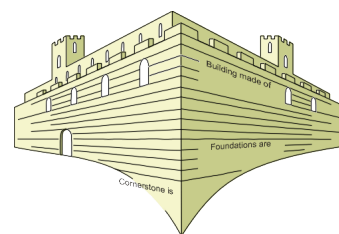


Cornerstone Tasks



The pressures of high-stakes accountability testing have led many schools and districts to encourage their teachers to engage in “test prep” instruction, especially in the tested grades and subject areas. Additionally, there has been an increase in the use of “interim” or benchmark assessments that mimic the state tests. While these practices may have their place, they typically focus on decontextualized content knowledge and skills at the expense of more relevant and engaging learning. As a counter-balance to “test prep” teaching and “practice” testing, Grant Wiggins and I have argued for the inclusion of more robust and authentic tasks as part of a local curriculum and assessment system. We refer to these as “cornerstone” tasks.

The Cornerstones are curriculum-embedded tasks that are intended to engage students in applying their knowledge and skills in an authentic context. Like a cornerstone anchors a building, these tasks are meant to anchor the curriculum around the most important performances that we want learners to be able to do (on their own) with acquired content knowledge and skills. They honor the intent of the Standards, within and across subject areas, instead of emphasizing only the tested (a.k.a. “eligible”) content. Moreover, they support effective instructional practices that engage learners in “meaning making” and transfer.

More specifically, Cornerstone tasks:

- are *curriculum embedded* (as opposed to externally imposed);
- *recur across the grades*, becoming increasingly sophisticated over time;
- establish *authentic contexts* for performance;
- call for *understanding* and *transfer* via genuine performance;
- may be used as rich learning activities *or* assessments;
- *integrate 21st century skills* (e.g., critical thinking, technology use, teamwork) with subject area content;
- evaluate performance with established *rubrics*;
- engage students in *meaningful learning* while encouraging the best teaching;
- provide content for student portfolios so that they graduate with a *resume of demonstrated accomplishments* rather than simply a transcript of courses taken.



Examples of Recurring Cornerstone Tasks

Mathematical Modeling

Grade 2/3

Every seven weeks students work in groups of four to measure the height of each other using tape measures affixed to the classroom walls. By mid-May, the class has obtained six height measures. Then, students create a simple graph (height in inches plotted against the months of the school year) and plot the data. Using rulers, they connect the dots to see “rise over run” (a visual representation of their growth over time). The chart papers are posted throughout the room, and the students circulate in a gallery walk to view the changes in heights of the various groups.

Students then analyze the data to answer guiding questions: “In what months did we grow the most this year?” “Is there a difference between how boys and girls have grown in second grade?” “How does our class growth compare to that in the other second grades?” “What can we predict for next year’s second graders about how they will grow based on our data?” Students then work in their groups to develop a presentation for the current 1st/2nd graders to predict how much they will grow next school year.

Middle School

A former NBA legend, Hoops McGinty, has pledged money to the local science museum for an exhibit on our solar system. He pledges the money under one condition: that a regulation NBA basketball be used to represent some aspect of the scale display and that other NBA-related shapes and sizes be used (e.g., a basketball be used to represent a planet or moon). The building floor space is 300 by 800 feet.

Your job is to create a model of the solar system that is built to scale to fit within this space. Prepare a diagram with accurate measurements drawn to scale. Show your work so that Hoops will approve and fund your design.

High School

Create a mathematical model in order to:

- recommend the most cost effective cell phone contract while considering different variables (e.g., type of cell phone, length of contract, calling/data amounts).
- compare home mortgage options for varied purchase prices, down payments, interest rate plans, and length of term (including variable rates).
- predict future Olympic event winning times (e.g., men’s and women’s marathon).

The Literacy Design Collaborative Task Templates

Funded through the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Literacy Design Collaborative (LDC) has developed a set of Modules designed to support the integration of the Common Core Standards (6-12) in English/ Language Arts with core content in Science, Social Studies and Technical areas. Each Module consists of a task and associated instructional procedures intended to provide a rigorous, authentic classroom experience for students at the secondary level.

The Tasks require students to read, analyze, and comprehend written materials and then write cogent arguments, explanations, or narratives in the subjects they are studying. A key feature of the LDC's work is a set of generic Task Templates -- fill-in-the-blank "shells" that allow teachers to design their own tasks.

Here are several samples:

Argumentation Task Template

After researching _____ (informational texts) on _____ (content topic or issue), write a/an _____ (essay or substitute) that argues your position on _____ (topic, issue, essential question). Support your position with evidence from research. Be sure to acknowledge competing views. Give examples from from past or current events issues to illustrate and clarify your position.

Social Studies Example:

After researching academic articles on **censorship**, write a/an **blog or editorial** that argues your position on **the use of filters the use of Internet filters by schools**. Support your position with evidence from research. Be sure to acknowledge competing views.

ELA Example:

What makes something something funny? After reading selections from **Mark Twain and Dave Barry**, write a **review** that **compares their their humor** and argues **which type of humor works for a contemporary audience and why**. Be sure to support your position with evidence from the texts.. Be sure to support your position with evidence from the texts.

Informational or Explanatory Task Template

[Insert question] After reading _____ (literature or informational texts), write a/an _____ (essay, report, article, or substitute) that defines and explains (term or concept). Support your discussion with evidence from the text(s). What _____ (conclusions or implications) can you draw?

Social Studies Example:

What did the authors of the American Constitution mean by "rights"? After reading the **Bill of Rights**, write an **essay** that defines **"rights"** and explains **"rights" as the authors use it in this foundational document**. Support your discussion with evidence from the text. What implications implications can you draw?

Examples of Recurring Cornerstone Tasks

Science – Investigation

Upper Elementary/Middle School

The Pooper Scooper Kitty Litter Company claims that their litter is 40% more absorbent than other brands.

You are a Consumer Advocates researcher who has been asked to evaluate their claim. Develop a plan for conducting the investigation. Your plan should be specific enough so that the lab investigators could follow it to evaluate the claim.

High School

Design an investigation to answer the question, *How much does it cost to take a shower?*

Identify the variables that must be considered and then develop a plan for conducting the investigation. Your plan should be specific enough so that other investigators could follow it and answer the question.

Social Studies – Involved Citizen

Upper Elementary/Middle School

You have an idea that you believe will make your school better, and you want to convince school leaders that they should act on your idea. Identify your audience (e.g., principal, PTSA Board, students) and:

- Describe your idea.
- Explain why & how it will improve the school.
- Develop a plan for acting on your idea.

Your idea and plan can be communicated to your target audience in a letter, e-mail, or presentation.

High School

After investigating a current political issue, prepare a position paper/presentation for a public policy maker (e.g., Congress person) or group (e.g., school board, legislative committee). Assume that the policy maker or group is opposed to your position. Your position statement should provide an analysis of the issue, consider options, present your position, rebut opposing positions, and attempt to persuade the public policy maker or group to vote accordingly.

Your position can be communicated in a written report, via a web blog, or delivered as a presentation.

Examples of Recurring Cornerstone Tasks

Visual Arts – Self Portraits

Task Frame: You have {...just learned about; ...been studying; ...researched} the work of {selected artist(s)} to observe their style and specific techniques used to portray self or others. Using {selected media}, create a {portrait or self-portrait} using {specific style and/or technique} in order to reveal {specific characteristics, mood, personality, history, interests, context, etc.}.

Upper Elementary/Middle School

You have just learned about **the proportions of the face by carefully observing drawings by Leonardo da Vinci and other artists of the Renaissance period**. Use a mirror to draw a frontal view self-portrait that shows your facial features in correct proportion. Use oil pastel to add details to your portrait such as hair, clothing and one or two props/objects that will show your interests and symbols that will communicate ways in which you are unique.

High School

You have just completed researching **contemporary self-portraits from the exhibition “Beyond the Self,”** at the National Portrait Gallery, Canberra, http://www.portrait.gov.au/site/exhibition_subsite_beyondtheself.php and/or self-portraits from other artists of your choice. Create a **series of self-portraits using a medium of your choice that communicates narratives about personal or imagined identity**.

Music – Selecting Work(s) to Perform

Task Frame: Select {a piece of music / a program of music} to perform for {audience and context / setting}. Identify {in writing / orally} which {piece or sequence of pieces} you will perform and explain why.

Upper Elementary/Middle School

Task Example: **You have the opportunity to select a piece of music that your instrumental group will perform for your school’s end-of-the-year student assembly**. Be prepared to identify which piece you have selected and explain why.

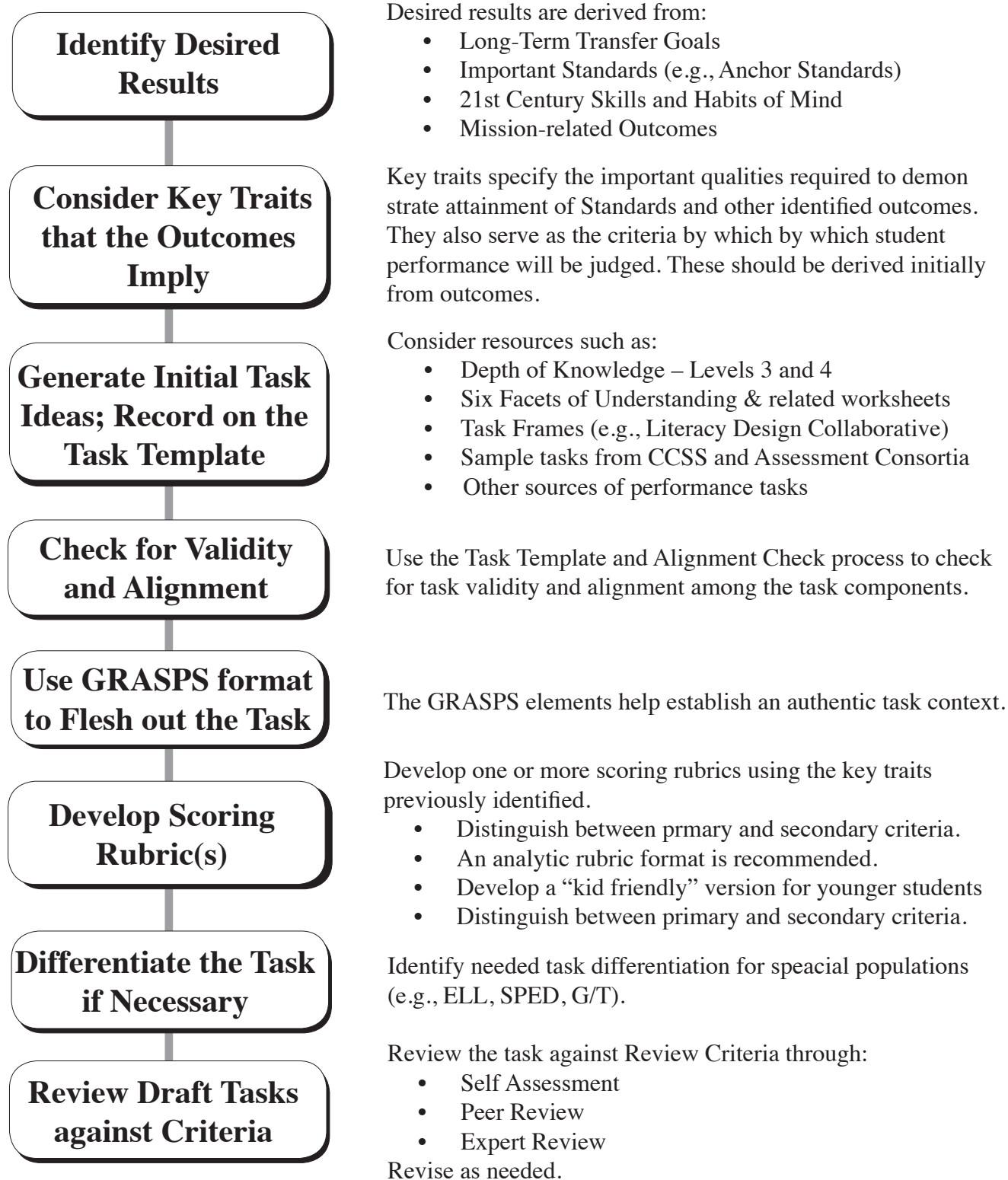
High School

Task Example: **You have been chosen to select a repertoire of 4-5 songs** for your chorus to perform **at the retirement gala for Mrs. XXXX** (a beloved retiring teacher). at a special of music to perform for **your school’s end-of-the-year student assembly**. Explain which songs you have chosen and the sequence you propose.

Source: adapted from NCCAS Next Generation Standards project (draft materials)

Steps in Designing a Cornerstone Task

The following process illustrates one sequence for developing a draft performance task using the Performance Task Template in this packet.



Cornerstone Task Review Criteria

| |
|--|
| KEY TO RATINGS: 3 = <i>extensively</i> 2 = <i>somewhat</i> 1 = <i>not yet</i> |
|--|

CRITERIA

| | | | |
|--|----------|----------|----------|
| 1. The task addresses/assesses targeted standard(s)/outcome(s). | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 2. The task calls for understanding and transfer, not simply recall or a formulaic response. | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 3. The task requires extended thinking and habits of mind – not just an answer. | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 4. The task is set in an “authentic” context; i.e., written in the G.R.A.S.P.S. form. | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 5. The task includes criteria/rubric(s) targeting distinct traits of understanding and successful performance; i.e., criteria do not simply focus on surface features of a product or performance. | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 6. The task directions for students are clear. | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| <u>Optional:</u> | | | |
| 7. The task allows students to demonstrate their understanding/proficiency with some appropriate choice/variety (e.g., of products or performances). | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 8. The task effectively integrates two or more subject areas | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 9. The task incorporates appropriate use of technology. | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| Other: _____ | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| _____ | | | |