SAMPLE ITEMS AND PERFORMANCE TASKS

Frequently Asked Questions

1. What is purpose of the sample items and performance tasks?

Smarter Balanced sample items and performance tasks are intended to help teachers, administrators, and policymakers implement the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and prepare for the implementation of the Smarter Balanced assessment system in the 2014-15 school year. They provide an early look into the depth of understanding of the CCSS that will be measured by the Smarter Balanced assessments.

2. Will these items and tasks appear on the final assessments?

The sample items and tasks are meant to illustrate the rigor and complexity students will encounter on the Smarter Balanced assessments. They also show the different types of questions that will appear on the assessments, including: selected-response; constructed response; technology-enhanced; and performance tasks. While these items and tasks may be included in the non-secure interim assessment item bank, they will not be part of the secure summative assessment item bank. Smarter Balanced is working with educators to develop and test thousands of additional items and performance tasks in 2013 and 2014.

3. Can I administer these questions to my students?

The sample items and tasks are not intended to be used as practice tests. However, educators can use them to begin planning the shifts in instruction that will be required to help students meet the demands of the new assessments.

4. When will teachers and students be able to view complete assessments?

Teachers and students will have two opportunities to experience the assessments prior to implementation in the 2014-15 school year. All schools in Smarter Balanced member states will be eligible to participate in a Pilot Test of the assessment system beginning in February 2013. Additional information about how to participate in the Pilot Test will be made available to states in fall 2012.

In early 2014, a large-scale Field Test will be conducted across member states. The goal of the Field Test will be to ensure that administration, scoring, and reporting systems function correctly in preparation for the implementation of the assessment system in the 2014-15 school year.

5. What is a performance task?

Performance tasks are extended activities that measure a student's ability to integrate knowledge and skills across multiple standards—a key component of college and career readiness. Performance tasks will be used to better measure capacities such as depth of understanding, research skills, and complex analysis, which cannot be adequately assessed with selected- or constructed-response items. Some performance tasks can be scored automatically; many will be hand-scored by professionally trained readers.

These tasks will be delivered as part of the interim and summative components of the assessment system, with more extended tasks available in the digital library as part of the Smarter Balanced-developed exemplar instructional modules and inventory of currently available resources. The time and resource constraints for each performance task will be guided by its placement in the overall assessment system.

6. How were the sample items and performance tasks developed?

Smarter Balanced is working with educators from Governing States to write and review items and tasks. Detailed item and task specifications—along with training modules for item developers—ensure that each question is aligned with approved content claims, assessment targets, and the Common Core State Standards.

7. What tools are available for students with special needs?

Smarter Balanced is committed to providing valid, fair, and reliable measures of achievement and growth for English language learners and students with disabilities. The sample items and tasks do not include accessibility tools and accommodations options that will be available when the assessments are administered to students in the 2014-15 school year—such as Braille, translation options, and the ability to change font size, highlight text, or magnify portions of items. Over the next several months—guided by the Consortium's Accessibility and Accommodations Work Group and advisory committees for English language learners and students with disabilities—Smarter Balanced will finalize the accessibility tools and accommodations options available through the test interface.

8. Why are some English language arts/literacy items missing a reading passage?

The sample English language arts/literacy items and performance tasks include a mixture of published and commissioned reading passages and sources. Smarter Balanced has not obtained permission to reprint copyrighted passages and source documents referenced in the sample items. As a result, several sample items and performance tasks—Planes on the Brain 1-3, Animal Defenses, and Garden—include only the citations for copyrighted material, rather than the complete text. For the operational assessment in the 2014-15 school year, Smarter Balanced intends to use primarily published passages—reflecting the emphasis in the Common Core on exposure to "high-quality, increasingly challenging literary and informational texts"—and the full text of these passages will be available to students.

9. What are the technology requirements for viewing the sample items and tasks?

The sample items and performance tasks are compatible with desktop and laptop computers with the following Internet browsers:

- Firefox 3.6 or newer
- Internet Explorer 8 or newer
- Chrome 18 or newer
- Safari 4.1 or newer

In addition, Android and iPad tablets with 9.5 inch screens (10 inch class) or larger are supported with the following Internet browsers:

- Chrome 18 or newer (Android)
- Safari 4.1 or newer (iPad)

It is important to note that these specifications do not reflect the minimum technology requirements for the operational Smarter Balanced assessment system in the 2014-15 school year. More information on the Consortium's new hardware purchasing guidelines is available on the Technology page.

10. Can the sample items and tasks be scored?

Users can score most selected response and technology-enhanced items to receive instant feedback on their answers. Constructed response and performance tasks are not able to be automatically scored at this time, although scoring rubrics are provided under "About this Item." In some cases, the range of possible answers for constructed response items must be validated through the Field

Test. In addition, Smarter Balanced is developing automated technologies to score written responses. Items and tasks that cannot be scored automatically will be evaluated by trained educators.

11. How can I submit comments or questions about the sample items?
Smarter Balanced welcomes comment and feedback on the sample items and performance tasks. Educators and interested stakeholders can submit feedback online at http://www.smarterbalanced.org/sample-items-and-performance-tasks-questions-and-feedback/.