

EXIT LEVEL GUIDE TO SUCCESS

Foreword

Purpose

The Guide to Success is meant for teachers who are interested in finding new ways to differentiate instruction for gifted and talented students or in becoming familiar with curriculum that provides enhanced academic opportunities for all students. The Texas Performance Standards Project (TPSP) does just that—it is a statewide system of standards, curriculum, and assessment for gifted and talented students. On this CD, you can learn about implementing the program in your classroom, school, or district. The CD also includes information about resource people and materials available to you.

How To Use the CD

The CD was developed for use on computers running current versions of Windows and Macintosh OS X operating systems. Some features require the Adobe Acrobat PDF Reader software which can be downloaded for free from www.adobe.com if it is not already installed on the computer. For PC users, the CD should start automatically. If it does not, choose “Explore CD” from the explorer menu, navigate to the “Guide_to_Success.exe” file and double click it to start the program. Macintosh users will need to follow the steps in the “Read_Me” file in the “Macintosh_Version” folder for instructions on running the program on the Macintosh computer. Additionally, for optimal viewing, the recommended display settings are a resolution of 1024 x 768 or higher.

The materials and software available on this CD are provided "as is" without any express, conspicuous or implied warranty of any kind including warranties of merchantability, non-infringement of intellectual property rights, or fitness for any particular purpose. In no event shall TEA or its employees be liable for any conspicuous damages whatsoever (including, without limitation, consequential or incidental damages for loss of profits, business interruption, loss of information) arising out of the use of or inability to use the materials on this CD.

This CD contains links to third party web sites. The linked sites are not under the control of TEA, and TEA is not responsible for the contents of any linked site or any link contained in a linked site, or any changes or updates to such sites. While the links on this CD are current as of publication, third party sites may experience name and server changes, change page content, or remove pages without warning causing broken links and missing files.

Copyright

© 2006 by the Texas Education Agency

Copyright © Notice. The Materials are copyrighted © and trademarked TM as the property of the Texas Education Agency (TEA) and may not be reproduced without the express written permission of TEA, except under the following conditions:

- 1) Texas public school districts, charter schools, and Education Service Centers may reproduce and use copies of the Materials and Related Materials for the districts' and schools' educational use without obtaining permission from TEA.
- 2) Residents of the state of Texas may reproduce and use copies of the Materials and Related Materials for individual personal use only, without obtaining written permission of TEA.
- 3) Any portion reproduced must be reproduced in its entirety and remain unedited, unaltered and unchanged in any way.
- 4) No monetary charge can be made for the reproduced materials or any document containing them; however, a reasonable charge to cover only the cost of reproduction and distribution may be charged.

Private entities or persons located in Texas that are **not** Texas public school districts, Texas Education Service Centers, or Texas charter schools or any entity, whether public or private, educational or non-educational, located **outside the state of Texas** *MUST* obtain written approval from TEA and will be required to enter into a license agreement that may involve the payment of a licensing fee or a royalty.

For information contact: Office of Copyrights, Trademarks, License Agreements, and Royalties, Texas Education Agency, 1701 N. Congress Ave., Austin, TX 78701-1494; phone 512-463-7004; email: copyrights@tea.state.tx.us.

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank all of the Regional Education Service Center gifted and talented specialists for their work with gifted and talented educators and their contributions to the TPSP over the years. In developing the Guide to Success, many people contributed, and we would like to thank them here:

- Vowery Carlile, Coordinator/Teacher of the Gifted K-12, Sundown ISD
- Linda Bell, G/T Specialist, Alvin ISD
- Jackie Caffey, G/T Specialist, Alvin ISD
- Kim Hamilton, G/T Specialist, Alvin ISD
- Bronwen Choate, G/T Coordinator, Graham ISD
- Ellen Morris, Teacher of the Gifted/Secondary Language Arts Leader, Graham ISD

Contact Information

Texas Education Agency

- Kelly Callaway, Director, Advanced Academics/Gifted Education
(512) 463-9581
kelly.callaway@tea.state.tx.us

Education Service Center Region 13

- Marilyn Peebles, Coordinator, Office of Statewide Initiatives
(512) 919-5392
marilyn.peebles@esc13.txed.net
- Erin Midgley Romero, Technical Specialist, Office of Statewide Initiatives
(512) 919-5489
erin.midgley@esc13.txed.net

Resources for Learning

- Linda Wurzbach, President
(512) 327-8576, ext. 411
lindaw@resourcesforlearning.net
- Judy Jennings, Senior Researcher
(512) 327-8576, ext. 451
judyj@resourcesforlearning.net
- Lauren Sartain, Product Development Specialist
(512) 327-8576, ext. 455
laurens@resourcesforlearning.net

Section 1: About the Texas Performance Standards Project (TPSP)

1. What is the TPSP?

The TPSP is a statewide standards and assessment system you can use to capture the high levels of achievement of gifted and talented students. The goal of the TPSP is for students to create work that reflects the professional quality that the [Texas State Plan for the Education of Gifted/Talented Students](http://www.tea.state.tx.us/gted/GTStatePlanEnglishAug05.pdf) (<http://www.tea.state.tx.us/gted/GTStatePlanEnglishAug05.pdf>) requires. Interdisciplinary student projects are TEKS-based and focus on the core content areas of English language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies.

Currently the TPSP is developed for fourth grade, eighth grade, and the exit level (typically eleventh or twelfth grade). The TPSP is available for any district or school that wants to use it for G/T instruction. The TPSP is designed for use with gifted students, but can be differentiated for all students. In fourth and eighth grades, the TPSP tasks include teacher-led instruction and independent student research. At the exit level, the research project is completely student-driven. For all levels there is a scoring rubric teachers and students can use to determine the level at which the student is performing and how he/she can move to the next level.

See the TPSP website for a [glossary](http://www.texaspsp.org/exit/glossary.php) (<http://www.texaspsp.org/exit/glossary.php>) of terms that are specific to the program.

2. Who developed and maintains the program?

In 1999, the Texas Legislature directed the Texas Education Agency (TEA) to develop an assessment system and statewide standards for G/T students. Work on the exit level began in 2000, on eighth grade in 2001, and on fourth grade in 2002. Working committees consisted of these members:

- Texas educators
- [The Texas Education Agency](http://www.tea.state.tx.us/gted/GifTal.html) (<http://www.tea.state.tx.us/gted/GifTal.html>)
- [Education Service Center, Region 13](http://www.esc13.net/) (<http://www.esc13.net/>)
- [Resources for Learning](http://www.resourcesforlearning.net/) (<http://www.resourcesforlearning.net/>)

A team from TEA, Region 13, and Resources for Learning currently maintains the program.

See the TPSP website for more information on the program's [history](http://www.texaspsp.org/history.php) (<http://www.texaspsp.org/history.php>).

3. What makes the TPSP unique from other G/T curricula?

The TPSP assessment system—the scoring dimensions and scoring scale—is aligned to the State Goal for Services for Gifted Students and allows for differentiated instruction. The vertical alignment of the fourth grade, eighth grade, and exit level projects provides a tool for assessing the quality of G/T services.

Completion of the exit level project helps students to feel successful. The TPSP provides students with many opportunities:

- A wide variety of choices in their learning
- More flexibility
- The ability to take charge of their learning
- Professional research experiences
- A chance to develop a high-quality product and presentation
- The ability to research subjects that are interesting to them
- Differentiated instruction that focuses on the individual student

Section 2: Resources for Implementation

1. What are some resources available to help me implement the TPSP?

The TPSP website (www.texaspsp.org) is an excellent resource for teachers, administrators, and others who want to learn more about the program. The website houses basic background information and more detailed information about the program at the three levels—fourth, eighth, and exit. You can find information about the structure of the exit level project, teacher curricular and instructional resources, and optional forms that students can use to guide them through the experience.

2. How can my Regional Education Service Center help me?

The regional ESC gifted and talented specialists are great resources. In addition to providing general information about G/T services, they can provide specific resources for the TPSP:

- Informational DVDs for fourth grade, eighth grade, and exit level
- Guides to Success for fourth grade, eighth grade, and exit level
- Awareness training
- Scoring training
- Examples of student work

See the TPSP website for [ESC contact information](http://www.texaspsp.org/escontacts.php) (<http://www.texaspsp.org/escontacts.php>).

3. Whom can I contact if I have questions about the TPSP?

If there are questions that district or regional specialists cannot answer, there are other people you can consult:

- Kelly Callaway, Director of Advanced Academics/Gifted Education at the Texas Education Agency, kelly.callaway@tea.state.tx.us
- Marilyn Peebles, Coordinator in the Office of Statewide Initiatives at Region 13, marilyn.peebles@esc13.txed.net
- Erin Midgley Romero, Technical Specialist in the Office of Statewide Initiatives at Region 13, erin.midgley@esc13.txed.net
- Linda Wurzbach, President of Resources for Learning, lindaw@resourcesforlearning.net
- Judy Jennings, Senior Researcher at Resources for Learning, judyj@resourcesforlearning.net
- Lauren Sartain, Product Development Specialist at Resources for Learning, laurens@resourcesforlearning.net

See the TPSP website for a [discussion board](http://www.texaspsp.org/discuss/) (<http://www.texaspsp.org/discuss/>) that teachers can use to seek advice or share ideas.

Section 3: Program Benefits

1. How do students benefit from participation in the TPSP?

Students who participate in the TPSP have a lot to gain, including:

- developing confidence in their abilities to complete an independent research project;
- using their own research to produce a professional, discipline-based product;
- being pushed to their limits and discovering what they are capable of doing academically;
- learning to accept challenges in order to perform at a high academic and intellectual level;
- exploring an area of interest and passion;
- performing research outside of the traditional curriculum;
- working with professionals in the field;
- receiving critiques from individuals other than the classroom teacher;
- gaining an academic measure for the Distinguished Achievement Program (DAP); and
- improving communication and presentation skills.

2. How do teachers benefit from participation in the TPSP?

Teachers who participate in the TPSP have a lot to gain, including:

- an evaluation tool that provides measures for student growth;
- a G/T curriculum model that can be differentiated for students of all ability levels;
- exit level projects that are aligned with the TEKS and the *Texas State Plan for the Education of Gifted/Talented Students*; and
- the opportunity to work with students in a meaningful, creative, and open-ended way.

3. What are the benefits to the entire learning community?

The TPSP provides a way to align the curriculum so that a school or district has a true continuum of G/T services. This alignment helps ensure that G/T programs are meeting the Texas State Plan's criteria for G/T education. After participating in the TPSP, educators will be able to identify areas of strength and weakness in the program.

The TPSP showcases what gifted students are capable of doing academically. Successful students are visible in the learning community and project a positive image of the G/T program.

4. How do the exit level projects help students achieve their learning goals?

The exit level TPSP gives students a framework for successfully completing a large-scale, long-term independent research project. The TPSP enables students to become real thinkers and scholars. Students are challenged to think critically, abstractly, and logically to evaluate and solve a problem. Students synthesize new information and comprehend different points of view. They learn to communicate effectively, professionally, and clearly in written and oral forms.

Section 4: Program Structure

1. What is a TPSP project?

At the exit level, gifted and talented students apply all the knowledge and skills they have amassed over their K-12 education to design an independent project that is individualized and based on a topic of their choosing. Over the course of a year, each student works with a mentor, who is a professional in the student's field of study, to create a unique, innovative final product or performance that is of professional quality. With the mentor, the student investigates an area of interest and passion, which may be outside the traditional high school curriculum. The TPSP provides opportunities for students to explore their areas of interest to an extent that is not often possible in school. Such an in-depth study may impact students' future studies and career plans. In other words, the project allows the student to extend beyond the classroom walls.

See the TPSP website for more information on the [exit level projects](http://www.texaspsp.org/exit/projects.php) (<http://www.texaspsp.org/exit/projects.php>).

2. How do students choose their projects?

Some students may already have an idea in mind, while others may need some time to explore. Teachers may wish to use a variety of tools to help students develop project ideas. For instance, students could complete interest inventories, shadow a professional in the workplace, follow a lifelong interest or general curiosity, or expand on a professional goal. Most importantly, students should choose a project topic that is interesting and relevant to them.

3. What steps should students take when carrying out an exit level project?

There are some general steps that all students carrying out an exit level project should complete, including:

1. Reviewing the performance standards and program requirements.
2. Choosing a topic or question of study.
3. Writing a proposal.
4. Securing a mentor and deciding collaboratively on the focus of the project, a final product, and a format for the process record.
5. Meeting agreed upon deadlines.
6. Developing a product.
7. Writing an abstract.
8. Preparing a process record in final form.
9. Preparing a public presentation.

See the TPSP website for more information about [student project guidelines](http://www.texaspsp.org/exit/StudentGuidelinesExit.pdf) (<http://www.texaspsp.org/exit/StudentGuidelinesExit.pdf>).

4. How do the projects help teachers structure instruction?

The TPSP provides teachers with an opportunity to guide students in independent work with the freedom to make appropriate adjustments and instructional decisions. Teachers do not need to be content experts; rather they should facilitate student explorations. **The exit level project should not create more work for G/T students. When G/T students have demonstrated that they already know course content, it provides an alternative for in-depth study and application.**

While the final product or performance is the student's creation, exit level teachers should help students develop deadlines and stay on track to complete the project. Throughout the project, teachers may choose to meet with students in order to evaluate student progress using the TPSP scoring scale.

5. Are the projects aligned with the TEKS?

Grounded in the content of the TEKS, the project allows students to develop an important content area question or idea in depth, but it does not necessarily reflect broad content knowledge in the field. Through the project, students will demonstrate the use of sophisticated and advanced research methods and the use of technology appropriate to the field of study.

If the school/district offers the TPSP through an independent study course, such as Independent Study in English or Scientific Research and Design, students should show mastery of the TEKS for that course.

6. How do the projects address different learning styles?

Because the TPSP at the exit level is designed by the student, that student has the freedom to take charge of his/her learning. As such, there is not a correct way to undertake the process or develop the end product. This flexible format allows for personal development and creative expression on the part of teachers and students. Projects can be done in various ways so that students can choose a medium that is appropriate for them.

7. Are group projects appropriate?

The TPSP's flexibility allows for the teacher to decide the best avenue for participating in the program. Two or more students may collaborate on a project if the project is of sufficient magnitude to warrant a team approach. The students need the approval of their teacher and mentor(s). Each student develops a product that stands on its own, while contributing to the overall group project. Individuals should outline project components that were their responsibility and include evidence of their own contributions. For collaborative projects, each student's individual submission of his/her product and documentation is

comparable to that of a student doing an individual project. Credit is awarded only to individual students, and the teacher is responsible for determining the integrity of each student's final product.

Section 5: Course Considerations

1. How is the TPSP structured?

The project structure should allow for the long-term development of a question or idea that is significant to professionals in the student's specified field of study. Additionally, the project should provide the student with opportunities to demonstrate sophisticated and advanced research methods and the use of technology appropriate to the field of study.

2. How are students awarded course credit?

Schools and districts can establish the exit level TPSP in many ways:

- Through Advanced Placement (AP), International Baccalaureate (IB), Pre-AP, Pre-IB, and other courses
- Through Independent Study and Mentorship/Internship courses
- Through core subject area courses

The class could be scheduled during normal school hours or at the zero hour. On the other hand, the class could also not have a meeting time. While this may not be the ideal arrangement, it has worked in many schools. In this case, teachers and students should have regular appointment times to discuss and monitor progress.

See the TPSP website for more information on [course credit](http://www.texaspsp.org/exit/deliveryCourseCredit.php?p=2) (<http://www.texaspsp.org/exit/deliveryCourseCredit.php?p=2>).

3. Does the TPSP fulfill Distinguished Achievement Program requirements?

The Distinguished Achievement Program (DAP) recognizes students who demonstrate high levels of performance equivalent to that of college students or work done by professionals in the field. One way to meet some of the DAP requirements is through developing an original product. In order for the student's TPSP final product to meet that requirement, the student's work must undergo professional judging.

Scoring of the exit level project by professional judges is not a TPSP requirement, so appropriate adjustments must be made in order for the exit level project to be a DAP advanced measure.

See the TPSP website for more information on [DAP requirements](http://www.texaspsp.org/exit/deliveryDAP.php?p=2) (<http://www.texaspsp.org/exit/deliveryDAP.php?p=2>).

4. What are some planning considerations when thinking about introducing the TPSP?

When planning to implement the TPSP, teachers should consider how to:

- address student needs, background knowledge, and interests;
- connect students with resources to help broaden their content knowledge and develop research skills;
- identify potential mentors;
- differentiate the exit level project to make it appropriate for all students;
- locate and utilize available resources and materials;
- integrate the project into the existing curriculum;
- moderate and encourage individual student progress; and
- communicate with and involve parents, colleagues, and community members.

Before introducing the TPSP to students, teachers will want to become familiar with the program and the scoring dimensions in order to have a better understanding of how the TPSP will unfold in their individual classrooms. Teachers may wish to:

- review the TPSP materials and curriculum;
- contact professionals and community members about becoming mentors;
- procure necessary supplies and materials;
- construct a plan for helping students to develop research skills; and
- develop a calendar with potential deadlines and deliverables.

Section 6: Student Projects

1. What is the teacher's role in the TPSP?

At the exit level, the TPSP teacher is a true facilitator of student learning. The level of involvement varies from student to student. Some students do not need as much teacher guidance and are able to remain focused on the end result. Other students may need more encouragement in order to stay on target. It is up to the teacher to determine how much structure each student needs. No student should complete the exit level project unsupervised.

The exit level teacher has some specific responsibilities:

- Helping students choose an appropriate topic
- Collaborating with students to establish project timelines
- Connecting students with mentors
- Informing students and mentors of project guidelines, requirements, and scoring criteria
- Providing the instruction necessary for students to succeed in the project
- Coaching students throughout the duration of the project
- Assessing student progress periodically and providing final assessments of student projects
- Assessing classroom grades
- Certifying that the project is the student's own work
- Following district guidelines for photographing and videotaping students and securing a release in accordance with district policy
- Following district guidelines for mentor selection and approval, which may include a background check

See the TPSP website for more information on [teacher guidelines](http://www.texaspsp.org/exit/TeacherGuidelinesExit.pdf) (<http://www.texaspsp.org/exit/TeacherGuidelinesExit.pdf>) and responsibilities.

2. How can teachers use tools to structure student learning?

The teacher plays an important role in the student's TPSP experience. Teachers can structure student learning in various ways:

- Use organizers or research journals
- Set weekly goals and keep records
- Reflect on and revisit goals
- Work with students to develop calendars with intermediate and final deadlines and deliverables
- Utilize the scoring scale to evaluate student progress and to determine how much work is still necessary
- Hold individual student conferences

3. What are some considerations for students when they begin planning their project?

Above all else, students should start with the end in mind. The exit level TPSP is a large-scale, long-term research project, and some students may not have had similar experiences in their academic careers. Therefore, students should know what the final expectations are and what the final outcome should look like. Teachers should introduce students to the TPSP scoring criteria and show students examples of completed products, which are available from the ESC G/T specialist.

4. How do students document their learning?

Teachers should introduce the scoring scale at the onset of the project so that students can understand the scope of the TPSP and the expectations for professional work. Students document their learning in the process record, which is one of the three components on which the student work is scored. An effective way for students to document their learning in the process record is to keep a journal of their experiences. The journal will allow students to review their preliminary experiences and findings and apply them to their work in the field. Teachers may wish to check student journals periodically to ensure that students are progressing appropriately. Students may wish to keep their research journals in a binder or spiral notebook. Appropriate documentation depends on the nature of the project.

Teachers can reinforce the idea that documentation of learning is evidence of scholarly behavior. The TPSP website also houses optional forms that students can use to document their learning, including forms for recording research findings, meetings with mentors, and primary and secondary sources. Some [optional forms](http://www.texaspsp.org/exit/forms.php) (<http://www.texaspsp.org/exit/forms.php>) are available online:

- Topic Submission and Approval
- Weekly Planner
- Product Proposal
- Research Plan/Proposal
- Product Due Dates
- Primary and Secondary Resource Process Sheets
- Mentor Meeting Review
- Periodic Progress Check

Documentation provides a professional experience for students. Students can develop this lifelong skill and apply it to their future careers in college and professional settings.

See the TPSP website for additional information on [documentation](http://www.texaspsp.org/exit/documentdevelopment.php?p=4) (<http://www.texaspsp.org/exit/documentdevelopment.php?p=4>).

5. How do teachers help students synthesize their learning?

Teachers can schedule individual and peer conferences. During the conferences, the teacher and student can construct a dialogue through the teacher's use of questioning and coaching techniques. Teacher and peer questions can prompt students to synthesize their learning and to evaluate their progress.

There are other ways to help students synthesize their learning:

- Modeling a professional presentation
- Conducting ongoing evaluations with the scoring dimensions
- Providing time for peers to offer suggestions and share ideas

6. How do students develop unique project ideas?

With peers or the exit level teacher, students can brainstorm possible project ideas and topics. Depending on the student's level of development, teachers may want to take a more active role. Teachers may also want to plan activities to encourage students to think creatively about the end product or performance. Students can look at existing products or ideas and discuss ways to improve the product or to morph the product into something different. Teachers may wish to share professional products that are also specific to the student's interest. The key is to create an environment where students feel safe to take intellectual risks and to be creative and unique.

When discussing project ideas with students, teachers may wish to:

- Stress originality and creativity—How can we improve what already exists? What doesn't exist that should?
- Use questioning and coaching techniques—I see you've identified a wide variety of resources. When you think about the range of resources available, how will you prioritize investigating these resources?
- Focus on the scoring scale—Which descriptor best fits for where you are now in your project, and where are you going?
- Watch for signs of frustration—Do we need to talk about this?
- Guide the students in journal writing—How can you document what you just did? How can you clarify your thinking?

In the end, the student's product should be discipline-specific and reflect the conventions of the profession.

7. How can teachers challenge students to move beyond what they already do?

Teachers should provide students with a secure environment in which students feel safe to move outside of their comfort zones without fear of failure or ridicule. In this type of setting, students are challenged to take academic risks and move beyond intellectual struggles. Teachers may wish to share the stories of successful people who pushed themselves beyond their limits and triumphed after struggling.

8. What is the final outcome? How will students know when their project is complete?

Teachers should use the scoring dimensions and scale throughout the course of the project to determine the level at which the student is performing and the steps necessary for the student to reach the next level. The scoring dimensions can help students determine when the project is complete.

As students complete their research, teachers may wish to have them practice their oral presentations. Teachers should share tips and pointers for communicating effectively. Teachers may wish to model or show a professional presentation. Students might also benefit by reviewing film of a practice session before the final presentation.

See the TPSP website for tips on [oral presentations](http://www.texaspsp.org/all/OralPresentations.pdf) (<http://www.texaspsp.org/all/OralPresentations.pdf>).

9. What are the students required to complete?

A completed exit level project consists of a **product**, an **abstract**, a **process record**, and a **presentation and question-and-answer session**.

The product is the focus of the scoring and can be in one of the following formats:

- Written, such as a formal paper, website, or literary work
- Performed, such as an exhibit or theatrical production
- Created, such as an invention, software, or tool

The abstract should include the title and purpose of the project, a brief description of the product, and an explanation of how the project relates to the TEKS.

The process record should include the documentation of the student's learning. An organized process record enables reviewers to follow the student's progress throughout the project.

The presentation should include an explanation of the project and a question-and-answer session.

10. How can the students organize their materials to turn in?

TPSP participation helps students to develop lifelong organization skills. Students should organize their materials and research findings in a manner that is easy for others to understand. Students and teachers should remember that the project is stand-alone. If formal judging occurs at the campus level or beyond, judges will only be able to see what students have prepared to submit. Students should start with the end in mind. From the beginning of the project, students should be aware of any submission requirements. This knowledge will help them organize their work throughout the TPSP process. Students should use an organizational tool, such as a binder, expandable file folder, or portfolio. Each submission should be clearly labeled with student name/number and a description of the specific items being submitted.

11. Who needs to receive completed student projects?

Student projects should initially go to the exit level teacher. Teachers may choose to review the projects themselves, as well as having peer, self, and external judge evaluations using the scoring scale. Some Educational Service Centers provide scoring sessions for scoring the projects at a regional level. For more information, check with the regional G/T specialist.

Remember that if the student is using the TPSP to meet the DAP, the exit level project must undergo scoring by professionals in the appropriate field.

12. How should I assign student grades?

Though teachers and students should use the scoring dimensions to measure progress, the dimensions were not meant to be a way to assign grades. Teachers should consider all aspects of student work and progress when determining classroom grades.

Teachers may want to consider some of the following questions when constructing a grading system:

- Does the student meet deadlines?
- What is the quality of the student's research and/or experiments?
- How detailed is the student's documentation?
- Does the student exhibit in-depth knowledge of the field during teacher-student meetings and/or interviews?
- Does the student take advantage of resources, including the mentor?
- Are the student's journal entries thoughtful and reflective?
- How prepared is the student for the presentation?
- Are the student's communication techniques effective?
- How has the student progressed over the grading period or duration of the project?

Section 7: Time Management

1. What is the role of time management?

Time management is crucial in order for students to have a satisfying, successful experience. Many teachers who have participated in the TPSP have found that timelines and calendars are helpful ways to organize the project. Teachers may want to develop a timeline for milestones and deliverables with student input. As students move through the work, it may become necessary to revise the timeline. Students should have an understanding of what the TPSP process looks like from the onset—here is where we are, here is where we are going, and here is where we will end up.

2. How do students develop timelines, including determining deadlines?

The TPSP projects are not short term; they require adequate time for students to complete professional, advanced products. It is important to set up a timeline from the beginning of the project—for students and for teachers. When estimating the time needed for project completion, teachers should consider program design, class time, frequency of meetings, and curriculum requirements. Teachers and students can revisit the timeline periodically.

Section 8: Assessing Learning through the TPSP

1. What are the scoring dimensions?

Experts in gifted and talented education designed the scoring dimensions, criteria, and scale. The nine scoring dimensions provide the basis for the student's work and for scoring of the project in the following areas:

1. Content Knowledge and Skills—the key facts, concepts, principles, skills, themes, and methods of inquiry of a discipline.
2. Innovation and Application—the creative use of knowledge and skills.
3. Analysis and Synthesis—advanced thinking processes that enable students to make connections across time, disciplines, locations, and cultures.
4. Ethics/Unanswered Questions—the student's awareness of legal and ethical issues and adherence to the profession's standard rules and procedures.
5. Multiple Perspectives—the consideration of other, diverse points of view.
6. Methodology and Use of Resources—the use of principles, procedures, practices, and references of the profession.
7. Communication—the use of appropriate written, spoken, and technological media to convey new learning in the discipline.
8. Relevance and Significance—the potential impact of the project on the student and society at large.
9. Professional Quality—a product that is comparable to the work of people in the profession.

See the TPSP website for more information on the [scoring dimensions](http://www.texaspsp.org/exit/scoringdimensions.php?p=1) (<http://www.texaspsp.org/exit/scoringdimensions.php?p=1>).

2. What are the scoring criteria?

The scoring criteria document five levels of performance for each of the nine scoring dimensions. The descriptors at each of the five levels describe the quality of student work in that category:

- Level 5: Superior level of student work in each dimension
- Level 4: High level of performance that is not easily attained
- Level 3: Norm for a student who has had quality services for gifted and talented students
- Level 2: Expectation for a student who receives credit for an advanced measure on the Distinguished Achievement Program (DAP)
- Level 1: Work that is still in need of improvement and refinement

See the TPSP website for more information on the [scoring criteria](http://www.texaspsp.org/exit/scoringcriteria.php?p=1) (<http://www.texaspsp.org/exit/scoringcriteria.php?p=1>).

3. What is the scoring scale?

The scoring scale is based on the nine scoring dimensions and the scoring criteria. It is the formal tool used to award a score to the student's work. The scoring scale consists of three categories—product, process record, and communication/Q&A. Descriptor statements of the different score levels are provided for each category.

See the TPSP website for the [scoring scale](http://www.texaspsp.org/exit/scoringscale.php?p=1) (<http://www.texaspsp.org/exit/scoringscale.php?p=1>).

4. How are the scoring dimensions used throughout the research and product development processes?

The scoring dimensions, criteria, and scale should be introduced to the students at the beginning of the project and used throughout as a guide for students developing their products. Exposure to the rubric from the onset will help students feel more comfortable and confident when scoring themselves and their peers. Teachers and students can discuss the project using the language of the scoring dimensions, criteria, and

scale. During product development, teachers may wish to encourage students to use self-evaluation and peer-evaluation techniques. Using the scoring scale throughout the project will keep students focused on the level of work they are capable of performing.

Note that the scoring scale does not have to be used in its entirety. Further, the scoring scale is not designed to assign classroom grades but as a way to assess the level of performance of gifted students.

5. How are the final projects scored?

When using the scoring scale, one should consider the student's complete set of submitted items, which includes the product, abstract, process record, and presentation and question-and-answer session. The scoring process is focused on the student's final product or performance.

Unless it is the focus of the project (e.g., creating a website), the use of media technology does not affect the score given, except in the judgment of its overall contribution to the quality of the product.

6. Who scores the project?

Projects are scored by teachers and students. For a formative, ongoing evaluation, students and teachers should regularly evaluate the students' progress and revise plans as necessary. Upon completion of the project, the teacher scores the final product according to the scoring scale.

Remember that judges from the field of study must review the project if the student is using the exit level project as a DAP measure. If professional judges are used to score student projects, the judges should be trained in the use of the TPSP scoring scale. Professional judging is not a TPSP requirement.

7. Are projects scored outside of the classroom?

There is currently no requirement for scoring beyond the classroom. District-level scoring can provide summative and formative information on an individual student's learning. Schools and districts can also use the results of this assessment to improve their services for gifted and talented students. Scoring training and additional scoring opportunities may be available through the Regional Education Service Centers.

8. How should teachers provide feedback for students and parents throughout and at the conclusion of the project?

Students should use the rubric routinely to determine the level of their work. Teachers should continually monitor student progress and make suggestions for improvement. Teachers may wish to provide written feedback, directly on the student's work if appropriate. Individual conferences are another effective way to provide students with feedback.

It is important to report the outcome of the assessment to students and parents. All too often, reducing the results of assessment to numeric scores dilutes the benefit that is gained. An effective method of providing feedback is to communicate results and share insights during individual conferences with students and parents.

9. How does the scoring contribute to the project's credibility and success?

The scoring process provides students with feedback that is not biased or subjective. The scoring dimensions, criteria, and scale give students guidance for developing presentations and meeting expectations at a professional level. When the TPSP is implemented at the fourth, eighth, and exit levels, student scores are a valuable tool for charting student progress. Upon completing the scoring process, students can see that they have worked as true scholars.

Section 9: Supporting Student Research

1. What does a student's research process look like?

The student's research process should consist of the following steps:

1. Identifying and defining the research problem or question.
2. Reviewing the existing evidence.
3. Refining the research question(s).
4. Developing a research design and proposal.
5. Carrying out the research design.
6. Analyzing the results.
7. Reporting the findings through a professional product or performance.

2. Who in the school community can contribute to student research?

The school librarian or media specialist is a valuable resource to students who are undertaking TPSP research projects. Teachers with specialized content knowledge in the sciences, history, mathematics, and language arts are also good resources and can serve as mentors if appropriate. Technology specialists can also be helpful with computers, telecommunications, or multimedia usage.

3. How should administrators be involved in the TPSP?

Support from the school/district administration is crucial in order for students to have a successful experience. Teachers can invite principals into the class to observe the students while they are working on their projects. Principals can also attend student presentations. Exposing administrators to the positive effects of the TPSP will help garner their support.

Administrators should structure master class schedules to include the exit level TPSP. Based on previous experience with the TPSP, here are some considerations for administrators:

- Classes scheduled in the afternoon periods allow students more flexibility for meeting with mentors.
- When teachers team-teach two or more courses, students can be allowed larger blocks of time for independent study in a regular schedule.
- Because of the varied interests of students, there will be scheduling conflicts with elective courses.
- Block scheduling and accelerated block scheduling will require a greater degree of coordination to allow students in-school time for this type of professional quality work.

District personnel should also be involved in the program. The district should support teachers and students during the process—this may include providing necessary funding. If the district has a gifted and talented coordinator, facilitator, or specialist, this person should provide additional support for the teacher through staff development, peer coaching, and/or modeling of instructional strategies.

4. How can districts utilize local community resources?

The local community contains a wealth of resources that students can use while conducting research. Consider tapping into local businesses, museums, colleges and universities, and libraries. Many community members are just waiting to be asked to contribute to student learning.

5. How can teachers help students identify and forge relationships with mentors and professionals in the field?

Teachers should encourage students to reach out to professionals in the field. In some cases, teachers may need to model what communication with professionals should look like. Community members and teachers with specialized content knowledge can serve as mentors.

See the TPSP website for more information on [mentor qualifications](http://www.texaspsp.org/exit/choosementor.php?p=4) (<http://www.texaspsp.org/exit/choosementor.php?p=4>).

6. What are some components of a successful student-mentor relationship?

The key to a successful relationship is for the mentor and student to share the same passion. The relationship should be founded on agreements between the mentor and student:

- The mentor and student will treat each other with respect.
- The mentor and student will understand and uphold their responsibilities and meet agreed upon deadlines.
- The mentor and student will be enthusiastic about the project.
- The mentor and student will see the project as a vehicle for growth for both parties.
- The mentor and student will determine when the project is complete and ready to undergo scoring.

During the first student-mentor meeting, the student should share his/her expectations of the mentorship and of the project and the two should draw up some agreements.

Districts may have additional requirements, which may include background checks, that should be followed.

See the TPSP website for more information on [mentoring guidelines](http://www.texaspsp.org/exit/MentoringGuidelinesExit.pdf) (<http://www.texaspsp.org/exit/MentoringGuidelinesExit.pdf>).

7. What are some financial considerations? Is additional funding necessary?

Educators must consider access and equity when asking students to work at a professional level. The financial needs for implementing the TPSP are minimal. Most of the necessary resources, such as libraries, Internet, and supplies, are available in the school or district. In general, TPSP participation does not present a financial burden to the school, teachers, or families.

If a student is developing a unique product with associated costs, community businesses are potential sources of funding. One way to show appreciation for any funding from community and civic groups is to have the students present their products to those groups. Community presentations are also a good way to promote the school/district gifted program and students. Once businesses see the impact of a small contribution, they may be more likely to get involved in the future.

See the TPSP website for additional [budget considerations](http://www.texaspsp.org/exit/deliveryOtherIssues.php?p=2) (<http://www.texaspsp.org/exit/deliveryOtherIssues.php?p=2>).

8. What can teachers do if students lack basic research skills?

Sometimes students do not have a background in conducting research at the professional level. If teachers notice their students struggling, they may consider offering instruction to help students build their research skills, including lessons on the following topics:

- Conducting research and surveys
- Asking guiding questions
- Developing computer skills
- Using library resources
- Using a variety of primary and secondary sources
- Writing a research proposal, paper, and bibliography
- Developing tables, charts, and graphs

Section 10: Overcoming Challenges

1. How can students and teachers plan ahead to avoid obstacles at the end of their projects?

Students and teachers sometimes encounter challenges when trying to finish the projects. There are some ways to avoid these obstacles:

- Organize all of the student's work and submission requirements
- Mark deadlines on a calendar
- Secure locations and equipment for student presentations
- Test audiovisual equipment and disks/tapes before they are needed
- Identify and secure judges in advance

2. How can students ensure that they complete their projects?

Student organization and planning are very important. The following guidelines will facilitate timely completion of projects:

- Start early
- Establish timelines
- Learn about project requirements and deadlines
- Develop a review schedule and carefully monitor progress
- Leave some extra time near the end of the project for unexpected delays
- Allow time to practice oral presentations and to receive feedback from peers
- Strive for balance among school work, the TPSP project, extracurricular activities, and life outside school

3. What are some common challenges teachers face when implementing the TPSP?

Before jumping into the TPSP, teachers should fully consider the requirements in order to understand expectations of teachers and students. Teachers might encounter some challenges:

- Time management
- Administrative support/buy-in
- Availability of work space for teachers and students
- Lack of research skills or experience
- Class scheduling difficulties

Considering these and other challenges is important when planning to implement the TPSP. One way to overcome problems with time is to develop a timeline and to share the timeline and expectations with students from the beginning. Students should get started on the project early and leave some additional time at the end in case aspects of the project take longer than they initially expected. Administrators, other teachers, and resource people should be aware of the project and the requirements and invited to participate. Teachers should remind administrators that the TPSP meets requirements for teaching gifted students in the state and that the exit level project can meet the DAP.

4. What challenges might students encounter?

Teachers should consider potential challenges that the TPSP might present to students. For instance, many gifted students may never have faced a curriculum that is challenging and differentiated to meet their learning needs.

The following challenges commonly arise:

- Procrastination
- Narrowing a subject to research
- Lack of research skills
- Fear of taking intellectual risks
- Choosing one topic

- Identifying a mentor
- Organizing the project
- Problems with commitment and time management

To help students overcome these and other challenges, teachers should make sure that students are grounded in basic organizational and research skills. With these basic skills, students will feel more confident about their journey. Teachers should establish a low-risk, safe environment where students feel comfortable practicing scholarly behaviors. Teachers can also make themselves available for student conferences to discuss timelines and progress. Time to brainstorm and plan with peers is also helpful.

5. What are the ethical and legal considerations?

The teacher is responsible for ensuring that student work is original and demonstrates academic integrity.

To uphold high ethical standards, student work should include the following:

- Accurate and reliable documentation
- Full acknowledgement of the ideas and words of another person
- Clear and precise references
- Complete biographical listing of all works cited
- Appropriate releases for copyrighted materials, including videotape footage, audio recordings, and photographs, if use extends beyond fair use guidelines
- Appropriate releases for using images of other students

6. How can teachers prepare to handle unexpected problems or challenges effectively?

If problems arise, teachers can contact other teachers and talk about possible solutions. Some sources of support include teachers who have previously participated in the TPSP and G/T specialists at the Regional Education Service Centers. These people can provide teachers, schools, and districts with technical assistance.

Here are some other ways to handle unexpected problems or challenges:

- Stay flexible
- Ask for help
- Refer to the TPSP website and discussion board
- Develop a support team of district TPSP teachers
- Visit with students individually
- Leave some extra time in the calendar for unexpected situations

Section 11: Involving the Learning Community

1. How can teachers connect students with community and school resources?

When building awareness of the TPSP during the first year of implementation, students can present their products to community and business representatives in order to spread awareness of the program. If the community is able to see the student work, members may be more willing to help students in their endeavors. Students can also present their products to other grade levels and school personnel. This is another good way to build awareness and garner support within the school. Faculty members and other employees, such as librarians, principals, counselors, technology specialists, and nurses, can be good resources for the students.

Teachers may consider contacting various people and organizations including the following resources:

- Local colleges and universities
- Newspapers
- Museums
- Retirement centers
- Local businesses

- Community organizations
- High school volunteers
- Previous TPSP participants

Section 12: Setting the Stage for Long-term Success

1. What do teachers who are new to the TPSP need to consider when undertaking the project?

New teachers need to review the project requirements and other supporting materials thoroughly in order to understand the scope of the exit level TPSP. Then teachers should consider what they already do in the classroom that would support the project. When used in the regular classroom, the TPSP should be integrated into the classroom curriculum rather than simply added on. The project should replace work or skills already mastered by the students, not be added to regular classroom work. It may be helpful for first-time teachers to gather all the resources and materials and put them in a central location to aid in organization. Teachers should keep communication open among students, other teachers, administrators, resource people, and parents.

2. What are the ingredients for a successful project?

While each teacher, classroom, and student is unique, there are some common ingredients for a successful project. There are some things teachers can do to help their students succeed:

- Become familiar and comfortable with the project requirements
- Integrate the project into the curriculum when appropriate
- Prepare carefully for the research process and product development
- Ascertain that students have a thorough background in research skills
- Create an atmosphere of excitement for the project
- Remain flexible with students and let them explore their interests
- Commit to the project and student success
- Cooperate with other teachers, resource people, and students
- Have fun