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Word Generation - Unit 2.24

Focus Words

tracking | aptitude | policy | components | involve



Weekly Passage

Academic tracking means students are placed into certain classes based on their abilities. Let's say Jasmine shows an aptitude for mathematics in sixth grade. She would then be put in advanced math courses starting in seventh grade and continuing all the way through high school. But Oscar, who is in her class, starts off slowly in math so he takes a completely different and easier set of math classes. In her senior year, when Jasmine knows more math than Oscar, is this because of aptitude or experience?

The arguments for and against the tracking policy have many components. Some people think tracking is a good idea. Students can learn at their own speed. Higher track students do not have to wait for others to catch up with them. Lower track students do not have to deal with students who are faster and get impatient with them for slowing the class down.

People who oppose academic tracking point out that the tracks are decided by testing. Tests can misrepresent students' skills. The people who think tracking is unfair argue that students who do not test well end up in low-level classes where they have fewer chances to learn. Maybe the students who score low on the test just need tutoring or a little more time to learn the same material as the high-tracked students. Tracking opponents complain that schools do not involve themselves in helping lower-tracked students learn because they are busy getting higher-tracked students ready for college.

What do you think about this? Is this practice fair? Do kids like Oscar miss out on a better education because they are put into a low track?

Unit 2.24 - Should middle and high schools use academic tracking?

Focus Word Chart

Word	Meaning	Forms	Examples of Use	Notes
track	(v.) - to group by ability			
aptitude	(n.) - ability, ease of learning			
policy	(n.) - course of action			
components	(n.) - parts			
involve	(v.) - to engage			

Unit 2.24 - Should middle and high schools use academic tracking? Problem of the Week



Hughes Middle School follows a **policy** of academic **tracking**. The school has advanced math classes for students who have an **aptitude** for math. Choosing students for this program **involves** giving all students a math test with two **components**: calculating and critical thinking. Students must earn a total score of 80% to qualify for the advanced class.

Option 1: Julie received 95 out of 120 points on her math **aptitude** test. Will she qualify for the advanced math class?

- A) Yes
- B) No

Option 2: On the math **aptitude** test, the calculating **component** is worth 70% of the final grade, and the critical thinking **component** is worth 30%. If Bethany gets half of the calculating problems right and all of the critical thinking problems right, will she qualify for the advanced class? (You can assume that all problems within each of the two sections are worth the same number of points.)

Discussion Question: **Tracking involves** measuring each student's **aptitude**, and this usually means giving a test. A **policy** of tracking students using a test score means that some students will miss qualifying for a higher track by just a few points. Is it fair for a student to be put into a lower track based on a few points? Is there a way to make **tracking** decisions more fair? What **components** should a fair **tracking** system have? Or is **tracking** just wrong?

Should middle and high schools use academic tracking?

Debating the Issue



I. Get ready...

Pick one of these positions (or create your own).

A Students should be tracked in school. This is the best way to make sure that students are getting the kind of instruction they need for their level.

B Students should not be tracked in school. All students regardless of their level should receive the same instruction, curriculum, and materials.

C Students should be tracked in school in different ways; tests should be used together with other ways of assessing a student's actual knowledge in math, science, social studies and English.

D Students should not be tracked at all. Students should be given opportunities to display their academic aptitudes through the school year. There should be on-going checks to see where kids are in their learning.

E _____

2. Get set...

Be ready to provide evidence to back up your position during your class discussion or debate. Jot down a few quick notes:

GO!

Be a strong participant by using phrases like these.

I think it's more accurate to say...

That's interesting - can you tell why you think that?

I think the evidence is contrary to what you're saying because. . .

Let me share something from the reading that will help us...

Unit 2.24 - Should middle and high schools use academic tracking? Science Activity



This activity is designed to help you practice thinking like a scientist and to use this week's focus words. Sometimes the data are based on real research, but they should never be considered true or factual.

"I wish our school used academic **tracking**," sighs Professor Seemy. "Kids are so different! Gerard hates math. Keisha has the **aptitude** for calculus. Separate tracks would make things easier for everyone!"

"Our school has a good reason for its no-tracking **policy**," says Professor Kahn. "Tracking **involves** labeling some students 'good' and others 'not-so-good.' Labels are dangerous! When teachers expect not-so-good work, they don't push their students to succeed."

"Can that be right?" Professor Seemy wonders. "Let's investigate!"

Question:

How do teacher expectations affect student performance?

Hypothesis:

If a teacher expects good work from one group of students, and not-so-good work from another, the "good" students will score higher on a quiz.

Materials:

- ▶ 20 students with a 3.0 GPA
- ▶ a one-day course on earthquakes, held twice
- ▶ quiz
- ▶ 1 teacher (The teacher's job has two components. He or she must teach the course on Monday, and then teach it again on Tuesday.)

Procedure:

1. Find 20 students with a 3.0 GPA.
2. Randomly assign 10 students to take the earthquakes course on Monday and the other 10 to take it on Tuesday.
3. Tell the teacher that the Monday students are “good” students, and the Tuesday students are “not-so-good” students.
4. Hold the course. Give the quiz.
5. Calculate the average quiz grade for each group of students.

Data:

	Average Grade
Monday (“good” students)	93%
Tuesday (“not-so-good” students)	78%

Conclusion:

Is the hypothesis supported or not by the data?

What evidence supports your conclusion?

How would you make this a better experiment?



Writing Prompt

Should middle and high schools use academic tracking?

Focus Words

tracking | aptitude | policy | components | involve

Support your position with clear reasons and specific examples. Try to use relevant words from the Word Generation list in your response.

A tool to help you think about your own writing!

Remember you can use focus words from any of the WG Units.

Check off what you accomplished:

Good Start

- ☐ Stated my own position
- ☐ Included 1 focus word

Pretty Good

- ☐ Stated my own position clearly
- ☐ Included 1-2 arguments
- ☐ Included 1-2 focus words

Exemplary

- ☐ Stated my own position clearly
- ☐ Included 1-2 arguments
- ☐ Included 1 counterargument
- ☐ Used 2-5 focus words

[illegible]