

The Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) requires districts to ensure that all students are familiar with the test they will be taking and are able to successfully navigate, use the online tools and accessibility features, and respond to different item types.

Each district determines which resources will be used and how they will be used. The resources students need to review will be determined by the school, and which resources are used may vary by school, grade, or student. For example, grade three students or students who are new to Minnesota schools may need different resources than grade ten students who have taken a test in previous years.

This document focuses on the student resources for the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment (MCA) and Minnesota Test of Academic Skills (MTAS); for more information on student resources for ACCESS and Alternate ACCESS for ELLs, see the [Student Resources](#) page (MDE website > Districts, Schools and Educators > Statewide Testing > Student Resources).

Overview of Resources

The student tutorial and item samplers have different purposes.

- The student tutorial is used to familiarize students and educators with the general **functionality** of the online test, and includes three components: navigation, tools, and test item types. The student tutorial is only available for the online MCA.
- The item samplers are used to familiarize students and educators with how the **content** is presented in the test. Item samplers are available for the online MCA (with and without available accommodations and linguistic supports), MCA paper test materials, and the MTAS.

While these resources are useful for preparing students for testing, they are not meant to be used as practice tests or be predictive of student performance. See the *Frequently Asked Questions* section on the next page for more information.

Teacher Guides

Teacher Guides are available for each component of the student tutorial and each grade and subject of the item samplers.

Tutorial Teacher Guides

For the tutorial, the Teacher Guides provide additional details for educators on the functionality students will experience in the tutorial components. Differences by grade and subject are addressed, and images of the functionality described are included. Educators may use the Teacher Guides to provide additional information as they are working with students on the tutorial.

Item Sampler Teacher Guides

For the item samplers, the Teacher Guides provide supplementary information including item images that show correct answers and rationales for correct and incorrect answer options.

Note: The answer keys for Reading and Mathematics MCA paper item samplers are also included in the Teacher Guides.

Frequently Asked Questions

Are all of the different item types included in the student resources?

The student tutorial includes practice opportunities for all technology-enhanced item types. Online item samplers may not include all the item types for a given grade level as they are meant to provide examples of how content may be addressed.

Are the student resources updated annually?

The student tutorial components are updated annually to address any changes in functionality, including new item types or changes to tools or navigation. The items in the item samplers are not updated annually since the content stays consistent from year to year unless the academic standards have changed. While teachers may see the same items every year, students are not seeing the same questions every year as they progress through the grades.

How is the content of the item samplers selected?

Many of the reading passages, science scenarios, and test items were previously used on past assessments or have been developed to show specific examples of how content is assessed. MDE considers items selected for the item samplers to be the same quality as the items chosen for the actual test; they are not items that have been rejected for use on the MCA.

Do item samplers predict how the student will perform on the test?

No. While the content in the item samplers is aligned to the Minnesota Academic Standards, item samplers are not created to meet all of the requirements of an actual test as outlined in the test specifications. This means they are shorter and do not cover the breadth and depth of the standards.

Repeated use of an item sampler with a classroom of students in hopes of improving their performance on the MCA is not an appropriate use of the item samplers, nor is using a student's performance on the item samplers to determine course placement or resource needs. Item samplers do not give a complete or fully accurate reflection of what students should know and be able to do at each grade level.

What is the purpose of the report that appears when an online item sampler is completed?

When item samplers are completed, the report displayed provides student responses for some item types. This report can be printed for use in conjunction with the information in the corresponding Teacher's Guide on how the student responded to those items. Note that the overall score on the report is **not** a predictor of performance on the MCA; it is simply a total of correct responses to some items.

How should I prepare students to take the MCA?

Since the assessments are based on the Minnesota Academic Standards, the best preparation is instruction aligned to the depth and breadth of those standards and multiple formative checks through best practices in classroom assessments of student understanding.

Please note that while test specifications are provided as a resource for educators to see how the academic standards are addressed on the test, they are **not** meant to be used as the basis for curriculum and instruction. Nor are they meant to limit instruction based on the limits in the test specifications. Instead, test specifications guide test developers on the information that must be included in each test, and some concepts included in the academic standards cannot be addressed on a statewide assessment.

Contact mde.testing@state.mn.us for questions regarding resources for testing.