



**New Mexico Measures of
Student Success and Achievement**

**Writing Assessment
Resource for
Teachers**

Supporting New Mexico Students as Writers

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Overview

The following section provides background information regarding the New Mexico Measures of Student Success and Achievement (NM-MSSA) writing assessment.

Development

The NM-MSSA writing prompts were primarily written and reviewed by New Mexico teachers, under the leadership of staff from a nationally renowned test development/publishing company, Cognia,[®] and NM PED personnel, with the support of a nationally recognized expert in writing assessment and instruction.

One of the key reasons for enlisting New Mexico teachers as prompt writers is because they are regarded as an important source of ideas for topics that are culturally relevant as well as grade-level appropriate for students in New Mexico.

Test Specifications

The NM-MSSA writing assessment, like the writing tasks on other assessments, addresses various standards from the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). However, the writing assessment only addresses standards in writing and in language, not standards in reading. Simply put, the assessment of writing has been “decoupled” from the assessment of reading, which is assessed in a separate part of the NM-MSSA. The intent in doing so is to avoid confounding evidence of students’ ability as writers with their competence as readers.

The writing assessment is passage based. Students will be asked to read between one and three brief passages prior to writing their response to a writing task. 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. Students will always be asked to use what they read, along with their own ideas, observations, experiences, and/or imagination, to develop their writing on the assessment. Examples of the language used to cue for sources of ideas and information appear in Appendix C.

The standards assessed on the writing assessment are the following:

Standard 1

Grades 3–5: Write opinion pieces on topics or texts, supporting a point of view with reasons and information.*

Grades 6–8: Write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence.

Standard 2

Grades 3–5: Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas and information clearly.*

Grades 6–8: Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas, concepts, and information through the selection, organization, and analysis of relevant content.

Standard 3

Grades 3–5: Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective techniques, descriptive details, and clear event sequences.*

Grades 6–8: Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective techniques, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences.

**The wording of Standards 1, 2, and 3 for Grade 3 is slightly different than for Grades 4 and 5.*

The number of passages intended as stimuli for each purpose for writing is as follows:

Narrative: 1–2 passages

Informative: 2–3 passages

Opinion/Argument: 2–3 passages

Passages were developed using the following word count and Lexile ranges per grade level:

| Grade Level | Maximum Word Count* | Lexile Range |
|-------------|---------------------|--------------|
| 3 | 800 | 520-820 |
| 4 | 850 | 740-940 |
| 5 | 900 | 830-1010 |
| 6 | 950 | 925-1070 |
| 7 | 1,000 | 970-1120 |
| 8 | 1,000 | 1010-1185 |

**This is the combined word count for the passages associated with each prompt.*

Expectations

The various resources in this packet are intended to provide a clear understanding of what the writing assessment looks like and what students will be expected to do.

On the assessment, students in grades 3–8 will see 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.

Topics

The New Mexico teachers who served as prompt writers were provided with a list of topics to avoid. Some of these unacceptable topics are fairly universal across state and national writing assessments, while others apply specifically to New Mexico (for example, prompts dealing with birds and animals sacred to particular tribal groups). A few examples of “off-limits” topics based on potential bias/sensitivity issues are:

- Abuse
- Homelessness
- Violence/Murder
- Euthanasia
- Religion

The early stages of prompt development—generating possible topics and drafting prompt and passage ideas—very quickly yielded some ideas that would be great for some classrooms and schools but would not be suitable for a statewide assessment. This was the case, for example, when a particular idea would be meaningful to students growing up in an urban environment, but not a rural one, or to students who have had a particular experience (like driving a tractor, for example, or going to an arcade) not available to all New Mexico students.

The prompt topics on the NM-MSSA writing assessment are intended to be accessible to every student at the intended grade level. Students will always be cued to bring some of their own ideas, experiences, observations, and/or imagination to the act of writing, along with ideas and information from the passages associated with the writing prompt they are assigned. The writing prompt topics are ones about which students can be expected to have some relevant ideas and information that they can incorporate in their written responses. They need not—and will not—bring the same personal ideas and experiences, but prompt topics are ones to which students assigned can bring sufficient content to their writing, from what they have read and from what they already have ideas about, to be successful.

Teacher Resources

This packet contains several resources that were used by the teachers who developed writing prompts for the NM-MSSA, which they identified afterward as ones that they felt would be useful to—and should be shared with—other teachers in the New Mexico instructional community. Many of these resources are ones that teachers will wish to share with their students, either as they appear or in a simplified form (focusing, for instance, on just one part of a longer and more detailed document).

Each resource is introduced with an explanation of its contents and purpose. The actual resources appear in the appendices to this document. For each resource, we offer several suggested “Applications in the Classroom.” These suggestions are just a starting point, and we have no doubt that New Mexico teachers will develop additional ways to make effective use of each resource. We encourage teachers to share “best practices” related both to the use of these resources and to writing instruction more broadly.

Prompt Development Resources

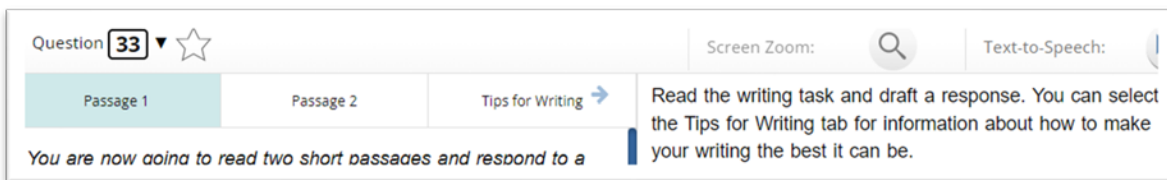
Resource 1: Sample Writing Prompt

Overview

This prompt, intended for eighth-grade students, illustrates the typical contents and organization of a NM-MSSA writing prompt. In this prompt, students are directed to read two related passages. The general topic of those passages—in this case, hiking—is identified.

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

If students were taking the assessment online, they would use the passage tabs (e.g., Passage 1, Passage 2) to navigate from one passage to the next, as shown in the snapshot below.



Students taking the assessment online will also see a tab labeled Tips for Writing. This tab includes a chart that identifies the characteristics of effective writing. There are different charts for grades 3–5 and grades 6–8. The chart for grades 6–8 is shown below.

Features of Successful Writing

| |
|--|
| Clearly addresses the topic and purpose identified in the prompt |
| Includes relevant and specific details and examples in support of ideas |
| Has a clear focus and an organizational plan |
| Uses language that is engaging and contributes to a style and tone appropriate to the task |
| Shows attention to sentence structure, sentence variety, and conventions (grammar, usage, spelling, punctuation) |

The Tips for Writing tab also includes a bulleted list that briefly explains the particular purpose for which students will be writing. There are different lists for each grade band (grades 3–5 and grades 6–8) and purpose for writing. The list for a grade 6–8 informative prompt is shown below.

Today you will be writing an informative text. When you write to inform, you

- **share what you know about a topic or subject with another person.**
- **think about what the audience may already know or may want to learn about the topic or subject.**
- **put your information in a logical order.**
- **use examples, definitions, and specific details to make the information clear and interesting to your audience.**

A similar explanation appears for narrative prompts and for opinion/argument prompts. In each case, the explanation makes clear the key features of writing for that purpose. All the Tips for Writing reference sheets are included in [Resource 2: Tips for Writing Reference Sheets](#).

On the right side of the screen, students will see a set of directions preceding the writing task.

Read the writing task and draft a response. You can select the Tips for Writing tab for information about how to make your writing the best it can be.

The specific writing task for each prompt immediately follows the set of directions. Each writing task provides enough information to establish a context for what the students will be asked to write. That context will be one that is plausible for New Mexico students at that grade level. In the sample writing prompt, the context is a scenario in which the writer has heard from a friend about plans for an upcoming adventure.

Every writing task will include what are sometimes referred to as “full rhetorical specifications.” That means the task will identify the purpose for writing (in this case, to inform), the topic (hiking safely at Kasha-Katuwe Tent Rocks National Monument), the audience (a hypothetical friend), and form (a letter). The specifications are highlighted in grayscale in the example below.

Writing Task

You have learned that a friend of yours plans on visiting Kasha-Katuwe Tent Rocks National Monument this summer. Your friend likes to hike and plans to do so at this beautiful site.

You have just read an article about hiking safety and information about Kasha-Katuwe from the Bureau of Land Management website. You decide to write a letter to inform your friend how to have a safe and enjoyable time at this U.S. national monument. Use details from what you have read, along with your own ideas and experiences, to write your informative letter.

You will notice that the task includes a directive to use both details from the passages as well as the writer’s own ideas and experiences. This part of the task is called a “support cue” since it signals to the writer “where to go to show what you know.” Each passage contains relevant ideas, details, and examples that students can draw upon when they write.

Writing prompt topics on the NM-MSSA will be ones about which students will have some prior knowledge or experience. This may be something they've read elsewhere, heard about, seen on television or online, or gleaned from another source. The support cue will only reference experience if it is plausible that students have all had some relevant experience (as in this instance, it might be hiking or simply doing something safely outdoors). See the section labeled "Resource 3: Support Cues" for more information and suggestions on how to use these in classroom activities.

The prompt ends with the directive, "**Now write your response in the space provided.**"

A student's response has been appended to this resource and is accompanied by a brief explanation of the score it would be likely to receive based on the Grade 6–8 Informative Writing Rubric (see Appendix F).

Applications in the Classroom

- Use this sample (regardless of grade) to illustrate and explain to students the component parts of an NM-MSSA writing prompt.
- Apply the explanations above to a "walk-through" of the practice test writing prompt for your grade (and perhaps the ones for the grade above and below yours as well). Have students:
 - Brainstorm what they already know, have experienced, seen or heard about, or imagine, related to the writing prompt topic.
 - Identify ideas, details, and examples in each passage that are relevant to the writing task.
 - Consider what kinds of language choices are suitable in a response to the task—based on the audience and form, should students' language be formal or can it be informal?
- Familiarize students with the rhetorical specifications in NM-MSSA writing prompts and connect those with "everyday" writing, inside and outside the classroom. Help them to recognize that any time we write, we have not only a topic in mind (what we want to write about), but also a target audience, and a purpose related to that audience. Do we want to entertain our readers, as we often do when we write stories? Do we want to provide new information or emphasize ideas and information that may have been forgotten or ignored? Do we want to make a reasoned case for doing something or acting a certain way? We also often make decisions about form—and determine the best way to convey our ideas in a given situation, whether by writing an essay, a story, a letter, or presenting our ideas in some other form.
- Some New Mexico teachers already are in the habit of introducing their students to the acronym FAT-P (which stands for Form-Audience-Topic-Purpose). Whichever way you chose to introduce these elements of the writing task during writing instruction, be sure that your students can easily identify the elements of any writing task and understand how they inform decisions that they will make as writers.
- Use what you learned about the design of the NM-MSSA writing prompts to "unpack" the practice test writing prompt for your grade level. Perhaps students identify and number the different subtopics or tasks required in the response or use color-coding to highlight key ideas that belong in specific body paragraphs. This visual and analytical process supports reading comprehension, promotes logical organization, and helps students plan focused, complete responses. The NM-MSSA practice tests are available at <https://newmexico.onlinehelp.cognia.org/practice-tests-nm-mssa/>.

Resource 2: Tips for Writing Reference Sheets

Overview

There are six Tips for Writing reference sheets: one for each purpose for writing at each of the two grade spans (grades 3–5 and grades 6–8). A closer look at a few of these reference sheets will reveal that there are some parts that are the same for all writing prompts at a grade band, such as the chart identifying features of effective written responses. The bulleted list immediately following the chart is unique to each purpose for writing for a grade band but does not change otherwise.

Applications in the Classroom

- “Deconstruct” a Tips for Writing reference sheet and spend some time focused on each of the component parts. For example:
 - The charts (*My Best Writing* for Grades 3–5 and *Features of Successful Writing* for Grades 6–8) clarify performance targets not only for assessments but for writing throughout the year. Spend time reviewing each feature with students. The charts can serve as a useful tool for classroom assessment, including self- and peer-assessment. You may also explain that the criteria used by trained raters to score assessment responses are based on these same features.
 - Provide students with brief texts or sample paragraphs and ask them to identify and highlight examples of specific features from the charts (e.g., strong topic sentence, relevant details and examples). This helps students connect the criteria with concrete examples.
 - Give students two versions of the same paragraph—one with strong writing and one with weak writing. Have students compare and identify which writing features are present or missing according to the charts. This can help students deepen their understanding of what makes writing effective.
 - The “purpose for writing” paragraph that follows each writing task sets forth very simply and clearly what writers aim to do when they compose written narratives, informative/explanatory pieces, or opinion/argument pieces. Provide students with frequent opportunities to reflect on their own purpose for writing—whether responding to assigned prompts or self-selected topics—to strengthen their ability to analyze tasks and choose appropriate approaches in their writing.
 - Give students opportunities to identify the writer’s purpose (e.g., What was the writer trying to do?) when reading brief passages in the classroom.
 - Provide students with short writing samples (a paragraph or excerpt) and have them sort each one into categories based on the author’s purpose—to inform, to persuade, to entertain, etc.—and explain their reasoning using text evidence.

- Engage students in a matching exercise that reinforces understanding of writing purposes and modes. Provide sample writing prompts and have students identify the purpose for writing—such as to inform, explain, or describe (informational/explanatory writing); to persuade or argue (opinion/argument writing); or to entertain, express feelings, or reflect (narrative writing). Students then match each purpose to the appropriate mode of writing and explain how the prompt’s wording connects the purpose to the mode.
- Ask students to identify signal words and phrases in texts that help reveal the author’s purpose (e.g., In conclusion, this proves that . . . for argument; One day . . . for narrative). These examples could be recorded on a running class chart titled “Purpose Signal Clues” listing common indicators for each writing mode. The class can continue adding to the chart as students discover new examples over time.

Resource 3: Support Cues

Overview

All writers bring their own prior knowledge—what they have learned, observed, heard about, experienced—and their imagination and ability to connect and extend ideas—to the act of writing. What they read, whether on an assessment, in the classroom, or in day-to-day life, also contributes to the ideas and examples that writers draw upon to produce a piece of writing.

The NM-MSSA writing assessment calls upon students to integrate what they have read in the passages that accompany the assigned task with what they “bring to the table.” Depending upon the prompt topic, this may be their own experiences or those of others they know about, things they’ve seen and heard, or their imagination. To help students identify appropriate sources of information, examples, and details to develop the ideas they present in their writing, every NM-MSSA writing task includes what is sometimes referred to as a “support cue.” For this assessment, every support cue combines a reference to the passages that students have read and to other relevant ideas and experiences. Examples of support cues can be found in **Appendix C: Signaling Writers Where They Can Go to Show What They Know**.

The explicit cueing to integrate personal ideas and information with ideas, details, and examples from the passages is something that teachers will likely want to highlight for their students. A key goal in including this feature in the writing prompts is to encourage students to go beyond “copy and paste” writing in which the text they produce is merely a collection of ideas and information taken directly from the reading passages.

When responses to the assessment are scored, trained raters do not need to determine whether a detail in a student’s writing comes from the passage or from the student’s own knowledge, experience, or imagination. What matters is that the writing shows relevant, well-developed ideas using varied and appropriate sources, including both text-based evidence and personal ideas. The goal is to teach students to integrate evidence and personal ideas smoothly, so their writing demonstrates depth and development without needing to trace every detail back to a source.

Applications in the Classroom

- To start, include a support cue in the writing tasks you create for classroom instruction and assessment. Instructions for learning logs, journal entries, warm-up activities, and exit slips, for example, can all include a cue that directs students to connect what they have read with their own ideas.
- When students are writing in a particular content area, you may wish to include as the “personal” component “What you have learned about _____.” When students have conducted an investigation or group project, you might cue them to “Use what you have read about _____, along with what you observed during your investigation/experiment ...” (e.g., Use information from our readings about minerals, along with what you observed during our hands-on investigation, to explain . . .”).
- Emphasize that students’ own knowledge and experiences are valuable, as long as they are relevant to the topic. You may find that some students feel they have little to contribute at first. Use small- or large-group discussions to explore what students know, have experienced, observed, or heard. This helps them see that everyone has ideas relevant to the topic and builds confidence in sharing their thinking.
- Sometimes, a support cue will ask for support based on the student’s own experiences or those of “others you know.” Encourage them to identify other valid second-hand sources of information and examples.

- Give students the opportunity to create a support cue of their own, based on a topic about which they'll be writing. This may help to get them thinking about the best sources of ideas and information in that instance. Will it be what they've already learned? What they have personal experience with? What they have seen and heard on television or the Internet? Some other source?
- When students share responses to a classroom writing task, encourage them to identify the source of the ideas and details used to develop their writing. You might have them use two colors to underline or highlight: one for words and phrases drawn from text (explicitly or implicitly) and another for personal support or examples.
- If students struggle to connect their ideas to evidence from the text, consider providing sentence starters or frames to help students practice this skill. Examples include:
 - “I know ___ because the author states ___.”
 - “From the passage, I learned that ___.”
 - “This shows that ___ because ___.”
- Encourage students to look for “footprints” in classmates’ writing—words or phrases that show the writer has read and incorporated ideas from a passage or text. These can be direct references from the passage or subtle signals that the writer has read and incorporated ideas from the text.

Resource 4: Possible Passage/Stimulus Text Types

Overview

The New Mexico teachers who served as prompt writers were strongly encouraged to create or select passages of many types rather than limited passages, essays, and articles. To this end, they were provided with a brief list of possible text types (See [Appendix D](#)).

Particularly when developing informative writing prompts, prompt writers worked hard to avoid prompt/passage sets in which students read two informative articles and then had to write an informative essay or article. Mixing up text types is often an effective way to avoid creating a situation in which students are likely to simply “write to regurgitate” information.

The list of possible passage text types also serves as a useful resource for teachers who are interested in expanding the variety of forms in which their students will write.

Applications in the Classroom

- While, as a classroom teacher, you may create new prompts only infrequently (or not ever), you can use this list to guide your selection of reading passages that will serve as a resource for student writing.
- Invite students to identify other text types they encounter in everyday life—both inside and outside of the classroom—and expand this list.
- Far too often, students write essays intended for one audience—their teacher. To get beyond writing as an academic exercise, you could guide your students in matching each of the text types listed (and others you and your students may have identified) with one or more plausible audiences. Have them consider which text types are more likely to be written for familiar audiences (e.g., friends, family, classmates, others in their school or community) and those that are more likely to be written for unfamiliar audiences (e.g., a government official or agency, the public at large, a business or organization).
- Encourage colleagues who are not primarily responsible for ELA instruction to develop writing tasks that require students to read and write different text types/forms. For example:
 - Students can apply what they’ve read about and learned through practice to write a display card to accompany a work of art they have created, which will be displayed for the public (in a school hallway, community center, etc.). In this text, students might explain how they applied certain techniques, media, and/or design elements. If students have based their work on a piece by a famous artist, they could explain that relationship to viewers.
 - Students who have learned about a particular period of history could write a journal entry, using what they’ve read and learned, from the perspective of a young person living at that time.
 - Having conducted a hands-on investigation in science, students might write a set of instructions to a student who was absent that day to explain how to do a similar investigation at home.
 - After learning about an unusual mathematical concept, students might write an article for a student magazine or newsletter about how that concept is in evidence in art or nature (e.g., tessellation in art or the Fibonacci sequence in the natural world).

Resource 5: What's the Difference between Persuasive Writing and Opinion/Argument?

Overview

As veteran teachers know, trends in writing assessment change somewhat over time. Prior to the introduction of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), one of the purposes for writing often highlighted in instructional resources and included on state and national writing assessments was persuasive writing. For example, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) has long included, and still includes, prompts that address writing to explain, to convey experience, and to persuade. The first two purposes correspond to CCSS Writing Standards 2 and 3. However, Writing Standard 1 addresses opinion/argument rather than persuasion. Distinctions between the two purposes—or domains—of writing have been challenging for some teachers and their students to fully understand, even though the CCSS were adopted by many states some time ago.

Since the NM-MSSA prompt writers were responsible for developing writing prompts that address either Standard 1, 2, or 3, one of the resources provided to them was a brief explanation of the differences between persuasive writing and opinion/argument (See [Appendix E](#)).

Applications in the Classroom

- Present a pair of writing samples to students and have them determine, based on the chart comparing persuasion and argument, which each sample represents. Discuss how they might change the persuasive writing sample so that it works as an opinion/argument piece. Be sure to look closely at any emotional language and consider replacements for words and phrases that would be more neutral.
- Gather a small set of persuasive prompts from credible sources of print and online instructional resources. Have students consider and discuss which prompt topics lend themselves to opinion/argument and determine collaboratively how persuasive prompts might be revised to work as opinion/argument prompts.
- Have students gather some opinion essays from current/recent newspapers and/or magazines to share with the class. Discuss each, focusing on whether the writing is more characteristic of persuasion or of opinion/argument. Ask them to determine, based on the traits of argument writing, how successful they think each essay is.

Resource 6: Rubrics

Overview

Six scoring rubrics have been created as part of the development process for the new NM-MSSA writing assessment. In **Appendix F**, you will find the following:

- NM-MSSA Rubric for Opinion Writing (Grades 3–5)
- NM-MSSA Rubric for Informative Writing (Grades 3–5)
- NM-MSSA Rubric for Narrative Writing (Grades 3–5)
- NM-MSSA Rubric for Argumentative Writing (Grades 6–8)
- NM-MSSA Rubric for Informative Writing (Grades 6–8)
- NM-MSSA Rubric for Narrative Writing (Grades 6–8)

The NM-MSSA scoring rubrics for writing were developed based on the Common Core State Standards for Writing and Language. Each rubric is similarly structured to focus on three criteria for evaluating the *Production of Writing* (Development/Content, Organization/Focus, and Language) and two criteria for evaluating *Use of Conventions* (Grammar/Usage and Mechanics). The score point descriptors under *Production of Writing* are different for each of the grade spans and purposes, while the descriptors for *Use of Conventions* are the same for both grade spans and all purposes for writing.

Students will be assigned one score for *Production of Writing* and another for *Use of Conventions*, based on the descriptors for writing at each of the score point levels. In each rubric, bulleted descriptors for each of the key criteria characterize writing at the different score points. The scoring methodology that will be used is holistic scoring; that means that raters will consider how well/how thoroughly the descriptors for a score point fit a given written response and assign the score that is the best fit. A response need not be characterized by all of the descriptors for a particular score point, and the bulleted descriptors are not hurdles that students must jump over to attain a particular score. If a response is more like a 4 than a 3, it will be assigned a score of 4. If it is more like a 2 than a 3, it will be assigned a score of 2.

Production of Writing is scored on a four-point scale, while *Use of Conventions* is scored on a three-point scale. The number of score points reflects the levels of performance that can be easily discriminated for each of those domains. The primary audience for the NM-MSSA rubrics is the raters who will be trained on these criteria and who will score student responses to the writing assessment.

It is important to remember that any rubric is merely a roadmap or guide, and that scoring training for raters relies heavily upon review of scored and annotated samples of student responses. Furthermore, rater training will go beyond the rubrics and samples to highlight slight differences in expectations grade by grade within each grade band that are captured in the CCSS.

Applications in the Classroom

- The rubrics are not intended as classroom resources, although teachers may determine that the language and detail is suitable for their particular students. If the actual rubrics are introduced to students, teachers may find it best to highlight main structural features, including the criteria for both *Production of Writing* and *Use of Conventions* and key words in each of the bulleted descriptors.

- Because the instructional target for *Production of Writing* is (or should be) excellence, you may wish to share with students only the descriptors for Score Point 4 for each purpose for writing. These descriptors align well with the chart in each prompt that outlines “best” (for grades 3–5) or “successful” (for grades 6–8) writing.
- The hierarchical language that differentiates score points can be helpful in the classroom, especially as you are homing in on a particular characteristic of writing (for example, development or use of precise language). You may wish to use (and have students use, when discussing their own or their peers’ writing) words and phrases that distinguish between levels such as:

Thoroughly – Generally – Partially – Minimally

Consistently – Generally – Sometimes – Rarely

- The *Use of Conventions* criteria and descriptors are less detailed than those for *Production of Writing*, and especially because they do not vary by grade band or purpose for writing, you may find these useful to share with students. However, because the specific expectations vary by grade level, it is important to identify these (as set forth in the CCSS) to your students.
- Provide students with simple, memorable strategies to guide editing and revising. The acronyms CUPS and ARMS help students focus on different aspects of their writing:

CUPS – Capitalization, Usage, Punctuation, Spelling

ARMS – Add, Remove, Move, Substitute

CUPS targets writing mechanics, while ARMS supports improving content, clarity, and organization. Using these techniques in mini-lessons, peer review, or self-assessment helps students produce stronger, clearer, and more polished writing.

Thoughts on Teaching Writing

New Mexico educators worked hard to develop writing prompts that met two key criteria:

- The texts students read should be worth reading and provide ideas and details that students can use when they write
- The questions for writing must be worth writing to (that is, provide authentic reasons to write)

We believe that one of the best ways to prepare students for the assessment is to give them ample opportunities to write for all three purposes (narrative, informative/explanatory, and opinion/argument), for a variety of realistic audiences, in an array of different forms, about meaningful topics. This kind of writing is “transactional”: it is intended to accomplish something, whether that is to inform, to entertain, or to convey the credibility of an argument.

In the real world, writers are often reading as a foundation for their writing, and so reading should remain a critical part of what students do to develop competence and confidence as writers. Students should continue to write responses to questions about texts they’ve read—addressing the various reading standards through writing.

Students should also write to learn—write in order to capture and shape their own understanding of something. Thus, besides writing as an adjunct to reading instruction and writing in response to “prompts,” students should have opportunities to write in a learning log, a reader’s journal, or a project notebook, for example. In these, the audience is the student himself/herself.

This is not to say that there isn’t a place for conventional academic essays—papers about a topic, often based on research or analysis—intended for the teacher as audience. This just shouldn’t be all that students do as writers.

And every so often, to make writing really become meaningful, consider giving students the opportunity to explore a topic or issue of genuine interest to them by collecting information from a variety of sources (text-based, interviews, questionnaires, etc.), in order to write “to make a difference.” This experience calls for students to not only identify the topic but also determine a suitable audience and an appropriate form. This makes sense when we recognize that all prompts are intended to do is to mimic the kinds of decisions that capable writers make all the time:

- What interests/matters enough to me to write about?
- Who else does/should this interest or matter to?
- What sort of impact do I want my writing to have on them?
- What’s the best form in which to get my ideas out to them?

With these sorts of opportunities to write, New Mexico’s students are not only more likely to improve their writing skills, but they are more likely to see themselves as writers and see writing as a means of connecting with and making sense of the world.

Appendix A

Sample Writing Prompt

Informative Sample Set

Grades 6–8

You are now going to read two brief passages and respond to a writing task. First, read the following passages about hiking. Read Passage 1 and then click the Passage 2 tab at the top of the screen to read Passage 2.

Passage 1

Tent Rocks

Kasha-Katuwe Tent Rocks National Monument, managed by the Bureau of Land Management, is famous for its scenic cone-shaped formations. These formations are composed of pumice, ash, and tuff deposits from volcanic eruptions 6–7 million years ago. Picnic tables, shelters, and toilets are available at the Monument. The Monument includes a National Recreational Trail for hiking only. The Trail contains two segments that provide opportunities for hiking, birdwatching, geologic observation, and plant identification. Both segments of the trail begin at the designated Monument parking area. The Cave Loop Trail is 1.2 miles long, and rated as easy. The more difficult Canyon Trail is a 1.5-mile, one-way trek into a narrow, "slot" canyon. Its steep (630 ft) climb to the mesa top offers excellent views of the Sangre de Cristo, Jemez, Sandia mountains and the Rio Grande Valley. The Veterans Memorial Trail is a 1-mile long loop trail. It is rated as very easy and is wheelchair accessible.

Entry into the Monument is between 8:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. Closing procedures begin at 3:30 p.m. to clear the Monument by 5 p.m. Visitors must be out of the fee booth gated area by closing time.

Federal annual, senior, and access passports are honored at the Monument. NOTE: No dogs are allowed at the Monument.



Photo by Gail Goldberg with permission

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Passage 2

Hiking Safety Tips

The sun is shining and the weather is warm and beautiful, the perfect day for a hike. But before leaving, you'll need to pack and plan for your trip so that you can stay safe while you are out on the trail.

Without the right packing and planning, you could be in serious trouble when something goes wrong, even on a short day hike. To ensure a safe hike (and an enjoyable experience in the great outdoors), remember these important hiking safety tips.

Make a List

Make a list of what you need and check that you've packed everything. Whether you'll be gone for three days or an afternoon, there are essential items you'll need to pack. The most important items are food, water, rain gear, a compass, and a small first aid kit. The last thing you want when something happens is to be without an important piece of gear.

Consult a Map

A map is a must in more remote areas. It should be detailed, with the trails in the area clearly marked. If you do not know how to read a map, learn how before you go. The trails in most national and state parks are well-marked and often post trail maps or make them available at the park entry or Visitor's Center.

Plan to Hike During the Day

Whenever possible, hike during the day. Hiking at night can be dangerous. It is easier to get lost and harder to avoid obstacles on the trail. Some wild animals hunt at night and they may present dangers to people. It happens sometimes that hikers get caught in the dark. Keep track of your progress on your map if you have one, so that you are always aware of where you are. Turn around and head back before you've completed your hike if there is any chance you could get caught in the dark.

Know the Land

It is fun to explore new hiking trails, but familiarize yourself with the territory before you go. Check regional government websites or the trail's website for information about the wild animals, poisonous plants, hunting areas/seasons, and weather conditions where you will be.

Keep an Eye on the Weather

One thing for sure, the weather can change at a moment's notice. Check the forecast up until the time you leave. This will help you determine the gear you'll need to bring, like sunscreen and warm clothing. If the forecast calls for rain, the trail you plan to take may be impassable. Contact the local Parks and Recreation Department for up-to-date information on the weather and conditions.

Be Confident, But Cautious

When hiking in a group or with an experienced friend, you may be tempted to keep pace with them, no matter what. This too can be dangerous. You could get injured, exhausted, or dehydrated, if you push yourself beyond your limits. Be honest with yourself and the other hikers about your limits. Stick to a pace that is comfortable for you. Besides, it's nice to slow down to enjoy the beautiful scenery and glimpse the local wildlife.

Tell Someone Your Plans

Tell a trustworthy person before you leave

- where you are going;
- when you will return home;
- who to contact if you do not return at the exact day and time.

Let that person know when you get back. If they don't hear from you, then they can take the necessary action.

Stay Together

Finally, stay together. When hiking with a group, people sometimes drift apart into groups of fast and slow hikers. This isn't always safe. Someone who hikes at a modest pace should be at the front of the group, to ensure everyone stays together.

Follow these hiking safety tips whenever you go out hiking. They will help ensure that you are prepared and that your trip is memorable and fun. Happy hiking!

"Hiking Safety Tips" © 2020 by Cognia, Inc.

Tips for Writing

As you write, think about what makes writing successful.

Features of Successful Writing

| |
|--|
| Clearly addresses the topic and purpose identified in the prompt |
| Includes relevant and specific details and examples in support of ideas |
| Has a clear focus and an organizational plan |
| Uses language that is engaging and contributes to a style and tone appropriate to the task |
| Shows attention to sentence structure, sentence variety, and conventions (grammar, usage, spelling, punctuation) |

Today you will be writing an informative text. When you write to inform, you

- share what you know about a topic or subject with another person.
- think about what the audience may already know or may want to learn about the topic or subject.
- put your information in a logical order.
- use examples, definitions, and specific details to make the information clear and interesting to your audience.

Read the writing task and draft a response. You can select the Tips for Writing tab for information about how to make your writing the best it can be.

Writing Task

You have learned that a friend of yours plans on visiting Kasha-Katuwe Tent Rocks National Monument this summer. Your friend likes to hike and plans to do so at this beautiful site.

You have just read an article about hiking safety and information about Kasha-Katuwe from the Bureau of Land Management website. You decide to write a letter to inform your friend how to have a safe and enjoyable time at this U.S. national monument. Use details from what you have read, along with your own ideas and experiences, to write your informative letter.

Now write your response in the space provided.

Sample Response

Dear Lucy,

I'm so excited for you that you get to go to the Kasha-Katuwe Tent Rocks National Monument! I've heard it has amazing formations made by volcanoes that are shaped like cones, as well as beautiful scenery and wildlife! You can also birdwatch, and of course the geology of the place is so cool! I want you to be safe and prepared on your trip so it's the best it can be, and since I just read an article on this topic, I have some advice to give you!

First and foremost, make sure you are prepared before you start hiking. A few things to have handy on the trail are food, water, a few first-aid supplies, a compass, and a map. You should also make sure that someone else knows where you are and when you should be home just in case something happens. The hiking should also be a fun experience for you! Don't try to walk as fast as someone else if it's hard for you, just go at your own pace. Trails are ranked in difficulty, so pick one that's good for everyone and won't be too strenuous for you. That being said, even if people in your group do walk at different paces, you should stick together. Try to accommodate everyone so that all the people in the group are together and no one gets lost.

There are a few things to look out for on the trails. One of the biggest ones is weather. You don't want to get caught in any nasty weather that you weren't prepared for, so check the forecast before you go. If it's going to be especially hot, bring a hat and sunscreen. If there's a chance of rain, add a raincoat to your things. It's also important to make sure you have a rough idea of how long the trail will be. This is because you want to start hiking at an early enough time so you're not out after dark. Trails can get dangerous after dark because it's harder to navigate, and wild animals may come out.

I hope this information was helpful for you, and I know you're going to have a great time at the monument! Send me pictures!

From, Greta

Sample Scoring Annotation

Likely score:

4 points

Explanation of Score:

All of the ideas in the response address the writing task, and the topic is developed with pertinent facts, details, and examples drawn from the passages and from the writer's own ideas about or experiences of hiking. The organizational plan is consistent with a letter, providing a grounded introduction and a sensible movement within and between paragraphs. The concluding statement clearly follows from the preceding ideas. Word usage such as *ranked* and *strenuous* show engagement with both the topic and the reading material, which is an indication of using "precise language to inform" (see Rubric for Informative Writing). Language in the responses is also varied throughout, extending from vocabulary (for example) and into sentence beginnings as well. This also connects to a demonstration of "effective use of transitions to create cohesion." For example: *Trails are ranked in difficulty, so pick one that's good for everyone and won't be too strenuous for you. That being said, even if people in your group do walk at different paces, you should stick together. Try to accommodate everyone so that all the people in the group are together and no one gets lost.*

While this letter addresses the task and provides enough details from the material to show more than general development, there is certainly room for more development; for example, the overall idea of preparation for the hike and how this might play into choosing which specific trail you might choose based on considerations; what specific kinds of animals, birds, or other wildlife might be encountered, and making connections about how you might photograph or observe them; connecting ideas from Passage 2 (e.g., **Know the Land** and **Keep an Eye on the Weather**) to the notion of sticking together, pacing oneself, and finding solutions for potential dangers. While not requirements for a proficient score, given the expectation that students can and should extend what they read, there is potential for a 4-level response to be more elaborate, introspective, interconnected, and/or provide more examples.

Overall, the response is more like a 4 than a 3 and would be likely to receive a score of 4.

Appendix B

Tips for Writing Reference Sheets

Grades 3–5 Narrative Reference Sheet

Tips for Writing

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 |

Today you will be writing a narrative. When you write a narrative, you

- tell about real or imaginary events.
- introduce one or more characters.
- put events in an order that makes sense.
- use details and dialogue to make the events and characters interesting.

Grades 3–5 Informative Reference Sheet

Tips for Writing

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 |

Today you will be writing an informative text. When you write to inform, you

- share what you know about a topic with another person.
- think about what your reader may want to learn about the topic.
- put your information in an order that makes sense.
- use examples and details to make the information clear and interesting to your reader.

Grades 3–5 Opinion Reference Sheet

Tips for Writing

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 |

Today you will be writing an opinion text. 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.

Grades 6–8 Narrative Reference Sheet

Tips for Writing

As you write, think about what makes writing successful.

Features of Successful Writing

| |
|--|
| Clearly addresses the topic and purpose identified in the prompt |
| Includes relevant and specific details and examples in support of ideas |
| Has a clear focus and an organizational plan |
| Uses language that is engaging and contributes to a style and tone appropriate to the task |
| Shows attention to sentence structure, sentence variety, and conventions (grammar, usage, spelling, punctuation) |

Today you will be writing a narrative text. When you write a narrative, you

- recount a real or imaginary series of events in an engaging way.
- think about how your story can affect your audience through humor, sympathy, or other emotions.
- put events in an order that makes sense.
- use specific details to make the events and characters interesting.

Grades 6–8 Informative Reference Sheet

Tips for Writing

As you write, think about what makes writing successful.

Features of Successful Writing

| |
|--|
| Clearly addresses the topic and purpose identified in the prompt |
| Includes relevant and specific details and examples in support of ideas |
| Has a clear focus and an organizational plan |
| Uses language that is engaging and contributes to a style and tone appropriate to the task |
| Shows attention to sentence structure, sentence variety, and conventions (grammar, usage, spelling, punctuation) |

Today you will be writing an informative text. When you write to inform, you

- share what you know about a topic or subject with another person.
- think about what the audience may already know or may want to learn about the topic or subject.
- put your information in a logical order.
- use examples, definitions, and specific details to make the information clear and interesting to your audience.

Grades 6–8 Argumentative Reference Sheet

Tips for Writing

As you write, think about what makes writing successful.

Features of Successful Writing

| |
|--|
| Clearly addresses the topic and purpose identified in the prompt |
| Includes relevant and specific details and examples in support of ideas |
| Has a clear focus and an organizational plan |
| Uses language that is engaging and contributes to a style and tone appropriate to the task |
| Shows attention to sentence structure, sentence variety, and conventions (grammar, usage, spelling, punctuation) |

Today you will be writing an argument. When you write an argument, you

- make and support a claim based on factual evidence.
- gather and present reasons for making that claim.
- use specific facts, examples, and details to support and elaborate upon those reasons.

Appendix C

Signaling Writers *Where They Can Go to Show What They Know*

Students have many sources to turn to for ideas, examples, facts and details to develop their writing. One feature of NM MSSA prompts is that the writing task will always provide students with some suggestions about possible sources. These suggestions are not requirements; however, students' writing is likely to be more successful if they draw widely and deeply upon all that they've read, learned, and know from things they've seen, heard, and/or experienced.

Although the following is not an all-inclusive list, it provides some examples of text support cues (signals to draw upon ideas and information in passages) and other cueing for ways students can "show what they know."

- ✓ Use information from the passage (story, directions, article) and from what you know (what you learned) to write your explanation.
- ✓ Be sure to include information and ideas from what you read and what you have learned.
- ✓ Use examples from the passage and your own ideas to make a case for ____.
- ✓ Support your choice (opinion, decision) with details from the (passage, story, article) as well as from your own ideas and experiences (knowledge).
- ✓ Give examples from what you have read and from your own experiences or those of others you know to ____.
- ✓ Be sure to support your response with details from what you read and from your own experiences and ideas.
- ✓ Use information from what you read and from what you already know about ____ to explain (argue for/against) ____.
- ✓ Use details from the story and your own ideas and impressions (your own imagination) to develop your writing.
- ✓ From what you have read and from your own experience or that of someone else you know (have read about, have heard about), ____.
- ✓ Develop the ____ and ____ in your story based on what you read, your own experiences, and your imagination.

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Appendix D

Possible Passage/Stimulus Text Types to Accompany NM-MSSA Writing Prompts

All NM-MSSA prompts are partnered with 1-3 brief text stimuli (selected or authored by prompt writers). These may be intact passages or only a part of a more extended text. Some possible text types include:

- ✓ Story
- ✓ Memoir
- ✓ Biography
- ✓ Poem
- ✓ Article
- ✓ Essay
- ✓ Review (book, music, performance, etc.)
- ✓ Editorial
- ✓ Website
- ✓ Letter
- ✓ Journal (diary, log) entry
- ✓ Instructions
- ✓ Advertisement
- ✓ Brochure
- ✓ Memo
- ✓ Questionnaire
- ✓ Script
- ✓ Transcript
- ✓ Display text (e.g., to accompany an artifact in a museum)

Appendix E

What's the Difference between Persuasive Writing and Opinion/Argument?

For decades now, the purposes for writing have included some slight variations upon narrative, informative, and persuasive writing. With the advent of the Common Core State Standards, however, focus shifted from writing to persuade to writing opinion pieces/arguments. To write effective prompts to elicit opinion pieces (Grades 3–5) or arguments (Grades 6–8), it may be helpful to consult the chart below.

| Persuasion | Argument* |
|---|--|
| Often starts with an opinion and then pursues reasons to support it | Starts with a claim that is based on having considered different sides of an issue; a claim is not merely an opinion but neither is it unassailable fact—rather, a claim is a statement that is debatable and/or subject to investigation. |
| Appeals to audience's emotions | Makes an objective/logical case for an idea or position rather than an emotional one (This is what I think); there need not be a specific audience |
| Develops reasons with observations, subjective opinions, impressions, as well as factual evidence | Develops reasons with factual/credible evidence, establishes logical connections between/among facts and details |
| May use a more personal, passionate style/tone | Uses an objective and formal style/tone; dispassionate and rational |
| Attempts to make audience think or act in a particular way (This is what <i>you</i> should think) | Aims to adequately make a valid case and support a claim without moving the audience to action (This is what / think) |

A claim might, for example:

- push back against a commonly held idea or previously accepted fact
- argue a particular cause-and-effect relationship
- assert the need for a particular policy or practice (X should/should not happen because . . .)
- establish the relative value or nature of something (better than, worse than, different from, etc.)

For argument prompts, passages must—as a pair or within each passage—convey that the topic is debatable and offer some information on different sides or positions.

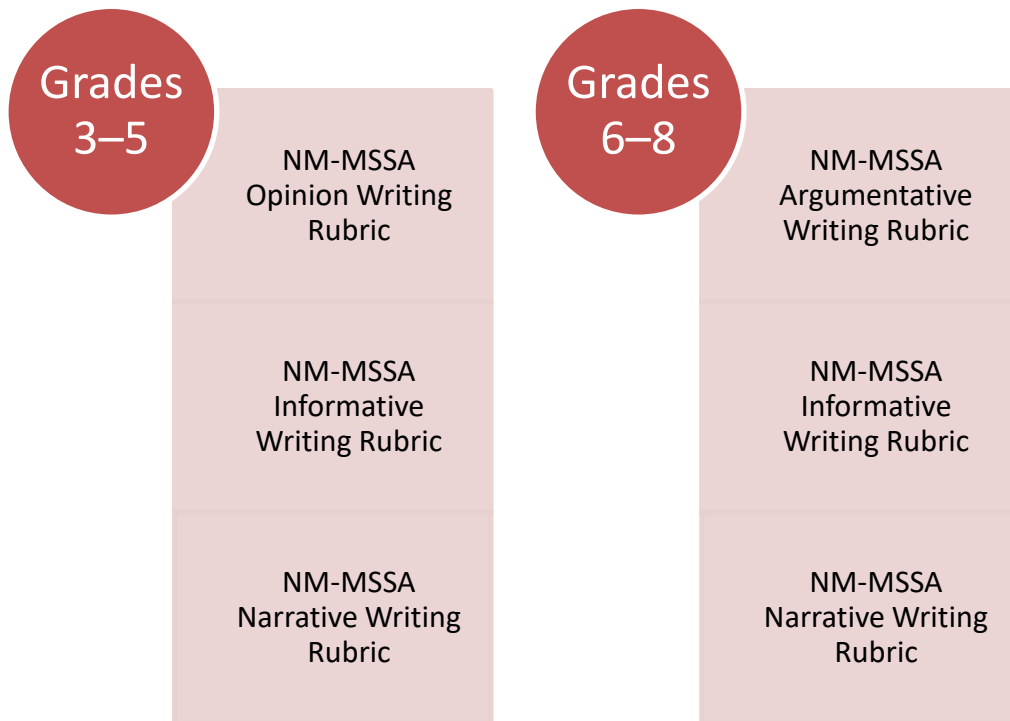
** Opinion writing is a precursor to writing an argument piece. The writer states an opinion or preference and provides reasons for that opinion supported by facts, details, and specific examples. Evidence is objective (rather than mere expressions of feelings or beliefs), and there is no “whining” in opinion pieces or arguments.*

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Appendix F

Rubrics

There are six scoring rubrics for the new NM-MSSA writing assessment. In this appendix, you will find each of the following rubrics:



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. | <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. | <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. | <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. |
| Organization/ Focus | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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"> 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"> 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"> 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. |
| 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. |

Production of Writing: NM-MSSA Informative 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"> Presents ideas that thoroughly address the task. Substantially develops the topic with consistently pertinent facts, definitions, details, examples, and other information from relevant sources. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Presents ideas that generally address the task. Generally develops the topic with mostly pertinent facts, definitions, details, examples, and other information from relevant sources. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Presents ideas that partially address the task. Partially develops the topic with some pertinent facts, definitions, details, examples, and other information from relevant sources. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Presents ideas that minimally address the task. Minimally develops the topic with few pertinent facts, definitions, details, examples, and other information from relevant sources. |
| Organization/ Focus | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establishes and consistently maintains an organizational plan focused on a controlling or central idea. Introduces the topic clearly and provides a concluding statement or section consistently related to the information presented. Consistently uses linking words and phrases effectively to connect ideas within categories of information. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establishes and generally maintains an organizational plan focused on a controlling or central idea. Introduces the topic and provides a concluding statement or section generally related to the information presented. Generally uses linking words and phrases effectively to connect ideas within categories of information. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attempts to establish and partially maintains an organizational plan focused on a controlling or central idea. Introduces the topic and provides a concluding statement or section partially related to the information presented. Sometimes uses linking words and phrases effectively to connect ideas within categories of information. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> May attempt to establish but does not maintain an organizational plan focused on a controlling or central idea. May be missing an introduction and/or a concluding statement or section that is related to the information presented. Rarely uses/does not use linking words and phrases effectively to connect ideas within categories of information. |
| Language | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consistently uses precise language and varied vocabulary to inform about or explain the topic. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Often uses precise language and varied vocabulary to inform about or explain the topic. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sometimes uses precise language and varied vocabulary to inform about or explain the topic. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rarely uses/does not use precise language or varied vocabulary to inform about or explain the topic. |

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. Has errors or patterns of errors that interfere with meaning or confuse the reader. |

Production of Writing: NM-MSSA Narrative 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"> Presents a narrative that develops real or imagined experiences or events that consistently address the task. Develops the narrative using consistently descriptive details. Uses consistently effective and varied narrative techniques (dialogue, description, pacing)* to develop experiences and events or show the responses of characters to situations. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Presents a narrative that develops real or imagined experiences or events that generally address the task. Develops the narrative using mostly descriptive details. Uses generally effective and somewhat varied narrative techniques (dialogue, description, pacing)* to develop experiences and events or show the responses of characters to situations. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Presents a narrative that develops real or imagined experiences or events that partially address the task. Develops the narrative using some descriptive details. Uses partially effective and/or limited narrative techniques (dialogue, description, pacing)* to develop experiences and events or show the responses of characters to situations. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attempts to present a narrative that develops real or imagined experiences or events but minimally addresses the task. Attempts to develop the narrative but uses few descriptive details, if any. Attempts to use narrative techniques (dialogue, description, pacing)* to develop experiences and events or show the responses of characters to situations, but these are not effective and/or varied. |
| Organization/ Focus | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Effectively orients the reader by clearly establishing a situation and introducing a narrator and/or characters. Consistently organizes an event sequence that unfolds naturally. Provides a conclusion that clearly follows from the narrated experiences or events. Consistently demonstrates effective use of a wide variety of transitional words and phrases to manage the sequence of events.* | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adequately orients the reader by generally establishing a situation and introducing a narrator and/or characters. Generally organizes an event sequence that unfolds naturally. Provides a conclusion that generally follows from the narrated experiences or events. Generally demonstrates effective use of a variety of transitional words and phrases to manage the sequence of events.* | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attempts to orient the reader by partially establishing a situation and/or introducing a narrator and/or characters. Partially organizes an event sequence that unfolds naturally. Provides a conclusion that partially follows from the narrated experiences or events. Sometimes demonstrates varied and effective use of transitional words and phrases to manage the sequence of events.* | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> May attempt to orient the reader by minimally establishing a situation and/or introducing a narrator and/or characters. Minimally organizes an event sequence that unfolds naturally. Provides a conclusion that minimally follows or does not follow from the narrated experiences or events. Rarely demonstrates/does not demonstrate use of varied or effective transitional words and phrases to manage the sequence of events.* |
| Language | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consistently uses concrete words and phrases and sensory details to convey experiences and events. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Frequently uses concrete words and phrases and sensory details to convey experiences and events. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sometimes uses concrete words and phrases and sensory details to convey experiences and events. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rarely uses/does not use concrete words and phrases and sensory details to convey experiences and events. |

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. |

*Specific expectations vary by grade.

Production of Writing: NM-MSSA Argumentative Writing Rubric (Grades 6–8)

| | Score Point 4 | Score Point 3 | Score Point 2 | Score Point 1 |
|-------------------------|--|--|---|---|
| | The Writing: | | | |
| Development/ Content | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Makes a claim that fully addresses the topic. Develops the argument with consistently logical reasons and consistently relevant evidence. Uses consistently accurate and credible sources and demonstrates substantial understanding of the topic. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Makes a claim that generally addresses the topic. Develops the argument with generally logical reasons and generally relevant evidence. Uses generally accurate and credible sources and demonstrates general understanding of the topic. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Makes a claim that partially addresses the topic. Develops the argument with only some logical reasons and partially relevant evidence. Uses partially accurate and/or credible sources and demonstrates limited understanding of the topic. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Makes a claim that minimally addresses the topic or does not explicitly make a claim. Attempts to develop the argument but includes few, if any, logical reasons and/or relevant evidence. Uses few accurate and/or credible sources and demonstrates little/no understanding of the topic. |
| Organization/ Focus | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides a clear and engaging introduction of the claim(s) and a concluding statement or section that logically follows from and supports the argument presented. Consistently organizes reasons and evidence logically. Substantially acknowledges alternate or opposing claims.* Consistently demonstrates effective use of words, phrases, and clauses to create cohesion and clarify the relationships among the claim(s), reasons, and evidence. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides a generally clear introduction of the claim(s) and a concluding statement or section that adequately follows from and supports the argument presented. Generally organizes reasons and evidence logically. Generally acknowledges alternate or opposing claims.* Generally demonstrates effective use of words, phrases, and clauses to create cohesion and clarify the relationships among the claim(s), reasons, and evidence. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides a partially clear introduction of the claim(s) and a concluding statement or section that partially follows from and supports the argument presented. Sometimes organizes reasons and evidence logically. Sometimes acknowledges alternate or opposing claims.* Sometimes demonstrates effective use of words, phrases, and clauses to create cohesion and clarify the relationships among the claim(s), reasons, and evidence. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> May be missing an introduction of the claim(s) and/or a concluding statement or section that follows from or supports the argument presented. May attempt to organize reasons and evidence logically. May not acknowledge alternate or opposing claims.* Rarely demonstrates/does not demonstrate effective use of words, phrases, and clauses to create cohesion and clarify the relationships among the claim(s), reasons, and evidence. |
| Language | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Includes language choices that establish and consistently maintain a style and tone appropriate to the task. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Includes language choices that generally contribute to a style and tone appropriate to the task. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Includes language choices that sometimes contribute to a style and tone appropriate to the task. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rarely includes/does not include language choices that contribute to a style and tone appropriate to the task and/or includes language that is inappropriate to the task. |

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. |

*Only assessed at grades 7 & 8

Production of Writing: NM-MSSA Informative Writing Rubric (Grades 6–8)

| | Score Point 4 | Score Point 3 | Score Point 2 | Score Point 1 |
|-------------------------|--|--|--|--|
| | The Writing: | | | |
| Development/ Content | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Presents ideas that thoroughly address the task. Substantially develops the topic with consistently pertinent facts, definitions, details, examples, and other information from relevant sources. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Presents ideas that generally address the task. Generally develops the topic with mostly pertinent facts, definitions, details, examples, and other information from relevant sources. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Presents ideas that partially address the task. Partially develops the topic with some pertinent facts, definitions, details, examples, and other information from relevant sources. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Presents ideas that minimally address the task. Minimally develops the topic with few pertinent facts, definitions, details, examples, and other information from relevant sources. |
| Organization/ Focus | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establishes and consistently maintains an organizational plan focused on a controlling or central idea. Provides a thoroughly clear and engaging introduction and a concluding statement or section that clearly follows from and supports the preceding ideas/information. Consistently demonstrates effective use of transitions to create cohesion. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establishes and generally maintains an organizational plan focused on a controlling or central idea. Provides a generally clear introduction and a concluding statement or section that generally follows from and supports the preceding ideas/information. Generally demonstrates effective use of transitions to create cohesion. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attempts to establish and partially maintains an organizational plan focused on a controlling or central idea. Provides a partially clear introduction and a concluding statement or section that loosely follows from and supports the preceding ideas/information. Sometimes demonstrates effective use of transitions to create cohesion. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> May attempt to establish but does not maintain an organizational plan focused on a controlling or central idea. May lack an introduction; a concluding statement, if provided, may not follow from or support preceding ideas/information. Rarely demonstrates/does not demonstrate any effective use of transitions to create cohesion. |
| Language | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consistently uses precise language to inform or explain the topic. Includes language choices that establish and consistently maintain a style and tone appropriate to the task. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Often uses precise language to inform or explain the topic. Includes language choices that generally contribute to a style and tone appropriate to the task. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sometimes uses precise language to inform or explain the topic. Includes language choices that sometimes contribute to a style and tone appropriate to the task. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rarely uses/does not use precise language to inform or explain the topic. Rarely includes/does not include language choices that contribute to a style and tone appropriate to the task and/or includes language that is inappropriate to the task. |

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. Has errors or patterns of errors that interfere with meaning or confuse the reader. |

Production of Writing: NM-MSSA Narrative Writing Rubric (Grades 6–8)

| | Score Point 4 | Score Point 3 | Score Point 2 | Score Point 1 |
|-------------------------|---|---|--|--|
| | The Writing: | | | |
| Development/ Content | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Presents a narrative that develops real or imagined experiences or events that consistently address the task. Uses consistently effective and varied narrative techniques such as dialogue, pacing, and description to develop experiences, events, and/or characters. Substantially develops the narrative using consistently relevant descriptive details. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Presents a narrative that develops real or imagined experiences or events that generally address the task. Uses generally effective and somewhat varied narrative techniques such as dialogue, pacing, and description to develop experiences, events, and/or characters. Generally develops the narrative using mostly relevant descriptive details. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Presents a narrative that develops real or imagined experiences or events that partially address the task. Uses partially effective and/or varied narrative techniques such as dialogue, pacing, and description to develop experiences, events, and/or characters. Partially develops the narrative using some relevant descriptive details. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Presents a narrative that develops real or imagined experiences or events that minimally address the task. Rarely uses/does not use effective and/or varied narrative techniques such as dialogue, pacing, or description to develop experiences, events, and/or characters. Minimally develops the narrative using few, if any, relevant descriptive details. |
| Organization/ Focus | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engages and effectively orients the reader by clearly establishing a context and point of view*and clearly introducing a narrator and/or character(s). Establishes and consistently maintains an event sequence that unfolds naturally and logically. Provides a conclusion that clearly follows from and reflects on the narrated experiences or events. Consistently demonstrates effective use of a wide variety of transition words, phrases, and clauses to convey sequence and signal shifts in time frame or setting. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adequately engages and orients the reader by generally establishing a context and point of view* and adequately introducing a narrator and/or character(s). Establishes and generally maintains an event sequence that unfolds naturally and logically. Provides a conclusion that generally follows from and reflects on the narrated experiences or events. Generally demonstrates effective use of a variety of transition words, phrases, and clauses to convey sequence and signal shifts in time frame or setting. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attempts to engage and orient the reader but does not clearly establish a context and point of view* and/or clearly introduce a narrator and/or character(s). Attempts to establish and partially maintains an event sequence that unfolds naturally and logically. Provides a conclusion that partially follows from and reflects on the narrated experiences of events. Sometimes demonstrates varied and effective use of transition words, phrases, and/or clauses to convey sequence and signal shifts in time frame or setting. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> May attempt to engage and/or orient the reader by establishing a context and point of view* and/or introduce a narrator and/or character(s). May attempt to establish but does not maintain an event sequence that unfolds naturally and logically. Provides a conclusion that minimally follows from and reflects on the narrated experiences or events or does not follow from them. Rarely demonstrates/does not demonstrate varied or effective use of transition words, phrases, and/or clauses to convey sequence and signal shifts in time frame or setting. |
| Language | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consistently uses precise words and phrases, vivid descriptive details, and sensory language to capture the action and convey experiences and events. Includes language choices that establish and consistently maintain a style and tone appropriate to the task. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Often uses precise words and phrases, vivid descriptive details, and sensory language to capture the action and convey experiences and events. Includes language choices that generally contribute to a style and tone appropriate to the task. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sometimes uses precise words and phrases, vivid descriptive details, and/or sensory language to capture the action and convey experiences and events. Includes language choices that sometimes contribute to a style and tone appropriate to the task. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rarely uses/does not use precise words and phrases, vivid descriptive details, and/or sensory language to capture the action and convey experiences and events. Rarely includes/does not include language choices that contribute to a style and tone appropriate to the task and/or includes language that is inappropriate to the task. |

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. |

*Only assessed at grades 7 & 8