



# FAQ

## Frequently Asked Questions about the Smarter Balanced Assessment

The Smarter Balanced Assessments are tests in English language arts (ELA) and math for grades 3-8 and 11 and ELA for grade 10. Beginning in the 2014-2015 school year, these assessments measure critical thinking with questions that ask students to demonstrate their research, writing and problem-solving skills. With Smarter Balanced, parents and teachers will have better tools and information to monitor student progress and help them succeed.

### What is it?

The Smarter Balanced Assessment measures what students know, based on Washington State Learning Standards in math and English language arts. It covers the full range of college and career-ready knowledge and skills that are required for student success.

### Who takes it?

All students in grades 3-8, 10 (ELA only), and 11, including students with disabilities and English language learners. For more information about accommodations for students with special needs, contact your child's teacher.

### When is it?

Tests will be given within the last 12 weeks of school, and parents will be notified before tests are administered to their child.

### How is it given?

Students will be given the assessment on the computer. School sites will determine which computers will be used and will schedule classes throughout the testing window. It is expected that students will require eight hours to complete all parts of the assessment, which will be broken into sessions.

### When will students get the results back?

Test results will be turned around within a few weeks of testing—much sooner than the previous state test.

### What makes the Smarter Balanced test better than the previous state test?

The new Smarter Balanced tests are:

- Designed to measure skills like research, listening, communicating and reasoning.
- “Computer-adaptive,” so the computer automatically adjusts the difficulty of the questions as the student is taking the test.
- Innovative, with accommodations for English Language Learners and students with disabilities that make the tests more accessible without compromising what they are designed to measure.
- Developed by states, for states. Washington state teachers are involved in every step of the design process.

### If we are raising learning expectations, will the test be harder, too?

Initially, yes. But that's not because students will know less. It is because we will be expecting more. Research shows that when you raise learning expectations, students will work harder to meet them. It might take some time for students to meet and exceed the standards, but most parents and teachers understand that a drop in test scores is temporary and that raising learning standards is important for our students' futures.

### Why the change?

Over the past several years, Washington schools have made a shift to new standards in math and English language arts that better prepare students for college and careers. These new Washington State Learning Standards are more demanding than previous standards. The Smarter Balanced Assessment was created to measure student mastery of these new standards.

