

Smarter Balanced English Language Arts Item and Task Specifications

APPENDIX C

Vocabulary*

The *CCSS Appendix A: Research Supporting Key Elements of the Standards*, defines three tiers of vocabulary words identified in current reading research. When choosing vocabulary words to be tested, it is important to distinguish among the following tiers:

Tier 1 words comprise the most basic, everyday words in our language (e.g., words of Anglo-Saxon origin like *head, hand, book, girl, and dog*). Tier 1 words will seldom appear as tested vocabulary words on common-core assessments.

Tier 2 words are those that have wide use in academic writing and are important to student learning across many topics and all grade levels. As noted in *CCSS Appendix A*, tier 2 words are “highly transferable general academic words (for example, qualifying adjectives and adverbs such as *important* and *typically*) are used broadly across domains (areas or fields of knowledge) and in situations outside of the classroom.” These words should appear in the vocabulary-focused questions on assessments aligned to the common core in grades 3 through high school.

Tier 3 words are low-frequency and domain-specific, the kinds of terms that tend to be footnoted in texts that are written about specific, focused topics (e.g., *legislature* and *circumference*). As stated in Appendix A, “Students typically learn these words . . . either by being taught them directly or by reading multiple selections from multiple authors within those domains.” These words will seldom be the focus of vocabulary questions on common core assessments.

Developing vocabulary questions in assessments requires a focus on tier 2 words at all grade levels. The standards have a special focus on the academic vocabulary common to complex texts in all disciplines, and assessments should share that focus in its treatment of vocabulary.

On the following page is a brief list of some representative tier 2 words chosen from the thousands of such words in English. The list is suggestive, not exhaustive. The words are listed in approximate grade-level bands to show that there are important tier 2 words to be taught and tested at every grade level. These words are used in many different contexts and exhibit various shades of meaning based on those contexts. Some of them are homographs, but most are not. Students who know tier 2 words like the ones listed on the follow page are greatly advantaged in the close, analytic reading required by the Common Core standards.

*Appendix C, Vocabulary was adapted from the Common Core State Standards and the Publishers’ Criteria for the Common Core State Standards

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Partial, Representative List of Tier 2 Words		
Likely to be in the 3-5 grade band	Likely to be in the 6-8 grade band	Likely to be in the 9-11 grade band
Different	assume	specify
important	identify	technique
choose	conclude*	compensate
faithful	alternative	arbitrary
stable*	consist	random
exactly	contribute	suffice
center	definite	verify
explain	distinct	perspective
excuse*	evident	pertinent
according	expand	evaluate
actually	indicate	feasible
bound*	individual	passive
declare	initial*	simultaneous
experience	intense	component
figure*	major*	formulate
fortunate	method	magnitude
gradually	publish	manipulate
necessary	structure	ultimate
ordinary	emphasize	criterion
measure*	illustrate	hypothesis
approach	exaggerate	fluctuate
period*	approximate	innovation
establish	complicate	respective
achieve	modify	subsequent
ignore	tradition	benevolent
select	transmit	malign
automatic	restrict	abstraction
concentrate*	negative*	coherent
construct	convert	emanate
consult	analyze	impervious
establish	consequent	succumb
demonstrate	impact	transitory
interpret	potential	empirical
obtain	precise	entity

*designates homographs