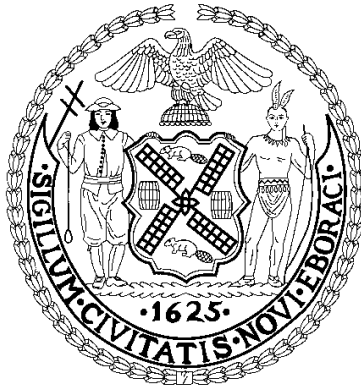


CASCADES HIGH SCHOOL

Literacy HANDBOOK



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**THE NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
CASCADES HIGH SCHOOL**

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Paul Rotondo Superintendent
Ezequiel Garcia Principal (IA)
Claire Sheehan Assistant Principal (IA)

Dear Parent or Guardian:

At Cascades High School, we are committed to a balanced literacy approach to reading and writing. We address this balance in each of our classrooms as we infuse language arts skills, reading, writing, listening and speaking skills into each of our lessons.

During our English Regents classes students are scheduled into block programmed classes that allow our students to spend more time in the practice of these skills. The delivery model in our lesson formats is designed first, to teach students, next to incorporate small group activities for students to practice their skills and finally to allow students independent time to complete assignments or conduct student centered activities.

This handbook is the product of a collaborative inquiry team effort. We are pleased to present this to you with the hope that some of the ideas and strategies contained within might assist your child do better in school and in life.

Paul Rotondo
Superintendent

Ezequiel Garcia
Principal (IA)

Claire Sheehan
Assistant Principal (IA)

CASCADES MISSION STATEMENT

We are a diverse, collaborative school community dedicated to achieving high standards of academic excellence for all our students. Our primary mission is to assist transfer students in completion of high school diploma requirements. We will accomplish this through high quality instruction based on New York State Regents curriculum and standards. Additionally, individualized student planning will be supported within a caring and professional environment.

OUR VISION STATEMENT

We envision Cascades High School as a collaborative community of learners and a school of academic excellence. Based on New York State Regents' and New York City Standards, our mission is to assist transfer students in completion of high school diploma requirements. We prepare our students through excellent instruction and active participatory courses. Our purpose will be supported by student centered learning, best practices in teaching, ongoing professional development, expanded use of technology, and increased parental involvement. Cascades High School is a place where all are encouraged to discover their potential and realize their dream of post secondary education or full time employment.

AND CORE BELIEFS

Caring Relationships with Adults: At Cascades everyone works to foster an environment that is conducive to creating this relationship with our students. Through individual attention, tutoring and advice, we develop relationships that strengthen our commitment to students and their success.

High Expectations: We convey to students a clear message that there are high expectations in our classes as well as in our school. We continually embody the concept that although this may be difficult, WE KNOW you can do this and do it WELL and WE ARE ALL HERE TO HELP!

Engaging Activities: We establish high quality learning activities both in and out of the classroom. We plan by asking if all activities present students with real options and choices? Do our activities combine emotional, sensory and intellectual involvement? Do they have clear learning goals and rules? Do they provide specific time for student reflection and teacher feedback?

Opportunities to Make Meaningful Contributions to School Life: We establish opportunities for students to be involved in decision making and other areas of school life. Through providing students with a voice in their school we help guide them in connecting learning to school culture and involvement.

Continuity: Our lessons, activities, clubs, relationships and messages are consistent. In providing this consistency at Cascades we develop situations in which students are clear about what is proper and what is not. We continue to provide the message of success to all our students.

Defining the Components of Balanced Literacy

Routine	Teacher's Role	Student's Role
READ ALOUD		
	Chooses the text so it is appropriate for the individual level of the student.	Listens to the read text
	Reads the text to the students.	Makes meaning of the text
	Reads for fluency and enjoyment.	
	Thinks aloud to demonstrate internal reading behaviors.	
	Scaffolds comprehension of the text.	
SHARED READING	Chooses the appropriate text for the student	Listens to the text being read
	Reads the text to the student.	Reads as much of the text as possible.
	Models the use of reading strategies.	Increases the participation with each reading.
	Decides on the skills and strategies for follow-up readings.	Makes meaning of the text.
		Applies the skills and strategies demonstrated.
INDEPENDENT READING		
	Sets Expectations	Reads individual books
	Models appropriate behavior	Re-reads books to become well phrased and fluent
	Chooses the text (initially)	
	Provides Support for choosing the text	
READING CONFERENCES		
	Listens to the student read	Comes to the Conference with a purpose
	Assesses the students reading and progress	Takes an active role in the Conference
	Helps student set reading goals	Helps set a reading goal
BOOK DISCUSSION		
	Models responsible talk	Practices responsible talk
	Asks questions that encourage comprehension and critical thinking skills	Makes self to text, Text to text, Text to world connections.
	Chooses members	Explains ideas about the text
LITERACY ACTIVITIES		
	Develops activities that engage the reading or reading like behavior of students.	Participates in the activities

	Helps the student understand the reading process.	Acts accountable for the behavior and learning during the activity
	Develops reading fluency	
	Sets expectations for the student and group behavior.	

Skills in Balanced Literacy

Some skills students must be competent with are:

FINDING and IDENTIFYING THE MAIN IDEA

The main idea tells a reader what happened in the story. It is what the story /passage or essay is about. Deriving an understanding of the main idea requires students to comprehend the story or passage as a whole, distinguishing the whole from the supporting details. Understanding this main idea is the overall purpose of reading.

FACTS AND DETAILS

Sentences that tell more about the main idea are called facts and details. Facts and details explain or support the most important detail in the paragraph. Facts and details often tell who, what, where, when, why and how of the main idea.

SEQUENCE

The order in which things happen in a story is sequencing. Sequence tells what happened first, second, third and so on. Clue words such as first, next, finally, before and after tell the order in which something occurred. Think of the story as a beginning, middle and end. Be prepared to ask what would happen next if the story were to continue.

CAUSE AND EFFECT

Cause and effect are the two parts of anything that happens. When an event occurs it happens for a reason. The reason is the cause and what happens is the effect. Getting students to understand this is a priority in high school.

COMPARING AND CONTRASTING

Finding how two or more things are alike and how they are different is the idea behind comparing and contrasting.

MAKING PREDICTIONS

When you think about what might happen next in a story you are making predictions. Using ideas or events in the story to back up your predictions is a higher level reading skill necessary for high school students.

FINDING WORD MEANING IN CONTEXT

When you use clues in a passage to figure out the meaning of an unfamiliar word. The words or phrases around the new term are often clues to understanding the meaning involved.

DRAWING CONCLUSIONS AND MAKING INFERENCES

We draw conclusions based on specific clues or details from written text. You must combine details and clues you are given and what you know in your own life in order to gain a deeper understanding of the text. Inferring is often referred to as “reading between the lines”. When we infer we figure out some information on our own.

DISTINGUISHING BETWEEN FACT AND OPINION

If a statement can be proven it is a fact. If it tells how someone thinks or feels about something than it is an opinion. Facts can be proven, opinions can not.

IDENTIFYING AUTHOR’S PURPOSE

All authors write for a reason. The reason an author writes is called purpose and figuring out the author’s purpose is a critical skill necessary for any reader.

INTERPRETING FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE

Similies, metaphors and idioms are types of figurative language. Authors use these to help readers create mental pictures when they read. When a reader understands the meaning of the simile or metaphor, they are interpreting the language.

SUMMARIZING

This skill allows the reader and teacher to check for understanding. It explains the most important details of the text in the reader’s own words. It is a critical to remember that summarizing is NOT re-telling the story.

ANNOTATING A TEXT

This skill allows a student to highlight the important words, phrases or details from a text or document. It is a good practice for identification of important facts and evidence to be used in later essay development. (note taking skill)

ACCOUNTABLE TALK

Accountable talk is aligned with annotating a text in that this skill supports the student's ability to support his or her opinion with fact based in the text or document they just read, or learned about.

Comprehension Strategies

ACTIVATING AND CREATING SCHEMA

Use the students' personal experience and background knowledge of a topic. This enables the student to use the information they previously learned and makes them the "expert."

Making text-to-self, text-to-text and text-to-world connections.

USING SENSORY AND EMOTIONAL IMAGES

As a student reading, the use of the five senses can enhance the text so that a reader can hear, see, smell, taste and feel the text come to life...well at least in their mind!

DETERMINING IMPORTANCE

What is the author's purpose? What is the reader getting from the text?

QUESTIONING

Students should be asking themselves questions before, during and after their reading. Some guiding questions you might use are: what needs to be clarified for the reader? What are they most curious about? Finally, when reading and evaluating the reading does the reader know the 5 W's (who, what, why, when and where)

INFERRING

Students have to read between the lines to get the deeper message in a particular text. They can infer through illustrations, or captions to better understand what the text is not directly telling them.

Students should also activate their schema or prior knowledge.

SYNTHESIZING

This is different from summarizing in that when a student is asked to synthesize they must pull information from the text and add their own personal experiences or schema to the reading.

MONITORING FOR MEANING

Strong independent readers that follow the six strategies above, need to monitor their meaning when reading. They need to constantly ask themselves, "How am I going to use these strategies as I read this text?"

Helping Students Imitate What Good Readers Do

WHAT EXACTLY DO GOOD READERS DO WHEN THEY READ?

They monitor their reading and notice when something doesn't make sense.

When they don't understand they stop and re-read to see if it clarifies an issue.

They ask for help when they need it.

They make predictions while they are reading.

They ask themselves questions while reading, like, "I wonder why he did that?"

They make connections with the story and their own life.

They look for important information and pay extra attention when they find it.

They slow down their reading when they need to focus.

THE ASSESSMENTS YOU CAN LOOK FOR

At Cascades High School we use a series of assessments that can be used to determine a student's reading and proficiency level. Be sure to ask your child's teacher about how they are performing and what progress they are making in class. The assessments are:

Periodic Assessments (Performance Series) - Students are tested in reading and math as they enter Cascades. A grade equivalent level is determined based on their responses to questions from text. This level is a fairly good assessment of what material a student can handle reading confidently. Further the assessment can identify areas of reading strength and weakness, such as vocabulary. Strategies can be focused on these areas to help the student progress.

Formative Assessment - This includes teacher observations during class and other instructional time. The teacher may make notes as to how well the student uses strategies employed in class to assist with reading. Student interest, learning style and habits are recorded.

Product Assessment – This information may include student writing samples, journal writing, responses to literature and other classroom projects.

Acuity – These assessments are mock Regents style exams and are given in the Regents class twice a year. The exams provide a breakdown for students' strengths and weaknesses.

Regents Assessments – In this final category, teachers look at a breakdown of the student's previous performance on standardized exams. This breakdown provides the teacher with an understanding of how well the student handles, content questions, essays, responses to document based texts and critical lens essays.

Any discussion with your child's teacher should include a full understanding of your child's assessments so that together we can develop better methods to assist them do better in school and in life.

The Comprehensive English Language Regents Exam

This is a **TWO** Day test. Students **MUST** take both parts!

Session One: Listening and Writing a Persuasive Essay

LISTENING – Students listen to a reading passage. The passage will be read twice. Students may take notes. The task is to write a report based on the information provided to you from the passage and any other related information that you can remember.

LISTENING – Students then answer SIX multiple choice questions based on the passage reading.

Part B – Next students will read a text and associated graphic. They will be provided with multiple choice questions that relate to the graph and or reading. The student must then write an essay using relevant information from the text and graphic.

Session Two: Reading and Writing for Literary Response

READING – Students read a passage from an autobiography and novel. Next, they answer multiple choice questions based on the reading. Following those questions they write an essay using information from the readings.

Part B – Students write a critical lens essay discussing two works of literature that they have read and or studied. The student is provided with a quotation and must respond in writing to that thought, quote or idea in essay format. The essay must discuss two literary works.

The following are tips to completing each exam task:

Task I: Taking notes while listening

- Don't try to write down every word you hear. Make sure you write down anything you feel is very essential.
- Have that task in your mind as your main focus, which will help you with information you need to jot down.
- Double space your notes, so you can add any important information during the second reading.

II. Writing the Essay

- Follow the guidelines strictly.
- Use the Task description to select information from your notes
- Try to use your own words to repeat the main idea of the passage.
- Avoid repeating the listening passage word for word. Instead you need to select and paraphrase the relevant information to support your discussion
- Don't add your personal opinions on the subject. Strictly use the information from the listening passage.
- Organize your writing and construct a five-paragraph essay.

Task 2 Essay

In writing, the most basic form of writing is the essay. One particular type of essay is the task II essay. In the task two essay, you are given a task with an article and graph as your source of information. Your job is to: Always keep the task in your mind, if you have to, look it over again.

- Write down key points from the article and graph. It is essential that you do this because the text can be very lengthy and you don't have time to read all the text over when needed.
- Whenever you take information from the article or graph put it all in quotation marks.
- You must remain focused and stick to what the task asks of you. It may be helpful to create a title but most importantly form your own opinion using the details from the article and the graph to back up your opinions.
- Avoid copying sentence by sentence from the article. Use your own words to paraphrase and summarize.

Task Three:

Read the two passages or literary pieces. Use the page to note important details and or highlight and annotate the text.

- Use information from both literary pieces
- Develop your controlling idea
- Show how the author uses specific literary elements or techniques like, theme, characterization, figurative language or symbolism to convey his or her message.
- Use specific examples

Task IV Essay:

1. Understanding and interpreting the critical lens
 - Read the critical lens quotation carefully more than once
 - Use your own words to explain what the quotation means to you. Try to provide an explanation in a way that you can support through two works of literature that you are familiar with.

- After developing an understanding of the quote decide whether or not you agree or disagree
 - Choose two works of literature that will support your ideas
2. Writing the Task IV Essay

- Provide a valid interpretation of the critical lens that clearly establishes the criteria for analysis
- Indicate whether you agree or disagree with the statement as you have interpreted it
- Choose two works you have read that you believe best support your opinion
- Use the criteria suggested by the critical lens to analyze the works you have chosen
- For each work, do not summarize the plot but use specific references to appropriate literary elements (for example, theme, characterization, structure, language, point of view) to develop your analysis
- Organize your ideas in a unified and coherent manner
- Specify the titles and authors of the literature you choose
- Follow the conventions of standard written English

TEN THINGS YOU CAN DO TO BECOME A BETTER WRITER

1. **Read:** Reading the work of good authors helps you develop a sense of how effective writing is constructed, and gives you a glimpse of the skill and artistry that goes into it.
2. **Listen:** If you are writing fiction, having an ear for the way people speak is essential. Listening to spoken language is a good way to get it, because spoken English and written English are not always the same. Dialog writing is a special skill. Authentic dialog makes characters real. When dialog is written well, the story comes to life.
3. **Think:** Writing isn't a pen to paper activity. It's a brain to pen to paper activity. Thinking is necessary preparation for writing. Before you pick up a pen or place your hands on the keyboard, get in the habit of giving thought to what you want to say. Know your purpose. Do your research. Organize your information. Choose your style (formal, casual, professional). All of these are decisions a writer must make. If you take the time to make them before you start, writing will be a much easier and smoother process.
4. **Use your dictionary and thesaurus:** One of the advantages of the English language is that we have so many words to choose from. There is an almost infinite variety of meanings and moods that we can impart by selecting the perfect word for every thought. Whenever you have a doubt, use your dictionary to check the definition, spelling, and even where to correctly hyphenate a word.
5. **Enrich your vocabulary:** All those words to choose from! The more of them you have at your command, the more expressive your writing will be. You can enrich your vocabulary by reading and listening to proper English. Choose the work of respected writers in any genre that interests you.
6. **Learn the differences between “sound-alikes” and commonly confused words, and use them correctly:** You want your reader to focus on what you have to say, but mistakes are distractions that will grab a reader's attention and interrupt the flow of your writing.
7. **Don't overdo the “Big Fifty-Cent Words”:** While you want to use a variety of words to convey more precise meaning, be careful that you don't fill your writing with big fifty-cent words. These are longer, more obscure, or more scholarly-sounding words that people often insert into their writing purely for the purpose of seeming more intelligent. But it's not the words themselves that indicate how smart you are, it's the ideas.
8. **Keep it simple:** Simple writing is clean, clear, and accessible to a wide variety of readers. Simple writing conveys your meaning but doesn't call attention to itself.

Try to keep the following three things in mind:

a. *Sentence length and structure*: Generally, express one idea per sentence. It may be a complex idea, but when you're ready to start a new idea then start a new sentence. Short sentences are okay. It's good to vary the length of sentences in your writing.

b. *Needless words*: Take a look at these two ways to write a cooking class regulation:

- When the process of baking a pie results in drips and splatters in your oven, the student must clean the mess created by such activity before leaving the kitchen.
- If you get the oven dirty when you bake your pie, you must clean it before you leave.

In the second example the author cuts a lot of extraneous words, this clears the purpose and meaning. Nothing is lost but the clutter.

c. *Active voice vs. passive voice*: Compare these two sentences:

1. The cake was cut into tiny pieces by Alice. (*passive voice*)
2. Alice cut the cake into tiny pieces. (*active voice*)

By switching from the passive voice to the active voice, you can make the sentences cleaner and more direct.

9. **Keep it honest**: Writing is a risky activity. Your writing tells the reader many things about you, whether it's a personal piece or not. Your writing shows what you think, how you think, and what you find important. It can indicate your level of education, political leanings, opinions – a whole world of information about you. If you are speaking or writing in your own voice, let that voice be authentic.

10. **Proofread your work**: Careless mistakes can spoil an otherwise good piece of writing. Writing mistakes can cost you...Don't merely rely on your spell checker. It won't catch real words that are used inappropriately. Don't rely too much on the grammar checker either. It doesn't really know what you want to say.

WRITING IMPROVEMENT STRATEGIES: