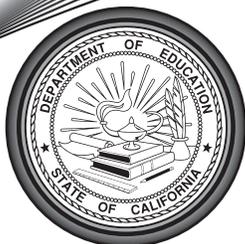


English-Language Arts **Teacher Guide**



California High School Exit Examination



California High School Exit Examination English–Language Arts Teacher Guide

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A Day Away (Random House)

Acting Up [*The ALAN Review* 24(3): 42–46]

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Introduction

The California High School Exit Examination (CAHSEE) Teacher Guide for English–Language arts (ELA) is designed to provide comprehensive and accessible information to assist teachers in preparing students for the CAHSEE. Teachers are encouraged to reproduce sections or all of the guide for classroom use. Districts and school personnel are encouraged to use this material in staff development activities.

- “Purpose and Content” provides an overview of the CAHSEE.
- “Overview of the Strands” gives detailed information about how the California academic content standards for reading are tested on the CAHSEE. The following reading and writing standards are assessed on the CAHSEE:

Word Analysis

Reading Comprehension

Literary Response and Analysis

Writing Strategies

Written and Oral English Language Conventions

Writing Applications

The overview provides a summary of the essential knowledge and skills covered followed by a detailed discussion of each academic content standard.

Purpose and Content

The primary purpose of the CAHSEE is to significantly improve pupil achievement in public high schools and to ensure that pupils who graduate from public high schools can demonstrate grade-level competency in reading, writing, and mathematics. The CAHSEE helps identify students who are not developing skills that are essential for life after high school and encourages districts to give these students the attention and resources necessary to help them achieve these skills during their high school years. Beginning in the 2005-06 school year, students must pass the CAHSEE as a condition of graduation, as well as meet the district's requirements for graduation.

The CAHSEE assesses a range of difficulty levels consistent with good testing practices. Questions assess full mastery of the designated academic content standards as well as foundational knowledge and skills underlying these standards, as recommended by the High School Exit Examination Standards Panel.

The ELA part of the CAHSEE includes questions that require students to determine the meaning of words in context. This vocabulary strategy is not specifically named in the grades nine and ten academic content standards, but it is included on the exam because it is an underlying skill required for achievement of the grades nine and ten vocabulary standards. Similarly, most CAHSEE ELA test forms contain at least one poem. Although poetry is not specifically named in the grades nine and ten literary analysis standards, analysis of poetry is a focus of standards in the earlier grades.

All questions on the examination have been evaluated for their appropriateness for measuring the designated ELA academic content standards. They have been reviewed and approved by committees of California educators, including teachers, administrators, and academicians. Also, all items have been reviewed and approved by California educators for their adherence to the principles of fairness and have been evaluated to determine if bias exists with respect to characteristics such as gender, ethnicity, and language.

The test blueprints for the CAHSEE, which indicate the academic content standards tested and the number of items per standard, are available on the CAHSEE Web site.

The CAHSEE is not a timed test, which means it has no fixed time limit in which students must complete the examination. However, students are expected to complete their work during the regular school day unless their individualized educational program (IEP) or Section 504 Plan specifies the need for extra time beyond the school day.

English–Language Arts Academic Content Standards

The standards for the English–Language arts part of the CAHSEE are taken from the California academic content standards for grades nine and ten. Standards include: Word Analysis, Reading Comprehension, Literary Response and Analysis, Writing Strategies, Written and Oral English Language Conventions, and Writing Applications.

The English–Language arts part of the CAHSEE contains 79 multiple-choice questions (72 operational questions and 7 field-questions) and 1 writing task.

Overview of the Strands

The ELA part of the CAHSEE assesses designated California academic content standards in reading for grades nine and ten, with the addition of two standards from grade eight. The reading section of the ELA part of the CAHSEE uses a multiple-choice format to assess Word Analysis, Reading Comprehension, and Literary Response and Analysis. The writing section assesses Writing Strategies, Writing Conventions, and Writing Applications.

A thorough understanding of the standards and the questions associated with them will help teachers focus their instruction on the academic content standards and better prepare students for the exam.

Reading Passages

The questions on the reading section of the CAHSEE are based on reading texts similar to those that students encounter during their high school years. Each form of the test includes about 50 percent informational texts and 50 percent literary texts. Informational texts include expository, persuasive, and functional passages. The latter includes consumer materials (e.g., warranties, advertisements), workplace documents (e.g., memoranda and announcements), and “how to” articles or written instructions. The literary texts on the CAHSEE include classical and contemporary stories, poems, and dramatic literature as well as literary nonfiction texts (e.g., essays, autobiographies, biographies, and memoirs that are written in a literary style). The passages on each test form include a mix of commissioned (newly written) passages and previously published literature. In some cases two texts that deal with the same topic or theme are included.

There are four to eight questions associated with each reading passage and three to six questions associated with each writing strategies passage. The length of passages on the examination depends on the type of text, but in general, passages are between 300 and 1200 words, with an average length of approximately 600 words. Usually no more than one lengthy text is included in each form.

Reading Constructs Measured by the CAHSEE

The CAHSEE is focused on English–Language arts constructs taught and assessed throughout elementary, middle, and high school. The underlying cognitive constructs for reading in the California academic content standards are shown in Table 1. The *Reading/Language Arts Framework for California Public Schools* (1999) emphasizes that students must be fluent readers by the end of third grade. A primary assumption in the reading academic content standards is that students have mastered early skills (concepts of print, phonemic awareness, phonics, and sight words) that are foundational and required for later, more complex higher order skills and understandings (background knowledge, vocabulary, syntax, text structure, comprehension monitoring, and reorganizing text). The English–Language arts section of the CAHSEE requires the student to decode words fluently and automatically in order to understand the concepts presented in printed text.

Table 1
Reading Constructs Measured by the CAHSEE

Strand	Construct
Word Analysis	Fundamental skills of reading: word analysis, fluency, and schematic vocabulary development
Reading Comprehension	Reading comprehension: reading, understanding, and analyzing grade-level appropriate informational materials
Literary Response and Analysis	Literary response: reading, understanding, and analyzing grade-level appropriate literary materials

Writing Strategies and Conventions Passages

Many of the questions on the writing section of the CAHSEE are based on reports and essays that represent student work. These passages contain typical student errors in diction, sentence structure, paragraph structure, and the conventions of written English. Students are expected to identify the errors and determine the best correction. Students may also be asked to determine appropriate introductory or concluding sentences for the passages. The length of the writing passages is between 200 and 300 words.

Writing Constructs Measured by the CAHSEE

The writing section of the CAHSEE focuses on ELA constructs that are taught and assessed throughout elementary, middle, and high school. The underlying cognitive constructs in the California academic content standards are shown in Table 2 below. A primary assumption in the California academic content standards for writing is that students can use learned strategies to write essays that convey clear perspectives on a subject, present a reasoned and organized argument, maintain a consistent tone and focus, and show evidence of mastery of the conventions of written English.

Table 2
Writing Constructs Measured by the CAHSEE

Strand	Construct
Writing Strategies	Writing strategies: clear, coherent, and focused writing
Writing Conventions	Fundamental skills of written and oral English language conventions: grammar and mechanics of writing
Writing Applications (Genres and Their Characteristics)	Writing applications