

# Creative Curriculum Extenders

Differentiated Projects for the English Classroom

for Years 3–5

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# Introduction



## 21st-Century skills for reading, writing and communicating

Today's students need a repertoire of knowledge and skills that are more diverse, complex and integrated than those of any previous generation. Communication is a very important aspect of reading and writing, and effective communication skills are necessary in the everyday lives of students. Such skills are essential to 21st-century learners, whether they go on to university, the workforce or technical training. *Creative Curriculum Extenders: Differentiated Projects for the English Classroom* takes these 21st-century skills into consideration in its array of activities. These skills enable students to learn and set goals independently and collaboratively. The following categories summarise the skills that students must develop in today's 21st-century classrooms.

### Critical thinking and reasoning

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In order for students to be successful and powerful readers, writers and communicators, they must incorporate critical thinking and reasoning skills. Students need to be able to successfully argue a point, justify reasoning, evaluate for a purpose, infer to predict and draw conclusions, problem-solve and understand, and use logic to inform critical thinking.

### Information literacy

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The student who is information-literate accesses information efficiently and effectively by reading and understanding content from a range of informational texts and documents, both traditional and electronic. This involves evaluating information critically and thoroughly and distinguishing among facts, points of view and opinions.

### Collaboration

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Reading, writing and communicating must encompass collaboration skills. Students should be able to collaborate with each other in multiple settings: in peer groups, one on one, in front of an audience, in large- and small-group settings and with people from backgrounds different from their own.

### Self-direction

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Students who read, write and communicate independently portray self-direction by using metacognitive skills. These important skills are a learner's automatic awareness of knowledge and ability to understand, control and manipulate their own cognitive processes. These skills are important not only in school, but also throughout life, enabling the student to learn and set goals independently.

### Invention

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Invention is one of the key components of creating an exemplary writing piece or synthesising information from multiple sources. Invention takes students to a higher level of metacognition while they explore literature and write about their experiences by forming new ideas.

## Creativity and divergent thinking

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*Creative Curriculum Extenders* provides students with the opportunity to look at unique situations and come up with alternative outcomes by combining research with creative thinking. The book poses real prompts with many possible answers, which lead to discovery, better insight and active involvement in subject matter. The book presents prompts that ask students to consider cause-and-effect relationships, as well as prompts that demand a wide variety of responses and activities, including discussion, debate, prototype, dramatisation and other forms of artistic expression. These activities offer opportunities for students to demonstrate fluent, flexible original and elaborate thinking.

### Fluency

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The activities in this book foster fluency or the ability to think of or consider multiple ideas and possibilities. With the menus in this book, students are encouraged to come up with alternate ideas, answers, solutions and outcomes.

### Flexibility

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Flexibility – the ability to think of varied ideas – is encouraged by the activities in this book, which prompt students to look at things from different angles and perspectives.

### Originality

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Students, through the menus in this book, develop their ability to think of unusual ideas. *Creative Curriculum Extenders* encourages students to produce novel responses and ideas.

### Elaboration

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By completing the activities found in this book, students will develop elaboration or the ability to add to ideas in order to improve them. This book challenges students to explain their ideas or include additional information.

### Evaluating creative thinking

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The rubric on the following page can be used to evaluate students with regard to the facets of creativity discussed here. As with any rubric, it will be helpful to thoroughly review the components in question with students prior to scoring, marking or evaluation.

## The importance of reading, writing and communicating

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### English standards

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In recent years, many schools have moved towards an integrated model of literacy that includes reading, writing and communicating. Literacy building has become a shared responsibility for teachers of all learning areas. Research skills are now integrated across the standards and across the year levels in many school regions. There has been a big shift in the standards in that the emphasis, particularly in the upper year levels, is now on writing to argue, inform and explain – writing, in other words, with purpose.

*Creative Curriculum Extenders* was written with consideration of all content areas. Research skills, increasingly valuable and emphasised in our information-driven society, are addressed in their own section, Researching and Informing, and many prompts featured on menus in other sections also require research.

Standardised writing tests focus predominantly on four types of writing: descriptive, narrative, persuasive and expository. *Creative Curriculum Extenders* includes menus for each of these four types of writing, along with writing to argue, writing to inform and writing to explain. When writing this book, the following standards set forth by the International Reading Association and the US National Council of Teachers of English (1996) were taken into account:

- ▶ Students adjust their use of spoken, written and visual language (e.g. conventions, style, vocabulary) to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes.

## Creativity rubric

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Score	3 (Excellent)	2 (Good)	1 (Needs improvement)
<b>Fluency (multiple ideas)</b>	Evidence of ability to come up with a wide variety of ideas, answers, solutions and outcomes above and beyond those of others	Evidence of ability to come up with a wide variety of ideas, answers, solutions and outcomes at or slightly above those of peers	Little evidence of ability to come up with a wide variety of ideas, answers, solutions and outcomes
<b>Flexibility (varied ideas)</b>	Evidence of resourcefulness, versatility, adaptability and freedom above and beyond those of others	Evidence of resourcefulness, versatility, adaptability and freedom at or slightly above those of peers	Little evidence of resourcefulness, versatility, adaptability and freedom
<b>Originality (unique ideas)</b>	Evidence of unique, eccentric, unusual and inventive thinking above and beyond that of others	Evidence of unique, eccentric, unusual and inventive thinking at or slightly above that of peers	Little evidence of unique, eccentric, unusual and inventive thinking
<b>Elaboration (expanded ideas)</b>	Evidence of a concern for detail above and beyond that of others	Evidence of a concern for detail at or slightly above that of peers	Little evidence of a concern for detail

Total: \_\_\_\_\_

- Students employ a wide range of strategies as they write and use different writing process elements appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes.
- Students conduct research on issues and interests by generating ideas and questions and by posing problems. They gather, evaluate and synthesise data from a variety of sources (e.g. print and non-print texts, artefacts, people) to communicate their discoveries in ways that suit their purpose and audience.
- Students use a variety of technological and information resources (e.g. libraries, databases, computer networks, video) to gather and synthesise information and to create and to communicate knowledge.
- Students use spoken, written and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g. for learning, enjoyment, persuasion and the exchange of information).

### Oral presentation skills

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In keeping with the rising priority of 21st-century skills requiring excellent interpersonal communication, many of the activities in this book ask students to present their products to the class or to make an oral presentation. The rubric on the following page can be used to evaluate students. It is helpful to review with students the categories and criteria, as well as examples.

## Differentiating for areas of strength

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This book is meant to make teachers' efforts to differentiate in the classroom as easy and as far-reaching as possible. The ideas of Carol Ann Tomlinson (1999) were valuable influences in the writing of this book, which strives to provide students encouragement, opportunities and rigour in the following areas.

### Creativity

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- Opportunities for real-world investigations and experiences is provided.
- Fluency, flexibility originality and elaboration is encouraged through open-ended classroom activities and products.



## Oral presentation skills rubric

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Score: \_\_\_\_\_

Project description: \_\_\_\_\_

	3 (Excellent)	2 (Good)	1 (Needs improvement)
<b>Delivery</b>	Holds attention of entire audience with the use of direct eye contact, seldom looking at notes. Speaks with fluctuation in volume and inflection to maintain audience interest and emphasise key points.	Consistently uses direct eye contact with audience, but still returns to notes. Speaks with satisfactory variation of volume and inflection.	Displays minimal eye contact with audience and reads mostly from notes. Speaks in uneven volume with little or no inflection.
<b>Content/ organisation</b>	Provides clear purpose and topic; offers correct and pertinent examples, facts and statistics; and supports conclusions and ideas with evidence.	Has a somewhat clear purpose and topic; includes some examples, facts and statistics that support the topic; and includes some data or evidence that supports conclusions.	Attempts to define purpose and topic. Provides weak examples, facts and statistics that do not adequately support the topic. Includes very thin data or evidence.
<b>Enthusiasm/ audience awareness</b>	Demonstrates strong enthusiasm about the topic during entire presentation. Significantly increases audience understanding and knowledge of topic. Convinces audience to recognise the validity and importance of the topic.	Shows some enthusiastic feelings about the topic. Raises audience understanding and awareness of most points.	Shows little or mixed feelings about the topic being presented. Raises audience understanding and knowledge of some points.

## Creative Curriculum Extenders

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- Opportunities are provided for creative problem-solving and divergent thinking techniques.
- Opportunities are provided for students to connect prior knowledge to new learning experiences and to establish relationships across disciplines.
- Creative thinking skills and problem-solving strategies are integrated with solid learning content.

### General intellectual ability

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- An emphasis is placed on higher-level abstract thinking and problem-solving.
- An emphasis is placed on students' interests, learning styles and strengths.
- Provides opportunities for independent and small group projects and investigations.
- Projects provided utilised concept-based thematic instruction.

### Specific academics

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- Product options develop analytical and critical thinking skills.
- Projects provided encourage participation in creative writing opportunities, debate and advanced literacy activities.
- An emphasis is placed on open-ended problems with multiple solutions or multiple paths to solutions.
- Technology use is encouraged.
- The regular school curriculum is extended to provide greater depth and breadth than is typically available.
- Projects provided aid students in organising information, writing and developing projects.

### Visual, spatial and performing arts

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- Multiple intelligence strength areas are embedded.
- Visual-spatial strategies in the content areas are embedded.
- Visual-spatial activities/products to improve performance in weaker academic areas are provided.
- Students are helped to transfer abstract thinking into a variety of forms of expression.