

2024 MCAS ELA High School Webinar Transcript

Slide 1: Welcome to our presentation on the MCAS ELA High School essays.

My name is Jia Pan, and I am a member of the ELA Test Development Team.

This presentation is geared toward high school classroom teachers and curriculum coordinators and was originally shared as a webinar on February 6, 2024, by members of the ELA Test Development Team.

In addition to the PowerPoint presentation, you will need to access the participant packet which includes the rubric, anchor papers, and student responses. We will be referring to these resources throughout the presentation.

Slide 2: During today's session, we will:

- Provide an overview of the MCAS test development and scoring process
- Analyze student work samples from a grade 10 essay question
- Individually score student responses
- Review additional resources available on the Department's website

Slide 3: These are the Department's strategic objectives. In partnership with districts, schools and programs, DESE has identified 3 strategic objectives.

- Today we are focused on the second strategic objective, Deeper Learning.
- As part of this session, we want to think about engaging all students in grade-level work that is relevant to them. We will connect to the MA frameworks and think about ways to support students in thinking critically, asking questions and making meaning.

Slide 4: Before we look at the grade 10 essay question, it's important that we have some background and understanding of how questions, which we refer to as items, end up on an operational MCAS test.

This is the "Life Cycle of an ELA Item." From beginning to end, this process takes about two years.

As you can see, there are many steps to getting an item onto an operational MCAS test. An operational question is a question (referred to as an item) that counts toward the student's score and has already been through this process.

We have two educator committees - the Assessment Development Committee or ADC (represented by the purple boxes) and the Bias and Sensitivity Committee or BSC (represented by the blue boxes). There is an ADC for each grade level and content area and a BSC for all content areas in grades 3-10.

The ADC is tasked with making sure that the passages and items on the MCAS test are grade appropriate, accurate, and aligned to the Massachusetts State Curriculum Frameworks. The BSC is tasked with making sure all passages and items are free of bias and sensitivity concerns.

The first sets of ADC and BSC meetings focus on passages and items. At the passage review meetings, passages are reviewed by educators to make sure that they are grade appropriate, rich enough to support a variety of questions, and provide opportunities to assess the standards in the ELA framework. This is also an opportunity for educators to suggest item ideas for each passage.

At the item review meetings, educators review all items associated with the passages. One of the important tasks at this meeting is to review the essay questions as well as the scoring notes that accompany them. The scoring notes include information and examples that we anticipate students might

use to answer the question. It is not an exhaustive list, but these scoring notes are important for us to determine if there is enough information in the passage for a student to write a response.

The questions are then prepared to be put on the test and are reviewed by content experts and editorial staff.

After the test is administered (represented by the orange box), the test is separated into operational items and field test items. The operational items – which are common to all students, are scored and results are sent to districts and families.

Scoring of essay items begins with a process called benchmarking. During the benchmarking process, anchor papers and scoring materials are chosen for each essay. Anchor papers are actual student responses that represent each of the score points based on the language of the rubric.

The field test items do not count toward the student's score, but the educator committees are reconvened to review the data and to determine whether the item can go into the operational eligible bank.

An important part of this life cycle process is the fact that these teams of current educators are included at multiple points to share their suggestions for ways to refine items. We work with educators, content experts, and editorial staff throughout the process.

Slide 5: Let's turn to the types of essays that are assessed on the MCAS. There are three types of essays: explanatory, argument, and narrative. The essay types correspond to writing standards 1, 2, and 3 on the Massachusetts ELA Curriculum Framework.

For explanatory and argument essays, the key words in the questions include explain or argue, evidence, and details. The responses needed are based on the passage or passages and should not draw on outside information or personal knowledge of the passages. We must make sure that all students have access to the same content.

Students should include a central idea or thesis and use evidence or details from the passage or passages. As a reminder, this can be direct quotes, paraphrased evidence, or a mix of both.

For narrative essays, responses should include narrative elements such as characters, dialogue, plot, and setting.

It is imperative that students are writing in the correct mode. In order to clearly communicate these expectations to students, reminders are embedded in the standardized direction lines and the essay prompt.

Slide 6: As mentioned on the previous slide, students need to pay particular attention to the question being asked and to the mode of writing being assessed. There are some situations where we can tell that the student has read the passage, but the essay is not responsive to the task and mode of the prompt. In these cases, the essay may receive a zero in Idea Development and/or Conventions.

For example, summaries of passage(s) will receive a 0 for Idea Development but may earn up to 3 points for Conventions.

- This is a case where a student does not answer the question asked and instead wrote a summary of the passage or passages.
- If there is no attempt to respond to the question, the essay will not earn any points in Idea Development.

- However, responding with an accurate summary of a passage does demonstrate that the student read the passage so they could receive up to 3 points in conventions

Likewise, writing in the wrong mode will receive a 0 for Idea Development but may also earn up to 3 points for Conventions.

- This is a case where the student did not RESPOND in the correct mode – for example, writing an explanatory essay for a narrative prompt.
- Again, however, if it is evident that the student read the passage, the essay can receive a score in conventions.

Direct copy from the prompt or passage with no original words from the student will result in a ZERO Score in both Idea Development and Conventions.

- By direct copy, we mean copying large amounts of text with no original words. In this case, we cannot tell if the student read the passage or simply copied it, so we cannot determine a score for either Idea Development or Conventions. It's important to talk to students about how to use the passage in their response. It is perfectly fine and expected for students to use quotes from the passage to support their central idea, but they do need to include their own words too.

Slide 7: Here are some additional points to keep in mind for the student essays.

The response must address the question and the writing mode.

- The question includes the specific information about what should be included in the student's essay.
- There are standardized directions for each writing mode (argument, explanatory, or narrative). As with different writing types there are different expectations for the responses, so it is important that students use the question and direction lines to understand what is expected in their response.

The response must be based on specific evidence from the passage or passages. Evidence can be quoted, paraphrased, or both, but it must come from the passage or passages. Though students will not lose points for outside information, we want them to focus on answering the question using the passage or passages they have just read.

Finally, well-developed responses generally include multiple paragraphs.

- We will be looking at responses at each score point and you will notice that the higher scores include more writing to support a central idea. We are not looking for a specific number of paragraphs. However, essays should show internal and external organization to receive higher scores.

Slide 8: Scoring begins with a process called benchmarking. Scorers must participate in an essay-specific training and qualify to score each essay question.

The materials, which include the rubric, the anchor papers, and the annotations, are used to train teams of scorers. We will be going into more depth about the scoring materials on the next slide.

Scorers must pass a qualification test for each MCAS essay that they score. This means that if a scorer is trained on a grade 10 question, that does not mean the scorer can score all grade 10 questions. Each question has a specific set of training materials, some of which you will see later in the presentation.

Scorers must qualify to score each question. They need to demonstrate that they understand the expectations at each score point.

Once scorers are trained and qualify to score an essay, scoring is continuously monitored using measures like read-behinds and embedded responses in order to ensure accuracy in the scoring process.

Slide 9: Scorers use a variety of materials during the scoring process. In addition to the passage and question, scorers have the scoring guide, anchor papers, and annotations to use when scoring. We will be using these materials during this presentation.

The scoring guide is the rubric. Most of you are likely familiar with the scoring guide already. Scorers pay attention to the specific descriptions of what is expected at each score point.

A set of anchor papers is put together for each essay during the benchmarking process. These papers are actual student responses that have been selected to represent each score point. The anchor papers have been chosen based on the rubric and the scoring notes that were developed in conjunction with the educator committees. The anchor papers are used to illustrate the expectations at each score point.

Annotations are additional notes that accompany each of the anchor papers. These notes are a way to articulate, explain, and expand upon the scoring, providing more of an explanation than the rubric alone.

While the scoring guide is applied to every essay item, each essay item has its own set of unique anchor papers and annotations that are specific to the question.

Slide 10: We will be reviewing a grade 10 essay question, some sample student responses, and the criteria for scoring the student responses.

- First, we will review the scoring guide (also referred to as the rubric).
- Then, we will plan to review the question and direction lines.
- Finally, we will look at student anchor papers in each score point.

And just one more note here, scorer training is an intensive process that requires more time than we have here. For the purposes of this presentation, we are using an abbreviated anchor set.

Slide 11: The High School Essay Rubric is a 2-trait rubric that outlines the criteria for idea development and for Standard English Conventions. On all rubrics, the overall criteria are listed at the top and the specifics are outlined for each of the possible score points.

In grade 10, students can score up to 5 points for Idea Development and 3 points for Conventions.

Slide 12: This is the top part of the essay rubric. Rubrics are scored on two traits: idea development (worth 5 points for grades 6-8 and 10) and conventions (worth 3 points). The Idea Development score aligns to writing standards 1, 2, or 3 and writing standard 4. The Conventions score aligns to language standards 1, 2 and 3.

For idea development, we analyze the essays in terms of

- the quality and development of the central idea or thesis* (or in other words) how well the student answers the question
- selection and explanation of evidence and/or details* (or in other words) how well the student uses relevant evidence to support the central idea
- organization (or in other words) how well the student organizes the writing

- expression of ideas (or in other words) how well the student expresses the ideas in the writing (including use of language, style, voice, and grade-level vocabulary) and
- awareness of task and mode (in other words) whether the student is aware of the purpose for the writing

You'll notice an asterisk next to central idea and evidence and details in the box. For narrative writing, the quality and development of narrative elements will be assessed in place of a central idea or thesis.

For conventions, we are looking at the overall essay. Does the student show consistent control of sentence structure, grammar, usage and mechanics in a way that is expected of the grade level?

It is important to note that we are looking for control and not perfection. The essay does not have to be perfect to get a top score in conventions. We recognize that this is on-demand writing.

Please note that specific elements within each cell of the rubric are not a checklist. Certain elements may be stronger in some essays but still warrant a particular holistic score based on the overall balance. There is range within each score point. For example, at the 3 score point, some of the responses may be stronger than others but they are still examples at the 3 score point.

Slide 13: As noted earlier, writing expectations for MCAS essays are communicated to students through direction lines, which are standardized for each writing mode.

The question itself (or the essay prompt) also includes specific information about what to include in an essay with an additional reminder to use details and information from the passage or passages.

We'll take a look at these direction lines in the example on the next slide.

Slide 14: The direction lines vary depending on the type of writing. Let's take a look at an example of an explanatory essay prompt from 2022. The question goes with the excerpts from *The Signature of All Things* and *Emma*.

At the top, you'll see the direction lines asking students to present and develop a central idea (used interchangeably with thesis), provide evidence from the excerpts, and use correct grammar, spelling, and punctuation.

The essay prompt asks students to write an essay explaining how Hanneke in *The Signature of All Things* and Mr. Knightley in *Emma* each play a significant role in the life of the main character. Students are also reminded to use details from both excerpts to develop the essay.

From reading the essay prompt, students know that they will be expected to write an explanatory essay.

Slide 15: Let's take a look at an example of a student essay where the response scored a 5 in idea development and a 3 in conventions. Given the length of a couple of these responses, we will be analyzing each paragraph on separate slides. When essays are scored, the essay is evaluated holistically. For today's purposes, we will be highlighting different traits for each paragraph.

This response is on printed page 13 of your participant pack.

Just as a reminder, let's look at the language of the rubric. A response receiving a 5 in idea development includes:

- An insightful and fully developed central idea or thesis
- Skillful selection and explanation of evidence or details
- Skillful and/or subtle organization

- Rich expression of ideas and
- Full awareness of the task and mode

A response receiving a 3 in Conventions includes:

- Consistent control of a variety of sentence structures
- Consistent control of grammar, usage, and mechanics

Let's take a look at the introduction.

The introduction begins by explaining the similarities of the two main characters before pointing out the roles of the supporting characters. The introduction goes on to compare the two characters and specify the impact the supporting characters will have on the main characters.

The final sentence of the introduction shows an insightful central idea (or thesis statement) in which the student provides a road map of the main ideas that the body paragraphs will further explore. We know from reading the introduction that the student will go on to discuss how the supporting characters (Hanneke and Mr. Knightley) are both generally older and respectable people, are obliged to point out wrongdoing of the main character[s], and provide advice on how to fix or avoid [their mistakes] in the future. The central idea tells us that *this student* chose to organize the essay by ideas (as indicated by the red underline).

Please note that this is just one way to organize an effective essay, as we will see when we review another paper that also earned a top score in idea development. We are not looking for a specific structure (such as a 5-paragraph essay), but we do want to see purposeful organization.

Slide 16: As we can see, the central idea is carried through into the first body paragraph as indicated by the red underlining.

- The student supports the idea that both supporting characters are quote “generally older and respectable people” through skillful selection of evidence directly from the excerpts noted here in the yellow underlining.
- The student then expands upon and explains the selected evidence and connects these ideas back to the central idea as seen in the blue underline.
- The student skillfully discusses the significant role that each of the supporting characters (Hanneke and Mr. Knightley) play in the lives of the main characters (Alma and Emma) through a rich expression of ideas . An example of the student's rich expression of ideas is underlined in light blue on the slide.
- The final sentence of the paragraph, underlined in red, reinforces the student's central idea.
- Finally, because this student chose to organize the essay by idea, we also see that the paragraph also has an equal balance and discussion of both excerpts.

Slide 17: In the second body paragraph, the student uses a skillful transition to connect the first idea (that the supporting characters are (quote) “generally older and respectable people”) with the student's second idea that they feel obliged to point out the (quote) “faults and mistakes” of the main characters. This is noted in the red underline on the slide.

The student skillfully organizes the ideas throughout the essay and skillfully selects evidence to support the central idea as indicated by the yellow underlining. The student explains and expands upon the selected evidence as shown in the dark blue underlining. The student also shows through a rich expression of ideas how the supporting characters play significant roles in the lives of the main

characters. Note, for example, the language used by the student underlined in light blue where the student uses the phrase (quote) “slightly more aggressive tone and word choice” to emphasize Mr. Knightley’s role.

Slide 18: In the third body paragraph, we can see the student’s central idea is, again, carried through in the first sentence in red underline on the slide. The student supports this central idea through a skillful selection of evidence in yellow underline and an explanation of evidence in blue underline. The student demonstrates both skillful and subtle organization by contrasting the impact of the supporting characters’ actions toward the main characters. The student points out how Hanneke (quote) “gives [Alma] an idea on how to handle things herself” and Mr. Knightley (quote) “puts the responsibility in Emma’s hands and provides a valuable lesson.”

Slide 19: Finally, as we move to the conclusion, we see that the conclusion is brief, but it ties together the entire essay through a restatement of the ideas that the student explored throughout the essay. The student states in the conclusion how the insights provided by the supporting characters “can be used later [by the main characters] on their journey[s].” A full awareness of task and mode is evident in the conclusion.

Ideally, the essay would have expanded upon its ideas in the conclusion. However, in this essay, the student fully develops the introduction and the body paragraphs, resulting in the student earning a 5 in idea development.

Now that we’ve reviewed the entire essay, let’s discuss the conventions score for this essay.

Conventions are scored separately on a scale of 0 to 3, and scorers look at the essay as a whole to determine the score. As stated earlier, a top score in conventions does not necessarily mean that the essay is error-free. To earn a 3, students must show that they can demonstrate consistent control of a variety of sentence structures and grammar, usage, and mechanics. In this case, consistent control of conventions is evident throughout the essay resulting in the student earning a 3 in conventions.

Slide 20: Let’s take a look at another example of a student essay that earned a 5 in idea development and a 3 in conventions. This response is on page 14 of your participant pack. Given the length of this response, we will be analyzing each paragraph on separate slides. Again, the scorers read the full response but for this presentation, we will be analyzing each paragraph but consider the essay as a whole.

As a reminder, the essay prompt asks students to write an essay explaining how Hanneke in *The Signature of All Things* and Mr. Knightley in *Emma* each play a significant role in the life of the main character. Students will need to use details from both excerpts to develop their essays.

Let’s take a look at the introduction of this essay.

The introductory paragraph immediately shows that the student has a full awareness of the task and mode. The essay starts with a brief summary to provide background before stating the significant roles of the supporting characters in the lives of the main characters. The student approaches the essay by indicating that although the supporting characters are different in the excerpts, their roles are similar in that (quote) “both excerpts feature a mentor offering advice to characters who have made mistakes.”

Slide 21: This first body paragraph is organized by focusing in on specific moments in the excerpt where the supporting character, Hanneke, provides the main character, Alma, with advice following disappointment. The student’s discussion of the first excerpt follows a logical progression and builds to the idea that “the mutual trust” between the two characters allows Hanneke to “act as a role model” for Alma and that Hanneke is “a highly intelligent mentor” to Alma. The student ends the first body

paragraph with the central idea carried through from the introduction. The student skillfully selects and explains the evidence as indicated by the yellow and blue underlining, respectively. The student has a rich expression of ideas as indicated in the two examples in light blue underline on the slide.

As we can see here, the student chose to organize the essay by passage rather than by ideas as in the previous essay that earned a 5 in Idea Development.

Slide 22: The second body paragraph shifts to a discussion of the second excerpt where the student expands upon the central idea of Mr. Knightley being a “positive role model” for Emma. The student demonstrates skillful and subtle organization throughout the essay by building toward the main idea (similar to how the student organized the first body paragraph). The student again draws on multiple details directly from the excerpt to support the idea that Mr. Knightley serves as a positive role model for Emma in the way that he “took the time to confront Emma and risk[ed] her being angry at him.” Quotes are seamlessly woven into the body paragraph. The explanation is thorough. Again, we can see a nice balance of evidence directly from the text and the student’s own original writing.

Slide 23: The conclusion expands upon the insightful thesis in the introduction by explaining how the authors (quote) “successfully created mentors that were curated carefully to guide their characters” to becoming better versions of themselves. The student maintains a full awareness of task and mode as evident in the restatement of the significant roles that Hanneke and Mr. Knightley played in the lives of Alma and Emma, respectively.

Turning to conventions, consistent control of a variety of sentence structures and grammar, usage, and mechanics is evident throughout the essay resulting in the student earning a 3 in conventions.

Slide 24: The next essay we are going to take a look at is an essay where the student scored a 4 in idea development and a 3 in conventions. This response is on page 15 of your participant pack. Given the length of this response, we will be analyzing each paragraph on separate slides.

As we mentioned, we share multiple examples at each score point for the scorers to ensure that the language of the rubric is clear and articulated through examples of student responses.

Just as a reminder, let’s look at the language of the rubric. The rubric is on page 11. A response receiving a 4 in idea development includes:

- A clear and well-developed central idea or thesis
- Effective selection and explanation of evidence and/or details
- Effective organization
- Clear expression of ideas and
- Full awareness of the task and mode

A response receiving a 3 in Conventions includes:

- Consistent control of a variety of sentence structures
- Consistent control of grammar, usage, and mechanics

Now let’s turn to the introduction for this essay.

In this essay, the student demonstrates a full awareness of the task and mode in the introduction by stating that the supporting characters “play significant roles in the lives of the main character[s].” The student then introduces the supporting characters and proceeds to state how (quote) “both characters

help to teach the [main characters] a lesson and alter their perspective[s] on life.” The central idea is clearly expressed in the last sentence of the introduction.

Slide 25: The first body paragraph is effectively organized by excerpt and includes an effective selection and explanation of evidence to support the student’s central idea. The paragraph expands upon the central idea (in red underline) through an effective selection of evidence and explanation of the impact that the supporting character has on the main character. The paragraph ends with a discussion of how the supporting character teaches the main character a lesson about life. For Alma, the advice from Hanneke (in quote) “has a dramatic effect on her outlook [on] life.” The student’s ideas are clearly expressed throughout the essay. An example is indicated by the light blue underline.

Unlike in the essays where the students earned a 5 in Idea Development, the essay here relies more on summary (boxed in green on the slide) to help introduce the central idea. The selection and explanation of evidence is effective but doesn’t include the level of analysis that we see in the 5s.

Slide 26: The second body paragraph expands upon the central idea through an analysis of the impact that the supporting character has on the main character and similarly ends with a discussion of how Mr. Knightley (quote) “helped Emma to realize that she should think before she speaks and feel further sympathy for those around her.” Relevant quotations are woven throughout the essay, and the student provides clear and effective explanations of them to develop the central idea. Ideas are clearly expressed throughout the paragraph.

Slide 27: The effective conclusion rewords the thesis and states that Hanneke and Mr. Knightley teach (quote) “the main characters significant lessons about life.” The student reiterates the essay prompt in the concluding statement, which does demonstrate full awareness of the task and mode but doesn’t provide any new insights or information. Ideas are clearly expressed as indicated by the light blue underline.

The 4 essay differs from the two 5 essays in that the use of language is less sophisticated and it relies a bit more on summary than on explanation of evidence and details as noted in the green underline. However, the central idea is clear and well-developed and the selection and explanation of evidence, and the organization of ideas are still effective.

For conventions, the student demonstrates consistent control of a variety of sentence structures and grammar, usage, and mechanics relative to the length and complexity of the essay resulting in the essay earning a 3.

Slide 28: Let’s take a look at an essay that scored a 3 in Idea Development and a 3 in Conventions. This response is on page 16 of your participant pack and the question is on page 8.

Just as a reminder, let’s look at the language of the rubric. The rubric is on page 11. A response receiving a 3 in idea development includes:

- A general and moderately developed central idea or thesis
- Appropriate selection and explanation of evidence and/or details
- Moderate organization
- Adequate expression of ideas
- Sufficient awareness of the task and mode

A response receiving a 3 in Conventions includes:

- Consistent control of a variety of sentence structures

- Consistent control of grammar, usage, and mechanics

Now, let's take a look at the actual student response.

The introduction is brief and yet shows sufficient awareness of the task and mode. The central idea states a difference between the two supporting characters and this contrast is moderately developed throughout the essay. Ideas are moderately organized with appropriate selection and explanation of evidence.

The first body paragraph begins with a summary of the first excerpt and relies more on summary, boxed and underlined in green, to expand upon the student's central idea. The second body paragraph is organized with a discussion of the second excerpt. The student contrasts the impact of Mr. Knightley on Emma and Hanneke on Alma. The second body paragraph includes more explanation, although the student still relies on paraphrased textual evidence to expand upon the central idea.

The essay ends abruptly after the comparison of the two excerpts. Discussion of the two excerpts is imbalanced. The student relies more on summary of events in the first body paragraph and lists a number of paragraphs with examples of Mr. Knightley's interactions with Emma in the second body paragraph. Further elaboration and analysis of the significant roles that the supporting characters play in the lives of the main characters would result in a higher score point.

Though this essay is shorter than the previous essays, it has enough length and complexity to earn a 3 in conventions. The student is able to demonstrate consistent control of varying sentence structures, grammar, usage, and mechanics.

Slide 29: Let's take a look at an essay found on page 17 that scored a 2 in Idea Development and a 2 in Conventions. As a reminder, the essay prompt is on page 8 and the rubric is on page 11. A response receiving a 2 in idea development includes: A present and somewhat developed central idea or thesis, Limited selection and explanation of evidence and/or details, Limited organization, Basic expression of ideas and Partial awareness of the task and mode

A response receiving a 2 in Conventions includes: Mostly consistent control of a variety of sentence structures relative to length of essay and Mostly consistent control of grammar, usage, and mechanics relative to complexity and/or length of essay.

Now, let's take a look at the student response. In this essay, the introduction is brief and acknowledges in the central idea a similarity in the important role that the supporting characters play in the lives of the main characters. The student demonstrates a partial awareness of the task and mode with a more simplistic central idea in which the student reworded the essay prompt. Selection and explanation of evidence are limited throughout the essay as noted in yellow and blue underline. In addition, organization is limited throughout the essay. The first body paragraph relies on summary, noted in green underline, and direct quotes with little explanation to support the central idea. The paragraph concludes with a more basic statement expressing that (quote) "Hanneke is like a motherly figure to Alma" to explain (quote) "why Alma [relies] on [Hanneke] so much" without additional elaboration. The second body paragraph similarly relies on summary and direct quotes with little explanation. After the direct quotation, the student abruptly shifts to a concluding statement indicating that both supporting characters play important roles in the lives of the main characters (quote) "by being someone that helps and understands the main characters." Essays in the lower score points tend to struggle with going beyond a statement of a simplistic central idea. These essays often rely on summary instead of explanation and use quotes (sometimes heavily) to advance the central idea. For conventions, there is too little original writing to demonstrate consistent control of conventions. Some awkwardness and

errors in usage and mechanics stand out relative to the complexity and length of the essay resulting in the student earning a 2.

Slide 30: Let's take a look at an essay that scored a 1 in Idea Development and a 1 in Conventions that is found on page 18. Again, the question is on page 8.

Let's look at the language of the rubric. The rubric is on page 11. A response receiving a 1 in idea development includes:

- A central idea or thesis that is not developed
- Insufficient evidence and/or details
- Minimal organization
- Poor expression of ideas
- Minimal awareness of the task and mode

A response receiving a 1 in Conventions includes:

- Little control and/or no variety of sentence structures and/or
- Little control of grammar, usage, and mechanics relative to complexity and/or insufficient length

Now, let's take a look at the student response.

In this essay, the central idea is introduced in the first sentence and restated in the last sentence. The central idea is not developed, and evidence is insufficient to support the central idea. Overall, the response is too brief to demonstrate more than minimal awareness of task and mode. The response does show some organization with a brief introduction and conclusion and two body paragraphs; however, there is too little development and only minimal attempts at explanation (underlined in blue). The introduction and conclusion essentially restate the prompt and are not further developed.

For conventions, the response is too brief to demonstrate more than little control of grammar, usage, and mechanics. Though there are few errors, there is too little original text to provide evidence of control of conventions.

Slide 31: Finally, let's take a look at an example of an essay that scored a zero in both idea development and conventions. The response is on page 19 of the participant packet.

The language of the rubric for a response receiving a 0 in idea development states that the response shows evidence the student has read the text but does not address the question or incorrectly responds to the question.

A response receiving a 0 in Conventions has sentences that are formed incorrectly with no control of grammar, usage, and mechanics and/or the response is insufficient in length.

Now, let's take a look at the essay.

There is some evidence that the student read the excerpts. However, the response is overly brief and is insufficient to answer the question.

For conventions, the essay demonstrates no evidence of control of standard English conventions resulting in a score of 0.

Slide 32: Now that we have analyzed essays in each of the score points, let's go over some key takeaways for Idea Development and Conventions.

- The central idea should respond to the essay prompt and be fully developed throughout the essay.
- Relevant evidence from the passage or passages should be purposefully selected and expanded upon. Evidence can be quoted, paraphrased, or a mix of both. The essay should also show original thinking in analyzing the evidence, and the student's ideas should be developed and expanded upon throughout the essay.
- The essay should show purposeful organization. As we saw in the anchor papers, essays can be organized by ideas, by passage, or in other ways. There is no requirement for a specific number of paragraphs, but fully-developed essays generally include multiple paragraphs.
- Rich expression of ideas should be evident through the student's use of language, style, voice, and grade-level vocabulary.
- An awareness of task and mode should be evident immediately in the introduction and throughout the essay.

In conventions, the essay should demonstrate consistent control of a variety of sentence structures and consistent control of grammar, usage, and mechanics relative to the length of the essay. The essay does not have to be error-free to earn a 3 in Conventions, but it should demonstrate consistent control.

Slide 33: Now that we have analyzed some student essays and reviewed some key takeaways for both Idea Development and Conventions, we're going to practice scoring some student essay responses. At this point in the presentation, please take some time to review Responses A through E. These can be found on pages 20 through 24 of your participant packet.

You'll want to pause the presentation at this point and familiarize yourself with the essay prompt on page 7 and the excerpts on pages 1 through 6 of the participant packet. You'll want to refer to both as you read the student responses.

As you read Response A, you'll want to refer to the anchor papers in your packet on pages 13 through 29 and the rubric on page 11. These resources are essential when scoring responses. Scorers have these readily available and refer to them as they score each response. As you read through the response, you'll want to determine which anchor paper Response A is most similar to based on the expectations at the score point. Choose the score that best represents the response.

Continue this process with Responses B through F.

When you have read and scored each of the practice papers, you may resume the PowerPoint presentation to learn about how each practice paper was scored.

Slide 34: The first essay we'll take a look at is response A. You can find response A on page 21 of the participant packet. This essay scored a 2 in Idea Development and a 2 in Conventions. Let's take a look at why.

- The response has a central idea that is somewhat developed throughout the brief essay as indicated in the red underlining. Similar to the 2 anchor, there is a limited selection and explanation of evidence. The essay relies more on summary (noted in the green underlining) than analysis of the evidence. For Conventions, the response shows mostly consistent control of sentence structures, grammar, usage, and mechanics. Noticeable errors are present throughout the brief response.

Slide 35: The second essay we will take a look at, response B, is on page 22 of the participant packet. This essay scored a 4 in Idea Development and a 3 in Conventions. Let's take a closer look at why.

- From reading the introduction, it is immediately clear that the student has a full awareness of the task and mode. Similar to the 4 anchor, the central idea in this response is clear (noted in the red underlining) and provides an outline of ideas that the student will discuss further in the essay. The body paragraphs are organized by excerpt where the student discusses the significant roles that the supporting characters play in helping the main characters realize where they (quote) "went wrong" in their actions. The selection and explanation of the evidence and the organization of the essay are effective. Ideas are expressed clearly. The conclusion reiterates the (quote) "significant impact" of the supporting characters.
- For conventions, the length and complexity of the essay are enough to show a consistent control of a variety of sentence structures, grammar, usage, and mechanics.

Slide 36: The third essay we will take a look at, response C, is on page 23 of the participant packet. This essay scored a 0 in Idea Development and a 0 in Conventions. Let's take a look at why.

- Though it is evident the student has read the prompt, the vague statement (quote) "they both know the role other people play in their life" is insufficient to answer the question. In conventions, there is no control of sentence structure, grammar, usage, or mechanics.

Slide 37: The fourth essay we will take a look at, response D, is on page 24 of the participant packet. This essay scored a 3 in Idea Development and a 3 in Conventions. Let's take a look at why.

- This response shows sufficient awareness of task and mode and is moderately organized, with a brief introduction and conclusion and a paragraph discussing each excerpt. The central idea – that both characters (quote) "help the main character to realize the effect of their actions and how they can grow in the future" -- is general and only moderately developed throughout the essay. The evidence selection and explanation is appropriate; however, as with the 3 anchor, the response relies somewhat on summary rather than analysis of the selected evidence. Additional specific details from both texts would have strengthened this response.
- In conventions, this response demonstrates consistent control of a variety of sentence structures. Minor errors in grammar, usage, and mechanics do not detract from the overall score.

Slide 38: The final essay we will take a look at, response E, is on page 25 of the participant packet. This essay scored a 1 in Idea Development and a 1 in Conventions. Let's take a look at why.

This response consists of a brief paragraph that demonstrates minimal organization and minimal awareness of task and mode. A central idea is stated in the first sentence: (quote) "these characters both play a role of a person who is interested in showing guidance or support." However, this statement is not developed with evidence from the texts. The response is similar to the 1/1 anchor in its brevity and lack of development.

In conventions, the response is too brief to show consistent control of sentence structure, grammar, usage, or mechanics.

Slide 39: This concludes our review of the practice papers. Let's shift to a discussion of some of the MCAS ELA resources posted on the DESE website.

- ELA Rubrics: This link includes the rubrics for grades 3 through 10.
- Student Work Samples and Annotations: These are the materials we looked at during the presentation. For each released essay, we include a sample set of score responses (the anchors) along with annotations that outline the expectations at each score point using the rubric. This is

an excellent resource to use for looking at other responses or essays that we have released in the past. We have up to five years' worth of material.

- Released Questions: These are found in the Resource center and include released passages and questions. They are displayed in the platform that the students use when taking the MCAS tests. This is something we encourage you to use with your students to simulate the testing experience. For example, students can type their responses in the essay boxes and submit them. Educators can print the score page at the end to see the students' responses.
- ELA Test Design: The ELA test design includes the components of the ELA test. The design includes information about the question types, the number of questions, and the reporting categories. As we've mentioned, the essay questions align to writing and language standards.
- And finally, we have a slide deck posted that includes information about MCAS ELA essays with a focus on narrative writing at the elementary and middle school levels.

Slide 40: If you have any policy questions about the MCAS assessments such as test designs or accommodations, please reach out to the Department by email or phone.

If you need logistical support, including tech support on the testing platform, please contact the MCAS Service Center.

Slide 41: On behalf of the Department, we thank you for viewing our presentation on MCAS ELA High School essays.