EQUITY IN MOTION

LITERACY ASSIGNMENT ANALYSIS GUIDE

The Education Trust

HOW TO USE THIS ASSIGNMENT ANALYSIS GUIDE

We encourage you to use this guide as a resource when analyzing sets of assignments across multiple days or weeks within your classroom, school, or district. It can also be used to call out important features to consider during the assignment formation process.

We add a note of caution about its effectiveness when examining a single assignment. And we caution against the notion that each assignment in a given classroom should include every feature or meet every indicator within this guide. Rather, we encourage you to look across multiple assignments to determine when and how often students are:

- working on extended tasks that align with the rigor demanded by college- and career-ready standards;
- gathering and citing textual evidence;
- thinking at high cognitive levels as they read, discuss, and write about complex texts; and
- receiving light or heavy supports from teachers as they work toward independence, engaging in tasks that hold relevance and support adolescent autonomy.

ASSIGNMENT IDENTIFICATION

The scope of your assignment analysis and the parameters around which you want to report the data will be the driving factors in determining which contextual features of the assignment you want to capture. While these are not content elements of the framework, the information collected in this section will shape what comparisons you are able to make across multiple assignments. Basic information, such as the course or subject, grade, etc., should be captured. For purposes of a blind analysis, you may also consider giving each assignment a unique identification number in place of the teacher's name.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

- Will the collected assignments cover multiple courses, teachers, or grade levels?
- Is it important for individual teachers to remain anonymous?

QUESTIONS FOR ANALYSIS	CONSIDERATIONS
What is the assignment identification number? **Which subject area or course does this assignment come from?** **What is the grade level of this assignment?** **What is the source of this assignment?** **Does this assignment come from an honors course?** a) No b) Yes	• These are a few sample characteristics you may want to collect for each assignment. Consider the purpose of your analysis and how you hope to report the data before determining which features of the assignment you want to capture. You may also want to give each assignment a unique identification number for analysis purposes.
Is the assignment an exam or quiz? a) No b) Yes	• Typically, an assignment will be labeled as an exam or quiz in the title. This component can sometimes prove to be a useful data point when comparing the rigor of classroom assignments and classroom assessments. It is safe to assume the assignment is *not* an exam or quiz unless otherwise indicated.
Does this assignment come from an EL/SDAIE course section? a) No b) Yes	• Typically, a course will be labeled as an EL or SDAIE in the course title.
Which best describes the length of the assignment? a) **Short/brief task** that is completed in **15 minutes or less** (e.g., Do Now, warm-up, Exit Ticket, journal reflection) b) A task that is completed within **one to two class periods** (e.g., lab, extended discussion) c) A task that is a long-term, ongoing assignment completed over the duration of **multiple weeks** (e.g., research paper, project)	• Use your best judgment to determine how long it will take students to complete the task. • Consider the amount of reading and/or writing a student must do in order to complete the assignment.

Is the task part of a long-term, ongoing project that is completed over the duration of multiple weeks (e.g., students peer review a draft of writing)?
 	
    a) No
    b) Yes
	• While assignments may cover similar topics or use the same materials over multiple days, this does not necessarily mean that these assignments are part of a long-term project.

ALIGNMENT

A Common Core-aligned assignment for English Language Arts/literacy has essential features. First and foremost, it must be aligned to the appropriate grade-level standard. The standard(s) then set the frame for instructional goals and the assignment's content and tasks. Alignment also means that the assignment embraces the instructional shifts articulated by the Common Core. In ELA/literacy, these shifts require students to have regular practice with complex texts and their academic language; read, write, and speak using evidence from texts, both literary and informational; and build knowledge through content. Finally, an aligned assignment is clearly articulated so that students can fully understand what is expected of them.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

- How often do students read, discuss, and write about complex texts in a way that honors the spirit of the Common Core?
- How do I ensure that my assignments and expectations for student work are clear? What language and guidance do I provide to ensure clarity?

QUESTIONS FOR ANALYSIS	CONSIDERATIONS
Does the assignment align to the appropriate grade-level, Common Core State Standard? a) No b) Yes	• Alignment with at least one CCSS, aside from R10 and W10, is necessary to meet this criterion. • ELA assignments should align with a specific, grade-level CCSS. • Science and social studies assignments for grades 6-12 should align with Common Core literacy standard(s) in that content area.
Does the assignment clearly articulate the task? a) No b) Yes	• Directions are clear and easily interpreted OR the assignment's format signals a routine procedure that is well known by the students in the class.

CENTRALITY OF TEXT

Texts hold a fundamental place in the area of literacy. In an assignment, the centrality of text permits students to grapple with key ideas, larger meanings, and author's craft and intent. Students must have the opportunity to:

- display increasing expertise in interpreting and responding to a text, and
- draw evidence from a text to justify their responses and thinking.

Such skills are essential to postsecondary success and undergird pedagogical shifts. Specifically, an assignment fully reflects this centrality of text when students are required to cite evidence (e.g., paraphrasing, direct citation) to support an opinion, position, or claim.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

- Do I ask students to interpret and respond to complex texts? When? How often?
- Do I ask students to cite textual evidence in order to support or develop a claim? When? How often?
- How do I select texts for my students to read?

QUESTIONS FOR ANALYSIS	CONSIDERATIONS
What is the name of the text?	
Is the text complex? a) No b) Yes **If yes, what type(s) of text complexity do you notice?**	• Consider the **quantitative** complexity of a text (e.g., Lexile, A-Z level, grade-level equivalency). • Consider the **qualitative** complexity of a text (e.g., content, theme, language, sentence structure, literary elements).
What is the genre of the text(s)? a) No text b) Literature (e.g., stories, drama, poetry) c) Informational (e.g., historical text, technical texts, literary nonfiction, memoir, biography) d) Mixture of literature and informational text	• A text typically falls into one of two genres: literature or informational. • Dictionaries, glossaries, and thesauruses do not count as a text.
What is the predominant text type? a) No text b) Written text with minimal/no visual text c) A mixture of written and visual text d) Visual text with minimal/no written text (e.g., video, drawings, diagrams with short captions)	• Written texts may include, but are not limited to, a novel or trade book, traditional textbook, poem, letter, article, lab experiment, magazine, or webpage. • Visual texts may include comics, videos, paintings, photographs, speaker, performances, or music. • Many written texts include illustrations, pictures, graphs, or tables to present or highlight key ideas and information. In these cases, the text should be classified as a written text because the pictures, graphs, tables, etc., are part of a written text; they do not stand alone.

QUESTIONS FOR ANALYSIS	CONSIDERATIONS
Which best describes the text length? a) No Text b) Excerpt (too short, e.g., single quotation or up to two paragraphs) c) Text excerpt (shorter than a chapter) d) Chapter(s) (e.g., chapter from a novel or textbook) e) Full text	• If there is more than one text, base your analysis of length on the longest text.
Does the assignment solicit text-based responses? Is a student's use of the text vital to successfully complete the assignment? a) No b) Yes	• Students must use/refer to the text, in order to complete the assignment.
Does the assignment require students to cite evidence from the text? a) No b) Yes	• Students analyze the text to find support for an opinion, position, or claim. • "Cite evidence" also means students must paraphrase or include a direct quote from the text.

COGNITIVE CHALLENGE AND WRITING OUTPUT

The cognitive work required to re-tell a story, identify facts from a text, analyze a character using textual evidence, or apply knowledge gained from multiple texts to form a new idea ranges from simple to complex. Cognitive challenge within an assignment increases when:

- Text-dependent questions and tasks become more complex and require students to cite evidence to support their ideas. This framework utilizes Norman L. Webb's Depth of Knowledge Levels to capture this thinking.
- Students are expected to complete an extended writing piece (aligned with appropriate grade-level writing expectations) that includes their original thinking/ideas supported with textual evidence. (*See table below for specific suggestions around extended writing in grades K-12.*)

GUIDING QUESTIONS

- When and how often do students experience an assignment that requires high levels of cognitive demand?
- When and how often are students assigned an extended writing piece that includes their original thinking/ideas supported with textual evidence?
- When and how often are students expected to work through the writing process (plan, draft, revise, edit, and publish) with an extended writing piece?

QUESTIONS FOR ANALYSIS	CONSIDERATIONS
What is the level of cognitive demand required by the assignment? a) **Recall and Reproduction** – Recall a fact, term, principle, concept, or perform a routine procedure b) **Basic Application of Skills/Concepts** – Use of information, conceptual knowledge, select appropriate procedures for a task, two or more steps with decision points along the way, routine problems, organize/display data, interpret/use sample data c) **Strategic Thinking** – Requires reasoning or developing a plan or sequence of steps to approach problem; requires some decision-making and justification; abstract, complex, or non-routine; often more than one possible answer d) **Extended Thinking** – An investigation or application to real world; requires time to research, problem solve, and process multiple conditions of the problem or task; non-routine manipulations across disciplines/content areas/multiple sources	• Based on Norman L. Webb's Depth of Knowledge Levels.
Does the assignment require high levels of cognitive demand? a) No b) Yes	• To meet this criterion, the assignment must align with Level 3 or Level 4 of Norman L. Webb's Depth of Knowledge Levels.

QUESTIONS FOR ANALYSIS	CONSIDERATIONS

What is the writing output of the assignment?
 	
a) No writing
b) Note-taking (i.e., key phrases/concepts, bulleted list, text annotation)
c) One to two sentences
d) Multiple short responses
e) One paragraph
f) Multiple paragraphs
	• Note-taking may include students jotting down key phrases/concepts, a bulleted list, using text annotations, highlighting, or taking margin notes.
	• Multiple short responses refers to assignments that require students to answer/respond to multiple questions. Answers may be one to two sentences per question or may be written as short phrase responses.
	• Multiple paragraphs may be defined as:
	  o An assignment that requires students to answer at least three questions/prompts by writing a single paragraph for each question/prompt
	  o An assignment that requires students to write multiple (at least two), cohesive paragraphs in response to a single question/prompt

Does the assignment link to the creation of a piece of extended writing? a) No b) Yes	• Extended writing may be defined as: Grades K-2 Multiple, cohesive ideas → a single complete paragraph Grades 2-3 Single paragraph → simple, multiple, cohesive paragraphs Grades 4-12 Simple, multiple, cohesive paragraphs → complex, multiple, cohesive paragraphs

MOTIVATION AND ENGAGEMENT

For students to thrive and achieve at high levels, educators must embrace the content of the curriculum and the design of instruction. Both of these elements impact student attention, interest, motivation, and cognitive effort and must be considered in the design of assignments. Specifically, two key areas hold priority: choice and relevancy. Students must be given some level of autonomy and independence in their tasks, with rigor maintained across all options. And the tasks must be relevant by focusing on poignant topics, using real-world materials and experiences, and giving students the opportunity to make connections with their goals, interests, and values.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

- Are there opportunities for my students to bring their own ideas, experiences, and opinions into the assignments I give them? Is so, when and how often?
- How do I bridge the known to the unknown for my students? Or how can assignments in my classroom offer students the opportunity to experience rigorous content — which may be unfamiliar or feel "foreign" — in a way that feels relevant for them?
- When and how do I give students choices in their assignments that support their autonomy?

QUESTIONS FOR ANALYSIS	CONSIDERATIONS
Do students have choice in the assignment in one of the following areas: content, product, or process? Is rigor maintained across all options? a) No b) Yes	• Choice in **content:** 　o Broad topics are provided by teacher; students can narrow/or specify the topic. 　o Content choices include self-selected texts or topics. • Choice in **product**: 　o Students are given a choice on how they will present their learning in genre, structure, or medium. • Choice in **process:** 　o Students may work alone or with their peers. 　o Students are given freedom to design their course of action and sequence their steps as they work on an assignment. 　o Students manage their timelines and deliverables, with teacher support provided as needed.
Is the task relevant? Does it focus on a poignant topic, use real-world materials, and/or give students the freedom to make connections to their experiences, goals, interests, and values? a) No b) Yes	• Consider the relevancy of the assignment. Notice if it: 　o Focuses on a poignant topic (e.g., themes, essential questions, enduring understandings). 　o Uses real-world materials or pertains to real-world events. 　o Allows students to make connections to their own experiences, goals, interests, or values.

DISCUSSION

As outlined in the Common Core Speaking and Listening Standards, discussion hold importance because students are expected to learn, practice, and ultimately refine the elements of speaking, listening, and argumentation as they:

- comprehend and consider the ideas of others,
- collaborate with peers, and
- present knowledge and their own ideas with conviction, authority, and clarity.

Moreover, discussions serve as a powerful tool for equity and support because student thinking is shared and considered by all. As you analyze assignments that include evidence of discussion, consider both the structure and the content of these interactions.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

- When do my students have the opportunity to participate in rich, structured conversations with their peers? As part of a whole class? In small groups?
- When and how do I include time for extended discussion assignments?
- How can I intentionally connect reading, writing, and discussion?

QUESTIONS FOR ANALYSIS	CONSIDERATIONS
How is discussion incorporated into this assignment? a) **No evidence** of discussion in this assignment b) The assignment includes **cues/moments for informal and/or brief discussion.** c) The assignment includes **cues/significant time for formal and/or extended discussion.**	• Use the assignment directions to guide your analysis. Focus on the discussion structure (brief/informal or extended/formal). • Examples of informal and/or brief discussion: Students are required to "turn and talk" or "pair-share" work with a partner or collaborative group. • Examples of formal and/or extended discussion: Socratic seminars, debates, and literature circles or discussions. • Consider opportunities for ELs to engage in discussion in multiple languages and/or their native language.
What is the central purpose of the discussion within the assignment? a) **No evidence of discussion** in the assignment b) The central purpose is to **clarify the tasks or manage the logistics** within the assignment (e.g., students discuss the plan for the assignment, students talk with a partner if they need help/clarification) c) The central purpose **aligns with a Speaking and Listening Standard** and is anchored by course content and/or a text (e.g., students contribute accurate and relevant information, students present knowledge and ideas from a text using evidence and a clear line of reasoning, students consider and evaluate the ideas of others)	• Use the assignment directions to guide your analysis. Focus on the discussion purpose and content (managing logistics or aligned with Common Core for Speaking and Listening).

Does this assignment provide English learner students with opportunities to engage in discussion and collaborative conversations?
 	
   a) No
   b) Yes
	• For ELs engaging in discussion – asking questions and responding to prompts, including opportunities to use their language, are key for demonstrating content knowledge and understanding.
	
	• Consider opportunities for students to use their home language to demonstrate mastery of the content.

Which communicative modes and process does this assignment address? *Check all that apply*:
 	
   a) Collaborative
   b) Interpretive
   c) Productive
   d) Connecting and condensing ideas
	• Look for evidence of students needing to engage in one or more of the following tasks, with opportunities to do so in their home language (multiple languages) to demonstrate language and content mastery:
	
	• Collaborative
	   o Exchanging information and ideas with others through oral collaborative discussions
	   o Interacting with others using writing
	   o Offering and justifying opinions, negotiating with and persuading others
	   o Adapting language choices to various contexts
	
	• Interpretive
	   o Listening actively to spoken English in a range of contexts
	   o Viewing multimedia to determine how meaning is conveyed through oral language
	   o Evaluating how well writers and speakers use language to support their ideas and arguments with details and evidence
	   o Analyzing how writers and speakers use vocabulary to explain ideas
	
	• Productive
	   o Expressing information and ideas in formal oral presentations
	   o Writing text to present, describe, and explain ideas and information
	   o Justifying own arguments and evaluating others' arguments in writing
	   o Using varied and precise vocabulary and language structures to effectively convey ideas

SCAFFOLDING

Teacher scaffolding speaks to the temporary supports teachers provide for students as they work toward independence.

Scaffolding can:

- range from light to heavy as teachers provide more or less support,
- be present at particular moments within an assignment,
- be ongoing, existing at each stage of the task for all students or only for those who need it, and
- appear in different forms in assignments (e.g., text annotation, graphic organizers, discussion).

GUIDING QUESTIONS

- When and how do I use scaffolding in my assignments?
- When is scaffolding important for my students?
- When and how do I limit or remove scaffolding in my assignments?

QUESTIONS FOR ANALYSIS	CONSIDERATIONS
Which statement best describes the amount of teacher supports and/or scaffolds in this assignment? a) **No scaffolding** in this assignment b) **Minimal/moderate scaffolding** in this assignment (e.g., scaffolding appears in one section of the assignment, scaffolding appears in less than half of the assignment) c) **Heavy scaffolding** in this assignment (e.g., scaffolding is ongoing in the assignment, scaffolding is present in more than half of the assignment)	• Look closely at the scaffolding (e.g., sentence starters, graphic organizers, annotation codes or guides, checklists, detailed steps/procedures laid out, teacher-student conferences) in the assignment. • Consider *how much* support students are given. • Consider if the assignment provides varying levels of support for students at different levels of language proficiency, such as annotated text to help explain key words, multiple representations of word problems, or shorter/excerpted texts.
Which statement(s) best describe the type of scaffolding? *Check all that apply:* a) **No scaffolding** in this assignment. b) This **assignment itself is a scaffold** (e.g., students complete a graphic organizer, students take notes or annotate a text). c) This assignment is **broken down into small bits/chunks** (e.g., students work on very small tasks, such as a single sentence or a small grammar skill). d) The **heavy cognitive work has already been given to students in this assignment** (e.g., the theme or "big idea" has been provided by the teacher, all the steps have been laid out for students).	• Look closely at the scaffolding (e.g., sentence starters, graphic organizers, annotation codes or guides, checklists, detailed steps/procedures laid out, teacher-student conferences) in this assignment. • Look closely for scaffolds that support students at different levels of language proficiency (e.g. word banks, glossary/vocabulary guides, annotated texts to help explain key words, oral or multimedia presentations) • Consider *the type(s)* of support students are given.

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Growing All Students Through High-Quality Assignments
Assignment Analysis Capture Sheet

ASSIGNMENT IDENTIFICATION	
What is the assignment identification number?	
Which subject area or course does this assignment come from?	
What is the grade level of this assignment?	
What is the source of this assignment?	
Does this assignment come from an honors course?	
Is the assignment an exam or quiz?	
Which best describes the length of the assignment?	
Is the task part of a long-term, ongoing project that is completed over the duration of multiple weeks (e.g., students peer review a draft of writing)?	
ALIGNMENT	
Does the assignment align to the appropriate grade-level, Common Core State Standard?	
Does the assignment clearly articulate the task?	
CENTRALITY OF TEXT	
What is the name of the text?	
Is the text complex?	
What is the genre of the text(s)?	
What is the predominant text type?	
Which best describes the text length?	
Does the assignment solicit text-based responses? Is a student's use of the text vital to successfully complete the assignment?	
Does the assignment require students to cite evidence from the text?	

Assignment Analysis Capture Sheet

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COGNITIVE CHALLENGE AND WRITING OUTPUT

What is the level of cognitive demand required by the assignment?	
Does the assignment require high levels of cognitive demand?	
What is the writing output of the assignment?	
Does the assignment link to the creation of a piece of extended writing?	

MOTIVATION AND ENGAGEMENT

Do students have choice in the assignment in one of the following areas: content, product, or process? Is rigor maintained across all options?	
Is the task relevant? Does it focus on a poignant topic, use real-world materials, and/or give students the freedom to make connections to their experiences, goals, interests, and values?	

DISCUSSION

How is discussion incorporated into this assignment?	
What is the central purpose of the discussion within the assignment?	
Does this assignment provide English learner students with opportunities to engage in discussion and collaborative conversations?	
Which communicative modes and process does this assignment address?	

SCAFFOLDING

Which statement best describes the amount of teacher supports and/or scaffolds in this assignment?	
Which statement(s) best describe the type of scaffolding?	

ABOUT THE EDUCATION TRUST

The Education Trust promotes high academic achievement for all students at all levels — pre-kindergarten through college. We work alongside parents, educators, and community and business leaders across the country in transforming schools and colleges into institutions that serve all students well. Lessons learned in these efforts, together with unflinching data analyses, shape our state and national policy agendas.

Our goal is to close the gaps in opportunity and achievement that consign far too many young people — especially those who are black, Latino, American Indian, or from low-income families — to lives on the margins of the American mainstream.

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