What Students Need to Know: GED® RLA’s Extended Response

- The webinar will start at 3:30 pm EDT/ 2:30 pm CDT.
- If you have a technical question before the webinar, please type it into the question panel. We will do our best to answer your question.
- When you log on, check your audio to make sure your headphones are working properly.
- If you use your phone to call in, be sure to enter the appropriate codes.
- As you enter the webinar, your audio will be muted to avoid a lot of background noise.
- You will not hear anything until 3:30 p.m. when the webinar goes live, so please don’t think that anything is wrong.
- If you haven’t downloaded the PowerPoint handout and guide, please feel free to do so from the handout panel.
Welcome!

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- Bonnie Goonen, Consultant to GEDTS
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Workshop Objectives

- Overview the performance expectations for CR items and scoring
- Explore teaching key aspects of constructed response
- Present a structured approach to tackling a writing task
- Share resources
Key Skills

Why Constructed Response?

• CR is the best way of directly assessing
  - Writing skills
  – Higher-order thinking skills
• RLA ER – 45 min., ~20% of test (in terms of raw score points)
• And, yes, it is possible to pass without earning score points…however, this is NOT good test strategy
The Urban Legends: Instructor Remix

- Using "I" earns an automatic "0"
- The Automated Scoring Engine (ASE) must not be working properly with all those zeroes
- “Show us some real student responses…There aren’t any real student responses available for instructors to work with”
- There isn’t enough time for students to complete the task
- Skipping the ER is good test strategy

The Urban Legends: Student Remix

- **NO ONE** earns any points on the ER
- You can game the system by using key words and phrases
- Forty-five minutes isn’t enough time to read, plan, and write
- The instructions don’t tell you what you have to do
- There is a “right” answer—they are just not admitting it
What Is Effective in Tackling the ER?

- Higher-order thinking skills (critical thinking and reasoning with a dash of problem solving)
- Effective “close reading”
- Sufficient understanding of the task to produce writing that is text- and evidence-based
- Familiarity with the test interface and basic keyboarding skills

Text-Based Writing Requires…

- Proficient reading skills (at a minimum)
- Organized thinking processes to enable analyzing and evaluating
- Ability to recognize and write about evidence
- A routine that becomes a “go-to”
- Enough practice
CR Drivers (aka the Three Traits)

CR requires…
1. “Use of Evidence” (Arguments and Use of Evidence)
2. “Ways of Expressing Meaning” (Ideas and Organizational Structure)
3. “Language Conventions and Usage” (Grammar & Sentence Structure)

to respond to the prompt…
• “In your response, analyze both positions presented to determine which one is better supported. Use relevant and specific evidence from the article to support your response.”

RLA ER Requires the Following Skills…

• “Closely” read text that is
  – more complex
  – greater in length
• Determine what is explicitly stated
• Draw specific comparisons between two texts
• Distinguish between valid arguments and faulty reasoning
• Distinguish between supported and unsupported claims
• Make logical inferences based on evidence
• Draw relevant and sufficient evidence from the texts
Sharing Findings

Test-Taker Performance: What We’ve Found

Why Are Students Struggling?

- Refusing to use an outline or plan from which to write
- Ignoring the value of a structured approach to the task
- Not writing enough to be scored
- Not fully utilizing the available time
What is the Skills’ Gap?

Reasoning—both qualitative and quantitative

- **Analysis** of written material—including the role of details, main ideas, thematic support and relationships within written sources;
- Extraction of **evidence** (e.g. facts, statistics, examples, or expert testimony) from written material and the ability to draw logical inferences or develop valid claims;
- “**Connecting the dots**”: understanding relationships (between people, places, things like processes and events, etc.) and the analysis of cause-and-effect relationships, both simple and complex.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>From Struggling to Successful</th>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Struggling Writers</th>
<th>Successful Writers</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Plan</strong></td>
<td>• Are unaware of purpose or process of writing</td>
<td>• Analyze the task</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Have little or no knowledge of the text structure of an essay</td>
<td>• Understand and apply all the elements of an essay</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Have difficulty developing plans and staying focused on the topic</td>
<td>• Create goals for their writing</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Experience greater writing anxiety and decreased motivation</td>
<td>• Develop plans to achieve their goals</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Discuss how and why a plan will work</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Organize</strong></td>
<td>• Produce fewer ideas</td>
<td>• Develop multiple ideas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Fail to organize their thoughts</td>
<td>• Organize their ideas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Draft/write</strong></td>
<td>• Plan what they are going to say as they write</td>
<td>• Write using an organized plan, but adjust goals when obstacles arise</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Use imprecise and nonspecific vocabulary</td>
<td>• Use vocabulary accurately</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Struggle to convey their thoughts, ideas, and opinions</td>
<td>• Experience fewer difficulties with the elements of an essay</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Write fewer sentences</td>
<td>• Generate sentences that support their ideas</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Focus on mechanics rather than on clarity and organization</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Edit and Revise</strong></td>
<td>• Experience problems with grammar, punctuation, and spelling</td>
<td>• Edit spelling, capitalization, and punctuation</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>• Place words and letters too close or too far from each other</td>
<td>• Make more content revisions</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Do not review and make correction</td>
<td>• Correct overall appearance</td>
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A Few Insights to Improve Student Performance

What Earns Points

• Going beyond merely stating which side is best supported
  – A single statement of a stance is considered insufficient
  – Needs to include the “why”

• Doing more than just using quotations
  – Evidence cited must support the overall message and must be analyzed in some way
Setting the Claim (statement of stance)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>This . . .</th>
<th>Instead of . . .</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Between the two positions in this article, the one against Daylight</td>
<td>They say daylight savings time is a great thing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Savings Time is better supported because of the stronger research used.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between the two positions arguing whether or not Daylight Saving Time</td>
<td>The changing to daylight saving time twice a year is</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(DST) is useful in terms of energy consumption and safety, the</td>
<td>quite confusing to a lot of people, especially at the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>argument in favor of DST is better supported because it uses more</td>
<td>time right before and after the change.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>factual evidence.</td>
<td></td>
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What Earns Points

- Analyzing the issue or the quality of the argument through which both sides are presented
  - Evidence cited must support overall message **and** must be analyzed in some way
- Demonstrating that the test-taker has engaged with the text and has created a text-based argument
Analyze, (evaluate), and engage

This . . .
In the argument for daylight savings time, it seems that the pro daylight savings time position has won. The first article brings up several improvements in the daily lives of Americans which daylight savings time brings about. The article then uses studies and large scale research to support its position. In the second article, only smaller scale studies are used, and the writer uses arguments with no factual basis to support anti-daylight savings positions.

Instead of . . .
The changing to daylight saving time twice a year is quite confusing to a lot of people, especially at the time right before and after the change. A person can become upset when they forget to change their clock each time. More accidents can also happen in rushing, when you forget to change all of your clocks.

What to Avoid
Responses should not

• Be composed of a summary of the passage or authors’ positions
• Include personal information (e.g. opinion)
• Be written in first person (let’s discuss why)
What Students Need to Know: RLA’s
Extended Response

Examples

Summarization
If those are the arguments that are made, then people just need to be more responsible if they are having trouble adjusting with the time change.

Personal Information
Back when it was thought of it made sense – but times have changed and now it’s time to not have it.

What is the expectation for an effective constructed response?

When you write . . .
• determine which position presented in the passage(s) is better supported by evidence from the passage(s)
• explain why the position you chose is the better-supported one
• remember, the better-supported position is not necessarily the position you agree with
• defend your assertions with multiple pieces of evidence from the passage(s)
• build your main points thoroughly

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Simple techniques to improve scores

Expose students to a structured approach to the writing task and help them understand that they need to:

• Write a complete response, not just a short paragraph (300-500 words)
• Provide commentary on the evidence cited (explain the “why”)
• Develop two or three ideas fully rather than mention a lot of things without detail
• Leave five minutes at the end for proofreading—that is one of the things evaluated

“Stuff to Teach”

• Writing about what is read (Hint: Practice, practice, practice!)
• Using a plan (e.g., a graphic organizer or an outline) for organizing the information from the reading and then writing about it
• Bringing good grammar to the writing task
• Answering the question that is asked
A Simple Structure for CR

**Beginning**
- The introduction states the main idea or position. It begins with a topic sentence/thesis statement. The beginning restates the question and sets the stage to answer the prompt.

**Middle**
- Answer the question first.
- Provide important information the author stated and meant. This is where you go to the text(s) and provide examples/evidence and important details to support the answer.
- Sample phrases to introduce each text reference include: … stated; in the text …; for example . . .
- Include background information as required through the prompt.

**Ending**
- Write a closing that summarizes the position taken or restates the thesis statement in a different way.

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Instructional Strategy

Teach Analyzing and Evaluating
What Students Need to Know: RLA’s
Extended Response

Interact with Text – Analyze

| Purpose/Context | What is the text about?  
|                 | What type of text is it?  
|                 | What overall purpose does the text serve?  
| Author          | Who is the author of the text?  
|                 | What qualifies him/her to write on this subject?  
| Audience        | Where does the text appear?  
|                 | What does the author expect the reader to do or think based on the argument/information presented?  
| Proof/Evidence  | What type of evidence is provided? Is more than one type of evidence provided? Is evidence provided for both sides of an argument?  
| Organization/Structure/Style | What is the organization of the text? What is the tone? What type of sentence structure/complexity, figurative language, rhetorical questions are used?  

Evaluation (makes judgment and explains why)

- Analyzes the purpose of the argument
- Recognizes the main claim and judges how it is expressed
- Understands and evaluates the structure of the argument
- Evaluates the reliability of evidence
- Understands and evaluates reasoning about the evidence
Prompt: Analyze the arguments presented in the press release and the letter to the editor.

In your response, develop an argument in which you explain how one position is better supported than the other. Incorporate relevant and specific evidence from both sources to support your argument.

Remember, the better-argued position is not necessarily the position with which you agree. This task should take approximately 45 minutes to complete.
What Students Need to Know: RLA’s Extended Response

Claim
“While both sides make an acceptable case, the letter provides a better-supported argument.”

Evidence
“a resident...is more credible...as compared to a representative”
“factual information”
“backed by logical explanations and facts with few speculations”

Analysis/Evaluation
“press release and letter...offer positions that are supported by both fact and opinion”

Counterclaim “press release offers some facts”, but “mainly specked with anticipation and hopes” rebutted by the author of the letter

What Drives Argumentative Writing: Evidence
Research Basis

G. Hillocks (2010) points out that “many teachers begin to teach some version of argument with the writing of a thesis statement [but] in reality, good argument begins with looking at the data that are likely to become the evidence in an argument and that give rise to a thesis statement or major claim.”


Written Argument in the Classroom

- Evaluate data
- Make a claim
- List evidence and reasoning
- Identify counterclaims and provide rebuttals
Both Sides Now

Students should
- List the evidence that supports
- List the evidence that opposes
- Evaluate the evidence
- Select the position that is better supported
- Provide reasons why (analysis/evaluation)

Helping Students Respond More Effectively

- Review the sample responses in RLA Resource Guides
- Closely examine the annotations
- Help students understand the prompt and what is being asked
- Use the rubrics and/or scoring tools to evaluate student work
- Provide ample practice in class using a variety of materials
What Students Need to Know: RLA’s Extended Response

Proficient Readers and Writers Can…

- Read complex text
- Identify text structure
- Look for key words and phrases
- Unpack the prompt
- Develop a claim or argument
- Find the evidence that supports that claim or argument
- Analyze and evaluate the evidence
- Explain how the evidence is connected to the claim or argument

Getting Started…First Steps…

Have students
- **Closely read** source texts and identify the evidence
- **Use the evidence** to determine the better supported argument
- **Provide a rationale** for why the argument was better supported
Thank you!

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