

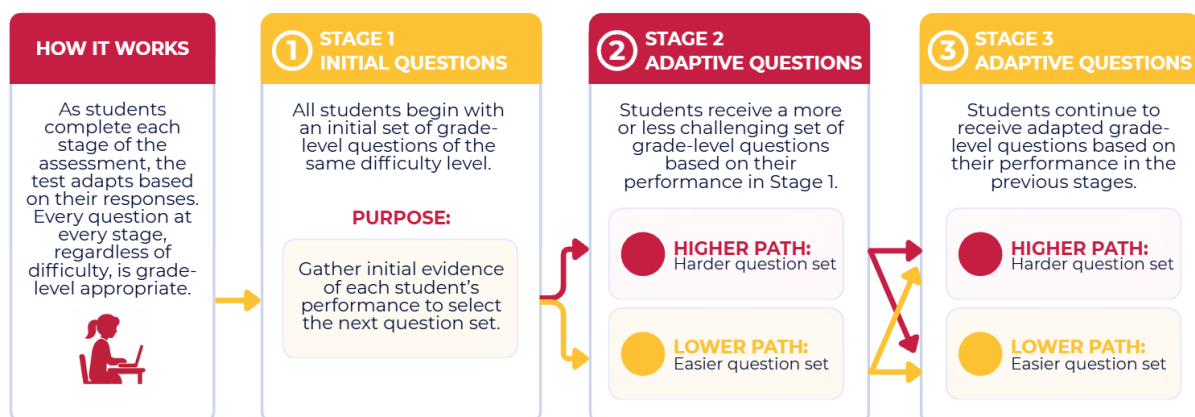
## MSTAR Adaptive Testing

The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) is delivering the MSTAR assessments in an adaptive testing design. Adaptive assessments adjust based on a student's performance as they move through the test. All questions presented to a student, regardless of difficulty, are grade-level appropriate.

Benefits of MSTAR adaptive testing include:

- **Shorter testing time:** Assessments are approximately 25% shorter than the previous Maryland assessments.
- **More tailored testing experience:** MSTAR routes students to groups of questions based on their performance as they move through the test. This can reduce the frustration students may feel when facing questions well above or below their level and can increase their engagement on the test.
- **More precise measurement:** MSTAR can more accurately pinpoint what students know and can do compared to a traditional test of the same length.

MSTAR uses multi-stage adaptive testing, which adapts by groups of questions, called stages. All students begin with an initial group of grade-level questions of the same difficulty level. Based on their responses, the assessment selects a subsequent stage that is appropriately matched to the student's demonstrated knowledge and skills.



## Frequently Asked Questions

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### **Q1: Does multi-stage testing mean more or longer testing periods?**

A1: No. “Multi-stage” describes how the assessment adapts, not the number or length of testing periods. In fact, MSTAR reduces overall testing time by approximately 25% compared with the previous Maryland assessment. The assessment uses a student's performance in a stage to determine which set of questions they will receive in the next stage. This process helps the test gather more precise information about student achievement while ensuring that students receive questions that are neither consistently too easy nor too difficult.

### **Q2: If students receive different sets of questions, how can their results be compared fairly?**

A2: Every MSTAR assessment follows a test blueprint, which establishes the content, structure, standards, and types of questions included on the assessment. This ensures that all students are tested on the same standards (see the ELA/L Blueprints and Math Blueprints on the [Maryland State Assessment webpage](#).) The MSTAR scoring model also accounts for the difficulty of the questions each student receives. Together, the blueprint and scoring process support fair and consistent comparisons of student performance, even when students receive different sets of questions.

### **Q3: How long are the MSTAR ELA/L and Mathematics tests, and how much time do students have to answer all questions?**

A3: For grades 3–8:

- ELA/L: Three time blocks, with 70 minutes scheduled for each.
- Mathematics: Three time blocks, with 40 minutes scheduled for each.

### **Q4: Can students review their answers before submitting them?**

A4: Yes. While working within a stage, students can mark questions for review and return to any question in that stage before submitting their responses. Students may change their answers during this review, and changing an answer will not affect the questions they have already received. Once a stage is submitted, the student cannot return to questions from that stage. At the end of a stage, students will be reminded that this is the last chance to review their answers before submitting.

### **Q5: What happens if a student tries to skip a question?**

A5: Students must answer each question before moving to the next question. If a student tries to move forward without answering, the platform will prompt them to respond before they can continue.

### **Q6: What happens if a student does not finish the test?**

A6: If a student runs out of time before completing the test, any remaining questions will be left unanswered. Unanswered questions are treated as incorrect

and will be reflected in the student's score as incorrect responses.

**Q7: How are constructed response questions handled?**

A7: Constructed responses are questions where a student must provide a written explanation rather than select an answer from a set of options. These responses contribute to the student's final score but are not used to determine which stage of questions the student receives next. Answers to constructed response questions are scored by scoring professionals and/or an automated scoring engine after the student completes the test.

## **Transition Supports & Resources**

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To support local school systems, educators, students, and families throughout the transition to MSTAR, MSDE will provide additional resources on adaptive testing and other features of the new assessment system. These resources will include subject-specific explanations of how adaptive testing works that schools can share with families before the first MSTAR administration. Visit the [Maryland State Assessment webpage](#) to access tools and resources as they become available.