

Section 1

1.1 Introduction

Purpose of This Guide

Welcome to the LAS Links® Second Edition Interpretation Guide. The LAS Links Second Edition English Language Proficiency Assessment (Forms C and D) (hereafter referred to as LAS Links 2nd Ed.) is designed to measure students' language proficiency in correspondence with the goals of the College and Career Readiness (CCR) Standards¹ and with the Council of Chief State School Officers' (CCSSO) Framework for English Language Proficiency Development Standards.² LAS Links 2nd Ed. builds directly upon the proven success of the LAS Links suite of solutions, which emphasizes language development in the areas of speaking, listening, reading, writing and comprehension for academic achievement and college and career readiness. It is designed to be used in Grades K–12 as a formal and standardized method to measure language knowledge and skills that are required for success in K–12 school settings.

This Interpretation Guide does the following:

- outlines the design and content qualities of LAS Links 2nd Ed.
- provides teachers and other stakeholders with the information needed to interpret and explain scores
- helps teachers and district personnel complete and use the Student Proficiency Profile Sheet and the Student Academic Profile Sheet

Uses of LAS Links 2nd Edition

LAS Links 2nd Ed. is a tool to help identify and monitor the progress of students requiring essential academic language skills. Additionally, it provides information to help classify English language learners (ELLs) who require language instruction, to inform decisions on such instruction, and to subsequently monitor students' progress toward English proficiency in social and academic language necessary to successfully participate in the mainstream classroom.

LAS Links 2nd Ed. provides educators and other stakeholders with valuable information about students' progress toward (1) meeting the demands of the CCR, (2) accessing and using academic language, and (3) achieving English language proficiency. A more detailed discussion on each of these follows.

Correspondence to Common Core State Standards

LAS Links 2nd Ed. was developed to measure students' English language proficiency in school settings in relation to the content, literacy, and linguistic goals of the CCR and other content standards of a similar nature. The CCR are a set of rigorous and research-based standards designed to promote 21st century knowledge and skills so students are prepared to meet the expectations demanded of them once entering college or the work force (CCR, 2010; Darling-Hammond & Adamson, 2010; Partnership for 21 Century Skills, 2009; Policy Analysis for California Education & Rennie Center for Education Research and Policy, 2010). The CCR English Language Arts (ELA) standards focus on literacy and communication in which students engage in academic tasks related to Speaking, Listening, Reading, Writing, and Language. The CCR emphasize the need for *all* students to be able to

¹ © Copyright 2010. National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and Council of Chief State School Officers. All rights reserved.

² © Copyright 2012 by the Council of Chief State School Officers. All rights reserved.

engage and use language in all subject areas, including areas such as math and science, which are not typically thought of as language related (CCR, 2010).

The CCR have raised the bar for content area standards for all students. In order to fully participate in the curriculum, students will be required to use language in complex social and academic related activities and practices, such as constructing effective arguments, collaborating with peers to create presentations, or identifying evidence to support conclusions. In addition, the CCR places specific emphasis on activities that frame language forms and functions within discipline practices or contexts (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2012). LAS Links 2nd Ed. meets the demands of the CCR by creating an assessment framework focused on communicative and contextualized language use within and across academic content areas, language knowledge and functions, and cognitive complexity. The assessment framework and reporting design is explained in more detail in Section 2, on page 14.

Academic Language

In the last several decades, researchers and policy makers have studied and come to understand the pivotal role of academic language in effective curriculum and instruction for both ELLs and Academic English Learners (Anstrom et al., 2010). The development of academic language skills is critical not only for ELLs, but for every student. Academic English Learners (also known as Standard English Learners) are those students (whether they speak English at home or not) who do not yet have enough academic language proficiency to succeed in the classroom. LAS Links 2nd Ed. provides stakeholders a tool to identify those students who may require additional language support in order to meet the demands of the CCR.

LAS Links 2nd Ed. refers to academic language as the language skills (e.g., vocabulary, grammar, functions, discourse, registers, and discipline practices) that students need to access and use in order to engage with academic content. For example, academic speaking and listening include skills necessary for formal communication such as classroom presentations or classroom discussions on specific topics. Academic reading and writing include comprehension of different genres and the ability to produce specific writing types such as narrative, expository, or persuasive. In order to measure students' academic language, LAS Links 2nd Ed. targets academic language strands that are reflected in the CCR and other ELL development standards. LAS Links 2nd Ed. specifies three criteria related to language in academic settings:

1. Target content areas or strands of academic language: Foundational Skills; Language Arts, Social Studies, and History; and Mathematics, Science, and Technical Subjects
2. The linguistic complexity of receptive and expressive language (e.g., word/sound recognition, vocabulary, grammar, discourse features, etc.)
3. The types of language function and tasks for communicative purposes in a school context (e.g., identifying, comprehending, describing, analyzing, etc.)

The LAS Links 2nd Ed. approach to measuring academic language is designed to help students, teachers, and stakeholders understand how students access and utilize language in academic content areas. The social, instructional, and intercultural communication language context strand is equally important and targets the language used to navigate social and interpersonal contexts at school. Section 2 will describe how these strands operate in the assessment framework and reporting structure.

Monitoring Students' Progress Toward English Language Proficiency and Proficiency in Academic Language

Language proficiency in academic and social settings has always been critical to students' success in the classroom, and the CCR have raised the bar even higher. LAS Links 2nd Ed. identifies the specific academic language related to the content areas of language arts, social studies, history, mathematics, science, and technical subjects, along with instructional and interpersonal communications, in order to ensure students are prepared to engage in the academic discourse that will be expected of them in today's classrooms. The assessment provides educators with a valid and reliable test instrument to determine how well students are progressing toward the acquisition of the English language skills needed to be successful in academic settings by:

- creating a framework that corresponds to the goals of the CCR Standards
- utilizing a comprehensive assessment framework that assesses language use (a) in contextualized and targeted social and academic content areas; (b) across different levels of linguistic complexity; and (c) across different levels of cognitive demand
- creating meaningful measures of students' language proficiency through the four core domains of Speaking, Listening, Reading, and Writing; and the combined domains of Comprehension, Productive, Oral, Literacy, and Overall
- providing a comprehensive test scoring and reporting system that allows districts and schools to maintain baseline and longitudinal data in order to track and monitor students' performance at the individual, school, and district levels

Like the previous generation of LAS Links Assessments, LAS Links 2nd Ed. continues to fulfill Title III requirements by providing a tool to assess Kindergarten through 12th-grade students who are classified as ELLs.

1.2 Test Description

This section provides the LAS Links 2nd Ed. scope and sequence at a glance, as well as a detailed description of each test domain and the subtests and tasks that comprise them.

Scope and Sequence

		Grade Span					
Domain	Subskill	K-1	2-3	4-5	6-8	9-12	Administration Mode
Speaking	Provide information	•	•	•	•	•	Individually for Grades K-12
	Express opinions and preferences	•	•	•	•	•	
	Identify an object (inanimate and animate) or concept	•	•	•	•	•	
	Identify an academic or social situation and describe it, using sentences	•	•	•	•	•	
	Ask questions, request clarification, and negotiate for understanding	•	•				
	Make requests	•	•	•	•	•	
	Describe purpose, use, or feature, using words, phrases, or sentences	•					
	Describe people, locations, and scenery		•				
	Describe information			•	•	•	
	Interpret and analyze information		•	•	•	•	
	Explain ideas and opinions		•	•	•	•	
	Interpret, narrate, and paraphrase events, using visual information	•	•	•	•	•	
Listening	Follow common, explicit oral directions to participate in diverse academic or social tasks	•	•	•	•	•	Individually or group for K; Group for Grades 1-12
	Respond to idiomatic expressions to participate in diverse academic or social tasks, including phrasal verbs with idiomatic meaning			•	•	•	
	Identify purpose		•	•	•	•	
	Identify main ideas	•	•	•	•	•	
	Identify supporting details	•	•	•	•	•	
	Make predictions based on known information				•	•	
	Make inferences based on known information	•	•	•	•	•	

Domain	Subskill	Grade Span					Administration Mode
		K-1	2-3	4-5	6-8	9-12	
Reading	Identify rhyming words	•					Individually or group for K; Group for Grades 1-12
	Apply letter-sound relationships to read English words	•					
	Apply letter-sound relationships to read English phonemes	•					
	Associate words with their representation	•					
	Apply knowledge of morphemes and syntax to word meaning		•	•			
	Classify words		•				
	Interpret words and phrases as they are used in text		•	•	•	•	
	Identify main ideas	•	•	•	•	•	
	Identify supporting details	•	•	•	•	•	
	Identify important literary features of text		•			•	
	Analyze the structure of texts				•	•	
	Identify point of view, tone, and attitude	•	•		•	•	
Writing	Copy words and sentences	•					Individually or group for K; Group for Grades 1-12
	Write letters, numerals, and words	•					
	Use articles	•	•	•	•	•	
	Demonstrate correct use of singular and plural	•	•	•	•		
	Use subject/verb agreement	•	•	•			
	Demonstrate correct use of tense and aspect		•	•	•	•	
	Use conjunctions		•	•	•	•	
	Use pronouns correctly	•		•	•	•	
	Distinguish adjectives and adverbs			•	•	•	
	Use prepositional phrases			•	•	•	
	Use auxiliary verbs		•	•	•	•	
	Use appropriate capitalization	•	•			•	
	Use sentence-ending marks	•	•		•		
	Use commas		•	•	•	•	
	Write sentences to summarize			•	•	•	
	Write sentences to describe or narrate	•	•				
	Write simple sentences to interpret or analyze		•				
	Write simple sentences to state opinions		•				
Write simple sentences to explain		•	•	•	•		
Write to describe, explain, report, compare, narrate, persuade, or express		•	•	•	•		

Speaking Test Description

The Speaking test should be individually administered by a fluent English speaker. In Grades K–3, the Examiner reads from the Student Answer Book and points to illustrations in the Speaking Cue Picture Book. In Grades 4–12, the Examiner reads from the Student Answer Book and points to illustrations in the Student Content Book.

The Speaking test consists of five subtests: *Make Conversation*, *Use Academic Words*, *Describe and Request Information*, *Present and Explain Information*, and *Tell a Story*. Note that Kindergarten students take only the first set of questions in *Present and Explain Information*. All Speaking items are performance-based in format. They measure vocabulary and grammatically correct verbal expressions in social and academic language. Tasks in the Speaking subtest elicit the production of single-word responses as well as multiple sentences related to school-appropriate topics.

Make Conversation

In *Make Conversation*, students are shown a picture of people engaging in a conversation in a school or social setting and asked to imagine that they are a participant in the scenario. Students then answer basic conversational questions that are appropriate for their participant role by either providing information or expressing opinions and preferences. Student responses are scored as incorrect (0 points), correct (1 point), or no response (NR).

Use Academic Words

In *Use Academic Words*, students are shown pictures of grade-appropriate vocabulary items, common objects, and objects they will encounter in the classroom and asked to identify the object or concept. Students respond with a single word or short phrases. Student responses are scored as incorrect (0 points), correct (1 point), or no response (NR).

Describe and Request Information

In *Describe and Request Information*, students are shown a picture depicting an academic or social situation and asked to describe it, using sentences. Next, students are required to complete a speech act or function by, for example, saying what they would do if they were a participant in the scenario. Grades K–1 students demonstrate their ability to ask questions, request clarification, and negotiate for meaning, while Grades 2–12 students demonstrate their ability to make requests. Student responses are scored on a 0–3 rubric.

Present and Explain Information

In *Present and Explain Information*, Grades K–1 students are shown an illustration of an academic or social situation and asked to describe what is happening in the illustration or explain the purpose, use, or feature of a particular object in the illustration using words, phrases, or sentences. Grade 1 students take an extended section of the same task with four more questions in which they describe or elaborate on an additional set of illustrations. Grades K–1 students demonstrate their ability to ask questions, request clarification and negotiate for meaning, as well as their ability to make requests.

In Grades 2–3, students are shown an illustration of people, a location, or scenery and asked to describe it. Students are then shown a different yet related illustration and asked to describe that one as well. Next, students are asked to compare the information in the two graphics and explain how the information is the same or different. Finally, students are asked to express their own opinion or state a preference based on the two graphics.

In Grades 4–12, students are shown a slide, map, or other graphic depicting information, such as a chart, and asked to talk about the information in the graphic as if they were giving a presentation to the class. Students are then shown a different yet related graphic and asked to present that information as well. Next, students are asked to compare the information in the two graphics and explain how the information is the same or different. Finally, students are asked to express their own opinion or state a preference based on the information provided in the two graphics. Student responses are scored on a 0–3 rubric.

Tell a Story

In *Tell a Story*, students are shown four related pictures that illustrate a story with a beginning, middle, and end. Pointing to the series of four pictures, the Examiner begins the story by reading a story starter to contextualize the pictures without giving away vocabulary or key content. Students are then asked to complete the detailed story depicted in the series of illustrations using multiple sentences to interpret, narrate, and paraphrase events. Student responses are scored on a 0–4 rubric.

Listening Test Description

The Listening test is administered to a group of students by a fluent English speaker who uses a prerecorded audio CD and reads from the Examiner’s Guide. The Examiner reads aloud directions on how to answer practice questions and helps the students navigate through the test. Students listen to audio passages, such as announcements, classroom directions, conversations, or discussions, on the audio CD. Questions and answer choices are also presented on the audio CD. The Listening test consists of two subtests: *Listen for Information* and *Listen for Academic Instruction*. All Listening items are in multiple-choice format.

Listen for Information

In *Listen for Information*, students listen to directions, brief school announcements, content-based discussions, and conversations. Then students answer questions about what they heard. Students are tested on skills such as following common, explicit oral directions, identifying main ideas, and making inferences. In upper-grade spans, students are also asked to comprehend idiomatic expressions and make predictions. All instructions, audio passages, questions, and answer choices are played on the accompanying audio CD. Each question has three answer choices. In Grades K–1, all answer choices are pictures. In Grades 2–3, there are both picture and text-based answer choices. In Grades 4–12, all answer choices are text-based.

Listen for Academic Instruction

In *Listen for Academic Instruction*, students listen to longer content-based discussions led by a teacher, with comments and contributions provided by class members. In this way, the listening texts approximate authentic classroom discourse patterns that are co-constructed by the teacher and the class members. Discussions are drawn from two broad academic categories: (a) Language Arts, Social Studies, and History; and (b) Mathematics, Science, and Technical Subjects.

All instructions, audio passages, questions, and answer choices are played on the accompanying audio CD. Each question has three answer choices. Students identify main ideas and supporting details and make inferences. At the upper grade spans, students also make predictions. In Grades K–1, all answer choices are pictures. In Grades 2–3, there is a mix of both picture and text-based answer choices. In Grades 4–12, all answer choices are text-based.

Reading Test Description

The Reading test is administered to a group of students by a fluent English speaker who reads from the Examiner's Guide. The Reading test consists of three subtests in Grades K–3: *Read Words*, *Read School Texts*, and *Read Academic Texts*; and two subtests in Grades 4–12: *Read School Texts* and *Read Academic Texts*.

Reading questions are multiple-choice format with three answer choices (some picture and some text-based) in Grades K–3 and four text-based answer choices in Grades 4–12. In Grades K–1, the student reads all prompts and answer choices, but the questions are read to the students by the Examiner. Note that Kindergarten students do not take all of the questions in the *Read School Texts* subtest. A new feature of *Read Academic Texts* in Grades 4–12 is the inclusion of four constructed-response questions that require students to complete a table, time line, or illustration with text taken directly from an extended reading passage.

Read Words (Grades K–1 and 2–3)

In *Read Words*, Grade K–1 students respond to items addressing word-analysis tasks: identifying rhyming words, applying letter-sound relationships to read English words, and applying letter-sound relationships to read English phonemes/graphemes. In Grades 2–3, students have the additional task of applying knowledge of morphemes and grammar to word meaning.

Read School Texts

In *Read School Texts*, students read a variety of short texts, such as classroom signs, school notices, letters, website postings, emails, and text messages between students. In addition, students in Grades 1–12 read texts they will likely encounter in the academic content areas of English Language Arts, History, Social Studies or Mathematics, Science, and Technical Subjects. These texts emulate grade-span-appropriate workbook or classroom tasks and measure the student's ability to understand the text, not their ability to complete the task being described. All questions are multiple-choice format and designed to measure students' ability to identify main ideas and supporting details, interpret words and phrases as they are used in text, and identify view, tone, and attitude.

Read Academic Texts

In *Read Academic Texts*, students read extended grade-span-appropriate passages drawn from two broad academic categories: (a) Language Arts, Social Studies, and History; and (b) Mathematics, Science, and Technical Subjects. Although both fiction and non-fiction texts are included, there is an emphasis on more complex non-fiction texts.

In Grades K–1, each passage has two related questions that measure the student's ability to identify main ideas and important details, or identify view, tone, and attitude. In Grades 2–3, each passage has five related questions that measure the student's ability to identify main ideas and important details, identify view, tone, and attitude, and interpret words and phrases as they are used in texts. In Grades 4–12, each passage has six related questions that measure the student's ability to identify main ideas and important details, identify view, tone, and attitude, and interpret words and phrases as they are used in texts. Two of the six items related to each passage in Grades 4–12 require students to complete a table, time line, or illustration with text taken directly from the passage. These constructed-response items are scored as either incorrect (0 points) or correct (1 point).

Writing Test Description

The Writing subtest is administered to a group of students by a fluent English speaker who reads from the Examiner's Guide. The subtest consists of four sections for Grades K–1: *Start Writing*, *Write to Express Ideas*, *Write Academic Texts*, and *Use Grammar and Conventions* (Note: Kindergarten students do not take the *Write Academic Texts* section). For Grades 2–12, there are three sections: *Use Grammar and Conventions*, *Write Academic Texts*, and *Write to Express Ideas*.

The Writing subtest includes both multiple-choice and constructed-response items that assess the student's knowledge of grammar, word order, and word choice and the student's ability to apply that knowledge to produce sentences and paragraphs that are commonly expected of students at their respective grade levels.

Start Writing (Grades K-1 Only)

In *Start Writing*, Grades K–1 students copy words and sentences and write numbers and letters. In addition, students write English words identifying objects in pictures.

Use Grammar and Conventions

In *Use Grammar and Conventions*, K–1 students select grammatically correct sentences and indicate whether a sentence has correct use of capital letters, punctuation, articles, singular and plural nouns, pronouns, and subject/verb agreement. In Grades 2–12, students select the grammatically appropriate response to complete sentences and paragraphs. Grammatical features are selected according to each grade span and include the correct use of capitalization, sentence-ending marks, articles, adjectives and adverbs, singular and plural nouns, pronouns, subject/verb agreement, tense and aspect, prepositional phrases, conjunctions, commas, and auxiliary verbs.

Write Academic Texts

In *Write Academic Texts*, Grade 1 and Grades 2–3 students write sentences describing pictures drawn from two broad academic categories: (a) Language Arts, Social Studies, and History; and (b) Mathematics, Science, and Technical Subjects. These tasks approximate common real-world classroom assignments where Grades 1–3 students are expected to write about something they see. Grades 2–3 students also write simple sentences to interpret, analyze, or state opinions regarding what they see.

Students in Grades 4–12 are first asked to write a short summary (two to five sentences) of a paragraph selected from a passage they read earlier in the *Read Academic Texts* section of the Reading subtest. Next, students are shown a table, time line, pie chart, or checklist and asked to write one or two full sentences explaining the information it contains. Finally, students are asked to either (a) compare the paragraph and the information contained in the table, time line, pie chart, or checklist and explain in one or two sentences how they are the same or different or (b) provide an opinion or preference based on the content of both sets of information. These tasks approximate common real-world classroom assignments where students are expected to summarize, in their own words, course reading material, extract tabular information and express it in prose, and compare and contrast academic content. Responses are scored on a 0–3 rubric to assess the student's ability to communicate effectively using appropriate grammar, vocabulary, and conventions.

Write to Express Ideas

In *Write to Express Ideas*, students are given an opportunity to write for personal communication. Grades K–1 students write a sentence describing a person. Students in Grades 2–3 write a letter. Students in Grades 4–12 write extended responses to an email message, note, or blog entry. The writing tasks for Grades 2–12 are designed for students to be able to demonstrate their ability to describe, explain, report, compare, narrate, persuade, or express ideas in writing. Responses are scored on a 0–4 holistic rubric to assess the student’s use of appropriate grammar and vocabulary and the student’s ability to express meaning in a cohesive and coherent manner.