



**DISTRICT 75: MIDDLE SCHOOL UNITS OF STUDY**



***NAVIGATING THE ELA***  
A FIVE-WEEK UNIT IN TEST SOPHISITICATION

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b><u>TOPICS</u></b>	<b><u>PAGES</u></b>
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	2
<b>PURPOSE OF THE UNIT</b>	3
<b>STRATEGIES FOR SELF-MONITORING</b>	4
<b>TEST-TAKING STRATEGIES FOR MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS</b>	5
<b>ADDITIONAL TEST-TAKING TIPS</b>	6
<b>CURRICULUM MAPS</b>	7-11
<b>WEEK ONE: WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT TESTS?</b>	
<b>WEEK TWO: HOW DO WE EXTRACT IMPORTANT     INFORMATION FROM THE TEXT?</b>	
<b>WEEK THREE: HOW CAN I UNDERSTAND TEST     QUESTIONS?</b>	
<b>WEEK FOUR: WHAT DO I DO WHEN I ANSWER     THE TEST QUESTIONS?</b>	
<b>WEEK FIVE: HOW DO I LISTEN EFFECTIVELY?</b>	
<b>LESSONS TO SUPPORT THE UNIT OF STUDY</b>	12-15
<b>GRAPHIC ORGANIZERS AND LESSON COMPLEMENTS</b>	16-17
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b>	18

## INTRODUCTION TO THE UNIT OF STUDY: NAVIGATING THE ELA

This unit of study will deepen the Middle School student's understanding of the necessary strategies and techniques that are required for **effective** test taking. In providing teachers with focused instructional objectives aimed at improving student performance on the ELA exam, this unit of study explicitly addresses the process of understanding what is being asked, where and how to find the answer and how best to present the answer.

In addition to providing teachers with a myriad of ways to improve student ability to comprehend and analyze text, this unit is designed to assist teachers and students in analyzing the features of standardized exams. Students will be taught to identify key words in order to determine main idea. They will infer, visualize, and ask themselves "who and what" questions as well as self-monitor while they read. Students will learn to use graphic organizers, develop their listening comprehension skills, and take notes that they can use to better comprehend either the text or questions related to the text. In the end, students will better comprehend what the test maker is asking and be prepared to respond correctly.

This unit includes sample lessons, graphic organizers, and a list of activities for successful test preparation. As in all units of study, the curriculum maps and lessons are **only suggestions** and should be adapted and differentiated so as to maximize student learning.

By giving students differentiated simulated activities that ask for application of concepts and rules focused on understanding the elements of reading, writing and oral language, educators are providing opportunities for students to strengthen and integrate skills and strategies throughout lessons and throughout the year. Planning lessons that connect students' growing knowledge and skills with test demands, exploring texts from different perspectives (social, political, cultural, historical, personal) and developing ideas beyond the superficial will empower students to take ownership of their own learning. Teachers will also be able to design follow-up lessons that enable students to move beyond their initial thoughts and help broaden pupils' thinking and perspectives.

In order to be effective, teachers must use a variety of teaching approaches based on students' needs in order to supply students with the knowledge, rules and vocabulary they will need to do well on the ELA, in coursework and in life. This unit was designed as a framework to help students not only become familiar with the test format, but also feel comfortable with the content. Providing our students with the necessary skills and strategies to succeed on exams will no doubt help them not only as test takers but also throughout their lives.

## PURPOSE OF THE UNIT OF STUDY

To help students learn how to:

- ✚ understand the features of the test
- ✚ understand how to use key words to determine main idea
- ✚ understand what the test maker is asking
- ✚ understand that self monitoring leads to active reading
- ✚ predict possible answers
- ✚ understand the process of elimination
- ✚ summarize and underline the most important information from the text
- ✚ use the “Five Step Method for Writing” and “Digging for Details”
- ✚ go back to the text to answer detail questions
- ✚ restate questions in their own words
- ✚ identify vocabulary used in test prompts
- ✚ make connections to the text as they read
- ✚ utilize graphic organizers to understand the text or aid in their writing
- ✚ prepare for the kinds of responses expected on the NYS English Language Arts exam

Students will also explore different strategies that they can use when participating in testing situations.

- ✚ Engaging in strategic scanning
- ✚ Reading the directions carefully
- ✚ The Five Step Method
- ✚ Digging for Details
- ✚ Using graphic organizers
- ✚ Taking short notes
- ✚ Using visualization
- ✚ Using clues from the text to help them figure out meaning of words
- ✚ Proof reading a final draft

Teachers will be able to help students develop strategies for self monitoring, which will help students stop and think about their responses when participating in a testing situation.

## STRATEGIES FOR SELF-MONITORING

### Before Reading...

I look at the title, cover, illustrations, and the blurb.

I ask myself:

- What do I already know?
- What can I predict?
- What is my purpose for reading?

### During Reading...

Am I:

- making connections to what I know?
- making a picture in my mind (visualizing)?
- stopping often to think to myself about what I read? (Stop and Retell)
- asking myself if it makes sense?
- rereading if I am confused?
- making predictions about what might happen next?
- trying to figure out words that I do not know by:
  - ✓ Sounding it out
  - ✓ Looking at word parts
  - ✓ Reading on and filling in a word that makes sense
  - ✓ Using clues from the text to help me figure out the meaning of the sentence

### After Reading...

I ask myself:

- What did I learn and how can I use it?
- Can I summarize this in my own words?
- How does this fit in with what I already know?
- What did I like? Why?
  - Can I tell the main idea in One Summary Sentence?

## **TEST-TAKING TIPS FOR MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS**

### **Before actually taking the test...**

- Engage in strategic scanning
- Read questions
- Look at the writing task
- Read the directions carefully
- Study the multiple choice questions

### **During the test...**

- Attack the passage
- Use context clues when confronted with unfamiliar words
- Reread the text
- Underline/take short notes
- Carefully select your answers

### **When writing your essay...**

- Think about the organization of your essay
- Look at conventions and mechanics (spelling, punctuation usage and grammar)
- Allow yourself to make personal connections but remember to remain on topic
- Proofread your final draft

## ADDITIONAL TEST TAKING TIPS TO KEEP IN MIND

- A short- response question will have about 5 lines for students to write on.
- The names of the steps of a strategy will help students remember the method.
- “Prompt” is the name for a question that requires a written response.
- For listening passages, students will underline keywords in the prompt *after* hearing the passage.
- On Test Day, students will use details from the passages, not from their own experience, in their written response.
- A complete response includes supporting information from the passage. Students must be able to support their answer with details from the text.
- Remind students that the scorer must be able to read their responses, so they should write neatly.
- Students must be specific! General statements will not earn students a high score.
- The title of an article will often help students identify the 2Ws.
- The notes students take are for their eyes only. They do not have to include correct punctuation, grammar, or spelling.
- Students should never use full sentences when taking notes-they’ll waste valuable time.
- Students will record only the key ideas, and not the details, in their Note Chart.
- Students may notice that the test directions state, “As you listen to the article the second time, you *may* want to take notes.” Let the students know that despite the word *may*, taking notes during the second reading is not optional. Taking notes will greatly contribute to their success.
- The notes students take do not count; only what they write on the lines or in the space provided will be counted toward their score.
- Students do not need to use complete sentences to answer graphic-organizer questions.
- Students should include at least two supporting details from the article in their short response.
- In the editing task, the space above each line of text is where students will make corrections.
- A proper noun names a specific person, place or thing. Proper nouns should be capitalized.
- Students should watch out for words that *have* been capitalized, but should *not* have been.
- Some sentences in the paragraph may contain no errors.

Sample lessons are in bold print.

<b>WEEK ONE:</b>  WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT TESTS?	Readers take practice tests to get a feel for test-taking.	Readers examine the structure of the stories and features of the test.	Readers use titles and illustrations to get ready to read.  <i>*Habits of mind: Predictions</i>	Readers think about what they already know as they begin to read testing items and passages.  <i>*Habits of mind: Uses Schema</i>	Readers respond to test directions including the “nouns” and “verbs” of test questions.
	Writers use graphic organizers to show a) character traits b) different/similar c) main idea and details from the reading passage.  <i>Skill: Compare/Contrast</i>	<b>Writers “Dig for Details” in the text of the story to find information to answer the test question using a graphic organizer.</b>	Writers identify details needed to answer question using keywords, underlining important words in text.	Writers practice answering test questions using graphic organizer for character traits, and details.	Writers practice answering test questions using graphic organizer for different/similar comparisons.  <i>Skill: Compare/Contrast</i>

The goals of the first week of this unit include but are not limited to:

- ✚ Understanding the features of the test
- ✚ Understanding how to use key words to determine main idea
- ✚ Understanding what the test maker is asking
- ✚ Learning and practicing how to answer test question using graphic organizers
- ✚ Understanding keywords, details and character traits

<b>WEEK TWO:</b>  HOW DO WE EXTRACT IMPORTANT INFORMATION FROM THE TEXT?	<b>Readers skim the questions to find key words to look for as they read.</b>  <i>*Habits of Mind: Determines What is Important in Text</i>	Readers skim the text for key words and or phrases to find answers to questions.  <i>*Habits of Mind: Determines What is Important in Text</i>	Readers answer detail questions by going back to the text.	Readers can monitor their comprehension by summarizing.  <i>*Habits of Mind: Monitors Comprehension</i>	Readers can figure out the most important information by asking the 5 W questions.  <i>*Habits of Mind: Asks Questions</i>
	Writers learn the ‘ <b>Five Step Method for Writing</b> ’	<b>Writers Unmask the task:</b> Restate question in your own words. What are you supposed to do? How is your answer supposed to look?  <i>Habits of Mind: Determines what is important</i>	<b>Writers Analyze –</b> Underline keywords in prompt and in story. Find information in passage to support your answer. <b>Writers Strategize –</b> Plan your response. Say it/Support it.	<b>Writers Write -</b> Follow your plan. <b>Writers Review-</b> Did you complete the task, support your ideas, check for errors?  <i>Habits of Mind: Asks Questions</i>	Writers practice answering short response test questions.

The goals of the second week of this unit include but are not limited to:

- ✚ Understanding that self monitoring leads to active reading
- ✚ Using the strategy of skimming for details and evidence
- ✚ Finding details using the 5 W’s
- ✚ Writing answers in complete sentences
- ✚ Answering short response test questions

<b>WEEK THREE:</b>  HOW CAN I UNDERSTAND TEST QUESTIONS?	Readers can summarize by underlining the most important information in the text.  <i>*Habits of Mind: Determines What is Important in Text</i>	Readers find signal words to help them identify different types of questions.	Readers answer sequence questions using key words like before, after and next.  <i>*Habits of Mind: Determines What is Important in Text</i>	Readers answer “compare and contrast” questions.	Readers use context clues to help with unfamiliar vocabulary.
	<b>Writers learn Digging for Details and review the ‘Five Step Method for Writing’.</b>	<b>Writers Analyze –</b> Writers review vocabulary used in test prompts. Writers underline important words in prompt and in text.	<b>Writers Strategize -</b> Writers practice writing complete sentences based on text to answer questions.  Writers <b>Write</b> - Follow your plan.	<b>Writers Review-</b> Did you complete the task, support your ideas, check for errors?  <i>Skill: Self-monitoring</i>	Writers practice answering extended response questions.

The goals of the third week of this unit include but are not limited to:

- ✚ Summarizing and locating important parts of the text
- ✚ Using context clues to understand unfamiliar vocabulary
- ✚ Responding in complete sentences based on text to answer questions
- ✚ Understanding vocabulary used in test prompts

<b>WEEK FOUR:</b>  WHAT DO I DO WHEN I ANSWER THE TEST QUESTIONS?	Readers distinguish between fact and opinion.  <i>*Habits of Mind:          Monitors Comprehension</i>	Readers predict possible future outcomes based on what is in the text.  <i>*Habits of Mind:          Monitors Comprehension</i>	Readers figure out the author’s purpose for writing.  <i>*Habits of Mind:          Infers</i>	<b>Readers draw conclusions and make inferences using information from the text.</b>	Readers predict what the answer might be before they look at the choices.
	Writers review <b>Digging for Details</b> and the ‘ <b>Five Step Method for Writing</b> ’	Writers <b>Analyze</b> – Writers review vocabulary used in test prompts. Writers underline important words in prompt and in text.	Writers <b>Strategize</b> - Writers practice writing complete sentences based on text to answer questions.  Writers <b>Write</b> - Follow your plan  <i>Skill:          Compare/Contrast</i>	Writers <b>Review</b> - Did you complete the task, support your ideas, check for errors?  <i>Habits of Mind:          Monitors Comprehension</i>	Writers practice answering extended response questions

The goals for the fourth week of this unit include but are not limited to:

- ✚ Distinguishing between fact and opinion
- ✚ Predicting possible outcomes based on text
- ✚ Figuring out the author’s purpose
- ✚ Finding evidence

<b>WEEK FIVE:</b>  HOW DO I LISTEN EFFECTIVELY?	Readers can use the process of elimination.  <i>*Habits of Mind: Determines what is important</i>	Readers can skip difficult questions and return to them later on.	Readers monitor their attention and comprehension while listening.  <i>*Habits of Mind: Monitors Comprehension</i>	Readers visualize while they are listening.	Readers take notes while they are listening.  <i>*Habits of Mind: Determines what is important</i>
	Writers learn to use the <b>Three Step Method for Listening Comprehension.</b>	Writers practice ‘visualization’ and identify <b>2w’s (who, what)</b> during first reading of the listening part of test.	Writers draw a <b>Note Chart</b> using <b>2w’s (who, what)</b> and <b>key ideas</b> and practice using it during second reading of text  <i>*Habits of Mind: Determines what is important</i>	<b>Writers practice taking notes from stories read aloud using note chart.</b>	Writers practice answering <b>listening comprehension</b> questions.  <i>*Habits of Mind: Monitors Comprehension</i>

The goals for the fifth week of this unit include but are not limited to:

- ✚ Using the process of elimination when choosing a response
- ✚ Visualizing either when listening or reading a text

**Title of Mini-lesson: Readers Draw Conclusions and Make Inferences Using Information from the Text**

**Intention:** To have students use inferential thinking in order to answer test questions.

**Connection:** “So far in this unit we have looked at how we can summarize what we have read to help us better understand our texts. We have also figured out the most important information by asking the 5 W’s.”

**Teaching:** “Today, we are going to use the strategy of visualization to help us make inferences (read between the lines) about the story using the author’s words. Readers are like detectives, discovering the hidden meanings embedded in the text. To make an inference is to make a guess based on evidence. I am going to give you an example. Look at the following paragraph as I read it.”

Examples:

- “As I turned the corner, I saw the giant red fire engines and thick smoke.”  
“*What’s happening?*” (inference) “*How did you figure that out?*” (evidence)
- “The girl was soaked and carried a broken umbrella in her hand.”  
“*Why do you think the girl is wet?*” (inference) “*What makes you think that?*” (evidence)
- “Mom said, ‘If you don’t clean your room, you will see what will happen?’”  
“*What do you think mom means?*” (inference) “*Why did you make this conclusion? What clues did the author give to make you think this way?*” (evidence)

Other questions the teacher can ask to elicit inferences.

“*What clues does the author give to describe the character’s demeanor/feelings/facial expressions/gestures without directly saying it?*”

“*What hidden meanings can we figure out from the author’s language? Why?*”

“*How does the author use character’s actions, words and inner thoughts to give us clues about what is happening in the story?*”

“*What can we conclude when we read between the lines?*”

“*How do we make decisions about the text based on the words and actions of the characters?*”

“*What conclusions does the dialogue help us make?*”

*What hidden meanings are imbedded in the characters’ words/actions?*

*Why were the character’s inner thoughts different from his/her words? What does this tell us?*

*Can you infer what the character might do based on this event?*

Teacher can demonstrate by making inferences aloud.

Example: “*Although the author does not say that it was raining...I can infer that it is because the character’s clothes were drenched and she was carrying a broken umbrella.*”

**Active Engagement:** Select a new piece of text and read it out loud. Pause at pre-selected points and pose inferential questions for students to answer.

**Link:** During Independent Reading students will find five inferences and show evidence of implied meaning.

**Debrief:** Students share their inferences and explain the rationale behind each (evidence).

**Title of Mini-lesson:** Readers skim the questions to find key words to look for as they read.

**Intention:** To have students practice the strategy of reading the questions first and then looking for question stems in the passage in order to find the answer.

**Connection:** “Yesterday, we learned to respond to test directions by listening to the nouns and verbs we found in the test questions. Today, we will use the strategy of skimming to help us read the questions at the end of the passage in the test so that we can find the answers in the passage. I’ll show you how.”

**Teaching:** “I’ve been thinking about what it’s like for me when I take a reading test. For me, it is like a scavenger hunt. Do you know how scavenger hunts work? Everyone gets a list of things to find—a rock, a flower, etc.—and then everyone has to go and find those things. Well, when I take a reading test, it’s a little like I’m going on a scavenger hunt, except that the list of things I’m supposed to find is the answers to the questions at the end of the passage. So let me show you what I do when I take a test.”

Using an overhead projector or chart paper, present an enlarged one-page passage from a test prep booklet. The page should begin with a short passage and end with multiple-choice questions. Be certain to choose reachable questions for the first few times.

E.g., Why was John in trouble?

“O.k. so this is the first question on my list. I am going to be looking for reasons why John is in trouble.”

Read a second question.

E.g., “How old is Mr. Anderson?”

“I am making a note to look for each question. These are enough for me to remember. I will now be looking for them as I read the passage.”

Have students watch as you model and read the passage. Read the passage aloud (modeling your thinking as though reading aloud to self).

As you find a piece of information that answers one of the questions, point it out: “There it is! That’s the answer!” Then immediately register the correct answer on the answer sheet. Do the same with the second question.

Be sure to model questions whose answers are not found in sequential order, e.g., Answer to question 1 found in last paragraph, question 2 found mid-paragraph, etc.)

**Active Engagement:** Present another passage and have students practice finding the question stems in a group.

**Link:** Place students into groups of 3 or 4. Each group should have a different reading passage with questions (these should not be too difficult for the first few practice sessions). Have them work individually for the first part of the activity. Students will choose 2 questions at a time to find in the passage. After completion of all questions, students join their group members, compare answers and defend their rationale for choice made.

**Debrief:**

Students share their answers and show the location of their question stem.

**Title of Mini-lesson: Writers “Dig for Details” to Find Information to Answer Test Questions.**

**Intention: To have students employ “Dig for Details” technique and graphic organizer to identify important information within a text.**

**Connection:** “Yesterday we talked about the different types of questions that will be asked on the ELA exam. We know that in order to properly answer these questions we have to find information in the text that we read or listen to. Today we will learn to use a system to help us find information that will help us to answer the test questions.”

**Teaching:** The teacher will introduce the steps to finding important information:

1. Identify detail needed to answer question.
2. Find first mention of detail in text.
3. Closely read sentences and paragraph containing detail.

“We will now read a short passage using silent reading. You will each get a copy of a story and a copy of the questions about the story that you must answer. You will have five minutes to read the story and answer the questions.”

“At the end of the five minutes you will exchange papers with your neighbor. The story will then be projected on the wall using an overhead. I will then read the story aloud. I will underline the important words by finding words that match words in the questions.”

“We will review the answers to the questions and we will see how the answers to the questions can be found in the text. We will review what explicit and implicit means.”  
We will write down what we learn on a chart.

**Active Engagement:** Now I am going to pass out another story. You will have 5 minutes to read silently, and then you will sit with a partner and together find and underline important words in the questions and the text. Then, together, you and your partner will use this information and decide how to answer the questions. When everyone is finished we will check our answers and review what we learned today.”

**Link:** “All of the open ended questions on the ELA exam require you to identify important words in the story to answer test questions. To get clues about important words in the story we need to look at the questions. Then we will know what information to look for as we read.”

**Share:** We will look at one more story together. We will read it aloud, along with the questions. Then I will project it on the wall and we will together choose the correct answers to all of the questions using the steps we learned today.

**Title of Mini-lesson:** Writers practice taking notes from stories read aloud using note chart.

**Intention:** To have students practice listening to a story and answering questions about the story using notes they take while listening.

**Connection:** “The other day we practiced finding and underlining important information in a stories and questions that we read. Some questions on the ELA exam require you to listen to a story and answer questions that you will not see until after the story has been read to you. Taking notes will help you remember important information about the story, so that you can answer the questions.”

**Teaching:** “Taking notes means that you write down what is important. Using a graphic organizer can help you to organize your notes. Your notes will tell you who and what and which are the key ideas. I will show you how to use a graphic organizer to take notes on a story that is read to you. First I will read the story aloud and everyone will listen, and try to visualize what is happening in the story. Then I will reread the story aloud and take notes on the overhead so that everyone can see how it’s done. You will help me decide what important information I need to write down using only a few words.”

**Active Engagement:** “Now I am going to read you another story, twice. The first time you will listen and try to make a picture in your mind about what is happening in the story. The second time you will take notes by writing down important words, nouns, verbs or names and things that happen. Then you and your partner together, will look at the test questions and use your notes to answer them.”

**Link:** “In the Listening part of the test, we do not get to see the questions until after we have listened to the story being read aloud twice. The first time the story is read we listen and visualize. The second time, to help us remember what happened in the story, we will take notes, writing down who, what and the key ideas. We use a graphic organizer so that our notes will make sense. We will use our notes to help us answer the questions about the story.”

**Share:** “We will chart what we need to do during the Listening part of the examination.”

## **Three-Step Method for Reading Comprehension**

- a. Scan
- b. Read actively
- c. Answer question

### **Digging for Details**

1. Identify detail needed to answer question – Look at illustrations, captions or headings; underline keywords in text and question.
2. Find first mention of detail in text – identify the main idea.
3. Closely read paragraph containing detail.

## **Five-Step Method for Writing Tasks – To be used with short and extended response questions**

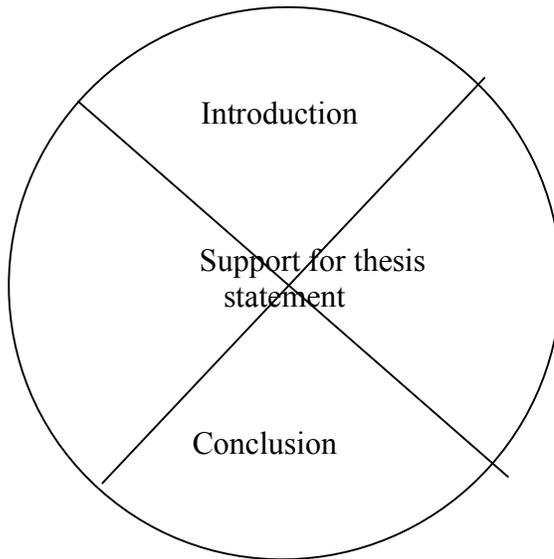
1. Unmask the Task
  - a. Restate the question in your own words
  - b. Identify the task type
2. Analyze
  - a. Underline keywords in the prompt
  - b. Underline important information in the passage
3. Strategize - Response to question should be given in complete sentences and include information from passage to support answer
  - a. Plan your response
  - b. Say it! Support it! (short response)
  - c. Pie and Pieces (extended response)
4. Write – Follow your plan
  - a. Introduction
  - b. Paragraphs to support thesis
  - c. Conclusion – restatement of thesis
5. Review
  - a. Was task completed?
  - b. Were my ideas supported?
  - c. Did I check for errors?

## Graphic Organizer for Listening Part of ELA Examination

Thesis Statement – What you plan to write about.

Use the 2Ws and keywords from the writing prompt to develop your thesis

Thesis statement



Each section of the pie represents the topic of a paragraph of your essay.

Each paragraph will correspond to a bullet in the writing prompt.

To completely answer the question, each bullet should be represented by a pie piece

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