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# SHOULD PASSING A STANDARDIZED TEST BE A HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION REQUIREMENT?

Word Generation - Unit 2.01

## Focus Words

standardized | assess | criteria | correspond | formulate



## Weekly Passage

In many states high school students must pass a standardized test to graduate. For example, Massachusetts law requires the MCAS. The law was passed to make sure high schools are challenging their students. Businesses often complain that high school graduates cannot read and do math needed on the job. Colleges worry that not all high school graduates can do college work. The tests are used to see who has the skills expected by employers and colleges.

Tests like MCAS assess students' ability to write, read critically, and do difficult math. The tests are geared to the skills people need in jobs and in college. Supporters say standardized testing is fair because all students are graded using the same criteria. For example, writing might be graded by how many examples the students give.

Some people think graduation tests are unfair to students who are learning English. These students might know the information but have trouble with the test questions. Other students might have trouble focusing their attention. Their test scores might not show what they really know.

Students in different schools learn different things. The standardized test might not correspond to what some students were taught in a particular school. Students in another school, however, might find the test matched what they learned in class. People argue this isn't fair. Some people also worry that standardized tests make teachers just cover what is on the test. Teachers might not formulate lessons that will be interesting to their students.

Other people think that standardized testing is valuable, but that there should be different ways for students to show that they are ready to graduate.

Do standardized tests hold all students to high standards? Or do they unfairly keep some students from graduating?

### TEACHER - Discussion Questions

- ▶ Are there other standardized tests you have taken besides the MCAS?
- ▶ What criteria do your teachers use to assess writing in class?
- ▶ When you took the math MCAS, did the questions correspond to what you had learned in class?
- ▶ What groups of students might be hurt if we use the MCAS for graduation?

## Unit 2.01

# Should passing a standardized test be a high school graduation requirement?

## Focus Word Chart - TEACHER VERSION

Word	Meaning	Forms			Related Words
		Inflectional	Basic Word Classes	Prefixes/ Suffixes	
standardized	(adj.) - the same for everyone		standard	standardize standardizes standardizing standardization	
assess	(v.) - judge the quality of; evaluate	assesses assessing assessed		assessment assessor	session
criteria	(n.) - standards or rules used to make a decision	criterion (sing.)			critic criticize critical
correspond	(v.) - match	corresponds corresponding corresponded		correspondence	respond response responsive
formulate	(v.) - invent by thinking about	formulates formulated formulating	formula	formulation formulator formulaic	form

# Should passing a standardized test be a high school graduation requirement?

## Problem of the Week



We want high school graduates to meet important **criteria**. They should read well. They should **formulate** ideas logically and express them clearly. They should understand basic ideas about math, science, and social studies. What is the best way to **assess** whether students meet these criteria? Is a **standardized** graduation test too harsh? In Massachusetts in 2010, several thousand students failed to graduate because they failed one or more of the state tests.

**Option 1:** Of the 69,008 Massachusetts 2010 high school seniors, 2,556 failed the MCAS math exam. Which answer **corresponds** to the percentage of the class that failed the exam?

- A) about 2.4%
- B) about 3.7%**
- C) about 4.1%
- D) about 6.7%

**Option 2:** Under a new Massachusetts state rule, students must pass all three MCAS exams to graduate: the Science exam, the English exam, and the Math exam.

Of the 69,008 Massachusetts high school seniors in 2010:

- 1,958 failed the English MCAS
  - 2,556 failed the Math MCAS
  - 2,933 failed the Science MCAS
- a) Based on these numbers, what is the smallest possible number of students who could not graduate because of the tests? (Hint: Remember that students could have failed all three exams, so the amounts could overlap.)
- b) Based on these numbers, what is the largest possible number of students who could not graduate because of the test? (Hint: Remember that each student could have failed only one exam, so the amounts could not overlap at all.)

Smallest possible number: 2,933. This assumes that the students who failed the Science exam also failed the English and Math exams and thus are already counted.

Largest possible number: 7,447. This assumes that each student failed only one exam, so the number of students prevented from graduating is the sum of the three categories.

Vaznis, J. (2010, May 20). Education officials may scrap MCAS test. *The Boston Globe*. Retrieved on July 20, 2010 from [http://www.boston.com/news/education/k\\_12/mcas/articles/2010/05/20/education\\_officials\\_may\\_scrap\\_mcas\\_test/?page=full](http://www.boston.com/news/education/k_12/mcas/articles/2010/05/20/education_officials_may_scrap_mcas_test/?page=full)

Vaznis, J. (2010, May 28). 2,933 to miss diploma over science MCAA. *The Boston Globe*. Retrieved on July 21, 2010 from [http://www.boston.com/news/education/k\\_12/mcas/articles/2010/05/28/2933\\_to\\_miss\\_diploma\\_over\\_sciences\\_mcas/](http://www.boston.com/news/education/k_12/mcas/articles/2010/05/28/2933_to_miss_diploma_over_sciences_mcas/)

**Discussion Question:** **Standardized** tests must change each year to prevent cheating. Each year testing companies **formulate** new exams. Teachers and experts review each question. A good exam question meets these **criteria**: it **corresponds** to what students should be learning in class, and it fairly **assesses** what students know. These carefully prepared exams are expensive. For example, the state of Massachusetts spends \$35 million each year on making its standardized test. Is this a good use of state money? Why or why not?

# Should passing a standardized test be a high school graduation requirement?

## Debating the Issue



### I. Get ready...

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

**A** Students should be required to pass a standardized test to graduate from high school. This is the best way to make sure that all students are ready for jobs and college.

**B** Students should not be required to pass a standardized test to graduate from high school. Tests can't show everything they know.

**C** Schools should give students standardized tests, but formulate other ways to assess students who speak another language or who have other educational needs.

**D** Schools should require different kinds of student work instead of standardized tests. This will show more about what students know and are able to do.

**E** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

# GO!

Be a strong participant by using phrases like these.

*I believe that...*

*I agree with you because. . .*

*You make a good point, but have you considered...*

*Can you show me evidence in the text that supports what you said?*

### 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:

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#### TEACHER

Whatever the debate format, ask students to use academically productive talk when arguing their positions. In particular, students should provide reasons and evidence to back up their assertions. It may be helpful to read these sample positions to illustrate some possibilities, but students should be encouraged to take their own positions about the issue at hand.

# Should passing a standardized test be a high school graduation requirement?

## 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.

At a staff meeting, teachers are debating a new graduation requirement: a **standardized** test.

“We need strict **criteria** for deciding who graduates,” says Professor Kahn. “All of our students should be able to read, write, and do basic math. We should **formulate** a graduation exam that **assesses** those skills.”

“Actually, a graduation exam that tests simple skills could hurt our students,” says Professor Seemy. “Teachers want students to graduate, so they may limit their teaching to the skills that **correspond** to the test. Will they stop teaching other skills, like critical thinking and creative problem solving?”

### Question:

Do graduation exams have a negative effect on SAT scores? (The SAT Reasoning Test assesses critical thinking and creative problem solving. Most colleges require SAT scores.)

### Hypothesis:

Schools with graduation exams will have lower SAT scores.

### Materials:

- ▶ School A (which has a graduation exam)
- ▶ School B (similar to A, but no graduation exam)
- ▶ SAT scores from both schools

### TEACHER

#### Real Research:

-In the article cited below, researchers found that students in states that required students to pass graduation exams had lower SAT scores than students in states that did not require a graduation exam. The authors controlled for demographic characteristics like race and family income and academic indicators like GPA.

-Marchant, G. and Paulson, S. (2005, January 21). The relationship of high school graduation exams to graduation rates and SAT scores. Education Policy Analysis Archives, 13(6), 1 - 16. Retrieved on December 6, 2009 from <http://epaa.asu.edu/epaa/v13n6/v13n6.pdf>

**Classroom Discussion:** Summarize the real research. (Students in states without graduation exams score higher on the SAT.) Are students surprised by this finding? Why or why not? How does the finding connect to this week's topic? Which side(s) of the debate could it support?

**Procedure:**

- 1. Collect SAT scores from all students at School A.
- 2. Collect SAT scores from all students at School B.

**Data:**

	School A Average SAT Scores	School B Average SAT Scores
Critical Reading	470	500
Writing	450	510
Math	460	500

**Conclusion:**

Is the hypothesis supported or not by the data?

Supported

What evidence supports your conclusion?

In School B, which has no graduation exam, SAT scores are higher.

How would you make this a better experiment?

Encourage students to consider sample size, number of trials, control of variables, whether the procedure is a true measure of the question, whether the experiment can be repeated by other scientists, data collection and recording systems, and other potential explanations for the outcome. Students should understand that these simple experiments represent the beginning of an exploration, not the end. If time permits, have students suggest how the experiment could be strengthened, emphasizing the use of the target words in the discussion.



# Writing Prompt

Should passing a  
standardized test be a high  
school graduation  
requirement?

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

## Focus Words

standardized | assess | criteria |  
correspond | formulate

### 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

## TEACHER

Ask students to write a response in which they argue a position on the weekly topic.

Put the writing prompt on the overhead projector (or the board) so that everyone can see it. Remind students to refer to the word lists in their Word Generation notebooks as needed.

## Unit 2.01

### Source References:

» [http://www.kidshealth.org/teen/school\\_jobs/school/adhd.html](http://www.kidshealth.org/teen/school_jobs/school/adhd.html)

» <http://www.help4adhd.org/en/education/rights>