

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

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Developed by the authors of the Common Core State Standards, these criteria are designed to guide publishers and curriculum developers as they work to ensure alignment with the Common Core State Standards in developing reading materials for the early grades.

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 material. 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 ensure that teachers 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.

## **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 in and out of classroom settings (through take-home or after-school activities) 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.

In particular, by the end of kindergarten, students should be comfortable recognizing and writing letters of the alphabet and know the primary sound/symbol relationship for every letter. By the end of 1st grade, they should have sufficient working knowledge of English spelling patterns and conventions to decode regular, one- and two-syllable words, including those with inflections. First graders are also expected to apply their knowledge of English spelling patterns and conventions in writing, so they can produce regular one- and two-syllable words that are phonemically complete and decipherable even if not formally correct. Learning about irregularly spelled words should be distributed across grades in accordance with the language demands of children’s texts. Their introduction should begin in kindergarten with very high-frequency grammatical words, including articles, prepositions, and common irregular verbs such as *is* and *do*. Finally, by the time they complete 2nd grade, students should be decoding automatically and reading with fluency.

Because students differ widely in how much exposure and repetition they need to master foundational skills, materials also need to incorporate high-quality parallel activities for those students who are able to reach facility with less repetition. Approaching remediation and extension activities in this parallel 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 for 2nd graders.** Materials should also provide ample opportunities for repeated oral reading (in and out of the classroom) 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. Instructions should also require students to follow along while text is read aloud by the teacher to achieve fluency. By the end of 2nd grade, it is essential that students be 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 — both in and out of classroom contexts — 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. While instruction should be systematic and varied (i.e., multiple word meanings, morphology, phonology, and orthography), materials should also use games, jokes, puns, and other forms of word play to enhance instruction and develop a sense of excitement about words.

- 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.

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> Research makes clear that the complexity levels of the texts students are presently required to read throughout their school careers are significantly below what is required to achieve college and career readiness. 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. Both these issues must be addressed by selecting complex texts that are grade level appropriate.
2. ***All students, including those who are behind, have extensive opportunities to encounter and comprehend grade-level complex text as required by the standards.*** Complex text, whether accessed 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.

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 read 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 and gain world and word knowledge. Therefore, remedial materials must be flexible and straightforward enough to be used in alternative settings and times: before and after school, at home, or in after-school programs. In most cases, the persons working with students in such settings will not have as much experience as the primary classroom teachers, and materials must accommodate that fact.

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

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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 criteria, due out in summer 2011, will blend quantitative and qualitative factors and will be widely shared and made available to publishers and curriculum developers. It is likely that the measurement of some narrative fiction as well as poetry and drama for the time being 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.

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.)

Selections in the early elementary grades must also contain sufficient repetitions of each lesson's words and spelling/sound patterns and should be complemented with associated spelling and writing activities. To be sufficient, materials should provide abundant — and easily available — opportunities to ensure that all students can transfer knowledge of spelling/sound patterns to words not previously seen or studied.

4. **Materials include a greater volume of informational text.** The Common Core State Standards call for a much greater emphasis on informational text. Specifically, they call for elementary curriculum materials to be recalibrated to reflect a mix of 50 percent informational and 50 percent narrative text. (See p. 31 of the standards for details on how these two types of texts are defined.) 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 equal time and weight are given to scientific and historical text and to literary text. In addition, to develop reading comprehension and vocabulary for *all* readers, the selected informational text materials should build a coherent and self-scaffolding body of knowledge within and across grades. (The example of “The Human Body” on p. 33 of the Common Core State Standards offers one approach.)
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 opportunity to read and write about texts of their choice on their own during and outside of the school day. Students should have access to a wide range of materials on a variety of topics and genres. These texts should enable students to read broadly to build their knowledge, vocabulary, and experience. Materials will need to include texts at students' own reading level as well as texts with complexity levels that will challenge and motivate students. 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 gain 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 in direct response to high-quality text and text-dependent questions and omit that which would otherwise distract from achieving those goals.

1. **Questions are grounded in the text and are worth thinking about and answering.** 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 suggest that a majority of questions posed to children be based on the text under consideration.

(This is equally true for read-alouds students listen to and for material students read for themselves.) Materials should be sparing in offering activities that are not text dependent. Whether written or spoken, responses based on students' background knowledge and the experiences they bring with them to school are not sufficient. A proficient answer should require thinking about the text carefully and finding evidence in the text itself to support the response. Discussions 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, rather than on trying to cajole or entertain students as a prerequisite for asking them to engage with the text.

2. ***Prereading activities start with the text itself.*** Scaffolding, summaries, and stimulant questions that connect the reader to the text ahead of time should not preempt or replace the text by translating its contents for students or telling students what they are going to learn. Students' initial exposure to a text should engage them directly with the text so they can begin to make meaning for themselves. Students should be able 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. Extra textual scaffolding prior to and during the first read should focus on words that are essential to a basic understanding and that students are not likely to know or be able to determine from context. As a preferred option for read-alouds, teachers should be directed to read aloud materials themselves, rather than listening along with their students to the text read by a recorded voice. Texts and the questions asked of students also should be selected and ordered so that they bootstrap onto each other. In short, prereading 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.
3. ***Rather than focusing on general strategies and questions disconnected from texts, strategies and questions are cultivated in the context of reading specific texts.*** Close and careful reading must be at the heart of classroom activities and not be consigned to the margins when completing assignments. Practices such as organizing instructional units around broad, abstract themes like "traditions" or "our changing world" can be hard to develop and even harder for students to grasp. Such broad themes can invite teachers and readers to have general conversations rather than focusing reading on the specifics, drawing evidence from the text, and gleaning meaning from it. In addition, discussion of reading strategies must take its rightful place *in service* of reading comprehension, not as a separate body of material. Reading strategies are a tool for — not the point of — reading instruction. Appropriate strategies, to be effective, should be introduced and exercised only 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.

4. ***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.
5. ***Materials offer assessment opportunities that genuinely measure progress.*** Aligned materials, therefore, 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.

#### **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).