

## Plain Language Q and A

### What is Plain Language?

“Plain Language is text-based language that is straightforward, concise, and uses everyday words to convey meaning. The goal of Plain Language editing strategies is to improve the comprehensibility of written text while preserving the essence of its message. Greater clarity may be achieved, for instance, by reducing text length, removing esoteric jargon, and/or adding illustrations to aid the reader in her understanding of written information.” (Hanson, Hayes, Schriver, LeMahieu, and Brown, 1998)

### How do I determine if a student needs to take a Plain Language test?

Each student must be considered individually based on what is in the best interest of the student. A teacher and instructional team who know the individual student should make this decision.

### Who should take Plain Language tests and how are they different?

#### **MATHEMATICS**

The Plain Language Mathematics assessment is designed for those students that know the mathematics, but struggle with reading. The level of difficulty of the mathematics does not go as low as a level A or as high as a level C. This means:

- Students that struggle with mathematics will have a better testing experience if they continue to take Level A, where the mathematics is at their level of understanding.
- Students that need to be challenged, or that have a good probability of exceeding the standard, should continue to take Level C, otherwise there is an artificial ceiling in place which may cause them to receive a lower score.

### **If the Plain Language Mathematics is open to all and students can earn a CIM with it, why would a student choose to take one of the leveled mathematics assessments?**

All of the items on the Plain Language Mathematics assessment have been purposely written to minimize the language load while maintaining the mathematical integrity of the item. Since the Plain Language Mathematics assessment is a “wide-range” assessment [items primarily from Level B with some from Levels A and C], the students don’t have the opportunity to achieve scores from the full range of the RIT scale. For those students intending to use the PASS system as a part of their college application, this could mean a restriction of opportunities to have classes waived as a result of high scores on a portion of the Certificate of Initial Mastery testing.

## Why not have all students take the Plain Language Mathematics assessment?

Reducing the language load on a mathematics item does not mean lowering the content level. Likewise, items assessing the more difficult content would have little meaning if the language load were to be reduced. Looking at the examples (below) of Plain Language Mathematics items: if a strong mathematics student were given the probability example question, s/he would want to know if the picking of socks is random? If the socks picked are replaced in the drawer prior to the next selection? Are 5 red socks 2.5 pairs out of 10 pairs - or 5 out of 20 single socks? Thus, the question may raise more questions for the student and may interfere with his/her selection of the best answer.

## Can we see a couple of examples of Plain Language Mathematics items?

Standard	Plain Language
There are eight 100-point tests each semester in Mrs. Johnson's class. John has an average of 87% on the first 5 tests. What must John average on the final 3 tests to have an overall average of 90%?	John averages 87% on the first 5 tests. John needs an average of 90% What must John average on the final 3 tests?
There are 20 socks in a drawer, 5 each of red, yellow, orange, and blue. If each sock is chosen entirely at random, and not replaced, what is the probability of choosing 5 socks and getting all 5 red socks?	There are 20 socks. 5 – red 5 – yellow 5 – orange 5 – blue Pat picks 5 socks. What is the probability of getting 5 red socks?

## READING

The Plain Language Reading test attempts to minimize idioms, vocabulary, or expressions that would be difficult for students who are struggling with the English language to understand. Passages and items use primarily simple sentence structures. Because of these attributes, plain language reading forms are lower in difficulty than the "A" form for a given grade or benchmark level.

### Why not have all students take the Plain Language Reading assessment?

Since the Plain Language Reading assessment is lower in difficulty, a student must get a much higher percentage of the items correct to meet the standard. As a result, carelessness or a lack of attention because a question seemed “too easy” play a more active role in a proficient student’s not meeting the standard than on a leveled reading test.

### Can we see an example of a Plain Language Reading assessment item?

Standard	Plain Language
According to the text, why is Mars called the Red Planet? A. The surface of the planet is covered with rusty rocks. B. The surface of the planet has many active volcanoes. C. The planet has many moons that are in orbit around it. D. The atmosphere of the planet is composed of carbon dioxide.	Mars is called the Red Planet because it has  A. rusty rocks. B. volcanoes. C. moons. D. atmosphere.

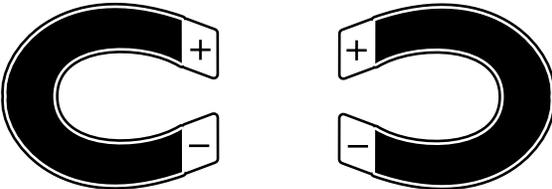
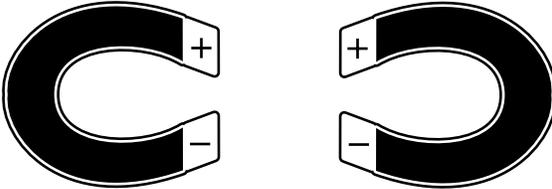
### SCIENCE

The Plain Language Science assessment is designed for those students that know science concepts and skills, but struggle with reading. The level of difficulty of the Plain Language Science test will be determined when field testing has been completed. At this time, it is not conclusive how science Plain Language items will equate with non-plain language items.

### If the Science Plain Language will be open to all and students can earn a CIM with it, why would a student choose to take the non Plain Language test?

Although science items on the Plain Language assessment have been purposely written to minimize the language load while maintaining the science integrity of the items, most likely, complex concepts and detailed questions will not be included on Plain Language Tests. Similar to the other content areas, it is anticipated that students who take the Plain Language Science test won’t have the opportunity to score from the full range of the RIT scale. In addition, when descriptive language is removed from an item, the advanced student is presented with questions that are missing contextual clues and therefore may be at a disadvantage. Students who are capable of exceeding the science performance standard, should be assessed using the standard science assessment.

**Can we see an example of a Plain Language science item?**

Standard	Plain Language
<p data-bbox="237 422 776 575">The two magnets were placed near each other on a tabletop. Which statement about the magnetic force of these two magnets is true?</p> <p data-bbox="435 619 566 653" style="text-align: center;"><b>Magnets</b></p> <div data-bbox="224 688 776 919" style="text-align: center;"><p data-bbox="326 695 354 716">#1</p><p data-bbox="651 695 678 716">#2</p></div> <p data-bbox="250 961 773 1289">A. The two magnets will be attracted to each other. B. The two magnets will repel each other. C. There will be no force between the magnets. D. The magnetic force will change the magnets.</p>	<p data-bbox="857 422 1354 455">What is true about magnetic force?</p> <p data-bbox="1055 619 1187 653" style="text-align: center;"><b>Magnets</b></p> <div data-bbox="844 688 1396 919" style="text-align: center;"><p data-bbox="946 695 974 716">#1</p><p data-bbox="1271 695 1299 716">#2</p></div> <p data-bbox="870 961 1341 1163">A. The two magnets will attract. B. The two magnets will repel. C. There will be no force. D. The force will change the magnets.</p>