

SOL Testing Targets

Sentence Formation/Grammar/Mechanics

For the Virginia Writing SOL tests, all surface features of writing are in one large domain – the usage/mechanics domain. As a result, the list of features for each grade level looks long, even for grade five. But they’re not, really. Of all the fifty-one million rules for grammar usage, mechanics, and sentence construction, only major ones are listed – and only those anyone might reasonably assume to be a part of the Standards of Learning’s “edit for grammar and mechanics” at the three grade levels. When one looks at the three lists, one does see differences. The lists grow with each grade level, as do students’ abilities to deal with surface features. The following tables display the word-level grammar skills and cuing systems that make up the list in the SOL Writing Test blueprints for grades 5, 8 and 11.

Virginia SOL Writing Test: Surface Domain Features

Standard Sentence Formation

	Grade 5	Grade 8	Grade 11
Use complete sentences.	assessed	assessed	assessed
Avoid clausal fragments.		assessed	assessed
Avoid on-and-ons.	assessed	assessed	
Avoid run-ons.	assessed	assessed	assessed
Avoid comma-splices.		assessed	assessed
Avoid dangling modifiers.			assessed
Use standard word order.	assessed	assessed	assessed

Usage

	Grade 5	Grade 8	Grade 11
Subject-verb agreement	assessed	assessed	assessed
“I” in a compound subject situation	assessed	assessed	assessed
“Me” as an object		assessed	assessed
pronoun case			assessed
pronoun reference			assessed
pronoun antecedent agreement		assessed	assessed
adjective comparisons	assessed	assessed	assessed
adverb comparisons	assessed	assessed	assessed
adverbs instead of adjectives, when appropriate (e.g., “He played <i>really</i> well.”)	assessed	assessed	assessed
verb tense inflections	assessed	assessed	assessed
tense consistency		assessed	assessed

possessives		assessed	assessed
plural inflections	assessed	assessed	assessed
Avoid double negatives.	assessed	assessed	assessed
correct homophones		assessed	assessed
active/passive verb voice			assessed
usage: them/those	assessed	assessed	
usage: good/well	assessed	assessed	
usage: a/an	assessed	assessed	
usage: could/should/would have (not would of)	assessed	assessed	
usage: (e.g., lie/lay)			assessed
usage: (e.g., less/fewer)			assessed
usage (e.g., accept/except)			assessed
usage diction – correct word	assessed	assessed	
faulty parallelism			assessed

Mechanics

	Grade 5	Grade 8	Grade 11
end punctuation	assessed	assessed	assessed
punctuation of letter parts	assessed	assessed	assessed
period after abbreviations	assessed	assessed	assessed
commas in dates, series, addresses	assessed	assessed	assessed
commas around interrupter (includes nouns of direct address, appositives, expletives, etc.)	assessed	assessed	assessed
commas before certain clauses		assessed	assessed
commas and semi-colons in sentence types			assessed
punctuation in and around dialogue		assessed	assessed
quotation marks around dialogue	assessed	assessed	assessed
italic or underlining as appropriate		assessed	assessed
apostrophes in contractions	assessed	assessed	assessed
apostrophes in possessives	assessed	assessed	assessed
quotation marks around titles of articles		assessed	assessed
colons			assessed
capitalization: first word	assessed	assessed	assessed
capitalization: proper nouns	assessed	assessed	assessed
capitalization: proper adjectives		assessed	assessed
capitalization: "I"	assessed	assessed	assessed
capitalization: school subjects, as needed		assessed	assessed
capitalization: class designations (e.g., sophomore)			assessed
capitalization: titles of works			assessed
capitalization: "Mom" and "Dad", as appropriate		assessed	
format: indent paragraphs or double-space	assessed	assessed	assessed
format: paragraph dialogue correctly		assessed	assessed
format: divide words correctly	assessed	assessed	assessed
spelling	assessed	assessed	assessed

Use "a" and "an" correctly (SOL tests, 5, 8, 11)			I	B	M	S	S												
Use "good/well/bad correctly. (SOL tests 5, 8, 11) "I did well." "He feels bad."						I	B	M	M	M	S	S	S	S					
Use "them/those" correctly. (SOL tests 5, 8, 11) "I want those apples"								S	S										
Adverb conventions (4.8, 6.7, SOL tests 5, 8, 11): Avoid double negatives.				I	M	M	M	S	S	S	S	S	S	S					
Preposition conventions (SOL tests 5, 8 11)																			
Avoid redundant "at" and "to" at ends of sentences: "Where's my hat at?"					I	M	S	S					S	S					
Use "of" correctly (not to mean "have," "for." "about") "could have," not "could of."						I	S	S	S	S	S								
Other word conventions (SOL test11): "lie/lay," "sit/set," "accept/except" etc.													I	B	B	M			
Use of "have," not "got": "I have that book for class" not "I got that book."													I	B	B	M			
Use homophones correctly (# = year of emphasis)																			
to, too			#	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	M	S	S	S					
its, it's			#	S	S	S	S	S	S	M	S	S	S						
your, you're			#	S	S	S	S	S	M	S	S	S							
whose, who's						#	S	S	M	S	S								
there, their, they're						#	S	S	S	M	S	S							
INFLECTIONS: WORD ENDINGS/SPELLINGS THAT CHANGE MEANINGS																			
Verb inflections (tense forms)																			
Use appropriate verb forms for past and present tense in speech. (2.1)	I	B	B	B	M	M	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S					
Use regular verbs correctly in writing. (SOL test: all)		I	B	M	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S					
Use correct forms of irregular verbs. (SOL tests: all)					I	B	B	M	M	S	S	S	S						
Keep tenses consistent. (SOL tests: all)					I	B	B	M	M	S	S	S	S						
Avoid illogical shifts in active/passive voice (SOL test, grade 11)											I	B	B	M					
Number inflections: sound plural nouns "-s," "-es," sp. Change. (SOL tests: all)		I	B	B	M	S													
Possessive inflections: sound the possessive in writing (SOL tests: all)			I	B	B	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	S	S					
Adverb inflections: Use "-ly" inflections to make many adverbs from adjectives					I	B	M	S	S	S	S	S	S						
Comparison inflections for adjectives and adverbs: Use "more/most," "less/least," or "er/-est" appropriately (SOL tests: all)				I	B	M	M	S	S	M	M	S	S						

WRITING MECHANICS: Giving cues to the reader about meaning

	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
CAPITALIZATION SKILLS													
Initial letter of first word of sentence (1.13, 2.10, all SOL tests)	I	B	B	M	S	S	S	S					
Proper nouns (specific, people, places, things):													
Print own name in appropriate upper and lower case letters (K.10)	I	B	B	S									
Names of people and places (2.10, all SOL tests)	I	B	B	B	M	S	S	S	S				
"Mom, Dad," when appropriate as proper nouns (SOL test 8)						I	B	B	B	M	M	S	S
Clubs, activities, when appropriate as proper nouns (SOL test 11)							I	B	B	M	M	S	S
East, South, etc, capitalized as places but no capitalized as directions (SOL test 11)					I	M	S	S	S	S	S		

School subjects capitalized only when appropriate (SOL tests 8, 11)								I	B	B	M	M	M	S
Letter and envelope formats: correct capitalization (salutation, closing, etc.)			I	B	M	S	S	S						

	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
SPELLING SKILLS													
Use invented/phonetic spelling (also a word-attack skill). (K.11)	I	S	S										
Spell frequently used words correctly. (1.12, 2.10)		I	B	B	M	S	S						
Eliminate spelling errors during editing of formal writing assignments. (2.10, 3.78, 2.8, 4.7, 6.7, 7.8, 8.5, 9.6, 10.7, 11.7, 11.8, 11.9, 12.7, 12.8, all SOL tests)				I	B	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M
Keep a personal spelling list to use during writing. (1.14)		I	M	M	M	M							
Use a dictionary (1.14, 2.11, 5.4, 6.9)		I	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	S	S	S	S
Use a spell-check on word-processed documents. (7.9)						I	M	M	M	M	M	S	S

	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
PUNCTUATION SKILLS													
Punctuation mark at end of sentence (1.12, all SOL tests)	I	B	M	S	S	S	S	S					
Punctuation for statement, questions, exclamations (2.10, all SOL tests)			I	B	M	S	S	S					
Periods after abbreviations (all SOL tests)			I	B	M	S	S						
Periods within quotation marks (SOL test 8 and 11)							I	B	B	B	M	M	M
Apostrophes in possessives (5.7, all SOL tests)			I	B	M	S	S	S	S	M	M	S	S
			I	B	M	S	S						
Quotation marks around dialogue (5.7, all SOL tests)		I	B	B	B	M	M	S	S	S	S		
Commas after items in series (4.8, all SOL tests)			I	B	M	S	S	S					
Commas before coordinator in compound sentence (4.8, all SOL tests)					I	B	M	S	S	S	S	S	S
			I	M	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S
Commas between cities and states (4.9, all SOL tests)			I	B	S	S	S						
Commas on envelopes and letters in addresses (all SOL tests)			I	B	M	S	S						
Commas around interrupters (appositives direct addresses, "well," "yes," "no", other)					I	B	M	M	S	S	S	S	S
Commas after introductory clauses (SOL tests 8 and 11)							I	M	M	M	M	S	S
Commas in sentences with dialogue (SOL tests 8 and 11)						I	B	M	M	M	M	S	S

	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
NEATNESS STANDARDS FOR WRITING													
Print legibly (form letters and space words correctly.) (1.13)	I	B	M										
Write legibly in cursive. (3.9) Cursive begins in 2nd grade; mandatory thereafter.			I	I	B	B	M	M	M	S	S	S	S

	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
FORMATTING STANDARDS FOR WRITING													
Paragraphing to help the reader (all SOL tests)				I	B	M	S	S	S	S	S	S	S
Indenting beginnings of paragraphs (4.7, all SOL tests)			I	B	M	S	S	S					
Indenting dialogue (SOL tests, 8, 11)						I	B	M	M	M	M	S	S
Text arrangement in letters and on envelopes (11.8)			I	M	S	S						M	M
Maintaining margins on final drafts					I	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S
Hyphen position in word divided at end of line (SOL tests, 5, 8, 11)					I	B	M	S	S				
Appropriate syllabication in word divisions (SOL tests, 5, 8, 11)			I	B	B	S	S						

While having a writing curriculum helps with the “what” to teach at which grade levels, it doesn’t help with the day-to-day management of the writing workshop. Teachers, however, develop many good management tools. For example, many teachers have their students keep personal usage and mechanics sheets in their writing folders or working portfolios. On these, students record the usage and mechanics problems the teacher or their peers find in their papers; then, they use this list for personal editing. Because these problems are theirs, not a list from the editing board that they were told to copy, students solve these personal editing problems (unlike the grammar book lessons they never seem to transfer into their own writing).