



## **MOST SIGNIFICANT COMMON CORE KEY TERMS**

Research has shown that students' understanding of just 55 "critical words" contributes to 85% of success on standardized assessments that are aligned with Common Core according to Marilee Sprenger, a noted expert on child literacy and brain development (<http://www.marileesprenger.com/the-critical-words.html>). Below are listed the 27 terms that are embedded *most often* in both in Common Core and the PARCC, collated into three levels of increasing complexity. I have included relevant definitions aligned with each level of cognitive difficulty along with the number of times I found each term cited in all 56 pages of Common Core English Language Arts Standards. Obviously, in the near term, not all these concepts can be taught in preparation for the initial implementation of the PARCC or Smarter Balanced assessments scheduled for the 2014-2015 school year. However, since *all* students' scores on the upcoming standardized assessments are factored in, irrespective of individual students' learning capacity, an effort can be made to match students' cognitive capability with the appropriate level of the three noted below.

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**Text (561):** The main body of matter in a manuscript, book, newspaper, etc., as distinguished from notes, appendixes, headings, illustrations, etc. The original words of an author or speaker, as opposed to a translation, paraphrase, commentary, or the like: e.g. "The newspaper published the whole text of the speech."

**Note:** *For the purposes of Common Core and the PARCC, content should not be thought of as limited to "text." Content is content (music, art, historical events, scientific experiments, statistical data, video games, movies, commercial advertisements, etc.) regardless of source! Definition: Content - substantive information or creative material viewed in contrast to its actual or potential manner of presentation.*

### **LEVEL I:**

**Compare (31):** Examine in order to note *likenesses* between two things or what they have in common

**Contrast (35):** Examine in order to note significant *differences* between two or more things

**Describe (34):** To tell or show with written or spoken words; point out facts or details

**Identify (38):** To establish as particular by noting individual features or characteristics in isolation.

**Story (46):** The plot or succession of incidents of a novel, poem, drama, etc.

**Demonstrate (86):** To describe, explain, display or illustrate through examples

**Determine (89):** To decide or conclude through reasoning or observation.

**Explain (43):** To make clear or understandable to others; make plain.

**Support (140):** To back up, justify your answer, opinion, or claim (with evidence)

**Details (101):** Elements that support ideas; smaller elements of structure.

## **LEVEL II:**

**Develop (116):** Expand, elaborate; add details.

**Narrative (29):** A sequence of events, experiences, or the like, whether true or fictitious.

**Central/Main Idea (188):** The author's most important idea or the cognitive catalyst for the creation of his work. Idea - Any conception existing in the mind as a result of mental understanding, awareness, or activity.

**Theme (39):** A unifying or dominant idea or motif. Often the answer to the question, "What did I *learn*?"

**Explicit (27):** Clear, leaving no room for interpretation, leaving nothing merely implied.

**Infer (22):** To deduce, conclude, to derive by reasoning; to guess, figure out or surmise from evidence. An "inference" is the answer to the question, "Why is that/it there?"

**Summarize (12):** (Note: a specific prompt in the PARCC) To state or express in concise form the essential components of something, usually chronologically.

**Evidence (121):** That which proves or disproves; that which makes plain or clear. Facts.

**Structure (64):** Essential elements of something. The relationship or organization of *component* parts.

## **LEVEL III:**

**Figurative language (24):** Based in figures of speech, especially metaphorical; not literal; expand meaning.

**Analyze (146):** To break down into its constituents parts and examine them; determine meaning from.

**Context (58):** The parts of a written or spoken statement that precede or follow a specific word or passage, usually influencing its meaning or effect: e.g. "You have misinterpreted my remark because you took it out of context." The set of circumstances or facts that surround a particular event, situation, etc.

**Cite (20):** To quote specifically, recall.

**Evaluate (40):** To make a judgment, to set a value on.

**Assess (27):** To measure, to determine the amount of.

**Argument (43):** A process of reasoning, a discussion involving different points of view, a set of reasons why something is true.

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On the following page are listed the key terms that appear most often on PARCC sample questions and explanatory materials found on the PARCC website. These are the terms that should be addressed as early as possible within the 2014-2015 school year in preparation for implementation of standardized tests. I'd like to point out parenthetically that these "cognitive processes," as represented by these terms, are useful, if not even critical, for students' understanding in general as they grow into capable adults. Imagine if "teaching to the test," by developing these thinking skills, would actually contribute to a student's life-long learning!

## **MOST PREVALENT TERMS ON WHICH PARCC QUESTIONS AND PROMPTS ARE BASED**

### **ACTION**

#### **Analyze**

(To break down into its constituent parts)

#### **Identify**

(To recognize or establish as particular by noting individual features or characteristics)

#### **Describe**

(To tell or show with written or spoken words; point out facts or details)

#### **Summarize**

(To state or express in concise form the essential components of something; usually in chronological order)

#### **Support**

(To back up, justify with evidence)

#### **Compare**

(Examine in order to note likenesses)

#### **Contrast**

(Examine in order to note differences)

#### **Determine**

(To decide or conclude through reasoning or observation.)

#### **Infer**

(To deduce, conclude, to derive by reasoning; to guess, figure out or surmise from evidence; the answer to, "why is that there?")

### **TARGET**

#### **Main/Central Idea**

(The author's most important idea or the cognitive catalyst for the creation of his work.)

#### **Key details**

(The specifics that are explicitly written in a text that support or expand the main/central idea.)

#### **Theme**

(A unifying or dominant idea or motif; what did you *learn*?)

#### **Structure**

(The relationship of component parts that constitutes a whole.)

#### **Claims**

(To assert as fact)

#### **Meaning**

(The significance of something)

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If students do not understand the meanings of terms on which PARCC prompts are based, it is unlikely that they can do well on a PARCC ELA assessment. Thus, it is a good idea to determine how well they comprehend the meanings of the terms above. On the following page is a set of guidelines that could be considered when constructing a qualitative, diagnostic pre-assessment that simply requires students to define, in their own words, the most significant terms embedded in the Common Core and PARCC assessments. The teacher can then juxtapose the students' understandings to the definitions referenced above in order to evaluate what students do and do not comprehend.

# **GUIDELINES FOR QUALITATIVE DIAGNOSTIC PRE-ASSESSMENT**

**UNDERSTAND THE DEFINITION OF “DEFINITION.”**  
“A statement of the meaning or significance of a word.”

**DISTINGUISH BETWEEN THE COMMON CORE-ALIGNED DEFINITION OF THE TERM FROM OTHER DICTIONARY REFERENCES.**

**DO NOT DEFINE THE TERM WITH THE TERM.**  
“Summary is a summation.”

**DO NOT USE AN EXAMPLE AS A DEFINITION**

**DO NOT USE A SYNONYM AS A DEFINITION**

**DO NOT USE THE VERB FORM AS A DEFINITION**  
“Conclusion means to conclude.”

**DURING REMEDIATION – HAVE STUDENTS DETERMINE THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SIMILAR TERMS – e.g. “Infer (derive information) and “interpret” (derive meaning)**

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## **STUDENT LEARNING OBJECTIVE (SLO) PROCESS Per Cognitive Term**

- Conduct Diagnostic Pre-Assessment of selected “key terms”
- Students obtain definition of an assigned term and cite source for it.
- Discuss meaning for the term that is relevant to Common Core using textual, visual, aural, and/or kinesthetic examples.
- Students go out, discover and submit examples of the term or its use
- Students *create their own* example of the term and/or its use
- Repeat pre-assessment as a post-assessment
- Have student employ understanding in an ELA/PARCC context