

Constructed Response Items – What to Expect for Spring 2026

During the 2026, spring administration of the NSCAS General Assessment, constructed response items will be field tested for grades 4, 7 and 8. Constructed response items are questions that ask students to write their own answers, rather than choosing from given options. Constructed response items will allow for better assessment of certain indicators than the typical multiple choice option items which will allow students, parents and teachers a deeper understanding of the mastery of the knowledge and skills students should be able to demonstrate.

Constructed Response Item Structure

When a student arrives at a constructed response item, it will provide directions that establish the writing scenario.

E.g., Joel is writing an essay about the benefits of playing team sports. Read the final paragraph of Joel's essay.

The items will include a writing sample and to minimize the reading load, the sample will only be as long as needed to assess the target ALD.

Finally, the item will include a stem explaining what the student is expected to write and the writing goal.

E.g., Joel needs to add a conclusion to his essay. Write 1-2 sentences that would clearly summarize his points and serve as an effective conclusion.

Scoring Constructed Response Items

The constructed response items will be rubric-based and focused on the single targeted attribute (e.g., effectiveness of the conclusion) in the scoring. The human scorers will also use sample responses written

What does it mean to field test an item?

Field testing means administering and evaluating new assessment questions to a representative sample of students before they are used on an official, scored test. The purpose is to ensure these items are valid (measuring what they're supposed to), reliable (consistent), and fair to all students.

for each score level when looking at a student's response. Scorers will provide students with partial credit (1 pt) for responses that display partial mastery of the ALD (e.g., a conclusion that partially summarizes or that includes irrelevant information) and full credit (2 pts) for responses that show mastery (e.g., a functional or compelling conclusion).

Supporting Teachers Prepare for Constructed Items

After content and bias reviews, NDE will provide teachers with five examples, per grade, of constructed response items released to help them understand the type of items students will receive on the assessment. Each item will include the task, the rubric, and two sample responses for each score level (0, 1, 2 points).

On January 12, 2026, there will be a professional learning webinar released for certified facilitators and a follow-up Q&A session on January 26th for them to field questions on these items and what to expect and can be shared with all educators.