

How Can Teachers Effectively Use the Standards?



The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) are the focus of educators in more than 90% of the states, as well as in the U.S. territories, such as the U.S. Virgin Islands. This unexpected connection between educators and the Standards has resulted in a communal effort to use the Standards effectively. The movement has an energy about it that appears to be fueled by the need to know everything possible about the Common Core.

As participants in this undertaking, teachers are wondering about numerous aspects of the multifaceted Standards. How the College and Career Readiness (CCR) Anchor Standards support the English Language Arts Standards is a prime example of this. Others include the need to know how to align the Standards with teaching strategies and how to assess students as they engage with the Common Core.

In this chapter, we address teachers' needs. We explore how we, as educators, can effectively use the CCSS with our students. We share our thinking by responding to the following questions:

- How can we use the College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards to gain an overview of the expectations of the CCSS?
- How should we read the Common Core State Standards?
- How can we align the content of the Standards with viable teaching strategies?
- How should we assess students when using the CCSS?
- How should we plan to teach the English Language Arts CCSS?
- What can we do differently to help our students achieve?

How Can We Use the College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards to Gain an Overview of the Expectations of the CCSS?

Because the Common Core State Standards are multifaceted, using them is a complex task. To begin, the College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards provide a foundation for the CCSS. These Anchor Standards are what students should know and be able to do by the end of 12th grade to succeed in college and the workplace. The CCSS are organized according to the CCR Anchor Standards. The CCR Standards are the broader, more general anchors; the CCSS are the more specific benchmarks

that underpin each anchor. The grade-specific Common Core State Standards connect to the CCR Standards as benchmarks of what students in each grade level, K–12, should know and be able to do to meet the CCR Standards by the time they graduate from high school. As represented in Table 1.1, the K–12 Common Core State Standards are divided into two general categories: English language arts and mathematics. (The CCSS in their entirety are available online at www.corestandards.org.)

The College Career and Readiness (CCR) Anchor Standards delineate what students must know and be able to do when they graduate from high school. In the English Language Arts Standards, there are four strands of CCR Anchor Standards: Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening, and Language. Understanding the substance of each CCR Anchor Standard helps us clarify the content of the Common Core State Standards as a whole. For example, the CCR Anchor Standards for Reading are organized into four clusters: Key Ideas and Details, Craft and Structure, Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, and Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity. Table 1.2 features an overview of the CCR Anchor Standards for Reading.

How Should We Read the Common Core State Standards?

The CCSS are organized by grade level to correspond with the categories of the CCR Anchor Standards. This structure allows teachers to read the Standards both vertically and horizontally.

The designations for the strands of the English Language Arts standards are

- RL—Reading Literature
- RI—Reading Informational Text
- RF—Reading Foundational Skills
- W—Writing
- SL—Speaking and Listening
- L—Language

Further, each standard has an assigned code that describes the strand, grade level, and standard number. For example, the designation RI.4.3 means **Reading Informational Text, Grade 4, Standard 3**.

Table 1.1 Overview of the Common Core State Standards

English Language Arts and Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects	Mathematics
Reading <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Literature: K–12 • Informational Text: K–12 • Foundational Skills: K–5 	Mathematical Practice: K–12 (same for every grade level) Mathematical Content: K–8 and High School
Writing: K–12	
Speaking and Listening: K–12	
Language: K–12 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conventions • Vocabulary 	
Literacy in History/Social Studies: 6–12	
Literacy in Science and Technical Subjects: 6–12	

Table 1.2 Overview of the College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Reading

Cluster	Standards
Key Ideas and Details	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.2. Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.3. Analyze how and why individuals, events, and ideas develop and interact over the course of a text.
Craft and Structure	<ol style="list-style-type: none">4. Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.5. Analyze the structure of texts, including how specific sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text (e.g., a section, chapter, scene, or stanza) relate to each other and the whole.6. Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.
Integration of Knowledge and Ideas	<ol style="list-style-type: none">7. Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.8. Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, including the validity of the reasoning as well as the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence.9. Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take.
Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity	<ol style="list-style-type: none">10. Read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently.

Note. From *Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects* (p. 10), by the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and the Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010, Washington, DC: Authors.

Why Should We Read the Standards Vertically Within Each Grade Level?

Within the CCSS, we need to read vertically to gain a general understanding of how the Standards are structured and what the more specific expectations are for each grade level. For example, if we were teaching third grade, we would read the third-grade Reading Standards 1–10 as detailed in Table 1.3.

When we read all of the English Language Arts Standards for third grade vertically, it becomes clear that as reading teachers, we are responsible not only for the Reading Standards but also for the Writing, Speaking and Listening, and Language Standards. This is a critical point because essential topics, such as vocabulary, which we would traditionally expect to encounter in the Reading Standards, are included in the Language Standards.

Another reason to read the Standards vertically is to get a big picture of what students need to know and be able to do in English language arts by the end of each grade level. Understanding what students are expected to know before and after they are taught at a particular grade level provides the teacher with knowledge of what students should know coming into class and what they will need to know when they leave that class. This is necessary information for understanding students as well as for planning instruction.

Why Should We Read the Standards Horizontally Across Grade Levels?

Within each standard, we read horizontally to fully understand what each grade-level standard actually encompasses. The Common Core State Standards are not structured in a way that allows a

Table 1.3 Overview of the Common Core State Standards for Reading Literature for Grade 3

Cluster	Standards
Key Ideas and Details	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Ask and answer questions to demonstrate understanding of a text, referring explicitly to the text as the basis for the answers.2. Recount stories, including fables, folktales, and myths from diverse cultures; determine the central message, lesson, or moral and explain how it is conveyed through key details in the text.3. Describe characters in a story (e.g., their traits, motivations, or feelings) and explain how their actions contribute to the sequence of events.
Craft and Structure	<ol style="list-style-type: none">4. Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, distinguishing literal from nonliteral language.5. Refer to parts of stories, dramas, and poems when writing or speaking about a text, using terms such as chapter, scene, and stanza; describe how each successive part builds on earlier sections.6. Distinguish their own point of view from that of the narrator or those of the characters.
Integration of Knowledge and Ideas	<ol style="list-style-type: none">7. Explain how specific aspects of a text’s illustrations contribute to what is conveyed by the words in a story (e.g., create mood, emphasize aspects of a character or setting).8. (Not applicable to literature)9. Compare and contrast the themes, settings, and plots of stories written by the same author about the same or similar characters (e.g., in books from a series).
Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity	<ol style="list-style-type: none">10. By the end of the year, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poetry, at the high end of the grades 2–3 text complexity band independently and proficiently.

Note. From *Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects* (p. 12), by the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and the Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010, Washington, DC: Authors.

fifth-grade teacher to teach only the fifth-grade standards. To fully understand what each standard requires of students, we need to ensure that all of the preceding standards within a given anchor are being met (see Table 1.4).

For example, the Reading Informational Text Standard 1 for fifth grade is “Quote accurately from a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text” (NGA Center & CCSSO, 2010, p. 14). However, the standards for grades K–4 for the same benchmark address the following (NGA Center & CCSSO, 2010, pp. 13–14):

Kindergarten: “With prompting and support, ask and answer questions about key details in a text.”

Grade 1: “Ask and answer questions about key details in a text.”

Grade 2: “Ask and answer such questions as *who*, *what*, *where*, *when*, *why*, and *how* to demonstrate understanding of key details in a text.”

Grade 3: “Ask and answer questions to demonstrate understanding of a text, referring explicitly to the text as the basis for the answers.”

Grade 4: “Refer to details and examples in a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.”

As a result, a more accurate phrasing that details what teachers and students need to know for grade 5’s Standard 1 is: Ask and answer questions about key details in a text. Demonstrate

Table 1.4 Common Core State Standards 1–3 (Key Ideas and Details) for Reading Literature for Grades K–5

Grade	Standards
K	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. With prompting and support, ask and answer questions about key details in a text. 2. With prompting and support, retell familiar stories, including key details. 3. With prompting and support, identify characters, settings, and major events in a story.
1	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ask and answer questions about key details in a text. 2. Retell stories, including key details, and demonstrate understanding of their central message or lesson. 3. Describe characters, settings, and major events in a story, using key details.
2	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ask and answer such questions as <i>who</i>, <i>what</i>, <i>where</i>, <i>when</i>, <i>why</i>, and <i>how</i> to demonstrate understanding of key details in a text. 2. Recount stories, including fables and folktales from diverse cultures, and determine their central message, lesson, or moral. 3. Describe how characters in a story respond to major events and challenges.
3	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ask and answer questions to demonstrate understanding of a text, referring explicitly to the text as the basis for the answers. 2. Recount stories, including fables, folktales, and myths from diverse cultures; determine the central message, lesson, or moral and explain how it is conveyed through key details in the text. 3. Describe characters in a story (e.g., their traits, motivations, or feelings) and explain how their actions contribute to the sequence of events.
4	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Refer to details and examples in a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text. 2. Determine a theme of a story, drama, or poem from details in the text; summarize the text. 3. Describe in depth a character, setting, or event in a story or drama, drawing on specific details in the text (e.g., a character’s thoughts, words, or actions).
5	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Quote accurately from a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text. 2. Determine a theme of a story, drama, or poem from details in the text, including how characters in a story or drama respond to challenges or how the speaker in a poem reflects upon a topic; summarize the text. 3. Compare and contrast two or more characters, settings, or events in a story or drama, drawing on specific details in the text (e.g., how characters interact).

Note. From *Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects* (pp. 11 and 12), by the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and the Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010, Washington, DC: Authors.

understanding of key details by asking and answering *who*, *what*, *where*, *when*, *why*, and *how* questions. Ask and answer questions to demonstrate understanding of a text, referring explicitly to the text. Refer to examples in the text when explaining the text and drawing inferences from it. Quote accurately from a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.

Understanding the English language arts expectations for a particular grade level is important (reading vertically), but we must also be aware of the expectations that build to that grade level (reading horizontally).

How Can We Align the Content of the Standards With Viable Teaching Strategies?

Knowing the content of the Standards is essential for teaching students how to meet them. This requires studying each of the Standards in depth and aligning the content with viable teaching

strategies. For example, Language Standard 4 for grade 2 (L.2.4) is “Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases based on *grade 2 reading and content*, choosing flexibly from an array of strategies” (NGA Center & CCSSO, 2010, p. 27).

We could begin by examining a small part of the Standard: “Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown...words.” Next, we could brainstorm strategies that we might use to help students meet this section of the Standard. Ideas such as the Semantic Map (Johnson & Pearson, 1984; see Chapter 11) and Semantic Feature Analysis (Johnson & Pearson, 1984; see Chapter 10) might be among those that come to mind.

How Should We Assess Students When Using the CCSS?

We need to assess students in relation to their ability to meet the Standards before we plan effective instruction. Formative assessments provide viable options to determine student knowledge. According to the International Reading Association (2012), formative assessments are ongoing measures that teachers use to obtain information about various aspects of students' literacy. Examples of formative assessments include teacher observations (of discussions, patterned partner reading, and whisper reading); strategy applications, such as the Semantic Question Map (McLaughlin, 2010), the Bookmark Technique (McLaughlin & Allen, 2009), retellings, and summaries; and brief written responses, such as Tickets Out (McLaughlin, 2012).

We can begin by using formative assessments to determine the degree of students' background knowledge. The results of such assessments provide a beginning point for effective instruction and illuminate any gaps in knowledge that may exist. Within each standard and across all of the standards, we can also use formative assessments to measure student progress.

Formative assessments occur every day during teaching and learning and provide information that informs multiple processes. Using formative assessments is not only an effective way to monitor student progress but also a viable way to glean information for planning future instruction. (Chapter 2 goes into further detail about formative assessment.)

How Should We Plan to Teach the English Language Arts CCSS?

According to the Common Core State Standards document, the ELA Standards are based on an integrated model of literacy, with expectations for research and media skills embedded throughout. Intentionally, there are no specific teaching strategies recommended. Instead, the document advocates flexibility in teaching methods. This means that teachers will need to find resources and plan curricula so their students can meet the English Language Arts Standards. First, however, teachers will need to study the Standards and decide what they mean.

What Can We Do Differently to Help Our Students Achieve?

The Common Core Standards are different from many state standards in terms of structure and content. For example, when considering structure, the CCSS are directly linked to the College and Career Readiness Standards, whereas state standards have traditionally stood on their own. When thinking about content, the English Language Arts Standards focus on skills such as interpretation, argumentation, and literary analysis, whereas more traditional standards focus on reader response and comprehension.

Elementary teachers who have been implementing the ELA Standards find that their thought processes about curricula, instruction, and assessment are being continually challenged. Even though standards for each grade level are provided, they are broad, and there is little direction about how to teach students to meet them. In fact, that is left for the teachers to determine. As stated in the introduction to the Common Core Standards (NGA Center & CCSSO, 2010), “By emphasizing required achievements, the Standards leave room for teachers, curriculum developers, and states to determine how those goals should be reached and what additional topics should be addressed” (p. 4). Yet, the expectations have clearly been set for students to be able to read texts on grade level with appropriate text complexity and write, speak, listen, and use language effectively. This has left educators wondering how to teach the aspects of literacy emphasized in the Standards.

Many teachers have been finding that they need to adapt their instruction to help students meet the expectations of the Standards. An example of how instruction may need to be different can be found in the challenges of Reading Standard 8 for Informational Text. It focuses on how an author uses reasoning and evidence to support points in informational text. It is associated with College and Career Readiness Reading Anchor Standard 8, which states that by the end of high school, students will be able to “delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, including the validity of the reasoning as well as the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence” (NGA Center & CCSSO, 2010, p. 10). In Reading Standard 8 for Informational Text for grades K–5, teachers are responsible for helping students learn a progression of skills that lay the foundation for middle school and high school instruction about using formal arguments to persuade a reader. The K–5 skill progressions for this standard are delineated in Table 1.5.

Of course, before students can analyze a text to determine the validity of the author’s reasoning and the sufficiency of evidence, the students must first be able to comprehend the text. Thus, reading comprehension strategies still need to be taught. A number of volumes about explicitly teaching reading comprehension strategies have been published (e.g., Harvey & Goudvis, 2007; McLaughlin, 2010; McLaughlin & Allen, 2009). The research purports that comprehension is a multifaceted process that typically involves strategies such as activating relevant background knowledge, monitoring, visualizing, self-questioning, inferring, summarizing, and evaluating. Teaching these strategies helps enable students in each grade level to meet the expectations of all the CCR Anchor Standards, but especially Substrand 10: Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity.

Mary, a fourth-grade teacher in Kentucky, is an example of an educator who has experienced the challenge of teaching her students what they need to know to read successfully, while simultaneously focusing

Table 1.5 Common Core State Standard 8 for Reading Informational Text for Grades K–5

Grade	Standard
K	With prompting and support, identify the reasons an author gives to support points in a text.
1	Identify the reasons an author gives to support points in a text.
2	Describe how reasons support specific points the author makes in a text.
3	Describe the logical connection between particular sentences and paragraphs in a text (e.g., comparison, cause/effect, first/second/third in a sequence).
4	Explain how an author uses reasons and evidence to support particular points in a text.
5	Explain how an author uses reasons and evidence to support particular points in a text, identifying which reasons and evidence support which point(s).

Note. From *Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects* (pp. 13 and 14), by the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and the Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010, Washington, DC: Authors.

on the instructional methods and materials necessary for students to meet the Common Core Standards. She has also observed that her teaching emphases have changed. Mary notes,

Before the Common Core, much of my reading instruction focused on teaching reading comprehension strategies. Our state standards were pretty explicit about what to teach. I knew exactly what to teach and which strategies to use. With the Common Core, I find myself working with other teachers, studying each standard, trying to decide what the standard means and what students should be able to do when they achieve it. Once we determine that, we need to think about what the Standards should look like in practice and determine what kind of instruction it will take to meet them. We also need to make sure we are using appropriate text complexity in instruction and integrating good formative assessments.

Previously, with state standards, Mary planned reading instruction with a focus on comprehension. She spent time introducing the text, teaching essential vocabulary, and encouraging students to make predictions and ask questions about the text. She taught comprehension strategies such as making connections, monitoring, visualizing, and summarizing. She also invited students to respond to the text in a variety of ways. Mary taught those skills and strategies that were clearly delineated in the state standards. She documented what she had taught and noted students' progress in meeting the state standards through formative assessments and required district measures.

To meet the CCSS, Mary knows that her students still need to be able to comprehend text. Consequently, in her teaching, Mary knows that she needs to continue teaching her students not only to use a repertoire of reading comprehension strategies, which are not emphasized in the CCSS, but also to learn other ideas that are stressed in the Common Core. As Mary notes, "I still teach comprehension strategies because my students definitely need them, but now I need to teach more."

Since they began teaching the Common Core State Standards, Mary and her colleagues have realized that teaching the concepts embedded in the English Language Arts Standards cannot be accomplished in a series of isolated lessons. The teachers know that they must integrate what they know about best practices in the teaching of reading, writing, speaking and listening, and language and the CCSS every day. Comprehension instruction remains a critical curricular component, as the Standards are interwoven in lessons across the curriculum. In Standards-based lessons, teaching methods need to be carefully planned, and the content needs to be well coordinated. Teaching the Common Core State Standards is a complex task. They cannot simply be checked off a list.

These teachers integrate the Standards when they plan instruction. For example, when teaching CCR Anchor Standard 2 for Reading for fourth grade, Mary integrates a number of Standards: Reading Literature Standards 1 and 6, Reading Informational Text Standard 8, Speaking and Listening Standards 1 and 2, Language Standard 6, and several Writing Standards. For example, Reading Standard 2 for fourth grade for Literature is "determine a theme of a story, drama, or poem from details in the text; summarize the text" (NGA Center & CCSSO, 2010, p. 12), and for Informational Text is "determine the main idea of a text and explain how it is supported by key details; summarize the text" (NGA Center & CCSSO, 2010, p. 14). To teach CCR Standard 2 for Reading for fourth grade, Mary plans lessons about inferring, how to determine an author's message, how to summarize, and how to prepare an explanation of the text. She rarely teaches a reading lesson that does not involve identifying text-based evidence to support conclusions, so she

has to teach her students how to pull words from the text that will support their explanations (CCR Anchor Standard 1).

With literature, Mary teaches her students to infer the author's takeaway message (theme) and why the author values it (Reading Literature Standard 1). Her students learn that *theme* is the vocabulary word for *takeaway message*, plus they learn academic language found in the text selection. With informational text, students learn the term *main ideas* plus domain-specific vocabulary found in the text (Language Standard 6). Mary teaches her class to determine the author's point of view (Reading Literature Standard 6) because she believes that the point of view often reveals a lot about why the author may have written the text. For texts in which the author states an opinion, she teaches her students to determine claims the author has made and analyze the author's reasons and evidence that support those claims (Reading Informational Text Standard 8).

Mary uses many instructional techniques in which students participate in collaborative conversations about the theme or the main ideas and key details of the text (Speaking and Listening Standard 1). She also teaches her fourth-grade students to write narratives with an obvious theme (Writing Standards 3 and 9), develop opinion pieces that include reasons supported by facts and details (Writing Standard 1), and create informational essays that include supporting facts and details (Writing Standard 2). Mary states,

For my students, learning a concept such as author's purpose now takes a lot of whole-group and small-group discussion about text, writing, use of graphic organizers, and interactive experiences involving art, drama, and technology. I need to engage my students in different types of lessons for them to become critical readers of text.

In Chapter 2, we discuss formative assessment: We define it, focus on the role that it plays in the successful implementation of the Common Core State Standards, and detail practical classroom applications.

ESSENTIAL RESOURCES

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