

VCLA

# Virginia Communication and Literacy Assessment

Teacher Certification Exam

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

**DOMAIN I. READING COMPREHENSION AND ANALYSIS**

**COMPETENCY 1.0 UNDERSTAND THE MEANING OF WORDS AND PHRASES.**

Skill 1.1 Use context clues to determine the meaning of a word with multiple meanings. ....1

Skill 1.2 Use the context of a paragraph or passage to determine the meaning of words or phrases.....3

Skill 1.3 Identify synonyms or antonyms for words in a passage.....4

**COMPETENCY 2.0 UNDERSTAND THE MAIN IDEA AND SUPPORTING DETAILS IN WRITTEN MATERIAL.**

Skill 2.1 Identify the main idea of a paragraph or passage.....6

Skill 2.2 Establish the sequence of events or steps presented in a passage. .7

Skill 2.3 Recognize information, ideas, and details that support the main idea of a paragraph or passage.....7

Skill 2.4 Recognize a writer’s expressed or implied purpose for writing (e.g., to persuade, to describe). ....9

**COMPETENCY 3.0 ANALYZE THE RELATIONSHIP AMONG IDEAS IN WRITTEN MATERIAL.**

Skill 3.1 Recognize cause-and-effect relationships in a passage.....10

Skill 3.2 Analyze relationships between ideas in opposition (e.g., pro and con) or in agreement (e.g., reasons to support a claim).....11

Skill 3.3 Draw conclusions from information stated or implied in a passage. ...12

**COMPETENCY 4.0 USE CRITICAL-REASONING SKILLS TO EVALUATE WRITTEN MATERIAL.**

Skill 4.1 Interpret a passage to determine the writer’s opinion, point of view, or position on an issue.....15

## TEACHER CERTIFICATION STUDY GUIDE

---

Skill 4.2	Analyze the stated or implied assumptions on which the validity of an argument depends.....	17
Skill 4.3	Analyze the logical structure of an argument and identify instances of faulty reasoning.....	18
Skill 4.4	Distinguish between fact and opinion in written material.....	19

**COMPETENCY 5.0            APPLY SKILLS FOR SUMMARIZING, OUTLINING,  
AND VISUALLY REPRESENTING WRITTEN  
MATERIALS AND FOR INTERPRETING  
INFORMATION PRESENTED IN GRAPHIC FORM.**

Skill 5.1	Identify an accurate summary, outline or graphic representation of information presented in written material .....	21
Skill 5.2	Interpret information presented in charts, graphs, or tables.....	22
Skill 5.3	Select graphic forms (e.g., bar graphs, line graphs, pie charts, tables, timelines, graphic organizers) to present information contained in written material. ....	23

### **DOMAIN II. WRITING KNOWLEDGE AND PROFICIENCY**

**COMPETENCY 6.0            UNDERSTAND THE INFLUENCE OF PURPOSE  
AND AUDIENCE IN WRITTEN COMMUNICATION.**

Skill 6.1	Identify written material consistent with a specific purpose or audience (e.g., a business letter, a speech to a skeptical audience). .....	28
Skill 6.2	Adapt writing (e.g., in terms of sentence structure or vocabulary) for different purposes or audiences.....	31

**COMPETENCY 7.0            APPLY PRINCIPLES OF UNITY, FOCUS, AND  
DEVELOPMENT IN WRITING.**

Skill 7.1	Recognize examples of well-developed writing. ....	33
Skill 7.2	Make revisions that improve the unity and focus of a paragraph or passage. ....	34
Skill 7.3	Identify information, statements, or details presented in a paragraph or passage that are of topic. ....	36

## TEACHER CERTIFICATION STUDY GUIDE

---

Skill 7.4	Select supporting material consistent with the argument or main idea of a paragraph or passage. ....	37
-----------	--	----

### **COMPETENCY 8.0            APPLY PRINCIPLES OF ORGANIZATION IN WRITING.**

Skill 8.1	Recognize effective organization in a written passage. ....	40
-----------	---	----

Skill 8.2	Reorganize sentences or paragraphs to achieve an effective sequence of ideas.....	41
-----------	---	----

Skill 8.3	Identify appropriate transitional words or phrases (e.g., “however,” “as a result,” “moreover”) to help readers understand the organization of ideas.....	42
-----------	---	----

### **COMPETENCY 9.0            APPLY PRINCIPLES OF SENTENCE AND PARAGRAPH CONSTRUCTION IN WRITING.**

Skill 9.1	Recognize effective topic sentences.....	44
-----------	--	----

Skill 9.2	Recognize wordiness and redundancy in sentences and paragraphs.....	45
-----------	---	----

Skill 9.3	Identify sentence fragments and run-on sentences. ....	46
-----------	--	----

### **COMPETENCY 10.0        APPLY CORRECT USAGE IN STANDARD ENGLISH.**

Skill 10.1	Recognize the standard use of verbs (e.g., subject-verb agreement, verb tense).....	54
------------	---	----

Skill 10.2	Recognize the standard use of pronouns (e.g., pronoun-antecedent agreement; the use of possessive pronouns; the use of the relative pronouns <i>who</i> , <i>whom</i> , <i>whose</i> , <i>which</i> and <i>that</i> ; and the use of the demonstrative pronouns <i>this</i> , <i>that</i> , <i>these</i> and <i>those</i> ). ....	63
------------	---	----

Skill 10.3	Recognize the standard use of modifiers (e.g., adverbs, adjectives, comparatives, superlatives). ....	72
------------	---	----

Skill 10.4	Recognize the correct use of commonly misused words (e.g., their/there/they’re, to/too).....	78
------------	--	----

**TEACHER CERTIFICATION STUDY GUIDE**

---

**COMPETENCY 11.0      APPLY KNOWLEDGE OF MECHANICAL  
CONVENTIONS IN STANDARD ENGLISH.**

Skill 11.1	Identify and correct examples in which incorrect or extraneous punctuation has been used (e.g., commas, periods, exclamation points, apostrophes, quotation marks, semicolons joining clauses, colons to begin a list) or necessary punctuation has been omitted .....	81
Skill 11.2	Apply standards for capitalization. ....	87
Skill 11.3	Identify misspelled words in a sentence or passage.....	88

**COMPETENCY 12.0      IMPROVE INEFFECTIVE WRITING BY ANALYZING  
AND REVISING SENTENCES CONTAINING  
PROBLEMS RELATED TO GRAMMAR AND  
USAGE, CONSTRUCTION, AND MECHANICS.**

Skill 12.1	Revise sentences to correct problems relating to grammar and usage (e.g., syntax, pronoun-antecedent agreement, subject-verb agreement, misplaced modifiers).....	91
Skill 12.2	Revise sentences to correct problems relating to sentence construction (e.g., sentence fragments, run-on sentences).....	100
Skill 12.3	Revise sentences to correct problem relating to mechanics (e.g., spelling, punctuation, capitalization). ....	100

**COMPETENCY 13.0      PRODUCE A WRITTEN SUMMARY OF A GIVEN  
INFORMATIONAL OR PERSUASIVE PASSAGE.**

Skill 13.1	Organize information into an effective summary of the main ideas of an informational passage, capturing the author’s perspective and point of view.....	101
Skill 13.2	Organize information into an effective summary of the key arguments and supporting details or a persuasive passage, capturing the author’s perspective and point of view. ....	101
Skill 13.3	Demonstrate effective paragraph and sentence structure. ....	101
Skill 13.4	Demonstrate command of mechanics, grammar, and usage according to the conventions of Standard English. ....	101

**TEACHER CERTIFICATION STUDY GUIDE**

---

---

<b>COMPETENCY 14.0</b>	<b>PREPARE A DEVELOPED COMPOSITION IN A GIVEN TOPIC USING LANGUAGE CONSISTENT WITH A GIVEN AUDIENCE AND PURPOSE.</b>	
Skill 14.1	Employ effective organizational strategies consistent with the topic and purpose of writing.....	104
Skill 14.2	Incorporate effective thesis statements, topic sentences, transitions, and conclusions.....	104
Skill 14.3	Establish and maintain a specific focus through supporting illustrations and examples.....	104
Skill 14.4	Support an argument with effective logic. ....	104
Skill 14.5	Employ vocabulary consistent with the audience and purpose of the writing sample.....	104
Skill 14.6	Demonstrate effective paragraph and sentence structure. ....	104
Skill 14.7	Demonstrate command of mechanics, grammar, and usage according to the conventions of Standard English. ....	104
<b>Reading Sample Test</b> .....		<b>120</b>
<b>Answer Key</b> .....		<b>131</b>
<b>Rigor Table</b> .....		<b>131</b>
<b>Rationales</b> .....		<b>132</b>
<b>Writing Sample Test</b> .....		<b>150</b>
<b>Answer Key</b> .....		<b>158</b>
<b>Rigor Table</b> .....		<b>158</b>
<b>Rationales</b> .....		<b>159</b>

**DOMAIN I. READING COMPREHENSION AND ANALYSIS**

**COMPETENCY 1.0 UNDERSTAND THE MEANING OF WORDS AND PHRASES.**

**Skill 1.1 Use context clues to determine the meaning of a word with multiple meanings.**

**Context clues** help readers determine the meanings of unfamiliar words. The context of a word is the sentence or sentences that surround the word.

Read the following sentences, and attempt to determine the meanings of the words in bold print.

*The **luminosity** of the room was so incredible that there was no need for lights.*

If there were no need for lights, then one must assume that the word luminosity has something to do with giving off light. The definition of luminosity is *the emission of light*.

*Jamie could not understand Joe's feelings. His mood swings made understanding him somewhat of an **enigma**.*

The fact that he could not be understood made him somewhat of a puzzle. The definition of enigma is *a mystery or puzzle*.

## TEACHER CERTIFICATION STUDY GUIDE

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Familiarity with word **roots** (the basic elements of words) and with **prefixes** can help one determine the meanings of unknown words. Following is a partial list of roots and prefixes. It might be useful to review these.

<u>Root</u>	<u>Meaning</u>	<u>Example</u>
aqua	water	aqualung
astro	stars	astrology
bio	life	biology
carn	meat	carnivorous
circum	around	circumnavigate
geo	earth	geology
herb	plant	herbivorous
mal	bad	malicious
neo	new	neonatal
tele	distant	telescope
un-	not	unnamed
re-	again	reenter
il-	not	illegible
pre-	before	preset
mis-	incorrectly	misstate
in-	not	informal
anti-	against	antiwar
de-	opposite	derail
post-	after	postwar
ir-	not	irresponsible

### Word Forms

Sometimes a very familiar word can appear as a different part of speech. For example, you may have heard that *fraud* involves a criminal misrepresentation, so when it appears as the adjective form *fraudulent*, (e.g., "He was suspected of *fraudulent* activities.") you can make an educated guess. You probably know that something out-of-date is *obsolete*; therefore, when you read about "built-in *obsolescence*," you can detect the meaning of the unfamiliar word.

**Practice Questions: Read the following sentences and attempt to determine the meanings of the underlined words.**

1. Farmer John got a two-horse plow and went to work. Straight furrows stretched out behind him.

The word furrows means

- (A) long cuts made by a plow
- (B) vast, open fields
- (C) rows of corn
- (D) pairs of hitched horses

2. The survivors struggled ahead, shambling through the terrible cold, doing their best not to fall.

The word shambling means

- (A) frozen in place
- (B) running
- (C) shivering uncontrollably
- (D) walking awkwardly

**Answers:**

1. (A) is the correct answer. The word *straight* and the expression *stretched out behind him* are your clues.
2. (D) is the correct answer. The words *ahead* and *through* are your clues.

**Skill 1.2 Use the context of a paragraph or passage to determine the meaning of words or phrases.**

**Adjacent sentence clues**

The context for a word goes beyond the sentence in which it appears. At times, the writer uses adjacent (adjoining) sentences to present an explanation or definition.

*The two dollars for the car repair would have to come out of the contingency fund. Fortunately, Angela's father had taught her to keep some money set aside for just such emergencies.*

Analysis: The second sentence offers a clue to the definition of *contingency* as used in this sentence—*emergencies*. Therefore, a fund for contingencies would be money tucked away for unforeseen and/or urgent events.

## Entire passage clues

On occasion, you must look at an entire paragraph or passage to figure out the definition of a word or term. In the following paragraph, notice how the word *nostalgia* undergoes a form of extended definition throughout the selection rather than in just one sentence.

*The word nostalgia links Greek words for “away from home” and “pain.” If you are feeling nostalgic, then you are probably in some physical distress or discomfort, suffering from a feeling of alienation and separation from loved ones or loved places. Nostalgia is that awful feeling you remember the first time you went away to camp or spent the weekend with a friend’s family—homesickness, or some condition even more painful than that. However, in common use, nostalgia has come to have associations that are more sentimental. A few years back, for example, a nostalgia craze had to do with the 1950s. We resurrected poodle skirts and saddle shoes, built new restaurants to look like old ones, and tried to make chicken à la king just as mother probably never made it. In TV situation comedies, we recreated a pleasant world that probably never existed and relished our nostalgia, longing for a homey, comfortable lost time.*

### Skill 1.3 Identify synonyms or antonyms for words in a passage.

The context for a word is the written passage that surrounds it. Sometimes the writer offers synonyms—words that have nearly the same meaning. Context clues can appear within the sentence itself, within the preceding and/or following sentence(s), or in the passage as a whole.

## Sentence clues

Often, a writer will actually **define** a difficult or particularly important word for you the first time it appears in a passage. Phrases such as *that is*, *such as*, *which is*, or *is called* might announce the writer’s intention to give just the definition you need. Occasionally, a writer will simply use a synonym (a word that means the same thing) or a near-synonym joined by the word *or*. Look at the following examples:

*The credibility, that is to say the believability, of the witness was called into question by evidence of previous perjury.*

*Nothing would assuage or lessen the child’s grief.*

## TEACHER CERTIFICATION STUDY GUIDE

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**Punctuation** at the sentence level is often a clue to the meaning of a word. Commas, parentheses, quotation marks, and dashes tell the reader that the writer is offering a definition.

*A tendency toward hyperbole, extravagant exaggeration, is a common flaw among persuasive writers.*

*Political apathy—lack of interest—can lead to the death of the state.*

A writer might simply give an **explanation** in other words that you can understand in the same sentence.

*The xenophobic townspeople were suspicious of every foreigner.*

Writers also explain a word in terms of its **opposite** at the sentence level.

*His incarceration was ended, and he was elated to be out of jail.*

**DOMAIN II**

**WRITING KNOWLEDGE AND PROFICIENCY**

**COMPETENCY 6.0**

**UNDERSTAND THE INFLUENCE OF PURPOSE AND AUDIENCE IN WRITTEN COMMUNICATION.**

**Skill 6.1 Identify written material consistent with a specific purpose or audience (e.g., a business letter, a speech to a skeptical audience).**

Because students typically write for their instructor, they have a narrow view of audience. They must learn to adapt their communication to the needs of their audiences. One way to teach this is to have students determine the values, needs, constraints, and demographics of their audience.

**Values:** What is important to this group of people? What is their background and how will that affect their perception of your speech?

**Needs:** Find out in advance what the audience's needs are. Why are they listening to you? Find a way to satisfy their needs.

**Constraints:** What might hold the audience back from being fully engaged in what you are saying, or agreeing with your point of view, or processing what you are trying to say? These could be political reasons, which make them wary of your presentation's ideology from the start, or knowledge reasons, in which the audience lacks the appropriate background information to grasp your ideas. Avoid this last constraint by staying away from technical terminology, slang, or abbreviations that may be unclear to your audience.

**Demographic Information:** Take the audience's size into account as well as the location of the presentation. Demographics could include age, gender, education, religion, income level and other such countable characteristics.

Start where the listeners are, and then take them where you want to go!

Just as you talk to different people in different ways so do you write in different styles and levels of formality. Students should learn that writers use different writing styles to accomplish their purposes and to reach their different audiences.

Is a **business letter** outdated? Although much business-letter writing has been relegated to e-mail communications, letters are still a valuable form of communication. A carefully written letter can be powerful. It can convince, persuade, alienate, entice, motivate, and/or create good will.

## TEACHER CERTIFICATION STUDY GUIDE

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As with any other communication, you will need to know information about your receiver. This may be complicated if there will be more than one receiver of the message; in these cases, write for the largest or most important group of readers without “writing down” to any of those who will read and be affected or influenced by the letter. It may be better to send more than one form of the letter to the various receivers in some cases.

Purpose is the most powerful factor in writing a business letter. What is the letter expected to accomplish? Is it intended to motivate the receiver to act or to act in a specific manner? Are you hoping to see some action take place as the result of the letter? If so, you should clearly define for yourself what the purpose is before you craft the letter. To avoid procrastination, include a time deadline for the response.

Why should you choose a letter format as your channel of communication?

1. It's easy to keep a record of the transaction.
2. The message can be edited and perfected before it is transmitted.
3. It facilitates the handling of details.
4. It's ideal for communicating complex information.
5. It's a good way to disseminate mass messages at a relatively low cost.

Because letters have external readers, they typically use formal language. They should be straightforward and courteous. The writing should be concise and complete; otherwise, more than one exchange of letters or phone calls to get the message across may be necessary.

A **complaint** is a different kind of business letter. It can come under the classification of a “bad news” business letter, and guidelines are helpful when writing this kind of letter. A positive writing style can overcome much of the inherent negativity of a letter of complaint. No matter how much in the right you may be, maintaining self-control and courtesy and avoiding demeaning or blaming language is more likely to be effective. Abruptness, condescension, or harshness of tone will not help achieve your purpose, particularly if you are requesting a positive response such as reimbursement for a bad product or some help in righting a wrong that may have been done to you. The goal is to solve the specific problem and to retain the good will of the receiver if possible.

Induction is better than deduction for this type of communication. Beginning with the details and building to the statement of the problem generally has the effect of softening the bad news. It's also useful to begin with an opening that will serve as a buffer. The same is true for the closing. Leave the reader with a favorable impression by writing a closing paragraph that will generate good will rather than bad.

## TEACHER CERTIFICATION STUDY GUIDE

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**E-mail** has revolutionized business communications. It has most of the advantages of business letters and the added ones of immediacy, lower costs, and convenience. Even very long reports can be attached to an e-mail. On the other hand, a two-line message can be sent and a response received immediately bringing together the features of a postal system and the telephone.

Instant messaging goes even one step further. It can do all of the above—send messages, attach reports—and still have many of the advantages of a telephone conversation. E-mail has an unwritten code of behavior that includes restrictions on how informal the writing can be. The level of accepted business conversation is usually also acceptable in e-mails. Capital letters and bolding are considered shouting and are usually frowned on.

Remind students that e-mail messages, even if intended for just one reader, may eventually reach a much wider audience. In recent years, a number of e-mail writers have found themselves in embarrassing situations or legal troubles because of the circulation of their personal e-mails on the Internet. When writers need to address a sensitive, unpleasant or controversial matter, they should consult state laws to determine whether personal privacy laws protect correspondence. If the law does protect such correspondence from being circulated by the addressee, then the writers may wish to mention this in their messages to forestall publication. Otherwise, clarity, concision, and civility in written works will protect writers.

### **Personal Letters**

When writing personal notes or letters, the writer needs to keep the following key matters in mind:

- Once the topic is determined, the writer must determine the appropriate tone to introduce and express it. Is humor appropriate? Seriousness? Bluntness or subtlety? Does the situation call for formal or informal language? The answers to these questions will depend, in good part, on the writer's relationship to the reader. Plan appropriately regarding situation and audience.
- Does the writer's introduction clearly explain the topic/situation to a reader who doesn't know or feel what the reader knows or feels? Don't assume that the writer and reader are of the same mindset. Use a checklist to make sure all key information is clearly and concisely expressed.
- If a note or letter involves a request, what type of response/result does the writer desire? Devise a strategy or strategies for achieving a desired outcome.
- If a note or letter involves a complaint about the reader, the writer will need to decide whether to ask for particular amends or to let the reader decide what, if anything, to do. If no amends are requested, the writer may wish to suggest ideas that would help to avoid similar conflicts in the future. Asking the reader for his or her opinions is also a possibility.
- If a timely response to any note or letter is needed, the writer must mention this.

Provide students in-class opportunities to write a variety of personal notes and letters, whether involving real life or hypothetical situations. Invitations, thank-you notes, complaints, requests for favors, or personal updates are a few of the options available. Have students experiment with a variety of tones and strategies on a particular piece of personal correspondence. For example, they could write a complaint letter in a blunt tone, then write the same complaint in a humorous tone; compare and contrast the drafts. Structure in-class activities to allow for peer feedback.

### Types of Persuasive Speech

1. **Fact:** Similar to an informative speech, a persuasive speech on a question of fact seeks to find an answer where there isn't a clear one. The speaker evaluates evidence and attempts to convince the audience that their conclusion is correct. The challenge is to accept a certain carefully crafted view of the facts presented.
2. **Value:** This kind of persuasion tries to convince the audience that a certain thing is good or bad, moral or immoral, valuable or worthless. It focuses less on knowledge and more on beliefs and values.
3. **Policy:** This speech is a call to action, arguing that something should be done, improved, or changed. Its goal is action from the audience, but it also seeks passive agreement with the proposition proposed. It appeals to both reason and emotion, and tells listeners what they can do and how to do it.

### Skill 6.2 Adapt writing (e.g., in terms of sentence structure or vocabulary) for different purposes or audiences.

Tailoring language for a particular **audience** is an important skill. Writing to be read by a business associate will surely sound different from writing to be read by a younger sibling. Not only are the vocabularies different, but the formality/informality of the discourse will also need to be adjusted.

Determining what the language should be for a particular audience, then, hinges on two things: **word choice** and **formality/informality**. The most formal language does not use contractions or slang. The most informal language will probably feature a more casual use of common sayings and anecdotes. Formal language will use longer sentences and will not sound like a conversation. The most informal language will use shorter sentences—not necessarily simple sentences, but shorter constructions—and may sound like a conversation.

In both formal and informal writing, there exists a **tone**, the writer's attitude toward the material and/or readers. Tone may be playful, formal, intimate, angry, serious, ironic, outraged, baffled, tender, serene, depressed, and so on. Both the subject matter and the audience dictate the overall tone of a piece of writing. Tone is also

## TEACHER CERTIFICATION STUDY GUIDE

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related to the actual words that make up the document, as we attach affective meanings to words, called **connotations**. Gaining this conscious control over language makes it possible to use language appropriately in various situations and to evaluate its uses in literature and other forms of communication. By evoking the proper responses from readers/listeners, we can prompt them to take action.

The following questions are an excellent way to assess the audience and tone of a given piece of writing.

1. Who is your audience? (friend, teacher, business person, someone else)
2. How much does this person know about you and/or your topic?
3. What is your purpose? (to prove an argument, to persuade, to amuse, to register a complaint, to ask for a raise, etc.)
4. What emotions do you have about the topic? (nervous, happy, confident, angry, sad, no feelings at all)
5. What emotions do you want to register with your audience? (anger, nervousness, happiness, boredom, interest)
6. What persona do you need to create in order to achieve your purpose?
7. What choice of language is best suited to achieving your purpose with your particular subject? (slang, friendly but respectful, formal)
8. What emotional quality do you want to transmit to achieve your purpose (matter of fact, informative, authoritative, inquisitive, sympathetic, or angry) and to what degree do you want to express this tone?

**Sample Test: Reading  
Comprehension and Analysis**

***Read the following passage and  
answer the questions that follow.***

This writer has often been asked to tutor hospitalized children with cystic fibrosis. While undergoing all the precautionary measures to see these children (i.e., scrubbing thoroughly and donning sterilized protective gear for the children's protection), she has often wondered why their parents subject these children to the pressures of schooling and trying to catch up on what they have missed because of hospitalization, which is a normal part of cystic fibrosis patients' lives. These children undergo so many tortuous treatments a day that it seems cruel to expect them to learn as normal children do, especially with their life expectancies being as short as they are.

1. **What is meant by the word "precautionary" in the second sentence?**  
***(Average Rigor) (Skill 1.1)***
  - A. Careful
  - B. Protective
  - C. Medical
  - D. Sterilizing
2. **What is the main idea of this passage?**  
***(Average Rigor) (Skill 2.1)***
  - A. There is a lot of preparation involved in visiting a patient with cystic fibrosis.
  - B. Children with cystic fibrosis are incapable of living normal lives.
  - C. Certain concessions should be made for children with cystic fibrosis.
  - D. Children with cystic fibrosis die young.
3. **What is the author's purpose?**  
***(Average Rigor) (Skill 2.4)***
  - A. To inform
  - B. To entertain
  - C. To describe
  - D. To narrate
4. **What is the author's tone?**  
***(Average Rigor) (Skill 4.1)***
  - A. Sympathetic
  - B. Cruel
  - C. Disbelieving
  - D. Cheerful
5. **Is there evidence of bias in this paragraph?**  
***(Rigorous) (Skill 4.1)***
  - A. Yes
  - B. No

6. Does the author present an argument that is valid or invalid concerning the schooling of children with cystic fibrosis? *(Rigorous) (Skill 4.2)*

- A. Valid
- B. Invalid

7. How is the author so familiar with the procedures used when visiting a child with cystic fibrosis? *(Easy) (Skill 4.4)*

- A. She has read about it.
- B. She works in a hospital.
- C. She is the parent of one.
- D. She often tutors them.

8. The author states that it is “cruel” to expect children with cystic fibrosis to learn as “normal” children do. Is this a fact or an opinion? *(Average Rigor) (Skill 4.4)*

- A. Fact
- B. Opinion

**Read the following passage and answer the questions that follow.**

Disciplinary practices have been found to affect diverse areas of child development such as the acquisition of moral values, obedience to authority, and performance at school. Even though the dictionary has a specific definition of the word “discipline,” it is still open to interpretation by people of different cultures.

There are four types of disciplinary styles: assertion of power, withdrawal of love, reasoning, and permissiveness. Assertion of power involves the use of force to discourage unwanted behavior. Withdrawal of love involves making the love of a parent conditional on a child’s good behavior. Reasoning involves persuading the child to behave one way rather than another. Permissiveness involves allowing the child to do as he or she pleases and to face the consequences of his/her actions.

9. What is the meaning of the word “diverse” in the first sentence? *(Easy) (Skill 1.1)*

- A. Many
- B. Related to children
- C. Disciplinary
- D. Moral

**10. What is the main idea of this passage?**  
***(Average Rigor) (Skill 2.1)***

- A. Different people have different ideas of what discipline is.
- B. Permissiveness is the most widely used disciplinary style.
- C. Most people agree on their definition of discipline.
- D. There are four disciplinary styles.

**11. What is the purpose of this selection?**  
***(Average Rigor) (Skill 2.4)***

- A. To persuade
- B. To describe
- C. To inform
- D. To tell a story

**12. Name the four types of disciplinary styles.**  
***(Easy) (Skill 3.3)***

- A. Reasoning, power assertion, morality, and permissiveness
- B. Morality, reasoning, permissiveness, and withdrawal of love
- C. Withdrawal of love, permissiveness, assertion of power, and reasoning
- D. Permissiveness, morality, reasoning, and power assertion

**13. From reading this passage, we can conclude that**  
***(Rigorous) (Skill 3.3)***

- A. The author is a teacher.
- B. The author has many children.
- C. The author has written a book about discipline.
- D. The author has done much research on discipline.

**14. Is this passage biased?**  
***(Average Rigor) (Skills 4.1)***

- A. Yes
- B. No

**15. The author states “assertion of power involves the use of force to discourage unwanted behavior.” Is this a fact or an opinion?**  
***(Average Rigor) (Skill 4.4)***

- A. Fact
- B. Opinion