# A Report of the NCTE Review Team on the July 2009 Draft of the Common Core English Language Arts State Standards

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**Introduction**

This report is prepared at the request of the NCTE Executive Committee. The purpose is to provide a response to the July 2009 draft of the Common Core English Language Arts State Standards. We appreciate the invitation by the Council of Chief State School Officers, the National Governors Association, and other organizations working on the Common Core State Standards to provide this response. The National Council of Teachers of English is always eager to work with others seeking to improve the quality of education that youth receive in schools, and we look forward to continued conversation about ways in which to make that happen.

This document is divided into two parts. Part I offers a general critique. Part II provides a specific critique along three points: (A) potentially positive directions in the draft document; (B) omissions; and (C) suggestions for language revisions.

**Part I:  General Critique**

The introduction of the common core standards occurs at a time of substantial change in American language and literacy. US schools are now much more diverse, with more multilingual and multicultural students *per capita*, than has been the case in a century. At the same time, commerce and communications have become globalized, and people can no longer assume that they will interact only with those whose language and culture match their own. These new patterns are permanent and growing, and the transformations bring with them new definitions of what it means to be educated. In addition, the rise of the Internet as the locus of so much of the developed world's information and communications environment has introduced new forms of language, new kinds of texts, and new practices with composing and interacting. The literacy environment is one that demands innovation, creativity, and adaptability within an accelerating rate of change. In our classrooms across the nation, the impact of these changes is already apparent. That impact, however, is not apparent in the draft of the Common Core State Standards, which, with a few exceptions, could apply as well to the schools of 1950 as to the schools of this decade and the realities the nation and the world face today.

Consequently, we see these standards as too narrow in scope. Standards express the highest goals for student learning, and we would be disappointed if students learned only what is proposed in this draft. The National Council of Teachers of English suggests that these standards do not meet their stated criterion of high standards. For affluent students whose lives are already privileged, objectives like the ones listed in the Common Core State Standards draft might be taken for granted in their schools. Students who come from more privileged families and communities will meet these goals quickly, and so their curriculum will move beyond the low-level objectives to more sophisticated and enriched learning. For students from marginalized groups, especially ethnic minorities and students from low-income households, however, we anticipate school experience sharply narrowing to focus on only the limited skills enumerated in the document, omitting the literacy practices that motivate, engage, and inspire, as well as those that represent real power in civic life, the workplace, and the academy. Restricting their curriculum to the mundane and tedious acquisition of skills whose purpose and value—the pleasures and power of a literate life—they are never invited to see is likely to reduce education, for them, to an exercise in meeting limited literacy standards. By adhering to these standards, teachers in schools of poverty might in fact lower their expectations for their students.

The crafting of standards that might serve a nation as diverse as the United States is without doubt a difficult task. With the goal of "higher, clearer, and fewer" standards, the inclination could be to move toward specificity; however, such a move could result in the crafting of benchmarks rather than standards. It is the opinion of this review team that this is the case in this Common Core State Standards document. The standards in this draft are articulated as individual, testable actions rather than as authentic performances in college classrooms or workplaces. Another way of considering this is to ask, if these are the standards, how would they be different from the 12th grade benchmarks? To embrace the goal of "higher, clearer, and fewer" we are well-advised to focus first on "higher," by which we mean more significant; failing that, then whatever is offered as "clearer and fewer" will not create the citizen needed in the 21st century.

As we consider these standards, our most intense concern is for students in groups that often under-perform on assessments. They are the people whose teachers will be forced to attend narrowly to the standards, and therefore, for the sake of their educations, the standards cannot be narrow. As drafted, the standards leave out very important dimensions of literacy learning—especially those enumerated below in a section on omissions—and if one imagines a teacher adhering tightly to the currently proposed standards, one must imagine a teacher who is prevented from preparing students for the real world.

Furthermore, we are concerned that the items in the common core may be rapidly transformed into assessments that may be reductive. Research demonstrates that narrow and high-stakes assessments reduce the scope of curriculum and decrease student engagement (Amrein & Berliner, 2002; Anagnostopoulous, 2003; Hillocks, 2002; Ketter & Pool, 2001; McNeil, 2000; Valli & Chambliss, 2007), producing unintended consequences injurious to students, especially those who have historically been

underserved (Booher-Jennings, 2005; Roderick, Jacob, & Bryk, 2002; Valenzuela, 2004). Though we are confident in our ability to respond technically to the proposed standards, we would be remiss to leap into such a discussion without signaling the need for caution. We think our reservations are shared by educators, parents, and concerned citizens across the United States, and we think they should be listened to carefully.

We note that the document presently contains a claim that these standards are evidence-based, but we note that none of the evidence has been drawn from peer-reviewed research journals or similar sources. Rather, the evidence offered at present consists of surveys conducted by the testing companies that stand most immediately to gain from the testing of these standards. This seems to represent a conflict of interest in the development of the standards. Furthermore, much research into college literacy practices (Yancey, 2009) and workplace literacy (Beaufort, 2009) has been overlooked in this draft of the standards. We are pleased with one way of mitigating this—that those who are familiar with the relevant research and important practices were invited to contribute their insights to the standards. Additionally, we suggest removing claims that these standards are based in valid evidence, since such claims will only invite skepticism and criticism that cannot be answered.

Additionally, we also hope that the common core standards can be released with an anticipated brisk calendar of revision. Realistically, even if our revisions are incorporated, it is not likely that all the shortcomings this draft, including ones we have overlooked, will be sufficiently addressed. Moreover, as literacy practices in colleges and workplaces change rapidly, there will need to be frequent updating. We hope, too, that more K–12 and college educators will be included in the framing and drafting of the standards in the future, as we believe such inclusion would contribute much knowledge and wisdom to the process. NCTE stands ready to provide names and contact information for high-quality professionals with extensive experience in standards development.

Finally, we appreciate the attempts to frame common core standards that states and schools might embrace voluntarily, as opposed to national standards that are imposed top-down. However, we believe that the distinction between these two very different situations will be lost on most publics and that voluntary core standards will be treated as federally mandated rules. The concern is that such mandates could shut down important conversations about standards at many local levels, and that national standards—especially ones that are well defined and authoritative—create a set of expectations from a great distance and are imposed on the daily lives of students, teachers, parents, communities, and states.

**Part II:  Specific Critique**

In what follows, we outline a detailed response to the draft language of the standards as of August 6, 2009, including at times suggestions for immediate revision. We begin with a section that highlights those things in this draft that align with NCTE policy and positions. After that, we call your attention to omissions in the document—the areas of literacy that have not been named in the excessively reduced scope of this document and that we fear, as a result, might not be taught or assessed. In the third section, we outline suggestions for specific revision to the existing language, sometimes for things we view as inaccuracies in details of subject matter and other times to mitigate some of the problems we have named above.

A. Potentially Positive Directions in the Draft Document

We begin this section on revisions by first stating areas of strength. We believe that the skills listed as standards in the draft are indeed desirable for college-bound students to have, because they are some of the capacities demanded in some college classes. Though it is not an exhaustive or even sufficient list of skills, especially compared to the NCTE/IRA Standards for the English Language Arts or other NCTE positions, it is, for the most part, accurate as a list of a *few* things students should be able to do in college (though its alignment with research on workplace literacy is substantially more limited).

Furthermore, we can see that the draft attempts to name skills that could become lessons that teachers could teach, and it is somewhat successful in this regard. A teacher would indeed have some clear ideas about what to teach from these standards. For example, this draft makes it clear that students should learn to assess the contribution of textual details, as well as larger chunks, to the meaning of the whole text.

We were pleased to see that the standards begin to acknowledge different kinds of texts, purposes for literacy, and language forms (though see our revisions and our discussion of varied purposes for reading and writing in Section B below).

We were gratified that, though the draft begins to delineate certain qualities of reading materials, it does not go so far as to name particular texts students should read (though see our revisions of the sections on literary quality and complexity in Section C below). We were also happy to see an understanding that readers and writers actively construct meanings and understandings with texts.

That the standards process revealed a need for the text box on narrative demonstrates that there is, among the people revising the standards, already some awareness that they are too narrow at present in the range of literacy forms they address, and we found it heartening that such conversations may have already begun among members of the drafting and feedback groups. Therefore, even as we move toward our areas of concern and objection, we do acknowledge that in some initial assumptions, we are on the same page.

B. Omissions

We turn now to areas of omission that should be addressed if this document is to serve as a college and career readiness guide.

*Purposes*

The standards speak to "college and career" readiness. However, there are important dimensions of education beyond these two domains. Purposes for writing include self-expression; releasing the imagination; creating works of art; developing social networks; engaging in civic discourse; supporting personal and spiritual growth; reflecting on experience; communicating professionally and academically;

building relationships with others, including with friends, family, and other like-minded individuals; and engaging in aesthetic experiences. Most important perhaps is education for social and civic participation. A central purpose of education—and certainly literacy education—has been to create citizens who understand and evaluate complex situations within societies and to influence the democratic process ethically, responsibly, and effectively. Much reading and writing in college centers on the public good, with students frequently asked to produce texts that address various publics, not only other academics. (For example, even in business schools, one implication of the Sarbanes-Oxley act has been to have students read and write about business practices within a larger social context.)

In light of other purposes for education, these standards should either

(1) incorporate at least our modest suggestions for revision that are detailed in Section C below;

(2) provide a clear and forceful statement that they speak to only two purposes of education and affirm that other purposes are equally vital; or

(3) provide a compelling defense that college and career readiness are the primary purpose of secondary education. We have included some language within the standards document that could assist with this problem.

*Processes*

As drafted, the standards essentially ignore the fact that writing occurs as a process. Effective writers have a robust repertory of skills and practices that they access and apply in response to given writing situations. They have the ability—and flexibility—to know when to concentrate on generating ideas, for example, and when to concentrate on proofreading and correctness. We understand that accounting for writing processes presents certain technical difficulties for assessment. However, if these standards are meant to guide teachers and administrators, they must address what should be taught, not simply what is easy to assess. Though it is technically possible to assess writing as a process, it is difficult on a large scale, and expensive. Although assessing process is difficult and involves investment, these standards are not being advertised as standards for assessment but standards for learning. It will be extremely costly for the nation to misrepresent the nature of composition in such standards.

*Diversity*

The draft is silent on matters of racial, ethnic, linguistic, and cultural diversity. Competent communication in college and careers for the 21st century, however, cannot ignore such diversity. Explicit standards need to address a writer, speaker, and reader's consciousness of cultural difference and organized knowledge about cultural differences. Such differences are crucial not only within individual workplaces but, certainly, among workplaces that demand collaboration, especially in a globalized economy.

*Social dimensions of learning*

As stated in this draft, these competencies appear to evolve in the individual without social interaction, and without social interaction as a goal. Communicative competencies, especially in writing and reading, are stated as if they occur in solitary situations. That vision of literacy ignores the importance of talk as a context for reading and writing and the role of others in individuals' developments of these skills. Furthermore, in digital environments, in the college classroom and in the contemporary white-collar workplace, collaborative reading and writing are extremely common. Once again, perhaps a focus on ease of assessing has given rise to distortions in the drafted standards for teaching and learning.

*Variety in writing quality*

The document suggests that writing differs only in "style and tone" for given audiences (Standard #5). The standards posit a generic kind of writing when, in fact, what counts as an effective text varies immensely in terms of audience and purpose; good texts vary in terms of length, genre, and what counts as evidence or proof, method of development, modality (print, digital, etc.), ethos of the writer, and so on. Standard #14 begins to broaden this idea by talking about shaping material for audiences, but it doesn't go very far.

*21$^{st}$ century literacies*

The standards' references to changing practices of literacy in this draft are vague and very limited. The demands of new literacies are real, substantive, and high-stakes, and we do not see how a set of standards produced a decade into the new millennium can ignore them to the extent this draft does. The NCTE 21st Century Curriculum and Assessment Framework, available on the Web, is one document that would offer guidance in this critical area.

C. Suggestions for Language Revisions

As an organization serving literacy educators at all academic levels for nearly a century, NCTE has extensive experience in working at the school, district, state, and national levels to not merely frame standards but also to support teachers and students in the day-to-day quest to achieve them. Through these experiences, we have come to understand that the phrases used to describe outcome goals have far-reaching consequences, not only for educators and students, but for communities and our society generally. Thus, we focus our review efforts on being as precise as possible in sketching the implications of text/phrase choices found in benchmarks and standards in the current draft. Our comments are grounded in NCTE policy, the peer-reviewed research base that underlies those policies, and the real-world experience of schools, districts, and states who have encountered unforeseen frustrations when the standards-based reforms they pursued didn't square with rapid changes in the practice of literacy and the conditions of schooling.

This section will proceed page by page through the existing draft. Our revisions to language are highlighted.

**Section 1.A, Standards For Reading Informational and Literary Texts, Title**

Current language: Standards For Reading Informational and Literary Texts

Proposed language: Standards For Reading For a Wide Range of Purposes

Rationale: The dichotomy of reading as consisting either of "informative" or "literary" texts is not yet sufficiently broken down. While it's good that the document distinguishes among different types and purposes of reading, it could do so with greater care. Though a significant amount of reading in college is "informational," an equally important amount is "persuasive" or "argumentative." That is, scholars use disciplinary methods to argue for particular theories, interpretations, or actions. Similarly, much reading in the workplace occurs not simply to extract information but to evaluate recommendations or courses of action. While the list of proposed standards cites argument (9) and identifies the need to assess evidence and reasoning (11, 12), the top-level categories of informative and literary do not yet reflect an adequate range of texts and reading purposes.

**Section 1.A, Standards For Reading Informational and Literary Texts, Core Standards, #1**

Current language: 1. Determine what the text says explicitly and use evidence within the text to infer what is implied by or follows logically from the text.

Proposed language: 1. Determine what the text says explicitly and use prior knowledge and evidence within the text to infer what is implied by or follows logically from the text.

Rationale: Inferences require the use of a reader's existing knowledge.


**Section 1.A, Standards For Reading Informational and Literary Texts, Core Standards, #2**

Current language: 2. Support or question statements about the text by citing the text explicitly and accurately.

Proposed language: 2. In discussion with other readers, support or question statements about the text by citing the text explicitly and accurately.

Rationale: The standards tend to be expressed in language that describes the learner as solitary and do not attend to collaboration and social processes that are essential in college and even more so in the workplace. This can be helped a little by naming a discussion context in which students would demonstrate these behaviors.


**Section 1.A, Standards For Reading Informational and Literary Texts, Core Standards, #4**

Current language: 4. Summarize the ideas, events, or information in the text and determine the main ideas and themes.

Proposed language: 4. Summarize the ideas, events, or information in the text and interpret for main ideas and themes.

Rationale: There is an imprecise notion of right/wrong in the language of too many of the standards. These matters, such as main idea and theme, are not predetermined and correct/incorrect. Validity of these judgments can be made only in a particular community of readers.


**Section 1.A, Standards For Reading Informational and Literary Texts, Core Standards, #6**

Current language: 6. Analyze the traits, motivations, and thoughts of individuals in fiction and nonfiction based on how they are described, what they say and do, and how they interact.

Proposed language: 6. Analyze the traits, motivations, and thoughts of individuals including the author, in narrative and expository texts, based on how they are described, what they say and do, and how they interact.

Rationale: The fiction/nonfiction distinction is problematic, since what is really meant here is text structure, not reference to reality. In many informational texts, the author is the only person available to analyze, and it is important for critical readers to do so, even (perhaps especially) in scientific texts.

**Section 1.A, Standards For Reading Informational and Literary Texts, Core Standards, #7**

Current language**:** 7. Draw on context to determine what is meant by words and phrases, including figurative language.

Proposed language**:** 7. Draw on context to negotiate what words and phrases may mean, including figurative language.

Rationale: Addresses the shortcomings mentioned above regarding solitariness and overly definite right/wrong meanings. Corrects an "intentional fallacy" as well as passive construction.

**Section 1.A, Standards For Reading Informational and Literary Texts, Core Standards, #8 and #9**

Current language:
8. Analyze how word choice shapes the meaning and tone of the text.
9. Analyze how the organizational structure advances the argument, explanation, or narrative.

Proposed language:
8. In conversation with other readers, analyze how word choice shapes the meaning and tone of the text.
9. In conversation with other readers, analyze how the organizational structure advances the argument, explanation, or narrative.

Rationale: Addresses the shortcomings mentioned above regarding solitariness.

**Section 1.A, Standards For Reading Informational and Literary Texts, Core Standards, #10**

Current language: 10. Interpret data, graphics, and words in the text, and combine these elements of information to achieve comprehension.

Proposed language: 10. Interpret data, graphics, images, interactive features, and language in the text, and combine these elements to support understandings.

Rationale: As written, graphics could be taken to refer narrowly to charts and diagrams. While we assume that the original intent was likely more expansive, that intent should be more explicitly signaled. It is important for students to see pictures, design elements, and video as elements of text meaning and impact. It is also important that students interpret features of interactivity as elements of meaning in digital environments. The change to the later part of the sentence addresses the sense of right/wrong or simplistic information transfer.

**Section 1.A, Standards For Reading Informational and Literary Texts, Core Standards, #13**

Current language: 13. Analyze how two or more texts with different styles, perspectives, or arguments address similar topics or themes.

Proposed language: 13. In conversation with other readers, draw upon multiple texts of varying styles, perspectives, or arguments to discuss topics, ideas, or themes.

Rationale: More accurately represents the application of this skill in real college and workplace settings. The wording in the draft sounds more like a skill to be tested, not an academic behavior.

**Section 1.A, Standards For Reading Informational and Literary Texts, Core Standards, addition of #15**

Current language: n/a

Proposed language: 15. Discuss texts with other readers, to negotiate, question, and defend meanings, interpretations, and implications.

Rationale: Highlights the collaborative work essential in college and career literacy practices.


**Section 1.A, Standards For Reading Informational and Literary Texts, Core Standards, Notes, last sentence**

Current language: "Analyze the traits, motivations, and thoughts of individuals" applies to studying characters in fiction and figures in historical texts.

Proposed language: "Analyze the traits, motivations, and thoughts of individuals" applies to studying characters in fiction, figures in historical texts, and writers of any text."

Rationale: The fiction/nonfiction distinction is problematic, since what is really meant here is text structure, not reference to reality. In many informational texts, the author is the only person available to analyze, and it is important for critical readers to do so, even (perhaps especially) in scientific texts.


**Section 1.B, Required Range and Contexts, Complexity: sentence 3**

Current language: In college and careers, students will need to extract knowledge and information from reference materials, technical manuals, literature, and other texts (print and online) that are characterized by demanding and context-dependent vocabulary, subtle relationships among ideas and characters, a nuanced rhetorical style and tone, and often elaborate structures or formats.

Proposed language: In college and careers, students will need to construct understandings with reference materials, technical manuals, literature, and other texts (print and online) that are characterized by demanding and context-dependent vocabulary, subtle relationships among ideas and characters, a nuanced rhetorical style and tone, and often elaborate structures or formats.

Rationale: The language in the draft seems outdated in reading and psychology (since the 1970s). Much research from a variety of perspectives supports a more constructive model of reading, not simple extraction of information (e.g., Freire & Macedo, 1987; Lee, 1995; Rosenblatt, 1978; Rumelhart, 1985; Schraw & Bruning, 1999; van Dijk & Kintsch, 1983).


**Section 1.B, Required Range and Contexts, Complexity: sentence 4**

Current language: These challenging texts require the reader's close attention and often demand rereading in order to be fully understood.

Proposed language: These challenging texts require the reader's close attention and often demand rereading in order to support defensible paraphrases, interpretations, and intellectual exchanges.

Rationale: If a text is as nuanced and complex as the draft says here, it may not be fully understood after rereading. The goal is to prepare for an engagement with other readers, not necessarily to reach closure with all meanings suggested in the text.

**Section 1.B, Required Range and Contexts, Quality: sentence 2**

Current language: Since certain works are products of exceptional craft and thought, all students should have access to these especially strong models of thinking and writing.

Proposed language: All students should have access to exceptionally strong models of thinking and writing.

Rationale: Language like "Since certain works are products of exceptional craft and thought" begs the question of who is going to decide which works, and what they will be. In other words, this kind of statement implies the creation of a canon and implicit or explicit exclusion of works not included in that canon. Leaving aside the question of whether it is true that certain works are such monuments, the process of identifying them in a nation like the United States is impractical and politically explosive.

**Section 1.B, Required Range and Contexts, Quality: sentence 3**

Current language: This includes texts that have broad resonance and are referred to and quoted often, such as influential political documents, foundational literary works, and seminal historical and scientific texts.

Proposed language: Such models might include influential political documents, foundational literary works, and seminal historical and scientific texts.

Rationale: The beginning of the sentence is missing a referent—this what? And it would be impossible to measure "broad resonance" or the frequency of quotation. The language is imprecise and immeasurable, so these works could not be defined in a defensible way.

**Section 1.B, Required Range and Contexts, Quality: add sentence after sentence 3**

Current language: n/a

Proposed language: Because students will live, work, and attend college in an increasingly diverse world, such models must include works by women and authors of diverse racial, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds.

Rationale: This language addresses a bit of the draft's lack of attention to diversity, in this case, of literature.

**Section 1.B, Required Range and Contexts, Quality: sentence 4**

Current language: At the same time, reading substantive contemporary fiction engages students in the world and culture around them, just as reading thoughtful contemporary works in science and other disciplines enables students to reflect on pertinent issues in these disciplines.

Proposed language: delete "substantive"

Rationale: The nature of "substantive" is not determinable on a national level.

## Section 1.B, Required Range and Contexts, Quality, add final sentence

Current language: n/a

Proposed language: Students also build reading strength and engagement through highly motivated experience with a range of texts, and they must be provided with opportunities to develop independent reading agendas, favorite authors and topics, and habits that sustain a literate life. They must learn as well to discuss features of textual quality in reference to the everyday texts in their lives, such as songs, websites, and advertisements. Such transfer of notions of quality is essential to the practicalities of the workplace and to lifelong literacy.

Rationale: It is important to broaden the range of reading engagements, especially when one considers these as standards for instruction. It is well demonstrated in research that engagement and motivation are essential to reading growth and at the same time, are of intrinsic value to a literate life, almost by definition (Campbell, Voelkl, & Donahue, 1997; Community College Survey of Student Engagement, 2009; Finn,1993; Guthrie, Van Meter, et al, 1996; Kirsch, DeJong, et al, 2002; National Survey of Student Engagement, 2009; Sieridis & Padeliadu, 2001; Smagorinsky & O'Donnell-Allen, 1998; Taylor, B., Pearson, P.D., et al, 2003).

## Section 1.B, Required Range and Contexts, Range

Current language: Range: Students also must demonstrate their capacity to read a variety of literary and informational texts and read deeply within fields of study in order to gain the knowledge base they need for college and career readiness.
    *Literature:* When reading literature, students must demonstrate their capacity to pay special attention to the choices authors make about words and structures. Many literary effects depend on the order in which events unfold and the specific details used to describe characters and actions. Since these same strategies—order and use of detail—are equally critical in understanding the most demanding informational texts, reading literature helps students comprehend what they read in science, history and other subjects.
    *Informational Text:* Because the overwhelming majority of college and workplace reading is non-fiction, students need to hone their ability to acquire information from nonliterary texts in mathematics and the social and natural sciences. When reading informational text, students must become attuned to different formats in which ideas are presented to access the knowledge contained in these texts. In order to be college and career ready, students will need to encounter complex non-fiction in their English courses as well as when reading in history, the sciences and other disciplines.

Proposed language: Replace the whole section with the following:
Range: Students must also demonstrate their capacity to read a variety of texts ranging widely in cultural background, genre, structure, language, and purpose. Students must be able to read in a wide array of contexts, including preparation for action, for discussion in a large group, for discussion in a small group, and for varied forms and purposes of writing. When reading literature, students must demonstrate an ability to respond affectively to language, to attend to aesthetic effects, to negotiate complex meanings with others, and to attend to wide contextual perspectives influencing the text's art and meaning, among other things. When reading informational text, students must be strategic in the use of text structures and arrangement in order to read efficiently and purposefully. When reading claims about reality or arguments about policy, students must demonstrate the ability to determine an author's perspective and to situate that perspective alongside others available, including the student's own. Students must demonstrate the capacity to carry meanings across media and text forms, including those that contain still and moving images, sound, interactive features such as hypertext, and multiple languages. To learn to live in a

diverse world, students should demonstrate the ability to notice, analyze, and respect difference in other readers' and writers' backgrounds and to reason about the relative significance of those differences.

Rationale: Several problems exist in this passage as drafted. The first two sentences do not make much sense and seem to be about testing, not about standards. The dichotomy of literature/informational creates too restricted a set of purposes. The assertions about the nature of literary reading are not supported in research. The claim that literary reading has a causal relationship to success in other reading purposes has no basis in reading research beyond elementary school, and so it misstates the purposes of literary study in secondary and tertiary education. This section on range also presents an opportunity to address some of the draft's shortcomings on evolving forms of text and on human diversity. If some of the present draft is retained as is, the word "non-fiction" in the informational section is not precise. The referentiality of text is not at issue, but the language form; it should probably be called "expository." It is a difficult issue, because of the problems created by the mistaken literature/informational binary.

**Section 2.A, Standards for Writing, Core Standards**

Current language: To be college and career ready, students must:
1.  Select and refine a topic or thesis that addresses the specific task and audience.
2.  Sustain focus on a specific topic or argument through careful presentation of essential content.
3.  Create a logical progression of ideas and use transitions effectively to convey the relationships among them.
4.  Support and illustrate arguments and explanations with relevant details and examples.
5.  Develop and maintain a style and tone appropriate to the purpose and audience.
6.  Choose words and phrases to express ideas precisely and concisely.
7.  Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard written English, including grammar, usage, and mechanics.
8.  Represent and cite accurately the data, conclusions, and opinions of others.
9.  Access the quality of one's own writing and, when necessary, strengthen it through revision.

Proposed language: To be college and career ready, students must be able to produce writing through a process of revision and editing as they:
1.  Choose a topic or thesis that addresses the specific task and audience.
2.  Revise toward a sustained focus on a specific topic or argument through careful presentation of essential content.
3.  Revise toward a logical progression of ideas and use transitions effectively to convey the relationships among them.
4.  Support and illustrate arguments and explanations with relevant details and examples.
5.  Develop and maintain a style and tone appropriate to the purpose and audience.
6.  Choose words, phrases, images, and other media to express ideas precisely and concisely.
7.  Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard written English, including grammar, usage, and mechanics.
8.  Represent and cite accurately the data, conclusions, and opinions of others.
9.  Assess the quality of one's own writing and, when necessary, strengthen it through further revision.

Rationale: We note that the draft includes revision in #9. However, to say "when necessary" is to misunderstand the nature of most writers' processes. They do not write and then revise only when necessary. Writing, for almost all writers and situations, is a process of revision, and the textual features listed should be described in those terms. Note that the same sort of revision is necessary for the other two stems on this page.

**Section 2.A, Standards for Writing, Core Standards, add #10**

Current language: n/a

Proposed language: 10. Collaborate with other writers by providing suggestions and feedback and by thoughtfully considering suggestions and feedback from them, in the process of revising.

Rationale: A vital part of writing in college and in careers beyond involves collaboration. Students need to learn how to give and receive responses and suggestions to others' writing and to their own. They need to develop the kinds of social skills involved in writing.

**Section 2.A, Standards for Writing, Core Standards, Argument section**

Current language: add #?? after #12

Proposed language: #?? Demonstrate an ability to adjust an approach to an argument in order to appeal to varied audiences, taking into consideration their backgrounds, values, knowledge, and perspectives.

Rationale: Relationship and attention to audience is essential to argument and yet has been omitted here.

**Section 2.A, Standards for Writing, Core Standards, Writing to Inform or Explain section**

Current language: 13. Synthesize information from multiple relevant sources, including graphics and quantitative information when appropriate, to provide an accurate picture of that information.

Proposed language: 13. Synthesize information from multiple relevant sources, including published works, interviews with others, relevant personal experiences, images, videos, sound recordings, qualitative data such as deriving through direct observation, to provide an accurate picture of that information.

Rationale: The notion of sources in the draft is much more restricted than is common in college or the workplace.

**Section 2.A, Standards for Writing, Core Standards, Note section, sentence 4**

Current language: Proper sentence structure, correct verb formation, careful use of verb tense, clear subject-verb and pronoun-antecedent agreement, conventional usage, and appropriate punctuation that clarifies meaning are of particular importance to formal writing.

Proposed language: Appropriate sentence structure, correct verb formation, careful use of verb tense, clear subject-verb and pronoun-antecedent agreement, conventional usage, and appropriate punctuation that clarifies meaning are of particular importance to formal writing.

Rationale: The phrase "proper sentence structure" seems to suggest a right/wrong perspective on language that is not supported in linguistics. The suggested change is more accurate.

**Section 2.A, Standards for Writing, Core Standards, Note section**

Current language: n/a
After sentence 4 ending "formal writing," add the following sentence.

Proposed language: In addition to the ability to employ "standard written English," students must demonstrate the capacity to determine those social situations in which that dialect is most appropriate as opposed to those in which a different form of English is appropriate.

Rationale: This language more adequately brings teachers' attention to linguistic diversity and sense of audience.

**Section 2.B, Standards for Writing, Required Range and Contexts, Make an Argument, sentence 1**

Current language: The ability to frame and defend an argument is particularly important to students' readiness for college and careers.

Proposed language: The ability to frame and defend an argument is particularly important to students' readiness for college and careers and democratic participation.

Rationale:  see below

**Section 2.B, Standards for Writing, Required Range and Contexts, Make an Argument, sentence 2**

Current language: The goal of making an argument is to convince an audience of the rightness of the claims being made using logical reasoning and relevant evidence.

Proposed language: delete "of the rightness"

Rationale:  see below

**Section 2.B, Standards for Writing, Required Range and Contexts, Make an Argument, addition**

Current language: n/a
After sentence 4 ending "course of action," add the following sentence.

Proposed language: In civic life, citizens argue to persuade one another in democratic deliberations and shared self-governance.

Rationale: The overall structure of this page is awkward, with the two stems followed by colons at the top. The narrative inset box is awkward, and that discussion should be moved over to become parallel to the other two modes. We see no justification in restricting modes to two (even if the standards must use the outdated form of modes to organize the discussion). It would represent an inaccurate reduction of college and workplace writing.

**Section 2.B, Standards for Writing, Required Range and Contexts, Note on Narrative Writing**

Current language: n/a
After sentence 2 ending "narrative techniques," add the following sentence.

Proposed language: Narrative is also a valued research genre in both the social sciences and the humanities.

Rationale: The purposes for narrative given in the draft are too limited, and this statement more accurately describes some of the uses of narrative in college and careers.

**Section 2.B, Standards for Writing, Required Range and Contexts**

Current language: n/a
Add the following section on reflective writing.

Proposed language: *Reflective writing:* In college, students are often asked to write reflectively about their learning, their experiences, or in preparation for engaging with new material. Reflective writing involves taking stock of what one already knows, making connections among sources of knowledge, responding emotionally and socially to material, speculating about significance, discovering one's own perspective on a topic, and making meanings of new knowledge. While it is an essential mode when writing is used as a tool for thinking and learning in school, it is also a tool some individuals use throughout life, including in the workplace, and many traditional crafted essays, poems, and articles also make use of this form.

Rationale: As is stated here, college students must often engage in reflective writing, which does not fit well in the forms and purposes given in the drafts.

**Section 2.A, Standards for Writing, Required Range and Contexts**

Current language: n/a
Add the following section on further purposes for writing.

Proposed language: *Further purposes for writing:* Writers in college, the workplace, and other domains of life take up many further purposes for writing. Purposes for writing include self-expression; releasing the imagination; creating works of art; developing social networks; engaging in civic discourse; supporting personal and spiritual growth; reflecting on experience; communicating professionally and academically; building relationships with others, including friends, family, and like-minded individuals; and engaging in aesthetic experiences. Students must demonstrate understanding of the ways that language and form differ when purposes and audiences vary.

Rationale: The standards as written provide for too few of the purposes for writing. This list helps round out the picture of why people write in college, the workplace, and beyond.

**Section 2.B, Standards for Writing, Required Ranges and Texts, Audience, sentence 2**

Current language: Students must be able to take into consideration an audience's characteristics, such as its background knowledge, its interests, and its potential objections to an argument.

Proposed language: Students must be able to take into consideration an audience's characteristics, such as its background knowledge, its interests, the diversity of its members, and its potential objections to an argument.

Rationale: Attention to audience is one of the many places where students must be prepared for a culturally diverse world.

**Section 2.B, Standards for Writing, Required Ranges and Texts, On-demand Writing, sentence 2**

Current language: Frequently, however, writers must produce high-quality text the first time and under a tight deadline, whether in response to a supervisor's request for information or to a prompt on an exam.

Proposed language: Occasionally, however, writers must produce high-quality text the first time and under a tight deadline, whether in response to a supervisor's request for information or to a prompt on an exam.

Rationale: On the basis of our collective experience and our knowledge of research literature on college and workplace writing, we see no support for the claim that people frequently have to produce high-quality text on a tight deadline. We do not deny that people occasionally must write in such conditions; rather, we note that the great majority of writing situations include opportunities to revise and edit. We suspect the draft language is a justification of anticipated testing practices. Our preference would be to eliminate this paragraph entirely, though we are providing some revision suggestions to soften its likely impact on teachers and classrooms. Writing on demand occurs infrequently, only occasionally, and it is not expected to be "high-quality" in the same way that revised text is. Rather, professors and supervisors more commonly are looking for particular items of content, and the diction, style, arrangement, and other features of quality are not the focus in such settings. In the workplace, moreover, such a text would even less frequently be undertaken by an isolated individual, and even when it was, it would be situated in a context that, compared to a test, is socially supported by wide shared knowledge and practice.

**Section 3.A, Standards for Speaking and Listening, Core Standards**

Current language: n/a
Add these standards.

Proposed language:

5. Negotiate complex meanings in ill-defined problems to develop shared understandings of the nature of questions, potential strategies of approach, and a range of possible outcomes.

6. Expand topics so that they become susceptible to inquiry and interpretation, finding new questions and possibilities in what interlocutors contribute.

7. Contribute partially formulated ideas to discussions in progress, so that others may revise and build upon initial meanings.

Rationale: The giving of presentations is necessarily a small part of anyone's college life. Participation in discussions, in both large and small groups, is pervasive. In the workplace, too, building ideas and solving problems together is much more common for most workers than is giving presentational monologues. Furthermore, these deliberative discussion skills are essential to democratic participation. The assertion on the next page that one would apply the same standards across communicative contexts, including groups and one-to-one, is not supported by the standards that are actually named in the draft.

**Section 3.A, Standards for Speaking and Listening, Core Standards, Notes, Bullet 1**

Current language: Present information and findings clearly and persuasively: This includes conveying information concisely, taking into account audience background or prior knowledge of the selected topic,

and ensuring that nonverbal cues such as gestures and eye contact contribute effectively to the delivery of the message.

Proposed language: Present information and findings clearly and persuasively: This includes conveying information with sufficient development but not excessive verbosity, taking into account audience background or prior knowledge of the selected topic, and ensuring that nonverbal cues such as gestures and eye contact contribute effectively to the delivery of the message.

Rationale: For many undergraduates and novice speakers, concision is not the difficult part—development is.


**Section 3.A, Standards for Speaking and Listening, Core Standards, Notes, Bullet 2**

Current language: Register: This is the variety of language used in a particular setting. For example, a student should choose formal Standard English to deliver a presentation of research to an unfamiliar audience.

Proposed language: Register is the level of formality of language in a particular setting. For example, a student should choose relatively formal diction to discuss research before an unfamiliar audience and should use more informal diction when describing her or his own progress on research to people with whom she or he is relatively intimate. Flexibility with register, and attention to audience expectation, permits students and workers to navigate diverse language communities.

Rationale: It is mistaken to claim that a variety of English is connected to register, and conflating register and Standard English here could be insulting to diverse linguistic communities and is also likely to cause teachers to confuse dialect with register, when the two are not necessarily intertwined. In many workplaces, Standard English would often be a mistake. For that matter, attempting to center English would be dysfunctional in many contemporary workplace settings.


**Section 4.B, Applications of the Core, Media, paragraph 2**

Current language: Media mastery also calls upon some skills unique to the online environment, ranging from being able to conduct digital-based research to exchanging and debating ideas in online discussions to interacting with new text forms. In the electronic world, reading and writing are closely intertwined, which affects both the processing of information as well as its production. Students should be able to create, collaborate on, and distribute media communications and must learn both to read closely and critically and to contribute effectively online through different media forms, such as blogs, wikis, and social networks.

Proposed language: Media mastery also calls upon some skills that are especially salient in a digital, networked environment. These skills include composing and interacting with texts designed in multiple media, including sound, images, video, and text. They include rapid response in order to participate in textual interactions with others around the globe on a wide range of topics, as well as collaboration across distances through voice, image, and text, and collaboration in front of a screen with someone in the same room. They include planning a user's interactivity with the features of a text and designing pathways through that text for varied users' impulses and interests. They include building worlds that can be inhabited in a non-linear and recursive fashion, with implicit and explicit norms and codes. They also include remixing available media resources in order to articulate new messages and strategically choosing appropriate software to further one's own work. Online communication involves planning one's texts toward a network of associations and meanings, connecting one's own voice to that of others and then planning and further facilitating the distribution and circulation of that text through the network.

<u>Rationale:</u> These are some of the skills unique to digital environments, which are not specified in the draft standards.

**Section 5, Reading Illustrative Texts at the Required Level of Complexity**

We do not have a revision suggestion for the section on illustrative texts, though we do find their inclusion intensely problematic for the following reasons.

First, we doubt the validity of using the instruments cited to level the difficulty of adult texts.

Second, we do not find that the texts provided are examples of anything useful. The Declaration of Independence, as a linguistic artifact, is singular—there are not many others in that category: texts that are both intensely familiar and also very alien, that are of monumental importance to this nation though they are from a linguistic tradition in which most educated people no longer read. True, it is a primary document, but that is a type for history study, not a text type. The Mansfield story fragment contains only simple vocabulary. The reading difficulties in it are functions of embodied imagination, the ability to hear "fluty" music. The syntax is complex because of turns of interior thought in the character. We find it hard to believe that any objective instrument selected that text as challenging. The science textbook is typical of what lower-division undergraduates might encounter in science textbooks, but that is such a narrow field of textual experience—perhaps one or two courses. This sample is atypical of actual scientific discourse in research reports, and it bears little resemblance to the writing of scientists like Stephen J. Gould or Freeman Dyson for a general audience. The workplace text sampled here employs especially convoluted syntax because it supposedly comes from an employee handbook section that specifically uses legalistic phrasing in order to protect the company from employee lawsuits. It is far from representative of business communication.

We are not persuaded, in other words, that these texts are really representative. Furthermore, we have doubts, based on research and NCTE positions, that a focus on text complexity will in and of itself produce more engaged, curious, and ambitious readers. And we worry that too much focus on such text features will distract teachers from supporting students in becoming the kinds of readers who can have successful college careers and lifelong literacy.  We are certainly willing to continue a conversation about text complexity and ways of ensuring that all readers experience a range of texts.

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