# NJSLA Research Simulation Task Grade 7 Writing

**Lesson 3: Understanding the PCR Prompt and Writing a Thesis Statement**

## Rationale

- NJSLA's prose constructed response (PCR) represents a significant change from previous tests' essay prompts. On the Research Simulation Task, these prompts require students to write an argumentative or informative/explanatory essay based solely on textual evidence found in the associated texts.
- For students to write proficient responses, they need to start with a strong grasp of the prompt's requirements and must be able to develop a strong thesis statement that fully addresses the prompt.

## Goals

- To understand a PCR prompt
- To write a thesis statement that directly addresses all aspects of the PCR prompt

## Task Foci

- **CCSS W.7.1**: Write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence.

## Objectives

- Students will examine and understand the PCR prompt
- Students will write a thesis statement that specifically addresses all aspects of the PCR prompt

## Materials

- Research Simulation Task Sample Texts (3)
- Research Simulation Task Sample Prompt
- Prompt/Thesis worksheet

## Procedures

### Part 1

- Explain that today you will work as a class to understand the prompt for the prose constructed response of the NJSLA Research Simulation Task.
- Hand out the sample texts to students and have them read it independently. For this first read, they can take notes if they'd like to, but let them know that they will have the opportunity to take notes during a second reading.

- Next, present the PCR prompt to the class and hand out the PCR prompt/Thesis Statement worksheet.
- Work through the prompt as a class, asking questions such as: **What specific aspects of the text is the prompt drawing your attention to? Is it asking you to compare and contrast two ideas, people, or arguments? Is it asking you to compare how several articles treat one subject?**
- Address any questions the students might have.
- Tell your students that with this prompt in mind to re-read the text and look for details they think would help them answer the prompt. Allow time for them to read carefully and make annotations.
    - Note: Lesson 4 covers text support and evidence in depth. Students will return to their notes from this lesson for that
- In closing, have students share what they noted. To prepare them to write thesis statements, ask them how they could use their findings to answer the prompt.

## Part 2

- In this part of the lesson, students will use the texts and their notes from Part 1 to construct a thesis statement to answer the prompt.
- Explain that a thesis statement is a one or two sentence claim about a given topic, in this case the topic elicited from the PCR prompt.
- Model a thesis statement.
- Ask students: **What makes a good thesis statement?**
- Give students the opportunity to share what they may already know about what makes a good thesis statement.
- Inform students that a good thesis statement:
    - answers the prompt completely
    - clearly states your position
    - is debatable (someone could argue the opposite)
    - is one or two sentences
    - can be supported by evidence from the text
- After this discussion, tell students that now they will use the texts and their notes to write their own thesis statements.
- Have students return to the Thesis Worksheet and their annotated texts and complete the assignment.
- In closing, ask students to share their thesis statements, working through any problems or challenges they encountered while writing them.

## Teacher Tips

- For Part I: Circulate around the room while students are doing their second reading and taking notes. Pay attention to what passages students are underlining and if their notes are accurately capturing the information in the text.
- For Part II: Check for evidence that students are using textual support to develop their thesis statements.

## Extension Activity

- Students can evaluate each other's theses for effectiveness. This can be done anonymously. Evaluating the effectiveness of others' theses will help students understand the strengths and weaknesses of their own.

# What is Cyberbullying?
StopBullying.gov


Cyberbullying is bullying that takes place using electronic technology. Electronic technology includes devices and equipment such as cell phones, computers, and tablets as well as communication tools including social media sites, text messages, chat, and websites.

Examples of cyberbullying include mean text messages or emails, rumors sent by email or posted on social networking sites, and embarrassing pictures, videos, websites, or fake profiles.

Kids who are being cyberbullied are often bullied in person as well. Additionally, kids who are cyberbullied have a harder time getting away from the behavior. Cyberbullying can happen 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and reach a kid even when he or she is alone. It can happen any time of the day or night. Cyberbullying messages and images can be posted anonymously and distributed quickly to a very wide audience. It can be difficult and sometimes impossible to trace the source. Deleting inappropriate or harassing messages, texts, and pictures is extremely difficult after they have been posted or sent.

Cell phones and computers themselves are not to blame for cyberbullying. Social media sites can be used for positive activities, like connecting kids with friends and family, helping students with school, and for entertainment. But these tools can also be used to hurt other people. Whether done in person or through technology, the effects of bullying are similar.

Kids who are cyberbullied are more likely to use alcohol and drugs, skip school, experience in-person bullying, be unwilling to attend school, receive poor grades, have lower self-esteem, and have more health problems.

Parents and kids can prevent cyberbullying. Together, they can explore safe ways to use technology.

Talk with your kids about cyberbullying and other online issues regularly. Know the sites your kids visit and their online activities. Ask where they're going, what they're doing, and who they're doing it with. Tell your kids that as a responsible parent you may review their online communications if you think there is reason for concern. Installing parental control filtering software or monitoring programs are one option for monitoring your child's online behavior, but do not rely solely on these tools. Have a sense of what they do online and in texts. Learn about the sites they like. Try out the devices they use. Ask for their passwords, but tell them you'll only use them in case of emergency. Ask to "friend" or "follow" your kids on social media sites or ask another trusted adult to do so. Encourage your kids to tell you immediately if they, or someone they know, is being cyberbullied. Explain that you will not take away their computers or cell phones if they confide in you about a problem they are having.

Establish rules about appropriate use of computers, cell phones, and other technology. For example, be clear about what sites they can visit and what they are permitted to do when they're online. Show them how to be safe online.

Help them be smart about what they post or say. Tell them not to share anything that could hurt or embarrass themselves or others. Once something is posted, it is out of their control whether someone else will forward it.

Encourage kids to think about who they want to see the information and pictures they post online. Should complete strangers see it? Real friends only? Friends of friends? Think about how people who aren't friends could use it.

Tell kids to keep their passwords safe and not share them with friends. Sharing passwords can compromise their control over their online identities and activities.

Some schools have developed policies on uses of technology that may affect the child's online behavior in and out of the classroom. Ask the school if they have developed a policy.

School staff can help prevent bullying by establishing and enforcing school rules and policies that clearly describe how students are expected to treat each other. Consequences for violations of the rules should be clearly defined as well.

Cyberbullying can create a disruptive environment at school and is often related to in-person bullying. The school can use the information to help inform prevention and response strategies. In many states, schools are required to address cyberbullying in their anti-bullying policy. Some state laws also cover off-campus behavior that creates a hostile school environment.

When cyberbullying happens, it is important to document and report the behavior so it can be addressed.

- Don't respond to and don't forward cyberbullying messages.
- Keep evidence of cyberbullying. Record the dates, times, and descriptions of instances when cyberbullying has occurred. Save and print screenshots, emails, and text messages. Use this evidence to report cyberbullying to web and cell phone service providers.
- Block the person who is cyberbullying.

When cyberbullying involves these activities it is considered a crime and should be reported to law enforcement:

- Threats of violence
- Taking a photo or video of someone in a place where he or she would expect privacy
- Stalking and hate crimes

**Students and researchers disagree on whether 'cyberbullying' is a cause for concern**
Courtesy: National Science Foundation

The book *Cyberbullying: What Counselors Need to Know* identifies non-punitive strategies for responding to cyberbullying. In it, author Sheri Bauman argues the most important advice for parents and teachers is to get knowledgeable about technology and its safety strategies.

Bauman writes about a national survey in which 33 percent of parents interviewed, who had youth ages 10-17 living with them, used filtering software on home Internet access. She says installing filtering software is an easy, non-punitive, initial step towards protecting youth at home and at school.

"When I'm queen, I would mandate that schools provide education in technology, not just how to use a tool, but also to use it wisely, respectfully, carefully, and how to protect yourself from cyberbullying," says Bauman.

Other advice from Bauman includes keeping abreast of the most recent social media sites, monitoring social network activities, monitoring who friends are and taking advantage of control options, which are now available on most cell phones.

Meanwhile, Nathan Fisk, a science and technology researcher, suggests parents and educators address the more common, everyday problems identified by students that can lead to more severe forms of bullying. "Understanding social context is critical in defusing and managing conflicts between students," he says. "It is important to address conflict at the local individual level."

To do that, one approach Fisk recommends is to listen to the advice of adolescents who are closest to the problem. In a winning essay, student Morgan Biggs, an eighth grade student at St. Anne's School of Annapolis in Maryland, proposes what she calls a "Bully Beatdown" campaign to raise awareness of bullying issues. Her campaign would allow students to share personal stories and experiences with bullying and train them on anti-bullying tactics.

She also suggests schools create an anonymous email for students who don't want to report an incident of bullying or cyberbullying in-person for fear of becoming bullying victims.

The suggestion mirrors one offered by some experts. "Victims often do not report incidents of cyberbullying because they fear retaliation and worry that they will be ostracized if it is known that they reported it," says Bauman, who also suggests anonymous reporting. While there are no data on the effectiveness of anonymous reporting systems, giving youth an avenue to report via an anonymous website, or telephone number, could help mitigate future online bullying, she says.

Fisk responds to the suggestion with skepticism. "I don't think that having an anonymous tip line is a terrible idea, but it is at least somewhat problematic on a number of levels," he says. He argues that bullying offers a seductively simplistic frame for adults, who lack true understanding of the complexity of youth social interactions and that it is important to realize that some youth will exploit this knowledge to their advantage.

**Teen Uses Theater to Deliver Bullying Prevention Message**
StopBullying.gov

Ben Powell has been performing for others since the age of 3. Now at 19 years old, he enjoys acting, singing, and playing the guitar and trombone. As a high school student, Ben used his talents to impact his community. Specifically, Ben and his peers created a theatrical production to spread awareness about the potential consequences of bullying. With the support of his high school drama teacher, he and other students developed the project.

"Our drama teacher approached us and presented the idea that a message to students may be more effective if their peers delivered it. So, our drama class wrote the script. We also helped design the sets, and were the main actors in the production."

The group called the project *Teen Reality*. Similar to a haunted house attraction, audience members walked through the sets to view the different scenes. The plot centered on several youth. These youth included those who bullied, a young person who was the target of bullying, and youth who witnessed the behavior. The characters in the play experienced negative outcomes that can be linked to bullying. For example, they dealt with mental health issues, substance abuse, and suicide.

"We chose to focus on bullying so we could show people that their words and actions can have a huge impact on someone's life. We also wanted to show the psychological scarring that being bullied or bullying others can cause. It does not always happen, but bullying someone can lead to very serious consequences. That was the overarching message for the play."

The drama teacher and students gained the support of the school district and broader community. They received support from the school board, city council, law enforcement, hospitals, and other local groups and businesses.

The primary audience for the play was middle and high school students in Ben's school district in Southeastern Georgia. At the end of each performance, the group organized school assemblies to further discuss bullying and its effects. Students were able to speak about their experiences with bullying. The reach of the production went beyond the student body. Ben and his drama team peers performed for other community members. A local television station also aired the play.

"I thought the message would fall on deaf ears, but I realized it was impactful. People were emotional and their reactions made me realize its impact. I felt fortunate to be a part of people's experiences and to have possibly influenced their behaviors."

**Prose Constructed Response**
**Prompt**

You have now read three passages about cyberbullying and bullying. Consider the different suggestions on how to eliminate bullying and cyberbullying. Which suggestion is most likely to address both bullying and cyberbullying? Write an essay in which you analyze the different suggestions and highlight the one most likely to deal with both forms of bullying. Include evidence from at least two of the articles to support your answer.

# Writing a Thesis Statement

**<u>Identify what the PCR requires</u>**

Read the prompt and identify what it is asking you to do. In the box below, write a sentence or two that describe what the prompt is asking you to write about.

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### **What is the prompt asking?**

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**<u>Give it a try:</u>**

Now that you know what the prompt is asking you to do, write a thesis statement to answer the prompt.

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### **<u>Checklist</u>**

My thesis statement:

- ☐ answers the prompt completely
- ☐ clearly states my position
- ☐ is debatable (someone could argue the opposite)
- ☐ is one or two sentences
- ☐ can be supported by evidence in the text

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