

What Is an SCR Item?

A **Short-Constructed Response (SCR)** is a brief writing task—typically one paragraph—scored on **three traits**, each using a **1–3 scale**. It is designed to assess students’ ability to::

- Demonstrate **accuracy** in understanding the text.
- Communicate ideas with **clarity** and logical flow.
- Use strong, text-based **supporting details** to develop and explain their thinking.

SCR items are ideal for targeting **critical thinking**, **comprehension**, and **textual analysis** within a compact writing task. Short Constructed Responses can be created in any genre, allowing flexibility to assess narrative, informative, literary or argument/persuasive writing

Benefits of SCR in MY Prompt

- Aligned with **state standards** and **rubric-based grading**.
- Easily adapted across **grades and content areas**.
- Supports formative assessment and **targeted feedback**.
- Ideal for **quick checks** of comprehension or close reading.

Authoring Tips for Teachers/Admins

- **Keep it focused:** Use one paragraph of source text for in-depth analysis.
- **Align expectations:** Ask for specific information (i.e. explain, describe, argue a position, analyze)
- **Use the rubric:** When crafting prompts, ensure it’s possible for students to demonstrate all three traits.

Create a Writing Prompt

Prompt Name: Benefits of a Community School Garden

Prompt Type: Short Constructed Response

Grade Level: MY Middle School (Grade 6-8) Writing Prompts

Prompt Genre: MY Persuasive/Argument Writing Prompts

Keywords: SCR

Prompt:

Read the expanded source “Benefits of a School Community Garden” (below). Then, in one well-developed paragraph, explain what the author’s language in paragraph 4 suggests about the emotional and behavioral impact of the garden on students. Be sure to:

- State a clear claim drawn from the paragraph.
- Cite two pieces of text-based evidence (direct quote or accurate paraphrase).
- Explain how each piece of evidence supports your claim. Y

Your response will be scored on three traits, each on a 1–3 scale:

- Trait 1: Accuracy of Information
- Trait 2: Clarity of Explanation
- Trait 3: Supporting Details

Source 1: Benefits of a Community School Garden by Vantage Learning

1 In recent years, many schools across the country have turned unused patches of land into thriving community gardens. A study by the National School Gardening Association found that students who participate in garden programs score on average 15 percent higher on science and math assessments than their peers. Garden-based learning helps students see real-world applications of classroom concepts—measuring plant growth, calculating fertilizer ratios, and observing pollinators in action.

2 Beyond academics, community gardens foster teamwork and responsibility. When students share tasks—planting seeds one day and harvesting crops the next—they learn collaboration and time management. Principal Martinez of Lincoln Middle School reports, “Our garden has become the heart of our school culture. Students who never spoke in class now lead garden tours for visitors.”

3 Community gardens also support environmental stewardship. By composting food scraps and turning yard waste into rich soil, students observe the cycle of decay and renewal firsthand. This hands-on experience reinforces lessons about sustainability and waste reduction: “Turning cafeteria leftovers into garden compost taught us that nothing is truly ‘trash,’” recalls a seventh-grader at Riverside Elementary. Such practices often inspire whole families to start composting at home, extending the garden’s impact beyond the school gates.

4 Finally, garden work strengthens emotional well-being and mental health. Research from the Green Minds Institute indicates that regular time outdoors planting and nurturing plants reduces stress by up to 30 percent and improves mood indicators in children. “I feel calmer after

Teacher Plan: How to Teach Short Constructed Response (SCR) with Source Texts

1. Understand the Prompt

- Highlight action words (e.g., explain, argue, describe).
- Identify required components (claim, evidence, counterclaim).

2. Close Read the Source

- First read: General understanding.
- Second read: Annotate for key facts, signal words, and examples.
- Teach students how to paraphrase and quote accurately.

3. Model a Response (I Do)

- Show how to answer the prompt using a model paragraph.
- Think aloud to explain your choices for claim, evidence, and structure.
- Highlight how you cite the source using line numbers.

4. Guided Practice (We Do)

- Co-write a paragraph using a shared text. .
- Ask students to contribute ideas, transitions, and explanations
- Use sentence frames (e.g., 'This shows that...') to scaffold.

5. Independent Practice (You Do)

- Provide a new prompt and source.
- Use a response planner and checklist for structure.
- Allow peer collaboration or support with a graphic organizer.

6. Feedback and Revision

- Use a rubric to score (e.g., 1–3 scale for Accuracy, Clarity, Support)
- Highlight a strength and one area to improve.
- Students revise their response and reflect on growth.

Bonus Tips:

- Use color-coding to map the prompt to response sections.
- Provide model responses at different levels for comparison.
- Reinforce the 'Say it, Cite it, Explain it' method for supporting claims.