



08-09 Writing Assessment Proposal

August 2008

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I. Introduction to the New Writing Assessment

Historical Information

North Carolina, believing that an emphasis on writing instruction was needed and that the measurement of writing would enhance instruction, began a statewide writing assessment program in 1983-84. While changes have occurred in the statewide writing assessment program over the years, the basic commitment to the instruction and assessment of writing has remained a major component of the North Carolina State Board of Education (SBE) and Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI).

More recent changes in the writing assessment program began in September of 2001 when a process was initiated by the NCDPI staff that would result in the revision of the statewide writing assessment program including the rubrics and scoring procedures for grades 4, 7, and 10. Writing committees for each grade level were established that included general education teachers, English as Second Language (ESL) teachers, Exceptional Children (EC) teachers, curriculum specialists, principals, and university faculty. The North Carolina Writing Assessment Scoring Model was developed by NCDPI Testing and Development Section and NCSU-TOPS staff, refined by the writing assessment advisory committees, and approved by the State Board of Education (SBE) on January 9, 2003.

A pilot administration of the North Carolina Writing Assessment at grades 4, 7, and 10 was administered in March 2003 to all eligible students. The students in grades 4 and 7 received 75 minutes to respond to the on-demand prompt; students in grade 10 received 100 minutes. The writing assessments, the rubrics, the scoring model, and achievement level ranges were revised to reflect (1) the changes in the English/language arts curriculum emphasis and focus, and (2) the need to enhance the data analysis and reporting of student performance on the writing assessments. Changes to the North Carolina Writing Assessment at grades 4, 7, and 10 were implemented initially as an operational administration effective with the 2003-04 school year to reflect the revisions to the English/language arts curriculum adopted by the SBE (1999), the recommendations of the Writing Assessment Task Force (2001), and the recommendations of the SBE Ad Hoc Writing Committee (2002).

Type of Writing Assessed by Grade Level for General Assessment

Grade Level	Type of Writing
4	Extended narrative response (personal or imaginative)
7	Extended argumentative response (problem/solution or evaluative)
10	Extended informational response (cause/effect or definition)

Current Context

In June 2008 the North Carolina State Board of Education (SBE) adopted “A Framework for Change: The Next Generation of Assessments and Accountability” and subsequently directed the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) to develop a new writing assessment system that would replace the annual on-demand writing tests at grades 4, 7, and 10 and to elevate the importance of writing throughout the K-12 curriculum. The new K-12 writing system is to include authentic and on-demand writing assignments that mirror 21st century skills. The State Board of Education directed the NCDPI to prepare a transition plan for

writing for 2008-2009 so there would be no lapse in writing assessments at grades 4, 7, and 10 while a new writing system is being developed. If possible, the 2008-2009 writing process could serve as a pilot for the new writing assessment system.

In response to the Board's charge, the NCDPI organized a writing committee and directed members to "push the envelope" and propose a writing assessment system design that is innovative and differs substantially from the traditional assessment of writing. The writing committee is composed of NCDPI staff representing the areas of Testing/Accountability, English/language arts, Exceptional Children, Comprehensive Support, Career and Technical Education, Technology, Social Studies, Mathematics, Science, Health, English as Second Language (ESL), and Foreign Languages as well as external members representing several LEAs, the North Carolina Office of School Readiness, and North Carolina State University. The writing committee determined by consensus at its first meeting that whatever was proposed must ensure that students learn to write for a variety of purposes and audiences and that student writing be clear, organized, concise, and purposeful. The committee examined assessment programs from several states, representing differing methods to assess writing, as well as current research conducted at the national level. The committee discussed at length instructional practices and test and measurement issues concerning a proposed new system. The committee determined that this new system needed to be capable of generating pertinent information at the student, classroom, school, district, and state levels.

Vision for a New Model of 21st Century Writing Assessment

In keeping with the guiding mission of the SBE relative to 21st century assessments, the new North Carolina Writing Assessment System entails a paradigm shift from the traditional annual on-demand writing test to ongoing authentic writing assessments. This year-long assessment system will consist of four authentic, content-specific writing tasks/assignments (formative) and two on-demand writing tasks/assignments (one benchmark, the other summative). The content-specific tasks will involve prior reading and research that will culminate in a written product. The on-demand writing tasks will be similar to the traditional writing tests in which students will respond to prompts. During both types of writing sessions, middle grade students will complete their work using technology tools. In elementary school teachers may use their discretion regarding the appropriate use of technology tools for their students.

The new Writing Assessment System engages students in "real world" writing involving content-specific subject matter. Middle grade students, using tools such as a word processor to compose and edit their work and then saving and storing it in an electronic portfolio, will be engaged in a process or system that further prepares them for life and work in the 21st century. The system reinforces the belief that student writing should occur throughout the course of the school year, not just in preparation for a one time, isolated testing event, yet still includes an accountability measure through the use of the benchmark and summative components.

Middle grade students will use a centrally hosted, statewide electronic system to compose and store their writing tasks/assignments. Teachers will be able to access student work in the electronic portfolio in order to provide feedback and score the writing tasks/assignments. The electronic system will allow NCDPI to access student writing and to collect score data. Through the use of this electronic system, the NCDPI will have the capabilities to monitor compliance and to audit, ensuring that the assessment system produces results that are valid and reliable. Review of student writing will allow NCDPI to draw conclusions about student performance in

writing across the state, determine areas for needed professional development, and provide useful feedback to teachers and administrators about student writing performance.

Elementary students will store their hand-written or word-processed products in paper portfolios. NCDPI will monitor student portfolios to ensure compliance and reliability.

2008-2009 Pilot

In order to determine the appropriateness of the content, all students in grades 4 and 7 will complete two content-specific writing assignments and two on-demand writing tasks. Students in grade 7 will use word processing tools in order to complete their assignments. All 7th grade students, with the exception of students in ten pilot LEAs, will store their work in local portfolios. Teachers will use State rubrics to score student writing. NCDPI will monitor student portfolios to ensure compliance and check for reliability.

In order to determine the efficacy of the electronic storage and retrieval system, students in ten LEAs will participate in a pilot that will closely approximate the electronic storage, uploading, and retrieval of student work. NCDPI staff will report to the SBE in September 2009 the specifics of the electronic pilot.

Note:

During 2008-2009 students in Grade 10 will participate in the traditional 10th Grade Writing Test. The Writing Committee will continue to discuss options for a new writing assessment system at the high school. Two components of that comprehensive system will be the English test at Grade 10 and the High School Graduation Project.

Professional Development

The success of any instructional/test and measurement initiative depends heavily upon the quality and effectiveness of targeted professional development programs. Professional development for the North Carolina Writing Assessment System will be delivered to educators and stakeholders primarily electronically through the use of a moodle (online course management system). This professional development will consist of two courses: one specifically designed around the instruction of writing and the involvement of content teachers in the writing process, and the other focusing specifically on the assessment of student writing. The second course will focus on formative and summative assessment and on the use of the electronic system(s), scoring rubrics, scoring applications, and sample student responses.

Upon the successful completion of each course, participants will have the ability to print a certificate of completion, including a specific number of CEUs. This certificate can then be submitted by the participant to the LEA for professional development credit.

This paradigm shift from face-to-face to electronic professional development delivery empowers teachers and allows them to access training according to their schedules. The new Writing Assessment System also empowers teachers in that they are directly involved in the assessment process.

II. A Comparison of Current and Proposed Writing Assessment

	Traditional Assessment of Writing	Proposed New Assessment of Writing for 4 and 7
When we assess	One prompt administered statewide on one day-historically during March	Four content-specific writing tasks/assignments (two in first year pilot) completed during the school year (formative), two on-demand tasks/assignments, one in late fall, one in late spring (benchmark, summative)
How we assess	Only paper/pencil administrations	Entire system at grade 7 electronic based
Why we assess	One score for accountability purposes	To collect formative and summative assessment data and use this data to provide feedback to improve student writing.
How we assess	Writing instruction delivered in preparation for a single day test	Year-long writing instruction (implementing the writing process) delivered across all content areas for different types of writing tasks/assignments
How we train	Professional development consisted of the publication of scorer training materials and online score applications	Professional development consists of online instructional modules, such as writing across the curriculum, formative assessment and online assessment modules such as understanding the various applications of the scoring rubrics, the differences between scoring content-specific writing tasks/assignments and on-demand tasks/assignments
Who scores assessment	Student responses scored by contractor	Student responses scored by educators/ teachers (2 independent scorers for on-demand and 2 scorers for content-specific)

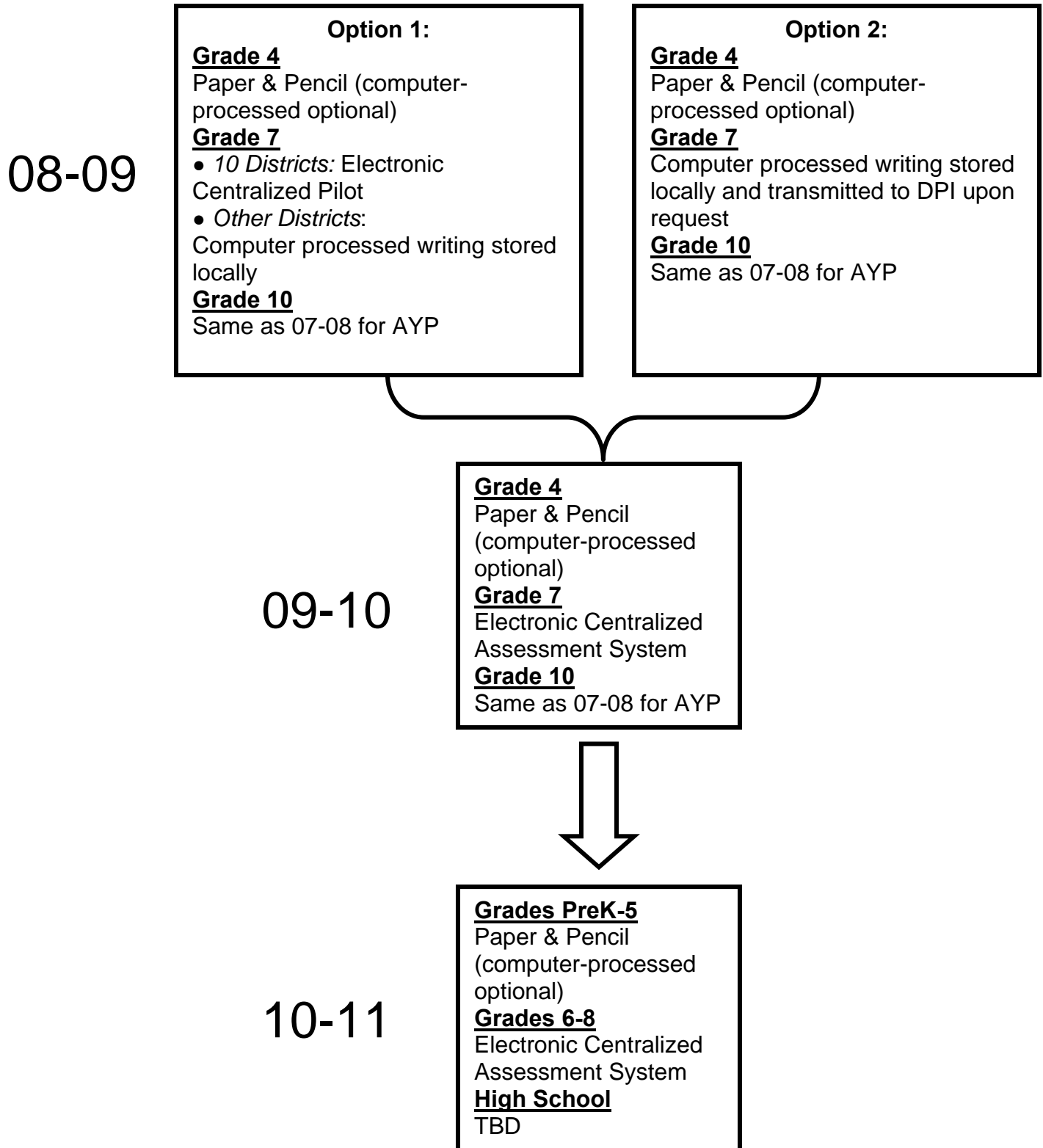
Sample Prompts

In the new model, we ask students to perform authentic writing tasks that mirror what they will see in post-secondary education and in work. The right hand samples will allow for a richer and deeper assessment of student writing when compared with the traditional on-demand prompts in the left column.

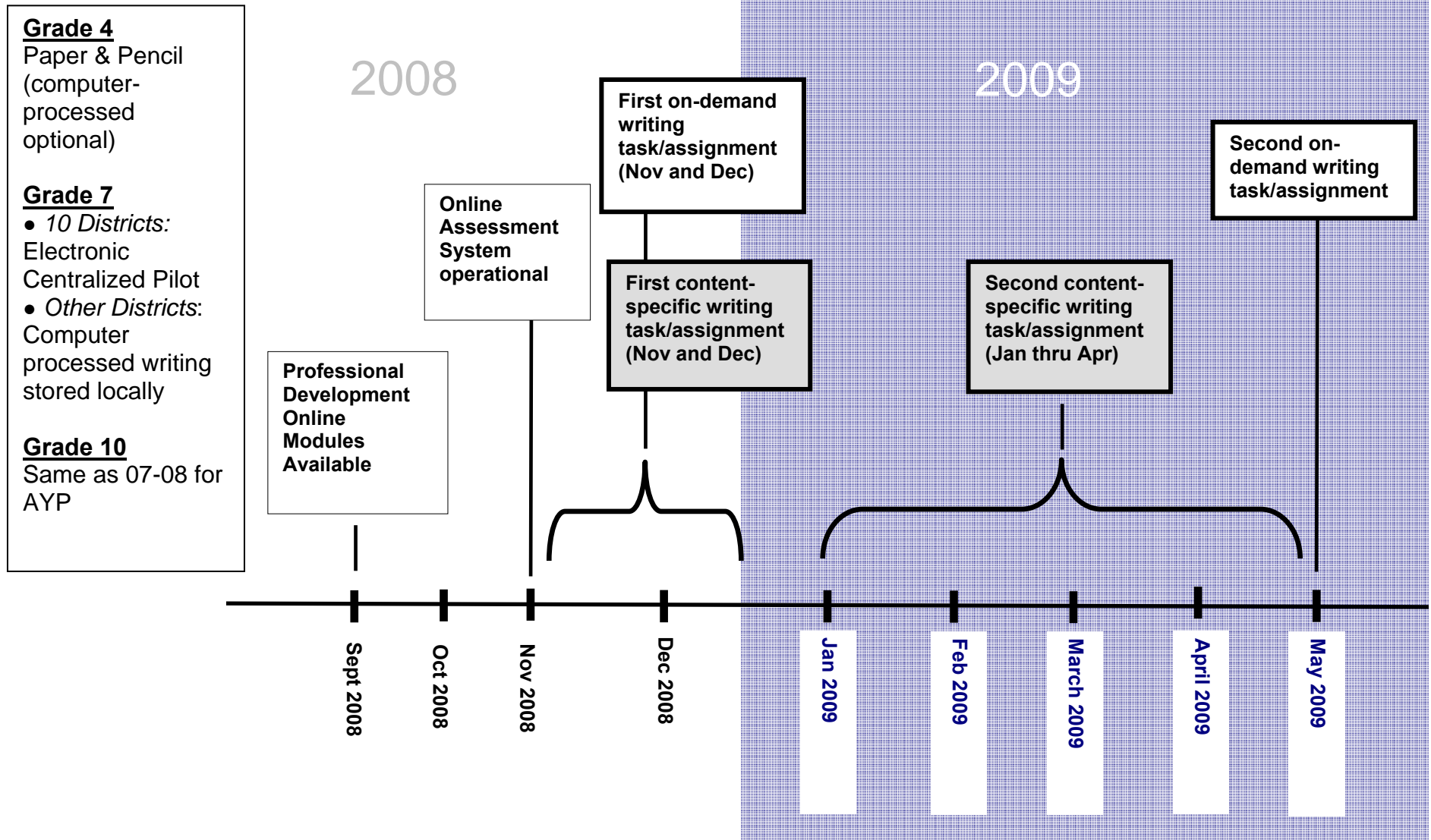
Sample On-Demand Prompt	Sample Authentic Content-Specific Prompt
<p>At the end of every school year, your principal chooses one way the school could be improved. Your principal bases the choice on recommendations from students. This year students proposed the following improvements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An outdoor lunch area • New sports equipment for the gym • Laptop for student checkout <p>Write a letter to your principal justifying which improvement would be best for your school.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">• MUSIC •</p> <p><i>Choose two famous musicians with differing styles, rhythm, and repertoires. Compare the interpretation of the same song performed by both musicians. Be sure to include correct music terminology. Your assignment is not to exceed 700 words.</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">• MATH •</p> <p><i>Julie would like to divide a small plot of land (200 ft x 150 ft) into two sections. One section is for her horses and one section is for her vegetable garden. She wants to use fencing she already has that can make almost any shape. She has 110 pieces of fencing. Each piece is 4 yards long. How could Julie divide her land so that the fenced in area for the horses is as large as possible and there is enough land left for the vegetable garden?</i></p> <p><i>Be sure to include</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A written report explaining which geometric shape would work best for Julie • Calculations, charts, or graphs which support your opinion • A rule or statement about how the area and shape of any fenced in area are related mathematically <p><i>Your assignment is not to exceed 700 words/characters.</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">• SCIENCE •</p> <p><i>Write a letter to the editor concerning animal rights and the protection of endangered species. Be sure your letter to the editor includes</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A logical, defensible position • An historical background of this issue • The position of advocacy groups speaking out on this issue • Specific examples and projections for the future <p><i>Your assignment is not to exceed 700 words.</i></p>

III. Implementation and Timelines

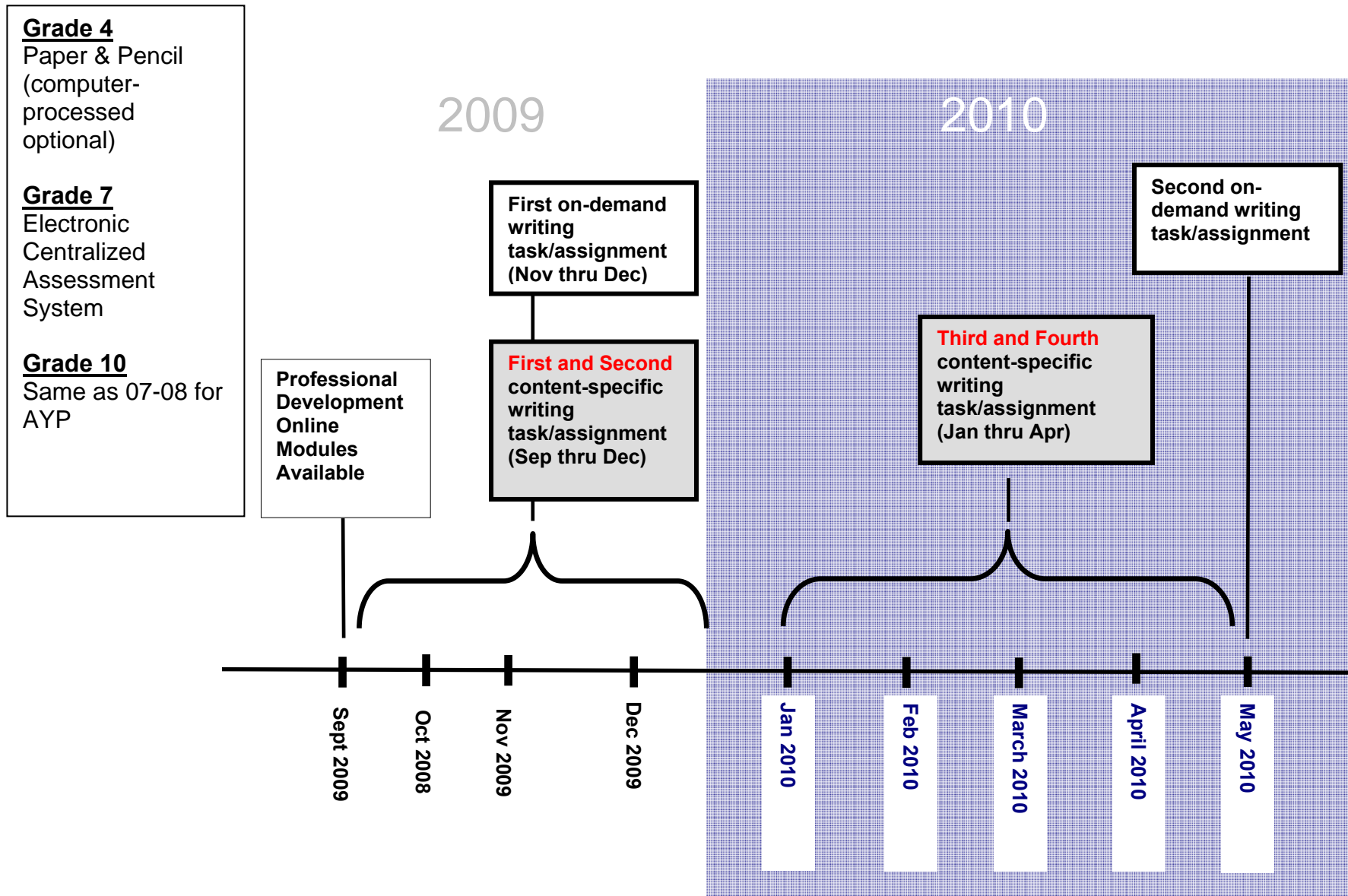
Currently DPI is considering the following implementation scenarios. The vision is the same starting in 09-10 however two options can be pursued in 08-09 to achieve the same step forward in writing assessment.



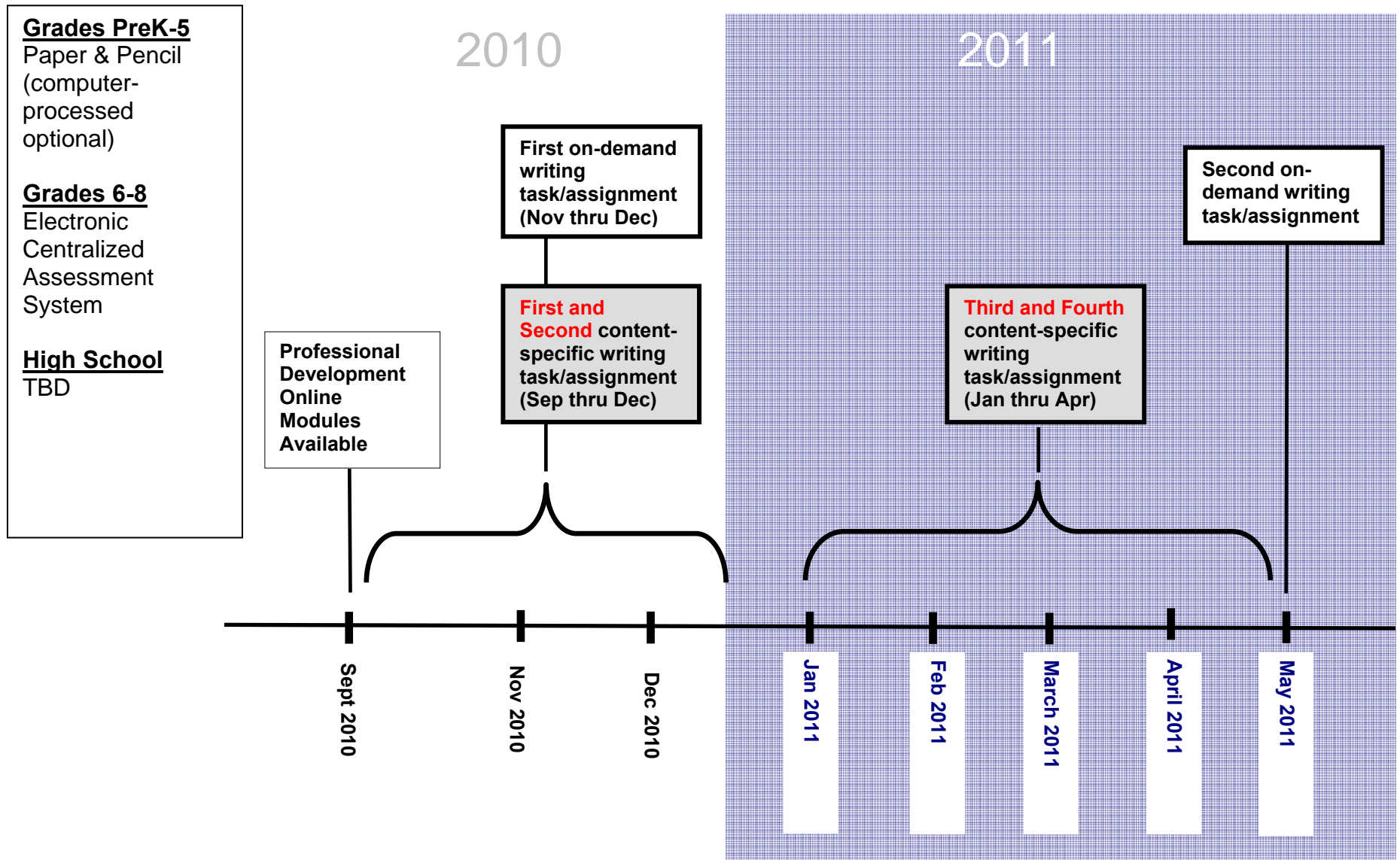
Timeline for 08-09 Writing Pilot



Timeline for 09 - 10 Writing Pilot



Timeline for 10 - 11 Writing Pilot



IV. Rubrics

Content Area Rubric

This scoring rubric applies to the content-specific writing tasks/assignments in content areas such as Mathematics, Sciences, Social Sciences, Humanities, Arts, Technology, etc and will be used in conjunction with the writing features and convention rubrics below.

Points	Descriptions
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The student response addresses all aspects of the writing task/assignment• All directions are followed• Appropriate and accurate specific examples are cited and explained• Sound reasoning is employed• Use of the skills of evaluation, analysis, and synthesis is apparent
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The student response addresses most aspects of the writing task/assignment• Most directions are followed• Appropriate examples are cited and explained, however, some inaccurate information is included• Reasoning employed is on the inferential level• Use of the skills of synthesis and analysis is apparent
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The student response addresses some aspects of the writing task/assignment• Some directions are followed• Some examples may be cited, may attempt to be explained, and inaccurate information is included• Reasoning employed is on the concrete level• Use of literal skills is apparent
0	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The student response addresses no aspect of the writing task/assignment• Few or no directions are followed• Examples, if cited, are inaccurate or inappropriate• There is little or no evidence of any reasoning employed• There is little or no evidence of any apparent skills

Writing Features Rubric

The writing features rubric will be used to assess both the on-demand responses and content-specific writing tasks. The writing features rubric has been back-mapped to the NC Graduation Project.

Points	Descriptions
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topic/subject is clear, though it may or may not be explicitly stated • Maintains focus on topic/subject throughout the response • Organizational structure establishes relationships between and among ideas and/or events • Consists of a logical progression of ideas and/or events and is unified and complete • Support and elaboration are related to and supportive of the topic/subject • Consists of specific, developed details • Exhibits skillful use of vocabulary that is precise and purposeful • Demonstrates skillful use of sentence fluency
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topic/subject is generally clear, though it may or may not be explicitly stated • May exhibit minor lapses in focus on topic/subject • Organizational structure establishes relationships between and among ideas and/or events, although minor lapses may be present • Consists of a logical progression of ideas and/or events and is reasonably complete, although minor lapses may be present • Support and elaboration may have minor weaknesses in relatedness to and support of the topic/subject • Consists of some specific details • Exhibits reasonable use of vocabulary that is precise and purposeful • Demonstrates reasonable use of sentence fluency
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topic/subject may be vague • May lose or may exhibit lapses in focus on topic/subject • Organizational structure may establish little relationship between and among ideas and/or events • May have major lapses in the logical progression of ideas and/or events and is minimally complete • Support and elaboration may have major weaknesses in relatedness to and support of the topic/subject • Consists of general and/or undeveloped details, which may be presented in a list-like fashion • Exhibits minimal use of vocabulary that is precise and purposeful • Demonstrates minimal use of sentence fluency
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topic/subject is unclear or confusing • May fail to establish focus on topic/subject • Organizational structure may not establish connection between and among ideas and/or events • May consist of ideas and/or events that are presented in a random fashion and is incomplete or confusing • Support and elaboration attempt to support the topic/subject but may be unrelated or confusing • Consists of sparse details • Lacks use of vocabulary that is precise and purposeful • May not demonstrate sentence fluency
NS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This code may be used for compositions that are entirely illegible or otherwise unscorable: blank responses, responses written in a foreign language, restatements of the prompts, and responses that are off topic or incoherent.

Writing Conventions Rubric

The writing conventions rubric will be used to assess both the on-demand responses and content-specific writing tasks.

Points	Descriptions
2	Exhibits reasonable control of grammatical conventions appropriate to the writing task <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Exhibits reasonable control of sentence formation• Exhibits reasonable control of standard usage including agreement, tense, and case• Exhibits reasonable control of mechanics including use of capitalization, punctuation, and spelling
1	Exhibits minimal control of grammatical conventions appropriate to the writing task <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Exhibits minimal control of sentence formation• Exhibits minimal control of standard usage including agreement, tense, and case• Exhibits minimal control of mechanics including use of capitalization, punctuation, and spelling
0	Lacks control of grammatical conventions appropriate to the writing task <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lacks control of sentence formation• Lacks control of standard usage including agreement, tense, and case• Lacks control of mechanics including use of capitalization, punctuation, and spelling

V. Writing Professional Development

Two professional development courses, each with three modules, will be offered on-line. All teachers must complete and demonstrate mastery of the content in these modules.

Writing Assessment System Online Course	Writing Instructional Delivery Online Course
<p>Module 1— Writing Assessment System Operation Designed to Answer:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the computer requirements for the writing assessment system? • How do I operate the computer system functions for the writing assessment system? • What are the steps for operation? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Operations to be performed BEFORE each assessment window ○ Operations to be performed DURING each assessment window ○ Operations to be performed AFTER each assessment window • When will each assessment window open and close for the submission of student responses and scoring the student responses? 	<p>Module 1 - Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC): Designed to Answer:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why is the Teacher as a Writer powerful and how does it effect classroom instruction? • How do teachers use writing to help students learn? • How can teachers implement writing across and among the content areas?
<p>Module 2— Writing Assessment System Introduction: Designed to answer:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the writing assessment system? • Who has to participate in the writing assessment system? • When do I start participating in the writing assessment system? • How is the writing assessment system used in Accountability? • Why is this system being piloted at Grades 4 and 7? 	<p>Module 2 - Understanding Types of Writing Assessments: Designed to Answer:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is effective feedback and how do I to provide it to students? • What are the purposes of formative assessment, and how does it support writing across content areas? • What are strategies for implementing formative assessment within classroom instruction?
<p>Module 3— Writing Assessment System Scoring Designed to answer:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What type of responses will students be asked to submit for the writing assessment system? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Authentic writing tasks/assignments—4 total from different content areas (2 each semester) ○ On-Demand submissions—2 total from state-provided prompts (1 each semester) • What are the criteria for scoring the writing assessment submissions? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Content Area rubric and composing features ○ On-Demand rubric and composing features 	<p>Module 3 - Deconstructing Writing Tasks & Using Rubrics: Designed to Answer:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the types of writing tasks and how are they constructed? • How to evaluate a writing sample using a rubric as an assessment tool?

*More detailed outlines of the modules are available.