



TOPIC 3: INSTITUTIONS OF U.S. GOVERNMENT

GRADE 8 CIVICS LOCAL-LEVEL CLASSROOM PERFORMANCE TASK



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INTRODUCTION TO THE MCAS GRADE 8 CIVICS ASSESSMENT

MCAS GRADE 8 CIVICS ASSESSMENT

The MCAS Grade 8 Civics assessment offers multiple, interrelated components to assess students' understanding of civics and the foundations of the Massachusetts and U.S. governments. The test provides opportunities for students to demonstrate their civic knowledge and skills through an in-depth exploration of topics from the [Massachusetts 2018 History and Social Science \(HSS\) Curriculum Framework](#), while also presenting a comprehensive indicator of student and school performance on the breadth of the standards.

The MCAS Grade 8 Civics assessment has two components: (1) a state-level performance task, and (2) an end-of-course (EOC) test. The state-level performance task aligns to one of the seven civics topics from the grade 8 standards, and the EOC test covers the breadth of the standards.

To help prepare students for the state-level performance task, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) has created local-level classroom performance tasks for each civics topic. This document describes procedures for the local-level tasks. (See [Grade 8 Civics Test Design](#) for additional information about the state-level performance task and the end-of-course test.)

LOCAL-LEVEL CLASSROOM PERFORMANCE TASK OVERVIEW

The local-level classroom performance tasks are designed to model best practices for classroom assessment and complement the content and skills that appear on the state-level performance task. Similar to the state-level task, each local-level task focuses on one topic from the grade 8 standards and assesses both content and practice standards.

Local tasks should be completed **after** regular instruction has occurred for the topic being addressed. These tasks include group work and discussions about the civics topics. In addition, the tasks ask students to analyze and evaluate sources to describe and explain civics concepts. Students will also be expected to write answers to questions related to the task topic. DESE will not collect student work or scores for these classroom tasks. Teachers may use these tasks for either formative or summative purposes in the classroom.

NOTE TO TEACHERS ABOUT THE LOCAL-LEVEL TASK MATERIALS AND TIMING

The local-level task materials include a task summary and standards alignment, task directions, presentation slides, student handouts, and a scoring rubric and notes. These materials have been reviewed and edited by the MCAS grade 8 civics educator review committee. In addition, a bias and sensitivity educator review committee has also reviewed the materials. The student handouts may be printed or distributed digitally for students to complete on a computer. Teachers should read through all materials, including the scoring notes, *prior* to administering the task to students. Although the tasks incorporate group work, each student should complete their own handout(s).

The time given to complete each part of the task is an estimated time. DESE estimates that, on average, each task will take one to two 50-minute class periods. It is important for teachers to review all the materials and estimate the amount of time it will take their students to complete the local-level task and adjust the timing as needed.

Although the tasks have been developed with the input of grade 8 civics teachers, DESE recognizes that classroom work may be different depending on the classroom context. Therefore, teachers may modify tasks and adapt them to their classrooms as needed. Modifications may include, but are not limited to:

- adapting materials including sources, presentations, instructions, or student handouts for additional clarity for specific populations (such as English learners),
- changing the scoring notes by adding additional student answers,
- incorporating previous class work during discussions, or
- administering a task in more than one class session.

TOPIC 3: INSTITUTIONS OF U.S. GOVERNMENT

TASK SUMMARY

For this task, **Topic 3: Institutions of U.S. Government**, students will analyze, discuss, and explain how the three branches of the federal government used their constitutional powers to respond to an important issue affecting people living in the United States. The standards that will be addressed are listed below.

STANDARDS ADDRESSED

Practice Standards

- 8.PS.1. Demonstrate civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions.
- 8.PS.3. Organize information and data from multiple primary and secondary sources.
- 8.PS.4. Analyze the purpose and point of view of each source; distinguish opinion from fact.
- 8.PS.6. Argue or explain conclusions using valid reasoning and evidence.

Content Standards

- 8.T3.1. Distinguish the three branches of government (separation of powers): Congress as the legislative branch, the Presidency and the executive agencies as the executive branch, and the Supreme Court and other federal inferior courts as the judicial branch.
- 8.T3.2. Examine the interrelationship of the three branches (the checks and balance system).
- 8.T3.3. Describe the respective roles of each of the branches of government.

TIME

There are three components to this Local-Level Classroom Performance Task.

1. small-group work (25-30 min)
2. a whole-class discussion (5-10 min)
3. small-group work (10 min)

A final optional writing component, to be completed individually, is expected to take 20 minutes.

Teachers may vary the time for each component as needed.

MATERIALS

- Task directions and scoring notes (for educators only)
- Slides with activator image and student directions (for educators only)
- Handout 1 (one for each student)
- Handout 2a (one for each student)
- Handout 2b, optional (one for each student as needed)

LOCAL TASK DIRECTIONS

1. At the beginning of class, provide students with the following directions for the class period, which teachers may modify as needed:

“We will be completing an activity about the three branches of the federal government. You will be given handouts to explore some ways that the federal government has responded to an important issue that affects the lives of people living in the United States. You will work in groups to examine sources related to this issue, discuss the federal government’s constitutional powers used to address this issue, and answer the questions on the handouts. We will then discuss the powers of the federal government as a class.”

2. Small-group work (25-30 min)
 - Assign groups of 3 or 4 students, varying the abilities of students in each group. You may assign roles to students, such as reading the questions aloud in their group, providing an initial answer to a question on the Handout, keeping track of time (timekeeper), sharing out the group’s answers with the whole class, or other roles that are used in the class for group work. Have students move into their groups. Students may also work independently as needed.
 - Distribute Handout 1 to each student.
 - Read aloud the overview and directions on Handout 1.
 - Tell students to complete Handout 1 in their groups. Group members should read and discuss the questions together, but each student should complete their own handout.
 - To facilitate this activity, you may monitor student progress throughout the different sections of the handout.
 - Teachers can answer questions that arise from the discussions but should not provide the answers to the questions on the handout.
3. Whole-class discussion (5-10 min)
 - After the students have completed Handout 1, ask students to share out their answers to the questions on the handout with the whole class and discuss. The discussion should consider the constitutional powers that the three branches of government exercised in their efforts to address water pollution.
4. Small-group work (10 min)
 - After the discussion, distribute Handout 2a to each student.
 - Tell students to complete the handout in their small groups. Group members should read and discuss the questions together, but each student should complete their own handout.
 - If time permits, teachers may also ask students to discuss how the three branches of the federal government might use their constitutional powers to respond to concerns about water pollution in communities today.
5. Optional activity (20 min)
 - Teachers may choose to extend this local-level task by having students independently complete the writing prompt on Handout 2b. This activity may be done during the next class period or can be done as a homework assignment. Although the activity is optional, it will allow students to synthesize and reinforce key ideas in an extended response.

6. Scoring

- The Scoring Notes may be used during the whole-class discussions (to facilitate and evaluate the discussions) and may also be used to evaluate individual student work after the task is complete.
- Teachers may collect the completed handouts and grade student responses based on the Scoring Notes.
- Teachers may choose to go over any parts of the task that students did not understand (either during the group discussion and/or after the handouts are graded).