

Increasing Testing Stamina

TWO IDEAS

Columbus City Schools
ELA 6-12 Curriculum

<https://tinyurl.com/CCSEnglish6-12>

TRIPLE

WEEKS

Whether your students are preparing for the AIR tests or AP exams, they need to be able to write a full essay in a limited amount of time. Having “Triple Weeks” can help students build the stamina needed to write quickly.

THE BASICS: A “Triple Week” is a five-day week where students write three different in-class essays on the first three days. Then, on the fourth day, they edit and revise one of the three in a writing workshop and submit it with original draft to the teacher. The in-class essay selected for revision is chosen randomly. On the final day, the students participate in reading workshop, while the teacher evaluates their submitted essays (and finishes them over the weekend), providing timely feedback on targeted areas.

THE PROMPTS: You will want to compose three prompts that resemble the types of prompts your students will see on a test for which they are preparing (AIR, AP, ACT, SAT, etc.) It is up to you to decide if you want them to be similar in task or varied.

THE TASK: The students will be composing fully-developed essays that answer the prompts. Let students know exactly how you will be evaluating their work. You should use the rubric for the standardized test for which they are preparing. You can choose to grade for one, two, or multiple sections of the rubric. This will give the students a focus for their writing, beyond answering the prompt fully. This will also allow your grading to be focused and less time-consuming.

THE FUN: Really sell the idea of a Triple Week to your students. You could offer to have no homework on Triple Weeks. Let them know that writing grows writers and Triple Weeks will give them an advantage on their standardized tests. Allow them to listen to music as they compose. Arrange the room differently to set the Triple Week apart from a normal week. Bring in snacks that the students can have during a few days of the Triple Week, especially the last two. —When you are selecting which prompt to revise on Day Four, make the way it is selected into a production. Invite the principal in to do the choosing. Have a tub of rice with all three prompts inside and choose a student to dig one out. Roll a large dice with only numbers 1-3 on it to come up with the winner. However you decide to do the choosing, let each class have their own selection process. This means that each of your classes may be revising a different prompt. This is fun for you because you won’t be reading 175 essays on the same prompt.

THE GRADING: Students receive 15 points each (5 for intro/5 for body/5 for conclusion) for completed essay on Days One-Three. The Revised Essay should be worth 100 points. All essays can be added to student portfolios.

THE LOGISTICS: You should have the students compose their essays in the same manner as is called for by the test for which they are preparing. Therefore, the Triple Week’s writings may be done electronically or hand-written.

EXAM

STACKS

Exam Stacks are stacks of practice test questions grouped by Standard, content, or strand that students work through in short practice sessions under timed conditions. Having students complete exam stacks at regular intervals helps them develop fluency and provides them with short, targeted practice and diagnostic feedback on their developing proficiency with specific Standards, content or strands.

STEP ONE: Collect or Write a series of sample objective test questions based on passage sets for the test your students are preparing to take. You can use released/sample questions or ones you have created that adhere to the test specifications.

STEP TWO: Group your questions by Standard, content, strand, etc., and Create sheets (electronic or hard-copy) with five questions each. Be sure to put the Standard, content, or strand at the top of the pages.

STEP THREE: Put all of your sheets in a stack (electronic or hard-copy) AND add a scoring table to the back of the stack. The scoring table should have columns for noting the percentage correct by Standard, content, strand on separate days.

STEP FOUR: Use the stacks in class.
—Instruct students to do only one problem per page in the Exam Stack, then go onto the next page until they have finished.
—Set a time limit for each question. Start with two minutes per question when you first begin using Exam Stacks. As you get closer to the test, reduce the time. Try to get the students down to 30 seconds per question. Tell the students when the time

limit is up for each page. Some students may have already finished the question they were doing on that page and moved to the next page. Just be sure to say aloud which page they should turn to when a time-limit is reached to keep the students moving through the stack.

NOTE: If you need the students to read a passage before answering the questions, put the passage(s) in the Exam Stack and also have a time limit for the reading of those pages.

STEP FIVE: When the time is up, post the key and have students check their answers and record their score on the scoring table. Make sure students note which Standard, strand, or content they need to work on and follow up with additional practice in those areas. This can be done through class tasks, choice boards, and/or individualized Google classroom or online assignments.

MAKING EXAM STACKS MEANINGFUL: Do not overuse Exam Stacks because it will become a meaningless exercise in drill and kill. The power of the Exam Stack lies in the immediate formative feedback. If students keep their stacks, they can be used for cumulative review by students before a standardized test. The scoring table allows for student ownership of strengths and weaknesses. You can have students rework wrong answers and create reasons why the correct answer fits the question.

VARIATION: You may choose to do all five of the questions for one Standard, content, or strand in the same sitting, rather than have students advance to the other pages of the stack for very targeted practice.