

“What should good student writing at this grade level look like?”

The answer lies in the writing itself.

The **Writing Standards *in Action* Project** uses high quality student writing samples to illustrate what performance to grade level standards looks like—in action.

Writing Standards *in Action*

Grade 10 English Language Arts

Blend of Inform/Explain and Narrate

(Personal Essay)

Thunder



Background Information

GRADE
10

FRAMEWORK / CONTENT STANDARDS ADDRESSED:

Massachusetts Curriculum Framework
for ELA and Literacy (2017)

Writing Sample Title: Thunder

Text Type and Purpose: Blend of Inform/Explain and Narrate

Grade level/Content area: Grade 10 English Language Arts

Type of Assignment: Personal Essay

Standards Addressed: (W.9-10.2), (W.9-10.3), (W.9-10.4), (W.9-10.5), (L.9-10.1), (L.9-10.2), (L.9-10.5), (L.9-10.6)

See descriptions of these standards in the right column of the next page.

Highlights:

This sample of student work meets grade level standards. It demonstrates the following attributes of effective writing.

The sample:

- Depicts the writer’s experiences with a blend of informational and narrative techniques
- Develops the topic and advances a brief narrative with relevant facts and well-chosen details
- Propels the narrative at a pace similar to that of the music played by the writer
- Incorporates figurative language and a variety of syntactic structures to convey the impact of the writer’s experiences
- Links one paragraph to another with effective and varied transitions that contribute to a smooth flow of ideas
- Includes effective and appropriate word choice
- Provides the writer’s detailed reflections on a critical revision to an earlier draft

CONTINUED ►



STANDARDS-BASED COMMENTARY

The student writing sample that follows includes standards-based commentary. The commentary found in this column describes how the writing meets the standards in the *Massachusetts Curriculum Framework for English Language Arts and Literacy (2017)* and other content frameworks when applicable.

Understanding the Standards-Based Commentary

1. Grade-specific standards addressed are:

- Listed in the column to the right of the student work by strand, grade, and number (or number and letter, where applicable)
- Marked by a colored block with a letter code, also in the column to the right of the student work

EXAMPLE: **A**

2. Colored blocks beneath each standard in the right column:

- Are of the same color and letter code as the block that marks the standard being addressed
- Mark standards-based commentary related to the standard being addressed
- Appear in alphabetical order

EXAMPLE: **A1**

3. Corresponding colored arrow blocks within the text:

- Set off sections of student work to which commentary applies
- Do not necessarily appear in alphabetical order—but where evidence of a particular standard exists

EXAMPLE: (begin) **A1** section **A1** (end)

Instructional Practices:

The teacher used the following practices:

- The teacher asked students to track key revisions and to explain how they improved the effectiveness of their final drafts.

Assignment Description:

Students were asked to write personal essays and brief reflective comments on the effect of important revisions on their final drafts.

Intended Audience:

Teacher, classmates, family

Time:

Unknown

Writing Process:

The teacher placed considerable stress on peer feedback and on writers' explicit descriptions of their revision processes.

Materials:

Unknown

Writing Standards:**Grade 9-10, Standard 2 (W.9-10.2)**

Write informative/explanatory texts (e.g., essays, oral reports, biographical feature articles) to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

EXAMPLES: **A B C D F**

Writing Standards:**Grade 9-10, Standard 3 (W.9-10.3)**

Write narratives to develop experiences or events using effective literary techniques, well-chosen details, and well-structured sequences.

EXAMPLES: **A E F**

Writing Standards:**Grade 9-10, Standard 4 (W.9-10.4)**

Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

EXAMPLES: **G**

Writing Standards:**Grade 9-10, Standard 5 (W.9-10.5)**

Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on addressing what is most significant for a specific purpose and audience.

EXAMPLES: **K**

Please note:

The samples may contain inaccuracies in wording and content or shortcomings in the use of standard English conventions.

CONTINUED ►

MORE STANDARDS ADDRESSED ►



Standards Addressed

(Continued)

Language Standards:

Grade 9-10, Standard 1 (L.9-10.1)

Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking; retain and further develop language skills learned in previous grades.

EXAMPLES: **H** **I** **I**

Language Standards:

Grade 9-10, Standard 2 (L.9-10.2)

Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.

EXAMPLES: **J**

Language Standards:

Grade 9-10, Standard 5 (L.9-10.5)

Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.

EXAMPLES: **I**

Language Standards:

Grade 9-10, Standard 6 (L.9-10.6)

Acquire and use accurately grade-appropriate general academic and domain-specific words and phrases; independently research words and gather vocabulary knowledge.

EXAMPLES: **D**

Please note:

The samples may contain inaccuracies in wording and content or shortcomings in the use of standard English conventions.

END OF BACKGROUND ■

END OF STANDARDS ADDRESSED ■



Blend of Inform/Explain and Narrate

GRADE
10

FRAMEWORK / CONTENT STANDARDS ADDRESSED:

Massachusetts Curriculum Framework
for ELA and Literacy (2017)

STANDARDS-BASED COMMENTARY

In this sample...

The writer uses narrative and informational techniques to relate a profound personal experience that occurs during an orchestra rehearsal. Information about the performance venue, the weather conditions, the orchestra, and the music coalesces into a brief, fast-paced narrative account of the writer's responses to the music, to the story it evokes, and to her place in the performance. Organization is mostly clear and coherent, notwithstanding a somewhat awkwardly constructed concluding section. Precise word choice, carefully placed parallel constructions, a variety of sentence formations, and effective figurative language develop the writer's insights in a style and tone that reflect the writer's enthusiasm for the topic and the powerful impact of the experience.

The writer also provides clear, coherent, and incisive reflections on the origin of the topic and on the effectiveness of a revision to an earlier draft. The reflections conclude with the writer's complex, self-critical appraisal of the revision's effect.

Thunder

Located in Sidney, Maine, also known as the middle of nowhere, is a music camp. It sits in the midst of a forest located next to a large

begin section **end**

WRITING SAMPLE CONTINUES ►



Understanding the Standards-Based Commentary

The student writing sample that begins on this page includes in this column standards-based commentary describing how the writing meets the standards in the *Massachusetts Curriculum Framework for English Language Arts and Literacy (2017)* and other content frameworks, when applicable. Where they apply, sub-standards marked by letters are included.

Evidence for the commentary is normally noted in the text of the student writing using color-coded, numbered 'begin' and 'end' arrows.

For example:

A1 marks the beginning and **A1** marks the end of the relevant section in the text.

Please note that labeled arrows in the text do not necessarily appear in alphabetical order.

Writing. Grade 9-10, Standard 2 AND Writing. Grade 9-10, Standard 3

A W.9-10.2.a AND

A W.9-10.3.a

W.9-10.2.a

Introduce a topic; organize complex ideas, concepts, and information to make important connections and distinctions; include text features (e.g., headings), graphics (e.g., figures, tables), and multimedia when useful to aiding comprehension.

W.9-10.3.a

Engage and orient the reader by setting out a problem, situation, or observation, establishing one or multiple point(s) of view, and introducing a narrator and/or characters; create an appropriate progression of experiences or events.

STANDARDS-BASED COMMENTARY

lake. **A1** Perhaps thirty, forty feet away from the lake is the Bowl, an amphitheatre that functions as an outdoor concert hall. The stage is round, as if a literal bowl had been taken and cut in half. When an orchestra plays in it, the conductor stands at the lowest point - the front center, while the musicians sit on **D2** incrementally **D2** higher terraces that radiate out from him. Three huge, white, rectangular sheets in front of the orchestra span the height of the building, designed to block out the sun, rain, and the occasional birds **A1** that are desperately in need of a sense of direction (or at least an eye check). From the audience's perspective, this setup is **D2** vaguely reminiscent **D2** of a 15th-century ship; its body formed by the curved brown wood of the stage, with three white sails above it flapping in the wind.

Writing. Grade 9-10, Standard 2 AND Writing. Grade 9-10, Standard 3
(continued)

A1 A1 Examples: 1

The writer begins a complex introductory section with well-chosen concrete details that provide a clear description of a music venue, the eventual setting of an orchestral rehearsal (*Perhaps thirty, forty feet away from the lake is the Bowl, an amphitheatre that functions as an outdoor concert hall. The stage is round, as if a literal bowl had been taken and cut in half. When an orchestra plays in it, the conductor stands at the lowest point - the front center, while the musicians sit on incrementally higher terraces that radiate out from him. Three huge, white, rectangular sheets in front of the orchestra span the height of the building, designed to block out the sun, rain, and the occasional birds.*)

A2 A2 Examples: 1 · 2 · 3

The writer then introduces a key situation, the basis of the brief narrative account to follow (*It was here that my orchestra learned Tchaikovsky's "Romeo and Juliet" overture... we rehearsed late into the night... During one of these rehearsals, a shower of rain began to fall upon us as we started running through the piece.*)

Writing. Grade 9-10, Standard 2

B W.9-10.2.b

Develop the topic with well-chosen, relevant, and sufficient facts, extended definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples appropriate to the audience's knowledge of the topic.

B B Examples: 1 · 2 · 3

The writer presents relevant information to help the reader understand the significance of the "Romeo and Juliet Overture" to the subsequent narrative account (*It is a hot, fiery, and violent piece... "Romeo and Juliet" begins with a foreboding, melancholy chorale... The symphonic overture slowly builds into something more tense and dangerous.*)

begin section end

WRITING SAMPLE CONTINUES ►



STANDARDS-BASED COMMENTARY

C **A2** It was here that my orchestra learned Tchaikovsky's "Romeo and Juliet" overture. **A2** **C** **B** It is a hot, fiery, and violent piece, **B** which was precisely why we, a group of middle- and high-schoolers, enjoyed it so much. Each day of camp, **A2** we rehearsed late into the night, **A2** playing the repertoire, learning our music, and struggling to fit all of our different parts together.

A2 During one of these rehearsals, a shower of rain began to fall upon us as we started running through the piece. **A2**

B **C** "Romeo and Juliet" begins with **C** a foreboding, melancholy **D1** chorale. **D1** **B** The sound of our **D1** wind instruments **D1** was accentuated by the sound of the wind outside,

Writing. Grade 9-10, Standard 2**C** **W.9-10.2.c**

Use appropriate and varied transitions to link the major sections of the text, create cohesion, and clarify the relationships among complex ideas and concepts.

C C Examples: 1 · 2 · 3 · 4 · 5 · 6

By referencing at the beginning of one paragraph relevant material from previous paragraphs, the writer creates transitions from one paragraph to another that are not formulaic or cut-and-dried (*It was here that my orchestra learned Tchaikovsky's "Romeo and Juliet" overture... "Romeo and Juliet" begins with... I had prided myself on being a violinist... By then, the rain... I've had the idea for this essay... The hardest part of writing this was*).

Writing. Grade 9-10, Standard 2 AND Language. Grade 9-10, Standard 6**D** **W.9-10.2.d** AND **D** **L.9-10.6****W.9-10.2.d**

Use precise language and domain-specific vocabulary to manage the complexity of the topic.

L.9-10.6

Acquire and use accurately grade-appropriate general academic and domain-specific words and phrases; independently research words and gather vocabulary knowledge.

D1 D1 Examples: 1 · 2 · 3 · 4 · 5 · 6

The writer includes domain-specific words that lend authenticity to the informational and narrative elements of this sample (*chorale, wind instruments, symphonic overture, brass, cymbals, on-beat*).

begin section end

WRITING SAMPLE CONTINUES ►



STANDARDS-BASED COMMENTARY

and the unlit 9PM darkness reflected the dark tone of the low strings. **B** **D1** The symphonic overture **D1** slowly builds into something more tense and dangerous, **B** **H** underlit by the nervous, **D2** tremulous **D2** excitement of musicians who know they are about to run through a piece with no stops, no rests, and no second chances. **H** We may not have had an audience, but we all felt the same pressure to give our all, **H** as if our peers, our conductor, and the forest itself were our judges that night. **H**

C I had prided myself on being a violinist, **C** a soloist, one to carry the high, piercing notes and the melody of the piece. However,

Writing. Grade 9-10, Standard 2 AND Language. Grade 9-10, Standard 6
(continued)

D2 D2 Examples: 1 · 2 · 3 · 4 · 5

Precise general academic words shape the reader's understanding of the writer's experiences (*incrementally, vaguely reminiscent, tremulous, intermittent, persevered*).

Writing. Grade 9-10, Standard 3

E W.9-10.3.b

Use narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, description, reflection, and multiple plot lines, to develop experiences, events, and/or characters.

E1 E1 Examples: 1

The writer creates a brief, fast-paced narrative account by interweaving depictions of furious weather conditions, technical performance details, and elements of the story told by the "Romeo and Juliet Overture" (*By then the rain had grown and ripened into a storm. It whipped water at the exposed necks of trees and aged wood exterior of the Bowl. It flung itself at the three white sails of the stage that was our ship, causing them to shudder and convulse. Meanwhile, the Montagues and Capulets of Tchaikovsky's imagination were fighting a war. The irregular, jarring crash of cymbals depicted the clashing swords of the two families, while the strings played the war theme, leading into quick, agitated notes that chased each other through the streets of Verona. Intermittent flashes of lightning were likewise chased by explosions of thunder that were oddly on-beat, deafeningly close, and shook our instruments and our bodies to the very bone*).

E2 E2 Examples: 1

The writer reflects on the impact of the experience (*We persevered in the heart of this fury, fifty or so children caught in the midst of the storm, and yet so much a part of it. We were raising up our own storm, Tchaikovsky's storm.*).

begin section end

WRITING SAMPLE CONTINUES ►



STANDARDS-BASED COMMENTARY

once the **D1** brass **D1** entered, with all the glory and majesty of the ocean, every ounce of that arrogance faded away. I was swept up in the wave of their sound, weightlessly riding on top of the swell like spray and sea foam, a mere drop adding its mass to the orchestra that it served. It owned me.

E1 **C** By then, the rain **C** had grown and ripened into a storm. It whipped water at the exposed necks of trees and aged wood exterior of the Bowl. It flung itself at the three white sails of the stage that was our ship, causing them to shudder and convulse. Meanwhile, the Montagues and Capulets of Tchaikovsky's imagination were fighting a war. The irregular, jarring crash of **D1** cymbals **D1** depicted the

Writing. Grade 9-10, Standard 2 AND
Writing. Grade 9-10, Standard 3

F **W.9-10.2.f** AND **F** **W.9-10.3.e**

W.9-10.2.f

Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from and supports the information or explanation presented (e.g., articulating implications or the significance of the topic).

W.9-10.3.e

Provide a conclusion that follows from and reflects on what is experienced, observed, or resolved over the course of the narrative.

F **F Examples: 1**

Notwithstanding awkward sentence construction, the writer provides a mostly clear concluding section that expresses the significance of the topic and gives some resolution to the narrative (*I was filled with a new, almost savage sense of pride, not one of being anything outstanding or anyone special, but one where I let myself be swept away, carried by the rich tones of the tuba and cello, giving all of me up to become part of that power, to push that wave just a little further. For although I was small, even the tiniest droplet of water has the right to feel proud when it is part of a storm.*).

Writing. Grade 9-10, Standard 4

G **W.9-10.4**

Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

G Overall text reference

The writer develops information and narrates the writer's experiences in a mostly clear, coherent, and effective manner.

Note: Comment refers to the piece as a whole rather than a specific example within the text.

begin section **end**

WRITING SAMPLE CONTINUES ►



STANDARDS-BASED COMMENTARY

Language. Grade 9-10, Standard 1**H L.9-10.1.c**

Use parallel structure as a technique for creating coherence in sentences, paragraphs, and larger pieces of writing.

H H Examples: 1 • 2

The writer uses parallel structure to emphasize the pressure felt by orchestra members to give a brilliant performance (*... underlit by the nervous, tremulous excitement of musicians who know they are about to run through a piece with no stops, no rests, and no second chances... as if our peers, our conductor, and the forest itself were our judges that night.*).

Language. Grade 9-10, Standard 1 AND**Language. Grade 9-10, Standard 5****I L.9-10.1.c AND I L.9-10.1.b AND****I L.9-10.5****L.9-10.1.c**

Use parallel structure as a technique for creating coherence in sentences, paragraphs, and larger pieces of writing.

L.9-10.1.b

Use various types of phrases (noun, verb, adjectival, participial, prepositional) and clauses (independent, dependent, noun, relative, adverbial) to convey specific meanings and add variety and interest to writing or presentations.

L.9-10.5

Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.

I1 I1 Examples: 1

The writer uses subordinate clauses, a participial phrase, and personification to clarify the function of a musical technique (*...while the strings played the war theme, leading into quick, agitated notes that chased each other through the streets of Verona.*).

clashing swords of the two families, **I1** while the strings played the war theme, leading into quick, agitated notes that chased each other through the streets of Verona. **I1** **D2** Intermittent **D2** flashes of lightning were likewise chased by explosions of thunder that were oddly **D1** on-beat, **D1** deafeningly close, and shook our instruments and our bodies to the very bone. **E1** **E2** We **D2** persevered **D2** in the heart of this fury, fifty or so children caught in the midst of the storm, and yet so much a part of it. We were raising up our own storm, Tchaikovsky's storm. **E2** Fifty bodies moved, breathed, and

begin section **end**

WRITING SAMPLE CONTINUES 



Blend of Inform/Explain and Narrate

GRADE
10

FRAMEWORK / CONTENT STANDARDS ADDRESSED:

Massachusetts Curriculum Framework
for ELA and Literacy (2017)

STANDARDS-BASED COMMENTARY

metabolized energy in unison. **F** I was filled with a new, almost savage sense of pride, not one of being anything outstanding or anyone special, but one where I let myself be swept away, carried by the rich tones of the tuba and cello, **I2** giving all of me up to become part of that power, to push that wave just a little further. **I2** For although I was small, even the tiniest droplet of water has the right to feel proud when it is part of a storm. **F**

Metacognition:

C I've had the idea for this essay **C** floating around in my head for quite some time, and was pretty happy with getting a chance to use it as a topic. Expressing the sensation that I felt in orchestra that day, and many times afterwards, has been something I have always wanted to do, but never had enough confidence in my writing ability

Language. Grade 9-10, Standard 1 AND Language. Grade 9-10, Standard 5
(continued)

I2 I2 Examples: 1

The writer employs participial and parallel infinitive phrases to construct metaphors that explain the powerful effects of Tchaikovsky's music (*giving all of me up to become part of that power, to push that wave just a little further.*).

Language. Grade 9-10, Standard 2

J L.9-10.2

Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.

J Overall text reference

The writer demonstrates command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling consistent with edited writing. Occasional errors do not impede understanding.

Note: Comment refers to the piece as a whole rather than a specific example within the text.

begin section end

WRITING SAMPLE CONTINUES ►



STANDARDS-BASED COMMENTARY

to attempt. **K1** I'm quite proud of what I created in this essay, but I believe that the written word can never do justice to that particular experience. **K1**

K2 **C** The hardest part of writing this was **C** fitting in the part where it starts raining. I wanted to do this early in the essay, as the concept is heavily referred to throughout the piece. Initially, I had a single sentence that directly stated that "it was raining" right before the description of the orchestra beginning to play. However, this seemed a bit disjointed and awkward, as it wasn't directly related to the sections around it. **K2** **K3** Later I wrapped this idea in a bit more context (such as putting it with the statement that the orchestra started playing) to create more flow in my essay. **K3** **K4** I'm not fully satisfied with it, but it's definitely an improvement. **K4**

Writing. Grade 9-10, Standard 5**K W.9-10.5**

Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on addressing what is most significant for a specific purpose and audience.

K1 K1 Examples: 1

In the section entitled "Metacognition," the writer reveals complex feelings about the topic of this essay (*I'm quite proud of what I created in this essay, but I believe that the written word can never do justice to that particular experience.*).

K2 K2 Examples: 1

The writer presents a detailed picture of a structural problem and its effect on an earlier draft (*The hardest part of writing this was fitting in the part where it starts raining. I wanted to do this early in the essay, as the concept is heavily referred to throughout the piece. Initially, I had a single sentence that directly stated that "it was raining" right before the description of the orchestra beginning to play. However, this seemed a bit disjointed and awkward, as it wasn't directly related to the sections around it.*).

K3 K3 Examples: 1

The writer explains the solution and its intended effect (*Later I wrapped this idea in a bit more context [such as putting it with the statement that the orchestra started playing] to create more flow in my essay.*).

K4 K4 Examples: 1

The writer provides a complex, self-critical appraisal of the revision's effect (*I'm not fully satisfied with it, but it's definitely an improvement.*).

begin section end

END OF WRITING SAMPLE ■

