

Core Standards for Reading, Writing, and Speaking and Listening

The Core Standards identify essential college- and career-ready skills and knowledge in reading, writing, and speaking and listening across the disciplines. While the English language arts classroom has often been seen as the proper site for literacy instruction, this document acknowledges that the responsibility for teaching such skills must also extend to the other content areas. Teachers in the social and natural sciences, the humanities, and mathematics need to use their content-area expertise to help students acquire the discipline-specific skills necessary to comprehend challenging texts and develop deep knowledge in those fields. At the same time, English language arts teachers not only must engage their students in a rich array of literature but also must help develop their students' ability to read complex works of nonfiction independently.

What is taught is just as important as how it is taught; the Core Standards should be accompanied by a comprehensive, content-rich curriculum. While this document defines the outcomes all students need to reach to be college and career ready, many important decisions about curriculum will necessarily be left to states, districts, schools, teachers, professional organizations, and parents. For example, while the standards require that students read texts of sufficient complexity, quality, and range, this document does not contain a required reading list. If states and districts choose to develop one, they should look at the Reading Exemplars provided here to get a sense of the level of complexity students must be able to handle independently when they read. Educators can also model their efforts on reading lists from around the nation and the world as long as the texts ultimately included meet the range and content standards in this document.

Standards today must ready students for competition and collaboration in a global, media-saturated environment. Colleges and universities have become international meetinghouses where people from across the globe learn with and from one another. At the same time, business today is truly a worldwide enterprise. Media-related technology helps shape what goes on in both college and the workplace; indeed, it has in some important ways reshaped the very nature of communication. Students who meet the Core Standards will have the reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills to flourish in the diverse, rapidly changing environments of college and careers.

Although reading, writing, and speaking and listening are articulated separately in the standards that follow, these divisions are made for the sake of clarity and manageability. In reality, the processes of communication are tightly interrelated and often reciprocal. The act of reading can no more be separated from the written word than the act of listening can be from the spoken word. When reading, students demonstrate their comprehension most commonly through a spoken or written interpretation of the text. As students solve problems, share insights, and build the

knowledge they need for college and career success, they draw simultaneously on their capacities to read, write, speak, and listen.

Student Practices in Reading, Writing, and Speaking and Listening

The following practices in reading, writing, and speaking and listening undergird and help unify the rest of the standards document. They are the “premises”—broad statements about the nature of college and career readiness in reading, writing, and speaking and listening—that underlie the individual standards statements and cut across the various sections of the document. Every idea introduced here is subsequently represented in one or more places within the larger document.

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Students who are college and career ready exhibit the following capacities in their reading, writing, and speaking and listening:

1. *They demonstrate independence as readers, writers, speakers, and listeners.*

Students can, without significant scaffolding or support, comprehend and evaluate complex text across a range of types and disciplines, and they can construct effective arguments and clearly convey intricate or multifaceted information. Likewise, students are independently able to discern a speaker’s key points as well as ask questions and articulate their own ideas.

2. *They build strong content knowledge.*

Students build a base of knowledge across a wide range of subject matter by engaging with works of quality and substance. They demonstrate their ability to become proficient in new areas through research and study. They read purposefully and listen attentively to gain both general knowledge and the specific in-depth expertise needed to comprehend subject matter and solve problems in different fields. They refine their knowledge and share it through substantive writing and speaking.

3. *They respond to the varying demands of audience, task, purpose, and discipline.*

Students consider their reading, writing, and speaking and listening in relation to the contextual factors of audience, task, purpose, and discipline. They appreciate nuances, such as how the composition and familiarity of the audience should affect tone. They also know that different disciplines call for different types of evidence (e.g., documentary evidence in history, experimental evidence in the natural sciences).

4. *They comprehend as well as critique.*

Students are engaged and open-minded—but skeptical—readers and listeners. They work diligently to understand precisely what an author or speaker is saying, but they also question an author’s or speaker’s assumptions and assess the veracity of claims.

5. *They privilege evidence.*

Students cite specific textual evidence when offering an oral or written interpretation of a piece of writing. They use relevant evidence when supporting their own points in writing and speaking, making their reasoning clear to the reader or listener, and they constructively evaluate others' use of evidence.

6. *They care about precision.*

Students are mindful of the impact of specific words and details, and they consider what would be achieved by different choices. Students pay especially close attention when precision matters most, such as in the case of reviewing significant data, making important distinctions, or analyzing a key moment in the action of a play or novel.

7. *They craft and look for structure.*

Students attend to structure when organizing their own writing and speaking as well as when seeking to understand the work of others. They understand and make use of the ways of presenting information typical of different disciplines. They observe, for example, how authors of literary works craft the structure to unfold events and depict the setting.

8. *They use technology strategically and capably.*

Students employ technology thoughtfully to enhance their reading, writing, speaking, and listening. They tailor their searches online to acquire useful information efficiently, and they integrate what they learn using technology with what they learn offline. They are familiar with the strengths and limitations of various technological tools and mediums and can select and use those best suited to their communication goals.

Introductory Evidence Statement for Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening Standards

To develop college- and career-ready standards for Reading, Writing, and Speaking and Listening that are rigorous, relevant, and internationally benchmarked, the work group consulted evidence from a wide array of sources. These included standards documents from high-performing states and nations; student performance data (including assessment scores and college grades); academic research; frameworks for assessments, such as NAEP; and results of surveys of postsecondary instructors and employers regarding what is most important for college and career readiness.

The evidence strongly suggests that similar reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills are necessary for success in both college and the workplace. A review of the standards of high-performing nations also suggests that many of these skills are already required in secondary schools internationally. The work group has endeavored to articulate these skills in the Core Standards, focusing educators, students, parents, and resources on what matters most.

Given that a set of standards cannot be simplistically “derived” from any body of evidence, the work group sometimes relied on reasoned judgment to interpret where the evidence was most compelling. For example, there is not a consensus among college faculty about the need for incoming students to be able to comprehend graphs, charts, and tables and to integrate information in these data displays with the information in the accompanying text. Although some evidence suggests that this skill is critical in the workplace and in some entry-level courses, college faculties from the various disciplines disagree on its value (with science and economics faculty rating it more highly than English and humanities professors do). The work group ultimately included a standard on the integration of text and data because the preponderance of the evidence suggests the skill’s importance in meeting the demands of the twenty-first-century workplace and some college classrooms.

In most cases, the evidence is clearer. In writing, for example, there is unequivocal value placed on the logical progression of ideas. The expectation that high school graduates will be able to produce writing that is logical and coherent is found throughout the standards of top-performing countries and states. This ability is also valued highly by college faculty and employers. In response to such clear evidence, the work group included Writing student performance standard #5: “Create a logical progression of ideas or events and convey the relationships among them.”

A bibliography of some of the sources we drew upon most is included at the end of this document. We also refer the reader to the Core Standards Web site (<http://www.corestandards.org>), which contains a similar bibliography (with links

to full documents where available) as well as lists of standards linked to relevant sources of evidence.

Finally, while the standards reflect the best evidence available to date, the decisions the work group made are necessarily provisional. The core should be reexamined periodically as additional research on college and career readiness emerges. Indeed, this document may serve as an agenda for such research.

How to Read the Document

This document is divided into three main sections: strands, applications, and supporting materials.

Strands

There are three *strands*: Reading, Writing, and Speaking and Listening. Although each strand is presented discretely for ease of understanding, the document should be considered a coherent whole.

The three strands are each in turn divided into two sections: *Standards for Range and Content* and *Standards for Student Performance*.

Standards for Range and Content

The Standards for Range and Content in each strand describe the contexts in which college- and career-ready students must be able to read, write, speak, and listen. Rather than merely supplement or illustrate the numbered list of Standards for Student Performance, the Standards for Range and Content are themselves required and carry equal force.

Standards for Student Performance

The Standards for Student Performance in each strand enumerate the essential skills and understandings that students who are college and career ready in reading, writing, and speaking and listening must have no later than the end of high school.

Applications

The clearest examples of the integrated nature of communication are the *Applications of the Core* for Research and Media. The Core Standards for Reading, Writing, and Speaking and Listening have been designed to include the essential skills and knowledge that students need to apply to college and career tasks, such as research and media. Rather than having an additional set of standards that would largely duplicate those already in Reading, Writing, and Speaking and Listening, the document includes the Research and Media applications that draw upon standards already in those strands. This both reaffirms the centrality of the core processes of reading, writing, speaking, and listening and shows how those processes can be combined and extended to describe key communicative acts in the classroom and workplace.

In the Research and Media applications, specific Reading, Writing, and Speaking and Listening standards are identified with a letter corresponding to the relevant strand (R for Reading, W for Writing, and S&L for Speaking and Listening) and a number or letter corresponding to the statement within that strand. For example, R-14 refers to the fourteenth statement in the Standards for Student Performance in Reading,

and W-A refers to the first statement of the Standards for Range and Content in Writing.