

Key Shifts of the Common Core State Standards in ELA Literacy

1. Building knowledge through content-rich nonfiction and informational texts	<p>Building knowledge through content rich non-fiction plays an essential role in literacy and in the Standards. In K-5, fulfilling the standards requires a 50-50 balance between informational and literary reading. Informational reading primarily includes content rich non-fiction in history/social studies, science and the arts; the K-5 Standards strongly recommend that students build coherent general knowledge both within each year and across years. In 6-12, ELA classes place much greater attention to a specific category of informational text—literary nonfiction—than has been traditional. In grades 6-12, the Standards for literacy in history/social studies, science and technical subjects ensure that students can independently build knowledge in these disciplines through reading and writing.</p> <p>To be clear, the Standards do require substantial attention to literature throughout K-12, as half of the required work in K-5 and the core of the work of 6-12 ELA teachers.</p>
2. Reading and writing grounded in evidence from text	<p>The Standards place a premium on students writing to sources, i.e., using evidence from texts to present careful analyses, well-defended claims, and clear information. Rather than asking students questions they can answer solely from their prior knowledge or experience, the Standards expect students to answer questions that depend on their having read the text or texts with care. The Standards also require the cultivation of narrative writing throughout the grades, and in later grades a command of sequence and detail will be essential for effective argumentative and informational writing.</p> <p>Likewise, the reading standards focus on students' ability to read carefully and grasp information, arguments, ideas and details based on text evidence. Students should be able to answer a range of <i>text-dependent</i> questions, questions in which the answers require inferences based on careful attention to the text.</p>
3. Regular practice with complex text and its academic vocabulary	<p>Rather than focusing solely on the skills of reading and writing, the Standards highlight the growing complexity of the texts students must read to be ready for the demands of college and careers. The Standards build a staircase of text complexity so that all students are ready for the demands of college- and career-level reading no later than the end of high school. Closely related to text complexity—and inextricably connected to reading comprehension—is a focus on academic vocabulary: words that appear in a variety of content areas (such as <i>ignite</i> and <i>commit</i>).</p>