



# California Science Test (CAST) FAQs

The following are the top five Frequently Asked Questions about the California Science Test (CAST) that CSTA receives and based on a recent survey of members. This FAQs list will be added to as needed.

## Q1. What is the best way to prepare students for the CAST?

**A1.** The CAST is not a test you can “teach to.” Aligning classroom instruction to NGSS, where students work to explain phenomena and solve problems building an increasingly deeper understanding of the three-dimensions, is the best way for students to prepare. If students have never engaged in practices such as developing and using models, for example, they will be unprepared for the CAST.

It is important to recognize that all classrooms need to shift instruction to align with NGSS as the CAST assesses student understanding at the end of the grade-band. Preparation is the responsibility of all grades not only that of the teacher of the grade the assessment is administered.

In order to help students be ready for the assessment, in addition to shifting instruction, teachers can make use of the training and practice tests available at no charge from CDE. See Q1A for more information.

Teachers can also familiarize students with the resources that will be available to them during the course of the assessment. 5th-grade students will have access to the Desmos calculator (this is the same calculator used in the Smarter Balance Math Assessment). 8th-grade and high school students will have access to the Desmos calculator, periodic table, and reference sheets (the periodic table and reference sheets can also be made available in print format). See question 5 for more information.

### Quick tip! Remember that...

- **The 5th-grade CAST assess performance expectations (PEs) in grades 3 - 5\***
- **The 8th-grade CAST assess performance expectations (PEs) in grades 6 - 8**
- **The high school CAST assess performance expectations (PEs) in grades 9 - 12**

**\*Includes foundational concepts that are addressed in kindergarten through grade two (K-2).**

## Q1A. Are there practice tests to help me and my students prepare for the CAST?

**A1A.** Yes! CDE offers both training and practice tests for free on the CAASPP website. The practice and training tests were updated for this first operational administration of the CAST and include all of the accessibility supports and reference tools that are available with this year’s CAST.





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**Q1B. What is the difference between a practice test and a training test?**

**A1B.** The practice tests provide students with grade-specific testing experiences that are similar in structure and format to the summative assessments. The training tests provide students with the opportunity to quickly become familiar with the software and interface features. Practice and Training tests can be accessed at <http://www.caaspp.org/practice-and-training/index.html>.

**Q1C. What practice and training tests are available for the CAST?**

**A1C.** In late 2018 CDE released the newest generation of practice and training tests. There are practice and training tests available for 5th-grade, 8th-grade, and high school.

## Available Practice and Training Tests from CDE

	5th-Grade	8th-Grade	High School
<b>Practice Tests</b>	32 discreet items and three performance tasks (one for each domain) <a href="#">Scoring Guide</a>	30 discreet items and three performance tasks (one for each domain) <a href="#">Scoring Guide</a>	31 discreet items and three performance tasks (one for each domain) <a href="#">Scoring Guide</a>
<a href="#">How to start a practice test.</a>			
<b>Training Tests</b>	two discreet items and one performance task <a href="#">Scoring Guide</a>	three discreet items - two of which are multi-part - and one performance task <a href="#">Scoring Guide</a>	one discreet item and one performance task <a href="#">Scoring Guide</a>
<a href="#">How to start a training test.</a>			

Practice and Training tests can be accessed at <http://www.caaspp.org/practice-and-training/index.html>.





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## Q2. How long does it take to take the test?

**A2.** The CAST is an untimed test that is designed to take approximately two hours to complete. Some students may require less time, some students may require more.

## Q2A. Can the CAST be administered over several class periods or days?

**A2A.** Yes. The test can be administered over more than one class period or over a number of days.

## Q2B. Is there a good time to pause the test?

**A2B.** To help plan for these pauses, CDE has developed a new resource: "[Suggested Pausing Points for the California Science Test](#)." Segments 1-5 on the Pause Points document should take approximately 20 minutes to complete.

## Q2C. Does it have to be a class pause, or can individual students pause the assessment?

**A2C.** There are several options for pause administration. Students can pause the test themselves (you can even direct students to pause the assessment when they complete Segment 2, for example), test administrators can pause students individually or as a whole class.

## Q2D. What does the student experience when returning to the test after a pause?

**A2D.** If paused at the end of a Segment, when returning, students will be presented with the next Segment. If a student is in a middle of a segment when the test is paused, if the student resumes testing in less than 20 minutes, they return to where they left off and may continue to review the items in their current segment. If the break exceeds 20 minutes, then a student will be returned to the point of the test where they have an uncompleted item, however, they will not be able to review items earlier in the segment. For a quick guide, access the "[Suggested Pausing Points for the California Science Test](#)". For detailed pause rules, review pages 58 - 60 of the [2018–19 CAASPP Online Test Administration Manual](#).





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## Q3. How many questions will there be on the 2018/19 operational CAST?

**A3.** For the first operational year of the CAST is a single test that consists of six Segments, Segments 1 and 2 will be made of 12 - 17 discreet items; students will be randomly assigned either another set of 12 - 17 discreet items or a performance task consisting of 4 - 7 items in Segment 3; Segments 4 and 5 will be randomly assigned performance tasks consisting of 4 - 7 items each; and Segment 6 is a student survey of 3 - 4 questions. So students will have 44 - 60 questions depending on the number of questions in each segment (the minimum or the maximum number) and if a student receives the third set of discrete items or a performance task in Segment 3.

## Q3A. Did they fix the problem with the ever-changing number of questions that was experienced in the 2017/18 Field Test?

**A3A.** Yes - but remember, all students experience something different on the test as they are randomly assigned question sets in Segments 3, 4, and 5 (see above). To help address the “problem” from last year, students will no longer be presented with a “progress” representation. They will now only see the number of question they are on, not how many are remaining.

## Q4. What can be on the walls of the room where a student is taking the assessment?

E.g. NGSS posters that list the practices and crosscutting concepts and statements such as: "I can use evidence of cause and effect to decide the type of relationships between them and to predict future change."

**A4.** Use this rule of thumb: when in doubt, remove it. Addressing the specific question above, the poster that includes the “I can...” statement should be removed. Page 35 of the [2018–19 CAASPP Online Test Administration Manual](#) outlines the Requirements of the Test Environment Before Testing. It states “Instructional materials must be removed or covered, including but not limited to information that might assist students in answering questions that is displayed on bulletin boards, chalkboards or dry-erase boards, or on charts (e.g., wall charts that contain literary definitions, maps, mathematics formulas, etc.).” There may be a question as to what qualifies as an instructional material that would be subject to removal based on the guidance above. If there is a question, the best option is to consider it as such and cover or remove it per the guidance.

**Quick Tip! Consider administering the CAST in a room that is not used for science to avoid this issue.**





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## Q5. What are the reference tools for the CAST?

A5.

The 2018/19 CAST will feature a new version of the periodic table that can be resized and moved within the item and is accessible for students using Job Access with Speech (JAWS®). This new periodic table is available in the practice and training tests. Both the [periodic table](#) and the reference lists may be printed (and enlarged) for the student. The reference sheets ([8th-grade](#) and [high school](#)) provide all formulas that a student may need to use in responding to a test item; however, this does not imply that the student will receive a specific item type. The purposes of these reference tools are to signal that students do not need to memorize formula sheets and to ensure that students have equal access to the tools during testing. ([Braille versions of these documents are also available.](#))

Two different Desmos calculators are available, [one for use with the 5th-grade assessment](#), and one for use with the [8th-grade and high school assessments](#). These calculators are available for students taking the CAST to use year-round in order to be able to be comfortable using them.

See <http://www.caaspp.org/administration/about/science/index.html> for more information.

**These reference tools are not meant to guide instruction.**

## Q5A. What accessibility supports are available to students taking the CAST?

A5A.

The CAST offers many Universal Tools, Designated Supports, and Accommodations in order to support all students.

**Universal Tools** are just that – universal. They are available to all students.

**Designated Supports** are supports that must be requested by a parent or teacher and do not require documentation in order to be utilized. They must be designated prior to commencing administration of the assessment.

**Accommodations** are available to students with a documented need in an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) or Section 504 Plan.

- [A summary of Universal Tools, Designated Supports, and Accommodations is available.](#)
- For details about accessibility supports that are available for the CAST visit <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/ca/documents/castaccesssupt.pdf>.

