



ISBE Literacy Framework: Literacy Lifelines

The Illinois ELA Literacy Framework’s purpose is to provide administrators, educators, and other stakeholders a guide for planning an effective, comprehensive literacy program. This framework includes recent findings gleaned from the Fordham Institutes’ “Reading and Writing Instruction in America’s Schools” and “Literacy Lifelines for America’s English Language Arts Teachers”. The components within the framework are founded on research-based, quality practices and are not program specific.

This section is adapted from the research and findings by the Fordham Institutes in the two works: [Reading and Writing in America’s Schools](#) and [Literacy Lifelines for America’s English Language Arts Teachers](#). (Used with permission: See Reference section for full citation).

Literacy Lifeline 1a: Foundational Skills (K-5)

Teacher Tip

Use Systematic Instruction:

Students should follow many of these foundational skills in a progression at the early elementary levels. The success of one skill often dictates a child's ability to move onto the next skill.

Foundational skills are the beginning of lifelong accessibility to the printed word and literacy itself. Considerable evidence supports that close to two-thirds of all fourth-grade students read at less than adequate levels on reading achievement tests and that the problem has persisted for decades. One reason is under-developed foundational reading skills that leaves students struggling to focus their attention on understanding what they are trying to read. (Paige, 2018)

Illinois Foundational Skills Standards are directed towards students' understanding and working knowledge of concepts of print, the alphabetic principle, and other basic conventions of the English writing system. Students should follow many of these foundational skills in a progression at the early elementary levels. The success of one skill often dictates a child's ability to move onto the next skill. Foundational skills should be taught in conjunction with the other literacy skills intended for that grade level and differentiated instruction should be provided. Good readers will need much less practice with these concepts than struggling readers will.

Resources

ILLINOIS FOUNDATIONAL SKILLS MATERIALS:

[KINDERGARTEN](#) [THIRD](#)
[FIRST](#) [FOURTH](#)
[SECOND](#) [FIFTH](#)

UNBOUNDED:

[K-2 FLUENCY GUIDE](#)
[3-5 FLUENCY GUIDE](#)

The foundational reading skills that enable students to read words (alphabets); relate those words to their oral language; and read connected text with sufficient accuracy and fluency, helping students to understand what they read, is the focus work of the Institute of Education Sciences (IES). Four recommendations from this 2016 report are:

Recommendation 1. Teach students academic language skills, including the use of inferential and narrative language, and vocabulary knowledge.

Recommendation 2. Develop awareness of the segments of sounds in speech and how they link to letters.

Recommendation 3. Teach students to decode words, analyze word parts, and write and recognize words.

Recommendation 4. Ensure that each student reads connected text every day to support reading accuracy, fluency, and comprehension.

Bottom Line for Literacy Lifeline 1a: Foundational Skills (K-5)

Why it Matters: The following Foundational Skills Standards outline the necessary skills for our Kindergarten-Fifth grade students. These skills should be systematically embedded throughout a K-5 curriculum. Students should demonstrate mastery of the previous year’s grade level standards before progressing to the next grade level standards.

Print Concepts: (Standard 1) K-1

Print concepts include the organization and basic features of print. Among these are:

1. English is read from left to right, top to bottom, and page by page.
2. Spoken words are represented in written language by specific sequences of letters.
3. Words are separated by spaces.
4. Sentences are distinguished by certain features, such as capitalization of the first word and use of ending punctuation.

Print concepts also include recognizing and naming upper- and lowercase letters of the alphabet.

- o Research indicates that young children’s knowledge of the forms and functions of written language is an important precursor of skillful reading (Justice and Piasta, 2011).
- o Knowledge of letter forms and names provides a basis for learning about the alphabetic system (Evans and Saint-Aubin, 2011).
- o A “deep, ready, and working knowledge of letters” (along with knowledge of their relationships to the sounds of speech), is crucial for literacy development and overall educational success (Adams, 2013).

Effective Practices:

Children learn print concepts through active, close interactions and extensive exposure to a variety of print materials. Adults should model daily how print works and make explicit references to print, directing children’s attention to a variety of print features, as they share books with children and write for and with children. The letters of the alphabet should be taught explicitly and ensure that children observe and use letters in meaningful print experiences.

In a discussion of the research on the development of alphabet knowledge-

- o Adams (2013) advises teaching the names and shapes of the uppercase letters before the lowercase letters because the former is visually much easier to learn and provides an anchor for learning lowercase letters.
- o The Teachers College of Reading and Writing suggest that while print layout, directionality, spacing, and the stop and go marks of punctuation determine the “rules of the road,” the major entry into discovering how print works is building an understanding of how letters in print come together to represent sounds in words (TCRWP, 2013).

Phonological Awareness (Standard 2) K-1

Phonological awareness is a broad skill that includes identifying and manipulating units of oral language – parts such as words, syllables, and onsets and rimes. Children who have mastered phonological awareness can identify and make oral rhymes, can clap out the number of syllables in a word, and can recognize words with the same initial sounds as 'money' and 'mother'.

Children's phonological awareness includes a continuum of skills that develop over time. From the simplest to the most complex, these include rhyme and alliteration, word and syllable awareness, and onset-rime and phoneme awareness. A careful assessment of students' phonological awareness will enable teachers to identify the levels of development in the classroom and plan instruction that is appropriate for students' needs.

Retrieved from <http://www.readingrockets.org/article/development-phonological-skills>

Effective Practices:

To effectively decode (convert from print to speech) and encode (convert from speech to print) words, students must be able to identify the individual sounds, or phonemes, that make up the words they hear in speech, name the letters of the alphabet as they appear in print, and identify each letter's corresponding sound(s). Teachers should begin instruction as soon as possible through a variety of activities such as read-alouds, poems, songs, games, direct instruction, etc. Once students know a few consonant and vowel sounds and their corresponding letters, they can start to sound out and blend those letters into simple words.

Phonics and Word Recognition (Standard 3) K-5

Phonics and word recognition standards include knowledge of letter-sound and spelling-sound correspondences, knowledge of word parts (syllables and morphemes), and recognition of irregularly spelled words. Developing readers use this knowledge to decode and identify words in written language. In other words, the phonics and word recognition reading standards are taught (along with print concepts and phonological awareness) so that students have the knowledge and skills to access language that has been recorded in print, including words they have never encountered in print.

The goal of phonics and word recognition instruction is to teach children the skills necessary for independence with our language code. Phonics instruction helps children learn the relationships between the letters of written language and the sounds of spoken language. Children are taught, for example, that the letter n represents the sound /n/ and that it is the first letter in words such as nose, nice, and new. Learning that there are predictable relationships between sounds and letters allows children to apply these relationships to both familiar and unfamiliar words and to begin to read with fluency.

Effective Practices:

It is recommended that phonics instruction and materials should provide a systematic sequence (the letter-sound relationship is taught in an organized and logical sequence) and explicit teaching focus (the instruction provides teachers with precise directions for teaching letter-sound relationships). Frequent opportunities for children to apply what they are learning about letters and sounds to the reading of words, sentences, and stories is paramount in preparing for becoming a literate individual. Instructional materials should be reviewed on a frequent basis to ascertain their effectiveness.

Systematic and explicit instruction:

- Significantly improves children's word recognition, spelling, and reading comprehension.
- Is most effective when it begins in kindergarten or first grade and is used as part of a comprehensive reading program with students who do not have a firm understanding of the letter-sound relationship, regardless of grade level.

Adapted from: Put Reading First: The Research Building Blocks for Teaching Children to Read Kindergarten Through Grade 3, a publication of The Partnership for Reading.

Fluency (Standard 4) K-5

Fluency is the ability to read with accuracy, appropriate rate (which requires automaticity), and prosody. Although fluency is important when children read aloud written text for an audience, such as their peers or family members, the primary importance of fluency is that it enables comprehension (Rasinski and Samuels 2011; Samuels 2006; Shanahan, and others 2010; Stanovich 1994).

Children who can efficiently access print have the cognitive resources available to engage in meaning making. The ELA Reading Standards makes this purpose clear: *Students read with sufficient accuracy and fluency to support comprehension*. It further emphasizes that comprehension will increase by including time for students to read on-level text with purpose and understanding, and use context to confirm or self-correct word recognition and understanding, and by rereading as necessary.

ISBE ELA Content Specialist: ISBE Literacy Framework (Fall, 2018)

It is important to note that although meaning making with text is dependent on fluent decoding, it involves much more than fluent decoding. Furthermore, evidence suggests that the relationship between fluency and comprehension is reciprocal: fluency contributes to comprehension and comprehension contributes to fluency (Hudson, 2011).

Fluency is a critical link between decoding and comprehension. Although fluent reading doesn't guarantee comprehension, we know that disfluent reading hinders comprehension, especially with complex texts. Disfluent readers, instead of being able to make meaning as they read, spend a disproportionate amount of cognitive capacity sounding out words or wrestling with sentence structure, leaving little time and energy to actually comprehend what they're reading (UnBoundEd, 2017).

Fluent readers have developed automatic and accurate recognition of a great many words, and the ability to quickly sound out (or attack) those that aren't automatically recognized. This automaticity allows readers to maintain a conversational pace during reading. Fluent readers also understand intrinsically how to use intonation, pauses, stops, phrasing, and inflection so reading sounds as though the reader is speaking naturally.

The foundation of vocabulary and background knowledge provides support to help the reader make meaning of the text. These components are the foundations on which students' reading fluency rests. To grow and improve students' reading fluency, goals must include:

- Building students' word attack skills and word recognition.
- Building students' understanding of how pace and expression are cued by syntax, vocabulary, and text structure.
- Building students' vocabulary and background knowledge (UnboundEd, 2017).

Effective Practices:

Having students read connected text daily, both with and without constructive feedback, facilitates the development of reading accuracy, fluency, and comprehension and should begin as soon as students can identify a few words. Students should interact with a variety of connected texts, including texts of varied levels, diverse genres, and wide-ranging content. In particular, students should read both informational and narrative text, beginning in the early grades (IES, 2016). The following recommendations from the Institute for Education Science research are listed here:

1. As students read orally, teachers should model strategies, scaffold, and provide feedback to support accurate and efficient word identification.
2. Teach students to self-monitor their understanding of the text and to self-correct word-reading errors.
3. Provide opportunities for oral reading practice with feedback to develop fluent and accurate reading with expression. (Retrieved from: https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/Docs/PracticeGuide/wwc_foundationalreading_040717.pdf)

Literacy Lifeline 1b: Fluency (6-12)

Teacher Tip

Continue Fluency Practice:

Disfluent reading hinders comprehension, especially with complex texts. Student ability to read fluently can change with text content (i.e., literature vs. science), genre or complexity, so continued fluency practice for students beyond the elementary grades is essential.

Resources

UNBOUNDED: [6-12 FLUENCY GUIDE](#)

The Foundational Skills Standards in Kindergarten through Fifth address fluency. UnboundEd states that fluency refers to how smoothly a student reads and is defined by these three characteristics:

1. Accurate decoding and word recognition.
2. Reading at a conversational pace.
3. Reading with appropriate prosody, or expression.

Because Sixth through Twelfth students may not always demonstrate the above characteristics, research supports that comprehension may suffer. Fluency is a critical link between decoding and comprehension. Although fluent reading doesn't guarantee comprehension, we know that disfluent reading hinders comprehension, especially with complex texts. Disfluent readers, instead of being able to make meaning as they read, spend a disproportionate amount of cognitive capacity sounding out words or wrestling with sentence structure, leaving little time and energy to actually comprehend what they're reading.

The good news is that fluency is an element of reading that can be improved relatively quickly with some attention and practice. And fluency practice can be conducted during existing classroom activities and routines.

As fluent readers, we have developed automatic and accurate recognition of a great many words, and the ability to quickly sound out (or attack) those that we don't automatically recognize. This automaticity allows us to maintain a conversational pace as we read.

As fluent readers, we also understand intrinsically how to use intonation, pauses, stops, phrasing, and inflection so our reading sounds as though we are speaking naturally to a friend. Our foundation of vocabulary and background knowledge provides support to help us make meaning of the text. These components that we rarely think about when reading are the foundations on which students' reading fluency rests. (Retrieved from UnboundEd Fluency Guide).

Bottom Line for Literacy Lifeline 1b: Fluency (6-12)

Why It Matters:

Typically, fluency has been a literacy issue directed solely at elementary grades. Illinois Reading Standards do not explicitly address fluency in grades 6-12, but the expectation is that students arrive to these grades having already developed it. However, the standards that are addressed in these grades are inextricably intertwined with fluency. In order to read the range, quality, and complexity of texts demanded by the standards, students should have developed insight into knowledge of language and structure of texts. This assists with their understanding of the expression with which the texts are to be read. Students need to develop background knowledge to fully understand the ideas expressed through text. With this background knowledge comes vocabulary, the development of which contributes to students' ability to automatically and accurately recognize words, another key element of fluency. Finally, exposure to the range of genres exemplified by the standards fosters greater understanding of how each genre has its own appropriate pace and cadence of reading. By explicitly targeting fluency, students' comprehension of the texts they read increases. (UnboundEd, 2017)

Effective Practices:

The most effective approach to building fluency for students at all levels is to use on grade-level texts. Using grade-level (versus reading-level) texts requires the instructor to move more slowly, but the support that accompanies fluency work—rereading, modeling, and feedback—helps all students access the rigor of these grade-level texts. Fluency routines should be approached through modeled readings, shared readings (teacher to peer and peer to peer readings), and repeated readings, which support students' productive struggle with the text. This shared struggle is designed to culminate in shared comprehension and success. Using complex, grade-level texts allows teachers to maximize gains within the short time shared with students daily.

Reading fluency can change with text content, genre, or complexity, so we must continue to provide fluency practice for our students—beyond the elementary grades. Teaching students to analyze syllables and word parts by explicitly teaching them the specific syllable types and providing them with practice blending and segmenting known syllables to form and read words, phrases, and sentences created from those syllables is another high impact strategy. Students should be trained to look for meaningful chunks in unknown words. Understanding how to break words into syllables will aid them in pronunciation of words that they do not recognize.

To grow and improve students' reading fluency, goals must include:

- Building students' **word attack skills** and **word recognition**.
- Building students' **understanding of how pace and expression are cued by syntax, vocabulary, and text structure**.
- Building students' **vocabulary** and **background knowledge**.

Literacy Lifeline 2: Selecting Appropriate Complex Text

Teacher Tip

Determine the instructional purposes for which it is suited.

When evaluating a text, teachers should supplement quantitative measures of complexity (such as Lexile and Flesch-Kincaid) with qualitative measures (such as vocabulary and subject knowledge requirements) and then use their professional judgment to determine the instructional purposes for which that text is suited.

Although most ELA experts now endorse the use of quantitative measures of text complexity, such as Lexile and Flesch-Kincaid, it remains important for teachers to supplement these tools with qualitative measures, and to use their professional judgment to decide which texts are suitable for which students—and for which purposes.

More specifically, Student Achievement Partners—a nonprofit that was founded by the primary authors of the CCSS-ELA—suggests that teachers use a three-step process to select appropriately complex texts.

1. Use quantitative measures to assign a text to a grade band (e.g., Lexile or Flesch-Kincaid).
2. Use qualitative measures to locate a text within a specific grade including:
 - Text structure
 - Language clarity and conventions
 - Knowledge demands
 - Levels of meaning/purpose
3. Use professional judgment to decide how suited a text is for a specific instructional purpose with a particular set of students.

Resources

TEXT COMPLEXITY

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING:

[ILLINOIS TEXT COMPLEXITY SHIFT KIT](#)

[KARIN HESS: TOOLS FOR EXAMINING TEXT COMPLEXITY](#)

SELECTING COMPLEX TEXTS

WITH INTENTIONS:

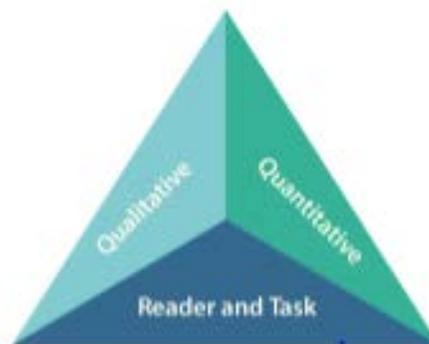
[ASSOCIATION FOR MIDDLE LEVEL EDUCATION](#)

ANALYSIS TOOLS

[LITERATURE RUBRIC](#)

[INFORMATIONAL RUBRIC](#)

Text Complexity Triangle



The text complexity triangle ([Appendix A](#)) illustrates the importance of incorporating these additional measures and considerations.

Bottom Line for Lifeline 2: Selecting Appropriate Complex Text

Why It Matters

Text complexity is defined as a multidimensional measure of the ideas, concepts, language, and structures that together make a text easier or more difficult for a student to read and understand. One of the key requirements of the ILS for Reading is that all students must be able to comprehend texts of steadily increasing complexity as they progress through school. By the time they complete primary and secondary education, students must be able to read and comprehend independently and proficiently the kinds of complex texts commonly found in college and careers.

In brief, while reading demands in college, workforce training programs, and life in general have held steady or increased over the last half century, K–12 texts have actually declined in sophistication, and relatively little attention has been paid to students' ability to read complex texts independently. These conditions have left a serious gap between many high school seniors' reading ability and the reading requirements they will face after graduation. (CCSS, Appendix A, 2010).

The standards also outline a progressive development of reading comprehension so that students advancing through the grades are able to gain more from what they read. Students will not become instantly proficient by merely being exposed to complex text. Students require expert scaffolding over time, which includes the explicit and thoughtful teaching of academic language.

The Standards presume that all three elements (showcased in the graphic on the previous page), will come into play when text complexity and appropriateness are determined. Therefore, selection of texts and what a reader will do with that text are of utmost importance when creating instructional plans and outcomes for students. A wide variety of text complexity templates are available for instructors who wish to determine whether the text being utilized is appropriate for their students. A literature and an informational rubric have been developed to by the CCSSOs in assisting with defining qualitative analysis:

[Literature Rubric](#)

[Informational Rubric](#)

Perhaps the biggest challenge to effectively teaching complex text is resolving the tension between teaching more challenging grade level texts and effectively intervening with students who are reading below grade level. Given the scale of this challenge, it's not surprising that many teachers are struggling to meet it. But what is surprising is the apparent direction of the trend, which suggests that teachers are implicitly or explicitly rejecting this aspect of the shift. Fordham Institute

Effective Practices:

Use of Text Sets

One significant element of instructional materials is text sets. A text set is a collection of related texts organized around a topic or line of inquiry. The line of inquiry of a given set is determined by an anchor text—a rich, complex grade-level text. A short anchor text or portion of a text, should be used to focus a close reading with instructional supports in the classroom. Text sets include a wide variety of teaching resources, aside from the anchor text, such as: video clips, newspaper articles, speeches, photographs, artwork, charts and tables, internet searches, songs, poetry, and more.

The number of texts in a set can vary depending on purpose and resource availability around a given topic. What is important is that the texts in the set are connected meaningfully to each other to deepen student understanding of the anchor text. In a sense, the texts “talk to one another” so that in reading the set, students build a coherent body of knowledge around a topic. (CCSSO, Guide to Creating Text Sets). Retrieved from:

<http://www.ccsso.org/Documents/Text%20Complexity/Showroom%20Models/Guide%20to%20Creating%20Text%20Sets.docx>

Reading Aloud Strategy

Reading aloud has been said to be the foundation for literacy development. It is the single most important activity for reading success (Bredenkamp, Copple, & Neuman, 2000). It provides students with a demonstration of phrased, fluent reading (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). It reveals the rewards of reading, and develops the listener's interest in books and desire to be a reader (Mooney, 1990).

Student can listen on a higher language level than they can read, so reading aloud makes complex ideas more accessible and exposes children to vocabulary and language patterns that are not part of everyday speech. This, in turn, helps them understand the structure of books when they read independently (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). It exposes less able readers to the same rich and engaging books that fluent readers read on their own, and entices them to become better readers. Students of any age benefit from hearing an experienced reading of a wonderful book.

Prior to the adoption of the standards, texts read aloud had a predominant narrative focus and the practice ended in elementary. Read-alouds have a place in all K-12 classrooms inclusive of both narrative and expository exposure so that craft, structure, vocabulary, intent, and meaning for comprehension can be a focus of instruction.

Students’ listening comprehension likely outpaces reading comprehension until the middle school years. It is particularly important that students build knowledge through being read to as well as through reading, with the balance gradually shifting to reading independently.

Reading Aloud in Older Grades

- Teachers need to directly instruct how to navigate & extract information from texts to become fluent & strategic readers. (RAND, 2002)
- Read-alouds and the use of text-based discussions are opportunities to help students learn from complex informational text, especially if students struggle to read informational text independently, (Beck & McKeown, 2001; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998).
- Teachers can use reading aloud in middle school and high school to build interest in a topic, introduce a topic, model fluent reading, and expose students to texts they might not read otherwise. Retrieved from https://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2010/01/06/16read_ep.h29.html

Literacy Lifeline 3: Building Content Knowledge

Teacher Tip

Organize your lessons around text sets.

Effectively scaffolding instruction through the use of text sets systematically builds students' content knowledge and dramatically accelerates the rate at which they learn new words.

By reading texts in history/social studies, science, and other disciplines, students build a foundation of knowledge in these fields that will also give them the background to be better readers in all content areas. Students can only gain this foundation when the curriculum is intentionally and coherently structured to develop rich content knowledge within and across grades (CCSS, 2010).

In general, content knowledge is essential to a quality education because an extensive knowledge base supports:

1. Reading comprehension
2. Vocabulary acquisition
3. Synthesizing information

In recognition of these benefits, the standards encourage teachers to adopt a content-rich curriculum that includes a healthy dose of informational texts. This distinction is important because research shows that, in addition to building content knowledge more quickly, students acquire new vocabulary up to four times faster when they read a series of related texts.

As noted in Lifeline 2, text sets are a powerful tool to support content knowledge and disciplinary literacy. Additionally, Student Achievement Partners suggests that teachers construct text sets that:

1. Center on a single topic (e.g., insects or entrepreneurship) and contain a variety of resources (e.g., books, articles, videos, websites, and info-graphics).
2. Purposely order resources to support students in building vocabulary and knowledge.
3. Include activities to be completed after each resource to demonstrate comprehension and students' newly acquired knowledge and/or vocabulary.
4. Are designed to be completed with increasing independence by students.

When creating a text set, begin with content knowledge—that is, start by choosing which books or other texts students ought to read for knowledge-building purposes—and then decide how to use those texts to teach skills and strategies.

Resources

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING:

[ILLINOIS INFORMATIONAL TEXT KIT](#)
[ILLINOIS CONTENT AREA LITERACY KIT](#)

FORDHAM INSTITUTE:

[WHAT ARE TEXT SETS, AND WHY USE THEM IN THE CLASSROOM?](#)

[WHICH TEXT SET APPROACH IS RIGHT FOR YOU?](#)

MODEL TEXT SETS:

[ACHIEVE THE CORE](#)

[READWORKS](#)

[NEWSELA](#)

Bottom Line for Lifeline 3: Building Content Knowledge

Why It Matters

The Partnership for 21st Century Learning identifies the skills, knowledge, and expertise students should master to succeed in work and life in the 21st century. One of the three student outcomes listed is “Content Knowledge and 21st Century Themes.” Students need a mastery of fundamental disciplines in the following areas:

- English, Reading, Language Arts
- World Languages
- Arts
- Mathematics
- Economics
- Science
- Geography, History, Government, Civics

As students continue to learn about and comprehend their world, their comprehension is strengthened by existing and new knowledge. Keep in mind that building knowledge is not a litany of facts, but rather conceptual understandings in which students become experts on the world around them.

Using Disciplinary Literacy

Timothy Shanahan states that disciplinary literacy is based upon the idea that literacy and text are specialized, and even unique, across the disciplines. Historians engage in very different approaches to reading than mathematicians do, for instance. Similarly, even those who know little about math or literature can easily distinguish a science text from a literary one.

Fundamentally, because each field of study has its own purposes, its own kinds of evidence, and its own style of critique, each will produce different texts, and reading those different kinds of texts are going to require some different reading strategies. Scientists spend a lot of time comparing data presentation devices with each other while literary types strive to make sense of theme, characterization, and style.

Effective Practices:

Disciplinary classes should have a deep dedication to imparting the content of the subjects to students, including information about the nature of inquiry in those fields. That means in a history class it is essential students be given opportunities to pore over conflicting evidence and alternative points of view and allow students chances to evaluate primary and secondary texts, too. Science reading is less about alternative perspectives and more about accurate information carefully grounded in the observations and experiments that identified it. Accordingly, science information tends to be expressed in a multiplicity of forms (e.g., prose, tables, charts, formulae, photos), often within the same account. (retrieved from <http://shanahanonliteracy.com/blog/disciplinary-literacy-the-basics#sthash.Rx4o0kaV.dpbs>)

Using Text Sets

The use of text sets is another effective practice because it is based on reading-comprehension research and shows the importance of building content knowledge and vocabulary. As mentioned earlier, text sets are collections of texts tightly focused on a specific topic. They may include varied genres (fiction, nonfiction, poetry, and so forth) and media (such as blogs, maps, photographs, art, primary-source documents, and audio recordings).

Research shows that students acquire new vocabulary up to four times faster when they read a series of related texts.

Literacy Lifeline 4: Balancing Cultural Literacy and Cultural Responsiveness

Teacher Tip

Expose students to new material that builds on a variety of cultural sources.

Seek out sources that expands cultural knowledge and that fosters respect.

Lifeline 4 highlights one of the difficult (and important) challenges facing teachers in the twenty-first century: striking a satisfactory balance between “cultural responsiveness,” or efforts to respectfully incorporate students’ cultures, and what E. D. Hirsch referred to as “cultural literacy,” which requires “participation in...a shared body of knowledge, a knowledge of the culture of the country” that is “assumed by writers of everything from training manuals to newspapers.”

Teachers are assigning more informational texts and literary nonfiction, as the third shift requires, however, informational text should not be shared at the expense of “classic works of literature.” English teachers can use informational texts and other cultural sources to support their literature selection.

Teachers can infuse more culturally relevant texts in their curriculum that reflect students’ increasingly diverse backgrounds and cultures.

Providing texts and background knowledge supportive of cultural differences and perspectives is critical but also providing a range of materials representing American cultural beliefs and values must be well planned in order for students to have a balanced core knowledge. The ILS call for such a balance and require “extensive reading of stories, dramas, poems, and myths from diverse cultures and different time periods, so that students gain literary and cultural knowledge” (CCSS, 2010).

Resources

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING:

[ILLINOIS ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS KIT](#)

ARTICLES:

E.D. HIRSCH: [TEACHING CONTENT IS TEACHING READING](#)

D. WILLINGHAM: [HOW KNOWLEDGE HELPS](#)

R. PONDSCIO: [KNOWLEDGE IS LITERACY](#)

THE ATLANTIC: [WHAT EVERY AMERICAN SHOULD KNOW](#)

Bottom Line for Lifeline 4: Balancing Cultural Literacy and Cultural Responsiveness

Why It Matters:

Culture is often described as being like an iceberg. Above the water are the aspects of the culture that you can easily see and experience: language, dress, food, festivals, and the like. Below the water, where you can't see it, are the aspects of the culture that those within the culture know and understand, often without thinking about it or questioning it (i.e., values, roles, customs, status, perceptions, beliefs, traditions, etc.). It is the goal for all classrooms to allow students a look below the tip of the iceberg and experience a culture through a variety of texts.

The unspoken aspects of a culture are influenced by its history, values, and assumptions, and range from perceptions of right and wrong, gender and other roles, and customs like use of personal space, to language based on assumed knowledge, (i.e., white elephant gifts, green thumbs, etc.).

Perhaps the challenge lies not in striking a balance between the cultural responsiveness and cultural literacy, but in recognizing the knowledge that we, as citizens of an increasingly diverse America, already share.

Assumed knowledge and values have real impact on people's lives. One example is racism, in which people do not have an understanding or valuing of the other culture or peoples, and negatively stereotype its members. Racism can lead to discrimination, exclusion, and even violence. Another example is gender and gender roles. Many cultures recognize only male and female genders and have assumptions about what a man or a woman should be or do: how to behave, what to wear, what kinds of work they can do. "Men are strong" and "women are caring" are two examples of cultural assumptions about gender. People who don't match up to the assumptions may be judged negatively. Retrieved from:

https://www.westernsydney.edu.au/studysmart/home/cultural_literacy/what_is_cultural_literacy

Effective Practices:

Recognizing the unspoken aspects of a culture **through literature** can be a very powerful tool in building content knowledge, analyzing specific literary works, and recognizing varying authorial styles specific to cultures. Table 6 below identifies the types of literary genre that should be shared across the K-12 experience.

Grade	Literature Genre Types in the Standards (Table 6)
Kindergarten	Stories, poems
1 st Grade	Stories, poetry, prose
2 nd Grade	Fables & folktales from diverse cultures , story, songs , poetry
3 rd Grade	Fables, folktales, stories, poetry, dramas, myths from diverse cultures
4 th Grade	Stories, dramas, poetry, prose, different versions of stories, traditional literature from different cultures
5 th Grade	Stories, dramas, poetry, literature in the same genre
6 th Grade	Fiction (i.e., fantasy), dramas, poetry, audio, video, live versions of texts
7 th Grade	Fiction, dramas, poetry (i.e., soliloquy, sonnet), fantasy, audio, filmed, staged, or multimedia versions texts
8 th Grade	Fiction (i.e., suspense), dramas, poetry, myths, traditional stories, religious works such as the Bible , a filmed or live production of a story or drama, scripts
9 th -10 th Grade	Fiction (i.e., world literature), dramas, poetry, plays (i.e., Shakespeare)
11 th -12 th Grade	Fiction, drama, poetry (i.e., at least one play by Shakespeare and one play by an American dramatist), recorded or live production of a play or recorded novel or poetry

Bold print reflects terms new to the grade level (www.corestandards.org)

Literacy Lifeline 5: Engaging in Close Reading

Teacher Tip

Use questions as “bread crumbs” that lead students toward deeper understanding of the text.

In an effective close reading, the teacher anticipates the aspects of a text that students will find challenging and plans his or her questions accordingly so that students have a trail to follow.

By selecting appropriately complex text that builds knowledge and exposes students to varying cultures, they can begin the process of close reading. Every close reading starts with the identification of a passage that is worth reading multiple times—first for basic understanding, then for a deeper appreciation of craft and style and finally how it connects to a broader concept.

Typically, the teacher asks a carefully planned set of text-specific questions designed to highlight elements that illuminate the text’s complexity. According to ELA expert Tim Shanahan, these questions serve as “bread crumbs” that help students:

- a) Establish the meaning of a text so that they can summarize it.
- b) Analyze how that meaning is achieved through word choice, symbols, allusions, and other structural elements.

By choosing a specific focus for their questions—and then moving from basic to advanced questions with that emphasis in mind—well prepared teachers can provide students with effective “scaffolding” that allows them to gain a deeper understanding of the text.

Resources

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING:

[ILLINOIS CLOSE READING SHIFT KIT](#)

[CLOSE READING IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS](#)

[ILLINOIS TEXT DEPENDENT QUESTIONS KIT](#)

MODELS:

ACHIEVE THE CORE: [CLOSE READING MODEL LESSONS](#)

TIM SHANAHAN: [CLOSE READING Q & A](#)

According to Shanahan, teachers leading close readings may often implement them **incorrectly** by:

- Asking questions as a check for understanding, rather than as “bread crumbs” designed to promote understanding.
- Asking lots of low-level questions but never getting to high level questions about the author’s choice of words, motivation, or argument.
- Skipping straight to high-level questions that require students to analyze a text without first helping them establish its basic meaning.
- Failing to choose a focus for their questions that leads students toward a deeper understanding of an aspect of the text.

Bottom Line for Lifeline 5: Engaging in Close Reading

Why It Matters:

The standards call for students to move away from simply reading for information, toward reading with a much more analytical stance. The ILS emphasize the importance of reading several texts about a topic, with readers determining the central ideas, issues and disputes in those topics, and anticipating the arguments around a topic (Calkins, 2012, p. 20). Grasping the subtleties of complex texts can be difficult, so students must practice reading closely if they are to develop the analytic capacity envisioned by this shift. And teachers must provide them with the guidance and direction that such practice requires.

Leading a successful “close reading” requires teachers to master—and successfully integrate—a number of difficult skills. Every close reading starts with the identification of a passage that is worth reading multiple times—first for basic understanding and then for a deeper appreciation of craft and style. Typically, the teacher asks a carefully planned set of text-specific questions designed to highlight elements that illuminate the text’s complexity.

Effective Practices:

By choosing a specific focus for their questions (and then moving from basic to advanced questions with that focus in mind), well prepared teachers can provide students with effective “scaffolding” that allows them to gain a deeper understanding of the text. See Fisher and Frey’s questioning model (See figure 5) or the progression of text dependent questions that supports a close read.

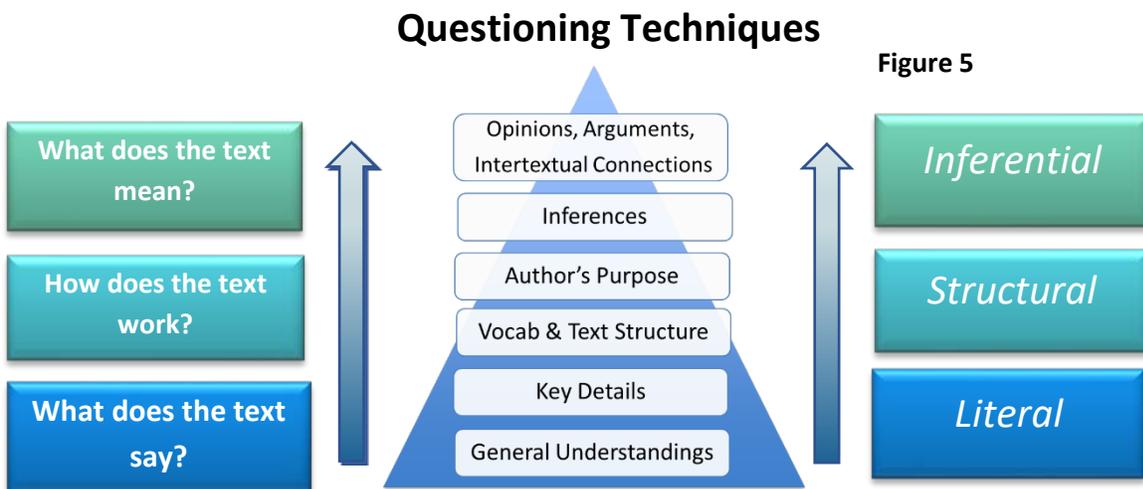


Figure 5

(Fisher and Frey, 2016)

According to ELA expert Tim Shanahan, these questions should serve as “bread crumbs” that help students:

- a) Establish the meaning of a text so that they can summarize it.
- b) Analyze how that meaning is achieved through word choice, symbols, allusions, and other structural elements.

As a caution, these types of questions do not follow a linear movement along critical thinking models, (i.e., Bloom’s Taxonomy or Webb’s DOK), but rather use those models to gain access to the text fluidly. For example, students can and should answer higher level questions about key details that are aligned to these models of critical thinking.

The ILS place special emphasis on question answering and generating while requiring students to rely on the text for evidence. Teachers regularly pose questions to their students, but the purpose and form of these questions can vary widely. Jay McTighe and Grant Wiggins provided defining characteristics of quality essential questions:

1. Is *open-ended*; that is, it typically will not have a single, final, and correct answer.
2. Is *thought-provoking* and *intellectually engaging*, often sparking discussion and debate.
3. Calls for *higher-order thinking*, such as analysis, inference, evaluation, prediction. It cannot be effectively answered by recall alone.
4. Points toward *important, transferable ideas* within (and sometimes across) disciplines.
5. Raises *additional questions* and sparks further inquiry.
6. Requires *support* and *justification*, not just an answer.
7. *Rekurs* over time; that is, the question can and should be revisited again and again.

These are questions that are not answerable with finality in a single lesson or a brief sentence. Their aim is to stimulate thought, to provoke inquiry, and to spark more questions, including thoughtful student questions, not just answers. By tackling such questions, learners are engaged in uncovering the depth and richness of a topic that might otherwise be obscured by simply covering it. (McTighe and Wiggins, 2013).

To learn more about the classification of questions developed by McTighe and Wiggins, visit:

<http://www.ascd.org/publications/books/109004/chapters/What-Makes-a-Question-Essential%A2.aspx>

Literacy Lifeline 6: Teaching Vocabulary

Teacher Tip

Make a conscious effort to spotlight new “Tier 2” words as students encounter them.

To understand complex texts, students must be familiar with both general academic vocabulary (“Tier 2” words) and domain-specific vocabulary (“Tier 3” words). Of the two, the former are easier to overlook.

The importance of students acquiring a rich and varied vocabulary cannot be overstated. Vocabulary has been empirically connected to reading comprehension since at least 1925 and had its importance to comprehension confirmed in recent years. It is widely accepted among researchers that the difference in students’ vocabulary levels is a key factor in disparities in academic achievement. (CCSS, Appendix A, 2010)

There are approximately 750,000 words in the English language—more than any teacher on the planet could hope to teach. So how should ELA teachers decide which words to focus on?

Although there is no one-size-fits-all answer to this question, most vocabulary experts agree that teachers should emphasize “high leverage” words that will have the largest positive impact on students. Specifically, research suggests that teachers should focus on words that are:

1. Needed to fully comprehend the text.
2. Likely to appear in future texts from any discipline.
3. Part of a word family or semantic network.

In addition to fulfilling one or more of these criteria, the words that a teacher decides to focus on should also be new to most of his or her students. According to literacy experts Douglas Fisher and Nancy Frey, grade-level lists of vocabulary words and phrases can help teachers with this sort of calibration.

In general, teaching vocabulary effectively means attending to new words as they occur in a text and intentionally spotlighting any high-leverage words. As part of this instruction, teachers may wish to model “word solving” so that students can learn how to infer the meaning of unknown words from their context. In addition, this provides opportunities to engage students in collaborative conversations, so they can practice using academic language.

Research suggests that students acquire new vocabulary significantly faster when they read a series of related texts (i.e., a text set like the ones described in Literacy Lifeline 2) due to the reciprocal relationship between vocabulary and content knowledge.

Resources

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING:

[ILLINOIS VOCABULARY SHIFT KIT](#)

ACHIEVE THE CORE:

[VOCABULARY AND THE COMMON CORE](#)

[ACADEMIC WORD FINDER](#)

FISHER & FREY: [MEANINGFUL VOCABULARY LEARNING](#)

Bottom Line for Lifeline 6: Teaching Vocabulary

Why It Matters:

Vocabulary knowledge is directly tied to student success in school and helps students in other ways as well. Knowing what words mean and how they interconnect creates networks of knowledge that allow students to connect new information to previously learned information. These networks of knowledge are commonly referred to as prior knowledge or background knowledge. (Marzano, 2004)

Research suggests that if students are going to grasp and retain words and comprehend text, they need incremental, repeated exposure in a variety of contexts to the words they are trying to learn. When students make multiple connections between a new word and their own experiences, they develop a nuanced and flexible understanding of the word they are learning. In this way, students learn not only what a word means but also how to use that word in a variety of contexts, and they can apply appropriate senses of the word's meaning to understand the word in different contexts (et. al., 2010).

Vocabulary in the Standards

Within the Standards, there are a few locations (see Table 7 below), that specify vocabulary development and knowledge. The three most noteworthy standard locations for K-12 vocabulary development are Foundational Skills (Standard 3-Phonics and Word Recognition), Reading (Standard 4-Craft and Structure), and Language (Standard 4, 5, and 6-Vocabulary Acquisition and Use).

Strand	Overview of Standard
Reading Literature	#4: Determine the meaning of unknown words in a text.
Reading Informational Text	
Language	#4: Determining unknown words using context, specific roots and affixes, glossaries, dictionaries, etc.
	#5: Understanding word relationships and nuance in word meanings.
	#6: Acquire and use a range of general academic and domain-specific words and phrases.
Foundational Skills	#4: Use context to confirm or self-correct (Grades 1-5)
Writing	Writing standards address vocabulary within certain grade specific standards expecting students to write with the vocabulary they acquire through reading.
Speaking and Listening	Speaking and Listening standards expect students to present and discuss what they have learned which should include vocabulary students acquire through reading, listening and engaging in discussion.

Three Tiers of Words

The Standards follow the recommendations of Isabel L. Beck, Margaret G. McKeown, and Linda Kucan (2002, 2008) who outlined a useful model for categories of words readers encounter in texts. Within each of these categories or tiers, a variety of challenges and applications can be discovered both by educators and students. These authors showcase three levels, or tiers, of words in terms of the words' commonality (more to less frequently occurring) and applicability (broader to narrower).

All three tiers of words are vital to comprehension and vocabulary development, however, mastering tier two and three words typically requires more deliberate effort. Appendix A of the CCSS defines the tiers below:

- *Tier One words* are the words of everyday speech usually learned in the early grades, albeit not at the same rate by all children. They are not considered a challenge to the average native speaker, though English language learners of any age will have to attend carefully to them.
- *Tier Two words* (what the Standards refer to as general academic words) are far more likely to appear in written texts than in speech. They appear in all sorts of texts: informational texts (words such as

relative, vary, formulate, specificity, and accumulate), technical texts (calibrate, itemize, periphery), and literary texts (misfortune, dignified, faltered, unabashedly).

Tier Two words often represent subtle or precise ways to say relatively simple things—saunter instead of walk, for example. Because Tier Two words are found across many types of texts, they are highly generalizable.

- *Tier Three words* (what the Standards refer to as domain-specific words) are specific to a domain or field of study (lava, carburetor, legislature, circumference, aorta) and key to understanding a new concept within a text. Because of their specificity and close ties to content knowledge, Tier Three words are far more common in informational texts than in literature. Recognized as new and “hard” words for most readers (particularly student readers), they are often explicitly defined by the author of a text, repeatedly used, and otherwise heavily scaffolded (e.g., made a part of a glossary).

In a nutshell, Tier Three words are likely specific to academic disciplines or content area subjects and should be introduced and mastered with consistent strategy instruction. Tier Two words are far less well defined by contextual clues in the texts in which they appear and are far less likely to be defined explicitly within a text than are Tier Three words. Yet, Tier Two words are frequently encountered in complex written texts and are particularly powerful because of their wide applicability to many sorts of reading. Teachers thus need to be alert to the presence of Tier Two words and determine which ones need careful attention. (CCSS, Appendix A).

Effective Practices

When considering literacy instruction, it is important to focus on vocabulary development to offer a balanced approach to instruction. As stated previously, vocabulary is addressed in the Reading and Language Standards and tasks should be carefully designed through purposeful and authentic interactions with texts.

Robert Marzano and Debra Pickering suggest eight research-based characteristics of effective vocabulary instruction. They are:

1. Effective vocabulary instruction does not rely on definitions.
2. Students must represent their knowledge of words in linguistic and nonlinguistic ways.
3. Effective vocabulary instruction involves the gradual shaping of word meanings through multiple exposures.
4. Teaching word parts enhances students’ understanding of terms.
5. Different types of words require different types of instruction.
6. Students should discuss the terms they are learning.
7. Students should play with words (i.e., word sorts).
8. Instruction should focus on terms that have a high probability of enhancing academic success, such as Tier Two words.

(Adapted from *Building Academic Vocabulary* by Robert Marzano and Debra Pickering, 2005)

The key to students’ vocabulary knowledge is building rich and flexible word knowledge. Students need a variety of opportunities to:

- Use and respond to the words they learn through informal talk, discussion, reading or being read to, and responding to what is read.
- Receive instruction about the connections and patterns in language.
- Analyze the logic and sentence structure of their texts.
- Develop an awareness of word parts, word origins, and word relationships.
- Make sense of how language works such that syntax, morphology, and etymology can become useful cues in building meaning as students encounter new words and concepts (Beck, McKeown, & Kucan, 2008).
- Be exposed to tasks that are carefully designed through purposeful and authentic interactions with texts.

Tier Two and Three Words in Upper Grades

- Students in grades 4-12 encounter an abundance of new vocabulary words in the increasingly difficult texts they are expected to read. To expand their vocabulary and their ability to access increasingly difficult text, students need to be taught the meanings of new words as well as be given strategies for determining the meaning of unknown words.
- In grades 4-12, students should receive vocabulary instruction in reading, English language arts, science, social sciences, math and other classes across the instructional areas.

Literacy Lifeline 7: Supporting Struggling Learners

Teacher Tip

Make students aware of the text’s structure.

If students fail to comment on the organizing features that might help them navigate a text, teachers should feel free to point these out—and then ask students what purpose they serve.

The nature of struggling readers is as varied as the students themselves, so our understanding needs to be both broad and deep. To accomplish this, educators need to know their students – their literacy backgrounds, interests, preferred ways of learning, and favored ways of representing their thinking.” (adapted from *Struggling Readers* by Maureen McLaughlin & Timothy V. Rasinski)

One of the most common approaches to helping struggling readers is to “frontload” background information and vocabulary by presenting it before students read the text. This strategy can make sense in some circumstances. However, it can be problematic if it results in teachers doing work that students should be doing for themselves.

The first step is reading the text carefully to identify where a lack of background knowledge or vocabulary might cause some students to struggle. Once these challenges have been diagnosed, the next step—and perhaps the hardest part of an ELA teacher’s job—is to address them in a way that still requires students to engage with the text.

One way of approaching this challenge is to double-down on the “bread crumbs” approach described in Literacy Lifeline 4 by posing more basic questions for the benefit of struggling readers. For example, if students fail to comment on organizing features of a text that might help them understand it, teachers should feel free to point these out—and then ask students what purpose they serve.

In a similar vein, the text sets described in Literacy Lifeline 2 can serve as scaffolding for struggling readers (as well as other students). By moving from less-rigorous to more-rigorous texts within the same unit of content, teachers can help these students accumulate necessary background knowledge and vocabulary before they encounter more challenging texts (thus simultaneously increasing their odds of understanding those texts and of inferring the meaning of any new words they contain).

In short, the best educators have thought carefully about what sorts of teacher-initiated questions might work as scaffolding. And by providing students with well-constructed text sets, they also allow them to do their own scaffolding.

Resources

[ILLINOIS REACHING ALL LEARNERS](#)

T. SHANAHAN:

[EIGHT WAYS TO HELP KIDS TO READ COMPLEX TEXT](#)

[THE INSTRUCTIONAL LEVEL CONCEPT REVISITED](#)

ACHIEVE THE CORE:
[SUPPORTING ALL LEARNERS WITH COMPLEX TEXTS](#)

Bottom line for Lifeline 7: Supporting Struggling Learners

Why It Matters:

Many struggling readers struggle with comprehension. Comprehension is defined as intentional thinking during which meaning is constructed through interactions between text and reader (Harris & Hodges, 1995). Student readers derive meaning from text when they engage in intentional, problem solving thinking processes. Many struggling readers do not engage in thinking processes when they are reading. Text comprehension can be enhanced when readers actively relate the ideas represented in print to their own knowledge and experiences and construct mental representations in memory.

The National Reading Panel noted three predominant themes in the development of reading comprehension skills:

1. Reading comprehension is a complex cognitive process that cannot be understood without a clear description of the role that vocabulary development and vocabulary instruction play in the understanding of what has been read.
2. Comprehension is an active process that requires an intentional and thoughtful interaction between the reader and the text.
3. The preparation of teachers to better equip students to develop and apply reading comprehension strategies to enhance understanding is intimately linked to students' achievement in this area.

Primary students who do not reach proficiency levels on the first exposures to the foundations of reading will need MORE exposures and experiences. Otherwise, they risk becoming the students who are reading five (or more) years below grade level in high school – the ones who rarely graduate. (Hernandez, 2001)

Unfortunately, in many schools the poorest readers read the least, often as much as three times less than their peers (Allington, 2006).

Effective Practices:

Comprehension strategies are routines and procedures that readers use to help them make sense of texts. Readers who are provided with direct, explicit instruction in comprehension strategies, improve their reading comprehension. Direct and explicit teaching involves a teacher modeling and providing explanations of the specific strategies students are learning, giving guided practice and feedback on the use of the strategies, and promoting independent practice to apply the strategies (Kamil, Borman, Dole, Kral, Salinger, and Torgesen, 2008).

1. Comprehension Monitoring: Readers monitor or are aware of their own comprehension and make strategic decisions to employ strategies, processes, or making meaning from their reading.
2. Cooperative Learning: Students learn strategies and process learning together through discussion of a text.
3. Graphic & Semantic Organizers: The use of graphic representations of written material assists students in making meaning.
4. Question Answering: Readers are more likely to understand a text when they are asked questions by their teacher or peers and receive immediate feedback about their answers.
5. Question Generating: Readers ask questions about various aspects of a text before, during, and after the reading itself.
6. Text Structure: Teaching the underlying organization or structure of a written text aids the student in understanding and recalling information from a passage.
7. Summarization: When readers engage in distilling, integrating, and generalizing the information from a passage, they form brief summaries and are better able to comprehend the text information. (Brassell & Rasinski, 2008).

Some of the following types of instruction are helpful when used alone, but many are more effective when used as part of a multiple-strategy method (i.e., using a graphic organizer and questioning).

Primary Student Suggestions (Some strategies may be used for older students as well):

Pre Reading

- Pre-expose students to the selected text with support (audio recording, read-aloud, peer tutor etc.).
- Provide a student-friendly glossary of key vocabulary (may include words &/or illustrations).
- Have students read a simple article, watch a video, or read student-friendly explanations of key information to help build background knowledge that will aid in comprehension.
- Reformat the text itself to include visuals or definitions of key vocabulary.
- Annotate text with a defined purpose for reading it (what they will learn from the reading).
- Number lines whenever possible to support students in referencing evidence from the text.

During Reading (initial)

- Make sure students experience (hear/read) the entire selection uninterrupted (except for supplying brief definitions essential for understanding). This gives students a sense of the whole text and supports comprehension and motivation.
- Teacher conducts a read-aloud with students following along to help build fluency (grades 2 +)
Note- if reading aloud, students should have ample opportunities to follow along while listening and revisit the text independently.
- Provide summaries of sections to help students build comprehension more quickly.
- Have students annotate the text for key ideas while reading and/or model annotation for students.
- Allow students time to discuss/write about the text following the first read:
 - using sentence starters or prompts as needed (Example: I wonder, I heard, I think).
 - by jotting or discussing the “gist” or “big idea” of the text as a whole.
 - by working with partners to ensure all students are participating.

During Subsequent Readings

- Ask a series of pre-planned, scaffolded text-dependent questions that build comprehension of the central idea of the text.
- Chunk the text. Provide text-dependent questions by chunk, to be answered before moving to the next portion of the text.

After/Between Readings (discussing or writing about text)

- Have scaffolded questions ready to support students in moving from concrete to more abstract reasoning.
- Provide oral or written sentence frames.
- Provide picture cues with text-dependent questions.
- Provide “hint cards” to direct students toward sections of the text as needed.
- Include text cues such as paragraph number, section, heading, etc. in wording of questions.
- Provide oral rehearsal time (with buddies, small group, or a teacher) prior to writing, and/or provide writing/thinking time prior to oral presentations.
- Make time for guided re-reading.

Older Students (Some of these strategies may assist primary students also):

In addition to being knowledgeable about students, educators will need to use instructional time wisely, provide accessible, engaging texts, and teach students to become skillful strategic readers. Integrating technology and using formative assessment are essential to these tasks. The goal is to teach, support and inspire struggling learners.

- Struggling readers should be reading authentic texts (articles, books, newspapers, speeches, etc.) in and outside of the classroom. This connection can help students view reading as an enduring skill in which they will engage throughout their lives.
- Struggling readers want to see a connection between reading tasks in school to what they may do in real life. Classrooms should include authentic tasks that can mimic tasks in our daily lives.
- Instructional routines that include familiar literacy structures can help build struggling students' ability and confidence.
- Struggling students simply do not read much. This lack of reading leads to reading-proficiency atrophy and regression. Struggling students need the opportunity to read during the school day.
- Authentic assessment is necessary in diagnosing strengths and weaknesses in a struggling student as well as monitoring their development.

As highlighted in the Close Reading section (Lifeline 5), the significance of using questioning techniques is reiterated here. Jay McTighe and Grant Wiggins provided defining characteristics of quality essential questions:

1. Is *open-ended*; that is, it typically will not have a single, final, and correct answer.
2. Is *thought-provoking* and *intellectually engaging*, often sparking discussion and debate.
3. Calls for *higher-order thinking*, such as analysis, inference, evaluation, prediction. It cannot be effectively answered by recall alone.
4. Points toward *important, transferable ideas* within (and sometimes across) disciplines.
5. Raises *additional questions* and sparks further inquiry.
6. Requires *support* and *justification*, not just an answer.
7. *Rekurs* over time; that is, the question can and should be revisited again and again.

These are questions that are not answerable with finality in a single lesson or a brief sentence. Their aim is to stimulate thought, to provoke inquiry, and to spark more questions, including thoughtful student questions, not just answers. By tackling such questions, learners are engaged in uncovering the depth and richness of a topic that might otherwise be obscured by simply covering it. (McTighe and Wiggins, 2013).

To learn more about the classification of questions developed by McTighe and Wiggins, visit:

<http://www.ascd.org/publications/books/109004/chapters/What-Makes-a-Question-Essential%A2.aspx>

Literacy Lifeline 8: Emphasizing Evidence-Based Writing

Teacher Tip

prompts to strengthen students' capacity for analysis.

Though there is obviously a place for creative writing in English class, colleges and employers are more likely to ask for a memo than a memoir—and the skills required for practical forms of writing are difficult, so students need to practice them.

Civil War?

Resources

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING:

[ILLINOIS WRITING FROM SOURCES KIT](#)

ACHIEVE THE CORE: [TOOLS TO WRITE AND EVALUATE TEXT-DEPENDENT QUESTIONS](#)

ARTICLES:

T. SHANAHAN: [WHAT DOES IT REALLY MEAN TO WRITE IN RESPONSE TO TEXT?](#)

ENGAGE NY: [BUILDING EVIDENCE-BASED ARGUMENTS ELA LITERACY UNITS GRADES 6–12](#)

The ability to inform and persuade based on a convincing analysis of the evidence is a critical skillset for K–12 students. Yet historically, many ELA teachers have devoted more energy and class time to nurturing students' creative writing skills. So how can teachers accustomed to teaching creative or narrative writing incorporate more evidence-based writing activities into their curricula?

Literacy expert Tim Shanahan suggests writing activities that are grounded in reading such as:

Summarization, in which students identify key ideas and details of text and then paraphrase or translate them into their own words.

Analysis and critique, in which students look for relationships and patterns in a text such as cause and effect, problem and solution, or comparison and contrast, or in which they evaluate a text through reasoning (e.g., “Why was there an American Civil War? Compare the causes of the Civil War from the perspectives of the North and South.”).

Synthesis, in which students write their own text but rely on evidence from multiple sources, combining, evaluating, and resolving conflicting information (i.e., research writing).

Text modeling, in which students identify key features of a text and then write their own texts, imitating the structure and language of the original but varying the key features (e.g., by writing a five-paragraph essay or a Socratic dialogue).

In addition to developing students' capacity for evidence-based writing, text-based prompts also greatly benefit students' reading comprehension by encouraging them to review what they have read, reflect on any new information or ideas they may have encountered, and then collect their thoughts in writing. In short, teachers would do well to think of reading and writing as complementary activities, rather than as separate subjects.

State assessments and the standards require students to read a portion of a narrative and respond to a prompt using evidence from what they have read. For example, students may be required to finish the story using the same character traits therefore showcasing evidence of those traits in their response.

Bottoms Line for Lifeline 8: Emphasizing Evidence-Based Writing

Why It Matters:

In addition to developing students' capacity for evidence-based writing, text-based prompts also greatly benefit students' reading comprehension by encouraging them to review what they have read, reflect on any new information or ideas they may have encountered, and then collect their thoughts in writing. Put another way, teachers would do well to think of reading and writing as complementary activities, rather than as separate subjects. It is important to note that this shift in focus does not call for evidence-based writing to replace narrative writing.

To succeed in college—and many workplaces—students must be able to construct a coherent argument based on their analysis of one or more texts (or other sources of information). Teachers should be cautious that they are not simply asking students to write persuasive essays based on their personal experiences, instead of asking them to summarize, synthesize, analyze, or argue from evidence.

Students must understand that the craft of writing is based on attentiveness to audience, task, and purpose. Students should be provided with an abundance of opportunities to practice writing about texts and reading texts as writers. “[Students] need to have access to real world texts that resemble what they, themselves, are attempting to emulate (Calkins, 2012). The Writing Standards explicitly include “planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach” as part of the production and distribution of writing.

For students to comprehend text fully, they must also write. Writing about text is effective because it encourages deeper thinking about ideas and:

- Requires students to draw on their own knowledge and experience.
- Helps them to consolidate and review information.
- Inspires the reformulation of thinking.
- Requires the organization and integration of ideas.
- Fosters explicitness.
- Facilitates reflection.
- Encourages personal involvement.
- Requires translation into one's own words (Shanahan, 2017).

Effective Practices:

The Writing Standards provide direction of the three modes of writing (opinion/argument, informative/explanatory, and narrative, or Standards 1-3), but opens instructional practices to include any form of creative writing that educators are encouraged to use at their discretion. To implement these modes of writing, all teachers, inclusive of content area educators, are expected to craft writing tasks that incorporate Standards 4-10. Some terms that educators and students need to be familiar with are:

- *Routine Writing*: writing regularly with a focus on practicing skills and processes.
- *On Demand Writing*: writing to a prompt that students have not had previous exposure.
- *Tasks*: the question or assignment to which students will write.
- *Audience*: the viewers, spectators or addressees of a piece of writing.
- *Purposes*: the goal or aim of a piece of writing; to express oneself, to provide information, to persuade, or to create a literary work. (These purposes align with the modes of writing or Writing Standards 1-3).
- *Writing Process*: determining purpose, prewriting, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing.
- *Traits of Writing*: the specific skills that writers use to craft writing (Ideas, Organization, Voice, Word Choice, Sentence Fluency, Conventions, Presentation).
- *Writing Workshop*: a method of writing instruction that provides coaching to students for them to write for a variety of audiences and purposes.