

Getting A Handle On The New Common Core

toolkits

Language Arts Overview

What are the Key Features of Common Core State Standards?

The reading Standards put a high emphasis on text complexity, and the ability and skill involved with reading a more sophisticated text. The writing Standards put a lot of weight on responding to reading, as well as researching. The ability to consume a large amount of text—mostly informational—is also stressed. While previously speaking and listening standards might have taken a back seat to those of reading and writing, this is not the case with Common Core. Another key feature is that of collaboration; whether that is in the form of partner or larger group collaboration. The ability to think critically with your peers is of high importance throughout the Common Core State Standards.

The Key Shifts Taking Place with Language Arts Instruction

One of the most notable shifts in reading is the shift away from literature to a more balanced approach to literature and informational texts, as well as a greater focus on text complexity and what level the students should actually be reading at. In writing, there is a shift away from creative and narrative writing towards argumentative (not persuasive) and informative/explanatory writing. There is also a huge emphasis on using evidence and sources to inform an argument. The collaboration piece is emphasized in the Speaking and Listening expectations with a focus on both formal and informal speaking standards; both in presentations as well as group work. There is also an overreaching goal of students using general academic as well as domain-specific vocabulary, as seen in some of the Language standards. You will also see reading, writing, and literacy across the curriculum in which there are literacy standards for science, social studies, as well as technical subjects. These standards will complement instead of replace the content standards in those subjects and should be seen as the responsibilities of those content-area teachers making sure that the weight of literacy is shared across the content areas.

What Does it Mean to Have our Students Be College- and Career-Ready?

The Standards are quite adamant on students being ready for college and/or careers after high school. They focus on students needing to, through the mastery of the Standards, show independence, strong content knowledge, the ability to respond both written and verbally, and to collaborate, to analyze, and to consume technology and digital media critically.

New Focus in the Reading Strands

These strands were written to provide a fairly aggressive appropriation of reading skills K-12. There is an emphasis on the importance of grade-level texts that are increasingly sophisticated. You will see a building of foundational skills K-5, and then standards for literature, informational texts K-12; as well as literacy standards for social studies, science, and technical studies for grades 6-12.

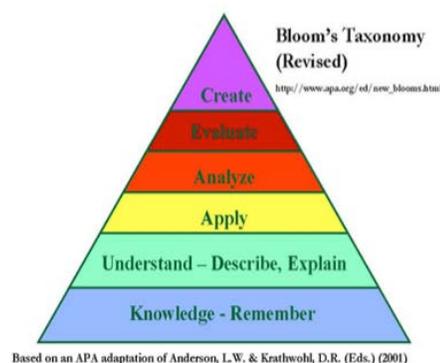
There is a repeated use of the words “exemplar texts” to refer to that literature, nonfiction, and poetry based texts that are high in text complexity and meet the three text complexity requirements:

1. Qualitative measures – levels of meaning, structure, language conventionality and clarity, and knowledge demands
2. Quantitative measures – readability and other scores of text complexity
3. Reader and Task – background knowledge of reader, motivation, interests, and complexity generated by tasks assigned



Argumentation instead of Persuasive and Other Terminology Changes in the Writing Strand

These strands still ask students to compose arguments and opinions (formerly known as persuasive writing) and informative/explanatory pieces (formerly known as expository writing) and narrative texts (included here are personal narrative and imaginative narratives- formally known as creating writing). Again as mentioned above, there is an emphasis on the use of evidence to prove validity of arguments and claims: showing the ability to conduct research on both a long term and short-term inquiry. The writing strands also ask students to incorporate technology as they create, refine, and collaborate on writing. The added emphasis on student-created content is visible as an example of our changing technological times (see revised Bloom’s Taxonomy to the left).



Embedding Speaking, Listening and Language Strands in All Areas

The focus in this strand is the ability to show speaking and listening range in both formal and informal settings: such as academic, small group, and whole-class discussions. There is an emphasis on understanding the effective communication practices, and analysis of messages presented through oral, visual, or multimodal formats.

Language Strands

Embedded within this strand are standards that cover conventions in both writing and speaking, and highlight the importance of adding to a student’s vocabulary acquisition through reading, direct instructions (example examination of root words and prefixes and suffixes) as well as through conversation. Most importantly however, is that these standards should be addressed in the context of the above strands: reading, writing, and speaking and listening, not necessarily as an unconnected standard.

Some Things to Think about As You Start Diving Deep into the Core

Focus on Results

The standards are open-ended enough that teachers need to focus on the results. Instead of focusing on a particular detail of the writing process teachers, can feel free to provide students with whatever tool they have in their toolbox—using their professional judgment—to see that those Standards are met.

The Main Components of Language Arts are Integrated

Even though they are still listed separately (similar to how they always used to be written at the state level) the Standards are still connected. If the students are attempting to meet the writing standard 8, for example, they have to read several different sources and then work on quotations and citations. They are reading, researching, and writing all in one standard. For reading standard 7 they are essentially comparing/contrasting the filmed version as compared to the original text, reading and analyzing. However, built within the standards themselves, are guidelines into what other Standards can be applied to create a full project. So to expand Standard 7, you could also apply the research to build knowledge, as well as the comprehension and collaboration in speaking and listening to round out all areas of language arts.

Digital Integration is Built into the Standards

In preparation for our increasingly technologically advanced society, the Standards are full of research related “media consumption.” The result is students with an increasing need to conduct research on a variety of print and nonprint texts. Similar to the basics of language arts reading, writing, listening and speaking being embedded and connected throughout the Standards, these research-based ideas are built-in as well, rather than being treated like a completely separate set of standards.

Persuasion vs. Argumentation

The Common Core also asks us to move from the idea of persuasive writing, and using opinion, to that of argumentation. The Standards are quite adamant about using logic and reasoning over opinion. This will come as a major shift for teachers, as most might not easily be able to see the difference between persuasion and argumentation. Teachers will need to focus more and more on refutation, and providing reasoning and evidence as supposed to just writing with emotion; again going back to the idea and importance of research and analysis of print and digital media. Teachers will need to look at logical fallacies and methods of persuasion. Using a lot of the same ideas as seen in the National Forensic League for speech and debate works well here, added influence on reasoning, evidence and rebuttals and of course the constant reminder of academic language.

Student Centered Onus and Sharing of the Burden

The Standards are pushing teachers and students to take a giant leap away from the basic teacher-centered construct and pedagogy that has been in place for the last 100 years in the public education classroom. The Standards focus more on student-centered, student-created content, and force both teacher and student to share the responsibility of student development. The Standards are also largely skill-based throughout most content discipline and ask that teachers across content areas help in the building of those basic main language arts components. Reading, writing, speaking and listening should be a shared responsibility throughout the school. With the increasing level of dependence on nonfiction texts, supporting that reading in all content areas is essential.

Assessments

When creating assessments for the Standards, “backwards design” is recommended. And instead of testing on each individual standard (as mentioned above) you can cover multiple standards with one rich authentic activity. If starting to implement Project Based Learning, you could see three or more standards being covered at once. It is important to work on alignment within the district so that you see a “ban” of curriculum and Standards being taught rather than segmented grades and curricula.

English Language Learners

While the Standards recognize students acquiring English, it is possible for a student to master a standard in language arts without mastering or displaying native-like control of the conventions. Especially when applying the idea of high-text complexity—which is repeatedly mentioned throughout the Standards—it is important that all students have the ability to participate fully while still permitting the appropriate accommodations. If you are not sure about the lexile level of a text (keeping in mind the text complexity requirements), use sites like [Lexile: The Lexile Framework for Reading](#) to help weed through the numerous amounts of available texts.

Overall, the standards focus on what should be taught and learned, but not on how teachers should teach the content. Compared to previous state standards that were quite wordy, the Common Core focuses more succinctly on what is most essential but not on all that can be taught. Instead, start focusing on the wording of the Standard itself and how you might allow the students to reach those goals and potentially go beyond them.

Resources

[Common Core State Standards Initiative](#)

[MasteryConnect](#)

[Achieve Organization](#)