

TEXTS,

TASKS,

& TALK

Instruction to Meet the Common  
Core in Grades 9–12

BRAD CAWN



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# Introduction

## THE NEW STANDARD

The relationship between standards and instruction can often be paper-thin—literally. We’ve all been there—drawing up a unit or lesson and then dropping the standards on top right before hitting the print button. As high school teachers, we know our students and our content—instruction is surely aligned to standards. But does our instruction address the standards? It’s not always clear.

Teaching that is *up to standard* is different. It starts with standards-aligned instructional goals paired to high-quality texts and content. It is learning centered, prioritizing the literacy skills and conceptual knowledge needed for students to be proficient and independent thinkers, readers, and writers in the content area you teach. It is dialogic and inquiry oriented. Student work that is up to standard is different, too: it is *complex*, *knowledgeable*, and *divergent and creative*, to use just a few of the descriptors from the Common Core State Standards (CCSS); it does not fit into a template. This is rigor.

And that, more than anything else in the age of the Common Core, is *the* major shift in both the intention and enactment of teacher practice: teaching, not just text, got complex. There is no program or textbook that provides an easy solution for the challenge of standards; there is no group of instructional strategies—new or otherwise—to readily define what it means to “do” the Common Core or other next-generation standards. The standards, it goes without saying, can’t teach themselves.

But wait until you see what’s possible with next-generation standards.

and the opportunities it offers for students to exchange ideas with one another. Leveraging the text toward strong student engagement entails two key shifts in teacher planning and practice.

1. Selecting texts that are grade appropriate and content rich, and thus worthy of instructional time
2. Providing the right kind of instructional support for students as they are challenged by academic language, abstract ideas, and rigorous tasks related to these texts

You must pay careful attention to both the opportunities and challenges a text provides, what it means to comprehend the specific text in question (and to texts in general—in other words, the standards), and what supports are necessary to ensure students have a complete understanding of the text (Kucan & Palincsar, 2011). A text's complexities should guide instructional decision making about how to teach it. Chapters 2–4 focus on texts.

### Tasks

The *task*—what students are actually asked to do with or in response to reading texts—is everything. In combination with the text, it is your opportunity to address and assess multiple standards; it is also the means to craft specific kinds of instructional supports needed to complete the task. Chapter 6 shows how to craft those supports, and chapter 7 looks at the role close reading plays in supporting content-area literacy.

Task construction starts with a meaningful intellectual or interpretive problem—the kind of question or problem that is worth dedicating precious instructional minutes to, requires close reading of multiple texts, and addresses multiple standards. But its most critical component is the way in which instructional time is designed to solve it. This requires you to think deeply about how to train students to read and respond to texts proficiently and independently, develop routines for reading and rereading texts, scaffold through modeling and questioning, and provide meaningful practice and feedback opportunities. This work should not be arbitrarily fitted into four- to six-week-long units; rather, what students are asked to do must dictate the time needed, be it four days or four weeks.

### Talk

Finally, we will discuss talk, which chapter 8 explores. In specifying precisely how students should participate with others in reading and understanding texts, the

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## FIVE ESSENTIALS TO TEACHING WITH NEXT-GENERATION STANDARDS

The Common Core and other next-generation standards are neither the salvation nor the destruction of education. As standards go, the Common Core and other newer standards frameworks are okay. They are better than most previous standards, to be sure; they are not, however, perfect. But standards don't need to be perfect; they only need to be useful to teacher work—all of the things teachers do to ensure their instruction is up to standard. The Common Core or any other standards framework is, after all, not an initiative; standards are just learning objectives, occasionally vague, and by no means comprehensive. Most importantly, they are nothing without great teaching. The only initiative in the CCSS is what you or others push to do with the standards.

While your literacy standards likely dictate very little about what classroom instruction should look like, they're organized and articulated in ways that, when read closely, provide a framework for what instruction could be. Grab your standards: let's get to work! We will begin by exploring five key ideas for teaching with next-generation standards.

1. Defining daily instruction
2. Reading closely versus close reading

3. Prioritizing critical reading
4. Prioritizing writing
5. Integrating language standards into reading and writing

Remember that the guidance in this chapter is built around the Common Core. If you are not using the CCSS, you can also review your own standards with the following key ideas in mind.

## Key Idea 1: Defining Daily Instruction

The first thing to locate in your standards and organize curriculum around are the articulations that address literacy every day in your classroom. In the Common Core, these are Reading standard ten, the text-complexity standard, and Reading standard one, the evidence standard; responding in writing using evidence, Writing standard nine, supports this reading work. Reading anchor standard one invokes both process (“read closely”) and product (“determine what the text says”); it identifies both explicit and inferential comprehension as the result of reading, and text evidence as the means by which students demonstrate such comprehension. It also calls for students to have repeated opportunities to read closely to “support conclusions drawn from the text.” The kinds of conclusions they draw are encompassed in Reading standards two through nine, which detail the particular kinds of *analysis* and *evaluation* students must do to understand complex texts. Picture, if you will, a ladder: the sides of the ladder are Reading anchor standard one and Reading anchor standard ten, which set the foundation that coursework is based on engaging complex texts, and that students do so by using *evidence* from these texts to demonstrate their comprehension. These sides support the rungs, anchor standards two through nine, which address certain kinds of evidence and uses of evidence in order to demonstrate more sophisticated levels of understanding (NGA & CCSSO, 2010).

The use of the word *analysis* in the grades 9–10 and 11–12 standards of Reading standard one illustrates this ladder relationship: it means students are to regularly engage in identifying evidence, understanding the meaning of that evidence, and using that evidence to explain accounts, processes, concepts, and so on. From this foundation, teachers can then focus on the standards at the highest cognitive level of Bloom’s (1956) taxonomy or Webb’s Depth of Knowledge (2002):

- Analyzing and strategic thinking (CCRA.R.2–6, CCRA.W.2)
- Evaluating (CCRA.R.8, CCRA.W.1)
- Synthesizing or extended thinking (CCRA.R.7, 9; CCRA.W.7–8)

qualitative measures, the team takes a closer look to determine the appropriateness of the proposed texts.

### Step 3: Use Qualitative Measures to Determine True Text Complexity

Because quantitative analysis focuses solely on the linguistic and semantic features of texts, it cannot pick up on many of the nuances of a complex text, such as how those linguistic and semantic features are utilized and the meanings they invoke. To show how rich and multilayered the qualities of a complex text can be, the following list shows just a few of the many facets teachers need to consider before rendering a summative judgment on a text (ACT, 2006; Chall, Bissex, Conard, & Harris-Sharples, 1996; Hess & Biggam, 2004; Morsy, Kieffer, & Snow, 2010).

1. Levels of meaning or purpose:
  - How many levels of meaning are there—one level or multiple levels?
  - Is there an explicitly stated purpose or an implicit purpose, which may be hidden or obscured?
2. Structure:
  - Are events presented in chronological order or out of chronological order?
  - Are text traits those of a common genre or subgenre or are traits specific to a particular discipline?
3. Language conventionality and clarity:
  - Is the language literal? Figurative? Ironic?
  - Is the language contemporary and familiar or is it archaic or otherwise unfamiliar?
  - Is the language conversational or is it general academic and domain specific?
4. Knowledge demands:
  - Does the text present common, everyday experiences or clearly fantastical situations, or are they experiences distinctly different from the reader's?
  - Does the text present perspectives like the reader's or perspectives unlike or in opposition to the reader's?



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## COLLABORATING: READING TO TEACH

For nearly three decades prior to the creation of the Common Core in 2009, the dominant paradigm of literacy instruction focused on what is sometimes referred to as the “just right” book. What students read was determined by what they could read—what was just right for them as determined by the teacher and assessments. When students struggled, what was just right changed: Shakespeare written in contemporary English, a summary of a laboratory report or article rather than the original document, the textbook summary of primary sources, and so on. The text met students where they were.

Those days are over. The new standard is for texts to meet students where they could or should be. In articulating as a standard the reading of grade-appropriate complex texts independently and proficiently, Common Core Reading anchor standard ten makes clear that all students need to have every available opportunity to engage in grade-appropriate complex texts; it is the teacher, not the text, who must now serve as the primary support in enabling student access and understanding of disciplinary content (NGA & CCSSO, 2010).

As detailed throughout this book, the implications and requirements of this shift are significant: more intentional text selection and sequence, more intensive preparation, and more strategic facilitation *during* reading instruction—all facets of professional practice, in other words. To meet these new challenges requires a change not only in what teachers do but *how* they do it, both in their own work and in collaboration with others. Both what it means to be a literacy practitioner *and* a literate practitioner has changed.

Table 6.1 provides a list, per the Common Core, of these skills for both high school grade bands, grades 9–10 and grades 11–12; the skills are organized by the component of formal writing they address: claim or idea development, integrating evidence, organization, and style and correctness.

**Table 6.1: Writing and Response Skills Taught Within the Task Completion Process**

	Grades 9–10	Grades 11–12
<b>Claim or idea development</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduce precise claim(s), and distinguish the claim(s) from alternate or opposing claims. (W.9–10.1.A)</li> <li>• Develop claim(s) and counterclaims fairly, supplying evidence for each while pointing out the strengths and limitations of both in a manner that anticipates the audience’s knowledge level and concerns. (W.9–10.1.B)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduce precise, knowledgeable claim(s), establish the significance of the claim(s), and distinguish the claim(s) from alternate or opposing claim(s). (W.11–12.1.A)</li> <li>• Develop claim(s) and counterclaims fairly and thoroughly, supplying the most relevant evidence for each while pointing out the strengths and limitations of both in a manner that anticipates the audience’s knowledge level, concerns, values, and possible biases. (W.11–12.1.B)</li> </ul>
<b>Integrating evidence</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop the topic with well-chosen, relevant, and sufficient facts, extended definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples appropriate to the audience’s knowledge of the topic. (W.9–10.2.B)</li> <li>• Integrate information into the text selectively to maintain the flow of ideas, avoiding plagiarism and overreliance on any one source and following a standard format for citation. (W.9–10.8)</li> <li>• Draw evidence from informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research. (W.9–10.9)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop the topic thoroughly by selecting the most significant and relevant facts, extended definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples appropriate to the audience’s knowledge of the topic. (W.11–12.2.B)</li> <li>• Integrate information into the text selectively to maintain the flow of ideas, avoiding plagiarism and overreliance on any one source and following a standard format for citation. (W.11–12.8)</li> <li>• Draw evidence from informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research. (W.11–12.9)</li> </ul>