

Supporting Improved English Language Arts Standards

A Simple Guide to the Common Core English Language Arts and Literacy Standards

Colorado has updated academic standards in 10 content areas for preschool through 12th grade. The Colorado Academic Standards for reading, writing and communicating and for mathematics incorporate the Common Core State Standards. The updated standards are focused and rigorous, conveying the prepared graduate competencies and the points of mastery at each grade level that lead to college and career readiness.

Common Core State Standards in English Language Arts and Literacy Standards: Key Points

Reading

The standards establish a “staircase” of increasing text complexity in what students must be able to read so that all students are ready for the demands of college- and career-level reading when they graduate from high school. The standards also require the progressive development of reading comprehension so that students advancing through the grades are able to gain more from whatever they are reading.

Through reading a diverse array of classic and contemporary literature as well as challenging informational texts in a range of subjects, students are expected to build knowledge, gain insights, explore possibilities and broaden their perspectives. The standards intentionally do not offer a reading list, leaving this matter to districts and schools, but they do offer numerous illustrative texts suggestive of the kinds of high-quality, increasingly-complex texts from a broad range of disciplines that students must encounter each year.

The standards avoid the “content-versus-skills” debate by recognizing that both are essential and neither is, in itself, sufficient. The standards require certain critical types of texts for all students, including classic myths and stories from around the world, informational and technical texts, foundational U.S. documents, seminal works of American literature and the writings of Shakespeare. The standards appropriately defer the many remaining decisions about what and how to teach to districts and schools.

About the Common Core English Language Arts and Literacy Standards

The Common Core State Standards in English language arts and literacy are the result of a collaborative effort between state departments of education, teachers, experts in a wide array of fields and professional organizations. The standards establish specific K-12 grade-by-grade standards (and grade spans in high school) in **reading, writing, speaking and listening**, and **language** with a steady progression of development leading to college and career readiness by the end of high school.

The standards are grounded in evidence, including the best work of states and high-performing nations, frameworks developed for the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), academic research, curriculum surveys, assessment data on college- and career-ready performance and input from educators at all levels and from a variety of subjects.

Districts, schools and classroom teachers have decision-making responsibilities for curriculum choices. Therefore, the Colorado Academic Standards do not mandate or suggest any curriculum materials.

Writing

The ability to write logical arguments based on substantive claims, sound reasoning and relevant evidence is a cornerstone of the writing standards, with opinion writing—a basic form of argument—extending down into the earliest grades.

Research—both short, focused projects (such as those commonly required in the workplace) and sustained inquiry—is emphasized throughout the standards but most prominently in the writing strand since written analysis and presentation of findings are critical in both college and careers. Annotated samples of student writing accompany the standards and help establish clear performance levels in writing arguments, informational/explanatory texts and narratives in the various grades.

Speaking and Listening

The standards require that students be able to access, evaluate and present increasingly-complex information, ideas and evidence through listening and speaking as well as through a wide range of media. An important focus of the speaking and listening standards is purposeful speaking and listening in various academic settings—including one-on-one, small-group and whole-classroom. Formal presentations are one important way such communication occurs, but so are the more informal discussions that take place as students collaborate to answer questions, build understanding and solve problems.

Language

The vocabulary standards require that students be able to determine word meanings, identify the nuances of words and steadily expand their repertoire of words and phrases, particularly those important to academic discourse. The standards expect that students will grow their vocabularies through a mix of conversations, direct instruction and reading.

Standards for conventions (grammar, usage, punctuation, capitalization and spelling) and language choice recognize that students must be able to use formal English in their writing and speaking but that they must also be able to make informed, skillful choices among the many ways to express themselves in a variety of contexts.

Vocabulary and conventions are treated in their own strand not because skills in these areas should be handled in isolation but because their use extends across reading, writing, speaking and listening.

Where can I learn more?

- CDE Standards website: www.cde.state.co.us/standardsandinstruction
- Additional CDE fact sheets: www.cde.state.co.us/communications/factsheetsandfaq
- Council of Chief State School Officers: www.ccsso.org

The Colorado Department of Education

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