TREES™ Informative Writing Diagnostic Assessment

Range Performance Level Descriptor (RPLD) Integrated Edition

The Writing Academy®, LLC

Purpose

A low-stakes informative-writing readiness assessment that identifies not only what students can recognize and produce, but the level of thinking they currently demonstrate within each TREES™ component. Results are used to adjust instruction, scaffolds, feedback, and opportunities for independence—not to generate a traditional grade.

● Foundational	■ Emergent	▼ Visible	▲ Independent	◆ Reflective
(Beginning)	(Developing)	(Engaging)	(Independent)	(Highly Independent)

TREES™ Framework

- T — Thesis (Central Idea): establish a focused response containing the topic, the thinking verb, and the answer to the prompt.
- R — Reasons: develop clear, distinct reasons that explain why the thesis (central idea) is true.
- E1 — Evidence: select accurate, relevant text evidence that directly supports each reason.
- E2 — Explanation: explain how and why the evidence proves the reason and supports the thesis (central idea).
- S — Significance: extend the learning beyond the immediate text to a larger lesson, implication, principle, or audience.

Core RPLD Principle

A student should not be assigned one thinking level for all informative writing. Determine a separate level for T, R, E1, E2, and S. A student may be Independent in Thesis and Evidence while remaining Visible in Explanation and Emergent in Significance.

Teacher Administration Guide

What to say, what to provide, and what not to coach

Materials to Prepare

- One student diagnostic packet per student.
- The short anchor passage, “The Power of a School Garden,” included in this packet.
- Pencil or approved writing tool; lined paper if additional writing space is needed.
- Teacher RPLD scoring profile and answer key.
- Any routinely provided documented accommodations. Accommodations should provide access without supplying the thesis, reasons, evidence, explanation, significance, or wording.

Suggested Administration Sequence

Phase	Suggested time	Purpose
1. Opening	2–3 min	Explain that this is not a grade and that students should show what they can do now.
2. Anchor Passage + Recognition	15–20 min	Read/follow the short passage, then complete passage-based and general recognition items.
3. Guided Informative Build	15–20 min	Students make their thinking visible through TREES™ planning prompts.
4. Independent Informative Response	30–40 min	Students plan and write independently. This section carries the strongest evidence for Independent and Reflective levels.
5. Broad Writing Check	5–8 min	Brief revising/editing information only; do not let it drive the primary TREES™ profile.

Opening Script

Teacher says: *“Today you are going to show me how you think as an informative writer. This is not a grade, and I do not expect everyone to do the same things yet. Some parts may feel easy and some may feel challenging. That is useful information for me because it tells me what I should teach you next. Do your best work and show me what you already know about building an informative response with TREES™.”*

What the Teacher May and May Not Do

MAY DO

- Read directions and the anchor passage aloud if that is part of normal classroom access or an approved accommodation.
- Clarify procedural directions such as where to write or which section to complete next.
- Pronounce a word from the directions or passage without explaining which answer it supports.
- Encourage effort with neutral language such as “Show me what you know.”
- Provide extra paper, approved assistive technology, or routine access accommodations.

DO NOT DO DURING THE DIAGNOSTIC

- Do not identify the topic, thinking verb, answer to the prompt, thesis, reasons, evidence, explanation, or significance for the student.
- Do not tell students which details from the passage to use or whether a chosen detail is strong enough.
- Do not ask leading questions that supply the missing reasoning, such as “Doesn’t this prove responsibility?”
- Do not add sentence frames beyond the ones already printed in the guided section.
- Do not correct spelling, punctuation, grammar, wording, or organization while the student is composing.
- Do not remind individual students of a TREES™ component they omitted during Part 3.

Anchor Passage for Part 1

The Power of a School Garden

Teacher says before reading: *"First, we will read a short informational passage. Follow along as I read it aloud. Afterward, you will read it quietly and answer questions about the choices an informative writer would make. I will not explain the answers while you are working."*

When students at Oak Ridge Elementary noticed that an unused area behind their school was filled with weeds, they began imagining something different. With the help of their teachers and several community volunteers, they transformed the empty space into a school garden.

At first, the students thought the garden would simply be a place to grow vegetables. Soon, however, they discovered that the garden provided many different learning opportunities. During science lessons, students observed insects, studied plant life cycles, and recorded how quickly different plants grew. Mathematics classes used the garden to measure plant height, calculate the distance between rows, and compare the amount of produce harvested each week.

The garden also helped students develop responsibility. Each class was assigned specific jobs such as watering plants, pulling weeds, checking the soil, or recording observations. Students quickly learned that when someone forgot a responsibility, the plants were affected. Working together became important because the success of the garden depended on everyone completing a job.

The benefits eventually extended beyond the school. When the garden produced more vegetables than the students could use, the classes donated some of the food to a local community center. Students who had originally planted seeds for a classroom project began to understand that their work could also help other people.

By the end of the year, the once-empty patch of land had become much more than a garden. It had become a place where students learned academic skills, practiced responsibility, worked together, and contributed to their community.

Teacher says after reading: *"Now read the passage quietly one more time. Then answer the passage questions on your own. You may look back at the passage as often as you need."*

Part 1A: Reading the Writer's Informative Choices

Use "The Power of a School Garden"

P1. T — Thesis (Central Idea)

Which statement BEST expresses the central idea the informative writer should establish?

A. The garden was located behind Oak Ridge Elementary.

B. The school garden became important because it helped students apply academic skills, develop responsibility, work together, and contribute to their community.

C. Students grew vegetables in rows.

D. Community volunteers visited the school.

P2. R — Reasons

Which TWO ideas would provide the strongest reasons for explaining why the garden became an important learning experience?

A. The garden replaced an area that had weeds.

B. Students used science and mathematics in real situations.

C. Students developed responsibility and learned that their work could help others.

D. The garden was located outside the school building.

P3. E1 — Evidence

Which detail BEST supports the reason that the garden made academic learning more meaningful?

A. Teachers and volunteers helped create the garden.

B. Students observed insects, studied plant life cycles, measured plant height, and calculated distances between rows.

C. The empty area had once contained weeds.

D. The garden grew vegetables.

P4. E2 — Explanation

Which explanation BEST shows why the assigned garden jobs helped students learn responsibility?

A. The students had several different jobs.

B. Gardens need water and healthy soil.

C. The students learned that their choices affected the plants and the success of the entire group, so completing each job consistently mattered.

D. Pulling weeds can take a long time.

P5. S — Significance

Which statement BEST carries the learning beyond this one school garden?

A. Every school should grow the same vegetables.

B. The students finished their project by the end of the year.

C. Real-world projects can help students use academic knowledge, accept responsibility, and understand that their work can improve a community.

D. School gardens are usually built outside.

P6. TREES™ Reasoning Chain

Which sequence BEST shows how the ideas in a strong informative response should work together?

A. Evidence → title → opinion → ending

B. Topic → unrelated details → summary

C. Reason → copied sentence → new topic

D. Thesis (central idea) → reasons → evidence → explanation → significance

Part 1B: Recognizing Strong Informative Writing

Choose the response that would create the strongest informative writing.

1. T — Identifying the Topic

What is the main topic students must write about?

A. Vegetables
B. Oak Ridge Elementary
C. Why the school garden became an important part of students' learning
D. How to build a garden

2. T — Identifying the Verb

In the prompt, what is the main thinking verb telling the writer what to do?

A. Explain
B. Garden
C. Students
D. Important

3. T — Answering the Prompt

Which statement BEST answers why the school garden became an important part of the students' learning experience?

A. The garden was located behind the school.
B. The school garden became important because it allowed students to learn academic skills, develop responsibility, and contribute to their community.
C. Students planted vegetables in rows.
D. Many schools have gardens.

4. T — Complete Thesis

Which thesis (central idea) BEST includes the topic, thinking verb, and answer to the prompt?

A. The school garden was behind Oak Ridge Elementary.
B. Students learned about gardens.
C. The passage explains that the school garden became an important learning experience because it helped students develop academic skills, responsibility, teamwork, and an understanding of how their work could help others.
D. Gardens are helpful.

5. R — Strong Reason

Which is the BEST reason supporting the thesis (central idea)?

A. The garden contained vegetables.
B. The garden helped students apply academic skills in real situations.
C. The school building had an unused area.
D. Volunteers came to the school.

6. R — Reason or Detail

Which statement is a reason rather than simply a detail?

A. Students measured plant height.
B. Students watered the plants.
C. The garden taught students responsibility because the plants depended on students completing their assigned jobs.
D. The garden was located behind the school.

7. R — Multiple Reasons

Which TWO reasons would provide the strongest organization for the response?

A. The garden was green.
B. The garden helped students apply academic learning.
C. The garden helped students develop responsibility and teamwork.
D. The garden was behind the school.

8. E1 — Relevant Evidence

A writer's reason is that the garden helped students use academic skills in meaningful ways. Which evidence BEST supports that reason?

A. "The unused area behind their school was filled with weeds."
B. Students "observed insects, studied plant life cycles, and recorded how quickly different plants grew."
C. Volunteers helped create the garden.
D. The garden contained vegetables.

9. E1 — Matching Evidence

A writer's reason is that the garden helped students become more responsible. Which evidence BEST supports that reason?

A. Each class was assigned jobs such as watering plants, pulling weeds, and checking the soil.
B. The garden was located outside.
C. Students studied plant life cycles.
D. The classes donated vegetables.

10. E1 — Relevance

A writer wants to prove that the garden helped students understand how their actions could affect other people. Which evidence should the writer use?

A. The area had originally been filled with weeds.
B. Students measured plant height.
C. Students donated extra vegetables to a local community center.
D. Teachers helped students create the garden.

11. E2 — Evidence Is Not Enough

A response gives a reason and then states that each class had jobs such as watering plants and pulling weeds. What is still missing?

A. A topic
B. A reason
C. An explanation of how the evidence proves the reason
D. A title

12. E2 — Strong Explanation

Which sentence BEST explains why the assigned jobs support the idea that students learned responsibility?

A. Gardens have many jobs.
B. This shows responsibility because students learned that the plants depended on them completing their assigned tasks consistently.
C. Students had to water plants.
D. The students went to school every day.

13. E2 — Connecting Evidence

Students used mathematics to measure plant height and calculate the distance between rows. Which explanation BEST connects this evidence to academic learning?

A. Mathematics includes numbers.
B. Plants can be measured.
C. This shows that students applied mathematics skills to a real task instead of practicing the skills only on paper.
D. Schools teach mathematics.

14. S — Recognizing Significance

Which conclusion BEST moves beyond simply repeating what happened in the passage?

A. The students had a garden.
B. In conclusion, they learned science, math, and responsibility.
C. The experience shows that learning can become especially powerful when students use what they know to solve problems, work with others, and make a difference in their community.
D. The garden grew vegetables behind the school.

15. S — Bigger Idea

Which statement BEST communicates the significance of the students' experience?

A. Vegetables can grow in gardens.
B. Students went outside during school.
C. The garden demonstrates that even a small school project can teach students that their knowledge and actions can have an impact beyond the classroom.
D. Students should always plant vegetables.

Part 2: Build the Informative Response

This section makes student thinking visible through guided construction.

Teacher says: *"Now the answer will not be in a list. I want to see how you build the parts of an informative response when I give you a place to think about each one. Use your own ideas from the passage. I can clarify where to write, but I will not give you the thesis, reasons, evidence, explanation, or significance."*

Student Prompt

Explain why the school garden became an important part of the students' learning experience. Use information from "The Power of a School Garden" to support your response.

16. T — Thesis (Central Idea)

Build a complete thesis containing the topic, the thinking verb, and the answer to the prompt. Topic: _____ Verb: _____ Answer: _____

17. R — Reasons

Write two distinct reasons explaining why the garden was important. Optional third reason may be added if it strengthens the response.

18. E1 — Evidence

Choose specific evidence from the passage for each reason. Make sure each piece of evidence directly matches the reason it is meant to support.

19. E2 — Explanation

Explain how each piece of evidence proves its reason. Use your own words. You may begin with “This evidence shows…” or “This matters because…,” but your reasoning must go beyond repeating the evidence.

20. S — Significance

Think beyond the students in this passage. What larger idea could another student, teacher, school, family, or community learn from this experience? Why does that idea matter beyond one school garden?

Part 3: Independent Informative Writing

The strongest evidence for Independent and Reflective thinking

Teacher says: *"This is the part where I want to see what you can do as an informative writer on your own. You may use the passage and the optional planning space, but you do not have to follow a formula. Make choices that help your reader understand why the garden was important. I will not remind you which TREES™ parts to add while you are writing. When you think you are finished, reread your response and make any changes you believe will make it stronger."*

Writing Task

Explain why the school garden became an important part of the students' learning experience. Use evidence from "The Power of a School Garden" to support your response.

Remember TREES™

- T — Thesis (Central Idea): establish a focused answer containing the topic, thinking verb, and answer to the prompt.
- R — Reasons: develop clear reasons explaining why the thesis is true.
- E1 — Evidence: use relevant, specific information from the passage.
- E2 — Explanation: explain how and why the evidence proves each reason and supports the thesis.
- S — Significance: extend the learning to a larger lesson, implication, principle, or audience.

Optional Planning Space

Thesis (Central Idea)

Reason 1 → Evidence → Explanation

Reason 2 → Evidence → Explanation

Significance — Why does this matter beyond the passage?

Write Your Informative Response

Part 4: Broad Writing Check

Secondary information only

The primary purpose of this diagnostic is informative-response development. Revising and editing results may help teachers plan support, but they should not determine the student's primary TREES™ thinking profile.

21. Revising Check

Read the paragraph: "The garden helped students learn responsibility. Each class had jobs. Students had to water plants and pull weeds. This shows that the garden was important." Which revision would MOST strengthen the explanation?

A. The garden had vegetables in it.

B. This responsibility mattered because students learned that their choices affected whether the plants remained healthy and whether the group succeeded.

C. Some students like vegetables.

D. Gardens need water.

22. Editing Check

Which sentence is written correctly?

A. The students learned science math and responsibility.

B. The students learned science, math, and responsibility.

C. the students learned science, math, and responsibility.

D. The students learned, science math and responsibility.

Teacher says when students finish: *"Thank you. I am going to use this work to decide what to teach you next and which parts you are ready to do with more independence. This information is for growth, not a grade."*

Teacher Scoring & RPLD Interpretation Guide

Score the thinking, not just the number correct

● Foundational	■ Emergent	▼ Visible	▲ Independent	◆ Reflective
(Beginning)	(Developing)	(Engaging)	(Independent)	(Highly Independent)

Three Sources of Evidence

Assessment evidence	What it measures best	Highest level it can support by itself	Teacher interpretation
Part 1	Recognition and discrimination among informative-writing choices	■ Emergent (Developing)	Correct answers show that the student can recognize effective TREES™ choices. Recognition alone is not evidence that the student can produce the craft independently.
Part 2	Guided construction of individual TREES™ elements	▼ Visible (Engaging)	The student's thinking becomes visible because the task names each component. Strong performance here does not automatically prove transfer into a complete response.
Part 3	Independent integration and transfer	◆ Reflective (Highly Independent)	Independent writing is required to justify Independent or Reflective. Reflective additionally requires strategic choice, self-evaluation, revision, or transfer.
Part 4	Broad revising/editing awareness	Supplemental only	Use to plan conventions support; do not lower a TREES™ thinking level solely because conventions are weak.

How to Assign a Level to Each TREES™ Strand

- Do not average the five TREES™ strands into one thinking level. Record each strand separately.
- Use the highest level supported by consistent evidence, not by one lucky selected response.
- If Part 1 is strong but Parts 2 and 3 are weak, the student likely recognizes the skill but cannot yet construct it independently.
- If Part 2 is strong but Part 3 is weak, the skill is Visible: it appears when the task names and structures it, but transfer is not yet dependable.
- If Part 3 shows the skill without prompting, Independent is appropriate. Reflective requires intentional choices, evaluation, revision, audience awareness, synthesis, or transfer.

A useful teacher question

Instead of asking "How many points did the student earn?" ask "What is the highest level of thinking this student can demonstrate consistently in this TREES™ strand, and what is the least support needed to help the next level appear?"

TREES™ RPLD Student Thinking Profile

One student can—and often will—have five different levels

TREES™ strand	Current RPLD level	Evidence from this diagnostic	Next instructional target
T — Thesis (Central Idea)	_____		
R — Reasons	_____		
E1 — Evidence	_____		
E2 — Explanation	_____		
S — Significance	_____		

Teacher Growth Conversation Template

Teacher says: *"I noticed that your _____ is currently at the _____ level because I saw you _____. That means you already know how to _____. Your next step is to _____. I am going to give you just enough support to practice that next step, and then I will watch for you to do it on your own."*

Example

"Your Evidence is Independent because you selected specific proof that matched both reasons without help. Your Explanation is Visible because the organizer helped you show how the evidence proves the reason, but that reasoning did not appear consistently in the independent response. We will preserve your independent evidence work and focus our next instruction on explaining the connection without a frame."

Worked Example: Turn the Profile into an Instructional Plan

Sample student profile: T ▲ Independent | R ▲ Independent | E1 ▲ Independent | E2 ▼ Visible | S ■ Emergent

Instructional decision	What the teacher does	What the teacher avoids
Preserve strengths	Let Thesis, Reasons, and Evidence remain independent during new writing. Praise the specific evidence-to-reason matches the student already controls.	Do not assign basic prompt-analysis, reason-identification, or evidence-matching worksheets just because Explanation or Significance is weaker.
Target first	Teach E2 with a reason → evidence → "how this proves it" oral rehearsal. Then have the student add one independent explanation sentence to an authentic body paragraph.	Do not reteach all five TREES™ components at once. Do not confuse copied evidence with explanation.
Build next	Use a significance ladder: passage event → larger lesson → who else could use the lesson → why it matters. Begin orally, then write one sentence.	Do not accept a repeated thesis or generic moral as evidence of significance.
Fade support	After guided practice, give a fresh short passage and one reason/evidence pair. Remove the explanation frame first, then remove the significance prompts.	Do not keep the student on the same organizer after the target skill appears independently.

Teacher can say: *"You already know how to build a clear thesis, choose reasons, and find strong evidence. I am not going to make you start over on those skills. We are going to work on the part that will make your evidence do more work for the reader—explaining how it proves your reason. Then we will practice carrying the learning beyond the passage in your significance statement. When you can do those two things without my frame, I will remove the support again."*

T — Thesis (Central Idea)

Does the student establish a complete, focused response to the prompt and use it to control the informative composition?

Thinking level	What the student answer/work shows	Teacher move to grow thinking	Evidence that the student is ready to move up
● Foundational (Beginning)	The thesis is missing, off-topic, copied from the passage, or extremely broad. The student may not yet identify the topic, thinking verb, and answer even when choices are provided.	Use oral prompt analysis and a one-sentence frame. Mark the topic, verb, and answer in three separate steps. Compare complete and incomplete theses and jointly build one response.	The student can select the topic, identify the thinking verb, orally answer the prompt, and attempt a thesis with teacher support.
■ Emergent (Developing)	The student recognizes a strong thesis but produces an incomplete, overly general, or frame-dependent thesis. One of the three required parts may be weak or implied.	Use a partial frame rather than a complete model. Ask “What is missing?” Have the student revise one weak thesis and explain how each part responds to the prompt.	The student independently builds a complete topic + verb + answer thesis in the structured Part 2 task.
▼ Visible (Engaging)	The student constructs a complete thesis when the task names the three parts. In the independent response, the thesis may be formulaic, broad, or inconsistently sustained.	Fade the organizer. Compare acceptable and precise theses. Ask what reasons the thesis requires and revise the wording so it controls the whole response.	The student transfers a focused thesis into the independent composition and sustains that focus throughout the response.
▲ Independent (Independent)	The student independently writes a complete, focused thesis and uses it to establish direction for the response.	Increase precision and flexibility. Use more complex why/how prompts and ask the student to refine wording for purpose, audience, and the organization that follows.	The student makes deliberate thesis choices, self-revises for precision, and can explain why one version controls the response more effectively.
◆ Reflective (Highly Independent)	The student crafts a nuanced thesis, anticipates organization, revises the controlling idea as thinking develops, and adapts it to purpose and audience.	Use unfamiliar content, paired texts, and prompts with multiple defensible approaches. Ask the student to justify the selected thesis and evaluate alternatives.	The student transfers thesis control across texts, genres, audiences, and complex purposes while explaining the effect of wording and structure.

R — Reasons

Does the student generate clear, distinct reasons that explain why the thesis (central idea) is true and organize the response?

Thinking level	What the student answer/work shows	Teacher move to grow thinking	Evidence that the student is ready to move up
● Foundational (Beginning)	The student gives facts, events, or details instead of reasons, or cannot distinguish a reason from a detail even when choices are supplied.	Use reason/not-a-reason sorts. Ask “Why is the thesis true?” orally. Turn one detail into a reason by naming what the detail proves.	The student can recognize a reason and generate one relevant reason with oral or written support.
■ Emergent (Developing)	The student recognizes strong reasons but generates only one general reason, overlapping reasons, or reasons that depend on teacher prompting.	Generate several possibilities together, then rank them. Use “Does this answer why?” checks and separate broad reasons from supporting details.	The student generates at least two relevant, distinct reasons in the structured Part 2 task.
▼ Visible (Engaging)	The student develops relevant reasons in the organizer, but one may remain broad, overlap another, or lose focus in the full response.	Fade the organizer and require independent reason selection. Ask the student to name the job of each paragraph and test whether the reasons overlap.	The student independently uses distinct reasons to organize and sustain the complete response.
▲ Independent (Independent)	The student independently develops clear, distinct reasons that directly support the thesis and organize the composition.	Increase decision-making: prioritize reasons, select the strongest sequence, combine related ideas, and remove a weaker reason when it does not add value.	The student becomes strategic about which reasons matter most, why they matter, and how their order affects clarity.
◆ Reflective (Highly Independent)	The student selects, prioritizes, sequences, and refines reasons intentionally as evidence develops, recognizing relationships among ideas.	Use prompts with competing possible reasons. Ask for justification of order, importance, grouping, and relationships among reasons.	The student transfers strategic reasoning to complex, unfamiliar, and multi-source informative tasks.

E1 — Evidence

Does the student select and integrate accurate, specific evidence that directly supports each reason?

Thinking level	What the student answer/work shows	Teacher move to grow thinking	Evidence that the student is ready to move up
● Foundational (Beginning)	Evidence is absent, copied without purpose, inaccurate, or unrelated to the reason. The student may struggle to identify relevant proof even when choices are supplied.	State the reason first, then hunt for proof. Use evidence/not-evidence sorts and reason-to-evidence matching cards. Model why one detail supports the reason and another does not.	The student recognizes relevant evidence and can match one specific piece of proof to a reason with support.
■ Emergent (Developing)	The student often recognizes relevant evidence but selects vague, incomplete, first-found, or weakly matched proof without prompting.	Offer two or three candidate details and ask the student to defend the strongest. Gradually remove highlighting and require the reason to be stated before evidence is selected.	The student selects specific, relevant evidence for each reason in the structured Part 2 organizer.
▼ Visible (Engaging)	The student selects appropriate evidence when reasons and evidence boxes are provided, but may default to the first relevant detail or integrate evidence weakly in the full response.	Ask “Is it relevant, or is it the strongest available?” Fade evidence boxes and require the student to locate, record, and integrate proof independently.	The student independently selects and integrates strong, specific evidence in Part 3.
▲ Independent (Independent)	The student independently selects accurate, specific evidence that clearly supports each reason and integrates it into the response.	Increase complexity through evidence from different parts of a text, multiple pieces of evidence, paired sources, or evidence that requires inference.	The student makes strategic evidence choices, combines proof without redundancy, and explains why the selected evidence is sufficient.
◆ Reflective (Highly Independent)	The student evaluates evidence quality, sufficiency, source relationships, relevance, and redundancy; synthesizes multiple details; and can justify selections.	Provide competing evidence sets, paired texts, and source-quality decisions. Ask the student to defend evidence choices and revise when stronger proof becomes available.	The student transfers evidence evaluation and synthesis across texts, disciplines, audiences, and purposes.

E2 — Explanation

Does the student explain how and why the evidence proves the reason and supports the thesis (central idea)?

Thinking level	What the student answer/work shows	Teacher move to grow thinking	Evidence that the student is ready to move up
● Foundational (Beginning)	Explanation is absent or simply repeats the evidence. The student does not yet distinguish "what the text says" from "how or why that proves the reason."	Explicitly contrast E1 and E2. Use oral "This shows… because…" practice and ask one causal question at a time: "So what?" "Why does that matter?"	The student can recognize a real explanation and attempt one sentence that goes beyond repetition.
■ Emergent (Developing)	The student recognizes a strong explanation and may use a frame, but the written reasoning remains brief, formulaic, general, or partly repetitive.	Keep the frame but require original wording. Ask "How does this prove your reason?" and "What did the evidence cause, show, allow, or reveal?"	The student produces a clear explanation with support in Part 2.
▼ Visible (Engaging)	The student explains evidence in the organizer and makes reasoning visible, but the explanation may be one-layered or inconsistent during independent writing.	Fade the sentence frame. Require a second layer of reasoning. Have the student underline E1 and circle E2 to verify that both jobs are present.	The student independently links evidence → reason → thesis throughout Part 3 without restating the text.
▲ Independent (Independent)	The student clearly explains how the evidence proves the reason and supports the thesis without merely repeating the passage.	Push analytical depth through cause/effect, relationships, implications, or why the evidence is especially convincing. Use evidence that requires inference.	The student becomes strategic and layered in explanation and can revise a surface explanation into a deeper one.
◆ Reflective (Highly Independent)	The student builds layered analytical explanation, connects evidence to multiple ideas, evaluates why evidence matters, and revises reasoning to improve clarity and depth.	Use paired evidence, synthesis questions, counterexamples, and metacognitive reflection. Ask the student to compare explanations and justify which one changes understanding most.	The student transfers analytical explanation to complex texts, multiple sources, and unfamiliar tasks.

S — Significance

Does the student communicate why the information matters beyond the immediate passage and to people beyond the writer?

Thinking level	What the student answer/work shows	Teacher move to grow thinking	Evidence that the student is ready to move up
● Foundational (Beginning)	The response ends abruptly, repeats the thesis, or summarizes the passage without showing why the learning matters beyond the immediate text.	Teach the difference between summary and significance. Ask orally: “Who else could learn from this?” “Where else could this idea matter?” Use concrete audiences such as school, family, or community.	The student recognizes a significance statement and attempts a broader connection with support.
■ Emergent (Developing)	The student recognizes strong significance and attempts a larger idea, but the statement may be generic, moral-like, inspirational, or still tied closely to the passage.	Use a temporary significance stem, then require the specific larger principle. Compare “repeat the passage” endings with “carry the idea beyond the passage” endings.	The student produces a meaningful broader connection with support in Part 2.
▼ Visible (Engaging)	The student extends beyond the passage in the structured task, but the independent conclusion may be general or only loosely connected to the response’s reasoning.	Fade stems. Require two moves: “beyond this text” and “why it matters.” Connect significance directly to the thesis, reasons, and evidence already developed.	The student independently creates a relevant, defensible significance statement in Part 3.
▲ Independent (Independent)	The student ends the independent response with a relevant larger lesson, implication, principle, or real-world connection that grows from the response.	Increase sophistication through audience, theme, real-world systems, and transfer. Ask for the most defensible larger idea, not merely any larger idea.	The student becomes nuanced and intentional in extending significance and can explain why the conclusion is warranted by the evidence.
◆ Reflective (Highly Independent)	The student develops nuanced, transferable significance that synthesizes the response and connects the learning to broader principles, disciplines, audiences, or contexts.	Invite cross-text, cross-disciplinary, and real-world connections. Require the student to justify the significance, revise it for audience, and avoid unsupported inspiration.	The student transfers significance and synthesis to increasingly complex informative writing and unfamiliar contexts.

Special Focus: E1 and E2 Are Different Thinking Jobs

Finding proof is not the same as explaining proof

The distinction teachers must protect

E1 answers: “What information from the text supports the reason?” E2 answers: “How and why does that information prove the reason and support the thesis?” A student may be Independent in E1 and still be Foundational, Emergent, or Visible in E2.

Worked Example

Reason: The garden helped students learn responsibility.
E1 — Evidence: Each class had jobs such as watering, pulling weeds, and checking the soil.
E2 — Explanation: Because the plants and the group depended on each student completing a job, students learned that their choices had real consequences.

Diagnostic pattern	What the pattern means	Teacher decision
No relevant evidence; no explanation	E1 is Foundational. E2 may be absent because there is nothing relevant to explain.	Target E1 first: state the reason, locate one matching detail, and explain why it is relevant.
Relevant evidence is copied; explanation repeats it	E1 may be Emergent, Visible, or Independent. E2 remains Foundational/Emergent.	Preserve the evidence skill. Ask “So what?” and “How does this prove the reason?” Do not reteach evidence selection unnecessarily.
Evidence and explanation appear with a frame	The reasoning is Visible when the task names the two jobs.	Fade the E2 frame while keeping the same reason/evidence pair. Recheck in one independent paragraph.
Evidence is strategically selected and explanation is layered	E1 and E2 may be Independent or Reflective depending on transfer, evaluation, and revision.	Increase text complexity, require synthesis, and ask the student to compare the strength of evidence and explanations.

Instructional warning

Do not lower a strong E1 level because E2 is weak, and do not award a strong E2 level merely because a student copied accurate evidence. Score the two jobs separately, preserve the stronger one, and target the weaker one.

How Teachers Move Students from One Thinking Level to the Next

The scaffold should change as the thinking changes

● Foundational → ■ Emergent

Goal: move from not yet demonstrating the skill to recognizing and attempting it.
Teacher move: provide an explicit model, oral rehearsal, choices, sorting, highlighting, sentence starters, and one small target at a time.

Teacher language: *"Watch how I make this choice. Now tell me which example works better and why. Next, you try one with me."*

■ Emergent → ▼ Visible

Goal: move from recognition or partial attempts to generating the skill when the task names it.
Teacher move: remove answer choices, provide a targeted organizer, use guided questions, and ask the student to build the component independently inside the scaffold.

Teacher language: *"You already recognize what this looks like. Now I want you to build one. I'll give you the question, but the idea must come from you."*

▼ Visible → ▲ Independent

Goal: move from successful guided construction to transfer inside a complete informative response without reminders.
Teacher move: fade organizers and prompts, require authentic writing, and check whether the component appears spontaneously and consistently.

Teacher language: *"You can do this when I point to it. Now I'm going to stop naming it for you. Show me where you decide it belongs in your response."*

▲ Independent → ◆ Reflective

Goal: move from competent independent use to strategic, intentional decision-making, self-evaluation, and transfer.
Teacher move: offer defensible choices, ask for justification, invite revision for precision and effect, and increase text, audience, and task complexity.

Teacher language: *"You can already do this on your own. Now decide which version creates the clearest and strongest meaning, revise intentionally, and tell me why your choice is stronger."*

Do Not Over-Scaffold Strong Strands

Important
If a student is ▲ Independent or ◆ Reflective in a strand, do not require the student to keep completing Foundational or Emergent practice for that strand simply because another strand is weaker. Preserve independence where it already exists and target the strand that needs growth.

Embedded Progress-Monitoring Tools

A second full diagnostic is not required

Strand	2–5 minute embedded check	What counts as growth
T — Thesis	Give a new short why prompt. Ask the student to identify topic/verb/answer, then write one thesis with the smallest support needed.	The student demonstrates the next-level thesis behavior with less prompting and in a new context.
R — Reasons	Give one thesis and ask for two distinct reasons. Then ask the student to rank them and explain why they do not overlap.	The student generates, separates, and prioritizes reasons with less support.
E1 — Evidence	Provide a short paragraph and one reason. Ask the student to select the strongest evidence and defend the choice.	The student locates and justifies stronger, more relevant evidence with less prompting.
E2 — Explanation	Provide one reason/evidence pair. Ask the student to write how and why the evidence proves the reason without a frame.	The student produces a non-repetitive explanation independently in a new example.
S — Significance	Give a summary ending and ask the student to transform it into a larger lesson, implication, or principle for another audience.	The student extends the idea beyond the text with a defensible connection and less prompting.

Progress-Monitoring Cycle

Instructional Cycle
Informative Diagnostic → TREES™ RPLD Profile → Target One or Two Strands → Provide Level-Matched Support → Short Embedded Writing Check → Reduce or Adjust Support → Look for Independent Transfer → Extend Depth and Synthesis

Quick Teacher Conference Record

Use this record for a brief strand-specific conference. Document one observable strength, one current level, one next thinking move, and the support that will be removed when growth appears.

Student		**Date**	
Priority TREES™ strand		**Current RPLD level**	
Evidence observed		**Next-level target**	
Temporary scaffold		**Recheck date/task**	

Conference Language
"I can see that you can already _____. Your next thinking move is to _____. I will give you _____ for now. When you can show the next-level behavior with less help, we will remove that support."

Teacher Answer Key & Evidence Map

Recognition items support—but do not replace—writing evidence

Item	Answer	Primary evidence
P1	B	T
P2	B and C	R
P3	B	E1
P4	C	E2
P5	C	S
P6	D	TREES™ chain
1	C	T
2	A	T
3	B	T
4	C	T
5	B	R
6	C	R
7	B and C	R
8	B	E1
9	A	E1

Item	Answer	Primary evidence
10	C	E1
11	C	E2
12	B	E2
13	C	E2
14	C	S
15	C	S
21	B	Revising
22	B	Editing

Scoring Reminder
Do not convert the recognition-item total into the student's RPLD level. A student can answer every recognition item correctly and still be Visible rather than Independent if the same informative-writing decisions do not appear in the student's own composition.

Flexible Grouping by Strand

Group for the skill, not for a global "ability" label. A student may need one group for Explanation and a different level of support for Thesis or Evidence.

- Foundational groups: explicit modeling + oral rehearsal + concrete choices.
- Emergent groups: remove some choices; use guided generation, sorting, and comparison.
- Visible groups: fade the organizer; require transfer into one authentic paragraph or complete response.
- Independent groups: preserve autonomy; use conferences, stronger texts, and strategic revision instead of repetitive worksheets.
- Reflective groups: increase complexity, audience, synthesis, source relationships, metacognition, and self-evaluation.