



## **Publishers' Criteria for the Common Core State Standards in English Language Arts and Literacy, Grades K–2**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Developed by two of the lead authors of the Common Core State Standards, these criteria are designed to guide publishers and curriculum developers as they work to ensure alignment of materials for the early grades with the standards in English language arts (ELA) and literacy for history/social studies, science, and technical subjects. The standards are the product of a state-led effort coordinated by the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and the Council of Chief State School Officers and were developed in collaboration with states, teachers, school administrators, and content experts.

The criteria articulated below concentrate on the most significant elements of the Common Core State Standards for literacy in kindergarten through 2nd grade and lay out their implications for aligning materials with the standards. They are intended to direct curriculum developers and publishers to be purposeful and strategic in both what to include and what to exclude in instructional materials. By underscoring what matters most in the standards, the criteria illustrate what shifts must take place in the next generation of curricula, including paring away elements that distract or are at odds with the Common Core State Standards. These guidelines are not meant to dictate classroom practice but rather to help ensure that teachers develop and receive effective tools. At the heart of these criteria is the belief that reading — in this case, learning to read — is central. In the early grades, this includes due attention to the foundations of reading. The goal for readers of all ages is to be able to understand and learn from what they read and to express such knowledge clearly through speaking and writing about text. Encouraging this expectation from the start is vital to developing purposeful readers who expect what they read to make sense to them.

In kindergarten–grade 2, the most notable shifts in the standards when compared to state standards include a focus on reading informational text and building coherent knowledge within and across grades; a more in-depth approach to vocabulary development; and a requirement that students encounter sufficiently complex text through reading, writing, listening, and speaking. While these criteria begin with the foundations of literacy, this document, as well as the standards, makes clear that the foundational skills outlined here are not goals in themselves but rather necessary components of students' independent mastery of the texts and tasks called for by the standards.

### **DOCUMENT ORGANIZATION**

This document has three parts: The first articulates criteria that should guide the teaching of reading foundations, the second details the criteria that should guide the selection of texts, and the third outlines criteria for the development of high-quality text-dependent questions and tasks so that students are able to read closely and gain knowledge from texts.

- I. Key Criteria for Reading Foundations**
- II. Key Criteria for Text Selections**
- III. Key Criteria for Questions and Tasks**

## I. Key Criteria for Reading Foundations

The Common Core State Standards offer specific guidance on reading foundations that should be observed in curriculum materials to prepare students to decode automatically and read with fluency by the time they finish 2nd grade. The standards articulate a well-developed set of skills and habits that taken collectively lay the foundation for students to achieve competence in reading comprehension. (See pp. 14–16 of the Common Core State Standards for more detail.) Materials aligned with the Common Core State Standards need to provide repeated, regular exposure to and practice opportunities for the full range of foundational skills that are woven into a clear developmental progression.

**1. *Materials must meet the needs of a wide range of students, reinforcing key lessons in concepts of print, the alphabetic principle, and other basic conventions of the English writing system.***

Students come to school unevenly prepared, so materials must have the capacity to meet a range of needs. Materials need to incorporate better designed and more powerful practice — including distributed practice — for all aspects of foundational reading than has typically been offered in basal reading materials. Materials that are aligned to the standards should provide explicit and systematic instruction and diagnostic support in concepts of print, phonological awareness, phonics, vocabulary development, and fluency. While these foundational skills are not an end in and of themselves, they are necessary and important components of an effective, comprehensive reading program designed to develop proficient readers with the capacity to comprehend texts across a range of types and disciplines.

Materials should provide ample opportunities for students to understand and fully learn the spelling/sound patterns that are necessary — though not sufficient — to become successful readers. This goal is accomplished when students can transfer knowledge of these patterns to words not previously seen or studied.

Because students differ widely in how much exposure and practice they need to master foundational skills, materials also need to incorporate high-quality activities for those students who are able to reach facility with less practice. Approaching remediation and extension activities in this way will help teachers resolve one of the central dilemmas of the early elementary classroom — meeting the needs of all learners. Instructional materials should be designed to provide systematic development and practice in these foundational skills without depriving any students of full access to rich complex text.

**2. *Fluency should be a particular focus of materials prepared.*** Materials should also provide ample opportunities for repeated oral reading with a variety of grade-level texts that can be easily implemented, including providing a framework and tools for assessing oral reading accuracy, rate, and expression. Teacher support for fluency instruction should explicitly recognize that reading rates vary with the type of text being read and the purpose for reading. For example, comprehension of texts that are of greater informational density or complexity generally requires slower reading. A key strategy for improving fluency and offering all students access to complex text is to ask students to follow along while text is read aloud by the teacher. By the end of 2nd grade, a key goal should be that students are able to read independently with automaticity and flow to ensure that their focus can be freed for comprehension.

**3. *Materials develop academic vocabulary prevalent in complex texts throughout reading, writing, listening, and speaking instruction.*** When they enter school, students differ markedly in their vocabulary knowledge. Materials must address this vocabulary gap early, systematically, and aggressively, or it will expand and accelerate. This means materials must provide opportunities for instruction that is driven by the diverse vocabulary levels of children and

provide more instruction and exercise for students with weaker vocabularies rather than offer them fewer words than their peers.

Of particular importance is building students' academic vocabulary or Tier 2 words. Informational text that carefully sequences content within a domain will greatly support the development of these words while building student knowledge. Aligned materials should guide students to gather as much information as they can about the meaning of these words from the context of how the words 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. It follows then that materials should require students to think about words: how and why specific words are used, how changing one word can change the meaning of a text, how one word can have varied but related meanings based on context, and why another word might be more appropriate. For English language learners, explicitly highlighting and linking cognates of key words with other languages can be very useful. Instruction should be systematic and varied (i.e., multiple word meanings, morphology, phonology, and orthography), and materials should use games, jokes, puns, and other forms of word play to enhance instruction and develop a sense of excitement about words.

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.

- 4. *Materials offer assessment opportunities that genuinely measure progress in the foundations of reading.*** Activities used for assessment should clearly denote what standards are being emphasized, and materials should offer frequent and easily implemented assessments, including systems for record keeping and follow-up. These should include a framework and tools for assessing oral reading accuracy, rate, and expression with a variety of text types when fluency is being measured.

## II. Key Criteria for Text Selections

The Common Core State Standards point strongly toward a text-based approach for teaching students how to read, including those students who lag behind in achieving reading facility. To bring all students up to grade-level reading proficiency, the criteria recommended below emphasize the need to provide *all* students with consistent opportunities to confront and comprehend grade-level complex text. This may require extra scaffolding for some students.

- 1. *Texts for each grade align with the complexity requirements outlined in the standards.*** 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. In each grade (beginning in grade 1), Reading Standard 10 outlines the level of text complexity at which students need to demonstrate comprehension. This can start in kindergarten or even earlier with complex texts read aloud to students. (Appendix A in

the Common Core State Standards gives further information on how text complexity can be measured.)<sup>1</sup>

- 2. *All students, including those who are behind, have extensive opportunities to encounter and comprehend grade-level complex text as required by the standards.*** Far too often, students who have fallen behind are given only less complex texts rather than the support they need to read texts at the appropriate level of complexity. Complex text, whether accessed through individual reading, through read-alouds, or as a group reading activity, is a rich repository to which all readers need access. Complex text contains more sophisticated academic vocabulary, lends itself to more complex tasks, and is able to support rich dialogue. Because students at these grades can listen to much more complex material than they can read themselves, read-aloud selections should be provided for the teachers in the curriculum materials. Students should also have ample opportunity to read sufficiently complex text on their own.

Curriculum materials must provide extensive opportunities for all students to engage with complex text as a member of a class, although students whose decoding ability is developing at a slower rate also will need supplementary opportunities to read text they can comprehend successfully without extensive supports. They 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 think deeply about texts, participate in thoughtful discussions, and gain world and word knowledge.

- 3. *Text selections are worth reading and re-reading.*** The standards maintain that high-quality text selections should be consistently offered to students because they will encourage students and teachers to spend more time on them than they would on low-quality material. Texts selected for inclusion should be well written and, as appropriate, richly illustrated. This principle applies equally to texts intended for reading aloud and texts for students to read by themselves. (For samples of appropriate quality of selection, see Appendix B of the Common Core State Standards.)
- 4. *Literacy programs shift the balance of texts and instructional time to include equal measures of literary and informational text.*** The standards call for elementary curriculum materials to be recalibrated to reflect a mix of 50 percent literary and 50 percent informational text, including reading in ELA, science, social studies, and the arts. Achieving the appropriate balance between literary and informational text in the next generation of materials requires a significant shift in early literacy materials and instructional time so that scientific and historical text are given the same time and weight as literary text. (See p. 31 of the standards for details on how literature and informational texts are defined.) In addition, to develop reading comprehension and vocabulary for *all* readers, the selected informational texts should build a coherent body of knowledge within and across grades. (The sample series of texts regarding “The Human Body” provided on p. 33 of the Common Core State Standards offers an example of selecting texts to build knowledge coherently within and across grades.)
- 5. *Additional materials markedly increase the opportunity for regular independent reading of texts that appeal to students’ interests to develop both their knowledge and joy in reading.*** These materials should ensure that all students have daily opportunities to read and write about texts of their choice on their own during and outside of the school day. Students need access to

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<sup>1</sup> A working group is developing clear, common standards for measuring text complexity that can be consistent across different curricula and publishers. These measures, due out in fall 2011, will blend quantitative and qualitative factors and will be widely shared and made available to publishers and curriculum developers. The measurement of some narrative fiction as well as poetry and drama for the time being likely will have to depend largely on qualitative judgments that are based on the principles laid out in Appendix A and are being further developed and refined.

a wide range of materials on a variety of topics and genres both in their classrooms and in their school libraries to ensure that they have opportunities to independently read broadly and widely to build their knowledge, experience, and joy in reading. Materials will need to include texts at students' own reading level as well as texts with complexity levels that will challenge and motivate students. Texts should also vary in length and density, requiring students to slow down or read more quickly depending on their purpose for reading. In alignment with the standards and to acknowledge the range of students' interests, these materials should include informational texts as well as literature.

### III. Key Criteria for Questions and Tasks

Materials offered in support of reading comprehension should assist teachers and students in staying focused on the primary goal of instruction: developing proficient decoders and fluent readers so that students are able to read closely and build knowledge from texts independently. The aim is for students to understand that thinking and reading occur simultaneously. Curricula should focus classroom time on practicing reading, writing, speaking, and listening with high-quality text and text-dependent questions and omit that which would otherwise distract from achieving those goals.

1. ***Questions and tasks cultivate students' abilities to ask and answer questions based on the text.*** Materials that accompany texts should ask students to think about what they have heard or read and then ask them to draw evidence from the text in support of their ideas about the reading. The standards strongly focus on students gathering evidence, knowledge, and insight from what they read and therefore require that a majority of questions and tasks that children ask and respond to be based on the text under consideration. (This is equally true for read-alouds students listen to and for material students read for themselves.) Text-dependent questions do not require information or evidence from outside the text or texts; they establish what follows and what does not follow from the text itself. Materials should be sparing in offering activities that are not text dependent.

Student background knowledge and experiences can illuminate the reading but should not replace attention to the text itself. Questions and tasks should require thinking about the text carefully and finding evidence in the text itself to support the response. Discussion tasks, activities, questions, and writings following readings should draw on a full range of insights and knowledge contained in the text in terms of both content and language. Instructional support materials should focus on posing questions and writing tasks that help students become interested in the text and cultivate student mastery of the specific ideas and illuminating particulars of the text.

2. ***Curricula provide opportunities for students to build knowledge through close reading of specific texts.*** Materials should design opportunities for careful reading of selected passages or texts and create a series of questions that demonstrate how close attention to those readings allows students to gather evidence and build knowledge. This approach can and should encourage the comparison and synthesis of multiple sources. 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.

- 3. *Scaffolding and stimulant questions in advance of reading should not preempt or replace 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; that is, the scaffolding should not become an alternate, simpler source of information that diminishes the need for students to read the text itself carefully. Students’ initial exposure to a text should often engage them directly with the text so they can practice independent reading. Students should be asked to glean the information they need from multiple readings of a text. These multiple readings may include initially having a text read to them by the teacher while students follow along in the text with successive independent readings completed by the students. In particular, aligned curriculum should explicitly direct students to re-read challenging portions of the text. This is equally true for material read aloud to students and for texts that students access on their own. Follow-up support should guide readers in the use of appropriate strategies and habits when encountering places in the text where they might struggle, including pointing students back to the text with teacher support when they are confused or run into vocabulary problems.

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. Care should also be taken that introducing broad themes and questions in advance of reading does not prompt overly general conversations rather than focusing reading on the specifics, drawing evidence from the text, and gleaming meaning from it. In short, activities related to the text should be such that the text itself is the focus of the instruction and children are able to appreciate and get a sense of the selection as a whole.

- 4. *Reading strategies support comprehension of specific texts and the focus on building knowledge.*** Close reading and gathering knowledge from specific texts must be at the heart of classroom activities and not be consigned to the margins when completing assignments. Reading strategies must take their rightful place *in service* of reading comprehension and assist students in building knowledge from texts. Explicitly cultivating the skills and habits of an effective reader is an essential part of early reading instruction, but this activity must not become disconnected and an end in itself. Appropriate strategies, to be effective, are meant to be introduced and exercised when they help clarify a specific part of a text and are dictated by specific features of a text (especially to assist with understanding more challenging sections). Over time, through supportive discussion, interaction, and reflection, students will learn to internalize the purpose of reading strategies in pursuit of the ultimate goal: helping them understand what they have read.
- 5. *Reading selections are by design centrally located within materials.*** The reading selections in either the teachers’ guides or the students’ editions of curriculum materials should be easily found and put at the center of the layout. The text should be the clear focus of student and teacher attention. Surrounding materials should be thoughtfully considered and justified as essential before being included. That is, the text should be central, and surrounding materials should be included only when necessary, so as not to distract from the text itself.

6. **Materials offer assessment opportunities that genuinely measure progress.** Aligned materials should guide teachers to provide scaffolding and support 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. Activities used for assessment should clearly denote what standards are being emphasized, and materials should offer frequent and easily implemented assessments, including systems for record keeping and follow-up.
7. **Writing opportunities for students are prominent and varied.** The standards call for writing both as a means of communicating thinking and answering questions and as a means of self-expression and exploration. The standards require students in the early grades to engage in a full range of writing, including writing narratives (both real and imagined), writing to inform, and writing opinions. Writing assignments should be varied and developmentally appropriate, and they should ask students to draw on their experience, on their imagination, and most frequently on the texts they encounter through reading or read alouds.

### **CONCLUSION: TRANSPARENT RESEARCH AND PRACTICE BASE**

Curriculum offered as an excellent match for the Common Core State Standards should produce evidence of its usability and efficacy with a full range of students, including English language learners. In all materials, principles of reading acquisition are explained, instructions to teachers and students are clear and concise, and the relationship between tasks and the expected learning outcome is clear and placed in close proximity to the task directions.

Curriculum materials must also have a clear and documented research base. This evidence should be offered to the teacher in clear, concise prose at appropriate points in the instructional materials (e.g., when vowel digraphs are being taught, a “best practices” discussion could be offered to the teacher; when fluency activities are introduced, the research base for fluency’s role in reading proficiency and how to achieve fluency in students could be presented to instructors).