**CUNY PD Module: Preparing Students for the TASC Writing Skills Test**

**Overall Goals:**

Teacher leaders will:

* Read the analysis of the TASC Writing Skills test
* Experience the question types on the TASC Writing Skills test
* Understand how to use the CUNY Teaching Guide to the TASC Writing Skills Test to prepare students for the test
* Understand how to use additional CUNY resources for the TASC Writing Skills Test

**Session I: Overview of Writing Skills Test and Sentence Basics**

**Materials**:

* Prediction Guide
* Sample facsimile TASC questions
* Analysis of the TASC Writing Skills test
* Individual copies of Teaching Guide to the TASC Writing Skills Test
* Electronic copies of the student handout “Let’s Talk about Sentences”

Computer access if possible, to view video segments for training at the following link: <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLM0Ajq8FKzykvG-_HRQrychnXRPswuLvC>

**Steps**:

1. Briefly review the goals of the training: to familiarize teachers with the demands of the test and explore a resource to prepare students. Give out the prediction guide and explain that it helps to get a sense of what teachers now understand about the test. Have teachers fill out the prediction guide, share it in pairs, and then ask for a report back on what people thought.
2. Give out the analysis of the TASC Writing Skills Test. Allow some time for teachers to peruse in pairs, then ask for a report back: what surprised you?
3. Give out the sample facsimile TASC questions. Tell teachers that they are looking at sample questions that deal with punctuation. There are other question types, but for now they will focus on these. Ask teachers to look at the questions and discuss in pairs what they notice. What will be difficult for students? You may want to make a list of teacher observations about the questions.
4. Give out the Teaching Guide and allow teachers 5 minutes or so to look through the Guide and orient themselves. Tell teachers that the beginning part of the Teaching Guide focuses on punctuation questions. Rather than learning a set of rules about punctuation, students are led to understand what a sentence is and is not, and some of the ways that sentences can be expanded and combined. Review the other “teaching principles” behind the Guide: grammar is taught in use; the Guide is both ***concept-based*** and ***test-driven***—in other words, it’s goal is to help students become better writers and develop a better understanding of sentence structure while also preparing for the TASC Writing Skills. Briefly review other teaching principles:

* Grammatical terminology is kept to a minimum
* One structure is introduced at a time, along with the necessary punctuation, and there is a lot of repetition and practice
* Students can practice the structures using sentence stems that relate to the content they are learning
* The structure is taught, then connected to test questions so that students can see the connections

Tell teachers that the first mini-lesson in the Guide is designed to help students gain a firmer grasp of what constitutes a sentence. Many students are confused about what a sentence is, and isn’t. They may have been told different rules by teachers in the past, and heard various grammar terms that they may or may not know the meanings of. Write the sentences from the first mini-lesson on the board, or give them out on a piece of paper, and ask teachers to discuss what they think their students might say about them.

Alternatively, view the classroom footage in which students are reviewing the sentences. After viewing, ask teachers to discuss what students struggled with. What misconceptions did students have about the sentences? What understandings did the teacher want them to walk away with? Comments/questions?

Explain that the Guide moves from understanding the basics of what a sentence is to expanding sentences in the simplest possible way: through a list. Explain that the simplest way to do this is to work with adjectives. The steps:

* As a class, the students generate a list of adjectives that describe people.
* The teacher writes a model sentence on the board with two adjectives in a row and a comma between them: *She was a helpful, organized teacher*.
* Students then write their own sentences using adjectives that describe themselves and write them on the board.
* The process is followed by writing sentences with three adjectives in a row: *She was a kind, helpful, and organized teacher.* Students are taught the importance of the oxford comma for the TASC. The rules for comma use in a list are written on the board.
* Students write their own sentences with three adjectives in a row and put them on the board.
* Finally a list with a colon is introduced. She was a great teacher: kind, helpful, and organized. The rule for comma and colon use with a list is written on the board.
* Students then work on an exercise to determine where the colon should go in a sentence.
* Students review the punctuation they have learned.

As an alternative, or in addition to the step above, have teachers view the segments of video footage that show students writing sentences with adjectives at the following link. If you are using video footage as an alternative to the step above, ask teachers to discuss the steps in the process.

**Session II: Appositives, FANBOYS, and Semi-Colons**

**Goals:**

Teachers will understand how to teach Mini-Lessons Three and Four from the Teaching Guide to the Writing Skills Test.

**Materials:**

* Individual copies of the Teaching Guide
* Electronic access for video viewing if possible/desired

**Steps:**

NOTE: Session II is intended to sequentially follow Session I. If it is not possible for the same teachers to attend both sessions, you may want to give teachers 10-15 minutes at the beginning of the session to look at a few sample test questions that focus on punctuation, as well as the beginning of the Guide. It would also be a good idea to have teachers who attended Session I orient teachers who did not.

1. Tell teachers that in this training session, they will be looking at mini-lessons that teach the following concepts:

* There are parts of a sentence that MUST be there for it to be a sentence: a subject and a verb.
* There is other information that can come at the beginning (introductory phrases) or middle (appositives) of the sentence that is EXTRA information. This information can be taken out and the sentence still makes sense. They are going to look at two different ways to do this and the type of punctuation they need to do it.
* After learning how to expand, or add to, a sentence that is ONE MAIN CLAUSE, students move on to combining TWO MAIN CLAUSES. Two sentences (a fancy word for these is *independent clauses*. Note the word *independent*—they can stand alone) can be put together using connector words called FANBOYS, and also with a semi-colon.

1. There are two ways to run this session: (1) A “teach-in” in which teachers briefly teach each other the two mini-lessons, or (2) Have teachers view the videotape footage of classroom teaching.
2. **For the Teach-In**:

At least 4 teachers are needed: two to briefly demonstrate each mini-lesson to the group. With larger groups of teachers, each mini lesson from the Guide can be divided into sections that are presented by pairs of teachers to the larger group.

1. Explain to teachers that the “teach-in” is intended to help them delve into the mini-lessons in the Guide to experience them. When they present a mini-lesson, it will be playing the role of teachers. When they are presented *to*, they will play the role of students. In other words, they will be wearing their student hats.
2. **Mini-Lesson Three can be divided as follows**:

* Two teachers demonstrate the SENTENCE SCRAMBLE by creating strips with the phrases written on them and leading teachers through the process of putting them together to form sentences. NOTE the comma!

Note to trainer: You may want to provide pre-made strips for the teachers.

* Two teachers model the process of matching the word that describes personality (ambitious, anxious, etc.) with the ACTION a person with that personality trait would be likely to take. Then, they will model how to create an appositive sentence with one of the words: *Denise, who was decisive, was always ready to order, right away, after looking at the menu.*

Note to trainer: you may want to provide extra copies of the needed handouts for the whole group

* Two teachers review the use of dashes instead of commas to set off extra information in a sentence, then lead the group through a practice test question.

Note to trainer: provide the teachers with a relevant test question focused on dashes.

1. **Mini-Lesson Four can be divided as follows**:

* Two teachers explain what FANBOYS are and how to use them, modeling how to combine two sentences using one or two FANBOYS and reviewing the comma rule. A great way to do this is with sentence strips, in which the two independent clauses are written. Teachers can ask the “students” who are being presented to which FANBOY is appropriate to connect the two independent clauses, and a student with that FANBOY written on a sentence strip can stand in the appropriate place.

Note to trainer: you may want to provide teachers with sentence strips.

* Two teachers can then introduce the semi-colon and explain its use, using the same sentence strips to demonstrate how to use a semi-colon to combine two independent clauses without a FANBOY.
* Two teachers can lead the group through the exercises from OWL Purdue: Commas vs. Semi-colons.

Note to trainer: Provide teachers with copies of the exercise for the entire group.

**Session III: Dependent Clauses and Commas with Coordinate Adjectives**

**Goals:**

Teachers will understand how to teach Mini-Lessons Five and Six from the Teaching Guide to the Writing Skills TASC

* Individual copies of the Teaching Guide
* Electronic access for video viewing if possible

**Steps:**

NOTE: Session III is intended to sequentially follow Session IV. If it is not possible for the same teachers to attend both sessions, you may want to give teachers 15-30 minutes at the beginning of the session to review what came before. Depending upon the number of teachers in your session, you could:

Assign three groups or pairs of teachers to review:

* Group One: Sample TASC questions and Mini-Lesson One & Two
* Group Two: Mini-Lesson Three
* Group Three: Mini-Lesson Four

Each group could list out the goals and steps for the lesson, then present to the group.

You might also want to have teachers review a sample TASC question and explain why one particular answer is correct.

Alternatively, have teachers read through the lessons in pairs and write questions they have, then bring the group together to discuss.

Tell teachers that in Training Session III, they will be looking at mini-lessons that teach the following concepts:

* Dependent clauses are clauses (groups of words) that have a subject and a verb but CANNOT STAND ALONE because they begin with a dependent clause word.
* Mini-Lesson Five also demonstrates how teachers can create sentence stems related to the content they are teaching.
* Students have now learned all the punctuation they need for the Writing Skills TASC EXCEPT a special case: commas with certain types of adjectives (these are called “coordinate adjectives”). They need this for the TASC.

Explain to teachers that they will do “teach-in.” Half the teachers in the group will briefly demonstrate the lesson on dependent clauses and half will briefly demonstrate the lesson on commas with coordinate adjectives.

**Mini-Lesson Five can be sub-divided as follows:**

* Two teachers model the explanation of dependent clauses that is in the lesson and have teachers write sample sentences using the dependent clause sentence-starters in the lesson.

Note to trainer: you may want to provide teachers with sentence strips that have the dependent clauses already written on them

* Two teachers lead the group through a few of the sentence-combining exercises in Mini-Lesson Five, and have them actually create sentences.

Note to trainer: you may want to provide copies of the relevant materials for the whole group.

* Two teachers work with an informational text on a different topic, and lead teachers through the process of creating sentence stems for dependent clauses with that text.

Note to trainer: Pre-select an informational text on a high-emphasis TASC topic

* Two teachers lead the group through sample TASC test questions related to punctuation.

Note to trainer: Provide teachers with TASC questions

**Mini-Lesson Six can be sub-divided as follows**:

* Two teachers demonstrate the part of the lesson that is a review and expansion of what constitutes an “adjective,” and the different types of adjectives (color, size, order, opinion, etc.) as well as a review of the need to put a comma between two adjectives that come one after the other….SOMETIMES. The rule is that the comma should only be there if the order of the adjectives is INTERCHANGEABLE. Teachers write down a few of the demo sentences from the lesson: *It’s the large red house on the left.* They then write sentences from the lesson like *“It’s the red large house on the left* or *It’s the scary first movie I’ve seen all month.* Do these make sense? No. Because sometimes adjectives have to come in a certain order.
* Two teachers review the two tests for deciding whether adjectives that are side by side need a comma between them: (1) Can you reverse the order and it still makes sense? (2) Can you put “and” between them and it makes sense? They model using the two tests with several sample sentences.
* Two teachers lead the group through a sample TASC question that draws on this rule.

**Session IV: Clarity and Conciseness: Wordiness and Passive Voice**

**Goals:**

* Teachers will analyze TASC Writing Skills Test questions that may be categorized as “clarity and conciseness” questions, noting what test-makers are aiming at
* Teachers will become familiar with mini-lessons from the Teaching Guide developed to prepare students for these question types on the TASC (wordiness and redundancy; passive voice)

Materials:

* Copies of the “Clarity and Conciseness” sample TASC questions for analysis
* Individual copies of the Guide for each teacher

Steps:

1. Tell teachers that they have now either been through the training sessions on the TASC punctuation questions and are ready to move on to the next type, or, if they have not, they can learn about these question types as a stand-alone training.
2. Tell teachers that the next type of question is extremely challenging. They are going to analyze, then look at some mini-lessons aimed at helping students meet the challenge (or at least get some of the questions right).
3. Give out the sample TASC questions for analysis. Write the directions: Read each question and and (1) decide on the right answer (2) discuss what the WRONG answers tell you about what the TASCmakers are aiming at (what does “clarity and conciseness” mean to them?)
4. Allow 5-10 minutes for this discussion. Depending upon the size of the group, you can have all teachers look at the questions, or have each pair of teachers responsible for reporting back on ONE question.
5. After small group discussion, bring the group together and lead a discussion about what teachers notice. As teachers report back, write up a list of what the questions reveal about TASCmakers intent, for instance:

* For the TASCmakers, “clarity and conciseness” means an emphasis on correcting misplaced modifiers
* For the TASCmakers, “clarity and conciseness” means NOT using passive voice
* For the TASCmakers, “clarity and conciseness” means no wordiness, repetition, redundancy
* For the TASCmakers, “clarity and conciseness” means choosing sentences with parallel structure.
* The correct “revised sentence must accurately reflect the original, with no extra or different information.

1. Explain to teachers that they will now be doing a “teach in” to review lessons designed to help students master two aspects of the “clarity and conciseness” questions: wordiness/redundancy and passive voice.

**Group One: Wordiness and Redundancy**

* Two teachers will write the “wordy” sentences from Mini-Lesson Seven on the board and model how to get students to recognize the parts that can be eliminated, then lead the group through a sample test question.

Note to trainer: you may want to provide the entire group with copies of the sample test question from the lesson. Alternatively, the teachers can write it on a large piece of paper.

**Group Two: Passive Voice**

* Two teachers can lead the group through Mini-Lesson Eight: the initial subject/verb review, the demonstration with throwing the keys, and the chart in which students must fill in passive and active voice sentences.
* Two teachers can lead the group through review of practice TASC questions that focus on passive voice.

Note to trainer: you may want to provide teachers with copies of the Active Voice/Passive Voice chart, and the entire group with copies of the sample test questions on passive/active voice

**Session IV: Clarity and Conciseness: Misplaced Modifiers and Parallel Structure**

Goals:

Teachers will become familiar with mini-lessons in the Teaching Guide designed to prepare students for Clarity and Conciseness questions (Misplaced Modifiers and Parallel Structure)

Materials:

* Copies of the “Clarity and Conciseness” sample TASC questions for analysis if needed
* Individual copies of the Guide for each teacher

**Steps:**

NOTE: Session IV is intended to sequentially follow Session III. If it is not possible for the same teachers to attend both sessions, it would be a good idea to repeat the process of looking at sample TASC questions for analysis as in the previous session:

1. Give out the sample TASC questions for analysis. Write the directions: Read each question and and (1) decide on the right answer (2) discuss what the WRONG answers tell you about what the TASCmakers are aiming at (what does “clarity and conciseness” mean to them?)
2. Allow 5-10 minutes for this discussion. Depending upon the size of the group, you can have all teachers look at the questions, or have each pair of teachers responsible for reporting back on ONE question.
3. After small group discussion, bring the group together and lead a discussion about what teachers notice. As teachers report back, write up a list of what the questions reveal about TASCmakers intent, for instance:
4. For the TASCmakers, “clarity and conciseness” means an emphasis on correcting misplaced modifiers
5. For the TASCmakers, “clarity and conciseness” means NOT using passive voice
6. For the TASCmakers, “clarity and conciseness” means no wordiness, repetition, redundancy
7. For the TASCmakers, “clarity and conciseness” means choosing sentences with parallel structure.
8. Tell teachers that they will be looking at two main concepts today: misplaced modifiers and parallel structure. In order to learn about how to teach these concepts, they will participate in a teach-in. Group One will focus on misplaced/dangling modifiers and Group Two will focus on parallel structure.

**Group One may be sub-divided as follows:**

* Two teachers model the beginning steps of the lesson:

Explaining what a modifier is and giving examples

Looking at the sentences:

*Jorge ate dinner and went to bed* AND

*After eating dinner, Jorge went to bed.*

* Two teachers explain that the modifier has to be attached to what is modifies, and looks at a sentence with a dangling modifier:
  + - *Having finished dinner, the football match was turned on.*

…walking teachers through another similar exercise from the lesson.

Note to trainer: To make this demonstration more visual, you may want to provide teachers with sentence strips that have the words of the sentence written on them so they can be moved around to show how an incorrect sentence can be made correct.

* Two teachers explain that modifiers need to be next to what they modify, and demonstrate using sentences with misplaced modifiers in Mini-Lesson Nine from the Teaching Guide (*Hungry for dinner, the surface is where Gert the goldfish waited in anticipation of food flakes*).

Note to trainer: To make this demonstration more visual, you may want to provide teachers with sentence strips that have the words of the sentence written on them so they can be moved around to show how an incorrect sentence can be made correct.

* Two teachers lead the group through the sample TASC questions in Mini Lesson Nine.

**Group Two can be sub-divided as follows:**

* Two teachers show the graphic that introduces parallel structure, and walk the group through the “Barking Dog” activity in Mini-Lesson Ten.
* Two teachers lead the group through sample questions from the Grammar Bytes exercises on parallel structure (link in Mini-Lesson Ten), then transition to the sample TASC questions

Note to trainer: you may want to provide the entire group with copies of the exercises.

**Session V: Text-Based Questions**

**Goals**:

Teachers will become familiar with mini-lessons in the Teaching Guide designed to prepare students for text-based questions.

**Materials**:

* Copies of text-based sample TASC questions for analysis if needed
* Individual copies of the Guide for each teacher
* Lesson materials: “Writing Effective Body Paragraph” handout; essay on biking in NYC, cut into strips; “Saving Money” essay; sample TASC test questions

**Steps**::

1. Give out sample text-based questions to teachers. Ask them to look at the questions in pairs and analyze what it is students need to be able to do and the kind of knowledge they need to have about text structure. Write a list as teachers report back.
2. Give out the handout, “Writing Effective Body Paragraphs” and have teachers read it over, then have them work on the essay on biking in NYC, paying attention to what they are using as indications that it’s time to start a new paragraph. Lead a short group discussion about what this implies for what students need to know.
3. Briefly, give out the essay on saving money and discuss with teachers what they would learn from the exercise
4. Ask selected teachers to lead the group in doing the sample TASC questions, then discuss what they think the best strategies are for using these questions with students. Materials:

**Session VI: Find-the-Right-Word Questions**

**Goals**:

Teachers will become familiar with mini-lessons in the Teaching Guide designed to prepare students for questions focused on tone and signal word.

Materials:

* Copies of “Find-the-Right-Word” questions
* Individual copies of the Guide for each teacher
* Lesson materials, Mini-Lesson Twelve: Handout on Signal Words, “How to Make Banana Pizza,” “Uniforms in School,” sample TASC questions.
* Lesson materials: Mini-Lesson Thirteen: Handout, “Formal vs. Informal Writing Styles;” Handout, “Other Ways to Say…”

Steps::

1. Have teachers look at sample TASC questions of this type. In pairs, they should discuss what students need to know/be able to do for these questions. Report back to the whole group.
2. Explain to teachers that they will be engaging in a “teach in” to review the material in the lessons and “rehearse” teaching them. Group One will work on signal words in Mini-Lesson Twelve and Group Two on “tone” words in Mini Lesson Thirteen.
3. Group One may be sub-divided as follows:

Two teachers lead the brainstorm on signal words (Steps 4, 5 and 6 from Mini-Lesson Twelve), gives out the Handout on Signal Words, and does the Banana Pizza exercise, as well as discussing other activities they might introduce to review signal words.

Two teachers lead the group through Steps 7-16.

1. Group Two may be sub-divided as follows:

Two teachers lead the group through Steps 1-4 in the lesson.

Two teachers lead the group through Steps 5-9 in the lesson. Discuss alternative activities they might use to teach students about “tone” words and present to the group.