

Common Core State Standards in English Language Arts and Literacy in Science, History/Social Studies and Technical Subjects

Why Common Standards?

When the Council of Chief State School Officers and National Governors Association joined together to lead a voluntary effort by states to create common standards, they had the following goals:

- Prepare *all* students for a 21st century economy, with increasing global competition, that requires more skills and knowledge;
- Reduce the large numbers of high school graduates entering postsecondary education unable to handle the demands of credit-bearing courses, and improve the ability of high school graduates to meet basic entry-level job skills requirements;
- Address the impact of family mobility's effect on students, as they encounter highly varied academic expectations between states; and
- Promote economies of scale and efficiencies so states can make better use of limited resources to better direct them to improving student achievement.

How are Common Core State Standards different?

The English Language Arts Common Core State Standards (ELA CCSS) are based on a **large body of evidence** *including the most current scholarly research, surveys on what skills are required of students entering college and workforce training programs, assessment data identifying college- and career-readiness, and comparisons to standards from high-performing states and nations.* The ELA CCSS also *build on the firm foundation of the NAEP frameworks in reading and writing, which similarly draw on an extensive body of scholarly research and evidence.* By focusing on the most essential elements of readiness for college and career, *teachers and students will spend their time and efforts on the skills required to prepare for postsecondary success.*

Highlights of the CCSS ELA and Literacy in other Subjects

- *Greater focus on text complexity.* The texts students are reading today are not of sufficient complexity and rigor to prepare them for the literacy demands of college and the workforce. *The ELA CCSS devote as much attention to the complexity of what students read as to how well students read them.* As students advance through the grades, they must develop more sophisticated comprehension skills and apply them to increasingly complex texts.
- *Shared responsibility for students' literacy development.* Most college and career reading consists of sophisticated, informational text in a variety of content areas. The ELA CCSS include a significant focus on informational text in grades 6-12 and a special section designed for history/social studies and science teachers to address content literacy in their respective disciplines. This focus is in addition to, not in place of, literary texts.
- *A focus on writing to argue or explain in the later grades.* The ELA CCSS include developing writing skills in three areas: argument, information/explanation, and narrative. As students progress toward high school-level work, the emphasis shifts to increasingly greater focus on writing to argue, inform, and explain by using evidence from sources (corresponding to the shift in emphasis found in NAEP).
- *Research and media skills integrated into the CCSS as a whole.* In college and the workforce, students will need to research information and will also consume and produce media. Media is embedded throughout the ELA CCSS rather than being treated as a separate section – and students are expected to research and utilize media in *all* content areas.

- *Recognition that both content and skills are important.* The ELA CCSS require certain critical content for all students, including classic myths and stories from around the world, America's Founding Documents, foundational American literature, and Shakespeare. Appropriately, the remaining crucial decisions about what content should be taught are left to state and local determination. In addition to content coverage, the ELA CCSS require that students systematically acquire knowledge in literature and other disciplines through reading, writing, speaking, and listening.

Key Instructional Shifts in ELA and Literacy

English Language Arts instruction will have to change as the ELA CCSS are implemented to meet more rigorous expectations:

Building knowledge through content rich informational text – Non-fiction, informational texts often contain unfamiliar vocabulary and help students build background knowledge in the content areas. In elementary grades, there should be a 50/50 balance between literature and informational texts (far more than what children currently encounter in most classrooms). This shift allows elementary school teachers to develop students' literacy skills through other content areas including science, history, social studies, and the arts. As students move through middle school and into high school, the balance should change and become tilted towards non-fiction/informational texts as the ELA CCSS expect teachers in the content areas to develop students' content literacy skills by requiring reading and writing. English classes will remain primarily focused on literature and poetry, though students should also be exposed to non-fiction.

Reading and writing grounded in evidence – As students develop their literacy skills in English and other content areas, they should be asked to read closely and answer questions that are entirely dependent upon the text. Similarly, the majority of student writing assignments should require students to respond to prompts about the texts so that they can demonstrate their understanding using evidence from the text to support their writing. New assessments will also require students to answer text dependent questions and write to inform, explain, or persuade.

Regular practice with complex text and academic vocabulary - The reading level of many students today is too low and there is a huge gap between the complexity of what they are reading in high school and the expectations of college and the work place. The ELA CCSS require an increase in text complexity as students progress from K to 12. A detailed explanation of text complexity can be found in Appendix A of the ELA CCSS:

http://www.corestandards.org/assets/Appendix_A.pdf.

Because there are significant changes in the expectations contained in the ELA CCSS, educators will need to revise curriculum and identify instructional materials aligned with the new standards. They will also need time to collaborate and opportunities for professional learning to support the transition required to help *all students* master the ELA CCSS and literacy in the other content areas. Common standards allow educators throughout the country to learn from and share best practices with one another.

Many **resources** are already available, and others are in development; here are a few examples:

- The K-12 ELA CCSS and Literacy Standards in Science, History/Social Studies and Technical Subjects: http://www.corestandards.org/assets/CCSSI_ELA%20Standards.pdf
- Publisher's Criteria for K-2: http://www.corestandards.org/assets/Publishers_Criteria_for_K-2.pdf and 3-12: http://www.corestandards.org/assets/Publishers_Criteria_for_3-12.pdf
- Tools, research and teacher work: <http://www.achievethecore.org/>
- Videos on the standards: <http://www.youtube.com/user/TheHuntInstitute>
- Exemplar lessons: https://www.teachingchannel.org/videos?categories=topics_common-core