subject areas of English/language arts (E/LA), mathematics, science, and social studies. The ISTEP+ assessment is criterion-referenced and is designed to measure students' mastery of the standards. ISTEP+ reports student achievement levels according to Indiana Academic Standards (IASs), adopted in April of 2014 by the Indiana State Board of Education. These standards are the result of a process designed to identify, evaluate, synthesize, and create high-quality, rigorous standards for Indiana students. They have been validated as college and career ready by the Indiana Education Roundtable, the Indiana Commission for Higher Education, the Indiana Department of Education, the Indiana State Board of Education, and the Indiana Center for Education and Career Innovation.

Characteristics of Stimuli

The primary function of a stimulus is to provide students in grades 3–8 and 10 the opportunity to respond to challenging tasks based on a variety of literary and nonfiction reading contexts, including permissioned, commissioned, and public domain selections. Each stimulus should be selected or developed with specific IASs in mind and provide sufficient context for a wide array of assessment tasks.

In order to provide an authentic assessment experience for Indiana's students, every text selected for ISTEP+ must:

- provide rich context for English/Language Arts assessment tasks.
- support a range of items that accurately assess multiple Indiana Academic Standards.
- integrate Indiana's Measurement of Text Complexity for Literature and Nonfiction, including quantitative measures, qualitative considerations, and a holistic evaluation.
- represent well-written, authentic text that is cohesive, logically arranged, and stylistically consistent.
- exemplify grade-appropriate level of difficulty and readability as supported by cited measures, topics, content, and educator evaluation.
- appeal to a diverse range of readers who possess varying interests and backgrounds.
- include grade-appropriate vocabulary with sufficient context.
- reflect real world cross-disciplinary contexts.
- embody a range of culturally diverse interests and topics
- avoid topics and themes which could foster bias and/or sensitivity issues.

In order to provide rich context for challenging tasks, stimuli development will include a wide variety of nonfiction and literary texts. Approximately 40% of ISTEP+ stimuli at each grade will be permissioned texts with the remaining 60% including commissioned stimuli and public domain. Selections for a given

grade will represent a range of difficulties, with reading levels appropriate for the skill levels representative of each grade. Reader and task considerations should always be considered when selecting or creating stimuli for ISTEP+, including variables that pertain to individual readers (e.g., motivation, knowledge, and experience) as well as those that pertain to specific tasks (e.g., purpose and complexity of task and planned assessment items).

Elements of High Quality Stimuli

In order to select the highest quality texts for ISTEP+, stimuli should demonstrate the following characteristics:

- Complex literary development and selection of word choice that hooks readers, even reluctant readers
- Nurturing cultural and socioeconomic diversity
- Topics, themes, and imaginative elements common to grade level curriculum
- Underlying realities of human nature and life and authentic real-life contemporary experiences
- Compelling dialogue, complex and interesting sentences, and vocabulary that is varied and artfully placed within the text
- Evidence of elements of plot and rich, believable character development
- Figurative language that is appropriately placed within the text
- Language understood by ELL and ESL readers
- Multisensory details
- Multilevel meaning from literal to abstract

Commissioned Stimuli Considerations

During the assessment experience, Indiana students should ascertain no difference between permissioned texts and commissioned texts in terms of authenticity and quality. In addition to adhering to all expectations for high quality stimuli, every commissioned text must be a unique work by the passage writer and include all referenced sources showing verification of facts and originality of the commissioned text. This applies to both literary and nonfiction stimuli.

Art and Text Feature Considerations

The purpose of art and text features in ISTEP+ stimuli is to engage students in the assessment task, supplement understanding of the text, and/or provide complementary context relevant to the text experience. Stimuli may include art and/or text features such as illustrations, photographs, tables, charts, maps, graphs, website features, advertisements, schedules, text boxes, and captions. Text features such as maps, graphs, tables, text boxes, and other graphic stimuli will have appropriate labels, legends, keys, and/or titles and captions.

Universal Design

English/Language Arts texts for ISTEP+ adhere to the principles of Universal Design. Passages should be accessible to the widest range of students, allowing all students the opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge of tested Indiana Academic Standards. Passages must be selected/written at an appropriate grade level in terms of content/subject matter, vocabulary, and readability.

Bias and Sensitivity Considerations

Texts must be relevant, interesting, and meaningful to students, clearly reflecting cultural diversity. Stimuli must accurately represent types of reading that students encounter in their classrooms and everyday lives. Students should be able to understand texts without reliance upon student-led or teacher-led discussions. Stimuli will be free of bias and sensitivity issues that may be upsetting or distracting to students or that may unfairly disadvantage any group of students. Stimuli will seek to highlight ethnicities from around the world as well as males and females in non-traditional roles.

Texts must avoid complex social issues, including but not limited to: climate change/global warming; deportation of immigrants; the occult, witches, ghosts or vampires; religion; sex; disease; death or dying; politics; gambling; drugs or alcohol; advocacy; killing animals for sport; and other sensitive topics.

Consider the questions below to help avoid bias and sensitivity issues.

Does the passage —

- contain language that is not commonly used or has different contemporary/regional connotations?
- discriminate in any way against individuals with disabilities?
- make assumptions that all students are from the same socioeconomic group or present information that may be offensive to students in a particular group?
- use offensive or demeaning words?
- contain especially violent or disturbing content?
- contain artwork that adequately reflects the diversity of the student population taking the test?

Types of Literary and Nonfiction Stimuli on ISTEP+

Literary stimuli includes texts students read primarily for pleasure and literary merit, such as:

- short stories (realistic fiction, historical fiction, mystery, fantasy, and science fiction)
- folk tales
- myths

- poems
- plays
- excerpts from novels

Literary and dramatic texts must contain literary elements such as conflict, plot, character development, setting, recognizable theme, and point of view. The literary selections should have a sense of completeness and ability to stand alone, even if excerpted.

Literary stimuli should display the use of literary techniques (such as irony, symbolism, and foreshadowing) and language (such as figurative language, personification, and noteworthy diction).

Poetry must be grade-level appropriate and should have distinct theme(s), structure, voice, and poetic devices, avoiding poems with archaic language or wildly unconventional structure.

Drama, such as one act plays, scenes, or excerpts, may be appropriate for ISTEP+ if they include a defined narrative thread.

Nonfiction stimuli includes materials students read primarily to gain information, such as:

- informative articles about science-related topics (such as inspiring scientific discoveries, relevant research innovations, unexpected breakthroughs, etc.)
- simple science experiments (appropriate for grades 3–5)
- interviews
- informative speeches
- technical texts (appropriate for grades 3–5)
- functional texts including those that provide instructions (how-to) (appropriate for grades 3–5)
- materials that give information about the physical, biological, and technical world
- simulated online reference or informational materials
- primary source documents as well as secondary source documents that use evidence and data to support arguments about historical events and issues
- primary historical documents (non-literary)
- informative articles, speeches, or letters about relevant historical or social studies topics, events, people, or groups
- other nonfiction materials that provide factual information about history or an aspect of society
- nonfiction personal essays/letters
- speeches
- true stories written in a literary style
- primary [literary] historical documents
- other literary texts or literary nonfiction including the subgenres of exposition and argumentation

Nonfiction texts often include expository selections, such as magazine articles, newspaper articles, and excerpts from books, many with data or statistical information.

Expository and persuasive selections must be thought-provoking and allow students to draw conclusions and make inferences, as well as understand the organizational structure, logic of argument, and rhetorical techniques of the author.

Prior Knowledge

Expecting the test-takers to possess common, grade-appropriate prior knowledge is acceptable. It is NOT acceptable to expect test-takers to have technical, topic-specific prior knowledge. Remember that we are testing reading comprehension and not subject-specific knowledge.

Science and Social Studies Topics

Passages with science content should be accessible to “informed non-scientists.” The passages should contain unambiguous context for understanding technical information. The content of the passage should assess reading comprehension of scientific information rather than assessing knowledge of particular scientific information.

Passages with social studies content should cover a range of topics from history as well as current affairs. Historical fiction passages should NOT “invent” information about actual events or people from history. Use factual resources as a guide in recreating scenes for historical fiction, but do NOT attribute unreal dialogue or facts to real people and places.

Text Complexity Using Quantitative and Qualitative Measures

Texts selected for ISTEP+ will be evaluated **quantitatively** using at least two measures as the initial step to determine text complexity. Each stimuli will be assigned a Lexile (L) measure and a Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level to determine the quantitative dimensions of text complexity.

The *Lexile Framework for Reading* has been developed by MetaMetrics, Inc. and employs a scientific formula to calculate the Lexile level of a text based on the semantic and syntactic elements of a text.

The Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level measures sentence length by the average number of words in a sentence and word length by the average number of syllables in a word to provide a U.S. grade level of education that an average student would require to be able to understand the text.

Recommended Lexile and Flesch-Kincaid ranges for each ISTEP+ grade are shown in the chart below.

ISTEP+ Grade(s)	Lexile	Flesch-Kincaid
3	420–820	1.98–5.34
4–5	740–1010	4.51–7.73
6–8	925–1185	6.51–10.34
9–10	1050–1335	8.32–12.12

Since numerous other factors affect the relationship between a reader and a text, including its content, the age and interests of the reader, and the design of the actual text, among other aspects, each ISTEP+ text will also be evaluated **qualitatively** to assign a holistic Measurement of Complexity, using Indiana’s labels of *Accessible*, *Moderately Complex*, or *Highly Complex*.

Reviewers will evaluate Literature selected for ISTEP+ based on the following five questions:

- How much background knowledge is necessary to understand the text?
- Does the text have a single level of meaning or are there multiple/hidden levels of meaning?
- How is the text structured?
- What are the language features of the text?
- How are illustrations/graphics (if included) used?

Reviewers will evaluate Nonfiction selected for ISTEP+ based on the following five questions:

- How much background knowledge is necessary to understand the text?
- How clear are the purpose, point of view, and central idea of the text?
- How is the text structured?
- What are the language features of the text?
- How are illustrations/graphics (if included) used?

Each text submitted for use on ISTEP+ will include a completed *Measurement of Complexity* form showing quantitative and qualitative information.

Indiana Academic Standards

Each text must support item development to assess the Indiana Academic Standards (IAS). The *Measurement of Complexity* form includes questions to help passage writers and searchers map the opportunities in the passage for assessing the IAS. The Pearson Assessment Specialists will provide the IAS including the critical standards that the grade level passages must be able to assess to target the ISTEP+ item development.

Word Count

Stimuli of varying lengths should be included in Literature and Nonfiction developed for ISTEP+ so as to allow for a variety of text experiences for every Indiana student. Care must be taken to ensure that these types of texts are robust enough to support a variety of English/language arts items measuring mastery of Indiana Academic Standards.

Grade	Maximum Word Count	
	Operational Bank	New Development *
3	730	650
4	830	750
5	975	750
6	1010	950
7	1090	950
8	1090	950
High School	1460	1100

*Passages developed in 2017-2018, were held to these maximum word counts.

For Part 1 (Applied Skills), pairings of texts should not exceed the length of the maximum word count for a single passage. Pairings are only used in the writing prompt session, not in the constructed response session. Grades 3 and 4 do not have pairings in Part 1.

For Part 2, in pairings of texts, each text counts as one. All grades can have pairings in Part 2. It is important to note that the maximum word counts are suitable for assessment situations, but they are not meant to be absolute. Maximum word counts are not intended for instructional uses.