

General Information

Q. Do students need to download the Secure Browser to take the Practice or Training tests?

A. No. Students can use the secure browser; however, students can also use recent versions of the Mozilla Firefox, Internet Explorer, Chrome or Safari browsers to take the practice or training tests, or they can use the native browsers built into iPads and Android tablets. Please be aware that the text-to-speech functionality is available only when using the secure browser.

Q. What is TDS?

A. TDS stands for "Test Delivery System". It is the online testing system that will be used for the practice tests, training tests, optional interim assessments and the summative assessments.

Q. What are the help desk hours?

A. Outside the testing window, [Help Desk](#) hours are M-F 7:00 a.m. until 4:00 p.m. EST. During the testing window, [Help Desk](#) hours are M-F 7:00 a.m. until 7:00 p.m. EST.

Q. What is the Portal for?

A. The portal acts as the gateway to all your assessment systems and provides resources to help students, families, and educators prepare for the administration of the Smarter Balanced Assessments in Mathematics and English Language Arts/Literacy.

Smarter Balanced and Computer Adaptive Testing (CAT)

Q. What is Computer Adaptive Testing (CAT)?

A. Computer adaptive tests use an algorithm to adjust the difficulty of questions throughout the assessment, based on student responses. For example, a student who answers a question correctly will receive a more challenging item, while an incorrect answer generates an easier question. By adapting to the student as the assessment is taking place, these assessments present an individually tailored set of questions to each student and can quickly identify which skills students have mastered.

Q. If students are asked different questions, how can we compare their results?

A. Each student's test must meet the requirements of the test blueprint. The blueprint specifies the content areas and types of questions that will appear on the test. For example, if the test blueprint requires that each student receive two questions about adding fractions, the adaptive software will select two questions from a group of perhaps a dozen that assess the ability to add fractions.

Q. What is a test blueprint?

A. The test blueprint describes the content that will be covered on the assessment. The Smarter Balanced test blueprint ensures that the full range of knowledge and skills in the Common Core State Standards will be assessed. In addition, the test blueprint specifies the number and types of questions associated with each section of the assessment. More information on the test blueprints can be found on the Smarter Balanced website here: <http://www.smarterbalanced.org/smarter-balanced-assessments/>

Q. Does the CAT pull out-of-grade-level questions?

A. The Smarter Balanced adaptive software is configured to select only from grade-level questions for approximately the first two-thirds of the test. At that point, if the estimate of the student's achievement level is clearly at the lowest (or highest) level, the question pool is expanded to include (as needed) questions either from below (or above) the student's grade level. Before being used, out-of-grade questions are screened to make sure they are instructionally and developmentally appropriate. Questions will not exceed or be below two grade-levels from the designated testing grade.

Q. Why do some students have a different number of test questions than others?

A. This is the nature of the CAT. Students will have a slight variation in the number of questions they are presented based on the customized, adaptive test.

Students and Families

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Technology

Q. Where can I find installation instructions for the secure browser?

A. The [Secure Browser Installation Manual](#) contains instructions for installing the secure browser on computers and tablets that will be used for testing. This manual contains instructions for both individual and network installation options.

Q. My school still has the secure browsers used last school year (2014-2015). Can we use these for testing?

A. No. Smarter Balanced Assessments can only be accessed using the secure browsers specifically designed for the 2015-2016 test administration. Past secure browsers will NOT work and you may want to consider uninstalling previous secure browsers to avoid having multiple browsers present on the desktop. While old browsers will not affect the functionality of the new browsers, they cannot be used for any reason and may cause confusion for students and Test Administrators. For information about uninstalling secure browsers, refer to the [Secure Browser Installation Manual](#).

Q. How do I know if I'm technologically ready for the online test administration?

A. It is recommended that you use the network diagnostic tool at each of your schools to make sure you have enough bandwidth to be able to test the number of students taking a test concurrently. The network diagnostic tool can be found on the [practice and training test site](#) under diagnostic tool.

Ensure that the secure browser is installed on all devices that you want to use for testing. It is highly recommended that students take an interim, training, or practice test using the secure browser before the summative test window. This allows you to determine whether or not the tests are running without any issues.

Q. Can tests be administered using virtualization software?

A.
AIR recommends this software is used in conjunction with a zero client. *Note:* AIR does not have the ability to assist with VMware configuration setups, these questions need to be directed to VMware tech support.

Test Administration

Q. Can any student request to print items/passages from the test?

A. No. Only students with a set accommodation in TIDE can use the print on demand feature during a test. All accommodations require an IEP/504 plan for the student. Print on demand is **not** an accommodation that is accessible to the general student population and **should not** be used as a way to take a test on paper. For more information please see the [Usability, Accessibility, and Accommodations Guidelines](#).

Q. Are there any supplies that schools need to provide so that universal tools, designated supports, and accommodations can be appropriately implemented?

A. Schools should determine the number of headphones they will provide (for text-to-speech, as well as for the listening test) and other non-embedded universal tools (e.g., thesaurus), designated supports (e.g., bilingual dictionary), and accommodations (e.g., multiplication table) for students. An alternative is to identify these as items that students will provide on their own.

Q. Why do some students have a different number of test questions than others?

A. This is the nature of the CAT. Students will have a slight variation in the number of questions they are presented based on the customized, adaptive test.

Q. Why are some students seeing a different set of stimuli and questions on the online performance task portion of the test, even though they all have the same topic?

A. Each performance task topic has multiple test forms. These forms are randomly assigned to students through the test delivery system, so it's possible that students in the same class are not seeing the same items.

Q. Why are hand scorable items not appearing in the Teacher Hand Scoring System?

A. The Teacher Hand Scoring System (THSS) is only used for scoring hand-scorable items on the interim assessments. If you are administering a summative assessment, the items will **not** appear in THSS.

Q. Can universal tools be turned off if it is determined that they will interfere with the student's performance on the assessment?

A. Yes. If a TA, TE, or educational team determines that a universal tool might be distracting or that students do not need to or are unable to use them, they can be turned off. This can be done by changing settings in the TA Interface prior to approving student entry into an online test. For additional information on how to change student settings, please see the [Test Administrator \(TA\)](#)

[User Guide](#).

Q. What is a roster?

A. Rosters are groups of students associated with a teacher in a particular school. Rosters typically represent an entire classroom, individual classroom periods, or course subject by grade. They can be created in TIDE for organizational purposes during the test administration. Teachers and Coordinators can view and print out student information by roster from TIDE. Rosters can also be used in ORS to view scores for a designated group of students or a class.

Q. What is the Teacher Hand Scoring System used for?

A.
The Smarter Balanced interim assessments (ICA & IAB) consist of machine scored items as well as hand scored items. No outside vendor will be scoring items for the interim tests. Teachers will need to go into the Teacher Hand Scoring System (THSS) to score these items. Teachers can use the THSS for professional development if they want to see how their students respond to items and provide a response based on what they see. This system is strictly for teachers to be able to score responses that their students provided on the interim assessments. It will not be used at all during the summative assessments.

Q. Do Test Administrators need to establish a TIDE account before administering the Practice or Training tests?

A. Students can take the practice or training tests in a proctored test session set up by a test administrator or as guests outside of a proctored test session. Test administrators (TAs) must have an account in TIDE to set proctored test session. TAs will use the same username and password to set up the proctored test session as they use to log into TIDE. We encourage TAs to practice setting up a proctored test session using the practice or training tests so they will have experience with how to do this before administering the summative tests.

Q. Where do I find information on tools, supports, and accommodations?

A. This information can be found under the [Resources](#) section of the portal under your user role of Test Administrator or Test Coordinator, within the User Guides and Manuals folder.

Test Information Distribution Engine (TIDE)

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up a proctored test session using the practice or training tests so they will have experience with how to do this before administering the summative tests.

Q. What is the difference between a Test Administrator (TA) and a Teacher (TE)?

A. Teachers have the ability to manage and upload rosters within TIDE. These rosters flow into the Online Reporting System (ORS) and can be used to organize and group student data. Within ORS, teachers have the ability to view summary statistics, participation reports, test completion rates, and score reports, and retrieve student results. Test Administrators do not have the ability to manage and upload rosters within TIDE or ORS. Within ORS, TAs only have the ability to view participation reports and test completion rates. Both Teachers and Test Administrators have the ability to view student information.

Universal Tools, Designated Supports, and Accommodations

Q. Can any student request to print items/passages from the test?

A. No. Only students with a set accommodation in TIDE can use the print on demand feature during a test. All accommodations require an IEP/504 plan for the student. Print on demand is **not** an accommodation that is accessible to the general student population and **should not** be used as a way to take a test on paper. For more information please see the [Usability, Accessibility, and Accommodations Guidelines](#).

Q. Are there any supplies that schools need to provide so that universal tools, designated supports, and accommodations can be appropriately implemented?

A. Schools should determine the number of headphones they will provide (for text-to-speech, as well as for the listening test) and other non-embedded universal tools (e.g., thesaurus), designated supports (e.g., bilingual dictionary), and accommodations (e.g., multiplication table) for students. An alternative is to identify these as items that students will provide on their own.

Q. What are the differences among the three categories of universal tools, designated supports, and accommodations?

A.
Universal tools are access features that are available to all students based on student preference and selection. Designated supports for the Smarter Balanced assessments are those features that are available for use by any student (including English language learners, students with disabilities, and English language learners with disabilities) for whom the need has been indicated by an educator or team of educators (with parent/guardian and student input as appropriate). Accommodations are changes in procedures or materials that increase equitable access during the Smarter Balanced assessments by generating valid assessment results for students who need them and allowing these students the opportunity to show what they know and can do. The [Usability, Accessibility, and Accommodations Guidelines](#) identify accommodations for students for whom there is documentation of the need for the accommodations on an Individualized Education Program (IEP) or 504 accommodation plan. Universal tools, designated supports, and accommodations may be either embedded in the test administration system or provided locally (non-embedded).

Q. Which students should use each category of universal tools, designated supports, and accommodations?

A. Universal tools are available to all students, including those receiving designated supports and

those receiving accommodations. Designated supports are available only to students for whom an adult or team (consistent with state-designated practices) has indicated the need for these supports (as well as those students for whom the need is documented). Accommodations are available only to those students with documentation of the need through either an Individualized Education Program (IEP) or a 504 accommodation plan. Students who have IEPs or 504 accommodation plans also may use designated supports and universal tools.

Q. What is the difference between embedded and non-embedded approaches? How might educators decide what is most appropriate?

A. Embedded versions of the universal tools, designated supports, and accommodations are provided digitally through the test delivery system while non-embedded versions are provided at the local level through means other than the test delivery system. The choice between embedded and non-embedded universal tools and designated supports should be based on the individual student's needs. The decision should reflect the student's prior use of, and experience with, both embedded and non-embedded universal tools, designated supports, and accommodations. It is important to note that although Print on Demand is a non-embedded accommodation, permission for students to request printing must first be set in Test Information Distribution Engine (TIDE).

Q. Who determines how non-embedded accommodations are provided?

A. IEP teams and educators make decisions about non-embedded accommodations. These teams (or educators for 504 plans) provide evidence of the need for accommodations and ensure that they are noted on the IEP or 504 plan. States are responsible for ensuring that schools follow Smarter Balanced guidance on the implementation of these accommodations.

Q. Are any students eligible to use text-to-speech for ELA reading passages on the Smarter Balanced assessments?

A. For students in all grades, read-aloud is available on ELA reading passages as a non-embedded accommodation for students whose need is documented on an IEP or 504 plan, subject to each state's laws, regulations, and policies. Text-to-speech is available on reading passages in all grades. Text-to-speech and read-aloud for ELA reading passages is not available for ELLs (unless the student has an IEP or 504 plan). Whenever text-to-speech is used, appropriate headphones must be available to the student, unless the student is tested individually in a separate setting.

Q. What is to be done for special cases of "sudden" physical disability?

A. One exception to the IEP or 504 requirement is for students who have had a physical injury (e.g., broken hand or arm) that impairs their ability to use a computer. For these situations, students may use the speech-to-text or scribe accommodations (if deemed appropriate based on the student having had sufficient experience with the use of the accommodations).

Q. For the highlighter universal tool, if a student pauses a test for 20-minutes, do the highlighter marks disappear?

A. If a student is working on a passage or stimulus on a screen and pauses the test for 20 minutes to take a break, the student will still have access to the information visible on that particular screen. However, students do lose access to any information highlighted on a previous screen. Please contact the AOE for further information.

Q. Can universal tools be turned off if it is determined that they will interfere with the

student's performance on the assessment?

A. Yes. If a TA, TE, or educational team determines that a universal tool might be distracting or that students do not need to or are unable to use them, they can be turned off. This can be done by changing settings in the TA Interface prior to approving student entry into an online test. For additional information on how to change student settings, please see the [Test Administrator \(TA\) User Guide](#).

Q. For the mark-for-review universal tool, will selections remain visible after a 20-minute break?

A. If a student takes a break for longer than 20 minutes, the student will not be able to access items from previous screens.

Q. How will the Test Administrator know prior to testing that the print on demand accommodation may be needed?

A. The test administrator will know this information prior to testing because accommodations need to be documented beforehand and print on demand is an accommodation. Any accommodations - including both embedded and non-embedded accommodations - need to be entered into the TIDE. The print on demand accommodation applies to either passages/stimuli or items, or both.

Q. What is print-on-demand?

A. Print-on-demand is an accommodation that **requires** an IEP or 504 plan. This accommodation allows eligible students to request a paper print-out of passages/stimuli and items that would appear on the online assessment. This accommodation should not be used as a replacement for a paper test administration. Refer to the [Usability, Accessibility, and Accommodations Guidelines](#) for more information on print-on-demand.

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