

History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects Literacy Curricula, Grades 6–12

INTRODUCTION

This brief addendum to the publishers' criteria for ELA in grades 3–12 focuses on the portions of those criteria most relevant to materials in history/social studies, science, and technical subjects. In the criteria that follow, we restate several of the key points from the ELA criteria as they relate to these content areas and add others that are particularly significant. As was the case with ELA, what follows is not an exhaustive list but the most significant elements of the Common Core State Standards to be mindful of when revising and developing aligned materials.

Meeting the demands of the Literacy Standards requires substantially expanding the literacy requirements in history/social studies as well as in science and technical subjects. The adoption of the Literacy Standards in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects therefore requires several significant shifts in these curricula. Specifically, in alignment with NAEP, the standards require that in grades 6–12, student reading across the curriculum must include a balance of texts that is one-third literary, one-third history/social studies, and one-third science. Specific standards (pp. 60–66) define the actual literacy skills for which history/social studies, science, and technical teachers are responsible. (Appendix B of the Common Core State Standards contains a sampling of texts of appropriate quality and complexity for study in these disciplines.)

I. Text Selection

1. **Text Complexity:** The Common Core State Standards require students to read increasingly complex texts with growing independence as they progress toward career and college readiness.
 - A. ***Texts for each grade align with the complexity requirements outlined in the standards.*** Reading Standard 10 outlines the level of text complexity at which students need to demonstrate comprehension in each grade. (Appendix A in the Common Core State Standards gives further information on how text complexity can be measured and offers guidance to teachers and curriculum developers on selecting the texts their students read.)³ Research makes clear that the complexity levels of the texts students are presently required to read are significantly below what is required to achieve college and career readiness. The Common Core State Standards hinge on students encountering appropriately complex texts at each grade level to develop the mature language skills and the conceptual knowledge they need for success in school and life. Instructional materials should also offer advanced texts to provide students at every grade with the opportunity to read texts beyond their current grade level to prepare them for the challenges of more complex text.

³ A working group has developed clear, common standards for measuring text complexity that are consistent across different curricula and publishers. These measures blend quantitative and qualitative factors and are being widely shared and made available to publishers and curriculum developers. The measures are based on the principles laid out in Appendix A and have been further developed and refined. These criteria recognize the critical role that teachers play in text selection.

- B. *All students (including those who are behind) have extensive opportunities to encounter grade-level complex text.*** Far too often, students who have fallen behind are only given less complex texts rather than the support they need to read texts at the appropriate level of complexity. Complex text is a rich repository of information which all readers learn how to access, although some students will need more scaffolding to do so. Curriculum developers and teachers have the flexibility to build progressions of text within grade-level bands that overlap to a limited degree with earlier bands (e.g., grades 4–5 and grades 6–8).

Curriculum materials should provide extensive opportunities for all students in a classroom to engage with complex text, although students whose reading ability is developing at a slower rate also will need supplementary opportunities to read text they can comprehend successfully without extensive supports. These students may also need extra assistance with fluency practice and vocabulary building. Students who need additional assistance, however, must not miss out on essential practice and instruction their classmates are receiving to help them read closely, think deeply about texts, participate in thoughtful discussions, and gain knowledge of both words and the world.

- 2. *Range and Quality of Texts:*** The Common Core State Standards require a keen focus on informational text.

- A. *Curricula provide texts that are valuable sources of information.*** Informational texts in science, history, and technical subjects may or may not exhibit literary craft, but they should be worth reading as valuable sources of information to gain important knowledge. It is essential that the scientific and historical texts chosen for careful study be focused on such significant topics that they are worth the instructional time for students to examine them deliberately to develop a full understanding. To encourage close reading on a regular basis, many of these texts should be short enough to enable thorough examination. Students should also be required to assimilate larger volumes of content-area text to demonstrate college and career readiness. Discussion of extended or longer texts should span the entire text while also creating a series of questions that demonstrate how careful attention to specific passages within the text provides opportunities for close reading. Focusing on extended texts will enable students to develop the stamina and persistence they need to read and extract knowledge and insight from larger volumes of material. Not only do students need to be able to read closely, but they also need to be able to read larger volumes of text when necessary for research or other purposes.

- B. *Curricula include opportunities to combine quantitative information derived from charts and other visual formats and media with information derived from text.*** An important part of building knowledge in history/social studies, science, and technical subjects is integrating information drawn from different formats and media. For example, the Reading Standards require students to integrate the knowledge they gain from quantitative data with information they gain from a single or multiple written text sources. Therefore, materials aligned with the Common Core State

Standards might require students to compare their own experimental results to results about which they have read, and integrate information from video or other media with what they learn from text.

II. Questions and Tasks

1. **High-Quality Text-Dependent Questions and Tasks:** Among the highest priorities of the Common Core State Standards is that students be able to read closely and gain knowledge from texts.

A. *Curricula provide opportunities for students to build knowledge through close reading of a specific text or texts.* As in the ELA Reading Standards, the large majority of the Literacy Standards for History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects require that aligned curricula include high-quality questions and tasks that are text dependent. Such questions should encourage students to “read like a detective” by prompting relevant and central inquiries into the meaning of the source material that can be answered only through close attention to the text. The Literacy Standards therefore require students to demonstrate their ability to follow the details of what is explicitly stated, make valid inferences that logically follow from what is stated, and draw knowledge from the text. Student background knowledge and experiences can illuminate the reading but should not replace attention to the text itself.

Materials should design opportunities for close reading of selected passages from extended or longer texts and create a series of questions that demonstrate how close attention to those passages allows students to gather evidence and knowledge from the text. This text-dependent approach can and should be applied to building knowledge from the comparison and synthesis of multiple sources in science and history. (It bears noting that science includes many non-text sources such as experiments, observations, and discourse around these scientific activities.) Once each source is read and understood carefully, attention should be given to integrating what students have just read with what they have read and learned previously. How does what they have just read compare to what they have learned before? Drawing upon relevant prior knowledge, how does the text expand or challenge that knowledge? As students apply knowledge and concepts gained through reading to build a more coherent understanding of a subject, productive connections and comparisons across texts and ideas should bring students back to careful reading of specific texts. Gathering text evidence is equally crucial when dealing with larger volumes of text for research or other purposes.

B. *All activities involving text require that students demonstrate increasing mastery of evidence drawn from text.* The Common Core State Standards require students to become more adept at drawing evidence from the text and explaining that evidence orally and in writing. Aligned curriculum materials should include explicit models of a range of high-quality evidence-based answers to questions — samples of proficient student responses — about specific texts from each grade. Questions should require students to demonstrate that they follow the details of what is explicitly stated and are able to make nontrivial inferences beyond what is explicitly stated in the text regarding what logically follows from the evidence in the text. Gathering text evidence

is equally crucial when dealing with larger volumes of text for research or other purposes.

C. *Questions and tasks require careful comprehension of the text before asking for further evaluation and interpretation.* The Common Core State Standards call for students to demonstrate a careful understanding of what they read before engaging their opinions, appraisals, or interpretations. Aligned materials should therefore require students to demonstrate that they have followed the details and logic of an author’s argument before they are asked to evaluate the thesis or compare the thesis to others. Before students are asked to go beyond the text and apply their learning, they should demonstrate their grasp of the specific ideas and details of the text.

2. *Cultivating Students’ Ability To Read Complex Texts Independently:* Another key priority of the Common Core State Standards is a requirement that students be able to demonstrate their independent capacity to read at the appropriate level of complexity and depth. Aligned materials therefore should guide teachers to provide scaffolding to students but also gradually remove those supports by including tasks that require students to demonstrate their independent capacity to read and write in every domain at the appropriate level of complexity and sophistication.

A. *Scaffolds enable all students to experience rather than avoid the complexity of the text.* Many students will need careful instruction — including effective scaffolding — to enable them to read at the level of text complexity required by the Common Core State Standards. However, the scaffolding should not preempt or replace the text by translating its contents for students or telling students what they are going to learn in advance of reading the text; the scaffolding should not become an alternate, simpler source of information that diminishes the need for students to read the text itself carefully. Effective scaffolding aligned with the standards should result in the reader encountering the text on its own terms, with instructions providing helpful directions that focus students on the text. Follow-up support should guide readers in the use of appropriate strategies and habits when encountering places in the text where they might struggle. When productive struggle with the text is exhausted, questions rather than explanations can help focus the student’s attention on key phrases and statements in the text or on the organization of ideas in the paragraph or the work as a whole.

When necessary, extra textual scaffolding prior to and during the first read should focus on words and concepts that are essential to a basic understanding and that students are not likely to know or be able to determine from context. Supports should be designed to serve a wide range of readers, including those English language learners and other students who are especially challenged by the complex text before them. Texts and the discussion questions should be selected and ordered so that they bootstrap onto each other and promote deep thinking and substantive engagement with the text.

B. *Design for whole-group, small-group, and individual instruction cultivates student responsibility and independence.* It is essential that questions, tasks, and activities are designed to ensure that all students are actively engaged in reading. Materials should

provide opportunities for students to participate in real, substantive discussions that require them to respond directly to the ideas of their peers. Teachers can begin by asking the kind and level of questions appropriate to the reading and then students should be prompted to ask high-quality questions about what they are reading to further comprehension and analysis. Writing about text is also an effective way to elicit this active engagement. Students should have opportunities to use writing to clarify, examine, and organize their own thinking, so reading materials should provide effective ongoing prompts for students to analyze texts in writing. Instructional materials should be designed to devote sufficient time in class to students encountering text without scaffolding, as they often will in college- and career-ready environments. A significant portion of the time spent with each text should provide opportunities for students to work independently within and outside of class on analyzing the text because this independent analysis is required by the standards.

III. Academic (and Domain-Specific) Vocabulary

Materials focus on academic vocabulary prevalent in complex texts throughout reading, writing, listening, and speaking instruction. The Common Core State Standards require a focus on academic vocabulary that is prevalent in more complex texts as well as domain-specific words. Academic vocabulary (described in more detail as Tier 2 words in Appendix A of the Common Core State Standards) includes those words that readers will find in all types of complex texts from different disciplines. Materials aligned with the Common Core State Standards should help students acquire knowledge of general academic vocabulary in addition to domain-specific words because these words will help students access a range of complex texts in diverse subject areas.

Aligned materials should guide students to gather as much as they can about the meaning of these words from the context of how they are being used in the text, while offering support for vocabulary when students are not likely to be able to figure out their meanings from the text alone. As the meanings of words vary with the context, the more varied the context provided to teach the meaning of a word is, the more effective the results will be (e.g., a state was admitted to the Union; he admitted his errors; admission was too expensive). In alignment with the standards, materials should also require students to explain the impact of specific word choices on the text. Materials and activities should also provide ample opportunities for students to practice the use of academic vocabulary in their speaking and writing.

Some students, including some English language learners, will also need support in mastering high-frequency words that are not Tier 2 words but are essential to reading grade-level text. Materials should therefore offer the resources necessary for supporting students who are developing knowledge of high-frequency words. Since teachers will often not have the time to teach explicitly all of the high-frequency words required, materials should make it possible for students to learn the words' meanings on their own, providing such things as student-friendly definitions for high-frequency words whose meanings cannot be inferred from the context. It also can be useful for English language learners to highlight explicitly and link cognates of key words with other languages.

IV. Writing to Sources and Research

1. **Materials portray writing to sources as a key task.** Crafting an argument frequently relies on using information; similarly, an analysis of a subject will include argumentative elements. While these forms are not strictly independent, what is critical to both forms of writing is the use and integration of evidence. In historical, technical, and scientific writing, accuracy matters, and students should demonstrate their knowledge through precision and detail.
2. **Materials make it clear that student writing should be responsive to the needs of the audience and the particulars of the text in question.** As the standards are silent on length and structure, student writing should not be evaluated by whether it follows a traditional format or formula (e.g. the five paragraph essay). Instead, the Common Core State Standards have been carefully designed to focus on the elements or characteristics of good writing including drawing sufficient evidence from texts, writing coherently with well-developed ideas, and writing clearly with sufficient command of standard English.
3. **Students are given extensive practice with short, focused research projects.** Writing Standard 7 emphasizes that students should conduct several short research projects in addition to more sustained research efforts. Materials should require several of these short research projects annually to enable students to repeat the research process many times and develop the expertise needed to conduct research independently. A progression of shorter research projects also encourages students to develop expertise in one area by confronting and analyzing different aspects of the same topic as well as other texts and source materials on that topic.