



# ALIGNMENT OF THE ACT PLUS WRITING TO

## ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS

This document summarizes the alignment evidence that the Nebraska Department of Education (NDE) has collected to support the connection between the ACT plus Writing and the Nebraska Academic Content Standards in English Language Arts. This evidence comes directly from Nebraska educators who participated in activities designed to conduct this evaluation and is provided to guide educators in their understanding how the content of the ACT samples from the knowledge, skills, and abilities included within the Nebraska Content Standards.

# NEBRASKA STATEWIDE CONTENT STANDARDS

Augusts 2018

## Alignment Evidence: Collecting, Organizing, and Evaluating

With the adoption of the ACT as the statewide High School assessment for English Language Arts (ELA), Mathematics, and Science, the Nebraska Department of Education (NDE) sought direct information as to how the knowledge, skills, and abilities measured by the ACT aligned to those specified in the statewide content standards. To gather this information, Nebraska educators identified connections (alignment) between the ACT and the statewide content standards two ways:

- The first approach was a review of three forms of the ACT and an evaluation of the alignment of each item to the Nebraska standards. The purpose of this approach was to see how some actual test items were targeting the same knowledge, skills, and abilities outlined in the statewide standards. Three forms of the ACT were reviewed as a sample of the type of items that could be expected on any given form of the test. This study was conducted in the summer of 2017.
- The second approach was an alignment of the ACT measurement targets (e.g., standards, reporting area descriptors) to the statewide content standards. The purpose of this approach was to evaluate the connection between the full range of knowledge, skills, and abilities (that could be measured by any given item on the ACT) to the statewide content standards. This study was conducted in early 2018.

The purpose of this document is to summarize the results of each study in a way that highlights how the ACT samples from across the full set of Nebraska statewide ELA content standards. As noted in the results, some areas of the standards (indicators) are covered to a greater extent than others. This work is based on a review of three forms of the ACT administered in Nebraska. However, multiple forms are administered each year and there may be some variations as to how the knowledge and skills included in the Standards are represented on each form.

## How to Understand the Results

- The results are presented in the tables below by Domain, grade level expectation (GLE), and curricular indicator.
- The results describe how each part of the Nebraska standards were connected to the areas of the ACT English and Reading Tests and the scoring elements in the ACT Writing Scoring Rubric<sup>1</sup> (see pages 8-10 of this document).
  - The results for the Standards alignment indicate how the indicators connected to the different areas of the ACT ELA test
  - The results for the item alignment indicate how the ACT test content (multiple-choice items and Writing test) connected to the indicators, GLEs, and Domains.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.act.org/content/dam/act/unsecured/documents/Writing-Test-Scoring-Rubric.pdf>

## ACT Content linked to NE Content Standards in ELA

Academic Content Standards [Domains/GLE/Curricular Indicator]	Measurement Target (Standards) Alignment	Item Alignment		
<b>12.1: Reading: Students will learn and apply reading skills and strategies to comprehend text.</b>	50% of the indicators were linked to specific areas of the ACT ELA Test (Reading, English, Writing)	38% of the indicators were directly measured by the ACT ELA test content (53% of the ELA multiple-choice items + Writing).		
<b>LA 12.1.5: Vocabulary: Students will build and use conversational, academic, and content-specific grade-level vocabulary.</b>	50% of the Indicators were linked to specific areas of the ACT Reading and English tests.	50% of the Indicators were covered by items on the ACT Reading and English tests (13% of the multiple-choice items) and the Writing task.		
<table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 20px;"></td> <td><b>LA 12.1.5.a:</b> Apply word analysis strategies to determine the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words across content areas to aid in comprehension and improve writing.</td> </tr> </table>		<b>LA 12.1.5.a:</b> Apply word analysis strategies to determine the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words across content areas to aid in comprehension and improve writing.	Linked to the <i>Craft and Structure</i> area of the ACT Reading test	3% of the multiple-choice + Writing
	<b>LA 12.1.5.a:</b> Apply word analysis strategies to determine the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words across content areas to aid in comprehension and improve writing.			
<table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 20px;"></td> <td><b>LA 12.1.5.c:</b> Acquire new academic and content-specific grade-level vocabulary, relate to prior knowledge, and apply in new situations. *</td> </tr> </table>		<b>LA 12.1.5.c:</b> Acquire new academic and content-specific grade-level vocabulary, relate to prior knowledge, and apply in new situations. *	Not Covered	No items directly linked
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<table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 20px;"></td> <td><b>LA 12.1.5.d:</b> Use semantic relationships (e.g., figurative language, connotations, technical and multiple meaning words, and key terms or phrases) to analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, aid in comprehension, and improve writing.</td> </tr> </table>		<b>LA 12.1.5.d:</b> Use semantic relationships (e.g., figurative language, connotations, technical and multiple meaning words, and key terms or phrases) to analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, aid in comprehension, and improve writing.	Linked to the <i>Craft and Structure</i> area of the Reading test and the <i>Knowledge of Language and Production of Writing</i> areas of the English test.	10% of the multiple-choice + Writing
	<b>LA 12.1.5.d:</b> Use semantic relationships (e.g., figurative language, connotations, technical and multiple meaning words, and key terms or phrases) to analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, aid in comprehension, and improve writing.			
<table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 20px;"></td> <td><b>LA 12.1.5.e:</b> Verify meaning and pronunciation of words or phrases using print and/or digital reference materials when appropriate. *</td> </tr> </table>		<b>LA 12.1.5.e:</b> Verify meaning and pronunciation of words or phrases using print and/or digital reference materials when appropriate. *	Not Covered	No items directly linked
	<b>LA 12.1.5.e:</b> Verify meaning and pronunciation of words or phrases using print and/or digital reference materials when appropriate. *			
<b>LA 12.1.6: Comprehension: Students will construct meaning by applying prior knowledge, using text information, and monitoring comprehension while reading increasingly complex grade-level literary and informational text.</b>	50% of the Indicators were linked to specific areas of the ACT Reading and English tests and the Writing task.	29% of the Indicators were covered by items on the ACT Reading and English tests (40% of the multiple-choice items) and the Writing task.		
<table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 20px;"></td> <td><b>LA 12.1.6.a:</b> Evaluate the meaning, reliability, and validity of text considering author’s purpose, perspective, rhetorical style, and contextual influences.</td> </tr> </table>		<b>LA 12.1.6.a:</b> Evaluate the meaning, reliability, and validity of text considering author’s purpose, perspective, rhetorical style, and contextual influences.	Linked to the <i>Craft and Structure</i> area of the Reading test and the <i>Knowledge of Language and Production of Writing</i> areas of the English test.	13% of the multiple-choice
	<b>LA 12.1.6.a:</b> Evaluate the meaning, reliability, and validity of text considering author’s purpose, perspective, rhetorical style, and contextual influences.			

Academic Content Standards [Domains/GLE/Curricular Indicator]		Measurement Target (Standards) Alignment	Item Alignment
	LA 12.1.6.b: Analyze and evaluate the relationships between elements of literary text (e.g., characterization, setting, plot development, internal and external conflict, inferred and recurring themes, point of view, tone, mood).	Linked to the <i>Key Ideas and Details</i> and <i>Craft and Structure</i> areas of the ACT Reading test	No items directly linked
	LA 12.1.6.c: Analyze the function and critique the effects of the author's use of literary devices (e.g., allusion, symbolism, metaphor, personification, epiphany, oxymoron, dialect, tone, mood).	Not Covered	No items directly linked
	LA 12.1.6.d: Summarize, analyze, and synthesize the themes and main ideas between multiple literary and informational works (print, digital, and/or other media).	Linked to the <i>Key Ideas and Details</i> and <i>Integration of Knowledge and Ideas</i> areas of the ACT Reading test	2% of the multiple-choice
	LA 12.1.6.f: Interpret and evaluate information from print and digital text features to support comprehension.	Not Covered	No items directly linked
	LA 12.1.6.g: Cite specific textual evidence to analyze and evaluate the effects of historical, cultural, biographical, and political influences of literary and informational text written by culturally diverse authors, to develop a regional, national, and international multicultural perspective.	Not Covered	No items directly linked
	LA 12.1.6.i: Construct and/or answer literal, inferential, critical, and interpretive questions, analyzing and synthesizing evidence from the text and additional sources to support answers.	Linked to the <i>Key Ideas and Details</i> area of the ACT Reading test and the <i>Ideas and Analysis</i> component of the Writing rubric	19% of the multiple-choice + Writing
	LA 12.1.6.j: Apply knowledge of organizational patterns to comprehend informational text (e.g., sequence, description, cause and effect, compare/ contrast, fact/opinion, proposition/support, concept definition, question/ answer).	Linked to the <i>Key Ideas and Details</i> , <i>Craft and Structure</i> , <i>Integration of Knowledge and Ideas</i> areas of the ACT Reading test and the <i>Production of Writing</i> area of the ACT English test	6% of the multiple-choice + Writing
	LA 12.1.6.k: Select text for a particular purpose (e.g., answer a question, solve problems, enjoy, form an opinion, understand a specific viewpoint, predict outcomes, discover models for own writing, accomplish a task), citing evidence to support analysis, reflection, or research. *	Not covered	No items directly linked

Academic Content Standards [Domains/GLE/Curricular Indicator]		Measurement Target (Standards) Alignment	Item Alignment
	LA 12.1.6.l: Build background knowledge and activate prior knowledge to clarify text, deepen understanding, and make connections while reading complex text.	Linked to the <i>Integrating Knowledge &amp; Ideas</i> area of the ACT Reading test	No items directly linked
	LA 12.1.6.m: Self-monitor comprehension and independently apply appropriate strategies to understand complex text. *	Linked to the <i>Key Ideas &amp; Details, Craft &amp; Structure, and Integrating Knowledge &amp; Ideas</i> areas of the ACT Reading test	No items directly linked
	LA 12.1.6.n: Formulate and justify inferences with text evidence while previewing, reading, and analyzing literary and informational text in various formats. *	Not covered	No items directly linked
	LA 12.1.6.o: Demonstrate an understanding of complex text by using textual evidence to support analysis, reflection, and research via multiple mediums (e.g., writing, artistic representation, video, other media). *	Not covered	No items directly linked
	LA 12.1.6.p: Analyze multiple interpretations of a story, drama, or poem (e.g., recorded or live production of a play or recorded novel or poetry), evaluating how each version interprets the source text. *	Not covered	No items directly linked
<b>12.2 Writing: Students will learn and apply writing skills and strategies to communicate.</b>		<b>53% of the indicators were linked to specific areas of the ACT ELA Test (Reading, English, Writing)</b>	<b>20% of the indicators were directly measured by the ACT ELA test content (47% of all ELA multiple-choice items + Writing).</b>
	<b>LA 12.2.1: Writing Process: Students will apply the writing process to plan, draft, revise, edit, and publish writing using correct spelling, grammar, punctuation, and other conventions of standard English appropriate for grade-level.</b>	<b>60% of the Indicators were linked to specific areas of the ACT Reading and English tests and the Writing task.</b>	<b>20% of the Indicators were covered by items on the ACT Reading and English tests (34% of all multiple-choice items) and the Writing task.</b>
	LA 12.2.1.a: Use multiple writing strategies recursively to investigate and generate ideas, organize information, guide writing, answer questions, and synthesize information.	Linked to all components of the Writing rubric	No items directly linked
	LA 12.2.1.b: Generate a draft that interprets complex ideas, raises relevant questions, solves problems, or evaluates ideas through	Linked to the entire Writing rubric (except <i>Language Use</i> ) and the	No items directly linked

Academic Content Standards [Domains/GLE/Curricular Indicator]		Measurement Target (Standards) Alignment	Item Alignment
	synthesis, analysis, reflection, and use of effective organizational patterns that are appropriate to the purpose and intended audience.	<i>Production of Writing</i> area of the ACT English test	
	LA 12.2.1.c: Gather and use relevant information and evidence from multiple authoritative print and/or digital sources including primary and secondary sources to support claims or theses.	Not covered	No items directly linked
	LA 12.2.1.d: Apply standard rules of grammar and paragraph formation, including parallel structure and subordination.	Linked to the <i>Knowledge of Language and Conventions of Standard English, Grammar, &amp; Mechanics</i> areas of the ACT English test and the <i>Language Use</i> component of the Writing rubric	9% of the multiple-choice + Writing
	LA 12.2.1.e: Revise to improve and clarify writing through self-monitoring strategies and feedback from others. *	Linked to the <i>Conventions of Standard English Grammar, Usage, &amp; Mechanics</i> area of the ACT English test	No items directly linked
	LA 12.2.1.f: Provide oral, written, and/or digital descriptive feedback to other writers. *	Not covered	No items directly linked
	LA 12.2.1.g: Adjust writing processes to persevere in short and long-term writing tasks of increasing length and complexity. *	Linked to all components of the Writing rubric	No items directly linked
	LA 12.2.1.h: Proofread and edit writing recursively for format and conventions of standard English (e.g., spelling, capitalization, grammar, punctuation, syntax, semantics). *	Linked to the <i>Knowledge of Language and Conventions of Standard English, Grammar, &amp; Mechanics</i> areas of the ACT English test	25% of the multiple-choice
	LA 12.2.1.i: Display academic honesty and integrity by avoiding plagiarism and/or overreliance on any one source and by following a standard format for citation.	Not covered	No items directly linked
	LA 12.2.1.j: Publish a legible document using a variety of media and apply various formatting techniques to enhance the readability and impact of the document (e.g., fonts, spacing, design, images, style conventions, citations, and manuscript requirements). *	Not covered	No items directly linked
<b>LA 12.2.2: Writing Modes: Students will write in multiple modes for a variety of purposes and audiences across disciplines.</b>		<b>40% of the Indicators were linked to specific areas of the ACT Reading</b>	<b>20% of the Indicators were covered by items on the ACT Reading and</b>

Academic Content Standards [Domains/GLE/Curricular Indicator]	Measurement Target (Standards) Alignment	Item Alignment
	and English tests and the Writing task.	English tests (13% of all multiple-choice items) and the Writing task.
LA 12.2.2.a: Communicate information and ideas effectively in analytic, argumentative, descriptive, informative, narrative, poetic, persuasive, and reflective modes to multiple audiences using a variety of media and formats. *	Not covered	No items directly linked
LA 12.2.2.b: Provide evidence from literary or informational text to support analysis, reflection, and research.	Linked to the <i>Ideas &amp; Analysis</i> and <i>Development &amp; Support</i> components of the Writing rubric	No items directly linked
LA 12.2.2.c: Conduct and publish both short and sustained research projects to answer questions or solve problems using multiple primary and/or secondary sources to support theses. *	Not covered	No items directly linked
LA 12.2.2.d: Use precise word choice and domain-specific vocabulary to write in a variety of modes.	Linked to the <i>Knowledge of Language</i> area of the ACT English test and the <i>Language Use</i> component of the Writing rubric	13% of the multiple-choice
LA 12.2.2.e: Analyze various mentor texts and/or exemplars in order to create a similar piece. *	Not covered	No items directly linked

## ACT English Test Information

The text included here is taken directly from the ACT Technical Supplement<sup>2</sup> and describes the reporting categories for each of the ACT ELA Tests (English, Reading, Writing). Each reporting category is accompanied by a description of the knowledge, skills, and abilities measured as well as the approximate percentage of test items that make up this section.

### English Test

Four scores are reported for the ACT English test: a total test score based on all 75 questions and three reporting category scores. The three reporting categories associated with the English test are Production of Writing, Knowledge of Language, and Conventions of Standard English. These reporting categories are subdivided into six elements, each of which targets an aspect of effective writing. A brief description of the reporting categories is provided below and the approximate percentage of the test items in each reporting category are given in the Table. In addition, the overall English test score, along with the reading and writing test scores, is used to determine the ELA score.

#### **Production of Writing** [29-32% of the test]

Students apply their understanding of the rhetorical purpose and focus of a piece of writing to develop a topic effectively and use various strategies to achieve logical organization, topical unity, and general cohesion.

- **Topic Development:** Students demonstrate an understanding of, and control over, the rhetorical aspects of texts by identifying the purposes of parts of texts, determining whether a text or part of a text has met its intended goal, and evaluating the relevance of material in terms of a text's focus.
- **Organization, Unity, and Cohesion:** Students use various strategies to ensure that a text is logically organized, flows smoothly, and has an effective introduction and conclusion.

#### **Knowledge of Language** [15-17% of the test]

Students demonstrate effective language use through ensuring precision and concision in word choice and maintaining consistency in style and tone.

#### **Conventions of Standard English** [52-55% of the test]

Students apply an understanding of the conventions of Standard English grammar, usage, and mechanics to revise and edit ext.

- **Sentence Structure and Formation:** Students apply an understanding of relationships between and among clauses, placement of modifiers, and shifts in sentence construction
- **Usage:** Students edit text to conform to Standard English usage.
- **Punctuation:** Students edit text to conform to Standard English punctuation.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.act.org/content/dam/act/unsecured/documents/ACT-Technical-Manual-Supplement.pdf>

## Reading Test

Five scores are reported for the ACT Reading test: a total test score based on all 40 questions, three reporting category scores based on specific knowledge and skills, and an Understanding Complex Texts indicator. The three reporting categories addressed in the reading test are Key Ideas & Details, Craft & Structure, and Integration of Knowledge & Ideas. In addition, the overall reading test score, along with the English and Writing test scores, is used to determine the ELA score. A description of the approximate percentage of the test devoted to each reporting category is provided next to the category name.

### **Key Ideas & Details** [55-60% of the Test]

Students read texts closely to determine central ideas and themes; summarize information and ideas accurately; and read closely to understand relationships and draw logical inferences and conclusions, including understanding sequential, comparative, and cause-effect relationships.

### **Craft & Structure** [25-30% of the Test]

Students determine word and phrase meanings, analyze an author's word choice rhetorically, analyze text structure, understand authorial purpose and perspective, and analyze characters points of view. They interpret authorial decisions rhetorically and differentiate between various perspectives and sources of information.

### **Integration of Knowledge & Ideas** [15-18% of the Test]

Students understand authors' claims, differentiate between facts and opinions, and use evidence to make connections between different texts that are related by topic. Some questions will require students to analyze how authors construct arguments, evaluating reasoning and evidence from various sources.

## Writing Test

Students who take the optional writing test receive a total of five scores: a single subject-level writing score reported on a range of 2-12 and four domain scores, also 2-12, that are based on an analytical scoring rubric. The subject-level score is the rounded average of the four domain scores. The four writing test domain scores addressed in the Writing test are Ideas & Analysis, Development & Support, Organization, and Language Use & Conventions. Two trained readers score each essay on a scale from 1-6 in each of the four domains. Each domain score represents the sum of the two readers' scores using the analytical rubric<sup>3</sup>. If the readers' ratings disagree by more than one score point, a third reader evaluates the essay and resolves the discrepancy.

### **Ideas & Analysis**

Scores in this domain reflect the ability to generate productive ideas and engage critically with multiple perspectives on the given issue. Competent writers understand the issue they are invited to address, the purpose for writing, and the audience. They generate ideas that are relevant to the situation.

### **Development & Support**

Scores in this domain reflect the ability to discuss ideas, offer rationale, and strengthen an argument. Competent writers explain and explore their ideas, discuss implications, and illustrate through examples. They help the reader understand their thinking about the issue.

### **Organization**

Scores in this domain reflect the ability to organize ideas with clarity and purpose. Organizational choices are integral to effective writing. Competent writers arrange their essay in a way that clearly shows the relationship between ideas, and they guide the reader through their discussion.

### **Language Use & Conventions**

Scores in this domain reflect the ability to use written language to clearly convey ideas. Competent writers make use of the conventions of grammar, syntax, word usage, and mechanics. They are also aware of their audience and adjust the style and tone of their writing to communicate effectively.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.act.org/content/dam/act/unsecured/documents/Writing-Test-Scoring-Rubric.pdf>