

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

A Workshop by GED Testing Service



welcome



Workshop Objectives



- Overview the performance expectations for CR items and scoring



- Explore the teaching of key aspects of the constructed response



- Present a structured approach to tackling a writing task
- Share resources



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Inquiring Minds Want to Know

RLA Extended Response



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** a good test strategy



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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 to use in the classroom”
- There isn’t enough time to complete the task
- Skipping the ER is good test strategy

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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 definitely a "right" answer—they are just not admitting it

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Constructed Response Items and Scoring

- Can you pass the RLA test and score a "0" on the ER item?
 - Yes, but most test-takers who pass at HSE do get some score points
 - The ER is designed to measure skills at the higher HSE levels and CCR levels
 - Many test-takers still do not understand the ER task
- GEDTS conducted research into how to best explain the task and what is required; some modifications will be made

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Constructed Response Items and Scoring

- How does the computer score the ER item? What is it looking for in a response?
- The automated scoring engine
 - Catalogs the characteristics of a writing sample
 - Compares those characteristics to real exemplar responses with known scores
 - Assigns a score based on similarity to existing exemplars
- If no similar responses found, ER is human-scored

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Constructed Response Items and Scoring

- Why should I spend time on teaching writing skills if students don't need many points on writing to pass the test?
 - Writing skills are one of the critical differentiators of long-term success
 - Building skills in this area helps develop thinking skills that impact performance on the entire test
 - Any score point earned counts towards the overall score

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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

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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 (an effective habit) that becomes a “go-to”
- Sufficient practice

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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.”

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RLA ER Requires Students to . . .

- “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

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Sharing Findings
Test-Taker Performance: What We've Found



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Why Are Students Struggling?

- Not utilizing an outline or plan from which to write
- Not taking a structured approach to the task
- Not writing enough to be scored (still!)
- Not fully utilizing the available time (45 minutes)

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From Struggling to Successful

	Struggling Writers	Successful Writers
Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are unaware of purpose or process of writing • Have little or no knowledge of the text structure of an essay • Have difficulty developing plans and staying focused on the topic • Experience greater writing anxiety and decreased motivation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analyze the task • Understand and apply all the elements of an essay • Create goals for their writing • Develop plans to achieve their goals • Discuss how and why a plan will work
Organize	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Produce fewer ideas • Fail to organize their thoughts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop multiple ideas • Organize their ideas
Draft/write	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plan what they are going to say as they write • Use imprecise and nonspecific vocabulary • Struggle to convey their thoughts, ideas, and opinions • Write fewer sentences • Focus on mechanics rather than on clarity and organization 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Write using an organized plan, but adjust goals when obstacles arise • Use vocabulary accurately • Experience fewer difficulties with the elements of an essay • Generate sentences that support their ideas
Edit and Revise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experience problems with grammar, punctuation, and spelling • Place words and letters too close or too far from each other • Do not review and make correction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Edit spelling, capitalization, and punctuation • Make more content revisions • Correct overall appearance

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Workbook— p. 2

The IRIS Center Vanderbilt Peabody College



A Few Insights to Improve Student Performance

What Earns Points



What Earns Points

- Going beyond merely stating which side is better 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



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Setting the Claim (statement of stance)

This . . .

In the argument for daylight savings time, the pro daylight savings position is better supported because the research is more timely and reliable.

Between the two positions arguing whether or not Daylight Saving Time (DST) is useful in terms of energy consumption and safety, the argument in favor of DST is better supported because it uses more factual evidence.

Instead of . . .

They say daylight savings time is a great thing.

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.

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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*

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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.

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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)



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 its time to not have it.



Expectations for 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 (300-500 words), not just a short paragraph
- 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

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“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

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A Simple Structure for CR

Workbook— p. 3



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



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Interact with Text – Analyze

Workbook – p. 4

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?



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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

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Begin with the End in Mind



Response 1:

Both the press release and the letter to the editor offer positions that are supported by both fact and opinion. The press release seeks to entice the new bill for expansion of Highway 17, while the letter argues that the passing of the bill could prove detrimental to the district. While both sides make an acceptable case, the letter provides a stronger argument because it provides more factual evidence.

One example of the letter's stronger argument is the explanation that federal tax dollars pay for the road, as it will incorporate six different states, therefore eliminating this particular state's ability to strike the bill down. This proves, with factual information, that the district did not have a fair say in the bill. The notion that few residents will use the road that their tax dollars are providing is an opinion. However, a resident and small-business owner in the town is more credible in the awareness of the town's concern, as compared to a representative who attended a few meetings in the town hall.

Another example of the better supported argument in the letter is the reference to the construction jobs as temporary. The press release praises the new jobs created by the highway construction, as this is a valid point. However, the author of the letter is correct in the fact that the jobs will not create a boom in the district's economy, or fill in the gap caused by the closures in the manufacturing plants, as the press release leads listeners to believe. The road construction does not solve the long-term issue of unemployment in the town. In addition, the author of the letter counters the argument that new motels, restaurants, and gas stations along the highway will create permanent jobs for the residents of the town. She explains that, "only minimum wage jobs will remain." This is a valid argument also, as unemployed residents that need enough income to support a household would not be much better off. Providing restaurant or motel jobs is very unlikely to feed or support an entire family. It will not pick up the laid-off employees of the manufacturing plants, who may have worked for many years towards promotions and a pension.

Another example of the letter's stronger argument is the author's explanation of the 2001 study. She concedes that the representative is correct in citing that bypasses are proven to reduce noise and traffic in town, but she argues that the study shows a negative effect on local businesses. This piece of the study was not mentioned by Representative Walls or the press release, and it is a proven fact. This draws more credibility to the argument in the letter. Also, although it is a speculation, it is more reasonable that traveler's will stick to the main highway and not venture miles off their path into small town when chain gas stations, restaurants, and motels are conveniently located directly at the highway exits. It is less likely that old roads in the towns will become historical locations, attracting tourists and boosting small business sales.

Despite the argument and evidence given by the press release, it appears that the letter to the editor offers a stronger case. The author's ideas are backed up by logical explanations and facts with a few speculations. Though the press release offers some fact, it is mainly speckled with anticipations and hopes, driven to overshadow any doubts and quell any concerns. The letter is penned by a resident of the town and owner of a business, subject to first-hand opinions of the citizens of the district. The press release is pushed by an elected representative who, upon visiting the town a number of times and consulting a small percentage of the constituents, is convinced she understands the majority. Although both parties may very well have the best interests of the district in mind, and either position could be correct, it is clear that the letter provides a better-supported argument.

Workbook—pp. 5-6

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.



Workbook – p. 7

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Both the press release and the letter to the editor offer positions that are supported by both fact and opinion. The press release seeks to exhort the new bill for expansion of Highway 17, while the letter argues that the passing of the bill could prove detrimental to the district. While both sides make an acceptable case, the latter provides a stronger argument because it provides more factual evidence.

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Workbook – p. 8

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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





Evidence
What Drives Argumentative Writing?

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“ *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.* ”

— G. Hillocks (2010)

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Other Recommendations

What Drives Argumentative Writing?

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Written Argument in the Classroom

The Question	
Your Claim	
Your Evidence	Your Reasoning
Counterclaims/Rebuttals:	
Summary of your argument:	

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

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Both Sides Now

Workbook— p. 11

Both Sides Now		
Evidence that Supports	Question or statement Which position is better supported?	Evidence that Opposes
Decision (Claim)		
Reasons (Analysis/Evaluation)		

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)



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Takeaway Tip

Make Your
Thinking Processes
Visible

Help 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

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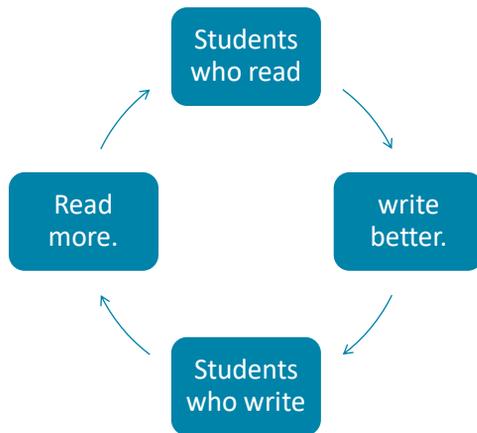
Success Begins with Reading

- Although it may appear counterintuitive, writing success begins with reading proficiency.
- Time constraints often result in our going directly to teaching writing without a necessary parallel focus on reading.
- You **CAN** teach a proficient reader how to be a proficient writer; trying to teach reluctant readers to be a proficient writers can feel like pushing a boulder uphill.

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The Link Between Reading and Writing



- Reading strategies should lead to writing
- Writing strategies should encourage further reading

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A Final Takeaway Tip:

Incorporate reading and writing into every classroom, every day



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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

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How to Get Started...

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



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Resources

What Drives Argumentative Writing?

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Access Online Reading Materials

The collage features several educational platforms:

- Annenberg Classroom:** Offers an "Introduction to Key Constitutional Concepts and Supreme Court Cases" and an "Online Constitution Course".
- Newsela:** A platform for science articles, such as "Scientists say sea animals on alien planet would probably swim the same" and "Experts worry as crab-fishing poses a whale of a problem".
- ProCon.org:** Promotes "critical thinking, education, and informed citizenship by presenting controversial issues in a straightforward, nonpartisan, primarily pro-con format." It lists "PROS AND CONS OF 92 CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES" including College Education, D.A.R.E., School Uniforms, Standalone Texts, Tablets vs. Textbooks, Teacher Tenure, 2006 Presidential Election, 2012 Presidential Election, 2014 Santa Monica Local Elections, Bill Clinton, Fallon Voting, Ronald Reagan, Voting Machines, ACLU, Concealed Handguns, Death Penalty, Boston Marathon Bomber, Drinking Age, Illegal Immigration, Social Security Privatization, WTC Muslim Center, Churches and Taxes, Under God in the Pledge, Alternative Energy vs. Fossil Fuels, and Social Security Privatization.
- DONATE.org:** A platform for social issues.
- Digital Resource Library:** Provides "Tools for Teachers: Professional Development Modules" including:
 - Part 1: Text Complexity and the CCSS
 - Part 2: Close Reading and Text-Dependent Questions
 - Part 3: Designing Close Reading Instruction
 - Part 4: Engaging in Academic Writing
 - Part 5: Using Evaluation to Support Mastery in Academic Writing
 - Part 6: Implementing the CCSS: The Role of ILTs and LASW

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Access Previous Webinars and More

https://ged.com/educators_admins/program/

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Q & A

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Thank you!

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