

**NY Performance Standards Consortium
Center for Inquiry**

**Background Information on changes to the Literature Rubric
09/2019**

Thesis and Organization

The previous “Thesis” and “Organization” strands were combined based on the premise that the literary essay should be more of an exploration of text than an argument about literary theory or literary value. This approach seemed to us more appropriate for the needs and interests of most adolescent readers. A book may have great literary value for a student—may possibly have evoked a deep response from a student—without fitting neatly into a particular theoretical lens. Students will still need a thesis to establish a central idea for their papers, and customarily, it will most often appear somewhere at the beginning of their paper, but it will also be embedded within the overall discussion and exploration of the text.

Connections

At one point we had considered making the “Connections” strand optional since it poses a large hurdle for our ELLs and since many papers discussed during the moderation studies seem too often to be narrowing students’ exploration of text to a particular theory or “lens.” Instead, we revised the types of connections a student may choose to make, adding “theme” and “creative element” to the options. For example, it would now be possible for a student to write about a single text by fully exploring and following a theme that runs through the text; or if analyzing a poet’s work, a student might choose to include an original poem that in style and content reflects the concerns of the poet’s collected work.

Many of us speak of connections to society, to the environment, to the world, but we have shunned the connections made to the self, which, again, can loom large for an adolescent reader. We hope that by adding these two additional options for connections we have broadened the possibilities for a meaningful paper.

Although we had a lengthy deliberation about the use of the first person “I” for the paper, we came to consensus that it is possible for a student to write an outstanding paper that uses the first person. (George Orwell’s famous essay “Shooting an Elephant” is actually a first person account of the event.) Like all student writing, a paper that uses the first person would have to go through the revision process to ensure that it’s the highest level of writing the student can do.

Analysis

The “Analysis” strand is now “Analysis & Interpretation” to broaden our understanding of what we are looking for when we read a student paper. We have kept the standard that a student may consider author’s language, craft, and/or choice of genre for an Outstanding paper and have also added it to the criteria for Good. The belief is that attention to craft is an inherent part of literary analysis; however, recognizing that this appreciation of craft and language can be difficult for many adolescent readers, we have retained “*may consider*” as opposed to *must*.

We have deleted any specific reference to literary elements since far too often the enumeration of literary elements became the thrust of both the task and the paper, often in ways that did nothing to support the main thesis or concerns of the paper. (We attribute this to the pernicious effect of the typical Regents question on literary elements.) Now the elements are subsumed to overall consideration of the author’s language and craft and do not need to be a separate focus for evaluating a paper (or creating a task).

Relation of student paper to student presentation

As with all PBAT presentations, the Consortium urges all teachers to be familiar with the Oral Presentation Protocols developed by Consortium teachers [see <http://www.performanceassessment.org/resources> (scroll down)]. The PBAT presentation is not a recitation of the paper; it is a chance to have a “literary” conversation with the student based on and growing out of the student’s experience with a particular text or texts.

The entire literature rubric is to be used for both the written work and the oral presentation.