



NEW MEXICO MEASURES
OF STUDENT SUCCESS AND
ACHIEVEMENT

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Released Item Booklet 2021

Writing Prompt

Support Materials

Grade 3

cognia®

In This Released Item Booklet

Writing Prompts

On the New Mexico Measures of Student Success and Achievement (NM-MSSA) assessment, students in grades 3–8 receive one writing prompt (comprising a passage or passage set, a writing task, and other supporting information and instructions), either narrative, informative/explanatory, or opinion/argument. The Common Core State Standard alignment assigned to each released writing prompt is displayed in the booklet.

There are a total of six released writing prompts, one for each of grades 3–8. There is one released item booklet per grade level, each containing one writing prompt. The writing prompts that appear in the released item booklets were among those piloted with a small sample of students in the spring of 2021. Similar writing prompts will appear in future administrations of the assessment. The writing prompts that will appear on future writing assessments may be subject to additional revision (for example, repositioning components of the prompt frame) before they appear in an operational administration and count toward a student's score.

Stimuli

All NM-MSSA writing prompts are partnered with one to three brief text stimuli. The purpose of these passages is to “set the stage” by introducing a general topic and providing some ideas and information about it that students will draw upon when they write. The text stimuli associated with each of the released writing prompts has been included in the booklet for reference.

Student Responses and Annotations

One sample student response is provided for each possible Production of Writing score point with annotations that explain the reasoning behind the assigned score. It is important to note that the scores in each booklet are likely to have been assigned the designated score that is shown; however, a definitive identification cannot be made at this point because range-finding—the process by which New Mexico stakeholders, in conjunction with Cognia content and scoring specialists, will identify writing samples that establish the lines between score points—had not yet occurred prior to scoring these writing prompts.

If a sample response was not available for one of the score points, an annotation is included to indicate some ways in which a student response could be further developed to exhibit the characteristics of a specified score point in accordance with the scoring rubric. Reviewing the student responses and annotations within a grade band or across all grade levels will provide additional examples and insight into the expectations for student writing on the assessment.

Rubrics

There are six scoring rubrics associated with the writing prompts on the NM-MSSA writing assessment. These are distinct for each grade band (3–5 and 6–8) and purpose for writing (Narrative, Informative/Explanatory, and Opinion or Argument). The released writing prompt in each booklet is shown with its associated rubric.

There are two scoring rubrics shown with the writing prompt. The first, marked “Draft,” was the initial version used to score the writing prompts for the pilot. The second rubric shown underwent refinement following the first field-test administration and is the current version in use for operational scoring.

For questions about the New Mexico writing assessment, additional information is available at https://newmexico.onlinehelp.cognia.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/10/2020/11/NM-MSSA_Writing-Assessment-Resources-for-Teachers.pdf

You are now going to read two short passages and respond to a writing task. First, read the following passages about trees.

Passage 1

Trees of New Mexico

- 1** What is that cotton-like thing floating down by the river and blowing around everywhere? The soft, white fluff comes from a tree called the cottonwood. Cottonwood trees grow in New Mexico in an area called the Bosque. The Bosque is found in the heart of the state. Cottonwood trees can grow to be 40–80 feet tall. They make a great shade tree. Animals like horses and beavers like to eat the sweet bark. Beavers use the cottonwood's branches to make their dams. The cottonwood tree needs lots of water. It grows best along the Rio Grande and San Juan Rivers.



National Park Service / Amy Gaiennie

Cottonwood

- 2** The blue spruce is found in the national forest of northern New Mexico. This giant tree grows to heights of 80–100 feet. Its leaf is long, stiff, and very sharp. Leaves stay green year-round. The cones grow downward. A small blue spruce makes a great tree for decorating. That is why it was chosen as “The People’s Tree” and placed on the lawn in Washington, D.C., in the winter of 2019. That blue spruce traveled over 2,000 miles from New Mexico across the U.S. to get to the lawn of the White House. Residents of New Mexico made homemade ornaments to decorate it.



Wikimedia Commons / KaiKemmann

Blue Spruce

- 3** Mesquite trees grow in the southern parts of New Mexico. If the tree is well watered it can grow up to 40 feet tall. When it does not receive enough water it does not grow as tall and looks more like a shrub. Mesquite trees have spines on their branches.
- 4** Mesquite trees have many uses. They provide food, fuel, medicine, and more. Mesquite beans are picked after they harden. They are then ground into flour. Water is added to the flour to make little cakes that can be eaten or used to thicken soups. The black sap of the mesquite tree can be made into a cleanser for cuts. Tea made from mesquite leaves can be used to treat headaches.
- 5** The piñon pine tree is New Mexico's state tree. The piñon tree is a drought-tolerant tree, which means it can survive without water for a long time. This tree can grow to be 10–20 feet tall. It has pointy needles and bears a piñon nut that has been eaten in New Mexico for centuries. The piñon nuts are sold in markets and can be used in cakes, cookies, and candies. The nuts can be eaten raw or roasted, or they can be ground into flour. A lot of animals rely on the piñon nuts for food.



Dcrjsr / Wikimedia Commons

Piñon Pine

"Trees of New Mexico" © 2020 by Cognia, Inc.

Passage 2

Why Trees Are Important

- 1 Do you have a favorite tree? What do you like about that tree? Trees are important to us for many different reasons. A tree provides us with shade to protect us from the sun. When we stand under a tree, it cools us off. In the winter, trees block the winter winds. Trees are great at reducing the heat that comes off the street. Planting more trees in our cities and neighborhoods helps the environment. Trees help keep our cities and streets looking beautiful. There are a lot of other benefits to having trees.
- 2 A tree is important because it can be a home to birds, insects, and other animals. Sometimes people like to make small houses in trees for their children to play in. A tree can provide food for both animals and people. Trees produce fruits and nuts that are healthy for us. The paper we use at our schools and offices come from trees. Boxes are manufactured from trees. Trees are useful in our daily lives.
- 3 Want clean air? Trees keep our air clean. One of the most beneficial things trees give us is oxygen, and in return we give trees carbon dioxide. Trees and humans make great partners.
- 4 Did you know that farms are not only for animals but for trees as well? Tree farms are special plots of land set aside for growing trees that will be sold or used in products. Trees planted on tree farms are often used to build homes. The trees that are sold during winter every year are grown on tree farms. Fruit and nut trees are also grown on tree farms. Wood from tree farms can be cut into logs for fireplaces to help keep us warm in the winter. Most of the wood furniture in our homes comes from tree farms.
- 5 Arbor Day is a day on which people are encouraged to plant trees. People plant trees not only because they look beautiful and majestic, but they may serve as a way to remember a special event. Some people plant a tree when they have a child or to honor a graduation. There are a lot of organizations that protect trees and keep them from harm. These organizations hold special events and plant trees on Arbor Day.

"Why Trees Are Important" © 2020 by Cognia, Inc.

Alignment
Standard: W.03.01

1. Now read the writing task and draft a response. As you write, think about what makes your writing the best it can be.

My Best Writing

Stays on topic and pays attention to all parts of the writing task
Includes details and examples to support ideas
Is clearly organized
Makes word choices that are well suited to the task
Uses simple, compound, and complex sentences with correct capitalization, punctuation, and spelling

Writing Task

Suppose that in April your class is going to plant a tree in your schoolyard for Arbor Day. You have read two passages about trees. You have decided that one of the trees you read about should be chosen to be planted: cottonwood, blue spruce, mesquite, or piñon pine. Write a letter to your teacher giving your opinion about which type of tree should be planted and why. Use details from what you have read, along with what you know about trees and your schoolyard, to support your opinion in your letter.

Today you will be writing an opinion letter. When you write an opinion, you

- tell others your opinion about a topic.
- gather and present reasons for your opinion.
- use specific facts, examples, and details to support those reasons.

After you have read the passages, and before you begin writing, think about

- what ideas in the passages you read led you to your opinion about the best tree to plant.
- what you already know about trees and about your schoolyard that supports your opinion.
- how you might respond to ideas that support a different opinion.

Now write your response in the space provided.

Production of Writing: NM-MSSA Opinion Writing Rubric (Grades 3-5)				
	Score Point 4	Score Point 3	Score Point 2	Score Point 1
	The Writing:			
Development/ Content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expresses an opinion that fully addresses the topic. Substantially supports the opinion with consistently pertinent facts and details from relevant sources. Establishes and consistently maintains an organizational plan in which related ideas are consistently grouped logically to support the writer's purpose. Introduces the topic clearly and provides a concluding statement or section consistently related to the opinion presented. Consistently demonstrates effective use of words and phrases to link the opinion and reasons. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expresses an opinion that generally addresses the topic. Generally supports the opinion with mostly pertinent facts and details from relevant sources. Establishes and generally maintains an organizational plan in which related ideas are generally grouped logically to support the writer's purpose. Introduces the topic and provides a concluding statement or section generally related to the opinion presented. Generally demonstrates effective use of words and phrases to link the opinion and reasons. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expresses an opinion that partially addresses the topic. Partially supports the opinion with some pertinent facts and details from relevant sources. Attempts to establish and partially maintains an organizational plan in which related ideas are only sometimes grouped logically to support the writer's purpose. Introduces the topic and provides a concluding statement or section partially related to the opinion presented. Sometimes demonstrates effective use of words and phrases to link the opinion and reasons. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expresses an opinion that only minimally addresses the topic or does not explicitly express an opinion. Minimally supports the opinion with few pertinent facts and details from relevant sources. May attempt to establish but does not maintain an organizational plan; related ideas are rarely grouped/not grouped logically to support the writer's purpose. May be missing an introduction and/or a concluding statement or section that is related to the opinion presented. Rarely demonstrates/does not demonstrate any effective use of words and phrases to link the opinion and reasons.
Organization/ Focus				
Language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consistently uses precise language and varied vocabulary-when supporting a point of view with reasons. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Often uses precise language and varied vocabulary when supporting a point of view with reasons. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sometimes uses precise language and varied vocabulary when supporting a point of view with reasons. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rarely uses/does not use precise language or varied vocabulary when supporting a point of view with reasons.

Use of Conventions: NM-MSSA Conventions Rubric (Grades 3-8)			
	Score Point 3	Score Point 2	Score Point 1
	The Writing:		
Grammar/ Usage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demonstrates general command of standard English grammar and usage. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demonstrates partial command of standard English grammar and usage. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demonstrates little command of standard English grammar and usage.
Mechanics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demonstrates general command of standard English conventions relative to the length and complexity of the text. May have minor or infrequent errors that do not interfere with meaning or confuse the reader. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demonstrates partial command of standard English conventions relative to the length and complexity of the text. May have errors or patterns of errors that somewhat interfere with meaning or confuse the reader. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demonstrates little command of standard English conventions relative to the length and complexity of the text. May have errors that interfere with meaning or confuse the reader.

NM-MSSA Rubrics for Opinion Writing (Grades 3 – 5)				
PRODUCTION OF WRITING				
	Score Point 4	Score Point 3	Score Point 2	Score Point 1
	The Writing:			
Development/ Content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Presents a fully developed response that addresses the task. Fully supports the opinion with consistently relevant facts and details. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Presents a generally developed response that addresses the task. Generally supports the opinion with mostly relevant facts and details. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Presents a partially developed response that addresses the task. Partially supports the opinion with some relevant facts and details. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Presents a minimally developed response that addresses the task. Minimally supports the opinion with few relevant facts and details.
Organization/ Focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establishes and effectively maintains an organizational plan. Provides a clear and engaging introduction for the opinion presented and a clear conclusion that follows logically. Demonstrates effective use of words and phrases to link opinion and reasons. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establishes and adequately maintains an organizational plan. Provides a general introduction for the opinion presented and a conclusion that follows logically. Demonstrates adequate use of words and phrases to link opinion and reasons. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establishes and somewhat maintains an organizational plan. Provides a limited introduction and conclusion for the opinion presented. Demonstrates limited use of words and phrases to link opinion and reasons. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> May attempt to establish but does not maintain an organizational plan. Provides a minimal or unclear introduction and/or conclusion for the opinion presented. Demonstrates insufficient use of words and phrases to link opinion and reasons.
Language	Uses consistently effective language appropriate to the task.	Uses generally effective language appropriate to the task.	Uses partially effective language appropriate to the task.	Uses minimally effective language appropriate to the task.
USE OF CONVENTIONS				
Grammar/ Usage/ Mechanics		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demonstrates general command of standard English grammar and usage. Demonstrates general command of conventions relative to the length and complexity of the text. If errors are present, they do not interfere with meaning or confuse the reader. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demonstrates partial command of standard English grammar and usage. Demonstrates partial command of conventions relative to the length and complexity of the text. May have errors or patterns of errors that somewhat interfere with meaning or confuse the reader. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demonstrates little or no command of standard English grammar and usage. Demonstrate little or no command of conventions relative to the length and complexity of the text. May have errors that interfere with meaning or confuse the reader.

Grade 3

Score Point 3;3

My opinion is Pinon Pine Tree and why I like this tree well I have five reason to tell. My first reason is the Pinon Pine Tree is the New Mexico state tree so it is rare New Mexico and that is amazing. My second reason is this tree can survive without water for very long time and it can grow up to 10 - 20 feet tall. My third reason is its nuts can be eaten for food like cake, cookies, and candies and it sells at the market and fun fact this nut can be eaten raw or roasted. My fourth reason is a Pinon Pine Tree is a drought - tolerant tree and a lot animals rely on the pinon nuts for food. My last reason is this tree is my favorite tree because it helps animals, people, and other things and thats what I like. So these my reasons why I like this tree so much.

ANNOTATIONS

Production of Writing: 3 (low)

The response begins to integrate some information from one passage with a personal opinion about the piñon tree. Although it is not a letter, it is an opinion related to the task and includes several general reasons connected to “why I like this tree.” Vocabulary such as “rare” and “amazing” is varied, although other words are largely from the passage. This is a lower 3, given its reliance on the existing passage and some generalization about “and other things and thats what I like.” Still, it is focused on the opinion and shows awareness of organization and transitions.

Use of Conventions: 3

The response demonstrates general command of standard English grammar and usage. The response has some minor errors, including some word omissions, but overall, the mechanics demonstrate command of conventions relative to the length and complexity of the text. Despite some sentence construction errors, capitalization (including proper nouns) and punctuation (including commas in a series) are mostly correct. Even though some of the writing is based on the first passage, there is sentence combining. In this case, it shows general, rather than partial, command.

A response with a score of 4 for Production of Writing should achieve a level of development with clearly stated support that substantially addresses the opinion with evidence of some more organizational techniques. The support might extend more by connecting some of the passage(s) ideas with the student’s own thoughts, engaging the reader with more thoroughly developed reasons for selecting a tree. This would also give more opportunity to assess aspects such as vocabulary, transitions and quality of details.

Grade 3

Score Point 2;2

Dear Mrs.G,

I think we should pant a bald cyprus in the play ground because it huge and pretty and it gives a lot of good shade. Another good thing about the bald cyprus is that helps with the enviroment for our oxegen. We can also place down a bench under so the teachers can whatch the kids play. Also when its a hot day we can go under the tree and have some good shade. Thats why I want for us to plant a bald cyprus tree.

From A, ps will we actully plant this?

ANNOTATIONS

Production of Writing: 2

The response includes features of a letter and gives a partially developed opinion about the “bald cyprus” tree (although not from the passages, this is acceptable.) The letter addresses the assigned topic and gives some support about how the tree could benefit the school, although at times, it reads like a list. However, “Also” and “Another” show an attempt to use transitions, and there is evidence of an introduction and conclusion. Vocabulary such as “huge and pretty,” “whatch the kids play” and “a lot of good shade” is somewhat effective. Overall, the response shows a somewhat developed opinion about how the bald cypress would benefit teachers and students.

Use of Conventions: 2

The response demonstrates partial command of standard English grammar and usage. There are minor errors (“because it huge”; “Thats”) and phonetic spelling (“oxegen”; “whatch”). Although commas are excluded, terminal punctuation, including a question mark, are correct. Capitalization of proper nouns is also correct. Limited development shows partial, rather than consistent, control of conventions relative to length and complexity.

Grade 3

Score Point 1;1

A Cottonwood tree is want I want to plant in the school yard. I think it would be fun to have a 40-80 tall tree and great shade school yard.

ANNOTATIONS

Production of Writing: 1

The response includes an opinion about planting a cottonwood tree with minimal support about its height and use for the school. Phrases such as “I want” and “it would be fun” are appropriate to the task, but there is little effective or precise language beyond this. The writing includes few details; there is little resemblance to a letter and it ends abruptly. Overall, the response shows a minimal attempt to give an opinion about which tree should be planted and why.

Use of Conventions: 1

The response demonstrates little command of standard English grammar and usage. Minor errors, such as “want I want” and “great shade school yard”, combined with lack of development, demonstrate little command of conventions. While punctuation and capitalization are correct, the writing is too brief to demonstrate sustained control.

Grade 3

Score Point

My opinion is cool because I never about cottonwood, pinon pine, blue spruce they can be cool trees.

ANNOTATIONS

This response does not receive a score in Production of Writing or Use of Conventions. It is a commentary about the passages and trees rather than an opinion related to the task. In addition, the writing is too brief to demonstrate awareness of letter writing.