

TO: Governing Board Members

FROM: Governing Board Staff

RE: Preparing for Policy Discussion on NAEP Reading Framework Update

DATE: February 26, 2021

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Because of the important role NAEP plays as “The Nation’s Report Card,” it’s essential that it remains a valid, reliable, and relevant instrument. To do that, each NAEP framework must reflect current research, policy, and practice.

In November 2020, the Board discussed four central policy issues regarding NAEP Reading Framework update recommendations: (1) Trend; (2) Universal Design Elements; (3) Acknowledging Context in the Assessment; and (4) Acknowledging Disciplinary Contexts. See the November 2020 Quarterly Governing Board meeting minutes for a full summary of this discussion.

Since the November 2020 Board meeting, the Assessment Development Committee (ADC) and Board staff have:

- 1) Provided guidance to the Framework Development Panel reflecting questions and concerns raised by Board members for the Panel’s revision work;
- 2) Convened the Visioning Panel twice to provide additional guidance and feedback for revising the public comment draft of the framework; and
- 3) Overseen the development of a revised draft of the NAEP Reading Framework Update, incorporating public comment and Governing Board input.

Notably, the Visioning Panel is a wider group of stakeholders that encompasses policy, business, and other constituencies. Earlier this week, the Visioning Panel affirmed support of this revised draft.

At the March 2021 Quarterly Board meeting, ADC Chair Dana Boyd and Vice Chair Mark Miller will moderate Board discussion after a briefing from:

- Gina Cervetti, Framework Visioning and Development Panel Representative;
- P. David Pearson, Framework Visioning and Development Panel Chair; and
- Susan Pimentel, Framework Visioning Panel representative.

The Board’s March 2021 discussion will inform the Development Panel as they prepare final revisions for Board action in May 2021.

This memo transmits the following attachments.

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**February 26, 2021 Draft of the NAEP Reading Framework Update**

Attachment A

*This draft of the 2026 NAEP Reading Framework reflects public comment and Board input from the July and November 2020 Governing Board meetings.*

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**Revision Summary**

Attachment B

*This summary documents revisions conducted to incorporate public comment and Board input. It also lists how framework updates and rationales relate to the current framework and the current assessment.*

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# Reading Framework for the 2026 National Assessment of Educational Progress

**\*\*\* February 26, 2021 Draft \*\*\***

**National Assessment Governing Board**  
U.S. Department of Education

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## **CHAPTER 1: OVERVIEW**

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The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), often called The Nation’s Report Card, is the largest nationally representative and continuing assessment of what students in public and private schools in the United States know and are able to do in various subjects. Since 1969, NAEP has been a common measure of student achievement across the country in mathematics, reading, science, and other subjects. The Nation’s Report Card provides national, state, and some district-level results, as well as results for different demographic groups. NAEP is a congressionally mandated project of the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), located within the U.S. Department of Education’s Institute of Education Sciences. By law and by design, NAEP does not produce results for individual students or schools. The National Assessment Governing Board (Governing Board), an independent, bipartisan organization made up of governors, state school superintendents, teachers, researchers, and representatives of the general public, sets policy for NAEP.

The 2026 NAEP Reading Framework describes the content and design of the 2026 NAEP Reading Assessment; it is intended for a general audience. A second document, the *Assessment and Item Specifications for the 2026 NAEP Reading Framework*, serves as the “test blueprint” with information about passage selection, item development and other aspects of test development; it is intended for a more technical audience, including NCES and the contractors that will develop the NAEP Reading Assessment. In accordance with Governing Board policy, the 2026 NAEP Reading Framework focuses on “important, measurable indicators of student achievement to inform the nation about what students know and are able to do without endorsing or advocating a particular instructional approach.”

The Education Sciences Reform Act of 2002 (P.L. 107-279) is the governing statute of NAEP. This law stipulates that NCES develops and administers NAEP and reports NAEP results. Under the law, the Governing Board is given responsibility for setting the assessment schedule, developing the frameworks that provide the blueprints for the content and design of the assessments, and setting achievement levels. The NAEP Reading Assessment is given in English every two years to students in grades 4 and 8, and every four years to students in grade 12. The assessment measures reading comprehension by asking students to read grade-appropriate materials and answer questions based on what they have read.

### **Current NAEP Reading Assessment in a Digital Environment**

The NAEP Reading Assessment has been administered on a digital platform since 2017. NAEP’s move to dynamic and innovative technologies provides an opportunity for an engaging assessment experience for students and more meaningful data about students’ skills and knowledge for educators. With digitally based assessments, students are asked to receive, gather, and report information just as they do in many aspects of their everyday lives. These assessments also are constructed to reflect the principles of Universal Design of Assessments (UDA) (National Center on Educational Outcomes, 2016). The principles of UDA are intended to increase assessment validity and accessibility and to provide a more accurate understanding of what students know and can do (Thompson, Johnstone, & Thurlow, 2002; Thompson, Thurlow, & Malouf, 2004). Examples of three of the seven UDA principles include precisely defined constructs, accessible, non-biased items, and maximum readability and comprehensibility.

The current NAEP Reading Assessment is organized according to assessment blocks. These feature either discrete items (stand-alone text passages and related questions) or scenario-based tasks (simulated settings in which students read passages while following various steps to accomplish a particular purpose or solve a problem). Scenario-based tasks (SBTs) can include many innovative features, such as:

- Task characters (avatars acting as simulated task partners)
- Increased guidance enabling students to navigate more complex items
- Item resetting in which students, after locking in answers, receive information about the correct response, so they can avoid carrying misconceptions into the next portion of the task

Schools and students participating in NAEP assessments are supported in various ways so they can successfully engage with the digitally based assessment. The digital platform provides students with support features that are intended to replicate the types of support provided during reading instruction and practice in school and at home or the workplace. For both discrete and SBT assessment blocks, tools available to all students include annotation via an on-screen pencil or highlighter, selection of color themes, and zoom-in. In addition, a text-to-speech capability is available on the Directions and Help screens (but not available for the reading passages or questions). Texts or questions may include hyperlinks, such as pop-up notes to click for more information (typically a definition of a selected word), a look-back button that takes students back to the relevant sentence or location in the text, multi-part response frames, and more. Not all support features are available in every block, but all blocks include some support features.

At the beginning of the assessment session, students interact with a tutorial that presents all the information needed to take the assessment on the digital platform; the tutorial explains how to progress through the reading passage and how to indicate or provide answers to questions, as well as how to use the tools. Students try out the tools and then enter and edit responses in a brief practice session. After the tutorial, students engage with two assessment blocks, each including one or more texts and approximately 10 questions. Texts may include images, graphics, or even a short video, and assessment items include both selected response and constructed response formats. The digital platform allows for a greater variety of formats, including selecting key words or sentences in a passage, dragging and dropping responses to complete a sequence or chart, completing a matrix or grid, and selecting more than one correct response. Hybrid items combine selected and constructed responses.

When students finish answering assessment questions, they participate in a digital survey, answering both general and reading-related questions. Student surveys collect demographic data and students' perceptions about access to technology and their reading habits and experiences in school, home, and the community. Together, the assessment blocks and survey take roughly 90 minutes. Teachers and administrators also complete surveys. Data collected as students navigate the digital assessment can provide valuable information about how students process texts and information during the assessment. For example, process data can reveal the time students take to read texts and respond to questions, how often they return to the text as they answer questions, and their use of optional digital tools.

While maintaining the essential structure and purpose of previous paper-and-pencil assessments, the development and implementation of digitally based assessments is key in maintaining NAEP's position as a leader in large-scale assessment.

### **Development of the 2026 NAEP Reading Framework**

In 2018, the Governing Board conducted a review of the current NAEP Reading Framework. In accordance with the Board policy, the review included commissioned papers and discussions with an array of reading educators and experts. Based on the review, at its March 2019 meeting, the Governing Board determined that the Reading Framework needed updating to address advances in research in reading. The process of updating the 2026 NAEP Reading Framework was guided by Governing Board policies that specify that the work be undertaken by a Visioning Panel of educators; experts in reading, learning and development, and assessment; and other key stakeholders in education. From this group, a subset of members continued as the Development Panel to finalize a document to recommend to the Governing Board for approval. In 2019, the Board charged the Visioning and Development Panels with developing recommendations for updating the framework as follows:

The Visioning and Development Panels will recommend to the Board necessary changes in the NAEP Reading Framework at grades 4, 8, and 12 that maximize the value of NAEP to the nation. The panels are also tasked with considering opportunities to extend the depth of measurement and reporting given the affordances of digital based assessment. The update process shall result in three documents: a recommended framework, assessment and item specifications, and recommendations for contextual variables that relate to student achievement in reading.

To undertake this charge the Visioning Panel reviewed the considerable developments in reading research, literacy standards, and assessment that have taken place since the Board adopted the 2009–2019 NAEP Reading Framework in 2004. The Visioning Panel also considered input from a special panel of state literacy leaders as well as a paper, commissioned by NCES and authored by the NAEP Validity Studies (NVS) Panel, that examined the degree to which NAEP's assessments in mathematics, reading, and writing reflected both the content standards and the assessments implemented by the states. In this report, the NVS Panel recommended that NAEP “should continue to develop and implement reading blocks that use new formats similar to scenario-based tasks or other alternatives that prioritize purpose-driven, performance-oriented, multisource tasks” (Valencia, Wixson, Kitmitto & Blankenship, 2019). Accordingly, the Visioning Panel set guidelines for drafting an updated NAEP Reading Framework that would:

- Expand the construct of reading;
- Expand the definition of text;
- Extend the range of comprehension tasks that require knowledge application;
- Augment and expand the cognitive targets and the approaches to reporting performance on them;
- Expand how language structures and vocabulary are defined and measured; and
- Include, measure, and report on the role of engagement in reading performance.

At the heart of the Visioning Panel’s guidelines was a commitment to equity, guided by two priorities in accordance with the most recent standards of fairness and equity in large-scale assessment to accomplish the following:

- (1) Measure disparities in students’ reading achievement in a way that minimizes test bias to the maximum extent (American Educational Research Association, American Psychological Association, and National Council of Measurement in Education, 2014; International Testing Commission, 2019; Task Force on Assessment of the International Reading Association, 2010); and
- (2) Describe disparities in “access to resources and opportunities, including the structural aspects of school systems that may impact opportunity and exacerbate existing disparities in family and community contexts and contribute to unequal outcomes” in reading (the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2019, p. 3).

The Visioning Panel thus wanted to ensure that updates to the 2009–2019 framework would enable students to draw on their accumulated knowledge and experiences to complete assessment tasks. To that end, the Visioning Panel asked the Development Panel to update the framework in a manner that would enhance the assessment’s validity and fairness while minimizing bias. The Panel also called for assessment texts and tasks to be broadly representative of the knowledge and experiences of the nation’s students and the many ways in which they engage with reading in today’s world.

To address the Visioning Panel guidelines, the Development Panel considered frameworks for other large-scale literacy assessments, such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS). The Development Panel attended to educational and societal developments, including advances in technology and new types of texts (digital and multimodal), and they incorporated findings from new research in three areas: disciplinary literacy; the role of affect, motivation, and agency in shaping readers’ performance; and the role of social and cultural experiences in human development and learning, particularly in reading comprehension. The Panel augmented its attention to principles of Universal Design of Assessments to address the experiences of the nation’s increasingly diverse students in more inclusive ways, many states’ recent adoption of new standards and assessments, and innovations in digitally based assessments. These broad developments in research, policy, and practice guided the drafting of this framework update for the 2026 administration of the NAEP Reading Assessment.

### **The Updated NAEP Reading Framework**

This updated framework for the 2026 NAEP Reading Assessment addresses reading comprehension within a sociocultural context. This framing is the natural outgrowth of recent understandings about the social and cultural nature of all learning and human development. The 2002 report of the Rand Reading Study Group identified three key components of reading comprehension—reader, text, and activity—and situated them in sociocultural contexts. The term sociocultural refers to the social and cultural features and practices of contexts, such as schools, homes, and communities, where students learn to read and engage in reading (Lee, 2020; Pacheco, 2015, 2018; Skerrett, 2020). This sociocultural perspective is important to reading comprehension assessment because it acknowledges that these practices influence how readers approach, engage with, and make meaning from texts (Mislevy, 2016; 2019).

Since the watershed Rand report, an even broader consensus has emerged across the multiple disciplines of the learning sciences—including psychology, developmental studies, anthropology, linguistics, cognitive science, and even biology—recognizing the central role of culture in lifelong learning (National Academy of Sciences, 2018). In this emerging consensus, learning—and reading—are still, at their cores, cognitive processes. However, cognitive acts, including reading, are influenced by the particular contexts in which texts are written and in which reading takes place.

The understanding of reading comprehension informing the 2026 NAEP Reading Framework is an outgrowth of earlier and current cognitively oriented work in reading comprehension (Anderson & Pearson, 1984; Kintsch, 1998; RAND Reading Study Group, 2002; Pearson, et al., 2020). Descriptions of the cognitive activities involved in constructing meaning have increasingly implicated social and cultural dimensions over time, dimensions that were also foreshadowed in NAEP reading frameworks adopted in 1992 and 2004. Research evidence has highlighted that, like all human learning, reading comprehension is a meaning-making activity imbued with socially and culturally specific characteristics and practices.

Drawing from previous frameworks and these research understandings, this updated NAEP Reading Framework attends to four key features of reading comprehension—contexts, readers, texts, and activities. The cognitive processes involved in reading are shaped by social interaction and mediated by many aspects of cultural practice, including the traditions and modes of speaking, that are part of students’ daily lives (Nasir & Hand, 2006). At the heart of the 2026 NAEP Reading Framework is the definition of reading comprehension:

**Reading comprehension is making meaning with text**, a complex cognitive process shaped by students’ social and cultural influences. To comprehend, readers:

- Engage with text in print and multimodal forms;
- Employ personal resources that include foundational reading skills, language, knowledge, and motivations;
- Extract, construct, integrate, critique, and apply meaning in activities across a range of contexts.

Readers draw on a range of resources to make sense from text:

- What readers know about a topic;
- What readers know about texts and how they work;
- Internal processes, or foundational skills, needed to render text sensible, including phonemic awareness, letter-sound knowledge, and word- and sentence-reading skills;
- Higher order cognitive processes, such as attention, working memory, language comprehension, inferential reasoning, and comprehension monitoring; and
- Socially and culturally situated knowledge and practices from home, community, and school contexts.

The definition of reading comprehension included in the 2026 NAEP Reading Framework acknowledges and incorporates the cognitive roots of previous reading frameworks. Also, the definition illustrates how what readers know, do, and understand from reading is tied to the variations in knowledge, skills, and experiences they bring to their reading from experiences

at home, in their communities, and in school. It embraces the understanding that social and cultural practices also influence texts, including who reads and writes them and under what circumstances, how they are generated, how they appear, and how they are used. And finally, the definition emphasizes the integration of reading with other communication practices and the application of reading to tasks that address wide-ranging purposes and contexts.

Advances in measurement and in digitally administered assessment of reading comprehension, already initiated by NAEP in 2017, allow for a large-scale assessment that is more accessible to a greater number of individuals (National Center on Educational Outcomes, 2016). These advances have also allowed the assessment design to address the sociocultural aspects of the cognitive processes known as reading comprehension. Enacting the definition of reading comprehension in the 2026 NAEP Reading Assessment—described in this and subsequent chapters of the updated Framework—will enable NAEP to:

- Develop assessments with greater ecological validity (e.g., reading with purpose, applying what one learns from reading to a new task, benefiting from the presence of Universal Design elements that are typically available when reading outside of an assessment context);
- Draw on a greater range of texts and tasks representative of students’ diverse experiences;
- Report on a broader array of the resources that students bring to bear in the act of reading (knowledge, language, motivations, prior experiences, agency, opportunities to learn); and
- Increase the precision of inferences about student reading achievement in the U.S.

## **Overview of the Updated NAEP Reading Framework’s Key Components**

The new framework maintains many aspects of the 2009–2019 NAEP Reading Framework. It also introduces some changes in the assessment design that are based on current scientific research in human development and learning, including reading comprehension. A continuing commitment to equity, non-biased and valid assessments, and the principles of Universal Design of Assessments were central to the updates in the 2026 NAEP Reading Framework. The advent of digitally based assessments in 2017 has allowed NAEP to provide an engaging assessment experience for students and explore new testing methods and question types. Framework updates also reflect trends in international reading comprehension assessments, such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS).

### ***Comprehension Targets***

Like its predecessors, the 2026 NAEP Reading Assessment engages students in reading texts and responding to questions that assess their comprehension of these texts. The 2026 NAEP Reading Assessment invites students to read texts and respond to questions that assess their comprehension of these texts. Comprehension Targets are used to generate test items that assess four important dimensions of reading comprehension. Three of these—Locate and Recall, Integrate and Interpret, and Analyze and Evaluate—are similar to the cognitive targets used in the 2009–2019 Framework. One new target—Use and Apply—reflects a frequent and authentic purpose in disciplinary and workplace reading. Assessment of students’ comprehension of



vocabulary and language structures is systematically woven throughout the comprehension items.

### ***Other Key Components***

Disciplinary contexts for reading have taken on an expanded role in the 2026 NAEP Reading Framework to mirror the increased focus in schools on reading comprehension within disciplines, as well as in state standards and large-scale reading comprehension assessments. Two broad purposes for reading comprehension—reading to develop understanding and reading to solve a problem—will be delineated to systematically sample students’ reading performance in literature, science, and social studies contexts. Texts, too, are sampled to address purposes within disciplines, affordances offered by digital and multimodal formats, and text complexity criteria for each tested grade. Finally, task-based, motivational, and knowledge-based Universal Design Elements are included as appropriate to support precise measurement of students’ reading comprehension in ecologically valid ways.

### ***Reporting 2026 NAEP Reading Assessment Results***

Results of the NAEP Reading Assessment are reported in terms of average scores for groups of students on the NAEP 0–500 scale and as percentages of students who attain each of the three achievement levels (*NAEP Basic*, *NAEP Proficient*, and *NAEP Advanced*). They are reported in the aggregate for the nation, states, and select large urban districts participating in the NAEP Trial Urban District Assessment; they are not reported for individual students classrooms, or schools.

The 2026 NAEP Reading Framework updates the reporting system to emphasize equity, rigor, precision, and validity. The aim is to provide more nuanced reporting and useful data to key stakeholders across the nation. Currently, results of the NAEP Reading Assessment are disaggregated by gender, race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, English learner status, state, region, type of community, public and nonpublic school, and literary and informational texts. Building on this system, the 2026 Framework proposes to disaggregate results by disciplinary contexts—literature, social studies, and science—rather than literature and informational texts. In addition, reporting categories are expanded to include (1) socioeconomic status within race/ethnicity and (2) former English (ELs) learners, in addition to current ELs and non-ELs, in order to describe student performance in more precise and detailed ways.

The framework also proposes to measure contextual variables, as is current practice, via student, teacher, and administrator questionnaires and by expanded use of digital process data to provide further precision and explanation of student performance. The variables are clustered by two sets of reader characteristics: (1) cognition and metacognition and (2) engagement and motivation; and by two sets of environmental characteristics: (1) perceptions of school and community resources and (2) perceptions of teacher, instructional, and classroom supports. Ultimately, the framework envisions a reporting system that has enhanced explanatory capacity to assist educators in accessing, interpreting, and acting on the valuable information provided in NAEP reports and databases.

## Comparison of the 2009–2019 NAEP Reading Framework and the 2026 NAEP Reading Framework

The framework for the 2026 NAEP Reading Assessment updates the framework developed and used for the 2009–2019 assessments. Building from this previous framework and on digital innovations, updates include:

- Expansion of the definition of reading comprehension to explicitly acknowledge the sociocognitive processes of reading. Reading comprehension is defined as making meaning with text and four key features are highlighted—contexts, readers, texts, and activities.
- Emphasis on three additional, research-based concepts: (1) how social and cultural experiences shape learning and development; (2) how reading varies across disciplines; and (3) the increasing use of digital and multimodal texts.

Key similarities and differences between the two frameworks are presented in exhibit 1.1. While updated, the continuity between the current framework and assessment and the 2026 NAEP Reading Framework is substantial.

### Exhibit 1.1. Similarities and Differences Between the 2009–2019 and 2026 NAEP Reading Frameworks

	Current Framework and Assessment	2026 Framework Update
Comprehension Targets	Locate and Recall Integrate and Interpret Critique and Evaluate	Locate and Recall Integrate and Interpret Analyze and Evaluate Use and Apply
Disciplinary Contexts	Literary Text Informational Text	Literature Contexts Social Studies Contexts Science Contexts
Purposes	Specific purposes communicated to students for scenario-based tasks in digitally based assessment as of 2017	Broad Purposes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reading to Develop Understanding</li> <li>• Reading to Solve Problems</li> </ul> Specific purposes for all assessment tasks are communicated to students
Text Types	Literary Texts Informational Texts	Literature Texts Social Studies Texts Science Texts
Text Source	Authentic	Authentic except in rare instances
Text Format	Digital texts as of 2017 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Static – non-moving print, graphics, or images on screen</li> </ul>	Digital texts <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Static – non-moving print, graphics, or images on screen</li> </ul>

	Current Framework and Assessment	2026 Framework Update
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Dynamic – navigation across modes (print, video, other) or nonlinear locations (hypertext link)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Expanded use of dynamic formats – navigation across modes (print, video, other) or nonlinear locations (hypertext link)</li> </ul>
Text Complexity	Expert judgment Passage length Two or more research-based readability measures	Expert judgment Passage length Quantitative and qualitative research-based complexity measures
Language Structures and Vocabulary	Vocabulary assessed Potential for subscore	Language structures and vocabulary assessed No subscore
Universal Design Elements (UDE)	Digitally based assessment as of 2017 includes tools and support features: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Highlighting and notetaking</li> <li>Text-to-speech on Directions and Help screens</li> <li>Zoom-in and selection of color schemes</li> <li>Sequential directions and transitions</li> <li>Look-back buttons to return to relevant section of text</li> <li>Graphic organizers</li> <li>Item foreshadowing</li> <li>Multi-part response frames</li> <li>Purpose statements</li> <li>Task characters (avatars that act as partners in simulated settings)</li> <li>Pop-up notes for definitions of vocabulary</li> <li>Resetting by providing correct response to answered questions</li> <li>Topic or passage introductions</li> </ul>	Types of UDEs and possible examples: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Task-based UDEs               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Highlighting and notetaking</li> <li>Text-to-speech on Directions and Help Screens</li> <li>Zoom-in and selection of color schemes</li> <li>Sequential directions and transitions for reading collection of texts</li> <li>Look-back buttons to return to relevant section of text</li> <li>Graphic organizers</li> <li>Item foreshadowing</li> <li>Multi-part response frames</li> <li>Student exemplars as mentor texts</li> </ul> </li> <li>Motivational UDEs               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Explicit connections between broad and specific purposes</li> <li>Task characters that provide oral or written directions, act as peers or experts, or serve as an audience</li> </ul> </li> <li>Knowledge-based UDEs               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Text, videos, or photographs providing brief topic previews</li> <li>Pop-up notes for definitions of words or phrases</li> <li>Resetting by providing correct response to answered questions</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Reporting	Overall scale score and achievement levels (NAEP Basic, NAEP Proficient, NAEP Advanced)	Overall scale score and achievement levels (NAEP Basic, NAEP Proficient, NAEP Advanced)

	Current Framework and Assessment	2026 Framework Update
	<p>Disaggregation by gender, race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, English learner status, state, region, type of community, public or nonpublic school, and literary and informational texts</p> <p>Data collected from student, teacher, and administrator questionnaires on contextual variables of interest</p> <p>Some data collected from students' test taking behaviors (process data) in digital administrations</p>	<p>Disaggregation by all existing categories, adding</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Disciplinary contexts</li> <li>• Socioeconomic status within race/ethnicity</li> <li>• Former English learners (ELs) as well as current ELs and non-ELs</li> </ul> <p>Data collected from student, teacher, and administrator questionnaires on expanded set of contextual variables</p> <p>Data collected from students' test taking behaviors (process data) on expanded set of contextual variables</p>

The remainder of the framework is organized to provide greater detail about the proposed content and design of the assessment and the reporting of results:

- Chapter 2 presents the **2026 NAEP Reading Assessment**, including the definition of reading comprehension and major assessment components.
- Chapter 3 describes the **Development of the 2026 NAEP Reading Assessment**, including specific design elements.
- Chapter 4 explains the **Reporting of NAEP 2026 Results**, including the expansion of reporting categories, contextual variables, and explanatory reporting capacity.

## ***CHAPTER 2: THE 2026 NAEP READING ASSESSMENT***

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The 2026 NAEP Reading Framework recommends updates necessary to deliver assessments that are relevant, fair, and valid measures of student achievement in the U.S. The 2026 Framework builds on the current NAEP framework and operational assessment, especially the advances made possible by digitally-based assessment, by drawing on current understandings of reading comprehension and assessment. Chapter 2 provides a detailed description of the components that will be included in NAEP Reading assessments that students will take beginning in 2026. The chapter begins with the 2026 NAEP Definition of Reading Comprehension, traces the definition’s origins in policy and scholarship on reading comprehension, and culminates in a description of the components of the assessment.

### **The NAEP Definition of Reading Comprehension**

The 2026 NAEP Reading Framework attends to four key features involved in reading comprehension—contexts, readers, texts, and activities. The cognitive processes involved in reading are shaped by social interaction and mediated by many aspects of cultural practice, including the traditions and modes of speaking, that are part of students’ daily lives (Nasir & Hand, 2006). At the core of the 2026 NAEP Reading Framework is the definition of reading comprehension:

**Reading comprehension is making meaning with text**, a complex cognitive process shaped by students’ social and cultural experiences. To comprehend, readers:

- Engage with texts in print and multimodal forms;
- Employ personal resources that include foundational reading skills, language, knowledge, and motivation;
- Extract, construct, integrate, critique, and apply meaning in activities across a range of contexts.

### ***Key Terminology in the Definition***

Each feature of the definition (contexts, readers, texts, activities) is important to understand how readers make meaning in the presence of texts.

**Contexts.** A central principle of the 2026 NAEP Definition of Reading Comprehension is that, as a human meaning-making activity, reading comprehension is situated within, and shaped by, social and cultural contexts. Social contexts, the settings within which individuals interact with one another, are governed by particular norms and expectations for the roles that different participants take up (e.g., student and teacher; youngest and eldest sibling). Social contexts are also inherently cultural. Cultural socialization occurs in classrooms, families, communities, and many other social contexts. With repeated ways of acting, interacting, knowing, believing, and valuing being passed down across generations all social groups develop cultures (Nasir & Hand, 2006).

Experiences students have in these contexts shape every aspect of reading comprehension: understanding of what to do, how to engage with text, and how to respond to and learn from reading. Contexts influence everything that readers bring to reading—including the language, knowledge, motivations, and cognition that are acquired and refined in home,

community, and school settings. Contexts shape the texts readers read. Although there is a common thread to the cognition involved in reading across contexts, much of the process of comprehension is influenced by context and situated within particular settings and practices (Scribner & Cole, 1981; Skerrett, 2020).

**Readers.** Each reader is a distinctive human being who brings a unique and diverse repertoire of cultural, cognitive (including metacognitive), motivational, and linguistic resources to every encounter with text. These resources are developed through experiences in multiple settings and communities and applied as readers make sense of text. For instance, first graders will use their knowledge of the stories they have listened to at home and in daycare settings to understand the stories they now have to read on their own. Adolescents in the U.S. would face a challenge when reading an unfamiliar text about the game of cricket in India, using their knowledge of other sports to make sense of the text. Bilingual readers often use what they know about reading in one language to read in another language (August & Shanahan, 2006; García & Godina, 2017). Readers' motivations and purposes are also impacted by their previous experiences and by the particular contexts in which the reading is being performed. They read to enjoy and be carried away by stories, to appreciate an author's use of language, to learn about themselves and the natural and social worlds in which they live, or to gather information and insight to act on the world. They read by themselves and with others; silently or orally; and lightly for a general impression or closely to prepare for a debate.

***The Specialized Role of Readers' Knowledge.*** Many different kinds of knowledge play important roles in reading comprehension (Willingham, 2006). The categories of knowledge include world knowledge, knowledge of the topics of texts readers encounter, knowledge of text genres and structures, and linguistic knowledge, including vocabulary and syntax. In the process of extracting meaning, readers use this knowledge to clarify potential sources of ambiguities, including use of pronouns, words with multiple meanings, and ambiguous syntax. These forms of knowledge enable readers to make connections between adjacent ideas in texts even when authors do not make these connections explicitly. In more transparently construction-oriented processes, readers use knowledge to fill in gaps left by the author. Readers also use frameworks of knowledge (e.g., a birthday party) related to key ideas or themes in the text to construct mental models of meaning.

Of all of the types of knowledge involved in reading comprehension, the role of topic knowledge is probably the best understood. Contemporary cognitive models of reading describe the essential role of topic knowledge in text comprehension (Graesser, Singer, & Trabasso, 1994; Kintsch, 1998; McCarthy & McNamara, 2021; van den Broek, Risen, Fletcher, & Thurlow, 1996). These models represent the relationship between knowledge and comprehension as one in which existing knowledge is continually activated and integrated with textual information as readers develop a propositional understanding and, ultimately, a coherent mental representation of the text. Moreover, a large body of research has documented the impact of readers' topic knowledge and domain knowledge on reading comprehension across grade levels and text genres (e.g., Pearson, Hansen, & Gordon, 1979; Taft & Leslie, 1985; Alexander, Kulikowich, & Schulze, 1994). These studies also explain that while topic knowledge often influences readers' ability to recall information from text and to answer text explicit comprehension questions, the most consistent impact of topic knowledge is on readers' abilities to respond to questions that require bridging inferences (connecting information within texts) and more global inferences

(such as understanding concepts or themes). Readers may be generally skilled at such mental operations but not able to do so when texts focus on unfamiliar topics.

**Texts.** Texts are artifacts generated by authors to communicate their ideas. Texts take many forms, drawing on multiple genres and combinations of genres. They relay vastly different content to address many kinds of purposes. They draw on a wide array of modalities (e.g., static print, nonlinear hypertext, images, videos), sometimes combining modalities into multimodal forms (e.g., print with images or links to videos). They may be printed on paper or published in digital forms. They also differ in complexity, a term that usually refers to the density and nuance of texts' ideas and language structures.

Texts are composed according to conventions tied to cultural traditions and social practices. These traditions and practices are developed within and across such disciplines as literature, science, or history. Such conventions include genre traditions of favored by disciplines and modalities that are selected because of the ways they communicate certain kinds of ideas. Texts also vary in terms of the people, points of view, and experiences that are or are not represented. This means that texts may be readily understood by readers who find the ideas familiar or compelling but more challenging to others.

**Activities.** Activities include all the things readers do as they comprehend text and communicate and apply their understanding after reading. For example, readers *read the lines*, making sense of individual propositions in a text; they *read between the lines*, drawing inferences that connect ideas in one part of the text with ideas in another; and they *read beyond the lines*, using what they know to fill in gaps and draw more global meanings, such as themes and concepts. Evidence of comprehension-related activity comes from the things readers do to communicate and apply their understanding. For example, readers discuss their understanding of text and engage in activities in which they apply their understanding, such as preparing for a debate. They offer evaluations of texts, and they apply what they learn from their reading to solve problems and act in the world. They also use foundational skills, such as decoding, word recognition, and fluency (Vorstius, Radach, Mayer, & Lonigan, 2013). While these activities enable comprehension, they do not provide direct evidence of comprehension; thus, they are not assessed in the NAEP Reading Assessment.

Reading comprehension depends on who is doing the reading, what they are reading, why and where they are reading, how they have been prepared for the reading, with whom they are reading, and what schools and society will take as evidence of successful comprehension. Because all of these factors influence a complex process like reading comprehension, assessments must be sufficiently complex in their design and implementation (Mislevy, 2016).

### ***Roots of the Definition***

The NAEP Definition of Reading Comprehension and the resulting assessment are grounded in important developments in reading comprehension theory, research, practice, and policy over the three decades since the first NAEP Reading Framework was published in 1992. This definition draws on robust features from earlier NAEP reading frameworks and research describing cognitive processes involved in reading comprehension. It also attends to recent sociocultural understandings of learning and development, disciplinary reading, and an expanding conceptualization of what counts as text in today's society.

NAEP's definitions of reading comprehension in both the 1992-2007 Reading Framework and the 2009-2019 Reading Framework reflected dominant cognitive models of their times. The Construction-Integration (C-I) Models proposed by theorists such as Kintsch (1998), Perfetti (1999), and van den Broek (van den Broek, Risen, Fletcher, Thurlow, Britton, & Graesser, 1996), are still regarded as the most valid and useful cognitive accounts of reading comprehension. These models emphasize the multiple levels of meaning readers create, including a representation of the surface form that reflects accurate decoding; a text-base that includes all of the key ideas in the text plus the text-based inferences that link ideas within texts; and a situation model that represents the integrative links readers make between ideas expressed in the text and the knowledge they bring to reading.

Although earlier frameworks were grounded in cognitive models of comprehension, they also acknowledged the importance of readers' purposes and the contexts in which they read and learned to read. In the first Reading Framework published in 1992, reading comprehension was defined as "... a complex process that involves an interaction among the reader, the text, and the context in which something is read" (p. 6). Purpose was mentioned when describing characteristics of good readers, who "can read a variety of texts for different purposes" (p. 9). The 2002 RAND Model of Reading Comprehension, which was heavily influenced by C-I models, was explicitly cited in the 2009-2019 Framework. Related to the features in the 2026 Definition of Reading Comprehension, the RAND model posited that reader, text, and activity reside in a sociocultural context, describing how "the identities and capacities of readers, the texts that are available and valued, and the activities in which readers are engaged with those texts are all influenced by, and in some cases determined by, the sociocultural context" (pp. 11-12). The 2009-2019 Framework also introduced the centrality of "using meaning as appropriate to type of text, purpose, and situation" (p. 3). The 2026 NAEP Reading Assessment will continue NAEP's longstanding focus on reading comprehension, rather than foundational skills or writing.

### ***Updating the NAEP Reading Framework***

The 2026 NAEP Reading Framework is updated to reflect three research-based developments that help to ensure that the NAEP Reading Assessment is a precise, fair, and accurate measure of reading comprehension. The first is how sociocultural experiences shape learning and development, including the learning and development of reading comprehension and, consequently, its assessment. The second is how reading varies across disciplines. The third development is the increasing use of digital and multimodal texts.

Literacy scholarship has documented that cognitive actions associated with reading comprehension reflect the language and literacy practices (broadly, any activities through which students make and communicate meaning) of schools and communities (Frankel, Becker, Rowe, & Pearson, 2016; Heath, 1982; Lee, 2017; Scribner & Cole, 1981; Smagorinsky, 2001; Street, 1984), including disciplinary communities (Goldman, et al, 2016; Moje, 2007). This insight mirrors the broad consensus that has emerged across the learning sciences that learning is sociocultural in nature (Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989; Nasir & Hand, 2006). This finding is reflected in a 2018 report of the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine [NASEM]. The report explains that "each learner develops a unique array of knowledge and cognitive resources in the course of life that are molded by the interplay of that learners' cultural, social, cognitive, and biological contexts" (NASEM, p. 33).



This NASEM finding is also reflected in other large-scale assessments. PIRLS, the international assessment of reading for fourth grade students, notes that “social interactions about reading in one or more communities of readers can be instrumental in helping young students gain an understanding and appreciation of texts and other sources of information” (Mullis & Marten, 2021, p. 7). PISA, an international assessment for many subjects for 15-year-olds, similarly states that reading “is viewed as an expanding set of knowledge, skills, and strategies that individuals build on throughout life in various contexts, through interaction with their peers and the wider community” (OECD, 2019, p. 27).

Scholars who study assessment closely (Greeno, 1998; Mislevy, 2016, 2019; Pellegrino, 2013) also note the importance of attending to contextual factors that shape student performance in any domain of expertise or learning. Measurement scholar Mislevy’s (2019) summary of the implications of recognizing these factors for educational assessment is far-reaching:

Situative, sociocognitive (SC) psychology is forcing a reconception of educational assessment. The SC perspective emphasizes the interplay between across-person linguistic, cultural, and substantive patterns that human activity is organized around and within-person cognitive resources that individuals develop to participate in activities. Rather than seeing assessment primarily as measurement, we are increasingly seeing it as an evidentiary argument, situated in social contexts, shaped by purposes, and centered on students’ developing capabilities for valued activities... Implications follow for current challenges such as assessing higher order skills, performance in digital environments, and diverse student populations. (p. 164)

This perspective builds on longstanding understandings from scholarship in psychology and education. Over 30 years ago, Cronbach (1990) predicted that the psychology of individuals would have to take into account the highly contextualized framing of learning implied by Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological approach. He noted that to fully understand individual development, psychologists and educators would have to engage in systematic analysis of the interactions among the attributes of students and the characteristics of the settings in which their learning is fostered and assessed. For many engaged in assessment, a perspective that accounts for contextual facets of the assessment space is needed to assess more complex constructs. One of these complex constructs is reading comprehension, which can be assessed with greater relevance, precision, fairness, and validity by better reflecting contemporary understandings about the nature of the process.

A second update in the 2026 NAEP Reading Framework is the recognition of recent research demonstrating that reading and texts are shaped by disciplinary contexts. While a core set of academic literacy skills and strategies can be applied across areas of study, there are important differences in disciplinary reading practices. These include differences in the genres and discourse conventions and structures of texts, what counts as explanation, argument, and evidence, and the kinds of reasoning needed to formulate new understandings (Goldman, et al., 2016; Moje, 2007; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008; Snow, 2010). These differences, which are related to the core activities in each discipline, require readers to employ different resources as they read and respond to text.

Also newly explicit in the 2026 Framework is recognition of the multimodal nature of texts used across all aspects of society. The widespread presence and rapid evolution of computers, smart devices, and software platforms have changed society’s ideas about what

counts as text and its uses. Students read digital/multimodal texts in and out of school. Even though there is a common thread to reading in print and multimodal texts, there are also substantial differences, particularly around navigation (Coiro, 2020; Hartman, Morsink, & Zheng, 2010; Serafini & Gee, 2017). The implication is that the NAEP Reading Assessment must sample multiple modes of text.

These updates allow the 2026 NAEP Reading Framework to account more precisely for how well U.S. students comprehend what they read in texts and situations that more closely approximate reading practices in today's society. By building on past frameworks and research traditions while embracing more recent developments in assessment, NAEP honors its mission of both leading and reflecting reading assessment in the nation.

### **The NAEP 2026 Reading Assessment and the Definition of Reading Comprehension**

The NAEP Definition of Reading Comprehension provides the foundation for how NAEP will assess reading comprehension. Each of the four aspects of the NAEP Definition of Reading Comprehension—contexts, readers, texts, and activities—is reflected throughout the 2026 NAEP Reading Assessment. The remainder of this chapter describes and explains key components of the NAEP Reading Assessment as well as their relationship to the definition. (See Exhibit 2.1.)

**Components.** The section begins with the core component of the assessment, the reading comprehension assessment items. After describing the items, the chapter takes on the challenge posed by Cronbach (1990) and Mislevy (2019), which is to address the variability inherent in complex domains of learning, including reading comprehension. Five additional sets of new or updated assessment components are introduced: disciplinary contexts, purposes, texts, universal design elements, and contextual variables. Taken together, these components ensure that NAEP will assess students' reading comprehension in ways that reflect the NAEP Definition of Reading Comprehension. It also allows the NAEP assessment to account for a wide range of factors that influence reading comprehension, mitigating potential bias that might result from a narrower operationalization of reading comprehension. That is, building planned variation into every facet of the assessment provides opportunities for readers with varied backgrounds to find connections to their knowledge and experiences. Although it continues to be the case that students read the same texts and complete the same tasks and that their responses are evaluated in the same way, these assessment components help to create a more equitable standardized assessment.

### ***Comprehension Items: The Role of Comprehension Targets***

As in previous NAEP assessments, the 2026 NAEP Reading Assessment will engage students in reading sets of texts and responding to questions that assess their comprehension of these texts. Comprehension Targets are used in NAEP to generate the questions, or test items, that students respond to as they take the test. Students' answers to these questions provide the observable data that NAEP uses to represent how effectively students engage in important comprehension processes, such as recalling texts and forming connections among ideas within and across texts, when reading various kinds of texts. Three of the four targets, ***Locate and Recall, Integrate and Interpret, Analyze and Evaluate***, are closely aligned with those in the 2009-2019 NAEP Reading Framework. One target, ***Use and Apply***, is an update that reflects the importance of applying comprehension to new situations.

Although different, the comprehension targets involve inferences that readers tend to find more or less challenging in general, items based on each target will range in difficulty, depending on the particulars of the questions in relation to the texts they are designed to probe. Building on the attention to vocabulary in the 2009-2019 Framework, the 2026 assessment also attends to structures of language within the comprehension targets.

**Locate and Recall.** The first set of Comprehension Targets is Locate and Recall. In order to comprehend, readers need to identify important information and form connections among ideas in the text as they move through it. In addition, readers often need to locate information to fulfill a particular purpose, aid recall, and repair understanding. These kinds of processing help readers build a literal understanding of what the text “says”.

Items assessing Locate and Recall targets typically focus on information stated directly in a single location in a text, such as a sentence, a paragraph, adjacent paragraphs, or a single graphic. However, in some cases, readers may need to navigate across different pages or documents, including hyperlinked and multimodal texts, to find additional information that is relevant to the test item. Test items might ask readers to recall or locate specific information about characters or settings in a story; or to locate a specific piece of information from a table in an expository text. Locate and Recall items can also require readers to form connections across text segments that are near one another in the text, such as fairly straightforward inferences about the relationships between ideas presented in adjacent sentences (e.g., A caused B or A occurred before B). Finally, readers may be asked to infer the meanings of unfamiliar words using information in the sentences immediately surrounding that word.

**Integrate and Interpret.** The second set of Comprehension Targets describes what students do as they Integrate and Interpret information from one or more texts. These processes can involve making connections across sentences, paragraphs, or sections within or across texts to synthesize ideas under a common theme (e.g., justice or loss) or idea (e.g., how food goes from the farm to tables in people’s houses). In making these connections, readers rely on their understanding of the ideas in the texts, their disciplinary knowledge, their knowledge of text genres, and even their knowledge of how language works to communicate ideas. In order to engage in these processes, readers may be required to navigate complex hyperlinks or multimodal elements, such as video or interactive graphics.

Test items that gauge readers’ ability to Integrate and Interpret may ask readers to compare and contrast characters and settings, examine causal and chronological relations across aspects of text, or formulate explanations for events or information in texts. For example, items may ask readers to explain or predict a character’s behavior by relying on multiple pieces of text information about that character’s history and dispositions, or they might ask readers to describe how the setting of a story contributes to the theme. Integrate and Interpret items might also ask readers to recognize how specific features of language signal relationships or viewpoints within a text. For example, readers might be asked to make judgments about characters based on the adjectives used to describe them or to rely on signal phrases (e.g., “to the contrary”) to understand the connections among ideas.

**Analyze and Evaluate.** The third Comprehension Target, Analyze and Evaluate, describes the processes associated with examining and assessing one or more texts during and after reading. Readers may analyze by closely examining the choices an author makes about content and form and how those choices affect meaning. The reader may then use those analyses

to evaluate a text by judging various aspects of the text as well as its overall effectiveness. In order to engage in Analyze and Evaluate processes, readers must view texts in relation to knowledge from other sources. Sources may include their existing knowledge base (Alexander, 2012; Lee, 2011) or common tools and criteria used in literary analysis, historical reasoning, or scientific argumentation (Lee & Spratley, 2010; Greenleaf et al., 2016; van Drie & van Boxtel, 2008). Readers also draw on their knowledge about and preferences for particular rhetorical strategies, such as the use of language, organization of text, or articulation of claims and evidence.

In items associated with the Analyze and Evaluate target, readers might be asked to evaluate the coherence, credibility, or quality of one or more texts. Readers may be asked to make judgments about the effectiveness of an author's use of figurative language, the degree to which the author provides sufficient evidence to support a claim, or the trustworthiness of the source (e.g., venue and author) (Bråten, Stadtler, & Salmerón, 2018; Meola, 2004; Ostenson, 2014; Wineburg, 1991; Wineberg & McGrew, 2017). For example, readers might use information appearing in one text as the basis for evaluating the ideas or the use of language in a second text.

**Use and Apply.** The final set of Comprehension Targets, Use and Apply, reflects the culmination of comprehension, in which understandings acquired during reading are used in new situations or applied in the development of novel ideas and products (Goldman, Greenleaf, & Yukhymenko-Lescroart, 2019; Pearson, Palincsar, Biancarosa, and Berman, 2020). This set of targets reflects contemporary understandings that comprehension may involve a series of processes that culminate in readers taking some kind of action in the world outside of text. As they engage in Use and Apply processes, readers must consider how to reframe ideas from their reading and experiences to create a new product for a specific purpose and audience (Marzano, 1988). As readers reflect on how to respond to items that require such processes, they take into account their purposes, norms established by genre and disciplinary conventions, as well as expectations about what is deemed appropriate and compelling to members of the target audience (Gee, 2001; Goldman et al, 2011; Moje, 2005).

Items designed to assess Use and Apply processes will ask readers to use information they acquire through reading to solve a problem or create a new text. For example, after reading a set of commentaries, readers might be asked to produce a blog-type message for a public audience that captures the most relevant information or offers an argument about an issue. Readers might also be asked to use one or more texts as a model for developing a new text or graphic representation. In a literature context, readers might be asked to rewrite an aspect of a story with a particular goal.

**Comprehension Targets and the NAEP Definition of Reading Comprehension.** The Comprehension Targets reflect the understanding that the extent to which a reader succeeds at particular reading tasks is dependent on many factors related to the reader's experiences, knowledge, language development, motivations, and perceptions of self. The Comprehension Targets also reflect the centrality of readers' use of reading processes, including a range of different kinds of inferential reasoning, in the meaning they construct. In developing items that target a range of knowledge and skills under conditions that replicate many aspects of authentic reading, the NAEP Reading Assessment provides a more precise and ecologically valid measure of students' reading comprehension.

## ***Contexts and Purposes***

As stated earlier in this framework, a central principle of the NAEP Definition of Reading Comprehension is that, as a human meaning-making activity, reading comprehension is a purpose-driven activity, situated within contexts that shape every aspect of readers' engagement with text and that influence how readers respond to and learn from the experience of reading. As a result of this principle, the 2026 NAEP Reading Assessment contextualizes almost every component of reading comprehension. This section describes how two expanded components of the 2026 NAEP Reading Assessment, Disciplinary Contexts and Purposes, contribute to this contextualization.

**Disciplinary Contexts.** Given recent advances in theory, research, and practice about reading within disciplines, NAEP has elevated the importance of disciplinary reading in literature, science, and social studies to reflect the increased importance of disciplinary reading in schools, state standards, and large-scale reading comprehension assessments. Students will read in each context, and their reading performance on test items will be reported by disciplinary contexts, along with an aggregate score for performance across all three. Reading in such contexts involves reading texts that are drawn from the range that students encounter when reading about literature, science and social studies. It involves engaging in tasks that yield new understanding, enable problem-solving common to such contexts, and focus on historical and contemporary social issues.

**Literature Contexts.** Perhaps more than in any other disciplinary domain, reading is the center of literary study and enjoyment. Themes of human experience pervade works of literature—nature and humanity, struggle and survival, love and friendship, loss and betrayal, victory and defeat, mortality and meaningfulness. Reading literary texts, such as poetry, fictional and nonfiction narratives, and criticism, provides opportunities for enjoyment and for reflection and analysis around these themes, including how they shed light on their own experiences and social worlds. Literature also often provides opportunities to connect with cultures and experiences similar to or different from one's own, extending readers' understandings about the world. Literature also invites its readers to examine text as a repository of language, rhetorical moves, and structure; to connect its ideas to other texts, authors and literary traditions; and to situate problems in contemporary and historical contexts.

**Science Contexts.** Science contexts are primarily focused on observing and explaining the natural world. Although these scientific activities do not depend exclusively on reading, texts play an important role in learning about and communicating science ideas in school and non-school settings. Learning the concepts and processes of science in school involves the use of varied texts to describe, report and articulate claims about the natural world (e.g., textbooks) and to record systematic efforts to act upon it (e.g., observation protocols, lab notes, experimental descriptions, journal articles). Outside of schools, individuals often access scientific information (e.g., in newspapers and on internet sites) needed to understand issues and solve problems. Moreover, the application of reading to understanding and acting upon the natural world calls on an array of reading strategies, as well as understandings about how scientists determine findings and what constitutes credible evidence for those findings.

**Social Studies Contexts.** Social studies includes history, geography, cultural studies, civics, and government, with less common forays into disciplines such as sociology and anthropology. These fields offer unique ways of thinking and organizing knowledge and

investigating social systems and events, current and past. In schools, social studies texts provide students with an intellectual context for studying how humans have interacted with each other and with the environment over time (College, Career, and Civic Life Framework for Social Studies, 2013). Social studies explores how humans organize societies and governments, how societies make use of available resources, and how cultures develop and change over time. In order to understand social studies texts, readers bring both conceptual tools needed to understand patterns in the social world (e.g., trade-offs, how perspective impacts representation) and understandings about how claims are developed and supported. Reading in social studies also requires the application of a broad range of the reading processes described in the comprehension targets.

**Purposes.** Purposes are a key component of the 2026 NAEP Reading Assessment. Purposes reflect a commitment on the part of NAEP to ensure that readers know why they are engaging in every part of the assessment, and to reflect the fact that all reading is done in relation to specific purposes. Within the disciplinary contexts described above, the assessment will be oriented toward purposes for reading, and these purposes will be communicated to students throughout the assessment.

***Broad Purposes.*** When students take the 2026 NAEP Reading Assessment, each set of readings and activities they encounter will be situated in one of two broad purposes for reading that reflect standards and curriculum frameworks across the United States—reading to develop understanding and reading to solve a problem.

*Reading to Develop Understanding* requires students to read texts carefully and respond to comprehension test items generated from the four Comprehension Targets. These items may assess students' understanding of concepts described in a science text or the development of a literary theme, for example. These purposes tend to resemble widely-used reading comprehension tests. Readers might read with the purpose of understanding the motives of a particular character in a literary text or read scientific texts to understand the significance of a public health threat.

*Reading to Solve a Problem* requires that students work across multiple texts and perspectives while solving a problem. These activities entail using information gained during text comprehension in the service of a specific action or to create a product. For example, readers might be asked to use information across four different short texts to develop an argument for or against a city ordinance requiring bicycle lanes on all city streets with a certain traffic load.

***Specific Purposes.*** In addition to these broad purposes, more specific purposes for reading particular texts or engaging in particular tasks will also be communicated to students. For example, within a Literature Context, students may be assigned a role and given a goal, such as working with task characters (avatar collaborators) in a book group to prepare a presentation about which character in a narrative behaved heroically. Or they might be asked to read a brochure for a new bicycle to evaluate how well the claims about the bicycle's qualities are supported with evidence.

**Contexts and Purposes and the NAEP Definition of Reading Comprehension.** The NAEP Definition of Reading Comprehension describes the role of contexts and purposes in shaping texts and activities related to reading comprehension. This definition relies on research documenting that, when readers taking the assessment know what they are doing, why they are doing it, and what role they are expected to play, the assessment is more likely to serve as a valid

proxy for their reading in authentic reading contexts (O'Reilly et al, 2018). Efforts to make contexts and purposes available to students stand in contrast to many widely used standardized tests of reading comprehension. In some assessments, readers are presented with individual passages and directed to read and answer questions following each passage, with little guidance about the purpose for reading and comprehending the passage. Such tests imply a purpose, namely reading to demonstrate how well one can perform on the test. But they do not explicitly connect with any activity readers might engage with outside of a testing situation. The aim of these components is to reflect the purposes, texts, activities, and resources that influence students' reading in school, home, and community settings.

### ***Texts***

Because texts are central to the NAEP Definition of Reading Comprehension, the 2026 NAEP Reading Framework recommends sampling from the large domain of texts that fourth, eighth, and twelfth graders are likely to encounter in school and non-school settings, as is described in more detail in the Design chapter. This portfolio of texts ranges from classic to contemporary text forms that characterize reading within and across varied disciplinary contexts. Texts will be selected with multiple and diverse criteria in mind: cultural diversity, disciplinary representation, and developmental appropriateness with regard to complexity, topic, and modality.

**Disciplinary Texts.** NAEP will sample texts that are used within the three broad disciplinary contexts described above: literature, science, and social studies. The features of these texts will vary by disciplinary context and include the genres, text types, discursive, rhetorical, and syntactic structural characteristics specific to texts in those disciplines. Sampling will also consider that such text features are normative rather than absolute, developed to address disciplinary purposes for their use. This means that there is overlap across disciplines regarding the kinds of texts used within disciplines.

**Literature Texts.** NAEP will draw on literary texts to reflect the range of classic and contemporary genres, text structures, literary language, and cultural traditions that students experience in their classrooms and communities. Literary texts may reflect long standing cultural traditions, like myths, short stories, novels, drama, and poetry. They can also include current evolving forms, such as fan fiction, author interviews, book reviews, and graphic novels. The challenge of reading literature is also reflected in specific discourse patterns, including word choice, sentence structure, and figurative language. Language used in literature also situates narratives in time and cultural traditions and draws on archetypal characters typical of those traditions. Literature texts may also be ironic, satirical, or narrated from a certain point of view to cue non-literal interpretations (Appleman, 2017; Lee, Goldman, Levine, & Magliano, 2016; Rabinowitz, 1987).

**Science Texts.** Science texts sampled for NAEP will reflect the formats, language, and structural elements germane to pedagogical, public, and professional science discourse whose purpose is to convey information, findings, and varied applications of scientific ideas. Science texts include technical information, such as raw data, bench notes, journals, personal communications, handbooks, refereed journal articles, and review articles (Goldman & Bisanz, 2002), as well as more general texts, including press releases, news briefs, websites, and blogs. Such texts draw on varied text structures, such as cause and effect, correlation, problem and solution, sequence, comparison, exemplification, descriptive classification, extended definition,

and analogy. Science texts also include many kinds of visuals, including tables, graphs, equations, diagrams, models, and flowcharts, as well as description, exposition, and narrative text (Cromley et al., 2010; Lemke, 1998; van den Broek, 2010). Several challenging language constructions are also common to these texts, including nominalized verbs (e.g., digest becomes digestion), passive voice (e.g., a liter of hydrochloric acid is added to the solution), and technical and specialized words (e.g., transpiration or metamorphic) (Fang & Schleppegrell, 2010; O'Hallaron, Palincsar & Schleppegrell, 2015).

***Social Studies Texts.*** NAEP will also sample from the varied forms of texts common to the social studies. Selection should represent a wide array of text types, forms of representation, sources of information, and perspectives. These texts document human activity across cultures, societies, and time periods. They include newspaper articles, diaries, letters, speeches, records of sale, advertisements, official government documents, photographs, cartoons, maps, artwork, music, and video and audio recordings. They also include interpretive books and articles about events, time periods, or people, and classroom textbooks. Social studies texts may organize ideas chronologically or thematically to represent time periods, social structures, continuity and change, cause and consequence, and varied social or historical perspectives to consider how the past influences the present (Charap, 2015; Seixas, 2010; Seixas, et al., 2015; Schreiner, 2014). Varied text structures use linguistic frames to mark arguments, persuasion, chronology, cause and effect, perspective, or comparison and contrast. Texts from long ago may even require readers to consider language and the policy contexts within which they were generated.

***Digital Platform.*** Like the 2019 NAEP Reading Assessment, the 2026 Assessment will be entirely based in a digital platform. The widespread presence of computers and smart devices in modern society has changed ideas about what counts as text. Students in school are frequently required to read literary, science, and social studies texts that reflect the digital environment, an environment that is different from the world of print on paper. On-line newspapers and magazines are replete with graphs that allow readers to simulate different scenarios and see possible outcomes when a causal factor is altered. Digital science texts now in use in schools include simulations that dynamically illustrate what happens to one human body system when variables in the other systems change.

Digital texts may be static, with no movement of the text on screen (Barron, 2015) and require readers to make sense of ideas using print and images (e.g., photographs, diagrams, tables) very much like those in a print-on-paper world. Dynamic texts require readers to follow movement across modes (e.g., between print and video or static image) or across nonlinear locations (e.g., clicking a hypertext link that moves you to another section) to construct meaning (Beach & Castek, 2016; Giroux & Moje, 2017; Kinzer & Leander, 2003; Kress, 2013; Manderino, 2012). Reading within and across multiple texts that contain both static and dynamic textual elements makes reading more complex, especially when texts contain conflicting ideas and varying stylistic features that further contribute to complexity. Readers must work actively within and across these text arrangements to construct meaning and create a situation model for a particular reading purpose.

Like the 2019 NAEP Reading Assessment, many state assessments have recently migrated to online digital platforms. Widespread use of digital texts was acknowledged by the Common Core State Standards in English Language Arts (NGA-CCSSO, 2010) and by multiple state consortia assessments (including SBAC and PARCC). Like reading in many of today's classrooms, these assessments include print texts paired with audio clips, podcasts, infographics,



and video segments. Even states that moved away from the CCSS and consortium assessments have retained standards and assessments that acknowledge widespread use of digital texts in homes, schools, and communities. Digital platforms offer a range of affordances, including increased attention to principles of Universal Design of Assessment to increase ecological validity and precision in measuring reading comprehension (Coiro, 2020; Fitzgerald, Higgs, & Palincsar, 2020).

**Text Complexity.** NAEP has long taken a multifaceted approach to assessing the complexity and accessibility of texts to determine which features of text to emphasize in selecting texts. The 2026 NAEP Reading Framework continues this approach, evaluating quantitative and qualitative features of texts, along with reader-text considerations.

Quantitative text complexity measures consider long-standing indicators of complexity, such as the type and number of features that make a text more difficult to read, including such features as familiarity of vocabulary, sentence length and complexity (e.g., Stenner, 1996; Kincaid et al, 1975), and more recent developments, such as the degree of cohesion of ideas across parts of the text, and even the degree to which a given story, for example, exemplifies the classic characteristics of a story (e.g., Graesser, et al., 2014; Sheehan, et al., 2014)

Qualitative tools include careful examination of additional discourse features and conceptual load. Examples might include evaluating the transparency of the relationships between paragraphs or sections (problem-solution, cause-effect), or assessing the quality of a definition and examples provided in a text to help students understand an unfamiliar concept. In reader-text considerations (NGA-CCSSO, 2010), NAEP considers the representativeness of texts for various subgroups by addressing the questions, “For whom, in what specific contexts, and with what levels of support are specific texts harder or easier to comprehend?” (Pearson & Hiebert, 2014). With added use of interconnected digital texts, the 2026 NAEP Reading Assessment will also capture navigational complexity (such as the number of links traversed to answer a question) to evaluate the number and nature of moves readers must make within and across digital texts (Coiro, 2020).

**Text and the NAEP Definition of Reading Comprehension.** Texts are used in the NAEP assessment in ways that tie to all other aspects of the NAEP Definition of Reading Comprehension. The assessment’s texts reflect disciplinary contexts, as well as the multiple genres and modalities, used in both school and non-school settings, as well as the many kinds of digital and multimodal texts that make up the textual diets of most students. Broad sampling increases the likelihood that all readers will encounter texts that connect to their experiences and identities, as well as those that are more distant.

### ***Universal Design Elements***

The purpose of the 2026 NAEP Reading Assessment is to measure students’ reading comprehension across a diverse range of test-takers. To help accomplish this purpose, the 2026 NAEP Reading Assessment employs principles of Universal Design of Assessments (UDA). Universal Design of Assessments (UDA) calls for the purposeful design of assessments that are accessible to the greatest number of students possible in order to accurately measure the same construct – in this case, reading comprehension – across the diversity of test takers (Thompson, Johnstone, & Thurlow, 2002; Thompson, Thurlow, & Malouf, 2004). To do this, assessments draw on design features, available to all test takers, called Universal Design Elements (UDEs).

UDEs are design elements of the assessment environment intended to help all test-takers access, organize, analyze, and express ideas when engaging in complex tasks, such as reading comprehension. As such, UDEs aid students' ability to engage with the content that is being tested by reducing the noise (what measurement scholars call construct-irrelevant variance) introduced when students lack familiarity with other aspects of assessment. For example, students might not know what the term synopsis means when it appears in a test item but could construct one if they knew it was like a summary. Or they might not be able to answer questions about the details of an obscure article but would be able to if they knew that the topic was motorcycle design. Or they might not be able to answer a vocabulary question on page 3 of a passage not because they did not know the word, but because scroll bars are a challenge for them.

Importantly, UDEs are designed to improve measurement for students across the performance spectrum rather than for only some students (Johnstone, Altman, & Thurlow, 2006). UDEs minimize but do not eliminate needs for some students' special accommodations, much like access ramps to increase building access may not enable all individuals to enter without added support. Designers validate UDEs before widespread use to ensure that purposes are reliably accomplished, enhancing precise measurement (Johnstone, 2003; Johnstone, Altman, & Thurlow, 2006).

Use of UDEs means that difficult tasks are difficult because they offer rigorous assessment of the construct being measured and not because they introduce unnecessary complexity or other construct irrelevant sources of variance. For instance, digital test features were employed in the 2019 NAEP, including a look-back button to link test items to points in passages where relevant information was provided to avoid unnecessary searching, scrolling, and page turning; specific directions for approaching the reading of a text; a resetting feature that provided a correct response to a previously answered item so readers could continue without carrying misconceptions from one item to the next; and task partners (e.g., avatar classmates or teachers) to complete tasks in simulation of many classroom assignments. Informed by the use of these features in the 2019 assessment, the 2026 NAEP Reading Assessment uses three expanded categories of UDEs: task-based, motivational, and knowledge.

**Task-based UDEs.** Task-based UDEs are designed to clarify requirements and guide readers in their use of available resources; they increase access and sustain readers' attention as they take the assessment. They clarify the expectations for readers and help them examine and use available resources within the assessment blocks (CAST, 2020; Dejong, 2006; Zhang & Quintana, 2012). They maximize the likelihood that readers are able to cognitively engage with complex NAEP-designed reading experiences within the compressed time frame of an assessment. They might include a sequential set of directions to communicate expectations for how and why readers should engage with a collection of texts; they can also help readers plan and monitor their work across multiple texts and tasks (de Jong, 2006). They might also include graphic organizers that allow readers to record and revisit their ideas, reduce time spent on searching and scrolling, and, thus, provide more time for students to read, evaluate, and engage with text content. These UDEs might also include simulated student work examples or mentor texts that offer models of approaches to tasks before students complete similar tasks independently (e.g., Sparks & Deane, 2014).

**Motivational UDEs.** Motivational UDEs are intentionally embedded into reading activities to encourage and support readers' interest, engagement and persistence, especially

when they encounter challenging tasks. These UDEs are informed by the substantial body of research that describes the beneficial influence of motivation on reading comprehension (Alton & Proctor, 2008; Buehl, 2017; CAST, 2020; Guthrie & Klauda, 2015). They may also maintain readers' interest by communicating explicit connections between the broader purpose for completing a task and the sub-tasks that need to be completed along the way. UDEs in the form of task characters provide written and/or oral directions or serve as experts or peers to provide information or moral support. Task characters may also serve as a simulated target audience with whom readers can communicate new understandings about what they have read and learned (e.g., Use and Apply). Motivational UDEs may also include the kind of resetting feature, described earlier, which has been part of NAEP since 2019.

**Knowledge-based UDEs.** Knowledge-based UDEs are designed to provide relevant information about topics, concepts, or vocabulary that students may need to make meaning from text as they read. Contemporary models of reading comprehension (Kintsch, 1998; McNamara, 2021; van den Broek & Helder, 2017) describe the significant, positive impact of readers' existing, text-relevant knowledge (especially topic knowledge) on their text comprehension. Wide variations in students' knowledge result in reading comprehension performance scores that reflect, not readers' comprehension skill, but instead their differences in background knowledge about specific topics. A reader who happens to have knowledge related to the text presented in the assessment will be better able to use the processes described in the comprehension targets as they read and respond to questions. For instance, in comprehending a text called Patagonia Glaciers, a reader who happens to have knowledge about glaciers is likely to be better able to successfully answer the comprehension questions than one who might be a skilled reader but has no relevant topic knowledge. Knowledge-based UDEs for the 2026 NAEP Reading assessment expand the use of brief passage introductions that offer topic previews in the form of brief text, videos, or photographs. The 2026 assessment continues using vocabulary pop-ups to offer on-demand definitions of untested vocabulary. Such knowledge-based UDEs, will help to address this long-standing potential source of bias in assessment, resulting in more accurate measurement of text comprehension across readers (Johnston, 1981).

***UDEs and the NAEP Definition of Reading Comprehension.*** Universal Design Elements in the 2026 NAEP Reading Assessment reflect the NAEP Definition of Reading Comprehension in several ways. UDEs enable readers to engage with topics to be read about by providing brief previews and offering instructions on how to complete assessment tasks. They also include lookback buttons and definitions of some words (only those not measured on the assessment), thus reflecting the kinds of navigational aids and tools available in typical reading situations. In addition, UDEs clarify the nature and order of tasks and expected responses. The provision of knowledge-based UDEs reflects the fact that the 2026 NAEP Reading Framework is directly addressing the decades-old concern about many reading comprehension assessments: that they assume all readers possess the same text-related background knowledge. Including these UDEs helps the NAEP assessment to better reflect the conditions of everyday reading situations.

### ***Contextual Variables***

In addition to the responses to comprehension items, NAEP also uses questionnaires to gather information about schools and students' interests and experiences. NAEP reports reading achievement to reflect these data, collectively called contextual variables. These include race/ethnicity, English language proficiency, socio-economic status, region of the country, and,

for special NAEP initiatives, large cities and districts. There are many links between these contextual variables and the NAEP Definition of Reading Comprehension. For example, NAEP has issued special reports that summarize performance according to students' habits and attitudes (e.g., How much do students like school; how often do they read for pleasure, go to the library, and/or read or write on a digital device?).

NAEP collects data to gain insight into contextual variables via questionnaires that are completed by students and school personnel. The questionnaire items offer many opportunities to gather information about students and their reading. Besides their demographic characteristics and language experiences, questionnaire items can also provide information about students' perceptions of the texts they read, their reading activities in school and community settings, and the encouragement and instructional support they receive from peers, teachers, or community agency leaders. Such information provides insights into the knowledge, interest, motivation, engagement, habits, attitudes, language competence, skills, and strategies that students bring to their reading comprehension. Reporting results solely by students' demographic characteristics might contribute to a perception that all students within each demographic group are the same. For example, reporting results by students' race/ethnicity might lead the public to infer that the achievement differences between racial groups are attributable only to students themselves rather than to the opportunities to learn which have been presented to them. These ideas are described more fully in Chapter 4. Therefore, additional information is important for contextualizing and better understanding the circumstances in which low-performing readers learn.

By providing more nuanced reports that display variability within groups, and by measuring disparities in resources and opportunities to learn, the 2026 NAEP Reading Assessment seeks to make variability within groups and explanatory variables associated with reading performance more visible. Instead of portraying student groups as unitary and homogeneous, this approach will yield a more nuanced and complete measure to better understand reading disparities as the result of a complexity of factors. (For more information about reporting contextual variables, see [Chapter 4](#).)

The digital format, which has been implemented starting in 2017, also allows NAEP to capture students' time on tasks and navigational moves as they complete the assessment. The process data now available because of the data gathering assets of the digital platform can provide information about student journeys through the texts, directions, UDEs, and items students traverse during the assessment. From these data, NAEP can construct indicators about how students direct their attention (including moment by moment shifts in focus), and how long (or how little) they linger on different segments of the texts, the items, the UDEs, or the directions. These indicators can be used to help interpret performance difference in a richer context (Guthrie & Humenick, 2004; Guthrie & Klauda, 2015).

**Contextual Variables and the NAEP Definition of Reading Comprehension.** There are many links between the NAEP Definition of Reading Comprehension and the contextual variables. In general, the questionnaire items allow NAEP to better understand the relationship between performance and different student variables: (a) demographic data (race/ethnicity, SES, or community type), (b) perceptions about themselves as readers, or (c) their experiences in school and community contexts. The process data allow NAEP to connect performance to cognitive activities such as attention. Using this information to contextualize results allows for more accurate interpretations of student performances.

## Summarizing the Relationship Between the Definition and Assessment Components

This chapter has described the NAEP Definition of Reading Comprehension and the NAEP Reading Assessment, and the relationship between them. Exhibit 2.1 summarizes these relationships, demonstrating how current understanding of reading comprehension, as embodied in the Definition of Reading Comprehension that opens this chapter, is represented in NAEP through the components of the assessment.

Chapter 3 takes the next step by describing the structure of the assessment and illustrating the use of key design principles and practices that will allow NAEP test developers to create an assessment that includes the components described here.

### Exhibit 2.1. Relationships Between the NAEP Definition of Reading Comprehension Definition and the NAEP Reading Assessment

	Features of the NAEP Definition of Reading Comprehension			
Assessment Components	Contexts	Readers	Texts	Activities
<b><i>Comprehension Items</i></b>	Reflect a view of the outcomes of reading as influenced by factors within and outside of the assessment.	Address an array of skills and strategies related to comprehension, including literal, inferential, analytical, and critical responses along with items that ask students to apply ideas in the texts.	Query different types of comprehension within and across texts and different aspects of the texts, including local and global features and meanings.	Attend to disciplinary contexts, purposes, and text challenges to determine how items will reflect the four comprehension targets.
<b><i>Contexts and Purposes</i></b>	Invoke rich contexts (discipline-related and otherwise) as a way of situating reading in settings that involve reading comprehension.	Communicate purposes for reading, introduce social elements, such as a digital “guide” or peers, and enhance engagement by focusing on contemporary issues.	Include varied texts that align with disciplinary contexts and purposes.	Establish authentic contexts, structures, and purposes for reading and formulate tasks that are aligned with those purposes.
<b><i>Disciplinary Contexts Purposes</i></b>				

	<b>Features of the NAEP Definition of Reading Comprehension</b>			
<b>Assessment Components</b>	Contexts	Readers	Texts	Activities
<b><i>Texts</i></b>	Include a variety of texts that represent a range of cultural traditions, disciplinary contexts, and reading purposes.	Select texts that are broadly representative of varied cultural traditions, backgrounds, experiences, and identities.	Include texts from a wide range of genres, modalities, formats, and disciplinary traditions.	Include varied texts that align with the disciplinary contexts, broad purposes, and genres appropriate for the block.
<i>Disciplinary Texts</i>				
<i>Digital Texts</i>				
<i>Text Complexity</i>				
<b><i>Universal Design Elements</i></b>	Reflect the kinds of resources that are commonly available during reading in school and community contexts.	Provide previews of the topics, information about unknown words that are not the focus of the assessment items, and instructions on how to complete assessment tasks, allowing readers to engage in more challenging reading tasks.	Increase broad access to texts, such as providing definitions of key words not measured on the assessment and offering lookback buttons.	Provide information that clarifies the nature and order of tasks and expected responses.
<b><i>Contextual Variables</i></b>	Gather information about the contexts of readers' lives and experiences in and out of school.	Gather information about demographics, motivation, and in- and out-of-school reading practices.	Gather information about the amount and kinds of texts that readers encounter in and out of school settings.	Gather information about reading activities that readers commonly engage in at school and outside of school.
<i>Questionnaire Items</i>				

	<b>Features of the NAEP Definition of Reading Comprehension</b>			
<b>Assessment Components</b>	Contexts	Readers	Texts	Activities
<i>Process variables</i>	Compare pathways when reading in different disciplinary contexts and for different purposes.	Track each participant's navigation through the assessment—reading texts and responding to items.	Compare pathways through the assessment when employing different sorts of texts.	Compare pathways for different sorts of items, both format and Comprehension Targets.

### ***CHAPTER 3: DEVELOPING THE 2026 NAEP READING ASSESSMENT***

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This chapter describes the assessment design components that contribute to best educational measurement practices, as outlined by the National Research Council (2001; AERA/APA/NCME, 2014) and used in previous NAEP Reading assessments (National Assessment Governing Board, 2019). These practices include incrementally augmenting current assessment design with features that are carefully tested and refined over time: a hallmark of NAEP development practices since the inception of the assessment.

The chapter is divided into three sections. The first section provides an overview of considerations related to developing block components of the 2026 NAEP Reading Assessment. This involves situating readers within a disciplinary context, a broad purpose, and a specific purpose and role for each block. The second section discusses the task components and how they can be used to expand the ways in which readers are asked to demonstrate their ability to engage in the comprehension processes outlined in [Chapter 2](#). Task components include texts and comprehension items. The third section details considerations for using digital assessment features, including Universal Design Elements (UDEs), process data, and item formats in line with principles of validity, fairness, and inclusivity (Thompson, Johnstone, & Thurlow, 2002). Overall, the design considerations outlined in this chapter are intended to enable the 2026 NAEP Reading Assessment to allow the greatest number of students to participate in ways that result in more valid inferences about their comprehension performance as situated in purposeful, disciplinary contexts.

#### **Situating Readers Within Assessment Blocks**

A block is the largest organizational unit for the 2026 NAEP Reading Assessment. In a typical NAEP reading session, test-takers engage in two grade appropriate blocks. The design of every block involves situating readers within a *disciplinary context*, a *broad purpose for reading*, and a *specific purpose and role* for the reader working through the block.

#### ***Designating Disciplinary Context***

All blocks will sample from a range of grade-appropriate texts within one of three disciplinary contexts, including literature, science, or social studies contexts. The primary context for each block will be identified according to one of these contexts so that NAEP can report reading performance scales for each of these disciplinary contexts, along with an aggregate scale for performance across all three contexts. In some cases, a block may contain texts associated with more than one disciplinary context. In these cases, the block is designed as both a primary reading context that shapes the overall reading purpose and a secondary context identified by one or more interdisciplinary or cross-disciplinary topics or genres. The distribution of disciplinary contexts by grade level varies according to the approximate amount of time that students in the U.S. are engaged in the respective contexts at grade levels 4, 8 and 12. Exhibit 3.1 shows the design principle and provisional distribution targets for sampling disciplinary contexts at each grade level.



**Exhibit 3.1. Principle and Provisional Distribution Targets for Sampling Disciplinary Contexts by Grade Level**

<b>Principle for Sampling Disciplinary Contexts:</b> The percentage of Literature decreases across grades as the percentage of Science and Social Studies increases				
Grade Level		4	8	12
Disciplinary Context	Literature	50	40	33
	Science	25	30	33
	Social Studies	25	30	33

***Designating a Broad Reading Purpose***

In addition to situating readers in one of the three disciplinary contexts, each assessment block is also designated as having one of two broad purposes: Reading to Develop Understanding or Reading to Solve a Problem. Situating reading in purpose-driven tasks has demonstrated potential for promoting student readers' interest and engagement in existing NAEP reading assessments (Educational Testing Service, 2019).

Reading to Develop Understanding (RDU) blocks are designed to measure what readers do when asked to deeply read and comprehend—literally, inferentially, interpretively, and critically—in or across disciplinary contexts. Reading to Solve a Problem (RSP) blocks are designed primarily to assess what readers do when asked to demonstrate understanding across multiple texts and related perspectives while solving a problem. Reading to Solve a Problem activities entail developing understanding, or comprehending text, but in the service of using this understanding to take a specific action or create a product, such as a written explanation or a classroom presentation.

In both types of blocks, these broad purposes are intended to help readers prepare for reading in order to develop understanding or to solve a problem. The design principle and provisional distribution targets for sampling broad purposes by grade level are depicted in Exhibit 3.2.

**Exhibit 3.2. Principle and Provisional Distribution Targets for Sampling Broad Reading Purposes by Grade Level**

<b>Principle for Sampling Broad Purposes.</b> The percentage of Reading to Develop Understanding (RDU) blocks decreases across grades as the percentage of Reading to Solve a Problem (RSP) blocks increases				
Grade Level		4	8	12
Broad Reading Purpose	RDU	<b>60</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>40</b>
	RSP	<b>40</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>60</b>

***Identifying Specific Purposes and a Reader Role***

Both RDU and RSP blocks also have specific purposes with reader roles that shape how and why readers engage with the tasks, texts, and comprehension items in one of the three disciplinary contexts. These specific purposes differ from the broad block purposes (i.e., RDU or RSP) because the duration of their guidance is limited to the text or texts within a given task in the assessment block. Test developers for the 2026 NAEP Reading Assessment will craft these purpose-driven statements with an eye toward reflecting the real-world contexts and purposes for which readers engage with and make sense of a diverse range of texts.

Reader roles are designed to reflect how readers typically engage with texts and each other in different contexts (e.g., fourth grade classmates and a teacher in a literature circle discussion at school, a group of friends at home reacting to news about a local event in their town). Some blocks may ask readers to take on a simpler, less immersive role that offers fewer specifications for the kinds of tasks with which readers will engage. Other blocks may assign readers to take on more immersive roles that offer more specifications for how readers should engage with the reading purpose, tasks, and expected outcomes.

Specific purposes and reader roles are explicitly shared with test-takers as part of the directions at one or more locations in the block. Exhibit 3.3 depicts an example of what readers might see when they begin the Grade 4 Reading to Develop Understanding block in a literature context. In this block, readers are invited to participate in a book discussion group about the short story *Hana Hashimoto, Sixth Violin* by Chieri Uegaki with three other fourth grade student task characters (simulated avatar classmates) .

In addition to reading directions about the discussion goal, students are told they will read parts of the story and respond to items situated in three purpose-driven tasks. Because test-takers encounter additional texts and items in different parts of the block, more specific purposes may be given to situate their work on particular comprehension items in the context of each new text. Note, in this example, each additional text is an excerpt from the same story.

The goal of the 2026 NAEP Reading Framework is to immerse readers in discipline-specific blocks for which both reading purpose and reader role are transparent to better simulate the situations in which most readers find themselves in school, workplace, and community situations.

**Exhibit 3.3. Task-specific purposes presented at the beginning of a Grade 4 Reading to Develop Understanding block using the text *Hana Hashimoto, Sixth Violin* (a short story) by Chieri Uegaki**


**Introduction**

You will read a book called *Hana Hashimoto, Sixth Violin* by Chieri Uegaki. After you read the story, you will participate in a small discussion group with three classmates to understand how Hana changes over the course of the story as a result of events involving her family.




To prepare for the book discussion, you will read the story while completing three tasks.

1. Identify important events in the story and consider what these events say about the characters.
2. Learn more about Hana and other important characters from their words, feelings, and actions in the story.
3. Use your understanding of the characters to predict what might happen after the story ends.

Your teacher for this project will be Mr. Beadle



You will work with three classmates in your discussion group: Brian, Diana, and Michael

**Developing Assessment Tasks: Texts and Items**

After readers are situated in the assessment block, they encounter two or more tasks, each with its own specific purpose. A task is a subunit within each block on the 2026 NAEP Reading Assessment. Each NAEP reading block has 2-3 tasks, one or more texts, and related comprehension items. Developers take into consideration time, total passage length, and grade appropriateness when determining the number of texts in each assessment block. Extended pieces of literature or a full argumentative essay might result in only one text with one or two tasks. Shorter texts such as a haiku poem, photograph, search engine result, or Twitter post might result in more than one text for a particular task.

For example, Exhibit 3.4 from an ePIRLS Grade 4 assessment block illustrates how several texts are embedded into one screen to authentically represent the array of texts young readers encounter when reading on the Internet; these texts include a webpage with two tabs and a navigational menu, an embedded hyperlink (which is the source of the answer as displayed in the blue pop-up box when the link is selected), a photo of a rocket, a photo of Mars' surface, a dynamic image of two planets spinning around the sun, and an advertisement with a hyperlink button that leads readers away from the relevant information. The item is intended to assess fourth graders' understanding of how to use embedded hyperlinks to locate and recall important information about the passage.

**Exhibit 3.4. Example of multiple texts readers encounter as part of one task on the ePIRLS (2016) Grade 4 reading assessment**

The screenshot displays the ePIRLS Online Reading 2016 interface. On the left, a vertical progress bar shows items 1 through 20. The main content area features a website titled "Mars Exploration Program" with a navigation bar including "Home", "Getting to Mars", "Missions", "Seeking Signs of Life", and "Rover Called Curiosity". The "Getting to Mars" section is active, showing the text "What does it take to get to Mars?" followed by two paragraphs: "First, you need a very powerful rocket." and "Second, you need to plan a long time ahead." Below this is a paragraph explaining orbital mechanics and a diagram of Earth and Mars orbits. A sidebar on the right encourages users to "YOU CAN BE A STAR!" and "HAVE A STAR NAMED AFTER YOU OR A FRIEND!" with a "Be A Star!" button. On the far right, the "ePIRLS Class Project" sidebar shows two tasks: Task 8, "Why do scientists keep trying to explore Mars?", and Task 9, "According to the website, what is an orbit?". Both tasks have a "SAVED" button and a "Student" response area.

All grade-appropriate blocks will sample from a variety of task-specific purposes and a range of texts, including reading materials that students might use in their everyday lives, in and out of school (see, for example, Creer, 2018; Dobler & Azwel, 2007). The texts can represent one or more genres, modalities, or disciplines.

**Selecting Texts**

**Text Selection Criteria.** Passages in the 2026 NAEP Reading Assessment are selected using rigorous criteria that include:

- **Authenticity.** Do texts represent the types of texts that students encounter in their reading in and out of school?
- **Diversity.** Do texts reflect an appropriate range of perspectives, geographical regions, gender, and social and cultural traditions characteristic of the diverse U.S. population, and are they written by diverse authors?
- **Engagement.** Will texts encourage and maintain student interest?
- **Developmental appropriateness.** Do the texts reflect grade level expectations of the students assessed at grades 4, 8, and 12?
- **Disciplinary appropriateness.** Do the texts represent the range of genres/text types and text features in the disciplinary contexts of Literature, Science, or Social Studies?
- **Quality and coherence.** Are the texts well-written and considerate, organized in ways that promote comprehension and learning?

- **Complexity.** Are the language features (vocabulary, syntax, discourse and rhetorical structures) representative of the specific grade and disciplinary context?

Several of these text selection criteria are elaborated below with a number of principles and design considerations.

**Authenticity.** Most texts included in NAEP Reading will be presented in their entirety, as students would typically encounter them. However, some texts may be excerpted from a novel or a long essay. Excerpted material will be carefully analyzed, and minimally altered if necessary, to ensure that it is coherent in structure. Texts will be selected to evoke the range of reading comprehension processes, or targets. Only in exceptional cases, NCES and its contractors may consider commissioning authors to write a text that satisfies the needs of a particular assessment block. For example, it might become highly challenging to find a text of a particular length that is suitable for a specific grade level for a RSP purpose. In the exceptional cases in which commissioned writing may be required, it should follow the text selection criteria applied to authentic texts. In very rare cases, then, commissioned texts may be used as part of a set of texts.

**Developmental Appropriateness of Texts.** Texts included in the assessment will be of different lengths. In grade 4, passage lengths will range from 200-800 words, in grade 8 from 400-1000 words and in grade 12 from 500-1500 words [See Exhibit 1 in Appendix A](#). Differing passage lengths are employed for several reasons, including the total time readers have to complete the block. To gain valid information about students' reading comprehension, stimulus material should be as similar as possible to what students use in their in-school and out-of-school reading. Unlike many common reading tests that use short passages, the 2026 NAEP Reading Assessment will include complete texts of greater length. Such texts require students to use a broader and more complex array of reading strategies, reflecting student reading in authentic in- and out-of-school situations (Goldman, 2018; Paris, Wasik, and Turner 1991).

Reflecting classroom practice, students in earlier grades generally read shorter texts while older students read longer texts. It is expected that in some cases, two or more texts (with static and/or dynamic textual features) will be used together to assess students' ability to compare, synthesize, and critique texts in terms of their content, themes, and stylistic features. In these cases, the total number of words will reflect the recommended passage length range for each grade.

Because videos may be used in NAEP assessments built from the 2026 NAEP Reading Framework, some attention should be given to video length. The length of a video segment will vary in relation to its purpose and to overall block time. Video length may also increase across grade levels. However, because students have greater engagement and perceived retention rates for shorter as compared to longer videos (Slemmons et al., 2018), video length should generally be kept relatively short, especially compared to the length of other written texts within the task.

**Disciplinary Appropriateness of Texts.** Selected texts must be representative of the discipline in both content and structure, reflecting the range of genres and discourse features detailed in [Chapter 2](#). Because reporting prompted by the 2026 NAEP Reading Framework will feature scales for the three disciplinary contexts, it is also important to specify both the variability of student reading within contexts and the commonalities across each context. Based on the account provided in [Chapter 2](#) of the range of text types, text structures, and text features, Exhibit 2 in Appendix A shows important textual elements that characterize texts in each of the

disciplinary contexts, while acknowledging that many text features are common across disciplines. A responsibility of test developers, as they build the portfolio of test blocks and tasks at each grade level, is to try to incorporate the entire array of text types and features in the blocks for each grade level. See *Assessment and Item Specifications for the 2026 NAEP Reading Framework* for more details.

**Standards for Cohesion and Complexity of Texts.** Efforts should also be made to promote the strategic balance and selection of texts across blocks. This process should be informed by general standards of quality, coherence, complexity and “considerateness” (e.g., conventional readability criteria, reader-text connections, language structures and vocabulary considerations; Anderson & Armbruster, 1984) and reflect contemporary standards applied to digital texts and other contemporary media forms. Because readers use specific knowledge to identify important information in different types of texts, developers attend to variations in organization and cohesion in line with common text structures and text features that are found across disciplinary contexts (see Exhibit 3 in Appendix A). Test developers should strive to select texts with features that cue readers’ attention to structure and influence the recall of information (Wixson & Peters, 1987).

The extent to which readers’ background knowledge, experiences, and interests connect to a text and its topic will also be considered when evaluating a text’s complexity, suggesting that a text is not just complex “in the abstract” but more or less complex for particular groups of readers under specific circumstances (Valencia, et al., 2014). Textual ideas in disciplinary contexts should be represented with appropriate vocabulary and, where needed, texts should have useful supplemental explanatory features such as definitions of technical terms or orthographic features (italics, bold print, headings) and connective signal words (e.g., first, next, because, however). Unfamiliar concepts should be defined with examples provided. Designers should aim for a flexible and diverse representation of language and structures across the blocks.

There is also wide variance in the nature and quality of graphical or multimodal displays of ideas in today’s texts. Therefore, in selecting texts, it is important to create a sample that represents the grade-appropriate array of graphical and structural representations (e.g., static, dynamic, multimodal, nonlinear) found in print and digital reading materials. As well, texts often appear, and are used in sets. Thus, it is important to determine grade-appropriate numbers of texts, and the opportunities for readers to engage with ideas within different sections of the same text as well as to process ideas across two or more texts.

A potential difference between traditional and digital texts is the nature of text arrangement and the means with which readers navigate through and across texts (Cho, 2014). In selecting digital texts, it is important to attend to the features that allow for navigating complex textual environments (e.g., search engines, dynamic hypertexts linked within and across documents) to reflect what readers do when they use the Internet. Further, digital texts represent diverse combinations of the information contained in text and the media used to present that information. For example, a digital text may include short (e.g., 30 second), embedded video and links to other sources of information. Thus, it is important to determine that the ideas, perspectives and modes presented in digital media reflect what readers encounter in their academic and everyday lives.

### *Developing Comprehension Items*

**Design Principles.** As with the selection of texts, item development is guided by a set of design principles in order to guarantee that readers are asked to respond to important aspects of the text and to use a range of processes that result in successful comprehension. These design principles include:

- **Importance.** Items should focus on central textual and intertextual concepts or themes or, on occasion, more specific information related to these themes and concepts. For example, a fact that provides evidence to support a claim or a detail that supports a main idea may be queried.
- **Balance.** The comprehension targets, as described in [Chapter 2](#), should be proportionally distributed across dimensions of the block (see [Exhibit 4 in Appendix A](#)):
  - across grade levels.
  - across the disciplinary contexts of literature, science, and social studies.
  - across broad purposes of blocks.

While the percentage of comprehension targets may vary across these dimensions, items representing all comprehension targets should be represented at all levels of these dimensions.

- **Clarity and transparency.** Items should be accessible and transparent. They should be written in accessible, straightforward language, and accompanied by directions that clearly explain what steps readers should take during the activities (e.g., which texts to read and for what purpose) and how their responses will be evaluated.
- **Alignment with an array of skills of navigation and inference.** Across items and in accordance with the focus of the comprehension targets, items should call upon readers to locate information in different textual environments (e.g., static and dynamic) and to make different kinds of inferences, from local bridging inferences to more complex inferences across texts and applications of knowledge to a new situation (e.g., Use and Apply). As such, audio and visual texts will have items associated with them.
- **Varied knowledge sources.** Items should invoke a variety of knowledge sources in accordance with the comprehension targets in a given assessment block. Across items, readers should be called upon to employ certain kinds of background knowledge (e.g., knowledge of vocabulary and language structures, knowledge of text structures and features) and to draw information from different sources in the texts (including information at various types of representation [e.g. directly stated in prose, embedded in a visual representation, or implied through symbolism] and across different locations in the text). On the other hand, items should not assess knowledge sources irrelevant to the items and associated comprehension targets in a given block. For example, items should *not* ask readers to draw upon text-independent domain knowledge, topic knowledge, knowledge of technical vocabulary or idiomatic expressions, or conceptual or domain knowledge in particular subject areas. Knowledge-based UDEs are therefore incorporated into given blocks to maximize students' ability to engage with the content that is being tested. Thus, knowledge-based UDEs are designed to reduce the noise associated with



knowledge sources not being assessed in a given block and also provide orientations to the topical knowledge addressed in the text(s).

**Planning the Distribution and Characteristics of Comprehension Items.** The four comprehension targets do not represent a hierarchy of strategies or skills. The difficulty of any particular item, regardless of which comprehension target it is designed to elicit, should be shaped by the content of text(s) (the ideas themselves), the language and structure of the text (the language and relations among ideas), and the cognitive demands of the comprehension target. As a consequence, there can be relatively difficult items representing Locate and Recall comprehension targets and relatively easy items representing either Integrate and Interpret or Analyze and Evaluate targets. The single most important standard that the 2026 NAEP Reading Assessment will meet is asking questions about matters of substance in the texts. [Chapter 2](#) contains examples of what test items might ask readers to do with respect to each of the four comprehension targets.

[Exhibit 4 in Appendix A](#) presents guidelines for distributing items mapped to comprehension targets across grade level and blocks. These flexible distributions allow for the possibility of varying the number of items for each target depending on block type. One broad principle is that the percentage of items designed to assess Integrate and Interpret or Analyze and Evaluate ideas increases across grades. In addition, in Reading to Solve a Problem (RSP) blocks, the percentage of items designed to assess Locate and Recall ideas decreases across grades as the percentage of Use and Apply ideas increases. Finally, the distribution targets should never outweigh the other principles in the bulleted list. In other words, for a given text, it is better to fall one item short in the number of items for a target than it is to include one that fails the importance or the clarity standard just for the sake of meeting the distribution goal.

**Considering Navigational Complexity of Texts, Tasks, and Items.** Developers should also consider the *navigational complexity of text* as it interacts with the reading task and the specific demands of the comprehension items attached to the text(s) within tasks (see Coiro, 2020). Comprehension items may, for example, vary in difficulty according to the nature of associated comprehension processes (e.g., locating a topically relevant idea is likely easier than inferring the tone of a particular passage or analyzing the impact of an author’s word choice on a particular audience). Further, comprehension items may vary in difficulty due to the nature of inferences readers are asked (or required) to make; that is, the *type* of inference (a local, straightforward inference within a paragraph vs. a global inference across ideas in a text) combined with the *number* (one or multiple) and the *distance* of these inferences (within one text, across two texts, or beyond the text) introduce variations in task and item demands that impact the difficulty of a particular comprehension item on the reading assessment. Thus, test developers will follow guidelines from the *Assessment and Item Specifications for the 2026 NAEP Reading Framework* to estimate levels of navigational complexity across an activity block as shaped by the number, levels, and types of inferences as well as the nature of texts, tasks, items, and response types included. In turn, estimated difficulty levels can be used to inform the development of future NAEP reading tasks as NAEP learns more about how reader attributes interact with various task demands to influence comprehension performance.

**Language Structures and Vocabulary in the Comprehension Items.** Language structures and vocabulary in the 2026 NAEP Reading Framework refers to the application of the reader’s understanding of individual words, grammatical structures, and discourse structures characteristic of grade-appropriate texts to text comprehension. Specifically, the 2026 NAEP



Reading Assessment will include items designed to evaluate readers' application of their knowledge of useful grade-appropriate words and language structures to their understanding of a text or a set of texts (see [Exhibit 5 in Appendix A](#)). Because these items target readers' application of the meaning of highly useful language found across grade-appropriate texts to text comprehension, testing items will exclude language known to be part of students' everyday oral proficiency, rare words of limited application across grade-appropriate texts, discipline-specific concepts, and idiomatic expressions characteristic of particular cultural and idiosyncratic discourse practices.

A maximum of 15-20 percent of items in any assessment block will assess readers' application of passage-relevant Language Structures and Vocabulary to text comprehension, while concurrently measuring a specific comprehension process. Due to the intricate relation between language understanding and text comprehension, language structures and vocabulary will not be measured independently from comprehension targets. Instead, they will be doubly coded for Comprehension Target (e.g., Locate and Recall; or Integrate & Interpret) and Language Structures and Vocabulary.

*A note on open-ended responses.* Whereas measuring students' understanding of passage-relevant grade-appropriate language is crucial, it is also important not to confuse language dexterity with the demonstration of text understanding in open-ended responses. Thus, consistent with the 2009-2019 NAEP Reading Assessments, the 2026 NAEP Reading Assessment will generate scoring rubrics and training for scorers that are language-conscious so that students are not erroneously penalized for language features irrelevant to the comprehension processes being assessed (for example, a student's written answer that displays accurate comprehension should not be negatively affected by uses of unconventional grammar or misspelled words).

### ***Digital Assessment Features: The Role of Item Response Options, UDEs, and Process Data***

An essential goal of the 2026 NAEP Reading Framework is establishing valid assessment tasks that can reliably measure diverse students' real-world reading comprehension. In the 2026 NAEP Reading Assessment, this goal is accomplished in two ways. First, all test components are designed to support ecological validity, which refers to the extent to which assessment elicits students' reading performance as it would be demonstrated in real-world settings. Newer, digital tools in particular allow assessments to situate cognitive acts of reading, to the extent possible, in complex but authentic home, school, and work reading contexts and to do so in ways that are ecologically valid (Mislevy, 2016). Second, by employing newer, digital tools, the 2026 NAEP Reading Assessment supports construct validity by providing more accurate interpretations of test results, thereby increasing the potential validity of scores across the diversity of test takers (c.f., Mislevy, 2016; Thompson et al., 2002).

To undertake these aims, the 2026 NAEP Reading Assessment is grounded in Universal Design of Assessments (UDA). As described in Chapter 2, UDA calls for the purposeful design of assessments that are accessible to the greatest number of students possible in order to accurately measure the same construct across the diversity of test takers (Thompson, Johnstone, & Thurlow, 2002; Thompson, Thurlow, & Malouf, 2004). See Exhibit 3.5 for an overview of UDA principles. The NAEP 2026 Reading Assessment employs UDA (Johnstone et al., 2006; Thompson et al., 2002) to select from a broad range of digital assessment features in order to design an assessment from which stakeholders can make more valid interpretations of assessment scores for all test-takers. Such digital assessment features include the purposeful

selection of item response formats, universal design elements, and process data, as described in each of the next three sections. See Exhibit 3.6 for an overview of how these digital features, as well as other aspects of the 2026 NAEP Reading Assessment, align with principles of UDA.

### Exhibit 3.5. Seven Principles of Universal Design of Assessments (UDA)

Principle Number and Name*	Description of Principle
<b>1. Inclusive Assessment Population</b>	This principle supports equitable participation in, and use of, assessments. Assessments should measure the performance of a wide range of students reflective of the population the assessment aims to represent. The assessment should do so in a way that ensures that students with diverse characteristics have opportunities to “demonstrate competence on the same content” (Johnstone et al., 2002, p. 6). This does not mean that the test will be less rigorous or that content should be altered. Rather, this is achieved through accessibility of content using diverse formats (e.g., item formats), technological tools (e.g., Universal Design Elements, or UDEs), and designs that include diverse test-takers.
<b>2. Precisely Defined Constructs</b>	Precisely defined constructs help to ensure that an assessment measures the construct it intends to measure rather than aspects not part of that construct, which creates construct-irrelevant variance. Without a precisely defined construct, it is hard to know whether items and other design features work towards measuring the intended construct or whether they might, in fact, be measuring something else.
<b>3. Accessible, Non-biased Items</b>	The purpose of this principle is to ensure that all test takers can access the content being assessed so that items measure the same construct for all students who take the assessment (i.e., items are “non-biased”). For example, if a passage contains a highly culturally-situated term that might be more familiar to some sub-populations of test takers (e.g., to boys more than to girls), this might unfairly advantage these students, resulting in inaccurate measurement across these subpopulations. Bias is measured statistically by comparing the difficulty of items across subpopulations of students.
<b>4. Amenable to Accommodations</b>	This principle refers to the physical design of the test (e.g., font, colors, graphics) being easily accessible for students’ sensory abilities or easily modified (e.g., avoiding vertical text allows for the easier modification of written text into Braille).
<b>5. Simple, Clear, and Intuitive Instructions and Procedures</b>	In accordance with this principle, instructions and procedures of an assessment should be easily understandable regardless of a student’s background (e.g., experience, knowledge, language use, concentration level). Instructions that use clear, simple language that is consistent across the assessment serve to maximize the ability of the assessment to measure the intended construct.

<b>6. Maximum Readability and Comprehensibility</b>	This principle refers to the ability of a text to be understood by all test takers so that readability does not interfere with the measurement of other content (e.g., on a math test, a student’s ability to read an item stem does not make it harder for them to complete the task).
<b>7. Maximum Legibility</b>	This principle refers to test elements (e.g., text, tables, figures, illustrations, and response formats) being easily understood. Developers should consider elements such as contrast, type size, spacing, and typeface when developing a test that is as understandable as possible.

\*These UDA principles are drawn from Thompson et al., 2002, where they are referred to as “elements” (see page 6).

### Exhibit 3.6 Alignment of the 2026 NAEP Reading Assessment With Principles of Universal Design of Assessments (UDA)

UDA Principle*	Alignment of Aspects of the 2026 NAEP Reading Assessment with UDA Principles
<b>1. Inclusive Assessment Population</b>	<p><b><i>Inclusive Population Assessed in NAEP Reading:</i></b> NAEP Reading aims to measure <i>reading comprehension</i> in a way that represents <i>all</i> students within the U.S. population at grades 4, 8, and 12 by not excluding any groups from sampling.</p> <p><b><i>UDEs</i></b> UDEs minimize bias while supporting construct validity by activating students’ knowledge, interest, and understanding of tasks across the diverse range of test-takers, helping to ensure that all students can access and understand the items. This supports the ability of the assessment to measure the same construct for all students, aligning with UDA Principles 1, 2 and 3.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Task-based UDEs facilitate students’ ability to focus limited cognitive resources on the assessment tasks and items by providing clear instructions about what to do during the task (but not how to do it).</li> <li>• Motivational UDEs activate interest in the topics of texts and tasks, eliciting motivational processes that typically occur in out-of-test reading situations and thus improving validity of assessment items.</li> <li>• Knowledge-based UDEs preview untested topic knowledge and provide definitions for vocabulary not intended to be assessed (e.g., a term not assumed to be possessed by <i>all</i> students). This maximizes the extent to which the assessment can measure the same, intended construct for all, diverse test-takers by minimizing the possibility that one group is advantaged over another and facilitating better measurement for all test-takers.</li> </ul>

<p><b>2. Precisely Defined Constructs</b></p>	<p><b><i>Definition of Reading Comprehension:</i></b> Chapter 2 of the framework defines the construct of <i>reading comprehension</i> and explains how this construct is operationalized using the comprehension targets as situated within the disciplinary contexts and broad purposes. This clearly defined construct helps to ensure that the assessment is measuring what it intends to measure (i.e., construct validity) by outlining exactly what is included and not included, helping to ensure that items can capture this construct and not elements outside of this construct.</p> <p><b><i>Reader Roles Support Ecological and Construct Validity:</i></b> Reader roles are designed to situate the reader within a disciplinary context and broad purpose, as readers would be during out-of-test reading activities. While assessments can never perfectly measure the constructs they intend to measure as those constructs exist in reality, assessments aim to do so to the extent possible (i.e., ecological validity). In so doing, this also supports construct validity, in alignment with the “precisely defined constructs” called for in UDA Principle 2. Situating the reader within a disciplinary context and broad purpose also allows the reader to access the content being measured because it activates the reader’s prior understandings relevant to those disciplinary contexts and purposes, allowing for more precise measurement of the construct.</p> <p><b><i>Specific Purposes:</i></b> Situating readers within specific purposes (e.g., a reader is asked to read a story and participate in a book discussion) activates readers’ prior understanding of what it means to read within a given task purpose and in so doing facilitates their ability to engage in the items and tasks. Specific purposes also help make clear to the reader what they are supposed to do with the texts and why. This aligns with “precisely defined constructs” because the specified purposes enable the assessment to do a better job of measuring the student’s ability to engage with the construct and not, for example, their ability to figure out what they are supposed to do.</p> <p><b><i>Item Formats:</i></b> Thoughtful selection of item formats to measure particular comprehension targets within the context of the texts and specific purposes supports students’ access to the test construct because they are able to focus limited cognitive resources on tasks aimed to measure the construct. This supports the assessment’s ability to measure the construct it intends to measure (Principle 2) by facilitating <i>all</i> students’ ability to access the construct (Principle 3).</p>
<p><b>3. Accessible, Non-biased Items</b></p>	<p><b><i>Regular NAEP Reading Research and Development Process:</i></b> Item bias is tested through NAEP’s regular item review and pilot testing procedures to ensure that items are not more or less difficult for students from particular subpopulations. To test item bias, the difficulty of items across different subpopulations of students (e.g., boys and girls) is compared to ensure that items measure the same construct across groups. Biased items are revised until they no longer demonstrate bias.</p>

	<p><b><i>Disciplinary Contexts &amp; Purposes:</i></b> Because all students being tested are familiar with the school-based disciplinary contexts of literature, science, and social studies, and with the Reading to Develop Understanding and Reading to Solve a Problem purposes as they are situated within these contexts, sampling texts and tasks from these disciplines and using these purposes helps to minimize bias, since all students can be presumed to be familiar with the kinds of texts used within these three disciplines.</p> <p><b><i>Range of Texts and Tasks Represented:</i></b> Selection of a diverse range of texts and tasks representing different student identities, interests, knowledge, and other backgrounds helps to ensure equity across diverse subpopulations of test-takers. Such broad sampling facilitates equitable test items and scales.</p>
<b>4. Amenable to Accommodations</b>	<p><b><i>UDEs and Item Formats:</i></b> UDEs and thoughtful use of item formats limit the need for special accommodations. For example, task-based UDEs and item formats such as “drag and drop” can limit the need for accommodations such as extended time because they facilitate students’ thoughtful use of time and focus on the texts and tasks being measured rather than on unrelated organizational skills.</p>
<b>5. Simple, Clear, and Intuitive Instructions and Procedures</b>	<p><b><i>Instructions:</i></b> Instructions, in simple language, facilitate measurement of the intended construct (in this case, reading comprehension) because they allow readers to focus limited cognitive attention on the items rather than on the instructions.</p> <p><b><i>Clear Comprehension Items and Tasks:</i></b> Similarly, items written using simple, clear language that is easily understandable regardless of a student’s background (e.g., experience, knowledge, language use, interest) support the student’s ability to engage in the items that are measuring reading comprehension ability aligned to the comprehension targets.</p> <p>Both of these aspects help to ensure that the items are measuring the intended construct (e.g., the student’s ability to make meaning from literature) rather than aspects unrelated to the construct (e.g., the student’s ability to understand written instructions or to understand the item stem).</p>
<b>6. Maximum Readability and Comprehensibility</b>	<p><b><i>Selection of Grade-Appropriate Texts:</i></b> Texts are selected based on readability and text cohesion elements relevant to the grade levels in which they are tested. This helps to ensure that students taking the test can be presumed to be able to read and understand texts at these particular levels.</p>
<b>7. Maximum Legibility</b>	<p><b><i>Visual Layout:</i></b></p>

	<p>The 2026 NAEP Reading Assessment layout considers elements such as contrast, font type and size, and spacing within the digital environment to facilitate the validity of items because it supports students' ability to focus limited cognitive resources on the items rather than on visual features. For example, layout should be easily accessible for different students' sensory abilities. Careful consideration of these elements also allows the assessment to be amenable to accommodations (Principle 4) because the layout is easily modified when accommodations do need to be made (e.g., translating the assessment into Braille).</p>
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\* These UDA principles are drawn from Thompson et al., 2002, where they are referred to as "elements." UDEs are "Universal Design Elements."

### ***Item Response Formats***

Central to the development of 2026 NAEP Reading Assessment is the careful selection of the ways in which students respond to items. From 1992 through 2016, items on the NAEP Reading Assessment were limited to two formats: multiple choice and constructed response (write the response with a pen or pencil). In 2017, the term multiple-choice was revised to "selected response" to account for the wider range of item formats available (e.g., "matching") with digitally based assessments. Selected-response items for use on the 2026 NAEP Reading Assessment include a variety of formats. The 2026 NAEP Reading Assessment thus employs Selected Response and Constructed Response options. Additionally, NAEP will be exploring additional kinds of Dynamic Response options.

**Selected Response Options.** These kinds of responses allow the student to select one or more choices from provided options and include the following types:

- **Single-selection multiple choice** – Students respond by selecting a single choice from a set of given choices.
- **Multiple-selection multiple choice** – Students respond by selecting two or more choices that meet the condition stated in the stem of the item.
- **Matching** – Students respond by inserting (i.e., dragging and dropping) one or more source elements (e.g., a graphic) into target fields (e.g., a table); see Exhibit 3.7.
- **Zones** – Students respond by selecting one or more regions on a graphic stimulus.
- **Grid** – Students evaluate ideas with respect to certain properties. The answer is entered by selecting cells in a table in which rows typically correspond to the statements and columns to the properties checked; see Exhibit 3.8.
- **In-line choice** – Students respond by selecting one option from one or more drop-down menus that may appear in various sections of an item.
- **Select in passage:** Students select one or more ideas in the passage and drag them into the target fields.

### Exhibit 3.7. Example of Matching Response Format from PARCC Grade 8 Literature

8. The table shows a shared theme of the passage from *The Black Pearl* and the poem "The Last Bargain."

Complete the table with **one** piece of evidence from **each** text that **best** supports the shared theme. Drag and drop the pieces of evidence that **best** support the shared theme into the appropriate rows of the table. Not all pieces of evidence will be used.

<i>The Black Pearl</i> : "They often die or become dull before a year passes." (paragraph 7)
<i>The Black Pearl</i> : "And the price, gentlemen, remains twenty thousand pesos." (paragraph 22)
"The Last Bargain": "But his power counted for nought . . ." (line 4)
"The Last Bargain": "Her smile paled and melted into tears . . ." (line 12)

Shared Theme
It is important to know what is truly valuable.
Evidence from <i>The Black Pearl</i>
Evidence from "The Last Bargain"

### Exhibit 3.8 Example of Grid Response Format from PISA

#### Chicken Forum Released Item #3

PISA 2018

**Chicken Forum**  
Question 3 / 7

Refer to the Chicken Health Forum on the right. Click on the choices in the table to answer the question.

Some posts on a forum can be relevant to the topic while some posts are not. Click on either **Yes** or **No** to indicate whether the posts in the table below are relevant to Ivana\_88's problem.

Is the post relevant to Ivana_88's problem?	Yes	No
NellieB79's post	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Monie's post	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Avian_Deals's post	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Bob's post	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Frank's post	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

www.chickenhealth.com/forum/aspirin-chickens

**Chicken Health**  
Your online resource for healthy chickens

About Forum Pictures

**Giving Aspirin to Chickens**

**Ivana\_88** THREAD STARTER Posted 28 October 18:12

Hello everyone!  
Is it okay to give aspirin to my hen? She is 2 years old and I think she hurt her leg. I can't get to the veterinarian until Monday, and the vet isn't answering the phone. My hen seems to be in a lot of pain. I'd like to give her something to make her feel better until I can go to the vet. Thank you for your help.

**NellieB79** Posted 28 October 18:36

I don't know if aspirin is safe for hens or not. I always check with my vet before giving my birds medicine. I know that some drugs that are safe for humans can be very dangerous for birds.

**Monie** Posted 28 October 18:52

I gave an aspirin to one of my hens when she was hurt. There was no problem. The next day I went to the vet but she was already better. I think it might be dangerous if you give too much, so don't exceed the dose limits! I hope she feels better!

**Avian\_Deals** Posted 28 October 19:07

Hi! Don't forget to check out my super low deals on all bird supplies. I'm having a great sale right now!

**Bob** Posted 28 October 19:15

Can someone please tell me how to know if a chicken is sick? Thanks.

**Frank** Posted 28 October 19:21

Hello Ivana,  
I am a veterinarian, specializing in birds. It is okay to give injured chickens aspirin if they

**Constructed Response Options.** These kinds of responses allow the student to develop their own response within a given parameter (e.g., a certain number of characters) and include:

- **Short constructed response** – Students respond by entering a short text in a response box that consists of a phrase or a sentence or two.
- **Extended constructed response** – Students respond by entering an extended text in a response box that consists of multiple lines (a paragraph or two).
- **Hybrid constructed response** – Students respond by selecting two or more choices that meet the condition stated in the stem of the item. Then they write a short explanation about their choices.
- **Fill in the blank** – Students respond by entering a short word or phrase in a response box.

Flexible distributions of item response type across grade level are presented in Exhibit 3.9.

**Exhibit 3.9. Flexible Distributions of Item Response Types Across Grade Level**

	<b>Selected Response Items</b>	<b>Short Constructed Response Items</b>	<b>Extended Constructed Response Items</b>
Grade 4	40-50%	40-45%	10-15%
Grade 8	40-50%	40-45%	10-15%
Grade 12	40-50%	40-45%	10-15%

**Dynamic Response Options.** NAEP is currently exploring the use of dynamic response options to assess comprehension (e.g., graphic organizers and drop-down menus). NAEP should continue this trend in the years ahead by further exploring the use of other interactive or dynamic response formats made possible with emerging digital tools. Many existing state assessments, as well as PARCC and SBAC, use these kinds of item response formats. Useful frameworks (Scalise & Gifford, 2006) and guidelines (Measured Progress/ETS Collaborative, 2012) introduce a wide variety of innovative item types that should be considered by NAEP in implementing digitally-based facets of the 2026 NAEP Reading Assessment, when it is indicated that such item types bring value to the assessment. For example, dynamic item formats introduce opportunities to assess how readers:

- Search and locate information (e.g., dynamic search engines); (see Exhibit 3.10).
- Select and identify information (e.g., multiple choice items with new media distractors);
- Reorder or rearrange information (e.g., ranking, categorizing, and sequencing items);



- Substitute or correct information (e.g., multiple drop down menus offering word choices embedded within lines; limited graphical elements that are adjusted or corrected to accurately represent ideas in the passage);
- Categorize or classify information (e.g., tiling, select and order);
- Construct relationships among information (e.g., dynamic concept maps, multimodal representations); or
- Construct spoken responses (e.g., recorded spoken language in open-ended responses).

When selecting the format of any particular item, developers should be mindful of the cognitive and logistical demands of varied formats and how these may interact with reader familiarity and the time constraints of each activity.

### Exhibit 3.10 Example of a Dynamic Search Engine Item from ePIRLS 2016 for Grade 4 Students

The screenshot displays the ePIRLS Online Reading 2016 interface. On the left, a vertical sidebar shows a progress bar with 14 steps, with step 1 highlighted. The main area shows a Google search for "Mars in the Solar System". The search results include links to "Mars Solar Energy Solutions", "Planet Discovered Outside Solar System", "An Overview of the Solar System", and "Solar Eclipses for Beginners". On the right, a sidebar titled "ePIRLS Class Project" contains instructions from Mr. Webster: "Today, we are going to read about the exploration of Mars." and "Let's begin by using 'Google' to search the Internet." Below this, a numbered instruction "1. Look at the Google search results, at left." is shown, followed by a student icon and the text: "Click on the link that is most likely to explain where the planet Mars is in the solar system."

### Universal Design Elements (UDEs)

Grounded in Universal Design of Assessments (Johnstone et al., 2006; Thompson et al., 2002), the NAEP 2026 Reading Assessment employs design features known as Universal Design Elements (UDEs). UDEs provide orientation, guidance, and motivation to sustain readers' journeys through the block. They are designed to mirror typical (non-testing) reading situations to improve the validity of the assessment. UDEs also offer a way for NAEP to develop fair and inclusive assessment tasks. The *fairness* of an assessment refers to a judgment about the appropriateness of decisions based on test scores (AERA, APA, & NCME, 2014). Research has shown that a student's background, language, and experience is important in how they interpret assessments (Solano-Flores & Nelson-Barber, 2001). Because these influences shape student thinking, they must be taken into account when trying to reduce bias in assessment items and support validity (Lee, 2020; Siegel, Markey, and Swann, 2005).

**All readers have access to UDEs.** UDEs, or the "built-in features of computer-based assessments," have been increasingly included in NAEP since the introduction of the digital

platform in 2017, and are available for *all* students (NCES, 2017). Importantly, UDEs are not the same as legally mandated accommodations. While the use of UDEs might minimize the need for special accommodations, UDEs are not designed to fully address accessibility needs for the full population of students who take the 2026 NAEP Reading Assessment. Other assessment features, called *accommodations*, are legally mandated for *some* but not all students with additional testing needs (see [NAEP Accommodations](#), last updated Oct. 2019). Examples of accommodations available on some assessments include extended time, options for responses in Braille or Sign Language, or having test-items read aloud. Universal Design of Assessments and the inclusion of UDEs are the means to enable *all* readers to validly demonstrate what they know and are able to do.

**Types of UDEs.** Examples of UDEs already exist in operational NAEP Reading (e.g., highlighters and look-back buttons) to reflect real-world experiences and how readers use technology. Amidst the use of these digital supports by all test-takers, NAEP has effectively maintained the ability to capture trends over time (NCES, 2017). Increasingly complex reading purposes and more dynamic texts in today’s society demand a broad collection of UDEs to enable test-takers to fully engage with the assessment (Mislevy, 2016). Consequently, the 2026 NAEP Reading Framework includes three broad categories: task-based UDEs, motivational UDEs, and knowledge-based UDEs. The three categories of UDEs are designed to accomplish three different, yet sometimes overlapping, functions as described next. The next section clarifies the role of each UDE and offers some hypothetical examples of how these might appear in the 2026 NAEP Reading Assessment. Additional details are provided in the item specifications.

**Task-based UDEs.** In the 2026 NAEP Reading Assessment, task-based UDEs are used to clarify requirements and guide readers in their use of available resources in the testing space. These UDEs are designed to increase access to test content and to sustain readers’ attention. A task-based UDE at the beginning of an activity (e.g., a sequential set of directions) might clearly communicate expectations for how and why readers should engage with a collection of texts. Such UDEs might also help readers plan and monitor their work across multiple texts and tasks (de Jong, 2006) by providing guidance on how to move among the texts. As readers move through the block, task-based UDEs might include graphic organizers that allow readers to record and revisit their ideas; these types of UDEs aim to reduce time spent on low-level activities (scrolling to find the location) while providing students more time for higher order activity—reading, evaluating, and engaging with text content (Sparks & Deane, 2014).

Exhibit 3.11 illustrates an example of an Integrate and Interpret item with a task-based UDE that is aligned with UDA principles calling for “assessment instructions and procedures...to be easy to understand, regardless of a student’s experience, knowledge, language skills, or current concentration level” (Thompson et al., 2002, p. 13). The task-based UDE (in this case, a word bank) is provided for students to enable them to select from an assortment of character traits and select the one most in line with their reasoning about the main character based on her actions in the story. More than one word choice could be an acceptable answer, but some selections are better than others, and the appropriateness of any word is linked to the reader’s ability to provide a reasonable justification for their choice. This type of task-based UDE aims to assess more challenging comprehension processes while allowing readers to access the new item in the relatively short period of time allotted by the assessment. Such clarity of expectations also maximizes the likelihood that readers are able to cognitively engage with complex NAEP-designed reading experiences within the short time frame allotted to each block.

The use of a word bank as a task-based UDE also aligns with principles calling for “accessible, non-biased items” and the removal of “non-construct oriented...barriers” to the assessment content (Thompson et al., p. 9). In this case, the word bank is designed to decrease construct-irrelevance by providing a set of words from which test-takers can *select*, rather than *generate*, a relevant character trait. That is, the provided words allow all readers, and especially English learners, to access the test and validly engage with the item designed to measure their ability to make inferences about character traits and not their ability to generate unfamiliar words in a timed assessment context. Similarly, this task-based UDE aims to reduce testing bias so that all students, regardless of their native language, have an opportunity to make sense of the story and demonstrate how to make inferences about characters and support their answers with evidence from the text.

**Exhibit 3.11. A Grade 4 Integrate and Interpret item illustrating a task-based UDE in the form of a word bank providing a set of character traits from which readers can select their choice and then use it as part of their constructed response.**

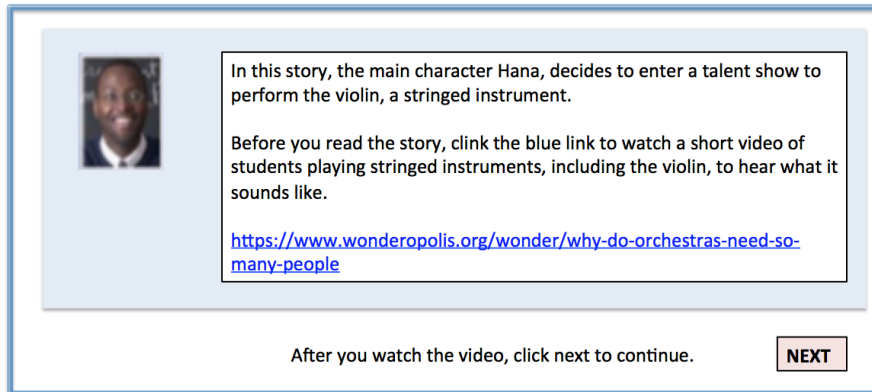
In the story, the author writes, “Hana swallowed her nerves like medicine and leaned toward the microphone. She would just do her best.”

What do you think the author is trying to tell the reader about what kind of person Hana is? Choose a character trait from the word bank to describe Hana’s personality. Then, use the box to explain what kind of person Hana is and what makes you think this.

WORD BANK	
helpful	curious
brave	proud
smart	nervous
afraid	confident
forgetful	determined

**Motivational UDEs.** In the 2026 NAEP Reading Assessment, motivational UDEs are designed to facilitate students’ interest in assessment content and persistence with challenging tasks (Alton & Proctor, 2008; Buehl, 2017; CAST, 2020; Guthrie & Klauda, 2015). Motivational UDEs might, for example, provide an engaging pre-reading preview or video that helps to generate a minimal amount of interest in an assessment block. See Exhibit 3.12, where a pre-reading preview and accompanying 30 second video of children playing the violin serves to pique students’ interest in the topic of a reading passage about a girl who learns to play the violin. Such UDEs can increase the test’s ability to measure the intended construct for all students, regardless of their prior interest and motivation.

**Exhibit 3.12. A Motivational UDE in the form of a 30 second video clip of students playing stringed instruments for the Grade 4 text *Hana Hashimoto, Sixth Violin* by Chieri Uegaki.**



In this story, the main character Hana, decides to enter a talent show to perform the violin, a stringed instrument.

Before you read the story, click the blue link to watch a short video of students playing stringed instruments, including the violin, to hear what it sounds like.

<https://www.wonderopolis.org/wonder/why-do-orchestras-need-so-many-people>

After you watch the video, click next to continue. **NEXT**

As with task-based UDEs, these kinds of motivational UDEs align with UDA principles calling for “accessible, non-biased items” as well as “precisely defined constructs” (Thompson et al., 2002, p. 10) by stimulating prior interest and motivation and thus removing some construct-irrelevant variance for students who might come to an assessment task with no prior interest in the topic or activity that is the focus of the assessment item.

Motivational UDEs may also maintain readers’ interest by communicating explicit connections between the broader purpose for completing a block and the sub-tasks that need to be completed along the way. UDEs in the form of task characters may provide written and/or oral directions, or interact directly with readers as experts or peers to provide information (see Exhibit 3.13). Task characters may also represent members of an authentic target audience to whom readers can represent and communicate new understandings about what they have read and learned (e.g., Use and Apply). To the extent that assigned purposes (and related texts, tasks and goals) are viewed as meaningful and relevant, readers are more likely to be motivated to engage with or react to the reading activity as a whole (Guthrie & Klauda, 2015; van den Broek, Bon-Gettler, Kendeou, & Carlson, 2011).

Exhibit 3.13. Teacher and student task characters remind the reader of the task goal.

**OUR NOTES**

**Note 1** In the beginning, Hana's brothers made fun of her.

**Note 2** But, Hana kept practicing anyways.

**Note 3** When she stepped on stage, Hana was nervous.

**Note 4** Hana remembered her Ojji-chan and played what she knew.

**Note 5** Hana's family loved it, and Hana decided to play again next year.

*Which sentences best describe Hana's personality at the beginning, middle, and end of the story. Click and drag your answers from the notepad into the appropriate boxes below.*

**Beginning** **Middle** **End**

**Knowledge-based UDEs.** In the 2026 NAEP Reading Assessment, knowledge-based UDEs will provide two types of information: (a) topic previews in the form of short introductions to either the entire block or to a specific task and text, and (b) definitions or examples for unfamiliar vocabulary unless a word is explicitly tested in a comprehension test item). Topic previews may take the form of short videos, images, texts, or a preview of specific concepts addressed in the text. Topic previews should be offered as appropriate any time that access to information that is not part of the items being assessed could differentially advantage or disadvantage particular readers. Determination must be made by assessment developers about whether a UDE is construct relevant. Other digital media (e.g., dynamic animations, glossary hyperlinks to related images—with or without language translation, simulations of interesting or challenging phenomena) can provide visual and multimedia cues to support readers' understanding of unfamiliar vocabulary or challenging concepts. Please see Exhibit 3.14 for the kinds of knowledge that will and will not be assessed.

**Exhibit 3.14 Knowledge Assessed and Not Assessed in the 2026 NAEP Reading Assessment**

Knowledge Not Intentionally Assessed	Knowledge Assessed
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Text-independent domain knowledge</li> <li>• Topic knowledge</li> <li>• Knowledge of technical vocabulary or idiomatic expressions</li> <li>• Conceptual or domain knowledge in particular subject areas</li> </ul>	<p>Knowledge of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• text structures (descriptive, causal, compare and contrast, problem-solution, etc.)</li> <li>• vocabulary and language structures</li> <li>• genres and rhetorical structures</li> <li>• authors' craft</li> </ul> <p>That enables students to demonstrate their ability to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• use text features to derive meaning</li> <li>• discern authors' rhetorical strategies and purposes</li> <li>• draw inferences based on information in text</li> <li>• synthesize information across text or multiple texts</li> <li>• analyze information</li> <li>• critically evaluate sources of information</li> <li>• use and apply knowledge</li> </ul>

Importantly, knowledge-based UDEs never provide answers to comprehension test items. Instead, they preview untested topic information, activate readers' knowledge, and pique interest in ways that permit readers to engage in the types of literal, interpretive, evaluative, and application processes (i.e., the four comprehension targets described in [Chapter 2](#)) required to demonstrate their comprehension of challenging text (Alexander & Jetton, 2000; Buehl, 2017).

Exhibit 3.15 offers one example of a multiple choice Integrate and Interpret item with a Knowledge-Based UDE that aligns with UDA principles calling for “accessible, non-biased items” (Thompson et al., 2002, p. 9). The knowledge-based UDE (a pop-up box defining “talent show”) is used appropriately to provide students with background information that does not overlap with the content being assessed. In this case, the multiple-choice item is not intended to measure students' understanding of the phrase “talent show.” Rather, the item is intended to measure students' ability to make an inference about why Hana's brothers flee the house every day, based on other character's words and actions (Hana's brothers cover their ears and complain about the “horrible noise” from Hana's violin practicing). Since the whole story is situated in the context of a talent show, the lack of topic knowledge about what a “talent show” is might unfairly disadvantage readers who are not familiar with this term. Biases such as this in tests can result in imprecise, inaccurate and unfair assessments of students' ability to engage in the construct being measured. The NAEP Reading Assessment does not assess what students know



about different topics and disciplines; that is the job of disciplinary assessments such as social studies or science. Instead, the NAEP Reading Assessment measures how well students can reason about the information provided in texts as that reasoning is reflected in the comprehension targets used to create comprehension items. Therefore, knowledge-based UDEs helps to orient readers to the topic of the text in an effort to reduce testing bias so that all students have an opportunity to make sense of the story and demonstrate how to make inference about characters.

Because the meaning or use of the phrase “talent show” is not directly assessed in this block, this Knowledge-based UDE also aligns with UDA principles calling for “precisely defined constructs” and the removal of “non-construct oriented...barriers” to the assessment content (Thompson et al., p. 9). In this case, the pop-up box defining a talent show is designed to decrease construct-irrelevant variance. That is, the definition allows all readers (and especially those with little knowledge about the kind of show a “talent” show is) to access the text and validly engage with an item designed to measure the reader’s ability to make an inference about character actions rather than the reader’s understanding of what a talent show is.

**Exhibit 3.15. A knowledge-based vocabulary UDE in the form of a pop-up box defining the term “talent show.” The pop-up appears when a test-taker clicks on the highlighted term.**

The text says, "When Hana Hashimoto announced that she had signed up for the **talent show** and that she would be playing the violin, her brothers nearly fell out of a tree...Hana practiced every day, just like Ojichan. And every day, her brothers fled the house with covered ears, complaining about the horrible noise."

A talent show is a show in which different people perform a special skill.

Thinking about this part of the text, why do you think Hana's brothers flee the house every day?

- They are angry with Hana
- The noise of the violin bothers them
- They have somewhere important to be
- They like the way the violin sounds

**Selecting appropriate locations for UDEs.** Developers decide on appropriate locations in which to insert UDEs into each block of the assessment. Because some NAEP Reading 2026 tasks involve complexities in response to handling multiple tasks and texts, readers may be asked to check and reflect on their reading progress in the activity and allocate their attention accordingly. Intuitively designed transitions between each task, such as task characters, visual flow charts, or simple written statements may be used to guide readers through the task sequence and structure in any given block.

A major question for block developers is how to decide when to employ and when to forego the deployment of a specific UDE as the potential for added support is weighed against

the potential for increased cognitive burden on the reader. Developers will also consider how to populate the grade-appropriate assessment space with UDEs while recognizing that readers have time limits within which to accomplish expected outcomes.

### ***Process Data***

Because 2026 NAEP Reading Assessment activities are situated in a fully digital environment, process data involving reader actions (e.g., number of mouse clicks, pathways through a task or hypertext, transcribed voice responses, length of time spent engaged with reading material or responding to an item) can be easily collected in digital log files stored in a database. While these data are not reported for individual students, aggregations of these types of data hold potential power to measure levels of engagement in purpose-driven reading activities (e.g., capturing frequency, density, and intensity of engagement or identifying and comparing novice to expert level of practice). Process data from log files can be aggregated and interpreted to characterize how reader attributes or other explanatory variables influence reading comprehension performance at one or more locations in the NAEP assessment space. Examples of process data developers use to account for reader variations include:

- Timing data (e.g., time on passages and items),
- Navigation data (e.g., navigating among passages, pages within passages, hyperlinks, using the next button to move through a block); see Exhibit 3.16,
- Data on using other affordances (e.g., the “Look Back Button,” glossing), and
- Item response process data (e.g., which answers readers choose, order of selections, answer changes, response mode, use of eliminating options in multiple choice items).

**Exhibit 3.16 Example of a Constructed Response Item from ePIRLS 2016 for Grade 4 that Collects Navigational Process Data. The Space Camp image and blast off button serve as a type of distractor item designed to capture process data about readers who click on irrelevant details (i.e., advertisements) on a webpage rather than attending to the comprehension item at hand.**

The screenshot displays a digital interface titled "8 PLANETS" with a navigation bar including Home, Sun, Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, and Neptune. The main content area is titled "INTRODUCTION TO MARS" and "The Red Planet", featuring a large image of Mars and two columns of text. The left column discusses historical scientific interest in Mars, while the right column discusses modern technological insights. A "Space Camp" advertisement is positioned on the right side, featuring a child's image and the text "Take control of a trip to the stars!" with a "Blast Off!" button. Below the advertisement is a "3." question prompt: "100 years ago, why did scientists think there might be life on Mars?" with a "Student" input field and a "SAVE" button. A "Mr. Webster" instruction box is also visible, stating: "Now, click on Mars to learn more about this planet." A "SAVED" status indicator is shown above the instruction box.



Overall, the strategic use of UDEs and determination of process data collected in each block enables the 2026 NAEP Reading Assessment to fully engage test-takers with complex comprehension tasks while also generating information to better account for the reading performance of fourth, eighth, and twelfth grade students. As knowledge about the use of UDEs becomes more robust and precise, more of these features should be operationalized in the NAEP Reading Assessment in the years ahead.

## **Conclusion**

The opportunities presented by the use of these innovative design features come with a caveat. Pilot offerings of all design features, including the examples above, should be carefully studied, as was noted in the introduction to this chapter. Various reader populations should be sampled carefully in these studies. One reason for this is to ensure that design features yield their intended outcomes for as many students as possible. A second reason is to ensure that new design features do not unintentionally disadvantage some populations of students. In addition to describing how scores will be reported, Chapter 4 illustrates how these new design features allow the 2026 NAEP Reading Assessment to report the reading achievement of the nation's children in new ways that enhance the interpretive capacity of NAEP results.

## ***CHAPTER 4: REPORTING NAEP 2026 RESULTS***

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The purpose of Chapter 4 is to describe how the results of the NAEP Reading Assessment will be communicated to the nation from the year 2026 onward. The chapter addresses the central communication responsibility of NAEP—to report scores in a manner that informs the public about current results and performance trends over time on NAEP Reading Assessment in what has become known as the Nation’s Report Card. In addition to describing how scores will be reported, Chapter 4 outlines how the 2026 NAEP Reading Assessment will collect information that can help contextualize and explain the results it reports and serve as a useful resource for informing educational policy related to teaching reading and learning to read.

### **Reporting Results**

Historically, NAEP Reading has reported data for the nation as a whole, for participating states, and for large urban school districts that volunteer to participate in the NAEP Trial Urban District Assessment—TUDA. Results of the NAEP Reading Assessment administrations are reported in terms of average scores for groups of students on the NAEP 0–500 scale and as percentages of students who attain each of the three achievement levels (*NAEP Basic*, *NAEP Proficient*, and *NAEP Advanced*) discussed below. By design, the assessment reports results of overall achievement; it is not a tool for diagnosing the needs of individuals or groups of students. Reported scores are at the aggregate level; by law, scores are not produced for individual schools or students.

In addition to reporting aggregate results for the nation, states, and TUDA school districts, the Nation’s Report Card allows for examination of results by school characteristics (urban, suburban, rural; public and nonpublic), socio-demographic student characteristics (race/ethnicity, gender, English learner status, socioeconomic level, disability status (i.e., supported by an individualized educational program), and English learner status. The NAEP Data Explorer is a publicly accessible tool that allows users to customize reports and to investigate specific aspects of student reading achievement, such as performance on different comprehension targets or by selected contextual variables. Also, reports of the results of survey questionnaires are produced each year on various topics (e.g., students’ Internet access and digital technology at home, instructional emphasis on reading activities, confidence in reading knowledge and skills, teachers’ satisfaction and views of school resources).

### ***Legislative Provisions for NAEP Reporting***

Under the provisions of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) legislation, states receiving Title I grants must include assurance in their state plans that they will participate in the reading and mathematics state NAEP at grades 4 and 8. Local districts that receive Title I funds must agree to participate in biennial NAEP reading and mathematics administrations at grades 4 and 8 if they are selected to do so. Their results are included in state and national reporting. Participation in NAEP does not substitute for the mandated state-level assessments in reading and mathematics at grades 3 to 8.

In 2002, NAEP initiated TUDA in five large urban school districts that are members of the Council of the Great City Schools (the Atlanta City, City of Chicago, Houston Independent, Los Angeles Unified, and New York City Public Schools Districts). Ten large districts participated in 2003 and 2005. The number of districts participating in TUDA has grown over

time to a total of 27 beginning in 2017. With student performance results by district, participating TUDA districts can use results for evaluating their achievement trends and for comparative purposes.

Through ESSA and the NAEP TUDA program, the NAEP Reading results report student achievement for the nation, states, and select large urban districts, enabling comparisons between states, large urban districts, and various student demographic groups.

### ***Achievement Levels***

Since 1990, the National Assessment Governing Board has used student achievement levels for reporting results on NAEP assessments. Generic policy definitions for achievement at the *NAEP Basic*, *NAEP Proficient*, and *NAEP Advanced* levels describe in general terms what students at each grade level should know and be able to do on the assessment. Reading achievement levels specific to the NAEP Reading Framework were developed to elaborate on the generic definitions. New reading-specific achievement level descriptors replaced those aligned to the previous framework (NAGB 2009). Exhibit 4.1 presents the generic achievement level descriptors. See Appendix A for the final achievement level descriptions.

#### **Exhibit 4.1. Generic NAEP achievement levels**

<b>Achievement Level</b>	<b>Policy Definition</b>
<i>NAEP Advanced</i>	This level signifies superior performance beyond NAEP proficient.
<i>NAEP Proficient</i>	This level represents solid academic performance for each NAEP assessment. Students reaching this level have demonstrated competency over challenging subject matter, including subject-matter knowledge, application of such knowledge to real-world situations, and analytical skills appropriate to the subject matter.
<i>NAEP Basic</i>	This level denotes partial mastery of prerequisite knowledge and skills that are fundamental for performance at the NAEP proficient level.

### ***Reporting Results of the Updated NAEP Reading Assessment***

While satisfying legislative requirements and maintaining the scale score and achievement level reporting structures, the 2026 NAEP Reading Framework updates and enhances the assessment and its reporting system to accomplish the following broad goals:

- Emphasize equity, rigor, precision, and validity throughout the assessment design and the reporting system.
- Revise items included in the reading-specific and the general (i.e., core) part of the questionnaires administered to students, teachers, and administrators whose schools participate in the NAEP Reading Assessment to increase knowledge about factors that can expand opportunities to learn.
- Transform the navigational data (sometimes called process data [Ho, 2017]), referring to how students make their way through the texts and test items) into measures that help explain test performance, as well as student interest and metacognition.

- Increase the capacity of NAEP Reading databases (including enhancements for the NAEP Data Explorer) in ways that encourage educators, policymakers, and researchers to conduct more nuanced analyses of NAEP Reading performance.

To achieve broader equity goals—with particular attention to providing more nuanced reports and useful data to key stakeholders on research-based contextual variables focused on opportunities to learn—the reporting system will:

1. Disaggregate scores for demographic subgroups in greater detail to provide a more accurate and dynamic description of student performance.
2. Expand the number of categories for reporting the achievement of English learners to better reflect the variability of English language proficiency within this population.
3. Reconceptualize reporting and contextual variables as an integrated system to explain student performance in ways that make the data collected more useful for policy makers and educators.

## **Reporting Categories**

The framework reporting system described below provides opportunities to interpret findings from NAEP Reading results by amplifying the demographic and descriptive student categories. The reporting system expands use of the data derived from the assessment to afford deeper understanding of how socioeconomic status (SES) and race/ethnicity intersect with opportunities to learn in schools and communities (e.g., the availability of libraries or access to challenging curricula). This disaggregation of SES within race/ethnicity allows for examination of diversity within groups. To support productive interpretations of results, the reporting of achievement results for the NAEP Reading Assessment will also disaggregate reporting by current and former English learner status.

NAEP Reading Assessment results have provided indispensable information on students' performance with traditional reporting variables parsing results into subgroups to portray how students perform within specific contexts—state, region, access to technology, socioeconomic level, and many more. By expanding reporting categories and adding more contextual variables, NAEP will now be able to point the way to plausible hypotheses for policy makers to consider in crafting reforms. Thus, the 2026 NAEP Reading Framework builds on the strengths of the prior NAEP reporting system by including enhancements to the reporting and explanatory capacity of NAEP through reporting by disciplinary contexts; disaggregating results within demographic categories; and expanding reporting categories for English learners.

### ***Reporting by Disciplinary Contexts***

The 2009–2019 framework had two subscales: reading for literary experience and reading for information. The 2026 NAEP Reading Framework uses three subscales to report on reading performance within and across three Disciplinary Contexts: Reading to Engage in Literature, Reading to Engage in Science, and Reading to Engage in Social Studies. In addition to continued reporting of outcomes as a point on a scale from 0–500 and as the percentage of students who score within different achievement level bands (*NAEP Basic*, *NAEP Proficient*, and *NAEP Advanced*), the 2026 NAEP Reading will report additionally on each of the Disciplinary Context scales. This enhancement is informed by increased attention to reading in the content areas in state standards across the nation.

### ***Disaggregating Results Within Demographic Categories***

NAEP will continue to report reading scores by selected student subgroups. Student subgroups are defined by the following characteristics: gender; race/ethnicity; family income, as measured by student eligibility for the National School Lunch Program; disability status; and English language status. In addition, results are reported by school characteristics, such as public/private, urban/rural, and region of the country.

Because the 2026 NAEP Reading Framework seeks to capture the dynamic variability within student groups, NAEP disaggregates student group data to show, at a minimum, differences of socioeconomic status within the student subgroup of race/ethnicity. In NAEP Reading, as in other large-scale assessments, lower levels of achievement historically are correlated with poverty. It is important to note that on international assessments such as PIRLS (Mullis & Martin, 2019) and PISA (OECD, 2019), SES does not predict achievement in reading comprehension as accurately as it does in the U.S. Consequently, it seems likely that SES alone does not offer a direct or sufficient explanation for reading performance and that additional contextual variables are crucial to better understand variability in reading. Enhanced reporting can help policy makers and stakeholders better understand reading performances in context. For example, these data may allow policy makers to consider how access to resources that support rich literacy opportunities (e.g., high quality teaching, rigorous curriculum, community-based institutional structures such as libraries) may serve as an underlying driver of achievement.

Additional parsing of the results in this way could be important because the results might suggest that what is, on the surface, presumed to be a cohesive and static category may indeed include significant differences in access to resources. Examining SES and race/ethnicity with a more nuanced lens can surface factors that are highly amenable to change, e.g., resource allocation. When the data are disaggregated by states and TUDA districts as described in the 2026 NAEP Reading Framework, they should thus be more helpful to stakeholders for addressing the needs revealed by the assessment.

### ***Expanding Reporting Categories for English Learners***

English learners (ELs) are defined by NAEP as students “who are in the process of acquiring English language skills and knowledge” (NAEP Nation’s Report Card, 2019). These students have not yet reached state-established standards for grade-level English proficiency and so are at the beginning or intermediate phases of acquiring English. In the prior NAEP reporting system, students were designated either as *not English learners* or *English learners* at the time of the assessment. The results for students who had been classified as ELs but who were no longer classified as such were reported along with students who had never been identified as ELs; hence, there was no way to disaggregate data to observe or track the successes and increases in achievement of former ELs.

The 2026 NAEP Reading Assessment results expand reporting categories in order to present data that is more attuned to the complex composition of today’s student populations, and, thus, more informative for states and school communities (Durán, 2006; Hopkins, Thompson, Linqianti, August, & Hakuta, 2013; National Assessment Governing Board, 2014; Kieffer & Thompson, 2018). In keeping with the latest research and current requirements for state-level reporting under ESEA, Section 3121(a), the reporting system for the 2026 NAEP Reading Assessment disaggregates scores by three English proficiency categories for which school systems that participate in NAEP already collect data:

1. *Current English learners* – Students designated as English learners at the time of the assessment;
2. *Former English learners* – Students who have reached grade-level standards of English proficiency within the last two years prior to the assessment and who have formally exited that status;
3. *Non-English learners* – Monolingual students who speak only English; bilingual students who speak English and another language and who were never previously identified as English learners; bilingual students who reached grade-level standards of English proficiency more than two years ago.

Reporting NAEP results for these three categories will allow more nuanced interpretation of data for students who are designated as current or former ELs and highlight challenges these students may face. Focusing exclusively on the current EL subgroup can obscure the progress that educational systems make in moving students toward English proficiency and higher levels of reading achievement. This expansion of EL reporting categories will shed light on any progress—or lack thereof—that might be detectable in the group of Former ELs. With states increasingly able to collect this information about English learners’ histories, and the likelihood that a majority of states will have these data available by 2026, the 2026 NAEP Reading Framework expands reporting categories for English learners in order to more accurately represent the descriptive data states and districts are already using to understand the performance of these students.

### **Contextual Variables**

Students participating in the NAEP assessments respond to survey questionnaires that gather information on variables important to understanding reading achievement nationwide. Teachers and school administrators also complete questionnaires. To the extent possible, information is also gathered from non-NAEP sources such as state, district, or school records to minimize the burden on those asked to complete the questionnaires. Questions are intended to be non-intrusive; free from bias; secular, neutral, and non-ideological; and do not elicit personal values or beliefs.

As stated in Governing Board policy, the collection of contextual data on students, teachers, and schools is necessary to fulfill the statutory requirement that NAEP include information whenever feasible that is disaggregated by race or ethnicity, socioeconomic status, gender, disability, and English learner status. Contextual information serves the additional purpose of enriching the reporting of NAEP results by examining factors related to academic achievement in the specific subjects assessed. To satisfy the goal of enriching reports on student achievement in reading, contextual variables are selected to be of topical interest, timely, and directly related to academic achievement. In addition to questionnaires, information on contextual variables is also obtained by analyzing process data derived from computer monitoring of students’ navigation within the assessment tasks completed.

The 2026 NAEP Reading Assessment uses an expanded set of research-based contextual variables (Guthrie & Klauda, 2015; Guthrie, Wigfield & Von Secker, 2000) to understand reading achievement. Contextual variables are measurable, and some are also malleable (that is, they can be influenced). These include *reader characteristics* (e.g., students’ self-perceptions about engagement and motivation, knowledge, self-efficacy, agency, effort, and interest) and

*environmental characteristics* (students' perceptions about facets of home, community, or school settings, including their perceptions about classrooms, sense of belonging, and support).

The current NAEP Reading Framework collects and reports data on contextual variables, factors that shape students' opportunities to learn, including time, content, instructional strategies, and instructional resources. Contextual variables are used to predict or account for variance in an outcome of interest, such as reading comprehension scores on NAEP. The 2026 NAEP Reading Framework's emphasis on the cultural assets of individuals and the power of context to shape learning and development leads naturally to the need to identify and expand research-based contextual variables for reading.

The 2026 NAEP Reading Framework expands the scope of contextual variable data collected in conjunction with the NAEP Reading Assessment to reflect expanded knowledge in the field regarding cultural validity in assessment (Solano-Flores, 2010). Cultural validity refers to "the effectiveness with which the assessment addresses the sociocultural influences that shape student thinking and the ways in which students make sense of [test] items and respond to them" (Solano-Flores, 2010; Solano-Flores & Nelson-Barber, 2001, p. 555). Attention to cultural validity in assessments can guide the development of instruments to capture the proposed contextual variables by anticipating how students with different background experiences will interpret what is being asked of them. This approach to assessment acknowledges that reading as a social and cultural practice influences how readers approach, engage with, and make meaning from texts (Pacheco, 2015, 2018). Readers' values, beliefs, experiences, and ways of communicating and thinking are all shaped by their everyday experiences (Lee 2007, 2016). Readers' histories of engagement with texts also affect how often they read, the types of texts they read, and their purposes for reading (Cazden, 2002; Heath, 1983, 2012; Lee 1993, 2005; 2019). From the multitude of potential contextual variables, the 2026 NAEP Reading Framework expands the questionnaires by adding a manageable, selected set of research-based and malleable factors. By taking into account students' differential engagement with reading and their access to home and community resources such as libraries, tutoring, and out-of-school programs, the expanded contextual variable data may help contextualize and explain students' differential performance on the NAEP Reading Assessment, and thereby support policymakers and stakeholders in identifying potential means to shift policy and education practice to better serve our nation's students. Guided by the latest research, the 2026 NAEP Reading Assessment includes contextual variables that seek to capture both reader characteristics and environmental characteristics.

### ***Reader Characteristics***

Research demonstrates that when students do not see an assessment as meaningful or relevant, it may not adequately capture what they know and are able to do (Valencia, Wixson, & Pearson, 2014). With respect to reader characteristics, the 2026 NAEP Reading Framework seeks to describe the role of students' perception of the interest, difficulty, and familiarity of texts, tasks, and contexts on their performances (Pintrich and Schrauben 1992; Eccles, O'Neil et al. 2005; Valencia, Wixson et al. 2014). The assessment construct (reading comprehension) calls for better understanding the role of student self-efficacy in carrying out particular tasks (Bandura 1993; Pajares 1996) and the relevance of such tasks for students' motivation and engagement (Guthrie and Wigfield, 2000). Reader characteristic data to be collected from questionnaires and process data include the following:

### **Cognition and Metacognition**

1. **Cognitive strategies** in reading comprehension refer to skills used to understand a text, such as drawing inferences to connect sentences together and checking to be certain that text information is fully understood (OECD, 2011).
2. **Metacognitive strategies** in reading comprehension refer to, for example, a student's use of a mental guidance system to perform such operations as deciding which sections of text are most relevant to an assigned reading goal, how to link two sections, and/or when to reread to seek more information or clarify understanding (Cho & Afflerbach, 2017).
3. **Topical knowledge** refers to students' use of their pre-existing knowledge of the reading topic to enable them to understand text information and construct new knowledge (O'Reilly & Wang, 2019).

### **Engagement and Motivation**

1. **Volume of reading** refers to the amount of reading a student does for personal interest, pleasure or learning (Schaffner, Schiefele, Ulferts, 2013).
2. **Reading for enjoyment** refers to the goals, uses, purposes, reasons and benefits students have for reading in school and out of school (Pitzer, & Skinner, 2017).
3. **Motivations for reading** refer to students' attention, effort, sense of self-efficacy, interest, and value for reading a particular text with a unique set of tasks and questions related to it (NAEP Reading Special Study, 2019).

### ***Environmental Characteristics***

Environmental characteristics are equally important in accounting for student performance. For example, students vary in their participation in cultural communities that may value reading in varied ways and integrate reading into their lives for different purposes (Skerrett, in press). Students' histories of engagement and participation constitute resources readers accumulate across their lifetimes and bring to bear on reading tasks, including those on NAEP assessments. Furthermore, what it means to read has evolved over time as cultural communities and societies have employed texts for different purposes and goals. Understanding students' differential access to community resources that support literacy development (i.e., libraries, tutoring, out-of-school programs) is important, since as these environmental contexts shift, so do the roles of reading and texts in students' lives. The degree to which schools and communities offer access to out-of-school resources influences, to some degree, students' opportunities to learn (OTL), including their own self-initiated learning, which may vary considerably. These characteristics are surveyed with regard to students' perceptions of them. Environmental characteristic data to be collected from questionnaires and process data include the following:

### **Perceptions of School and Community Resources**

1. **School social support** refers to the extent to which students perceive that their teachers and peers believe they contribute positively to classroom reading (through listening, speaking and interacting well with others) (Vaux, Phillips, Holly, Thompson, Williams, & Steward, 1986).



2. **Belonging in school** refers to the extent to which students perceive themselves to be accepted members of the school community (Faircloth, & Hamm, 2005).
3. **Participation in out-of-school reading/literacy activities** refers to the degree to which students have access to resources (i.e., books, computers, media centers, camps, and community organizations) that utilize literacy for enjoyment, communication, learning, and pursuing a variety of activities (Bowen, Bowen & Ware, 2002).

### **Perceptions of Teacher, Instructional, and Classroom Supports**

1. **Teacher support for reading engagement** refers to the extent to which students perceive their teacher(s) as providing materials and tasks that encourage the development of their reading competence and engagement (Afflerbach, Hurt, & Cho, 2020).
2. **Teacher support for motivation** refers to the degree to which students perceive their teacher(s) to support their interests, self-efficacy, and reading goals (Wigfield & Wentzel, 2007).
3. **Teacher support for students' background experiences** refers to the students' perceptions that their teacher recognizes and uses students' cultural, language, and social knowledge during reading instruction (Shin, Daly & Vera, 2007).
4. **Program and curricular support for reading development** refers to the extent to which teachers and administrators perceive that the school's reading program and curriculum enables them to support students' development of effective reading practices.

The NAEP 2026 Reading Framework expands collecting and reporting of contextual variables via use of refined survey item design, thereby allowing policy makers and stakeholders to gain more actionable insights regarding the variables' influences on students' efforts and their performances. For example, students' reported sense of reading engagement and motivation could be positively related to higher levels of NAEP Reading performance (Guthrie, Wigfield & You, 2012). Students' positive perceptions of their teachers' support and classroom climate could also be associated with higher NAEP Reading performance (Pitzer & Skinner, 2017). If relations such as these emerge from NAEP, they could have meaningful implications for the need to attend to perceptions, identity, and affect to support reading comprehension and achievement. Consideration of such factors is consistent with research on the importance of social and emotional well-being to learning (Damasio 1995; Markus and Kitayama 1991; Weiner 1985; Guthrie, J. T., Klauda, 2016; Guthrie, Wigfield & You, 2012), the incorporation of social-emotional learning into the design of classroom and school climate (Farrington, Roderick et al. 2012), and approaches that build on and engage students' out-of-school identities and interests to make learning meaningful and relevant (Katz, Brynson & Edlund, 2019; Shin, Daly & Vera, 2007).

These variables can also add deeper explanations for surface level findings. For example, girls are often higher achievers than boys, but this information is of limited utility for pedagogical or curricular improvement. Girls often exhibit higher motivation than boys, and they spend more time reading than do boys. When boys and girls are compared, controlling for reading time, the gender performance gap disappears (Torppa, Eklund, Sulkunen, Niemi & Ahonen, 2018). Since both reading time and motivation are malleable factors that can be impacted by interventions, the more nuanced explanation of the gender difference could inform educators about the need to reorganize instruction and improve support for reading opportunities

for boys in schools. Availability of such contextual variables disaggregated within race/ethnicity and SES also provide opportunities to understand malleable factors that can be impacted by the organization of instruction.

### **Data Sources**

Beyond expanding the coverage of contextual variables, the 2026 NAEP Reading Framework also updates the method for collecting such information. In addition to items in the *questionnaires* that are routinely completed by students, teachers, and administrators from participating schools, information about some variables will be obtained from the *process data* (computer-generated records of navigational data collected automatically as students engage with the assessment) (Ho, 2017; Bergner & Davier, 2018). Exhibit 4.2 provides a list of variables, along with their source in the revised contextual variable plan.

**Exhibit 4.2. Contextual Variables**

Variables	Source		
	Student Questionnaire	Teacher/ Administrator Questionnaires	Process Data
<b>Reader Characteristics</b>			
Cognition and Metacognition			
Cognitive strategies	√	√	√
Metacognitive strategies	√		√
Topical knowledge	√	√	
Engagement and Motivation			
Volume of reading	√	√	√
Reading for enjoyment	√	√	
Motivations for reading	√	√	
<b>Environmental Characteristics</b>			
Perceptions of School and Community Resources			
School social support	√	√	
Belonging in school	√	√	
Participation in out-of-school reading/literacy activities	√		
Perceptions of Teacher, Instructional, and Classroom Supports			
Teacher support for reading engagement	√	√	
Teacher support for motivation	√	√	
Teacher support for students' background experiences	√	√	
Program and curricular support for reading development	√	√	

## Enhancing NAEP's Explanatory Reporting Capacity

This chapter provides evidence for the potential of NAEP's reporting system to both report on and offer insights into relations between reading outcomes, students' cognitive processes and perceptions about factors that contribute to reading comprehension. The importance and visibility of NAEP results are unquestioned within the educational policy arena, both at the national and state level. When the NAEP Report Card for Reading is issued every two years, policy makers and the public pay attention, particularly to trend data. Yet, NAEP results have also been subject to misinterpretation (Linn and Dunbar 1992; Jaeger 2003; National Research Council 2017). Because results are reported in broad categories (Race by Grade or Language Status by School Setting – Urban/Rural), they can be inappropriately interpreted. In addition, in the past, achievement results have seldom been reported as a function of malleable factors, either for reader characteristics (e.g., student motivation) or environmental characteristics (e.g., opportunity to learn factors), yet it is the understanding and attention to malleable factors that are most likely to lead to improved policies and practices that can shift student outcomes. Implementing the changes summarized below can mitigate potential misinterpretations and increase the usefulness of NAEP data.

1. **Reframe the Reporting System Within the Larger Assessment Construct.** As discussed in preceding chapters, the 2026 NAEP Reading Assessment is guided by a commitment to equity, rigor, precision, and validity while grounded in scholarship about the nature of all learning and human development. The assessment reflects the field's evolving understanding of reading comprehension, cognitive processes, and the changing nature of reading demands in today's society. Importantly, it optimizes readers' opportunities to demonstrate reading comprehension that reflect the changing demands of our increasingly complex world (Mislevy, 2016; National Research Council, 2018). Reframing and expanding the reporting system is as important as the assessment construct itself in enhancing NAEP's explanatory power and its key role in promoting equity in the nation's education.
2. **Revise Questionnaires.** To increase the capacity to examine the impact of contextual variables related to readers and their environments, NAEP seeks to revise and refresh questions to better reflect current research. A thorough review of current surveys—both the reading-specific and core questionnaires for the three categories of participants (students, teachers, and administrators)—will determine questions that need to be revised, replaced, or discarded. While continuing its history of ensuring the appropriateness and sensitivity of all NAEP questionnaire items, this review also enables development of questions that reflect improvements in survey item design and that will allow for better data (i.e., the data reflect the constructs outlined for questionnaires in Exhibit 4.2).
3. **Disaggregate Scores to Achieve More Nuanced and Explanatory Reporting.** Just as international, state, and formative/benchmark assessments have increased disaggregation of data in reporting, it is essential to add nuance to the reporting of performance for the major demographic categories (e.g., SES within race/ethnicity) to keep NAEP reporting structures current and useful.
4. **Expand Reporting Categories for English Learners.** Expanding the number of categories for reporting the achievement of ELs enables NAEP to track the progress of different subgroups, importantly for the added category of former ELs. By reporting the

performance of non-ELs and former ELs separately, it will be possible to determine whether the two groups perform at similar levels on the NAEP Reading Assessment.

5. **Mine Process Data for Evidence of Cognitive and Metacognitive Processing.** Initial forays evaluating the utility of the process (logfile) data for NAEP (Bergner & von Davier, 2018) and other digitally delivered assessments and instructional programs (Ho, 2017) suggest that there is substantial potential for using these navigational data as indirect indices of cognitive and metacognitive processes. These indices can be used, perhaps in triangulation with measures of the same variables from reading questionnaire responses, to understand comprehension performance more deeply. Simple bar graphs can be displayed in the Report Card, and data can be related to reading performance in the NAEP Data Explorer.
6. **Enhance the Visibility and Utility of the NAEP Reporting Portfolio.** An effort to expand, energize, and advertise the untapped resources of the NAEP reporting portfolio would allow for more nuanced data analyses. The NAEP Data Explorer, for example, permits users to go online and generate more sophisticated analyses than typically appear in the Report Card, which, by its nature, can only provide foundational reporting. In the NAEP Data Explorer for the 2019 Reading Assessment, a user can query the database to obtain a report which, for fourth graders in the nation, breaks down the performance of low- versus high-SES students on the cognitive targets of Locate and Recall, Integrate and Interpret, and Critique and Evaluate when reading literary and informational text. For sound psychometric reasons, NAEP results are not reported separately for the comprehension targets; regardless, NAEP data can be used to obtain more in-depth, statistically reliable reports beyond the standard ones offered by the Nation's Report Card.

Moreover, NAEP has a long tradition of funding small grants for secondary analyses that permit scholars to answer, in a statistically robust design, the sorts of questions that users can query with the Data Explorer tool. Increasing the funding for these initiatives would dramatically increase the portfolio of the more nuanced explanatory analysis suggested by this framework. It would be useful to replicate the 1998 study conducted by the National Validity Studies Panel (Jaeger, 1998) regarding how NAEP results are used by policy makers and educational leaders, with a focus on whether the inferences that users draw from the NAEP Report represent valid interpretations of the evidence.

Implementing these steps, including a systematic study of the NAEP reporting portfolio, could serve to create an integrated system designed to better explain student performance. Such a process would use reporting variables, contextual variables, and the all-important outcome variable of comprehension, to create and evaluate the efficacy and utility of just such a system, including consideration of its costs, benefits, and feasibility.

## Conclusion

Reading comprehension performances vary depending on the combination of individual and contextual factors at the time of the assessment. Thus, NAEP Reading scores provide only a snapshot of the nation's students' reading comprehension performance as displayed in a particular testing situation at a certain moment in time. Recognizing these inherent limitations, the assessments derived from the 2026 NAEP Reading Framework nonetheless offer increased

opportunities to understand the validity, efficacy, and utility of students' assets and needs as readers.

The NAEP Reading Assessment attempts to address the role of background knowledge, readers' perceptions about the relevance and social utility of comprehension tasks, use of cognitive and metacognitive strategies, and socioemotional factors. This update of the NAEP Reading Framework provides opportunities to examine malleable contextual variables that can help explain comprehension scores. The identification of malleable factors by the 2026 NAEP Reading Assessment reporting system also provides information that educators and policy makers can use to guide the improvement students' reading comprehension instruction and performance. Moreover, the disaggregation of reporting that examines heterogeneity within groups (e.g., race/ethnicity, SES, gender, English learners) will also be important. Efforts to disaggregate scores beyond what has been done in past iterations of the NAEP Reading Assessment provide opportunities for further explanatory power and greater utility for practice and research and help the field and the nation to avoid some common misinterpretations of data (e.g., overgeneralizing about groups).

The enhanced reporting system for NAEP will provide a wealth of new data sources for policymakers at state and district levels. Having access to reporting by states and networks of districts, such as TUDA, can inform state- and district-level initiatives about factors that not only predict performance but that are also malleable. Such state- and district-level reporting allows policymakers to re-examine policies intended to support students and teachers. Finally, the updated reporting system offers opportunities for researchers who will have access to a wider range of data for exploring foundational questions around the dynamic nature of reading comprehension.

Ultimately, the focus on equity, rigor, precision, validity, and the definition of reading comprehension informing the NAEP 2026 Reading Framework can shape future investments in expanding student access to robust opportunities for reading and literacy engagement in and beyond schools.

***GLOSSARY***

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**Glossary terms placeholder**

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**APPENDIX A: ITEM SPECIFICATIONS**


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**Exhibit 1. Passage Lengths for Grades 4, 8, and 12**

Grade	Range of Passage Lengths (Number of Words)
4	200-800
8	400-1,000
12	500-1,500

**Exhibit 2. Typical Text Elements Across Disciplinary Contexts**

Context	Genres and Text Types	Discourse, Language Structures, and Text Elements
Literature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Myths, legends, and fables</li> <li>• Short stories</li> <li>• Coming of age stories</li> <li>• Novels</li> <li>• Dramas</li> <li>• Poetic traditions</li> <li>• Science fiction</li> <li>• Satires</li> <li>• Magical realism</li> <li>• Biographies</li> <li>• Memoirs</li> <li>• Comic books</li> <li>• Graphic novels</li> <li>• Manga</li> <li>• Fanfiction</li> <li>• Literary analyses</li> <li>• Literature reviews and recommendations</li> <li>• Author profiles and biographies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plot and character structures</li> <li>• Figurative language (symbolism, imagery, simile, metaphor, personification)</li> <li>• Point of view</li> <li>• Dialogue</li> <li>• Diction and word choice</li> <li>• Repetition</li> <li>• Exaggeration</li> <li>• Theme and message</li> <li>• Flashback</li> <li>• Foreshadowing</li> <li>• Mood, tone, irony, paradox, and sarcasm</li> <li>• Visual and graphical elements such as illustrations and photographs</li> <li>• Multimodal elements such as narrative soundscapes</li> <li>• Description, exposition and narrative elements and text structures</li> </ul>
Science	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reports</li> <li>• Press releases</li> <li>• News briefs</li> <li>• Discovery narratives, biographies, and first person accounts</li> <li>• Raw data</li> <li>• Bench notes</li> <li>• Journal articles</li> <li>• Personal communications</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Linguistic frames and signals for organizing arguments, comparisons, and/or causal chains</li> <li>• Abstraction and nominalization (e.g., technical terms like transpiration represent an explanation sequence)</li> <li>• Epistemological qualification of claims: may, probably, suggests, etc.</li> <li>• Visual and graphical elements such as tables, graphs, equations, diagrams, schematics</li> </ul>

Context	Genres and Text Types	Discourse, Language Structures, and Text Elements
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Multimodal elements such as simulations or animations</li> </ul>
Social Studies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Primary, secondary, and tertiary text traditions (mainly in history)</li> <li>• Primary: newspaper articles, census data, diaries, letters, speeches, inventories and records of sale, advertisements, archival documents, cultural artifacts</li> <li>• Secondary: interpretive explanations of historical, social, and cultural phenomena and trends.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Linguistic frames and signals for organizing arguments, comparisons, and/or causal chains</li> <li>• Abstraction and nominalization (e.g., to develop a chain of reasonings across events and happenings, e.g., this stance of brinkmanship...)</li> <li>• Rhetorical markers of persuasion</li> <li>• Lexical expressions that mark chronology or argument</li> <li>• Historical and ideological markers of language</li> <li>• Visual and graphical elements such as maps, timelines, political cartoons, photographs</li> <li>• Multimodal elements such as digital stories, procedural texts, public service announcements</li> <li>• Event models (how historical events are described)</li> <li>• Spatial (place, location) and temporal indicators (era, time, sequence, and tense)</li> </ul>

(Note: Many text types and elements are common across disciplines.)



**Exhibit 3. Text Structures and Features Within and Across Single Static and Dynamic Texts and Complex Textual Environments**

SINGLE STATIC TEXT	SINGLE DYNAMIC TEXT
<p><b>Textual structures</b> are comparable to those in a printed format for texts designed to inform, entertain and/or persuade. <b>Textual features</b> may include visual media elements in a single text comparable to those in a printed format that convey meaning through primarily static words, numbers, and/or visual graphics, such as those in a still photograph, diagram, or table.</p>	<p><b>Textual structures</b> include one or more <b>nonlinear</b> elements (e.g., hypermedia or hyperlinks) for readers to quickly move from one location or mode to another, but still <i>within the same text</i> (e.g., a navigational menu at the top of a document). <b>Textual features</b> include one or more <b>multimodal</b> elements (words, moving images, animations, color, music and sound) embedded into a single text or other media element</p>
COMPLEX TEXTUAL ENVIRONMENT	
<p><b>Text structures</b> may include one or more static or dynamic texts, with a strong likelihood of nonlinear elements both within a text (e.g., hypermedia or hyperlinks) that may lead to another text (e.g., another webpage within the same website or another webpage on a different website). <b>Text features</b> may include linked texts may contain either related or conflicting textual ideas. Multimodal elements (words, moving images, animations, color, music and sound) may appear in any or all texts.</p> <p>Note: Ideas within each cell are likely to change and expand as new kinds of texts and technologies continue to emerge.</p>	

**Exhibit 4. Distribution of Cognitive Comprehension Targets Across Grade Level and Blocks**

<b>Grade Level and Comprehension Targets</b>	<b>Reading to Develop Understanding</b>	<b>Reading to Solve a Problem</b>
<b>Grade 4</b>		
Locate and Recall	30 - 40%	10 - 20%
Integrate and Interpret	30 - 40%	30 - 45%
Analyze and Evaluate	10 - 20%	10 - 20%
Use and Apply	10 - 20%	20 - 30%
<b>Grade 8</b>		
Locate and Recall	10 - 20%	10 - 20%
Integrate and Interpret	30 - 40%	20 - 30%
Analyze and Evaluate	30 - 40%	20 - 30%
Use and Apply	10 - 20%	20 - 30%
<b>Grade 12</b>		
Locate and Recall	10 - 20%	10 - 20%
Integrate and Interpret	30 - 40%	20 - 30%
Analyze and Evaluate	30 - 40%	20 - 30%
Use and Apply	10 - 20%	20 - 30%

**Exhibit 5. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria for Connected Language and Vocabulary**



Language Structures & Vocabulary Included / Excluded From Testing	Criteria
Included	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Words and language structures that appear across numerous texts, either across literary texts (e.g., <i>despise, benevolent</i>) or across social studies and natural sciences texts (e.g., <i>resolution, commit</i>)</li> <li>• Words or phrases necessary for understanding at least a local part of the context linked to central ideas in the passage</li> <li>• Words and language structures found in grade-appropriate texts</li> <li>• Words that label generally familiar and broadly understood concepts, even though the words themselves may not be familiar to younger learners (e.g., <i>timid</i>).</li> <li>• Words that include word parts (roots and affixes) useful to acquire and figure out the meaning of unfamiliar words (e.g., <i>disregard, counterargument</i>).</li> <li>• Language that expresses logical relations between ideas (e.g., phrases that include connecting words such as <i>although, in contrast</i>)</li> <li>• Expressions that refer to characters, events, or ideas previously introduced in the passage (e.g., <i>those alliances, this phenomenon</i>)</li> </ul>
Excluded	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rare words of limited application across grade-appropriate texts and discipline-specific concepts (e.g., <i>fiduciary, photosynthesis</i>)</li> <li>• Idiomatic expressions (e.g., <i>spill the beans, up in the air</i>)</li> <li>• Words and language structures that are already likely to be part of students' oral proficiency at a specific grade level.</li> </ul>



\*Note: A total of 30 percent of items in any assessment block will assess passage-relevant Language Structures and Vocabulary knowledge while concurrently measuring a specific comprehension process.


**Exhibit 6. Principle and Provisional Distribution Targets for Sampling Assessment Design Elements: Text Formats and Modes**

<b>For All Grade Levels</b>
<p>Principle: The percentage of different text formats (static or dynamic) and modalities (print, sound, image, and multimodal) should reflect their distribution in the population of texts that students encounter in and out of school at different grade levels.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As dynamic and multimodal texts increase in our society and schools, NAEP should aim to keep pace with those shifts.</li> <li>• Current NAEP: 80% print, 20% other modalities</li> </ul>

**Exhibit 7. Range of Design Features for Assessment Components with which Students Might Engage in A Block**

<b>Assessment Component</b>	<b>More constrained and conventional assessment features</b>		<b>More complex, dynamic, and iterative assessment features</b>
Block	Less involved specific reading purposes that focus students' attention on a theme, question, or problem to be explored during the block (e.g., consider how a character changes throughout a story). Not, all tasks within the block necessarily work directly toward this theme.		More involved specific reading purposes paired with an essential inquiry question or problem to be examined (e.g., using an author interview, nonfiction texts, and a fiction story based on real issues, consider why an author includes characters with different perspectives despite the author's own perspective on the issue stated during the interview). All tasks within the block will help readers work towards this theme, question, or problem.
Role of readers	Reader is less constrained (assigned less of a role) by specific reading purposes that contextualize expectations for how to engage with provided texts and tasks.		Reader is more constrained by specific reading purposes and role expectations about how to engage with provided texts and tasks. Readers may be assigned (or choose to take on) particular roles, and their role may be more specified, particularly in relation to reading purpose(s) and expected outcome(s).

Assessment Component	More constrained and conventional assessment features		More complex, dynamic, and iterative assessment features
Tasks	<p><i>Inter-relatedness:</i> Purpose-driven tasks are situated in line with context norms but tasks are more loosely structured with less probability of readers moving back and forth across tasks; less need for resetting.</p> <p><i>Culminating elements:</i> Less involved culminating task that loosely addresses the question/problem; not a major driver of the block.</p>		<p><i>Inter-relatedness:</i> Purpose-driven tasks are situated in line with context norms but tasks are more tightly structured so that one task builds on the previous; more probability that tasks are interdependent; more need for resetting.</p> <p><i>Culminating elements:</i> More involved culminating task at the end of an activity that directly addresses the question or problem; major driver of the block.</p>
Assessment Component	More constrained and conventional assessment features		More complex, dynamic, and iterative assessment features
Texts	<p><i>Number:</i> 1-3 related texts; excerpts rather than entire texts from some texts may be included rather than in their entirety</p> <p><i>Dynamism:</i> More static texts with minimal dynamic features</p> <p><i>Linearity:</i> Fewer nonlinear structures to navigate within or across texts; less variation in structures across texts</p> <p><i>Features:</i> Texts include a narrower range of features and fewer types of media.</p> <p><i>Perspectives:</i> Less variation in content, purposes, perspectives across texts.</p>		<p><i>Number:</i> 2-4 interconnected texts (or excerpts from longer texts); readers may be asked to choose only some to engage with in line with task purposes</p> <p><i>Dynamism:</i> More texts with dynamic or multimodal text features</p> <p><i>Linearity:</i> More nonlinear structures to navigate within or across texts; more variation in structures across texts</p> <p><i>Features:</i> Texts include a wider range of features and more types of media</p> <p><i>Perspectives:</i> More variation in content and a wider range of purposes and perspectives across texts.</p>

Assessment Component	More constrained and conventional assessment features		More complex, dynamic, and iterative assessment features
Universal Design Elements (UDEs)	Less complex reading purposes that may involve UDEs for knowledge or motivation but lesser need for task-based UDEs.		More complex and inter-related reading purposes that may involve UDEs for knowledge or motivation but greater need for task-based UDEs.

### Exhibit 8. Illustrative Examples of Texts and Other Media Across Single Static and Dynamic Texts and Complex Textual Environments

SINGLE STATIC TEXT	SINGLE DYNAMIC TEXT
<p>Examples of single static genres and forms of continuous prose, non-continuous prose, and everyday reading materials from which designers might sample as readers read to engage in literature, science, or social studies and history are found in Exhibit XXX.</p>	<p><i>Nonlinear text</i> Single text with hyperlinks that only connect to ideas within the same document; may also contain one or more dynamic media elements</p> <p><i>Dynamic media</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dynamic image</li> <li>• Video</li> <li>• Podcast</li> <li>• Digital poster</li> <li>• Infographic</li> <li>• Interactive timeline</li> <li>• Interactive chart or graph</li> <li>• Data visualization</li> <li>• Blog</li> <li>• Simulation</li> </ul>
COMPLEX TEXTUAL ENVIRONMENT	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Augmented reality text</li> <li>• Blog</li> <li>• Database</li> <li>• Digital creation/composition tool</li> <li>• Dynamic simulation</li> <li>• Email</li> <li>• Interactive model</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Google document or Google folder</li> <li>• Role play simulation</li> <li>• Search engine</li> <li>• Social media (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, Twitter)</li> <li>• Threaded discussion</li> <li>• Webpage or website</li> </ul>

## ***APPENDIX B: ACHIEVEMENT LEVEL DESCRIPTIONS***

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The NAEP Reading achievement level descriptions (ALDs) articulate specific expectations of student performance in reading at grades 4, 8 and 12. Like other subject-specific ALDs, the NAEP Reading ALDs presented in this appendix translate the generic NAEP policy definitions into grade- and subject-specific descriptions of performance.

### **NAEP Policy Definitions**

- ***NAEP Basic.*** This level denotes partial mastery of prerequisite knowledge and skills that are fundamental for performance at the NAEP Proficient level.
- ***NAEP Proficient.*** This level represents solid academic performance for each NAEP assessment. Students reaching this level have demonstrated competency over challenging subject matter, including subject-matter knowledge, application of such knowledge to real world situations, and analytical skills appropriate to the subject matter.
- ***NAEP Advanced.*** This level signifies superior performance beyond NAEP Proficient.

### **Range ALDs**

This Framework presents range ALDs for NAEP Reading. For each achievement level, the corresponding range ALD details observable evidence of student achievement. In many cases, range ALDs also illustrate “changes” in skills across achievement levels, portraying an increasingly sophisticated grasp of the material from one achievement level (and from one grade level) to the next. Achievement levels are also cumulative, meaning each ALD in each grade includes all the reading achievement expectations identified in all the lower achievement levels and grade levels.

Range ALDs should not be confused with reporting ALDs. The fundamental difference between the two is straightforward; range ALDs communicate **expectations**, and reporting ALDs convey **results**. In other words, range ALDs are **conceptually driven**, based on the model of reading and the Assessment Construct in the NAEP framework. They answer the question, given what we know about the development of reading, what should students be able to do at different grade and achievement levels when responding to different combinations of texts and tasks? By contrast, reporting ALDs are **empirically driven**, based on **actual** performance of students who have taken NAEP. They answer the question, given the distribution of NAEP performance, what can students at different grade and achievement levels do when responding to various combinations of texts and tasks?

The 2025 NAEP Reading Framework does not provide reporting ALDs; those are constructed using empirical data during a later stage in the NAEP cycle, i.e., a live administration of the NAEP Reading Assessment. Further detail about the development of the reporting ALDs for NAEP is provided in the Governing Board’s [policy statement on achievement level setting](#).

### **Multiple Disciplinary Contexts for Reading**

The ALDs in this appendix are structured to mirror the presentation of the reading construct provided in the Framework narrative. The primary organizational structure in the Framework narrative is the disciplinary context. Whereas the prior (2009) NAEP Reading Framework



identified two reading contexts (literary and informational) this 2025 Framework has identified three (science, social studies, and reading). In the ALDs below, all three disciplinary contexts are described within each performance level.

## **Connections to the Sociocultural Model of Reading**

### *Comprehension Targets and Text Complexity*

Over the course of the NAEP Reading Assessment, students will engage with texts of various discourse structures and an appropriate grade-level range of text complexity. While reading these texts, students will complete varied reading comprehension activities that include specific purposes, tasks, processes, and consequences. The reader, per his or her achievement level, will employ various knowledge types to accomplish the assessment's reading comprehension activities. In doing so, the reader will demonstrate achievement relative to four *comprehension targets*: (1) Locate and Recall; (2) Integrate and Interpret; (3) Analyze and Evaluate; and (4) Use and Apply. Students at each achievement level are expected to meet the demands of each comprehension target. However, as the complexity of texts increases on a given reading assessment, students, on average, are expected to demonstrate less competency with skills associated with higher-level comprehension targets, such as Use and Apply.

### *Purposes*

According to the sociocultural model, reading activities are situated within not only a disciplinary context but also a purpose. This section describes the mapping of reading purposes to disciplinary contexts.

**Literary Texts.** People engage in reading literature for the following purposes:

- To understand human experience
- To entertain themselves and others
- To reflect on and solve personal and social dilemmas
- To appreciate and use authors' craft to develop interpretations

In school, students read, create, and discuss literary texts such as poems, short stories, chapter books, novels, and films. Outside of school, students participate in book clubs, create fan fiction and book reviews, follow and discuss authors, dramatize literary works with animation and music, and more. NAEP simulates these Contexts of Reading to Engage in Literature by providing test takers with activities to respond to literary and everyday texts like those read in and outside of school.

**Science Texts.** People engage in reading science for the following purposes:

- To understand natural and material phenomena
- To design solutions to problems
- To explore and discuss issues and ideas
- To consider impacts on themselves and society

In school, students read, create, and discuss science texts such as explanations, investigations, journal articles, trade books, and more. They design solutions to engineering challenges, use diagrams and flow charts, and follow step-by-step procedures to investigate scientific

phenomena. Outside of school, students engage in reading science when participating in games, cooking, and crafts, and reading and viewing science and health news. NAEP simulates these Contexts of Reading to Engage in Science by providing test taskers with activities to respond to science and everyday texts like those read in and outside of school.

**Social Studies Texts.** People engage in reading social studies for the following purposes, among them these:

- To understand past events and how they may impact the present
- To explore and discuss issues and ideas
- To understand human motivation, perception, and ethics
- To advocate for change for themselves and society

In school, students read social studies texts such as primary and secondary source documents, historical narratives in textbooks, case studies, current events, court cases, and more. They read, create, and discuss memoirs, timelines, and biographies. Outside of school, people engage in reading history and social studies when participating in trivia games, crafts, civic activities, community discussions, self-help, and community service. NAEP simulates these contexts of reading to engage in social studies by providing test tasks with activities to respond to history/social studies and everyday texts like those read in and outside of school.

## **NAEP Reading Achievement Levels: Grade 4**

### ***NAEP Basic***

**Fourth-grade students performing at the *NAEP Basic* level should be able to locate specific pieces of information, identify relationships between explicitly stated pieces of information, make simple inferences and interpretations within and between texts, create summaries, and show understanding of vocabulary in the disciplinary contexts.**

When engaged in reading literary texts such as fiction, drama, film, poetry, and literary nonfiction, fourth-grade readers performing at the *NAEP Basic* level should be able to use textual evidence as support to identify or determine literary elements such as character point of view, theme or central message, problem, and setting. Readers should be able to explain how a text's illustrations contribute to what is conveyed by the text, explain the differences between poems, drama, and prose, and show understanding of vocabulary and simple figurative language. Readers can produce a simple summary of a text and continue the narration of an incomplete story to a conclusion of their making.

When engaged in reading science texts such as exposition (including literary nonfiction), argumentation, and procedural texts (including investigations), fourth-grade readers performing at the *NAEP Basic* level should be able to use textual evidence as support to determine the main idea and how it is supported by key details, determine and interpret an author's point of view or purpose, and distinguish between fact and opinion. Readers should be able to interpret and integrate information presented in a text visually, quantitatively, and orally, analyze specific results of a simple multistep procedure, and show understanding of academic and domain-specific vocabulary. Readers can apply simpler ideas acquired through reading to solve a new problem.

When engaged in reading social studies texts such as exposition (including literary nonfiction), argumentation, and documents of historical and literary significance, fourth-grade readers performing at the *NAEP Basic* level should be able to determine the main idea and how it is supported by key details, determine and interpret an author's point of view or purpose, and distinguish between fact and opinion. Readers should be able to describe the overall structure of a text and compare and contrast explicit information found in a firsthand and secondhand account of the same event or topic. Readers can produce a simple summary of a text and integrate information from lower complexity sources to produce a new text of informational or argumentative purpose.

### ***NAEP Proficient***

**Fourth-grade students performing at the *NAEP Proficient* level should be able to make more complex inferences and interpretations, reconcile inconsistencies across a text or texts, and explain how an author uses reasons and evidence to support particular points in a text.**

When engaged in reading literary texts such as fiction, drama, film, poetry, and literary nonfiction, fourth-grade readers performing at the *NAEP Proficient* level should be able to use textual evidence as support to describe in depth character, setting, and plot, and to explain how a theme or central message is conveyed through details in a text. Readers should be able to analyze how a printed version of a text relates to its multimedia version and show understanding of nuances in word meaning. Readers can produce a detailed summary of a text and rewrite a story from a different character's perspective.

When engaged in reading science texts such as exposition (including literary nonfiction), argumentation, and procedural texts (including investigations), fourth-grade readers performing at the *NAEP Proficient* level should be able to use textual evidence as support to explain events, procedures, ideas, and concepts based on specific information in and across texts. Readers should be able to make predictions and to interpret an author's point of view or purpose, including in reference to a procedure or experiment and in comparison to another text's author. Readers should be able to develop a new procedure or experiment based on knowledge acquired from information gained from reading texts.

When engaged in reading social studies texts such as exposition (including literary nonfiction), argumentation, and documents of historical and literary significance, fourth-grade readers performing at the *NAEP Proficient* level should be able to use textual evidence as support to explain events, procedures, ideas, and concepts based on specific information in and across texts. Readers should be able to explain how information presented in a text visually, quantitatively, and orally contributes to an understanding of a text. Readers should be able to produce a detailed summary of a text and adopt the persona of a historical figure when producing a new text of informational or argumentative purpose.

### ***NAEP Advanced***

**Fourth-grade students performing at the *NAEP Advanced* level should be able to make complex inferences and to support their interpretations, conclusions, and their judgments based upon evidence within and across texts.**

When engaged in reading literary texts such as fiction, drama, film, poetry, and literary nonfiction, fourth-grade readers performing at the *NAEP Advanced* level should be able to use textual evidence as support to explain character motivation and behavior and how characters interact with setting and plot. Readers should be able to evaluate how characters or themes resonate with society and their personal lives. Readers should be able to apply knowledge acquired about author's craft to produce a literary work evidencing their understanding.

When engaged in reading science texts such as exposition (including literary nonfiction), argumentation, and procedural texts (including investigations), fourth-grade readers performing at the *NAEP Advanced* level should be able to determine the significance of information and arguments made in a text. Readers should be able to make predictions and to interpret an author's point of view or purpose and to argue for or against a particular interpretation.

When engaged in reading social studies texts such as exposition (including literary nonfiction), argumentation, and documents of historical and literary significance, fourth-grade readers performing at the *NAEP Advanced* level should be able to determine the significance of information and arguments made in a text. Readers should be able to make predictions and to interpret an author's point of view or purpose and to argue for or against a particular interpretation. Readers should be able to use acquired knowledge about a topic, conduct brief research, and produce a historical document, such as a political cartoon or a personal bill of rights.

## **NAEP Reading Achievement Levels: Grade 8**

### ***NAEP Basic***

**Eighth-grade students performing at the *NAEP Basic* level should be able to find information in dynamic and multimodal texts, make simple inferences and interpretations within and between texts, make predictions, create objective summaries, analyze word choice, and show understanding of vocabulary in the disciplinary contexts.**

When engaged in reading literary texts such as fiction, drama, film, poetry, and literary nonfiction, eighth-grade readers performing at the *NAEP Basic* level should be able to use textual evidence as support to determine theme or central idea and aspects of character, setting, and plot. They should be able to compare basic literary attributes of two or more texts and make judgments about how each author presents events. Readers show understanding of vocabulary and figurative language. They can develop a simple objective summary of a text and produce an argumentative text that prosecutes or defends the actions of a character by using evidence from the reading text.

When engaged in reading science texts such as exposition (including literary nonfiction), argumentation, and procedural texts (including experiments), eighth-grade readers performing at the *NAEP Basic* level should be able to use textual evidence as support to determine the central ideas and conclusions of a text and explain how a text makes connections among and distinctions between individuals, ideas, and/or events. Readers should be able to integrate quantitative or technical information expressed in words in a text with a version of that information expressed visually (e.g., in a flowchart, diagram, model, graph, or table), show understanding of how to follow precisely a multistep procedure of an experiment, and show understanding of academic

and domain-specific vocabulary, key terms, and symbols. Readers can apply simpler ideas acquired through reading to solve a new problem.

When engaged in reading social studies texts such as exposition (including literary nonfiction), argumentation, and documents of historical and literary significance, eighth-grade readers performing at the *NAEP Basic* level should be able to determine the central ideas, determine and interpret an author's point of view or purpose, and distinguish between fact, opinion, and reasoned judgment in a text. Readers should be able to identify key steps in a text's description of a process related to social studies (e.g., how a bill becomes law). Readers can produce a simple objective summary of a text and integrate information from multiple sources to produce a new text of informational or argumentative purpose.

### ***NAEP Proficient***

**Eighth-grade students performing at the *NAEP Proficient* level should be able to make more complex inferences and interpretations, form explanations and generalizations, generate alternatives, and apply new ideas acquired through reading to a new problem or context. Students should be able to use text-based evidence to support arguments and conclusions.**

When engaged in reading literary texts such as fiction, drama, film, poetry, and literary nonfiction, eighth-grade readers performing at the *NAEP Proficient* level should be able to analyze the development of the theme or central idea over the course of a text and how particular lines of dialogue or incidents in a text propel the action, provoke a decision, or reveal aspects of character. Readers should be able to analyze how a printed version of a text relates to its multimedia version and how text structure contributes to meaning and style. They can analyze how word choice impacts a text's meaning and tone. Readers can develop a detailed objective summary of a text and produce an informational text that analyzes how different authors developed a similar theme or central idea.

When engaged in reading science texts such as exposition (including literary nonfiction), argumentation, and procedural texts (including experiments), eighth-grade readers performing at the *NAEP Proficient* level should be able to use textual evidence as support to analyze the specific results of a multistep procedure based on explanations in the text, analyze how the author acknowledges and responds to conflicting evidence and/or viewpoints, and analyze how two or more texts provide conflicting information on the same topic, identifying where the texts disagree on matters of fact or interpretation. Readers should be able to compare and contrast information gained from experiments, simulations, video, or multimedia sources with that gained from reading a text on the same topic. Readers should be able to generate an alternative procedure or experiment based on knowledge acquired from information gained from reading texts.

When engaged in reading social studies texts such as exposition (including literary nonfiction), argumentation, and documents of historical and literary significance, eighth-grade readers performing at the *NAEP Proficient* level should be able to use textual evidence as support to explain how a text makes connections among and distinctions between individuals, ideas, and/or events (e.g., through comparisons, analogies, or categories). Readers should be able to analyze the relationship between a primary and secondary source on the same topic and analyze how two

or more texts provide conflicting information on the same topic, identifying where the texts disagree on matters of fact or interpretation. They should be able to analyze the structure an author uses to organize a text and develop a detailed objective summary of a text. Readers can produce an argumentative text that proposes a form of social action based on knowledge acquired and opinions formed from the reading texts.

### *NAEP Advanced*

**Eighth-grade students performing at the *NAEP Advanced* level should be able to make complex inferences and to support their interpretations, conclusions, and their judgments based upon evidence within and across texts. Students should be able to evaluate the relevance and strength of evidence to support an author's claims.**

When engaged in reading literary texts such as fiction, drama, film, poetry, and literary nonfiction, eighth-grade readers performing at the *NAEP Advanced* level should be able to use textual evidence as support to analyze how multiple literary elements in a text relate to each other and to analyze points of view of and between character(s) and the reader/audience. Readers should be able to analyze how a modern text draws on themes, patterns of events, or character types from myths or traditional stories, and then evaluate how these elements resonate with society and their personal lives. Readers should be able to produce a literary text that adapts elements of a myth into a contemporary retelling based upon the reader's personal experience.

When engaged in reading science texts such as exposition (including literary nonfiction), argumentation, and procedural texts (including experiments), eighth-grade readers performing at the *NAEP Advanced* level should be able to analyze the development of the central idea over the course of the text. They should be able to delineate and evaluate the argument, claims, and reasoning in a text, including whether the evidence is relevant and sufficient to support the claims. Readers can produce a new argumentative or informative text that synthesizes information from a range of sources to demonstrate a coherent understanding of a process, phenomenon, or concept.

When engaged in reading social studies texts such as exposition (including literary nonfiction), argumentation, and documents of historical and literary significance, eighth-grade readers performing at the *NAEP Advanced* level should be able to analyze the development of the central idea over the course of the text and analyze how the author acknowledges and responds to conflicting evidence and/or viewpoints. Readers should be able to delineate and evaluate the argument, claims, and reasoning in a text, including whether the evidence is relevant and sufficient to support the claims. They can produce an informative text that traces and connects various factors (e.g., economic and societal) by incorporating acquired knowledge through reading multiple sources and conducting brief research.

## **NAEP Reading Achievement Levels: Grade 12**

### *NAEP Basic*

**Twelfth-grade students performing at the *NAEP Basic* level should be able to find information in dynamic and multimodal texts, make inferences and interpretations within and between texts, make predictions, create objective summaries, analyze word choice, and show understanding of vocabulary in the disciplinary contexts.**

When engaged in reading literary texts such as fiction, drama, film, poetry, and literary nonfiction, twelfth-grade readers performing at the *NAEP Basic* level should be able to use textual evidence as support to analyze the development of the theme or central idea over the course of a text and to analyze points of view of and between character(s) and the reader/audience. They should be able to compare literary attributes of two or more texts and make judgments about how each author presents events. Readers show understanding of vocabulary and figurative language. They can develop an objective summary of a text and produce an informational text that applies a common theme or central idea culled from multiple texts to a current societal issue.

When engaged in reading science texts such as exposition (including literary nonfiction), argumentation, and procedural texts (including experiments), twelfth-grade readers performing at the *NAEP Basic* level should be able to use textual evidence as support to analyze the specific results of a multistep procedure based on explanations in the text, explain how specific individuals, ideas, and/or events interact and develop over the course of a text, and analyze how the text structures information or ideas into categories or hierarchies. Readers should be able to compare and contrast findings presented in a text to those from other sources and show understanding of general academic and domain-specific vocabulary, key terms, and symbols. Readers should be able to generate an alternative procedure or experiment based on knowledge acquired from information gained from reading texts.

When engaged in reading social studies texts such as exposition (including literary nonfiction), argumentation, and documents of historical and literary significance, twelfth-grade readers performing at the *NAEP Basic* level should be able to explain how specific individuals, ideas, and/or events interact and develop over the course of a text, determine and interpret an author's point of view or purpose, and distinguish between fact, opinion, and reasoned judgment in a text. Readers should be able to show understanding of general academic and domain-specific vocabulary and of figurative language and be able to develop an objective summary of a text by paraphrasing its complex concepts and information. They can integrate information from multiple sources to produce a new text of informational or argumentative purpose.

### ***NAEP Proficient***

**Twelfth-grade students performing at the *NAEP Proficient* level should be able to make more complex inferences and interpretations, form explanations and generalizations, generate alternatives, and apply new ideas acquired through reading to a new problem or context. Students should be able to use text-based evidence to support arguments and conclusions.**

When engaged in reading literary texts such as fiction, drama, film, poetry, and literary nonfiction, twelfth-grade readers performing at the *NAEP Proficient* level should be able to analyze how two or more themes or central ideas interact and build on one another to produce a complex account over the course of the text. Readers should be able to analyze how text structure contributes to meaning and style. They can analyze how word choice impacts a text's meaning and tone. Readers can develop a detailed objective summary of a text and produce a new text of literary purpose based on an archetypal conflict discovered in the reading texts.

When engaged in reading science texts such as exposition (including literary nonfiction), argumentation, and procedural texts (including experiments), twelfth-grade readers performing at the *NAEP Proficient* level should be able to use textual evidence as support to analyze an author's point of view or purpose, including in providing an explanation, describing a procedure, or discussing an experiment, identifying important issues that remain unresolved. Readers should be able to integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse media or formats (visually or in words) in order to address a question or solve a problem. Readers can produce a new argumentative or informative text that synthesizes information from a range of sources to demonstrate a coherent understanding of a process, phenomenon, or concept.

When engaged in reading social studies texts such as exposition (including literary nonfiction), argumentation, and documents of historical and literary significance, twelfth-grade readers performing at the *NAEP Proficient* level should be able to use textual evidence as support to analyze how the central ideas interact and build on one another to produce a complex account. They should be able to analyze the themes, purposes, and rhetorical features of foundational U.S. documents and evaluate the effectiveness of the structure in the text's exposition or argument. They should be able to develop a detailed objective summary of a text. Readers can evaluate multiple sources of information presented in different media or formats (visually or in words) in order to produce an argumentative text with evidence to structure and support a judgment.

### ***NAEP Advanced***

**Twelfth-grade students performing at the *NAEP Advanced* level should be able to make complex inferences and to support their interpretations, conclusions, and their judgments based upon evidence within and across texts. Students should be able to use an understanding of legal and ethical principles to develop a text or presentation on a matter of social debate.**

When engaged in reading literary texts such as fiction, drama, film, poetry, and literary nonfiction, twelfth-grade readers performing at the *NAEP Advanced* level should be able to use textual evidence as support to analyze and evaluate multiple interpretations of text (e.g., multimedia versions of a text) to the source text. Readers can use acquired knowledge to produce an informational text analyzing how elements of an era's poetry (e.g., Romanticism's celebration of nature; rejection of industrialization) are evidenced in the work of one or more poets.

When engaged in reading science texts such as exposition (including literary nonfiction), argumentation, and procedural texts (including experiments), twelfth-grade readers performing at the *NAEP Advanced* level should be able to delineate and evaluate the argument, claims, and reasoning in a text, and evaluate the hypotheses, data, analysis, and conclusions in a text. They should be able to explain how style and content contribute to the power, persuasiveness, or beauty of the text. Readers can produce a new argumentative or informative text that utilizes an understanding of legal and ethical principles to address a scientific matter of debate (e.g., uses of genetic databases).

When engaged in reading social studies texts such as exposition (including literary nonfiction), argumentation, and documents of historical and literary significance, twelfth-grade readers performing at the *NAEP Advanced* level should be able to delineate and evaluate argument, claims, and reasoning in a text. They should be able to explain how style and content contribute



to the power, persuasiveness, or beauty of the text. Readers can produce a new argumentative or informative text that utilizes an understanding of legal and ethical principles to address a societal matter of debate (e.g., indigenous peoples' land rights).

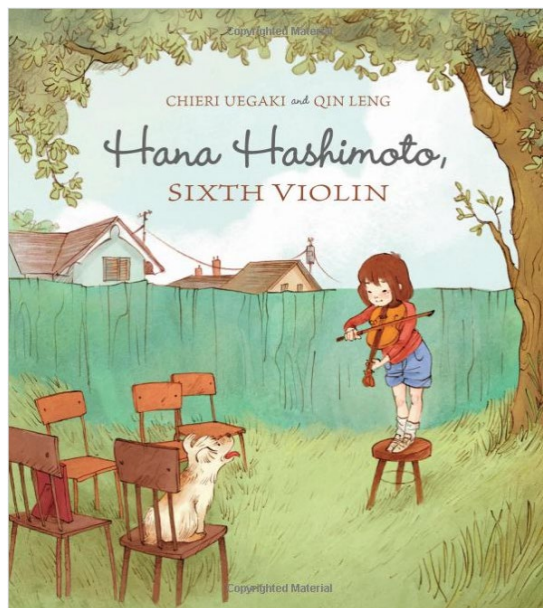
## ***APPENDIX C: ANATOMY OF TWO DIFFERENT ASSESSMENT BLOCKS***

This last section presents two hypothetical examples of 2026 NAEP Reading Assessment blocks. The first example illustrates a Reading to Develop Understanding (RDU) block, and the second example illustrates a Reading to Solve a Problem (RSP) block.

The first example outlines components in a Reading to Develop Understanding (RDU) block in which fourth graders read to engage with texts in a literature context. In this block, fourth-grade readers preview a short video of young children playing in an orchestra and then they read and interpret story excerpts from the short story, *Hana Hashimoto, Sixth Violin*, by Chieri Uegaki as they read to develop an understanding of the main characters, key events, and author's craft and apply their insights to predict events beyond the story.

The second example illustrates what eighth graders might encounter in a Reading to Solve a Problem (RSP) block with texts situated in a social studies context. In this block, students engage in more complex reading tasks that might include two to four more dynamic texts and involve greater integration across texts and items, all of which contribute to a generative opportunity to use and apply meaning from the text to solve a problem. While both assessment blocks include tasks, texts, items, and UDEs, differences in what readers experience illustrate just a sampling of the range of possible design features from which developers might choose in their creation of purpose-driven tasks embedded in any single block.

### **Grade 4 Assessment Block. Reading to Develop Understanding in a Literature Context: *Hana Hashimoto, Sixth Violin***



#### ***Context and Tasks***

This block is designed to assess how 4th-grade readers develop understanding within a single text by forming an interpretation about a story's main character and then applying that understanding to consider what might happen after the story ends. More specifically, readers are invited to engage with a group of fourth-grade students (represented by task characters in the

assessment) who are reading the text, *Hana Hashimoto, Sixth Violin*, by Chieri Uegaki. In this book, a young girl named Hana signs up to play the violin in her school's talent show after having had only three lessons. While many items give students opportunities to demonstrate their understanding and develop their thinking across the story, the texts (video and story) and items are relatively independent of one another. The test block also includes opportunities to develop understanding around other aspects of the story that may, or may not, contribute to that characterization. Throughout the block, readers are asked to activate and employ their personal, cultural, and literary knowledge and resources by drawing on textual evidence to make thoughtful interpretations of the text.

At the beginning of the assessment (see Exhibit 1), readers are invited to participate in a book discussion group about the story *Hana Hashimoto, Sixth Violin* with the three other 4th grade student task characters. A teacher task character joins them to explain the discussion goal, which focuses on understanding how Hana grows and changes over the course of the story as a result of events involving her classmates and her family. To prepare for the book discussion, students are told they will read parts of the story and respond to items situated in three purpose-driven tasks to: 1) identify important events in the story and consider what these events say about the characters; 2) learn more about Hana and other important characters from their words, feelings, and actions in the story; and 3) apply their understanding of the characters in order to predict what might happen after the story ends. Motivational UDEs (student task character classmates and a teacher task character; see also bottom of Exhibit 1) serve to situate and motivate readers to engage with the block.

**Exhibit 1. Task-specific purposes and student task characters serve to situate readers in a Grade 4 Reading to Develop Understanding block involving the short story *Hana Hashimoto, Sixth Violin* by Chieri Uegaki**


**Introduction**

You will read a book called *Hana Hashimoto, Sixth Violin* by Chieri Uegaki. After you read the story, you will participate in a small discussion group with three classmates to understand how Hana changes over the course of the story as a result of events involving her family.




To prepare for the book discussion, you will read the story while completing three tasks.

1. Identify important events in the story and consider what these events say about the characters.
2. Learn more about Hana and other important characters from their words, feelings, and actions in the story.
3. Use your understanding of the characters to predict what might happen after the story ends.

Your teacher for this project will be Mr. Beadle

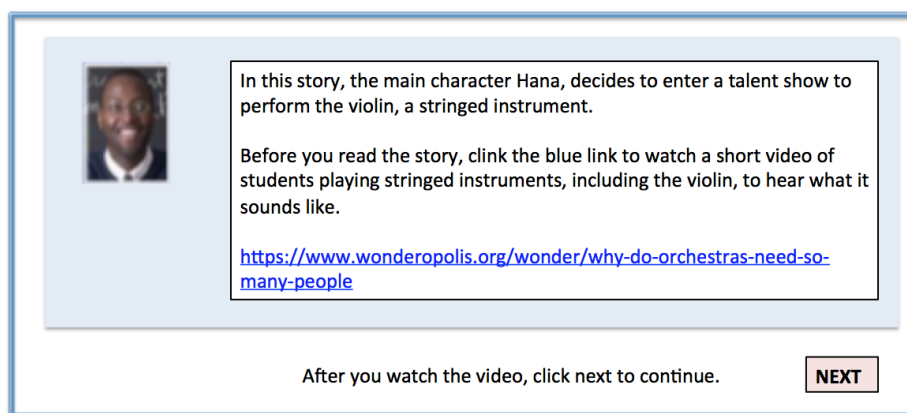


You will work with three classmates in your discussion group: Brian, Diana, and Michael

Next, test-takers are invited to view a 30 second video of young children playing in an orchestra found at a website designed for young children (<https://www.wonderopolis.org/wonder/why-do-orchestras-need-so-many-people>) (see Exhibit A2). This short video is an example of a motivational and knowledge-based UDE designed to introduce readers to the sounds and emotions one might experience when playing in an orchestra, while providing minimal background knowledge to students who may be less familiar with stringed instruments such as the violin.

**Exhibit 2. The teacher task character and a pre-reading preview of a 30 second video clip of students playing stringed instruments serve to pique students interest and provide minimal background knowledge needed to make sense of the story**



***Texts and Items***

After learning about the three task-specific purposes in this literature block and viewing the video, readers engage with several passages from the book that contain important information about Hana and other minor characters. Through these passages, readers learn that Hana's desire to take lessons was inspired by a recent visit to Japan to see her Ojichan, or grandfather, who plays the violin. They also learn that despite much teasing and doubting from her brothers, Hana practices and practices for the talent show, inviting everyone she can to be her audience.

Item response types would vary from simple multiple choice to short answer or hybrid constructed response items to give readers different kinds of opportunities to demonstrate their understanding in the block. Sample questions at this point may, for example, include multiple choice items to assess readers' ability to locate and recall important details (see Exhibit 3) as well as short constructed-response items that ask readers to interpret and integrate character traits into their understanding of the story (see Exhibit 4).

**Exhibit 3. Example of a multiple choice, locate and recall item in a Grade 4 RDU block**

How do Hana's brothers first respond to her decision to play the violin in the talent show?

A	<input type="radio"/>	They are happy for Hana.	<input type="button" value="−"/>
B	<input type="radio"/>	They make fun of Hana.	<input type="button" value="−"/>
C	<input type="radio"/>	They promise to help Hana.	<input type="button" value="−"/>
D	<input type="radio"/>	They are angry with Hana.	<input type="button" value="−"/>

**Exhibit 4. Example of a short constructed-response interpret and integrate item in a Grade 4 RDU block**

At this point in the story, do you think Hana's brothers supported her decision to play in the talent show. Please explain your thinking with facts from the story.

Within the block, knowledge-based UDEs might include pop-up boxes providing a hint about the meaning of certain domain specific words or general topics of a text (in this case, describing what a talent show is, see Exhibit 5) so readers are provided the minimal background knowledge from which to make sense of the story and engage with items designed to measure, in this case, their ability to make inferences about characters from their actions in the story. In addition, a look-back button (or task-based UDE) is embedded into the excerpted quote in this item; if readers choose, they can click on the underlined quote to see exactly where the excerpted text is located in the context of the original story passage in the assessment space.

**Exhibit 5. A Grade 4 Integrate and Interpret item illustrating a task-based UDE in the form of a look-back button that refers the reader to the relevant section of text and a knowledge-based UDE in the form of a pop-up box defining the term “talent show” for the text *Hana Hashimoto, Sixth Violin* by Chieri Uegaki. The blue pop-up box appears when a test-taker clicks on the highlighted term.**

The text says, "When Hana Hashimoto announced that she had signed up for the **talent show** and that she would be playing the violin, her brothers nearly fell out of a tree...Hana practiced every day, just like Ojichan. And every day, her brothers fled the house with covered ears, complaining about the horrible noise."

Thinking about this part of the text, why do you think Hana's brothers flee the house every day?

- They are angry with Hana
- The noise of the violin bothers them
- They have somewhere important to be
- They like the way the violin sounds

A talent show is a show in which different people perform a special skill.

As depicted in Exhibit 6, students could also be given a word bank (a task-based UDE) from which to select relevant character traits when asked to describe the kind of person Hana is. Then, in an analyze and evaluate item with a hybrid constructed response format, students could be asked to use that word to describe Hana's actions and then explain their thinking using evidence from the story.

**Exhibit 6. A Grade 4 Analyze and Evaluate item illustrating a task-based UDE in the form of a word bank providing a set of character traits from which readers can select their choice and then use it as part of their answer in the box.**

In the story, the author writes, "Hana swallowed her nerves like medicine and leaned toward the microphone. She would just do her best."

What do you think the author is trying to tell the reader about what kind of person Hana is? Choose a character trait from the word bank to describe Hana. Then, use the box to explain what makes you think this.

WORD BANK	
helpful	curious
brave	proud
smart	nervous
afraid	confident
forgetful	determined

Students could also be given a timeline on which to drag and drop their responses about how the main character changes over the course of the story (see Exhibit 7). A collection of relevant and irrelevant notes about the character can be provided from which students can select the best answers. Once completed, students would then have access to this informational graphic as a writing support when answering the final Use and Apply item (see Exhibit 7).

**Exhibit 7. Teacher and student task characters remind readers of the task goal and a notepad with drag and drop features offers students an efficient way to demonstrate their understanding of the main character’s personality at three points in the story in this Analyze and Evaluate item.**

As you work in your literature circles, remember the goal is to think about how Hannah grows and changes over the course of the story.

Ok, so how do you think we should get started?

I collected all of our notes about Hana into one notepad.

Thanks Diana! That definitely helps to have all of the ideas in one place.

**OUR NOTES**

**Note 1** In the beginning, Hana’s brothers made fun of her.

**Note 2** But, Hana kept practicing anyways.

**Note 3** When she stepped on stage, Hana was nervous.

**Note 4** Hana remembered her Ojichan and played what she knew.

**Note 5** Hana’s family loved it, and Hana decided to play again next year.

*Which sentences best describe Hana’s personality at the beginning, middle, and end of the story. Click and drag your answers from the notepad into the appropriate boxes below.*

Beginning Middle End

Toward the end of the story, readers learn that when Hana is on stage, she first becomes nervous and doubts herself, but then imagines her Ojichan telling her to do her best. Hana decides to play what she knows — the sound of a crow, her neighbor’s cat, and rain on a paper umbrella. Her family loves her performance so much that later that evening, they ask her to play them more musical notes around the dinner table. The story ends when Hana recalls the numerous songs her Ojichan shared with her and imagines what she might play in next year’s talent show.

A longer constructed response item such as the example shown in Exhibit 8 is designed to assess readers’ ability to Use and Apply their understanding to a new situation beyond the story itself. In this final part of the assessment block, after listening to one of the student task characters orally describe how Hana reacted to her brothers’ behavior earlier in the story, readers



are invited to join the discussion group with three task character classmates and contribute their ideas.

**Exhibit 8. The test-takers responses from their completion of the previous item are carried over to the final use and apply item to the complex constructed response.**

Here's the timeline we filled in earlier in case this helps.

Note 1	Note 2	Note 3
Beginning	Middle	End

Based on what you learned about Hana as a person, what kind of a song do you think Hana might choose to play with her violin in next year's talent show? Please explain your thinking with facts from the story and any notes from the timeline you created about how Hana changed.

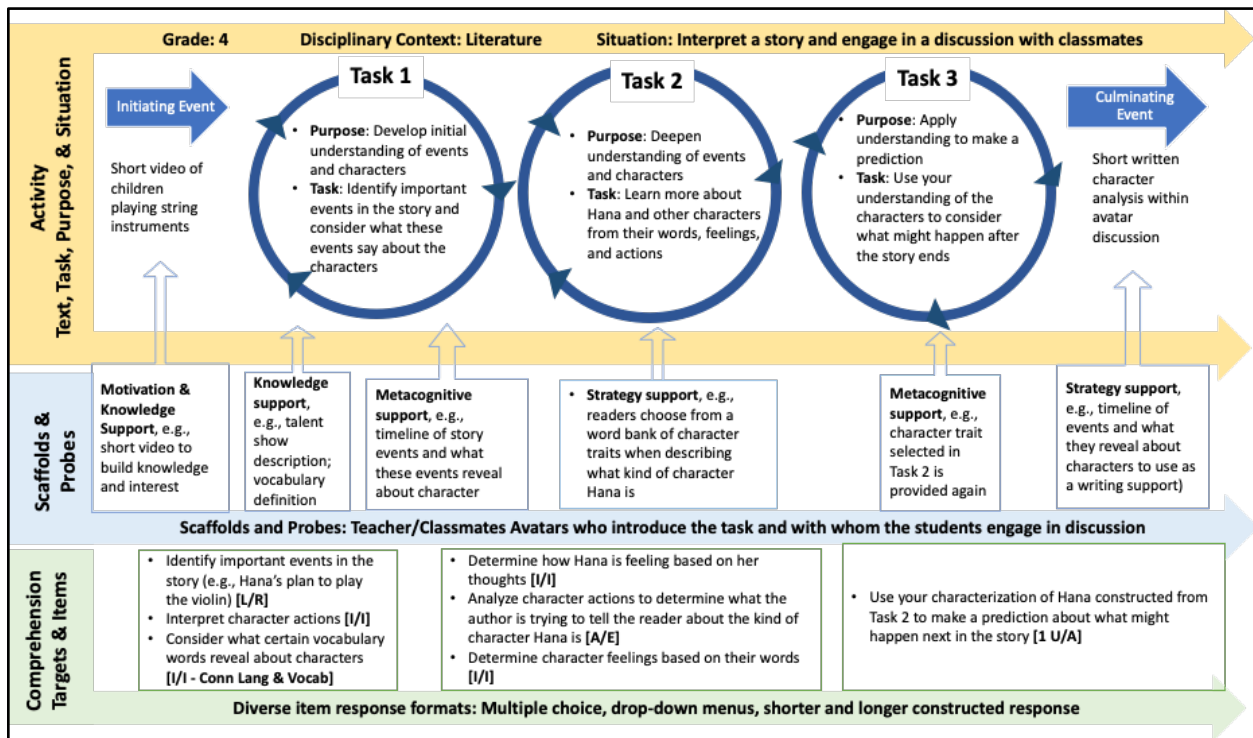
Below the prompt is a large empty rectangular box for the student's response.

***Performance Evidence and Indicators***

When interpreting reading achievement from performance on the 2026 NAEP Reading Assessment, multiple indicators can be used to situate and explain what students are able to do. As indicated earlier in this chapter, each block would be classified with a primary disciplinary context, grade level, and broad purpose. Scores from the *Hana Hashimoto, Sixth Violin* block, then, can demonstrate what Grade 4 students can do in a literature context as part of a Reading to Develop Understanding block designed to measure their ability to develop their understanding within a single text and then apply that understanding to a simple culminating event (in this case, making a prediction, based on the story, about what will happen after the story ends). Test developers keep an elaborate account of all decisions that go into classifying texts and generating items from comprehension targets in each block. This process enables NAEP to compile a description of what 4th graders (or sub-groups of 4th graders) can do in each disciplinary context as they engage with texts and test items, while also being encouraged to draw from and use the knowledge, skills, and experiences they bring to that reading context.



### Exhibit 9. Concept Sketch for the Reading for Understanding in Literature Block: *Hana Hashimoto, Sixth Violin*



### Grade 8 Assessment Block: Reading to Solve a Problem in a Social Studies Context

#### Context

This block is designed to assess how 8th grade readers develop understanding across multiple texts in a social studies context by forming an interpretation of current and historical events and then applying that understanding to solve a problem. More specifically, readers are invited to engage with a group of students (represented by task characters in the assessment) who are motivated to learn about a current civic project deeply rooted in their city's history: The City of Pittsburgh has recently announced an ambitious plan for the construction of an overpass park that reconnects the Hill District and Downtown. Park designers at a landscape architecture firm have created a proposed park design.

Test takers are asked to learn about this project by considering the role of a key aspect of the proposed park design: the inclusion of a 13-year-old African-American girl named Keisha who appears on illustrated signs throughout the park. Park designers have proposed including signs of Keisha in many park locations to provide details about the African-American community's history in the Hill. Throughout the block, readers engage with a collection of **XX** historical and contemporary multimodal texts to develop an understanding of the Hill District's history and then clarify the planned vision of the park to different members of the Pittsburgh community. While some of the items give students opportunities to demonstrate their understanding and develop thinking within a specific text, other items are designed to assess how readers integrate ideas and perspectives across multiple sources and then apply their understanding to the task at hand.

At the beginning of the assessment block (see Exhibit XXX), students learn that the city has recently unveiled the park plan to the public on its website, and the plan is now open for public comment. City residents have posted comments and questions (depicted in a series of twitter posts).


Insert something here about the motivational UDE's in the authentic Twitter posts and the overpass knowledge-based UDE and the role they play in the early part of the block.

The four twitter posts are designed to inspire the question that guides readers' inquiry in the block: Why does Keisha matter to the city park project? As test takers proceed, they are introduced to this question (see Exhibit XXX) and the four task-specific purposes for engaging with the texts and comprehension items in the block: explore the background history of the Hill District, demonstrate an understanding of the texts they encounter, and craft an historically informed presentation for the general public that clarifies and illustrates Keisha's role in the park (e.g., representing and celebrating the history of the Hill).

### Exhibit 10. Readers are Situated Within a Disciplinary Context and Broad Purpose in the Reading to Solve a Problem *Hill District* Block

**Introduction**

The City of Pittsburgh recently announced an ambitious plan for the construction of a highway **overpass** park that reconnects the Hill District and Downtown. The proposed park design has been posted on the city website. Read the public's comments to see what they are saying about the plan. Then, click next to continue.



**A Cortland** @cortland  
Wow – this will be a great place to bring my kids! [#Hill District](#)

**Jay Anderson** @janders459  
I don't understand why the city wants to spend their money on this park. Can someone explain? [#Hill District](#)

**Pedro Carano** @caranofamily  
I like the idea of a park, but why should be it built on a highway overpass? [#PittCityPlanners](#) [#Hill District](#)

**Ms. Peters** @petersgrade8  
I noticed in the park plan there were several signposts with a picture of a young girl named Keisha. Where can I read more about Keisha so I can talk with my students about how she fits in the planner's vision of the park? [#PS57](#)

**NEXT**





### Exhibit 11. Readers are Situated Within Task-specific Purposes and a Reader Role in the *Hill District Block*

Your goal is to help the public understand the history of Pittsburgh's Hill District and generate an answer to this question: **Why does Keisha matter to the park city project and what role does she play in fulfilling the park planner's vision?**

To accomplish this goal, you will:

1. Explore the background history of Pittsburgh's Hill District to understand what has happened to "The Hill" from the 1940's to the present.
2. Examine different perspectives about the proposed park plan to determine what park visitors might consider confusing or concerning about the plan.
3. Apply your understanding of the issues to imagine how you would respond to the public's concerns.

You will work with Mr. Ramirez, a regional historian, and three teens: Brian, Diana, and Michael

Mr. Ramirez

NEXT

#### Tasks

Readers are asked to engage in purpose-driven tasks across multiple stages of reading (see Exhibit 4.18) to make sense of a focal problem, the historical context in which the problem is rooted, different perspectives on the problem, and the potential action in response to the problem. In the initial stage, students have opportunities to build background knowledge about the problem (i.e., people lack understanding of the Hill District and why Keisha matters). In the following stage, students will encounter multiple texts about the history of the Hill District, to help them explicitly understand ideas that might initially be confusing to park visitors. Topics are selected to help students build knowledge about various aspects of the Hill (e.g., vibrant cultures, thriving community businesses, discrimination, and segregation) to understand what it was like in the past and what has happened to the Hill from the 1940s to the present (e.g., urban renewal, demolition of the Hill, civil protests, civic arena and parking lot development). Students are supported in examining ideas from two different perspectives to help them to imagine a possible pathway to address the problem (e.g., how to clarify Keisha's role and why she is effectively positioned to fulfill the park planner's vision).

#### Texts

Readers are asked to comprehend and consult different forms of disciplinary texts and popular media texts. Historical texts may include both primary and secondary sources, such as historical photos and maps, archived black-and-white news articles, textbook-like written summaries, or visual timeline charts. Students may also be asked to read some online multimodal texts when learning about the problem and people's diverse opinions through news articles and website comments.

Readers carry out a series of historical reading tasks with specific purposes as they demonstrate the range of comprehension processes, such as those involved in close reading of a historical text, synthesizing within and across multiple texts, analyzing historical arguments

using textual evidence, employing historical frameworks such as social structures or historical patterns, evaluating historical interpretations, and demonstrating historical perspectives. These tasks and texts are also socially situated in that the purposes, processes, and consequences of reading are considered in relation to the challenges associated with urban development both locally, in Pittsburgh, and across the country.

When choosing texts, test developers take into consideration the length and level of complexity to ensure selected texts and related tasks are suitable for 8th graders completing the entire block in 20-40 minutes (e.g., passage length, structures, vocabulary, knowledge demands, motivational features).

### ***Items***

Comprehension processes are identified throughout the block and linked to an appropriate balance of items among the intended targets (Locate and Recall, Integrate and Interpret, Analyze and Evaluate, Use and Apply). Given that this is a Reading to Solve a Problem block, more attention might also be given to Use and Apply items (with less focus on Locate and Recall items), so that readers have time to fully develop and express their solution to the problem in a 40-minute timeframe. Item difficulties might increase throughout the block with variations in attention paid to unique text features and task demands as well as qualitative differences within each comprehension target category.

### ***Universal Design Elements***

As shown in Exhibit 4.19, the block design includes a range of digitally enhanced UDEs as readers comprehend texts, respond to items, and reflect on their performance. In the initial stage, a task character (a regional historian designated as a knowledge-based UDE) presents the reader with a primary purpose for reading; then, the reader (alongside task character classmates that represent motivational UDEs) is asked to decide how to conduct brief research to find out more about the history of Pittsburgh's Hill District and generate their claims and responses to the inquiry question.

**We can insert a visual that illustrates what these task characters might look like with these dialogue prompts.**

Task-based UDE's may include an image-based timetable that sequentially displays important local and national histories designed in the form of a graphic banner with pop-up notes. A list of keywords and relevant information offers a built-in knowledge support in the form of a searchable resource compilation (e.g., historical terms, specific names and places, civil rights movement). These task-based design elements (a graphic timetable and a searchable resource compilation) also serve as motivational UDE's in that they are designed to assist with organizing and analyzing information throughout the testing block while also helping to facilitate real-world connections and sustain 8th graders willingness to persist in this block's challenging collection of tasks.

**We can insert a visual that illustrates what this timeline image might look like next to a list of keywords- Julie could draft an idea?**

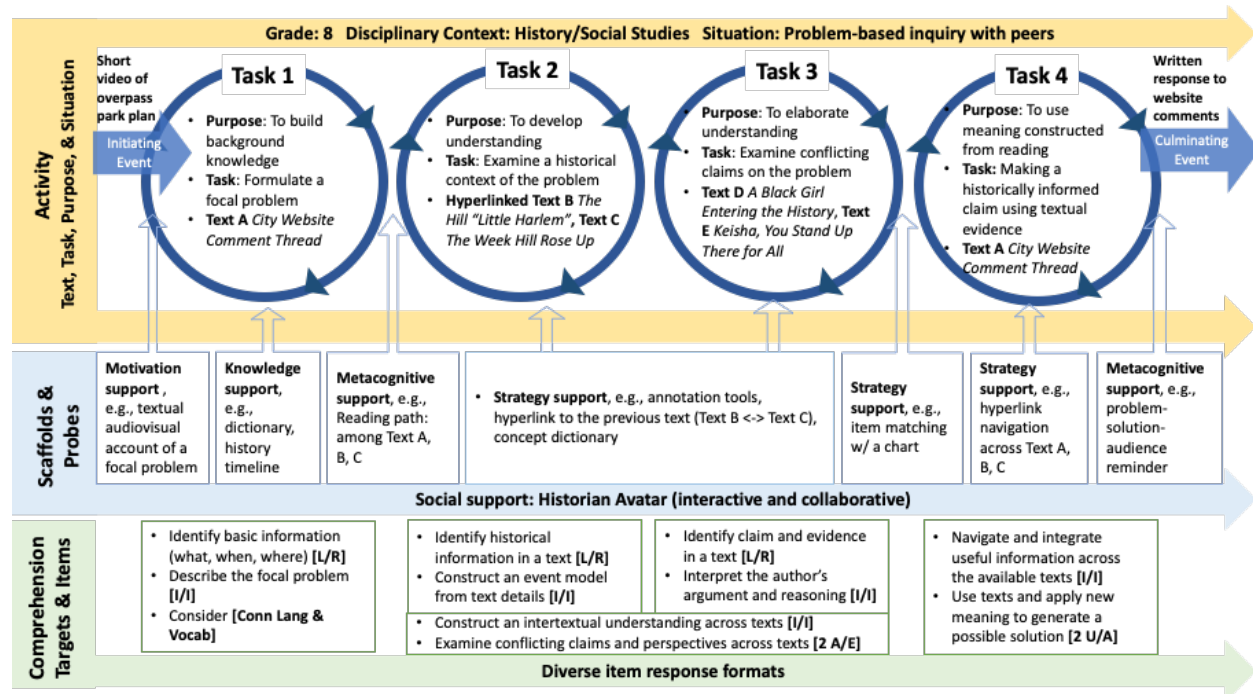
Diverse but intuitive response formats can be selected to facilitate reader engagement and reduce the cognitive memory load involved in expressing responses to test items designed to measure comprehension performance. Students are likely to benefit from embedded task guidance provided by task character guides and/or a graphical overview of block-specific reading

tasks to help monitor where they are and where they should focus their attention next to work toward the culminating task. Ultimately, decisions about UDEs should be specific to the block as test developers consider what is needed to fulfill the goal of obtaining comprehension scores that validly and fairly represent high-level comprehension processes in complex reading contexts.

### *Performance Evidence and Indicators*

Scores from the Hill District block reveals what Grade 8 students can do when Reading to Solve a Problem in a social studies context. Ultimately, NAEP produces descriptions of what 8th graders (or sub-groups of 8th graders) can do in each disciplinary reading context. Thus, from students' participation in the Hill District block (and other assessment blocks designated as Reading to Solve a Problem in social studies contexts), it is possible to characterize how well eighth-grade students are able to comprehend and use multiple sources while engaging in social-studies inquiries involving a collection of relatively short but nonetheless complex texts and a range of digitally enhanced items and access tools.

### **Exhibit 12. Concept Sketch of a Reading to Solve a Problem Activity Block: Keisha Reconnects the Hill with Downtown in the City of Pittsburgh**



## **REFERENCES**

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# **2026 NAEP Reading Framework Revision Summary**

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## Comparison Between Current NAEP Reading Framework and Draft 2026 NAEP Reading Framework

Written for paper-based assessment, the current NAEP Reading Framework was adopted in 2004 and first implemented in 2009. In 2017, the NAEP Reading Assessment was first administered on a digital platform. The table below provides a high-level comparison between the current NAEP Reading Framework, the current NAEP Reading Assessment, and the February 26, 2021 Draft of the 2026 NAEP Reading Framework. For any updates proposed for 2026, rationales for these recommendations are also provided in the table. Further detail on these updates and rationales follow.

### Similarities and Differences Between 2009-2019 NAEP Reading Framework and Draft 2026 NAEP Reading Framework

	Current Framework	Current Assessment	2026 Framework	
			Update	Rationale
<b>Definition and Model</b>	<p><b>Definition of Reading</b> from the 2009-2019 Framework:</p> <p>Reading is an active and complex process that involves:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Understanding written text.</li> <li>-Developing and interpreting meaning.</li> <li>-Using meaning as appropriate to type of text, purpose, and situation.</li> </ul> <p>In addition, the Framework states the following regarding the <b>definition of reading</b>:</p> <p>The purpose for reading also influences performance. In the case of the NAEP Reading Assessment, purpose is determined by the assessment context; thus, the influence of purpose on readers' comprehension is somewhat</p>	Same as 2009-2019 Framework.	Build on current definition to situate the cognitive process of reading comprehension within a sociocultural context and reflect current research describing reading comprehension as a sociocultural process	Align with most recent scientific theories of how social and cultural factors inform reading comprehension; increase ecological validity of assessment (i.e., supports more authentic and engaging assessment)

	Current Framework	Current Assessment	2026 Framework	
			Update	Rationale
	limited. For this reason, the definition of reading presented earlier should be considered as a guide for the NAEP Reading Assessment, not as an inclusive definition of reading. The definition pertains to how NAEP defines reading for the purpose of this assessment. It does not address the issue of how students should be taught to read.			
<b>Purposes for Reading</b>	<p>With the transition to digital assessment, the 2019 publication edition of the framework states the following regarding purposes for reading:</p> <p>Students' purpose for reading the passages presented on NAEP is determined by the assessment context; thus, the influence of purpose on readers' comprehension is somewhat limited. However, the transition to digital-based assessment creates opportunities to introduce more meaningful purposes such as reading to build and share knowledge or reading to conduct literary analyses.</p>	<p><b>Discrete blocks</b> include general directions to “read and answer the questions” but do not include block-specific purpose statements.</p> <p><b>Scenario Based Tasks (SBTs)</b> include both general directions and block-specific purpose statements.</p> <p><b>Block-specific purpose statements</b> introduce a purpose for reading and the task students are to be engaged in (e.g., gather information for a webpage or to compose an email message). The block-specific purpose statements focus on the tasks students will perform rather than on introducing specific texts.</p>	Continue and expand current NAEP practices by including two overarching purposes for all assessment blocks: (1) reading to develop understanding; and (2) reading to solve problems	Research supports the addition of purpose to all blocks: When readers are provided with an initial purpose for reading, they engage more deeply and therefore more reliably demonstrate their ability to comprehend passages.
<b>Types of Texts</b>	Authentic literary and informational texts with some infographics; presented digitally since 2017	In accordance with the 2009-2019 NAEP Reading Framework, <b>there are two broad categories of passages that make up the NAEP Reading</b>	Expand use of authentic disciplinary texts, including multimodal and digitally complex texts; commission	Align with types of texts currently in use in classroom, home, and community settings and

	Current Framework	Current Assessment	2026 Framework	
			Update	Rationale
	<p>From the 2009-2019 Framework:</p> <p><b><i>Selection of Literary and Informational Passages:</i></b> Several methods of evaluating passages will be used to ensure that the best possible stimulus material is included. Authentic material must be of the highest quality, and it must come from authentic sources such as those students would encounter in their in-school and out-of-school reading. Material must be coherent and allow items that assess domain-specific knowledge (Kobayashi 2002). Additionally, systematic efforts will be made to ensure that texts selected for inclusion will of interest to the widest number of students. Readers become more engaged in text and consequently comprehend a selection better when they find the material interesting (Baumann 1986; Wade, Buxton, and Kelly 1993; Wade and Moje 2000; Wade et al. 1993). Texts will reflect literary heritage by representing varied historical periods.</p>	<p><b>assessment: literary and informational.</b> Literary texts include fiction, literary non-fiction, and poetry. Informational texts include exposition, argumentation or persuasive texts, and procedural texts.</p> <p>The current item pool for the NAEP Reading Assessment is comprised of <b>Scenario-Based Task (SBT) Blocks and Discrete Blocks.</b></p> <p>SBT Blocks use both print and digitally native, multimodal texts. In contrast with discrete blocks, SBT blocks present texts and questions sequentially, controlling the order in which students read texts and items and respond to questions. That is, students are presented with sources and stimulus materials as needed to respond to items. Videos appear both as part of the texts students read or as stand-alone stimulus materials but are not used as introductions to texts. Items addressing video information always do so in relation to the written text.</p> <p>For Discrete Bocks, there are two types: <b>-Trans-adapted blocks</b> are digital renditions of the assessment blocks used in the paper and pencil era of NAEP.</p>	texts when authentic disciplinary texts cannot be found	the real world; expand availability of disciplinary texts

	Current Framework	Current Assessment	2026 Framework	
			Update	Rationale
		<p>These discrete blocks make up about two-thirds of the current operational assessment.</p> <p><b>-Newly developed blocks</b> were developed specifically for a digital platform. To take full advantage of the digital format, some of these blocks use print and texts that are “digitally native” and multimodal. Some passages contain embedded hyperlinks and videos. Videos are not used as introductions to texts. Items addressing video information do so in relation to the written text.</p>		
<b>Disciplinary Contexts</b>	Subscales reported for literary and informational texts	Same as 2009-2019 Framework.	Divide informational texts into the two disciplines of science and social studies; report subscales for reading literature, science, and social studies	Emphasize most recent research regarding importance of disciplinary reading; align with state standards that focus on literacy across the disciplines

	Current Framework	Current Assessment	2026 Framework	
			Update	Rationale
<b>Universal Design and Background Knowledge</b>	<p>From the 2009-2019 Framework:</p> <p><b><i>Factors that Influence Reading Performance:</i></b> Factors related to the text being read and to readers’ backgrounds and experiences influence reading performance. For example, understanding the vocabulary, concepts, and structural elements of the text contributes to readers’ successful comprehension. Comprehension is also affected by readers’ background knowledge and by the context of the reading experience. The background knowledge that students bring to the NAEP Reading Assessment differs widely. To accommodate these differences, passages will span diverse areas and topics and will be as engaging as possible to the full range of students in the grades assessed.</p>	<p>The types of assessment block features available on the current NAEP Reading Assessment include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Look-back buttons</li> <li>-Pop-up notes</li> <li>-Eliminate answer choice</li> <li>-Multi-part response frames</li> <li>-Block-specific purpose statements</li> <li>-Introductions</li> <li>-Avatars</li> <li>-Graphic organizers</li> <li>-Item foreshadowing</li> <li>-Directions and transitions</li> <li>-Item resetting</li> </ul> <p>Not all features are available in every block, but all of the current NAEP Reading blocks include some of these features. The discrete blocks use look-back buttons to take students back to locations in the text that are referred to in the item stem, on-demand pop-up notes, introductions, and an answer choice elimination tool for multiple choice items. Discrete blocks developed for digitally-based assessment (previously called “newly developed blocks”) also make use of multi-part items, i.e., complex items with multiple components may be split into multiple</p>	<p>Continue and expand current practices to include knowledge Universal Design Elements; task-based Universal Design Elements; and motivational Universal Design Elements (see table on p. 32 for more detailed information)</p>	<p>Make use of digital affordances to assess what all students know and can do; align reading assessment activities more closely with current classroom and real-world practices; validly measure if and how readers are able to process text at a deeper level; NCES research on block features indicates that students taking assessment blocks with these features generally outperform students taking the versions without support features in four of the six blocks and this performance pattern is consistent across all NAEP subgroups (gender, race, SES, disability, ELL) —i.e., no differential effect for any subgroup. (This performance pattern is also generally true for low- and high-performing students.)</p>

	Current Framework	Current Assessment	2026 Framework	
			Update	Rationale
		<p>response fields. SBT blocks use these same features.</p> <p><b>Regarding introductions to assessment items:</b> There are no guidelines or standards for when/how to provide introductions. Research on the role of prior knowledge in comprehension has been conducted by Patricia Alexander, Richard Anderson, Judith Langer, P. David Pearson and numerous others. This work, along with content analyses of instructional materials support this element of the current NAEP Reading Assessment. In addition, these introductions were deemed important by an external advisory board comprised of nationally recognized researchers and educators in the field of reading as a means of orienting the reader and as a response to the need for content and face validity.</p>		
<b>Cognitive (Comprehension) Targets</b>	<p>All assessment items address one of three cognitive targets: locate/recall, integrate/interpret, critique/evaluate.</p> <p><b>Locate/Recall</b> – These items ask students to identify explicitly stated information from a text.</p>	Same as 2009-2019 Framework.	Re-label cognitive targets to be referred to instead as comprehension targets; change label from Critique/Evaluate to Analyze/Evaluate to more accurately represent the target; include a new target, Use and Apply	Expand targets to align more closely with current classroom and real-world practices

	Current Framework	Current Assessment	2026 Framework	
			Update	Rationale
	<p><b>Integrate/Interpret</b> – These items ask students to make inferences within and across texts.</p> <p><b>Critique/Evaluate</b> – These items ask students to consider the text critically from different perspectives and make judgments based on what they have read.</p>			
<b>Item formats</b>	For 2009-2015, items formats included multiple-choice and constructed response. With the transition to digitally-based assessment in 2017, multiple choice items were expanded to a category called “selected response” items.	<p>The two item formats in the current NAEP Reading Assessment are:</p> <p><b>-Selected response</b> – This item type encompasses traditional single-answer multiple-choice items as well as more complex items that require multiple selections to be answered correctly. NAEP’s shift to digitally-based assessment allowed for the introduction of technology-enhanced items, include matching (drag and drop), grid, and select-in-passage items. Most selected response items are scored dichotomously (correct or incorrect), but more complex selected response items may be scored for partial credit.</p> <p><b>-Constructed response, short and extended</b> – This item type requires students to generate a written response.</p>	Formats continue to include selected response, constructed response (including extended constructed response), as well as dynamic response options (e.g., graphic organizers and drop-down menus) facilitated by digital affordances	Retaining this expansion in formats aligns with current standards and assessment practices, while offering more opportunities to express comprehension

	Current Framework	Current Assessment	2026 Framework	
			Update	Rationale
		Short constructed response items can be answered by a few words or sentences and extended constructed response items may elicit a short paragraph. These items are scored by humans, using a scoring rubric. Short constructed response items are scored with 2- or 3-point rubrics. Extended constructed response items use a 4-point rubric.		
<b>Language Structure and Vocabulary</b>	<p>The 2009-2019 Framework provides for a systematic approach to vocabulary assessment with potential for a vocabulary subscore.</p> <p>Vocabulary assessment occurs in the context of a passage; that is, vocabulary items functions both as a measure of passage comprehension and as a test of readers' specific knowledge of the word's meaning as intended by the passage author.</p> <p>The goal of vocabulary assessment will be to measure students' <i>meaning vocabulary</i>, which can be defined as follows:</p> <p>Meaning vocabulary is the application of one's understanding of word meanings to passage comprehension.</p>	Same as 2009-2019 Framework.	Expand to include assessment of language structure and vocabulary; no subscore proposed	Align with current research on the relationship of language to reading comprehension; consider contribution of students' understandings of language structure and vocabulary to their performance in reading comprehension



## Revision Summary

In June and July 2020, a draft of the 2026 NAEP Reading Assessment Framework was available to members of professional organizations and the general public for public review and commentary. A total of 2,626 comments were submitted by 158 individuals and 7 organizations. One of the responsibilities of the Development Panel was to reconcile and respond to the comments submitted during the public comment period. This document provides a summary of how the Development Panel revised the Draft Framework in response to the commentary submitted during the public comment period. The revised draft was submitted to the National Assessment Governing Board on February 26, 2021.

The summary is organized around eight themes in the public commentary: 1) The Sociocultural Model; 2) Disciplinary Contexts and Purposes; 3) Cognition, Cognitive Processes, Comprehension Targets; 4) Scaffolding and Background Knowledge; 5) Text/Literacy; 6) Vocabulary and Language; 7) Reporting; and 8) Equity. A ninth category, “Additional Issues,” is provided to describe matters that do not fit neatly into one of the eight themes. For each theme/category, the Panel provides a brief summary of the issues raised in the public commentary followed by a summary of how the issues were addressed in the February 26, 2021 revision.

### Sociocultural Model of Reading

There were 313 comments on the sociocultural model of reading submitted by 7 state administrators, 38 professors and researchers, 15 district and school personnel, 6 policy experts, 1 assessment expert, and 2 anonymous reviewers. The Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and the Council of the Great City Schools (CGCS) supported the addition of sociocultural theory. CCSSO stated: “We...appreciate the addition of the sociocultural theory of reading to the 2026 Framework. As an organization deeply committed to equity, we believe this is an important addition that will help to lead to a better understanding of students’ reading abilities.” However, the CGCS recommended that the revised framework “broaden the explicit theory of reading by including select elements from other well-established models alongside the sociocultural model to show how the latter interacts with other critical elements of reading comprehension.”

Despite many positive comments about using the sociocultural model as the underlying basis of the NAEP framework (it reflected current research, state content standards, and the importance of viewing students’ background experiences as assets), the model raised many questions and prompted requests for clarification and elaboration among readers, who were puzzled by some aspects of it. Among the issues that prompted concern were apparent misconceptions about the history of NAEP Reading Frameworks and their conceptualizations of reading comprehension, text complexity for passages in the assessment, relationships between foundational skills and reading comprehension, uses of technology, how to address student diversity in NAEP, underrepresentation of cognitive factors, an expected loss of ability to report NAEP performance trends, and a perception that the sociocultural perspective might yield a test that all students would be able to pass.

**ISSUE 1. There was a need to clarify the sociocultural model of reading in comparison to other models of reading.** *CHANGE: The Framework no longer refers to a Sociocultural Model of Reading or a Sociocultural Model of Reading Comprehension.*

### **Revision**

1. The revised framework deleted the claim that a sociocultural model underlies the NAEP assessment and clarified that the 2026 Framework was based on a set of consensus findings from developments in theory, research, policy, and practices about reading comprehension and its assessment. These evidence-based insights were foreshadowed in earlier versions to NAEP Reading; they included but were not limited to sociocultural perspectives. *(See Chapter 2: Introduction; Chapter 2: NAEP Definition of Reading Comprehension; Chapter 2: Roots of Definition; Chapter 2: Updates)*
2. To reflect this replacement, the revision:
  - Eliminated the separate chapter on a reading model and described the consensus findings in a more compact description at the outset of the chapter entitled the 2026 NAEP Reading Assessment *(See Chapter 2).*
  - Emphasized that cognitive processes still were central to comprehension in the NAEP Framework. However, per sociocultural perspectives, the cognitive processes varied according to the context in which they were acquired and enacted and the cultural resources that students brought to the assessment. *(See Chapter 2: NAEP Definition of Reading; Chapter 2: Roots of Definition; Chapter 2: Updates).*
3. In response to CGCS and other stakeholders, the revision more clearly included cognitive perspectives in the definition of reading. *(See Chapter 2: NAEP Definition of Reading; Chapter 2: Roots of Definition; Chapter 2: Updates).*
4. The deletion of the sociocultural model of reading resulted in a consensus definition of reading comprehension that more clearly balanced sociocultural and cognitive perspectives. *The revision clarified the distinction between what is being measured and scored*

### **Rationale for Revision**

While several key partners (including, CCSSO and CGCS) generally supported the sociocultural model, the draft framework permitted readers to infer that the sociocultural perspective replaced or overturned other perspectives, including cognitive perspectives, that guided prior NAEP frameworks. This was not the intention.

- The framework should reflect well-established models of reading.
- The framework should ensure that a broad, balanced, and inclusive set of factors were represented in the assessment, in accordance with Governing Board policy.
- The framework should reflect advances in research and practice, i.e., the framework should provide evidence to support the proposition that cognitive reading processes were shaped not only by neural processing inside the brain, but also by the physical, social, and cultural contexts in which those processes were enacted.
- Although a name, such as the NAEP Reading Comprehension Model, might help the framework be more accessible to general public audiences, on balance it did not appear helpful to use this name.

<p><i>and components of the assessment to maintain its validity and fairness. (See Chapter 2: NAEP Definition of Reading; Chapter 2: Roots of Definition; Chapter 2: Updates).</i></p>	
<p><b>ISSUE 2. Reviewers noted specific issues in the sociocultural model that required clarification and elaboration.</b></p>	
<p><b><u>Revision</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The revision clarifies and elaborates on several specific issues that were raised:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the relationship between foundational skills and comprehension (questioned by the CGCS) (see <i>Chapter 2</i>)</li> <li>• evaluating text complexity (see <i>Chapter 2: Updating the 2026 Reading Framework; Chapter 2: Text Complexity</i>)</li> <li>• the use of video and audio presentations of information (questioned by the CCSSO) (see <i>Chapter 2: Digital Platform; Chapter 2: Text and the NAEP Definition of Reading Comprehension; Chapter 3: UDEs</i>).</li> <li>• the expectation that the rigor of the assessment would be lowered (see <i>Chapter 2: The NAEP 2026 Reading Assessment and the Definition of Reading Comprehension, UDEs; knowledge-based UDEs; UDEs &amp; NAEP Definition of Reading Comprehension</i>). (see also <i>Chapter 3: UDEs</i>).</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p><b><u>Rationale for Revision</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• See sections on text/literacy, scaffolds and background knowledge, disciplinary contexts and purposes, equity, and reporting for rationales related to these specific issues.</li> </ul>

## Disciplinary Contexts and Purposes

There were 242 comments about this theme. Forty-two respondents discussed the disciplinary contexts, while 17 respondents discussed the two reading activity purposes. The majority of the feedback regarding the shift to disciplinary contexts was favorable: 76% approved of the shift to disciplinary contexts. 100% of webinar participants polled about the usefulness of the disciplinary contexts said that reporting subscales by the disciplinary contexts would be either “very useful” or “somewhat useful.” Experts from varied stakeholder groups, including state administrators and researchers, greatly appreciated the expansion of text types and textual environments, including the increase in multimedia and multimodal texts. Some respondents expressed concerns about the appropriateness of disciplinary contexts for grade 4. Some raised questions about the scope of the disciplinary contexts, asking whether additional areas (e.g., mathematics, engineering, and sub-disciplines in science) should be included, and/or urging a stronger orientation toward the specific reading and inquiry practices of the disciplines invoked in the contexts. Some respondents expressed

concerns about the lack of clarity for the definition of everyday texts in comparison to texts defined within disciplinary contexts. Concerns were also raised about how the update might impact the ability of NAEP to maintain trend.

Nearly two-thirds of respondents approved of offering test takers purposes for reading. Questions addressed how the two purposes were related to disciplinary contexts, whether the two purposes were distinguishable from each other, and whether test takers would actually pursue the indicated purposes when participating in NAEP.

**ISSUE 1. More clarity was needed about the intent and scope of disciplinary distinctions and the goal of reporting subscales for disciplinary contexts.**

**Revision**

1. The revised framework clarified that the goal of reporting by disciplinary contexts was to broadly reflect the kinds of reading that students did in content-areas in school and outside of school as they understood and solved problems with disciplinary connections. The framework revision clarified that the intent of introducing disciplinary contexts was to reflect contemporary understandings regarding the influence of genre and content on reading comprehension and thus to more clearly represent the reading abilities of U.S. students. The intent was not to capture the specialized reading and reasoning practices of disciplines and subdisciplines. (see *Chapter 1; Chapter 2: Updating; Chapter 4: Reporting Categories and Reporting By Disciplinary Contexts*)
2. The revised framework addressed concerns regarding disciplinary contexts for grade 4 students by making clear that the distribution of texts and text types mirrored those that were common practice in grade 4 classrooms. The revised framework also offered more example items so readers are better able to evaluate the appropriateness of the items for grade 4, 8, and 12 students. (see *Chapter 2; Chapter 3: Designating Disciplinary Contexts; Chapter 3 examples*).

**Rationale for Revision**

More examples and details were needed to clarify the scope of disciplinary contexts and the grade appropriateness of disciplinary contexts for grade 4.

The framework revision retained the core ideas presented regarding disciplinary contexts because:

- As the majority of respondents demonstrated, for NAEP scores to be relevant and useful, it is critical for NAEP to go beyond the reporting of scores using the generic category of informational reading to report reading comprehension performance in the contexts of science and social studies.
- The introduction of disciplinary contexts reflect current understandings about the significant influences of content and genre on students' reading comprehension. These understandings are reflected in a growing body of educational theory, empirical reading research, and in many highly regarded and widely used curriculum programs.
- Most state standards (including not only English language arts standards, but also science and social studies standards) indicate a clear connection between disciplinary knowledge and vocabulary and reading within those disciplinary contexts.

**ISSUE 2. The Framework needed to better define what was meant by “everyday” texts and the purpose of including such texts in the assessment.**

<p><b><u>Revision</u></b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The revised framework changed the wording from “everyday texts” to texts that students read out of school.</li> <li>2. The revision made clear that all texts—those read in school and out of school—would be selected according to the text complexity evaluation criteria. (see <i>Chapter 1: Other Key Components; Exhibit 1.1; Chapter 2: Text Complexity; Exhibit 2.1</i>)</li> </ol>	<p><b><u>Rationale for Revision</u></b></p> <p>Consistent with the standard of ecological validity, the role of including everyday texts (now referred to as texts read out of school) was not to reduce the rigor of the assessment, but to measure the extent to which students comprehended a wide range of texts.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● A more accurate account of students’ reading performance with important types of text, in school and out, is needed.</li> <li>● More examples and details are needed to clarify the definition and function of texts read out of school.</li> </ul>
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**ISSUE 3. Additional clarity was needed regarding the intent of including the proposed purposes and the distinctions between them.**

<p><b><u>Revision</u></b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The framework described two broad purposes: reading for understanding and reading for problem solving. The revision clarified the use of the two purposes, and so there was no need to discuss “overlap.” (see <i>Chapter 2: Designating a broad reading purpose</i>)</li> <li>2. The revision indicated that the new comprehension target “use and apply” was applicable to both purposes. A “use and apply” example was provided for reading for understanding in Chapter 3. (see <i>Chapter 3, Violin example</i>) (Also see <i>Chapter 1: Comprehension Targets; Chapter 1: Other Key Components; Exhibit 1.1; and examples in Appendix C.</i>)</li> </ol>	<p><b><u>Rationale for Revision</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● The two purposes provide guidance to test designers in conceptualizing new task ideas. The reading for understanding purpose is particularly applicable to discrete passages and tasks. So, including it offers NAEP test designers leeway in utilizing existing NAEP assessment blocks.</li> <li>● Research supports the addition of purpose to all blocks: When readers are provided with an initial purpose for reading, they engage more deeply and therefore more reliably demonstrated their ability to comprehend passages.</li> <li>● Research indicates that when readers are provided with an initial purpose for reading, there is an increase in ecological validity for the assessment’s tasks. In real life, it is rare to be asked to do something with no stated purpose; by including a purpose for NAEP reading tasks, test-takers have an initial context for their test-taking. Consequently, tasks have greater face validity.</li> </ul>
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## Cognition, Cognitive Processes, and Comprehension Targets

Forty-four individuals made 111 comments about this theme, with slightly more requests for clarification than indications of approval of the treatment of cognition and comprehension theme. Several reviewers requested further elaboration of the role of cognitive processes within the overall sociocultural model, mirroring many of the comments for the theme of the sociocultural model of reading; these requests included more information about foundational skills, metacognition, self-efficacy, engagement, and/or affective issues in the discussion of the sociocultural model. Regarding comprehension targets, reviewers, including partner CGCS, appreciated the new name (comprehension targets, rather than cognitive targets). The new target ‘use and apply’ attracted both approval (noting, for example, its similarity to many state ELA assessments) and concern (wondering whether it might be too challenging for fourth graders).

### ISSUE 1. Cognitive perspectives are viewed by some readers as either underrepresented or ambiguously represented in the sociocultural model.

#### Proposed Revision Plan

1. See issue #1 in the theme of the **sociocultural model of reading** section above; in addition, the framework provides a more balanced treatment of all theoretical perspectives on reading. Moreover, the Framework explicitly highlights cognitive carry-over from the previous NAEP Framework. (see *Chapter 1: The Updated 2026 NAEP Reading Framework*; *Chapter 2*).

#### Rationale for Proposed Revision Plan

- Reading comprehension is shaped by a broad, balanced, and inclusive set of factors emanating from the most recent reading comprehension theory, research, policy, and practice.

### ISSUE 2. Writing from sources is not a prominent feature of the NAEP Reading Assessment. Because no current NAEP assessments measure writing from sources, some reviewers recommended that NAEP Reading include such tasks to be parallel with many state ELA assessments.

#### Revision

1. The Assessment and Items Specification document will suggest that the Governing Board consider this issue across the entire portfolio of NAEP assessments. For example, it is advised that NAEP:
  - Determine during their normal research and development efforts whether it is feasible to double score extended constructed response items for both reading comprehension and for writing.
  - Consider extending block times beyond 30 minutes to allow more time for writing from sources.

#### Rationale for Proposed Revision Plan

- As NAEP partner CCSSO suggests, other prominent assessments and state standards, especially state ELA assessments, require reading and writing from sources. Without a writing from sources assessment, NAEP may be out of step with this important practice.
- The issue of how writing can be measured goes beyond the boundaries of the NAEP Reading Assessment; however, there are opportunities in the 2026 Reading Assessment where NAEP might gain some insights on reading and writing from sources.
- In the current schedule of NAEP assessments, there is no plan for

	direct writing assessment until 2029. Given the importance of writing as a tool for learning and thinking, a master plan for assessing writing within and across disciplinary contexts seems advisable.
<b>ISSUE 3. Fine tuning is needed for some of the comprehension targets.</b> Sometimes the distinctions between the comprehension targets are not precise. For example, it is not clear how items developed to emphasize “analyze” will differ from those emphasizing “interpret.”	
<b><u>Revision</u></b> 1. The Panel revisited the section on comprehension targets with an eye toward increasing the clarity of the type of inferences involved across comprehension targets. (see <i>Chapter 1: Comprehension Targets; Exhibit 1.1; Chapter 2: Comprehension Targets</i> )	<b><u>Rationale for Proposed Revision Plan</u></b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Comprehension targets have exhibited a high degree of overlap in previous studies, which is one reason why reporting by comprehension targets has not been implemented. This is similar to other NAEP assessments such as math, where high levels of correlation between different targets have been documented.</li> <li>Future evaluations of NAEP Reading results will support the NAEP community in further updating definitions of targets and sharpening distinctions among the descriptions for each of the four comprehension targets.</li> </ul>
<b>ISSUE 4. It is not clear whether, and if so, how, NAEP might measure important critical reading practices such as searching, sourcing, and adjudicating the trustworthiness of information across multiple sources, as requested by CCSSO.</b>	
<b><u>Revision</u></b> 1. The framework explains that these possibilities are licensed by the descriptions of the <i>analyze and evaluate</i> comprehension target and the assessment design. The Framework describes these possibilities more fully and provides examples. (see <i>Chapter 1: Comprehension Targets; Exhibit 1.1; Chapter 2: Comprehension Items; Chapter 2: The Role of Comprehension Targets in the NAEP Reading Assessment; Chapter 3: Planning the Distribution and Characteristics of Comprehension Items</i> )	<b><u>Rationale for Proposed Revision Plan</u></b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>It is essential, especially in this age of ever-expanding information, to ensure that we measure these important critical reading skills. Given the increase in capacity to navigate within and across texts in NAEP’s digital format, measuring students’ capacity to perform these tasks is more feasible than ever.</li> </ul>

**ISSUE 5. Several stakeholders, including CGCS, were concerned that the relationship between comprehension and foundational skills such as phonemic awareness, decoding, and fluency was not adequately addressed in the Framework.**

### **Revision**

1. In response to stakeholders, and CGCS, the revised framework makes the following points clear:
  - Beginning in fourth grade, the NAEP Reading assessment is charged with assessing reading comprehension, which is the desired outcome of school literacy curricula. (see *Chapter 2*)
  - From time to time (1992, 2004, and 2020), NAEP has authorized special studies in which researchers have piggybacked on the Fourth Grade NAEP Reading Assessment with follow up assessments of fluency (1992, 2004, 2020) and word recognition and decoding (2020) to study the relationship between foundational skills and reading comprehension more thoroughly. (see *Chapter 2*).

### **Rationale for Proposed Revision Plan**

- Most standards expect students to have mastered foundational skills by 4<sup>th</sup> grade and the NAEP Reading Assessment in grade 4 reflects grade-appropriate texts and expectations. Those expectations focus on reading comprehension.
- Recurring special studies regarding the relationship between foundational skills and comprehension provide important supplementary perspectives on students' performance.

## **Scaffolding and Background Knowledge**

Scaffolding and background knowledge received 215 comments. NAEP partners, such as CGCS, favored many proposed ideas for assessment task features, now referred to as Universal Design Elements, that support all students to access the assessment; however, they had questions about the knowledge scaffolds, and wanted to know what was maintained from the previous NAEP assessment. Reviewers appreciated the inclusion of Universal Design Elements to inform the Framework and several different stakeholders appreciated “the inclusion of the scaffolds descriptions and examples” and the comparison of current and future uses of assessment task supports. Clarification was requested regarding how “scaffolds” and related terms are defined, who will have access to them, and whether or not they could potentially contaminate the construct by providing answers to comprehension questions. Additional explanation was requested regarding how and why “scaffolds” are currently used in large-scale assessments. Some reviewers were concerned that “scaffolds” would take extra time in blocks and questioned whether they should be included in all blocks.



**ISSUE 1. More clarity is needed about what is meant by scaffolds, who will have access to the scaffolds, and whether or not they will contaminate the construct by providing answers to the comprehension questions.**

**Revision**

1. “Scaffolds” have been reconceptualized as Universal Design Elements (UDEs) in accordance with Universal Design of Assessment. This avoids confusion with common understandings of “scaffolds” as instructional supports and more clearly reflects how UDEs function as assessment task supports. UDEs (formerly called scaffolds) help *increase* the validity of test score interpretations without diminishing the rigor or complexity of the 2026 assessment tasks. (see *Chapter 2; Chapter 3; Table at the end of this document comparing scaffolds described in the June 2020 draft and UDEs described in the February 2021 draft*)
2. In keeping with NAEP’s existing use of Universal Design Elements, or “built-in features of computer-based assessments that are available to all students,” the framework refers to UDEs throughout the NAEP 2026 Reading Framework. UDEs include a sub-group of design elements called **knowledge-based UDEs** (previously referred to as “knowledge scaffolds”). (see *Chapter 2; Chapter 3*).
3. A UDE is defined as *a design element that helps learners access, organize and express ideas in order to accomplish complex tasks*. In the 2026 NAEP Reading Assessment, all students will have access to all UDEs. (see *Chapter 2; Chapter 3; Table at the end of this document*.)
4. To address stakeholder concerns, including those of CGCS, this definition is situated in a Universal Design for Assessment (UDA) framework to help readers understand that the purpose of UDEs is to more accurately capture the construct NAEP intends to measure. UDEs enable stakeholders to be sure that assessment scores reflect differences in comprehension ability rather than differences in depth of topical knowledge and motivation, thereby increasing the validity of interpretations from test results. (see *Chapter 2; Chapter 3; Table*

**Rationale for Proposed Revision Plan**

- The 2026 NAEP Reading Framework will include comprehension tasks that are complex and challenging. Students bring diverse knowledge and motivations to such reading comprehension tasks.
- In response to stakeholder questions, including that of CGCS, background knowledge is essential to comprehension but many previous standardized tests have not dealt adequately with this issue. The provision of topic previews (e.g., brief videos) prior to students’ reading about a topic can help to ameliorate the varied exposure students have had to a topic but will not diminish differences in the depth of knowledge that students bring to their reading comprehension. They also will not give students answers to test items. Currently, these topic previews already appear in the NAEP Reading Assessment in a written/print format. A video format is now enabled by a digital platform.
- Motivation influences comprehension performance. Thus, supporting student motivation will increase precision of measurement.
- Broadening the range of Universal Design Elements accessible to all readers across all subject areas ensures scores on NAEP Reading reflects both construct validity and ecological validity.
- “**Universally designed assessments**” are developed from the beginning to allow participation of the widest possible range of students and to result in valid inferences about performance for all students who participate in the assessment. Universally designed assessments add dimensions of fairness and equity to the testing process, requiring that all examinees be given a comparable opportunity to demonstrate their standing on the construct(s) the test is intended to measure.
- While it is not possible to fully control for construct-irrelevant

<p><i>at the end of this document)</i></p> <p>5. In response to CGCS’s concerns, the revision clarifies how the framework builds on NAEP’s existing use of Universal Design Elements that includes digital tools (e.g., highlighters) and other task guidance elements (e.g. graphic organizers, look back buttons, eliminating answer choice tools) to help all students access, analyze, and organize content while also minimizing construct irrelevance. (see <i>Chapter 2</i>)</p>	<p>variance associated with diverse students’ differing motivation and background knowledge, it is incumbent on NAEP to minimize such variance as much as possible now that there are more reliable and feasible ways to do so, facilitated by digitally based assessment.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Universal Design of Assessments (UDA) calls for the purposeful design of assessments that are accessible to the greatest number of students possible in order to accurately measure the same construct – in this case, reading comprehension – across the diversity of test takers (Thompson, Johnstone, &amp; Thurlow, 2002; Thompson, Thurlow, &amp; Malouf, 2004). To do this, assessments draw on design features, available to all test takers, called Universal Design Elements (UDEs). Importantly, UDEs are designed to improve measurement for students across the performance spectrum rather than for only some students (Johnstone, Altman, &amp; Thurlow, 2006). UDEs minimize but do not eliminate needs for some students’ special accommodations, much like access ramps to increase building access may not enable all individuals to enter without added support. Designers validate UDEs before widespread use to ensure that purposes are reliably accomplished, enhancing precise measurement (Johnstone, 2003; Johnstone, Altman, &amp; Thurlow, 2006).</li> </ul>
<p><b>ISSUE 2. More explanation is needed about how and why scaffolds (now called Universal Design Elements) are used in large-scale assessments.</b></p>	
<p><b><u>Revision</u></b></p> <p>1. Examples were woven into relevant sections of the framework, including appendices, to explain how the proposed resources are similar to design elements in several existing large-scale national and international assessments. (These elements are also a part of the current NAEP Reading Assessment and the recently adopted NAEP Mathematics Framework update for the 2026 NAEP Mathematics Assessment.) Many of these elements are designed to contextualize</p>	<p><b><u>Rationale for Proposed Revision Plan</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● These kinds of design elements are already used in existing national and international assessment frameworks such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Assessment of Transversal Skills (ATS 2020)</li> <li>○ Programme for International Student Assessment Reading Framework (PISA) (2018)</li> <li>○ Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (2020)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

<p>tasks and help test-takers represent and organize complex ideas under time constraints. They ensure that test-takers focus their efforts on more cognitively demanding comprehension processes. (see <i>Chapter 3: UDEs examples from ePIRLS, PARCC, PISA, GISA, PIRLS; Appendices</i>).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Studies have shown that the UDEs in the current NAEP Reading Assessment do not interfere with students' responses to comprehension items, and in fact, early research indicates that UDEs are equally helpful to all students.</li> </ul>
<p><b>ISSUE 3. Some reviewers, such as CGCS, requested clarification regarding the role of knowledge in determining reading comprehension performance on the NAEP assessment.</b></p>	
<p><b><u>Revision</u></b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Framework clarifies the role of knowledge in shaping the comprehension process and describes the ways in which knowledge is involved in the NAEP Reading Assessment construct. Specifically,             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In response to CGCS, in some (not all) blocks, students will be exposed to a brief text, video, or audio recording to facilitate their access to the topic addressed in the text(s) for which they will be asked to demonstrate their comprehension. (see <i>Chapter 3: UDEs</i>).</li> <li>In response to CGCS, in the Assessment and Item Specifications for the Framework, a special study will be proposed to examine the utility of including pre-reading knowledge probes (questions embedded in assessment blocks) that could be used to report comprehension in relation to students' self-reported knowledge of the topics covered in the texts they read. (see <i>Chapter 3: Pilot Testing</i>).</li> </ul> </li> <li>While acknowledging the importance of topic knowledge and familiarity, the revision clarifies that the NAEP Reading Assessment is a test of reading comprehension, not topical knowledge. (This sort of knowledge is directly addressed in other NAEP assessments, e.g., NAEP Science, NAEP Civics, NAEP U.S. History, etc.) (see <i>Chapter 1; Chapter 3: Knowledge-based UDEs</i>).</li> </ol>	<p><b><u>Rationale for Proposed Revision Plan</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>While no reading assessment can fully remove the effect of background knowledge, there are measures that need to be taken so that the assessment is accurately and validly measuring reading comprehension, not purely background knowledge.</li> <li>Including pre-reading previews of the general topic of the texts facilitates access to the relevant knowledge domain.</li> <li>Including self reports of topical knowledge (as will be proposed for special study in the Assessment and Item Specifications to the Framework) would allow NAEP to interpret comprehension scores as a function of self-reported familiarity with the topics students encounter in the texts.</li> <li>Anticipating which students—or groups of students—know which content is an impossible task. Documenting students' self-reported background knowledge (as will be proposed for special study) will enable NAEP to monitor how well related initiatives are implemented and to improve the assessment on the basis of these data.</li> </ul>

## Text/Literacy

There were 193 comments submitted on Text/Literacy. Although experts from varied stakeholder groups, including state administrators and researchers, greatly appreciated the expansion of text types and textual environments, including the increase in multimedia and multimodal texts, some experts asked for additional clarification regarding how the definition of text was expanded and how related terms were defined. A few, including CGCS, asked whether NAEP would continue to test students on their comprehension of unfamiliar texts or topics. Some researchers suggested that the framework needed to clarify the treatment of text complexity in different sections of the framework. Clarification was requested about whether the test was measuring computer skills or literacy skills. Some concern was expressed about the possibility of including commissioned texts versus exclusively using authentic texts.

**ISSUE 1.** More detail was needed on how the **definition of text was expanded**. Clarification of terms in the explanation also was requested.

### Revision

1. The revised framework more fully described the relationships among different forms of representation (static printed texts, video, audio, and graphic formats) and, per CCSSO, specified which forms were part of the text portfolio for the NAEP Reading Assessment, i.e., which texts students will be assessed on. (see *Chapter 1: Development of the 2026 NAEP Reading Framework*; *Chapter 2: Updating the 2026 Reading Framework*).
2. The revised framework clarified terms such as multimedia, multimodal, reader attributes, everyday texts (now referred to as out of school texts), and navigational complexity. (see *Chapter 1*; *Chapter 2*; *Chapter 3*; *Chapter 4*)
3. When relevant, explicit examples of texts were provided at different grade levels. (see *Chapter 3*)

### Rationale for Revision

- NAEP must sample from text formats and modalities that are characteristic of both school curricula and the modern array of texts encountered in everyday life in order to measure the full range of students' reading comprehension performance.
- Many 4th grade standards reflect the kinds of texts that children use in the real world. For example, the Common Core State Standards in ELA Reading Literature call for 4th graders to: "Make connections between the text of a story or drama and a visual or oral presentation of the text, identifying where each version reflects specific descriptions and directions in the text."
- Many current assessments, including state assessments, PISA, Standardized Assessment of Information Literacy Skills (SAILS), and the Global, Integrated Scenario-Based Assessments (GISA), demonstrate that comprehension of this wide array of text formats and modalities can be measured with high degrees of reliability and validity.

<b>ISSUE 2.</b> Clarification was needed about whether the test was <b>measuring computer skills or literacy skills.</b>	
<p><b><u>Revision</u></b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The revised framework clarified how a broader range of diverse texts (print, digital, and multimodal) situated in a digital environment, necessitated additional ways of comprehending, and clarified how these ways were part of the intended assessment construct. (see <i>Chapter 2</i>).</li> <li>2. The revision clarified that the 2026 NAEP Reading Assessment will <b>measure the comprehension targets</b> as situated in a <b>digital environment</b> not computer skills (such as using a scroll bar), and students would be provided with a tutorial on how to use the digital platform. (see <i>Chapter 1</i>).</li> </ol>	<p><b><u>Rationale for Revision</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Digitally-based assessments measure comprehension within the context of a digital environment. However, the NAEP Reading Assessment is not measuring computer skills. In fact, students receive training at the beginning of the assessment to help orient them to their digital environment and to provide practice with computer skills. Thus, such skills are used during the assessment but not actually measured by the comprehension items.</li> </ul>
<b>ISSUE 3.</b> More clarification was needed regarding what was meant by <b>authenticity of texts and how and why NAEP might consider including commissioned texts.</b>	
<p><b><u>Revision</u></b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The revision clarified that the vast majority of texts would be authentic (texts that represent what students regularly encounter when reading in school, community, home, and work settings) but elaborated on the reasons why it was important to leave open the possibility of commissioned texts. (see <i>Chapter 3: Authenticity</i>).</li> </ol>	<p><b><u>Rationale for Revision</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Although the majority of texts will be authentic, it is important to leave open the possibility of commissioned texts to meet testing requirements. This ensures that the test developers would measure the comprehension targets within the constraints of the assessment conditions and time.</li> </ul>
<b>ISSUE 4.</b> More clarification was needed about <b>how text complexity would be operationalized and whether reader attributes would be factored into notions of text complexity.</b>	
<p><b><u>Revision</u></b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Clarification was provided throughout the framework that NAEP would use the highest quality methods of evaluating text complexity available. These include quantitative, qualitative, and reader/task</li> </ol>	<p><b><u>Rationale for Revision</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New psychometric methods for determining quantitative text complexity have been developed since the last framework was published. Ongoing psychometric research support stronger quantitative measures of text complexity.</li> </ul>

<p>analytical methods. (see <i>Chapter 1: Other Key Components; Chapter 2: Text; Chapter 2: Text Complexity</i>).</p> <p>2. The revision clarified that texts selected for the 2026 NAEP Reading Assessment would reflect a broad range of settings and experiences and offer varied levels of text complexity. (see <i>Chapter 1: Other Key Components; Chapter 2: Text; Chapter 2: Text Complexity</i>).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● In the text evaluation and selection process, reader attributes and engagement data are collected as part of understanding the reader/task dimensions of text complexity during field testing.</li> </ul>
<p><b>ISSUE 5.</b> More clarification was needed on <b>what counted as text and why</b>. CGCS also asked for clarification on the use of diverse texts with diverse students in the U.S.</p>	
<p><b><u>Revision</u></b></p> <p>1. The revised framework provided additional clarification regarding how the expanded definition of text was aligned with the construct of reading comprehension on which the 2026 NAEP Reading Assessment focused. (see <i>Chapter 1: Development of the 2026 NAEP Reading Framework; Chapter 2</i>).</p> <p>2. The revision clarified that the centrality of print texts could not and should not be abandoned. However, the expanded definition of text, coupled with the ever-increasing presence of multiple ways of representing information in today’s digital world, required NAEP to acknowledge and include non-print texts. (see <i>Chapter 1; Chapter 2</i>).</p> <p>3. In response to CGCS and other stakeholders, the framework provided more clarity about whether and to what degree texts reflected the diverse backgrounds of U.S. students. (see <i>Chapter 1; Chapter 2; Chapter 3</i>).</p>	<p><b><u>Rationale for Revision</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● The current NAEP Reading Assessment makes use of charts, graphs, maps, and other infographics, as well as short videos. These text types were included as informational texts and as part of text sets designed for Scenario-Based Tasks. The 2026 NAEP Reading Framework continues and adds to the text types in the currently administered NAEP Reading assessment and makes this wider array of text types and their role in assessment explicit.</li> <li>● This expanded definition of text is aligned to the current contexts of literacy development, state standards, and instructional practice; the internet and digital devices made multimodal and dynamic forms of representation ubiquitous in society and classrooms alike. The 2026 NAEP Reading Assessment had to reflect this changing landscape in order to maintain relevance and ecological validity.</li> <li>● Students in U.S. schools live and learn in a wide range of contexts—urban, rural, or suburban—and bring a wide spectrum of experiences and knowledge to reading comprehension practices. Moreover, students represent a wide range of communities of different ethnic, cultural, and linguistic strengths and in-and out-of-school experiences. Therefore, as commended by CGCS, “the texts in the 2026 NAEP reflect[ed] this wide range of communities.”</li> </ul>

## Vocabulary and Language Structures

Thirty-two respondents made 106 comments about vocabulary and language structures. Almost half of them voiced approval of how vocabulary and language structures were conceptualized and included in the 2026 Framework. In particular, the CGCS appreciated the inclusion of discourse structures and morphology in the expanded view of vocabulary. A few respondents wanted more information on how students' vocabulary performance would be scored as part of NAEP, what was meant by language structures, and why disciplinary words and certain language structures were not assessed in the 2026 Framework. One-fourth of the respondents, including the CGCS, asked for more emphasis on foundational skills. Respondents interested in the assessment of English learners favored letting them respond in their home languages to open-ended questions (as proposed for a special study in the public comment draft of the framework), but a few wanted to know how the home-language responses would be measured.

### **ISSUE 1. Clarification is needed on how students' vocabulary performance will be scored on NAEP, what is meant by "language structures," and why discipline-specific words and certain language structures are not assessed on the 2026 NAEP Reading Framework.**

#### **Revision**

1. The revision clarifies that students' performance on items that measure vocabulary and language structures will not be reported independently. Instead, scores on items that measure key vocabulary and language structures will be assigned to one of the four comprehension targets proposed in the 2026 NAEP Framework. (see *Chapter 3: Language Structures and Vocabulary in the Comprehension Items*).
2. The revision provides and fine-tunes examples in the Framework to clarify what is meant by "language structures" in terms of discourse structures (relationships between words and across phrases) and word structures (word parts). (see *Chapter 3: Language Structures and Vocabulary in the Comprehension Items*).
3. Discipline-specific words will not be tested. NAEP Reading does not test disciplinary knowledge since such knowledge is tested on other NAEP disciplinary assessments. (see *Chapter 3: Language Structures and Vocabulary in the Comprehension Items*).
4. The "if..., then" language structure has been removed as an example. The revision states that only grade-appropriate language structures will be included in the test items. (see *Chapter 3*).

#### **Rationale for Proposed Revision Plan**

- Psychometrically, to report independent scores for vocabulary and language structures requires many items, which could dramatically increase the size of the NAEP item pool. In previous studies, vocabulary did not emerge as a factor independent of comprehension. Coding the items in terms of language demands enables analyses examining the role of language knowledge on reading comprehension to be conducted. This will result in an assessment that views language and comprehension as inherently interrelated.
- The definition of language structures is linguistically sound though readers may need more examples to understand it.
- It is important to clarify that NAEP Reading does not test disciplinary knowledge (such knowledge is tested on other NAEP disciplinary assessments) but NAEP Reading will test students' understanding of texts within disciplinary contexts. NAEP will only include vocabulary and language structures that states consider grade appropriate.

**ISSUE 2. Clarity is needed regarding how English Learners’ home-language responses to open-ended comprehension questions will be measured.**

**Revision**

1. Although this issue received positive responses, it will necessitate further study, so has been removed from the Framework. In the Assessment and Item Specifications document to the 2026 Framework, a special study related to this issue will be described.

**Rationale for Proposed Revision Plan**

- English learners’ home-language responses can be digitally translated into English and scored for how well the content and ideas demonstrate text comprehension. This could result in a more valid measure of English learners’ comprehension of English text because research shows that English learners often comprehend more than they can communicate in English.

## Reporting

There were 337 comments on the reporting proposals in the draft framework. The CGCS thought the overhaul in reporting was overdue; they stated that it was exciting to see NAEP “take the lead in such an innovative way.” The great majority of reviewers appreciated proposals to make the assessment more useful and informative to the public through the inclusion of explanatory reader and contextual variables, especially valuing the focus on factors malleable to change through educational policies and instructional improvement. The majority also applauded recommendations that NAEP report on additional categories of English learners and disaggregate SES within broader demographic group categories.

Questions arose regarding the intent and possible misuse of explanatory variables as well as how these would factor into scoring. Some reviewers expressed concerns that explanatory variables might be used in negative ways against certain populations - to blame teachers or particular groups of students for NAEP outcomes. Some reviewers expressed concern that reader variables would alter the assessment experience, potentially influencing student responses or reducing expectations by determining students’ pathways through the assessment. Finally, a few reviewers suggested that the term “explanatory” could raise invalid inferences about causality and questioned whether block-embedded questions could change student responses on the assessment.

**ISSUE 1. The purpose of the explanatory variables was not clear to some reviewers. Some public feedback indicated that the description of explanatory variables was vague.**

**Revision**

1. The revision clarifies that explanatory variables and contextual variables (administered in NAEP survey questionnaires) are one and the same; “contextual variables” is now used for all instances of both

**Rationale for Proposed Revision Plan**

- The framework for the 2026 NAEP Reading Assessment builds on previous reading frameworks by acknowledging the social and cultural contexts of cognitive processes involved in reading



<p>terms. (see <i>Chapter 1; Chapter 2: Contextual Variables; Chapter 2: Contextual Variables and the NAEP Definition of Reading Comprehension; Chapter 4: Contextual Variables</i>)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2. The revision clarifies that many of these variables are intended to provide policymakers with indices of potential factors related to comprehension that are malleable through instruction and school/classroom climate. (see <i>Chapter 1; Chapter 2; Chapter 4: Contextual Variables; Exhibit 4.2</i>)</li> <li>3. The revision provides more precise identification of variables. Each variable is named and defined. (see <i>Chapter 4: Contextual Variables; Exhibit 4.2</i>)</li> <li>4. The 2026 NAEP Reading Framework does not include block-embedded indicators of these variables, relying instead on post-assessment questionnaires and process (navigational) data to assist in the interpretation of NAEP Reading Assessment results. (see <i>Chapter 4 throughout; Chapter 4: Enhancing NAEP's Explanatory Reporting Capacity and Conclusion</i>)</li> </ol>	<p>comprehension. In addition to developing assessment tasks with this perspective, it is important to be clear about the individual and contextual dimensions of reading development and performance in this framework. Existing research in human development stresses the importance of students' experience and perceptions of experience.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● CGCS strongly supported measuring students' assets (leveraging what students know and find interesting; students' funds of knowledge and resources), stating that "significant overhauls of what is reported and how are long overdue." Accounting for more of the factors that contribute to student reading achievement is desirable. Emphasizing malleable factors will increase the utility of NAEP.</li> <li>● Validated measures exist and these will guide the development of questionnaire items and scales. Reference to publications containing measures will be provided.</li> </ul>
<p><b>ISSUE 2. Questions arose regarding the intent and possible misuse of explanatory variables.</b></p>	
<p><b><u>Revision</u></b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The revised framework clarifies that the possible misuse of contextual variables will be minimized because individual student achievement scores are not provided by NAEP and the data on contextual variables will be strictly confidential. It further clarifies that data on the linking of student characteristics to performance will only be available at the state and national levels of aggregation and will only be offered to the public through the NAEP Data Explorer. (see <i>Chapter 4</i>)</li> <li>2. The revised framework states that contextual variables will depict the factors associated with success within and across diverse groups. (see <i>Chapter 4</i>)</li> </ol>	<p><b><u>Rationale for Proposed Revision Plan</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● The presence of strong contextual variables will decrease the likelihood of misinterpretation of NAEP Reading results.</li> <li>● Disaggregating reporting within race/ethnicity and SES will allow the field to view diversity within groups, helping to avoid stereotypes.</li> </ul>

<p>3. The revision clarifies that survey items and scales will be drawn from existing validated measures in which there have not been issues of invasiveness. (see <i>Chapter 4</i>)</p>	
<p><b>ISSUE 3. Some reviewers requested details about how the assessment would be scored. Questions arose regarding how the explanatory (now contextual) variables would factor into scoring.</b></p>	
<p><b><u>Revision</u></b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The revision clarifies that contextual variables will not be part of reading scores and will not be used to differentiate the challenge of assessment items given to students. (see <i>Chapter 4</i>)</li> <li>2. The Assessment and Item Specifications to the Framework will describe the scoring process in detail.</li> </ol>	<p><b><u>Rationale for Proposed Revision Plan</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● It is important to keep comprehension performance distinct from survey questionnaire data collection activities.</li> <li>● Validated measures for each of the proposed explanatory variables exist and these will guide the development of questionnaire items.</li> </ul>
<p><b>ISSUE 4. Concerns that the term “explanatory” might raise invalid inferences and whether block-embedded questions might change student responses.</b></p>	
<p><b><u>Revision</u></b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The panel discarded the label <i>explanatory variables</i> in favor of the more commonly used <i>contextual variables</i> since this is how they are referred to in all NAEP frameworks and assessments.</li> <li>2. The revision clarifies that contextual variables provide indices of factors related to comprehension and that these will not be presented as causal factors in reading achievement. (see <i>Chapter 4</i>)</li> <li>3. The revision clarifies that data relating to these variables will be collected through surveys that will be administered after all comprehension tasks are completed and thus will not influence performance scores in any way. Thus, contextual variables cannot influence the students’ responses during the assessment. (see <i>Chapter 4</i>)</li> </ol>	<p><b><u>Rationale for Proposed Revision Plan</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Forgoing the term “explanatory variables” will avoid the implication that these variables “cause” changes in reading comprehension rather than providing hypotheses to guide decisions about policy and practice. The term contextual variables does not imply causality, and mirrors other NAEP assessments.</li> <li>● It is important to emphasize that process data (computer generated traces of how students traversed the texts and comprehension items) may be used to better understand NAEP results.</li> <li>● Embedding questions beyond test questions into assessment blocks may be proposed for special studies in the Assessment and Item Specifications for the 2026 Framework. Given the needed research and development, these questions would not be expected as part of the NAEP Reading Assessment for 2026, though they could be feasible at a later time.</li> </ul>

**ISSUE 5. While reviewers supported the inclusion of additional categories of English Learners, questions arose about the feasibility of including these categories.**

**Revision**

1. The revision acknowledges that states use varied means for determining English proficiency. At the same time, given ESSA standards, states are required to provide information that might be collected to identify additional categories of English Learners. The categories for English Learners in the 2026 NAEP Reading Framework are now as follows:

**Current English learners** – Students designated as English learners at the time of the assessment;

**Former English learners** – Students who reached grade-level standards of English proficiency within the last two years prior to the assessment and who have formally exited that status;

**Non-English learners** – Monolingual students who speak only English; bilingual students who speak English and another language and who were never previously identified as English learners; bilingual students who reached grade-level standards of English proficiency more than two years ago. (see *Chapters 1 and 4*)

**Rationale for Proposed Revision Plan**

- Increasing numbers of English learners are enrolled in the nation’s schools. While a previous NAEP Reading Framework recommended a special study to determine how English Learners performed on the assessment, this study was never completed. Without the means of differentiating English learners by varying levels of English proficiency, NAEP risks continued inability to determine the progress this growing population of students is making in reading comprehension performance.

## Equity

Fifty respondents made 118 comments about equity. Thirty-six percent of the respondents viewed the Framework’s treatment of equity favorably, including CGCS who stated, “It is critical to focus on equity,” and the “new activity structures should do much to engage a greater variety of students and thereby yield a more accurate picture of students’ reading abilities.” Given the “wide range of communities of different ethnic, cultural, and linguistic strengths and in-and-out-of school experiences,” CGCS also thought it was important to “acknowledge that the sociocultural perspective in the construction of the assessment will optimize students’ ability to draw on what they know and can do in this measure of reading comprehension.”

Nine respondents liked the possibility of letting English learners use their home languages to answer questions about English texts, and four liked disaggregating student scores by socioeconomic status and/or English learner status. In contrast, 14 respondents were concerned about the limited

focus on students with special needs. Eleven respondents questioned whether the proposed technological advances in NAEP required more time for some students to complete the assessment and/or posed access problems. Several respondents did not understand the priority placed on equity in the 2026 Reading Framework and questioned whether the equity approach lowered expectations for minority students or hid achievement gaps.

### **ISSUE 1. Clarification was requested regarding how students with special needs were accommodated in the 2026 Reading Framework.**

#### **Revision**

1. There should not be a limited focus on students with special needs in the 2026 Framework. The Framework revision stated that approved accommodations for students with disabilities would continue to be used in accordance with the Governing Board's policy on the testing and reporting of students with disabilities. (see *Chapter 1: Current NAEP Reading Assessment in a Digital Environment*; *Chapter 3: Universal Design Elements (UDEs)*).

#### **Rationale for Revision**

- The Governing Board's policy regarding the assessment of students with disabilities was stated and followed.
  - For example, texts are not read aloud to students on NAEP Reading because this would violate the fundamental reading assessment construct itself.

### **ISSUE 2. Clarifications were needed to indicate that technological advances and the inclusion of texts that reflected students' diverse backgrounds did not result in inequities for some students.**

#### **Revision**

1. The revision clarifies that orientation and practice tasks were provided as much as possible to diminish access issues (e.g., this is currently presented in an interface "tutorial" format for all NAEP digital assessments). (see *Chapter 1*)
2. In response to stakeholder concerns, including CGCS, the framework explains that diversifying texts/authors did not mean personalizing the test content or making the test easier for some students. To achieve a variety of texts/authors/themes, each text selected will comply with the requirements for text quality and complexity to measure grade-appropriate comprehension established by the 2026 NAEP Reading Framework. (*Chapter 1*; *Chapter 2*; *Chapter 3*).

#### **Rationale for Revision**

- NAEP's research and development protocols and piloting procedures will be followed to make sure that technological advances result in an assessment that can be completed within appropriate time limits.
- It is imperative that the amount of orientation and practice tasks result in equitable access for all students as much as possible.
- An important goal is for all students to be assessed on texts that reflected cultures/experiences other than their own. The aim is to provide a diverse enough selection of texts to assess students in comprehending texts that were both closer and farther away from their own cultures and experiences, per a concern of CGCS.
- To keep NAEP relevant, a variety of texts, authors, themes, and perspectives that better reflected the U.S. student body and the curricula of U.S. schools was necessary. In no way, did this variety

	compromise the level of difficulty of texts/items or the reliability of the data, nor did it tailor testing to particular groups.
<b>ISSUE 3. Clarification was necessary to explain why an explicit priority on equity was included in the 2026 NAEP Reading Framework, and why implementation of this priority did not result in lower expectations for minority students or artificially decrease the achievement gap.</b>	
<p><b><u>Revision</u></b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The revision states that the focus of NAEP 2026 on equity was guided by two priorities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● to measure disparities in students’ reading achievement in a way that minimizes test bias to the maximum extent possible; (see <i>Chapter 3: UDEs</i>)</li> <li>● to measure disparities in students’ access to resources and opportunities to learn shown to be associated with unequal reading outcomes. (see <i>Chapter 4</i>)</li> </ul> </li> <li>2. The revision explains that by providing more nuanced reports that display variability within groups, and by measuring disparities in resources and opportunities to learn, the 2026 Framework seeks to improve NAEP’s reporting on the variability within groups and the variables associated with reading performance. (see <i>Chapter 4</i>)</li> </ol>	<p><b><u>Rationale for Revision</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Although the 2017 NAEP Framework stated that NAEP legislation specified that the purpose of NAEP was “to provide, in a timely manner, a fair and accurate measurement of student academic achievement...” (p. 2), the 2009-2019 Framework did not mention or delineate an equity approach. To make equity appropriately central to NAEP it was important to define it and indicate how it influenced the 2026 NAEP Reading Framework. The intention was not to rectify inequity that may exist in schools/school systems across the country. Instead, the aim was to ensure the assessment itself did not have bias/unfairness built into it.</li> <li>● Reducing test bias does not lower expectations. Instead, a more nuanced assessment that reflects the demands of 21<sup>st</sup> century reading and measures all students in the same way without adjusting the texts or items to particular students or groups of students is needed.</li> <li>● Documenting disparities in students’ access to resources and opportunities does not lower expectations. Reporting results by student characteristics (e.g., race/ethnicity or SES) without offering any information to contextualize the circumstances in which low-performing readers learn is runs the risk of contributing to, rather than mitigating lowered expectations.</li> <li>● The aim of proposed updates is to yield a more nuanced and complete measure to better understand reading disparities.</li> </ul>

## Summary of “Universal Design Elements” (UDEs) (February 2021 Framework Draft)

February 2021 Draft Three Types of UDEs	Knowledge-based UDE	Task-based UDE	Motivational UDE
<b>February 2021 Description of UDEs</b>	<p><b>Universal Design Elements (UDEs)</b> are features of the assessment environment intended to help all test-takers access, organize, analyze, and express ideas when engaging in complex tasks, such as reading comprehension. As such, UDEs aid students’ ability to engage with the content that is being tested by reducing the noise (what measurement scholars call construct-irrelevant variance) introduced when students lack familiarity with other aspects of assessment. For example, students might not know what the term synopsis means when it appears in a test item but could construct one if they knew it was like a summary. Or they might not be able to answer questions about the details of an obscure article but would be able to if they just knew that the topic was motorcycle design. Or they might not be able to answer a vocabulary question on page 3 of passage not because they didn’t know the word, but because scroll bars are a challenge for them.</p> <p>Importantly, UDEs are designed to improve measurement for students across the performance spectrum rather than for only some students (Johnstone, Altman, &amp; Thurlow, 2006). UDEs minimize but do not eliminate needs for some students’ special accommodations, much like access ramps to increase building access may not enable all individuals to enter without added support. Designers validate UDEs before widespread use to ensure that purposes are reliably accomplished, enhancing precise measurement (Johnstone, 2003; Johnstone, Altman, &amp; Thurlow, 2006).</p>		
<b>February 2021 Definitions of Three Types of UDEs</b>	<p><b>Knowledge-based UDEs</b> are designed to provide relevant information about topics, concepts, or vocabulary that students may need to make meaning from text as they read. Contemporary models of reading comprehension (Kintsch, 1998; McNamara, 2021; van den Broek &amp; Helder, 2017) describe the significant, positive impact of readers’ existing, text-</p>	<p><b>Task-based UDEs</b> are designed to clarify requirements and guide readers in their use of available resources; they increase access and sustain readers’ attention as they take the assessment. They clarify the expectations for readers and to help them remember, examine and use available resources within the assessment blocks (CAST, 2020; Dejong, 2006; Zhang &amp; Quintana,</p>	<p><b>Motivational UDEs.</b> Motivational UDEs are intentionally embedded into reading activities to encourage and support readers’ interest, engagement and persistence, especially when they encounter challenging tasks. These UDEs are informed by the substantial body of research that describes the beneficial influence of motivation on reading comprehension (Alton</p>

	<p>relevant knowledge (especially topic knowledge) on their text comprehension. Wide variations in students' knowledge result in reading comprehension performance scores that reflect, not readers' comprehension skill, but instead their differences in background knowledge about specific topics. A reader who happens to have knowledge related to the text presented in the assessment will be better able to use the processes described in the comprehension targets as they read and respond to questions. For instance, in comprehending a text called Patagonia Glaciers, a reader who happens to have knowledge about glaciers is likely to be better able to successfully answer the comprehension questions than one who might be a skilled reader but has no relevant topic knowledge. Knowledge-based UDEs for the 2026 NAEP Reading assessment expand the use of brief passage introductions that offer topic previews in the form of brief text, videos, or photographs. The 2026 assessment continues using vocabulary pop-ups to offer on-demand definitions of untested</p>	<p>2012). They maximize the likelihood that readers are able to cognitively engage with complex NAEP-designed reading experiences within the compressed time frame of an assessment. They might include a sequential set of directions to communicate expectations for how and why readers should engage with a collection of texts; they can also help readers plan and monitor their work across multiple texts and tasks (de Jong, 2006). They might also include graphic organizers that allow readers to record and revisit their ideas, reduce time spent on searching and scrolling, and, thus, provide more time for students to read, evaluate, and engage with text content. These UDEs might also include simulated student work examples or mentor texts that offer models of approaches to tasks before students complete similar tasks independently (e.g., Sparks &amp; Deane, 2014).</p>	<p>&amp; Proctor, 2008; Buehl, 2017; CAST, 2020; Guthrie &amp; Klauda, 2015). They may also maintain readers' interest by communicating explicit connections between the broader purpose for completing a task and the sub-tasks that need to be completed along the way. UDEs in the form of avatars (digital partners with whom students complete assessment activities) provide written and/or oral directions or serve as experts or peers to provide information or moral support. Avatars may also serve as a simulated target audience with whom readers can communicate new understandings about what they have read and learned (e.g., Use and Apply). Motivational UDEs may also include the kind of resetting feature, described earlier, which has been part of NAEP since 2019.</p>
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	vocabulary. Such knowledge-based UDEs, will help to address this long-standing potential source of bias in assessment, resulting in more accurate measurement of text comprehension across readers (Johnston, 1981).		
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