



# **A New TASC Test Performance Level:** Distinguished Achievement Benchmark



### **A New TASC Test Performance Level: Distinguished Achievement Benchmark**

Data Recognition Corporation is the leader in developing assessments for the adult basic education market. DRC assessments have passed rigorous reviews at the state and federal level, and for more than 50 years, the Tests of Adult Basic Education (TABE®) have been the premier measure of achievement used by educators, states, and employers to assess the knowledge and skills of adult learners. DRC's expertise and capabilities in assessing adult basic education supported the company's ability to respond to states' need for a high quality, affordable, and accessible high school equivalency (HSE) assessment.

Recently some states and institutions of higher education have indicated that it would be helpful to have an additional, higher set of cut scores with an added level of insight into the skills, knowledge, and abilities examinees bring to their postsecondary endeavors or job pursuits. DRC is proud to introduce these new cut scores which are called the TASC Test Distinguished Achievement Benchmarks.

### **What is the TASC Test Distinguished Achievement Benchmark?**

The TASC Test Assessing Secondary Completion™ offers three performance levels, which are Not Yet Passing, Passing, and Distinguished Achievement. The Passing performance level determines whether examinees are eligible to receive their HSE credential. Those examinees have demonstrated a minimum level of performance in each TASC test content area which is equivalent to that of a sample of graduating high school seniors. The TASC Test Distinguished Achievement performance level is used to determine whether the examinee has earned an advanced level of performance achievement on each TASC test content area.

This third performance level for the TASC test is the Distinguished Achievement Benchmark that acknowledges a higher level of achievement earned by examinees in the areas of Mathematics, Reading, and Writing. Additionally, the award provides college Admissions Officers and employers with an added level of insight into the set of knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) examinees bring to their postsecondary endeavors or job pursuits. When viewed in conjunction with the new Proficiency Level Descriptors recently published for the TASC test, decision makers have a clear picture of exactly what an examinee knows and can do at a variety of cut scores.

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## Interpreting TASC Test Scores

While the scale for the TASC test was established to have a common HSE scale score cut of 500 for passing across subject areas, the TASC Test Distinguished Achievement scale score cuts vary, with the Reading cut score higher (580) than those for Mathematics and Writing (560). Note that the Writing test requires a minimum score on the Essay, in addition to the scale score cut of 500, as shown in the table below.

Subject	Passing Score	Distinguished Achievement Score
Language Arts Reading	500	580
Mathematics	500	560
Language Arts Writing	500 and at least a 2 out of 8 on the Writing essay	560 and at least a 6 out of 8 on the Writing essay

In addition to the cut scores in the table above, Performance Level Descriptors (PLDs) provide more information about the types of skills and knowledge examinees at or above the passing and the TASC Test Distinguished Achievement cut scores can be expected to have. Although these descriptions are useful for characterizing many of the types of skills and knowledge held by examinees, they are only a sample.

## Methodology

DRC conducted a standard-setting study in June 2015 for the TASC test Reading, Writing, and Mathematics assessments. Community college instructors from Indiana and New York—with experience in teaching remedial and entry-level credit-bearing courses in either Mathematics or English Language Arts (ELA)—participated in reviewing the skills required to successfully answer items on the TASC test. These instructors then helped in determining which skills were necessary to succeed in entry-level college courses. The scale scores that corresponded with mastering most of these skills were identified as possible cut scores for a TASC Test Distinguished Achievement.

The panelists who participated in the study completed the following tasks:

- Reviewed the skills required to successfully answer items on the TASC test.
- Identified the skills necessary to be better prepared for entry-level college courses.
- Examined the scale scores that corresponded with skills mastery.
- Discussed, reviewed, and suggested possible cut scores for TASC Test Distinguished Achievement.

As an external validity check, the results for the 2014 Smarter Balanced Achievement Level Standard Setting results were used to compare their percentage of students at Level 3 and above (ELA: 41%; Mathematics: 33%) with the TASC test percentage at or above the TASC Test Distinguished Achievement cut score. The expectation that a lower percentage of examinees would be at or above the TASC Test Distinguished Achievement cut score compared to the Smarter Balanced Level 3 or above was used in this validation. TASC Test Distinguished Achievement cut scores are based on requirements for examinee mastery of the majority of the skills identified by standard setting participants, and that the proposed TASC Test Distinguished Achievement cut scores be more stringent (i.e., lower percentages of examinees at or above the cut score) than the Smarter Balanced Level 3 and above.

## Benefits of Distinguished Achievement Cut Scores

- Help examinees, college admissions officers, and employers make better decisions regarding potential academic and career success.
- Enable the community to recognize examinees that have demonstrated a higher level of ability as compared to examinees earning the Passing score.

## Performance Level Descriptors

Use these Performance Level Descriptors (PLDs) to better understand an examinee's TASC test scores. They explain the depth of knowledge, skills, and abilities typical of students in each performance level.

# Mathematics:

## Knowledge and Skills Typical of Students in Each Performance Level

Domain	Not Yet Passing Scale Scores 300–499	Passing Scale Scores 500–559	Distinguished Achievement Scale Scores 560–800
	Test-takers who have not reached a passing score may be able to use part or all of the CCR Standards skills below. They are encouraged to continue studying and practicing the knowledge and skills in the Passing column (to the right).	Passing test-takers' knowledge and skills are likely to include those in the Not Yet Passing column (to the left). They may also have competence in the skills listed below and knowledge of how to use them.	Distinguished test-takers' knowledge and skills are likely to include those listed in the Not Yet Passing and Passing columns (to the left). They have developed knowledge and skills in the CCR Standards and apply them ably.
Number and Quantity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rewrite expressions with radicals and compute using properties of exponents.</li> <li>• Distinguish between rational and irrational sums and products of rational and irrational numbers.</li> <li>• Use rational approximations of irrational numbers to compare their size.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rewrite expressions with rational exponents using the properties of exponents.</li> <li>• Identify the sums and products of rational and irrational numbers as rational or irrational.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rewrite expressions with radicals using the properties of exponents.</li> <li>• Explain why the sum or product of rational numbers is rational; why the sum of a rational and irrational number is irrational; and why the product of a nonzero rational number and an irrational number is irrational.</li> </ul>
Algebra	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create equations in one variable and use them to solve problems.</li> <li>• Solve simple rational equations in one variable.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create equations in two variables and use them to solve problems.</li> <li>• Solve simple radical equations in one variable.</li> <li>• Use the structure of an expression to identify ways to rewrite it.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create inequalities in one variable and use them to solve problems.</li> <li>• Complete the square in a quadratic expression to reveal the minimum or maximum value of the function it defines.</li> <li>• Solve linear inequalities in one variable and systems of linear equations exactly and approximately.</li> </ul>



## Mathematics (cont.)

Domain	Not Yet Passing Scale Scores 300–499	Passing Scale Scores 500–559	Distinguished Achievement Scale Scores 560–800
Algebra (cont.)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Solve linear equations in one variable.</li> <li>• Interpret parts of an expression, such as terms, factors, and coefficients.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Represent constraints by equations or inequalities, and by systems of equations and/or inequalities, and interpret solutions as viable or nonviable.</li> <li>• Solve a simple system of a linear equation and a quadratic equation in two variables algebraically and graphically.</li> <li>• Add, subtract, and multiply polynomials.</li> <li>• Identify the graph of a linear inequality and a system of linear inequalities in two variables.</li> </ul>
Functions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Write arithmetic sequences and use them to model situations.</li> <li>• Interpret key features of graphs, including intercepts and intervals where the function is increasing or decreasing, and calculate or interpret the average rate of change.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use function notation and evaluate functions for inputs in their domains.</li> <li>• Interpret the parameters in a linear function in terms of a context.</li> <li>• Construct linear functions, given a graph, a description of a relationship, or input-output pairs.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interpret the parameters in an exponential function in terms of a context.</li> <li>• Determine an explicit expression or steps for calculation from a context.</li> <li>• Use the process of factoring and completing the square in a quadratic function to show zeros.</li> <li>• Calculate and interpret the average rate of change of a function over a specified interval.</li> <li>• Relate the domain of a function to its graph and to the quantitative relationship it describes.</li> <li>• Identify the effect on the graph of replacing <math>f(x)</math> by <math>f(x) + k</math> and find the value of <math>k</math>.</li> <li>• Compare the properties of two functions, each represented in a different way.</li> <li>• Understand radian measure of an angle as the length of the arc on the unit circle subtended by the angle.</li> </ul>

## Mathematics (cont.)

Domain	Not Yet Passing Scale Scores 300–499	Passing Scale Scores 500–559	Distinguished Achievement Scale Scores 560–800
Geometry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Apply concepts of density based on area and volume in modeling situations.</li> <li>• Know precise definitions of angle, circle, parallel and perpendicular line, and line segment, based on the undefined notions of point, line, and distance along a line.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use congruence and similarity criteria for triangles to solve problems and prove relationships in geometric figures.</li> <li>• Use volume formulas for cylinders, pyramids, and cones to solve problems.</li> <li>• Use geometric descriptions of rigid motions to transform figures and to predict the effect of a given rigid motion on a given figure.</li> <li>• Apply geometric methods to solve design problems.</li> <li>• Identify the shapes of two-dimensional cross sections of three-dimensional objects.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use trigonometric ratios and the Pythagorean theorem to solve right triangles in applied problems.</li> </ul>
Statistics and Probability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Represent data with plots on the real number line (histograms and dot and box plots).</li> <li>• Interpret the slope (rate of change) and intercept (constant term) of a linear model in the context of the data.</li> <li>• Understand statistics as a process for making inferences about population parameters based on a random sample from that population.</li> <li>• Distinguish between correlation and causation.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use statistics appropriate to the shape of the data distribution to compare the center of two different data sets.</li> <li>• Summarize categorical data for two categories in two-way frequency tables and interpret relative frequencies in the context of the data.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Describe events as subsets of a sample space using characteristics of the outcomes.</li> <li>• Understand and explain the concepts of conditional probability and independence in everyday language and everyday situations.</li> <li>• Understand the conditional probability of A given B.</li> </ul>

## Reading: Knowledge and Skills Typical of Students in Each Performance Level

Domain	Not Yet Passing Scale Scores 300–499	Passing Scale Scores 500–559 (at least 2 of 8 on Essay)	Distinguished Achievement Scale Scores 560–800 (at least 6 of 8 on Essay)
	Test-takers who have not reached a passing score may be able to use part or all of the CCR Standards skills below. They are encouraged to continue studying and practicing the knowledge and skills in the Passing column (to the right).	Passing test-takers' knowledge and skills are likely to include those in the Not Yet Passing column (to the left). They may also have competence in the skills listed below and knowledge of how to use them.	Distinguished test-takers' knowledge and skills are likely to include those listed in the Not Yet Passing and Passing columns (to the left). They have developed knowledge and skills in the CCR Standards and apply them ably.
Reading Informational Texts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify an author's purpose for placing key information in specific parts of a text.</li> <li>• Use information conveyed by an image to clarify a key idea developed in a text.</li> <li>• Determine the best support for a key idea in a text of low to medium complexity.</li> <li>• Determine the best support for a given theme.</li> <li>• Make simple inferences based on explicit references in a scientific/technical or historical/social studies text.</li> <li>• Identify the significance of a specific portion of a text to the development of the central idea.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify the primary purpose of informational text.</li> <li>• Determine contextual support for key concepts in straightforward text.</li> <li>• Determine a central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text.</li> <li>• Draw simple conclusions from a text.</li> <li>• Provide simple summaries of texts.</li> <li>• Identify how text structure contributes to the understanding of text.</li> <li>• Determine claims and effect of author's use of language on text style and rhetoric.</li> <li>• Identify how text structure contributes to the organization of ideas.</li> <li>• Analyze visual representations of straightforward text concepts.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Determine contextual support for key concepts in complex text.</li> <li>• Analyze the development of implied central ideas in and across texts.</li> <li>• Analyze text structure to draw complex conclusions/inferences about main ideas and/or author's purpose.</li> <li>• Analyze text structure to determine organization and effect on development of ideas and concepts.</li> <li>• Analyze key details in complex text.</li> <li>• Evaluate claims and effect of author's use of language on text style and effectiveness of rhetoric.</li> <li>• Analyze and evaluate effectiveness of text structure on key events and presentation of critical concepts and information.</li> <li>• Determine subtle central ideas and analyze their development over the course of texts.</li> <li>• Provide in-depth, objective summaries of texts.</li> <li>• Determine contextual support for key concepts in complex texts.</li> <li>• Evaluate the development and relevance of claims or arguments across texts.</li> </ul>

## Reading (cont.)

Domain	Not Yet Passing Scale Scores 300–499	Passing Scale Scores 500–559 (at least 2 of 8 on Essay)	Distinguished Achievement Scale Scores 560–800 (at least 6 of 8 on Essay)
Reading Informational Texts (cont.)			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evaluate the development of themes or central ideas across texts.</li> <li>• Compare authors' points of view across texts.</li> <li>• Evaluate the use of text structure within and across texts.</li> <li>• Analyze and compare the meanings of words and phrases within and across texts.</li> <li>• Determine nuances in meanings of words and the meanings of technical words and concepts in context.</li> <li>• Analyze and evaluate visual representations of complex text concepts.</li> </ul>
Reading Literary Texts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explain how a character's attitude affects interaction with others in the story.</li> <li>• Determine the narrator's feelings about a key idea.</li> <li>• Determine the support that best contributes to a character's trait(s).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify characters' feelings, motivations, and traits over the course of a text.</li> <li>• Determine the theme or central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text.</li> <li>• Draw simple conclusions/inferences about theme across two similar texts.</li> <li>• Provide simple summaries of texts.</li> <li>• Draw simple conclusions about mood across two similar or different texts.</li> <li>• Recognize key details in straightforward text.</li> <li>• Recognize supporting evidence in straightforward text.</li> <li>• Identify characters' points of view in straightforward text.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Determine contextual support for key concepts in complex text.</li> <li>• Determine two or more subtle themes or central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they build on one another.</li> <li>• Analyze characters' development, motivations, interactions, and points of view.</li> <li>• Analyze how an author's choice of specific, sophisticated words conveys meaning and affects tone.</li> <li>• Analyze and evaluate the effect of text structure on plot, character development, and aesthetics.</li> <li>• Provide thorough, objective summaries.</li> <li>• Analyze main ideas, key details, themes, setting, and use of text structure in and across texts to draw conclusions.</li> <li>• Evaluate the use of irony.</li> </ul>



## Reading (cont.)

Domain	Not Yet Passing Scale Scores 300–499	Passing Scale Scores 500–559 (at least 2 of 8 on Essay)	Distinguished Achievement Scale Scores 560–800 (at least 6 of 8 on Essay)
Reading Literary Texts (cont.)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Determine how text structure influences plot development.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evaluate the effect of the author’s use of language on tone and mood.</li> </ul>
Language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use context clues to determine the closest meaning of a technical term in a straightforward informational text.</li> <li>• Use context clues to identify the meaning of a word.</li> <li>• Determine the term that best matches a given definition.</li> <li>• Determine the meaning of an idiomatic phrase as it is used in a text.</li> <li>• Use context clues to determine the meaning of a technical word and apply the appropriate version of the word in a similar context.</li> <li>• Use context clues to determine the meaning of a one-syllable word.</li> <li>• Use context clues to determine the meaning of a word in a straightforward historical text.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Determine meaning of words using dictionary definitions.</li> <li>• Identify correct use of words based on context.</li> <li>• Determine nuances of words.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Analyze figurative and connotative meanings of sophisticated words and phrases in text.</li> <li>• Analyze and compare the meanings of words and phrases in text and across texts.</li> <li>• Analyze nuances in meanings of words and the meanings of technical words and concepts in context.</li> <li>• Evaluate figurative language.</li> <li>• Infer the meaning of sophisticated words in context.</li> <li>• Analyze meanings of challenging words using dictionary definitions.</li> </ul>

## Writing:

### Knowledge and Skills Typical of Students in Each Performance Level

Domain	Not Yet Passing Scale Scores 300–499	Passing Scale Scores 500–559 (at least 2 of 8 on Essay)	Distinguished Achievement Scale Scores 560–800 (at least 6 of 8 on Essay)
	Test-takers who have not reached a passing score may be able to use part or all of the CCR Standards skills below. They are encouraged to continue studying and practicing the knowledge and skills in the Passing column (to the right).	Passing test-takers' knowledge and skills are likely to include those in the Not Yet Passing column (to the left). They may also have competence in the skills listed below and knowledge of how to use them.	Distinguished test-takers' knowledge and skills are likely to include those listed in the Not Yet Passing and Passing columns (to the left). They have developed knowledge and skills in the CCR Standards and apply them ably.
Language Arts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify sentences that correctly use verbal phrases.</li> <li>• Identify the most precise and vivid verb to complete a sentence.</li> <li>• Determine which form of punctuation is needed after an introductory phrase.</li> <li>• Revise given sentences to form a compound sentence that best reflects an appropriate order of events.</li> <li>• Use context clues to correct a verb tense shift in a paragraph.</li> <li>• Review given style guide rules to determine the appropriate placement of quotation marks with a specific word from a text.</li> <li>• Establish the main claim presented in a paragraph.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Choose a word that conveys precise meaning to complete a sentence.</li> <li>• Replace an archaic word with a more contemporary one, given ample contextual support.</li> <li>• Maintain a sequence of ideas when combining sentences.</li> <li>• Choose a transitional word that best completes a sentence.</li> <li>• Identify parallel structure in a sentence.</li> <li>• Place subordinate information and modifying words or phrases correctly when combining sentences.</li> <li>• Locate support for a claim in a short paragraph.</li> <li>• Identify sentences that have correctly placed commas between adjectives in a sentence.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Choose a precise and appropriate transitional word that links ideas within a paragraph.</li> <li>• Revise a sentence for parallel structure.</li> <li>• Combine sentences for clarity, conciseness, and emphasis of specific ideas.</li> <li>• Recognize the correct hyphenation of words.</li> <li>• Revise a sentence for correct use of commas between adjectives.</li> <li>• Select an appropriate subheading for a paragraph.</li> <li>• Recognize conditional, indicative, and imperative moods.</li> <li>• Revise or express ideas concisely.</li> <li>• Use a colon to introduce a list.</li> <li>• Identify a subject in a complex sentence.</li> <li>• Revise or combine sentences or vary syntax to emphasize a specific idea or convey a specific meaning with or without guidelines.</li> <li>• Identify verbal phrases and their functions.</li> <li>• Identify information to support a claim in a text.</li> </ul>

## Writing (cont.)

Domain	Not Yet Passing Scale Scores 300–499	Passing Scale Scores 500–559 (at least 2 of 8 on Essay)	Distinguished Achievement Scale Scores 560–800 (at least 6 of 8 on Essay)
Language Arts (cont.)			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use active and passive voice for effect.</li> <li>• Identify irrelevant material in a text.</li> <li>• Maintain a formal and objective tone when appropriate.</li> <li>• Replace an archaic word with a more contemporary one, even with few contextual clues.</li> <li>• Choose a transitional word that links paragraphs within a text.</li> <li>• Maintain parallel structure in a bulleted list.</li> <li>• Correct shifts in voice, mood, and tense.</li> <li>• Identify support for a claim in a complex text.</li> <li>• Identify a misspelled word using the context of a sentence or paragraph.</li> <li>• Reduce wordiness or redundancy.</li> <li>• Identify the functions of various phrases/clauses in a variety of sentences and contexts.</li> <li>• Use a semicolon to connect two ideas.</li> <li>• Follow style manual guidelines.</li> <li>• Use ellipses to indicate omission of text.</li> </ul>

## Writing (cont.)

Domain	Not Yet Passing Scale Scores 300–499	Passing Scale Scores 500–559 (at least 2 of 8 on Essay)	Distinguished Achievement Scale Scores 560–800 (at least 6 of 8 on Essay)
Writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use context to determine the best transition word to use in a given paragraph.</li> <li>• Provide simplistic conclusions.</li> <li>• Produce writing with simplistic claims and minimal support.</li> <li>• Use overly simplistic or nonspecific vocabulary.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Select an appropriate heading for a paragraph.</li> <li>• Provide an introduction for a piece of writing.</li> <li>• Develop a topic with some relevant information when writing.</li> <li>• Use a general organizational structure when writing.</li> <li>• Provide a conclusion that is generally supported by the information presented.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Select the best title for a text.</li> <li>• Add an introduction to clarify the main concept of a paragraph.</li> <li>• Use voice and mood to maintain appropriate tone.</li> <li>• Identify material that supports a text.</li> <li>• Provide a concluding statement for a paragraph or text.</li> <li>• Support a topic with relevant information when writing.</li> <li>• Use clear word choices including transitional words and words that maintain appropriate tone when writing.</li> <li>• Provide a clear introduction when writing.</li> <li>• Use strategic organization when writing.</li> <li>• Provide an insightful conclusion that follows from and supports information presented.</li> <li>• Write an essay with very few errors in usage and conventions.</li> </ul>

For additional information on the TASC Test Distinguished Achievement Benchmark visit [TASCTest.com](http://TASCTest.com) or call DRC at 800.538.9547.