

This document contains *Chapter 2: Reading Comprehension* from the **2008 California High School Exit Examination (CAHSEE): English-Language Arts Teacher Guide** published by the California Department of Education. The entire guide is available at <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/hs/elateacherguide.asp>



7 questions	18 questions	20 questions	12 questions	15 questions	1 question
Word Analysis, Fluency, and Systematic Vocabulary Development	Reading Comprehension	Literary Response and Analysis	Writing Strategies	Written and Oral English Language Conventions	Writing Applications

Reading comprehension is more than recognizing and sounding out words on a page. It is the ability to gain meaning from print and understand text. Students should be able to comprehend what they are reading at a literal level (getting the facts), an inferential level (making some interpretations), and an applied level (going beyond the material). The focus in this strand is on how well students can comprehend and analyze informational materials, not just literary works. Informational materials are expository rather than narrative and require students to use specific strategies to construct meaning.

In the Classroom

Reading is a complex process that requires an integration of skills and knowledge. The ultimate goal of reading is comprehension, and skillful readers have the skills, knowledge, and strategies to understand narrative and informational text. Students can be taught the strategies needed to improve their comprehension of difficult texts. Much of the expository reading in high school is found in textbooks and readings assigned in classes across the curriculum; therefore, responsibility for improving reading comprehension of informational materials needs to be shared by teachers in all disciplines.

Skillful readers know how and when to use reading strategies. They know how to select and organize information, use their own prior knowledge, and generate questions about the text according to their reading purposes. Students should be expected to develop critical-thinking skills such as synthesizing the content from a variety of sources, paraphrasing ideas and connecting them to other sources, and extending their ideas in primary and secondary sources through analysis, evaluation, and elaboration. In grades 9 and 10, students should also be able to analyze the structural elements of workplace documents (e.g., business letters, memos, minutes, warranties, contracts, and procedural manuals). Much of the reading done in high school and in the workplace is expository. It is essential for students to be able to understand and use informational materials to succeed in today's technological and competitive world.

Skillful readers:

- Have a high degree of rapid and automatic word recognition
- Become actively involved in the reading
- Have an ongoing internal dialogue with the text
- Make predictions about what they are reading
- Relate prior knowledge to the topic they are reading
- Read with specific purposes
- Apply appropriate decoding and analysis for comprehension strategies when necessary

To successfully analyze the structural features of informational materials, students should be able to:

- Understand the features and functions (e.g., fonts, italics, underlining, type size, graphics, table of contents, headings and subheadings) of workplace documents. Workplace documents include, but are not limited to, business letters, memos, minutes, and procedural manuals.
- Analyze the structure and format of expository and functional workplace documents and explain how authors use various structures (e.g., internal organizational patterns: sequences, listing, compare-contrast, cause-effect, problem-solution, and prepositional support structures) to achieve their purposes.

To successfully analyze the content of informational materials, students should be able to:

- Synthesize the content from several sources on a single issue from writings by a single author (e.g., identify main ideas and important details from several sources)
- Paraphrase the important information and ideas and connect them to other sources
- Identify the difference between primary and secondary sources
- Extend ideas presented in primary or secondary sources through analysis, evaluation, and elaboration

On the CAHSEE

The CAHSEE contains 18 Reading Comprehension items. To demonstrate achievement, students must demonstrate their ability to comprehend and interpret informational texts. These texts include a variety of genres: expository passages, persuasive essays, written instructions, workplace documents (materials young adults might encounter in an entry-level, part-time work setting), and consumer materials (warranties, product information, instruction manuals).

One important focus is the use of structural features in informational text. Students should understand the importance of these features and use them to aid comprehension. Structural features that may be addressed on the CAHSEE include titles, headings, bulleted or numbered lists, graphs, and tables of contents. Students should be able to use the structural features to understand the text, to analyze the author’s purpose in using the specific features, and to determine how the features contribute to the reader’s understanding of the text.

A second important focus is the critical analysis of informational texts. Students are asked to connect ideas within and among texts and to extend ideas through analysis, evaluation, and elaboration. Students should also be able to critique the internal logic of a text and to evaluate the credibility of an author’s arguments—e.g., whether the author is relying primarily on personal opinion or research or whether there are assertions in the text for which the author provides little or no evidence.

Although most of the CAHSEE items assess the student’s achievement of these critical analysis skills, others assess the foundational skills for the critical analysis of texts, as found in the California academic content standards in earlier grades. These skills include determining the main idea of the whole or part of a passage, identifying cause-and-effect relationships, identifying underlying comparisons, making logical predictions, and determining the author’s purpose.

The following pages discuss the six California academic content standards in Reading Comprehension.

Reading Comprehension

Standard **8RC2.1**
Compare and contrast the features and elements of consumer materials to gain meaning from documents (e.g., warranties, contracts, product information, instruction manuals).

1 test question

According to the two boxes at the end of the document, which of these would be the BEST password?

- A** date of a wedding anniversary
- B** your family nickname
- C** the same number, repeated five times
- D** the first letters in the title of your favorite book

CAHSEE questions in this standard require students to make use of structural features to locate or understand information. Students also may be asked to analyze the author’s purpose in using specific structural features, or they may be asked to determine how the features contribute to the reader’s understanding of the text. Questions are based on documents that a young adult might encounter as a consumer, including those named in this standard. The consumer texts used to assess this standard have explicit structural features such as titles, headings, numbering or bulleting, graphics, tables of contents, indices, glossaries, works cited, and bibliographies.

The sample question is based on the passage “How to Choose a Password,” which is reproduced on pages 82 and 83 in Appendix B of this guide. The question requires students to locate information highlighted by a structural feature of the passage, i.e., the two boxes of summary information at the end of the document, and to apply this information to a new situation. The question provides four descriptions of possible passwords, and students should use the information in the boxes to determine which description represents an acceptable password. Choice D is the correct answer because in its use of first letters of words, it resembles two of the examples in the second box. Choice A, “date of a wedding anniversary,” can be eliminated by information in the first box, as it is similar to the example of the birth date. Choice B, “your family nickname,” can be eliminated by observing the example of a nickname in the first box. Choice C, “the same number, repeated five times,” can be eliminated by the example of the repeated letter in the first box.

Reading ComprehensionStandard **10RC2.1**

Analyze the structure and format of functional workplace documents, including the graphics and headers, and explain how authors use the features to achieve their purposes.

3 test questions

What is the order in which new movies are moved through the store?

- A** from Hottest Hits to Film Library to Recent Releases
- B** from Film Library to Hottest Hits to Recent Releases
- C** from Hottest Hits to Recent Releases to Film Library
- D** from Recent Releases to Film Library to Hottest Hits

CAHSEE questions in this standard are based on documents that young adults might encounter in an entry-level, part-time work setting. Students must be able to make use of structural features contained in these documents to locate or understand information. Students also may be required to analyze the author’s use of the structural features or to determine how the features are an aid to reader understanding. The structural features that appear in the reading passages include titles, headings, numbering/bulleting, graphics, tables of content, indices, glossaries, works cited, and bibliographies.

The sample question is based on the passage “Main Street Movies Employee Manual: Organizing Videos,” which is reproduced on pages 84 and 85 in Appendix B of this guide. The question is based on the sections of the document under the subheadings *New Releases Wall* and *Film Library*. Students should read the document carefully in order to determine that the New Releases Wall has two sections, Hottest Hits and Recent Releases, and that videos are first placed in the Hottest Hits section and later moved to the Recent Releases section before being placed in the Film Library. Thus, choice C is the correct answer. Students should learn to use structural features, such as the boldfaced titles in this passage, as aids in determining sequential information within a document. The other answer choices represent incorrect sequences for the movement of videos through the store.

Reading Comprehension

Standard **10RC2.4**
Synthesize the content from several sources or works by a single author dealing with a single issue; paraphrase the ideas and connect them to other sources and related topics to demonstrate comprehension.

3 test questions

Which statement can BEST be supported with information from the passage?

- A** Measures taken to protect Kartchner Caverns have not been totally successful.
- B** Visitors to Kartchner Caverns are from many other states and countries around the world.
- C** If Kartchner Caverns were to die, tourists would no longer want to visit there.
- D** Kartchner Caverns is very different from other caverns around the world.

CAHSEE questions in this standard require students to synthesize ideas that are not explicitly connected within a text or between texts. Questions will require students to connect ideas across two informational or persuasive texts on the same topic or to connect ideas contained in different sections of a single text. Other questions will require students to connect ideas in a text with additional source material supplied with the question, such as a quotation, chart, graph, or map.

Some questions for this standard may require students to connect information in different sections of a single text in order to make inferences about the following implicit relationships: sequencing, comparison and contrast, cause and effect, part and whole. Other questions may require students to use different parts of a text to infer the main idea or to recognize an accurate summary or paraphrase. Students are not required to bring specific background knowledge to these tasks. Questions are based on either informational or literary texts.

The sample question is based on the passage “Slow Death of a Cave,” which is reproduced on pages 96 and 97 in Appendix B of this guide. The question requires students to demonstrate their ability in a foundational skill for this standard: determining an accurate summary of a given text. Although Options B, C, and D are supported in the passage, only Option A pertains to the focus of the entire passage.

Practice in analyzing the structure of a passage and determining connections among ideas are underlying, foundational skills necessary for full mastery of this standard. Other CAHSEE questions for this standard address the student’s ability to synthesize ideas between and among related texts.

<p style="text-align: center;">Reading Comprehension</p> <p>Standard 10RC2.5 Extend ideas presented in primary or secondary sources through original analysis, evaluation, and elaboration.</p> <p>3 test questions</p>	<p>Based on information in the document, which statement about passwords is accurate?</p> <p>A Computer programs cannot be protected by passwords.</p> <p>B Passwords may not be used as a security measure in the future.</p> <p>C People only need to use one password for different systems.</p> <p>D Bad passwords could give access to unauthorized individuals.</p>
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The focus of this standard is the student’s ability to analyze, evaluate, or elaborate on ideas in a text. CAHSEE questions in this standard require students to demonstrate their ability in one of several ways: to draw a logical conclusion from information presented in the text, to make predictions based on the text, to understand the support for ideas presented in the text, or to determine the method the author uses to organize and develop a topic or a section of text. Students are not required to bring specific background knowledge to these tasks. Questions are based on informational or literary texts.

The sample question is based on the passage “How to Choose a Password,” which is reproduced on pages 82 and 83 in Appendix B of this guide. In asking students to find an accurate statement about the passage, the question requires them to analyze and elaborate upon the main idea—that it is important to create good passwords. Thus, choice D is the correct response, since it draws a logical conclusion from the main idea, that using poor passwords could give unauthorized individuals access to personal information. Choice A is not an accurate analysis because the first paragraph of the passage indicates that passwords protect many different kinds of computer-based information. Choice B cannot be correct because the passage provides no justification for predictions about the future. Choice C represents a misreading of the text rather than an analysis of the information.

It is important to note that this CAHSEE question measures student achievement of this standard at a foundational level. Other questions written for this standard may require a greater degree of analysis and inference.

Reading Comprehension

Standard **10RC2.7**
Critique the logic of functional documents by examining the sequence of information and procedures in anticipation of possible reader misunderstandings.

3 test questions

The passage provides the MOST information on the—

- A** causes of damage to Kartchner Caverns.
- B** location of Kartchner Caverns.
- C** inhabitants of Kartchner Caverns.
- D** age of Kartchner Caverns.

CAHSEE questions for standard 10RC2.7 are based on functional passages, such as written instructions, advertisements, workplace documents, and consumer documents. Some questions may require students to evaluate the organizational structure and the completeness of information in a passage. Other questions may require students to identify aspects that would make the passage easier to understand, to identify the topic on which the passage provides the most or least amount of information, or to determine the kind of support the author provides for his or her arguments (e.g., quotations from authorities, personal experience, summary of research reports, personal opinion).

The sample question is based on the passage “Slow Death of a Cave,” which is reproduced on pages 96 and 97 in Appendix B of this guide. The question focuses on the main emphasis of this informational passage, which is a foundational skill for achievement on this academic content standard. Students must examine the logic of the entire presentation to determine its overall goal and then to determine which of the four answer choices is the primary focus. Although all the topics listed in the options are discussed in the passage, Option A is the correct answer since the question asks the students to weigh the preponderance of evidence provided in a reading passage. It is vital that students pay close attention to emphasis words in test questions.

Reading Comprehension

Standard **10RC2.8**
Evaluate the credibility of an author’s argument or defense of a claim by critiquing the relationships between generalizations and evidence, the comprehensiveness of evidence, and the way in which the author’s intent affects the structure and tone of the text (e.g., in professional journals, editorials, political speeches, primary source material).

5 test questions

What information from the passage supports the idea that the temperature plays an important role in the life of cave formations?

- A** . . . brilliant orange, red, and gold stalactites and stalagmites in the caverns have been formed . . .
- B** . . . visitors must enter through two steel doors designed to keep hot air from seeping in.
- C** . . . hard rains have since fallen and added moisture.
- D** . . . they have hired a paleontologist to assess the impact of tourism on the cave . . .

CAHSEE questions for standard 10RC2.8 require students to analyze underlying relationships between assertions and evidence. Students must also be able to analyze the author’s purpose and its effect on the text. Questions may focus on the main point(s) of the argument, the supporting evidence for the main point(s), the quality of the author’s arguments or positions, the purpose of the text, the tone, or the identification of opinion as opposed to fact. Questions are based either on persuasive texts or on expository texts that support an argument or position. The passages focus on issues that are important to young adults, and the texts are presented in familiar formats (e.g., letter to the editor, editorials, speeches, excerpts from textbooks). In some instances, both sides of an argument or issue may be presented in separate passages.

The sample question is based on the passage “Slow Death of a Cave,” which is reproduced on pages 96 and 97 in Appendix B of this guide. The question requires students to analyze the support an author offers. Choice B is the correct answer. The other answer choices for this question repeat statements that do not support the specific assertion. This question also tests the students’ ability to recognize synonymous ideas. The detail about “hot air” in Option B reinforces the assertion being made about the role of the temperature in a cave.