



Education Commission
of the States



Civic Competency Categories

Categorization of Items by Type of Civic Competency Assessed

The Civics Assessment Database contains the following types of assessment items:

- civic knowledge
- civic thinking skills
- civic participation skills
- core civic dispositions
- participation-related civic dispositions.

Those interested in assembling an instrument can choose items or scales that match their state or district's standards from whichever category or categories seem appropriate.

Categorization of Items in the Data Base by Content

The database also is organized according to three content categories, and each item has been annotated to match the themes presented in the [Center for Civic Education's National Standards for Civics and Government \(CCE\)](#).

The three content categories are based on the work of John Patrick and include democracy and government structure (including free and competitive elections and the rule of law); citizenship (rights, responsibilities and roles of citizens); and civil society (civic participation as an expression of personal interest and for the common good).

The annotation of each item using the five theme questions found in the CCE National Standards is intended to help states identify assessment items aligned with their state standards. All but two states reported in 2002 that the national standards had been influential in developing their states' standards.

For more detailed descriptions of the competencies and content categories, see the Torney-Purta and Vermeer paper, [Developing Citizenship Competencies from Kindergarten Through Grade 12: A Background Paper for Policymakers and Educators \(2006\)](#).



Descriptions of Item Types

Civic knowledge: Items measuring civic knowledge assess historical and contemporary knowledge, such as understanding the structure and mechanics of constitutional government and the principles on which it is based. Understanding issues under public debate is also important. The Center for Civic Education's theme questions apply especially well to the civic knowledge area:

Democracy and Government Structure:

- What are civic life, politics and government?
- What are the foundations of the American political system?
- How does the government established by the Constitutions embody the purpose, values and principles of American democracy?
- What is the relationship of the United States to other nations and to world affairs?

Citizenship:

- What are the roles of citizens in formal institutions of American democracy?

Civil Society:

- What are the roles of individuals in civil society as a part of American democracy?

Civic thinking skills: Items measuring thinking skills often have a component of civic knowledge, and they usually include the ability to read and understand information about government or issues such as that found in the media, to distinguish between facts and opinions in written text, and to articulate abstract concepts such as democracy. These skills can also be referenced to the bullet points and questions contained under civic knowledge (above).

Civic participation skills: Items measuring participation skills assess the ability to effectively participate through the analysis of public issues, leadership, group mobilization and communication. Participatory skills also refer to a student's ability to resolve conflicts as part of a group, be part of an informed discussion about a candidate, monitor an issue and understand various communications issued at the time of elections. Some skills can also be referenced to the CCE bullet points and questions contained above under civic knowledge. Most of these items fall into the content category of citizenship.

Core civic dispositions: Items measuring core civic dispositions assess those attitudes that schools work to foster in areas such as respect and support for other individuals and civility, as well as support for law, social norms and basic democratic values. Dispositions are important because students will not necessarily connect knowledge and skills to their behavior without motivation or a reason to believe their actions are worthwhile.



Participation-related civic dispositions: Items relating to participation assess dispositions such as sense of the efficacy of social or political action, support for norms of participation, and expectations of actual political or social involvement. In addition, the disposition to look critically at issues and political materials is often included. These dispositions are important because students will not necessarily connect knowledge and skills to participation unless they believe these actions are appropriate, worthwhile, and likely to be effective.

Further elaboration of areas in which skill and disposition items might be developed may be found in books such as *Building civic literacy and citizen power* by James Chesney and Otto Feinstein (Prentice Hall). Further scales in the areas of participation skills and the two categories of civic dispositions may also be found on the [Compendium of Assessment and Research Tools \(CART\)](#) web page and in *The Measure of Service Learning* by Robert Bringle, Mindy Phillips, and Michael Hudson (American Psychological Association).

Number of Items by Civic Competency and Content Category

The following chart shows how many items are contained in the database for civic competencies and categories of content:

Content Categories	Civic Knowledge	Civic Thinking Skills	Civic Participation Skills	Core Civic Dispositions	Participation-Related Dispositions
Democracy and Government Structure	48	9	2	0	1
Citizenship	12	16	20	11	12
Civil Society	3	1	2	8	3

