

**A Report of the National Council of Teachers of English Review Team on the January 2010 Draft of the Standards for English Language Arts: Grades K-12**

**NCTE Review Team**

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## Opening Statements

After reviewing the K-12 Common Core Standards in December 2009, the standards developers invited NCTE to engage in a second round of reviews. This second invitation came as a result of three factors: (1) the developers greatly valued the thorough, specific, and professional nature of our initial review, (2) the revision suggestions from NCTE and other reviewers had substantially changed the standards, and (3) the NCTE review committee had expressed concerns that many portions of the standards were incomplete in December, and thus, were not reviewed.

Though the complete standards for this second review were slated to be released in the week of January 4<sup>th</sup>, 2010, NCTE did not receive the necessary documents until January 13<sup>th</sup> and was given just over one week to complete the review task. Generally speaking, the review committee was pleased to see follow-through on many recommendations from our first review, and spent the majority of our efforts not on praise but on specific issues which we felt would help to improve the quality, quantity, and intention of the Core Standards. Given the limitations of the brief turnaround time, this review is less detailed than our previous version but represents, nonetheless, a thoughtful and rigorous effort by the committee.

The review structure addresses specific questions given to NCTE by the developers; broad responses highlighting positive directions are followed by concerns and suggestions. In most cases the suggestions are referenced with page numbers that correspond to the electronic version of the documents given to NCTE for review.

As literacy leaders representing NCTE, we fully understand that the charge for developing standards and defining learner outcomes across K–12 grade levels, to govern *all* aspects of literacy—reading, writing, speaking and listening—is a Herculean task. Given the complexities of the reading process, the intricacies of writing development, and the diverse nature of language acquisition and development, we feel all the more reason to continue to strive for clarity through the revision process.

## Questions for Feedback on K–12 Common Core State Standards Draft as Solicited by the Standards Developers

### 1. Is the architecture of the draft standards clear and easy to follow for all audiences (e.g., teachers, administrators, curriculum developers, students, general public)?

**Positive Directions:** The review team was generally positive regarding the improved layout over the December Draft. The decision to explain how to read the document was helpful, and the document seems to have a logical flow, with an understandable layout for most audiences. The addition of statements regarding ELL and Students with Disabilities were appreciated for both their content and clarifications.

**Concern 1-1:** Some language regarding the architecture and intentions of sections of the document is still confusing or unclear. For example, the “illustrative texts” lists, named before each grade-level band, are still problematic without further clarification. As stated in our previous review, direct language about the intention of these lists is imperative. If they are intended, as has been stated verbally, as mere suggestions of texts that are examples of the complexity and types that could be used in a grade band, then such language needs to appear in writing to ensure that states, districts, or teachers refrain from interpreting these lists as “core reading lists” and the only materials sanctioned. Even with the laudable intention of support or reference, such lists are worrisome due to recent precedent. In the not-so-distant past, similar lists of suggested interventions or programs were developed with intentions of being helpful. Despite these intentions, under Reading First these lists became exclusive and immutable in the hands of other entities, removing control from teachers and schools, ultimately hurting the populations they were intending to help. Additionally, inclusion of lists of materials blurs the line between standards and curriculum.

Whenever instructional materials are named, standards are in fact moving into the realm of curriculum. As organizations involved in this new, national endeavor, you have stated that “standards are not curriculum. This initiative is about developing a set of standards that are common across states. The curriculum that follows will continue to be a local responsibility (or state-led, where appropriate)” (*Benchmarking for Success: Ensuring U.S. Students Receive a World-Class Education*. National Governor’s Association, the Council of State School Officers, and Achieve, Inc., 2008). While we agree with these statements and believe that states and other local entities should retain authority over determining materials and means to implementing the standards, we also note a conflict between this stated belief and what has actually appeared in these lists. Across grades 8–12, a small number of text materials are named by the standards as required reading for all students. The nature of these texts tend to be historically based (e.g., *The Declaration of Independence* and *King’s Letter from Birmingham Jail*), which raises yet another question:

Since these texts are all historic, are they more appropriately assigned within social studies/history classes? If it is the intention that these texts are read by students within history class, then feedback from the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) is warranted. If, however, the intention is that such works are read in English classes, we further question the intent and purpose of such readings and request further clarification.

**Suggestion 1:** Within the *How to Read the Document* section, clarify the difference between “Core Standards” and “Standards”; do not just define the difference, but make explicit the *intentions* behind these distinctions. Many references to the confusions of the review group regarding these intentions will be evident under the different question headings of this review. Due to the aforementioned issues with the difference between “Core Standards,” *Standards*, *Key Terms*, and *Foundations* (only in Grade K–3), the document remains confusing.

**Suggestion 2:** We recommend that the *Illustrative Lists* be clarified extensively or removed entirely to another document.

**Suggestion 3:** Add to the *How to Read the Document* section a further explanation of the overarching headings that transcend all the standards. For instance, a statement about what “Observing craft and structure” is all about, particularly for audiences such as students and the general public, would be helpful. Such an explanation for curriculum developers at the state or district level would be equally appreciated as they seek to interpret or add to this document and need to know where to best categorize additions.

**Suggestion 4:** Include a glossary of terms, defining concretely with examples some of the terminology for different audiences. As you recall, a glossary is a useful for defining the precise meaning of a term that has multiple meanings in different contexts. For example, a definition of the term “informational text” would be helpful. Some researchers and educators categorize “informational text” as a subgenre of “nonfiction,” which may not have been your intention in calling all nonfiction “informational text.” A glossary would add clarity and precision without adding standards or actions.

**Suggestion 5:** Further work may be warranted under the sections called *Language Development* as there seems to be confusion about which concepts should go under *Vocabulary* and which should go under *Conventions*. For example, for grade 9 (p. 86), there is a list of *Key Terms*—colon, ellipses, hyphen, semicolon, parallel structure, verbal—which seem appropriately placed under the *Conventions* heading because they are decidedly conventions concepts. But, as is later clarified (p.

107), “such key terms should be defined in grade-appropriate ways for younger students and fleshed out more fully in later grades. . . . Additional terminology may be helpful in particular instructional situations; avoiding terminology altogether may be appropriate in others.” By this clarification, these terms are simply vocabulary understandings and seem oddly placed in the *Conventions* heading. This confusion needs attention, although we applaud the notion that in many instances avoidance of terminology altogether is appropriate. This latter statement needs more prominence elsewhere in the document.

**Suggestion 6:** More definition is needed about the intention of the *Mix of Key Text Types* listed at the beginning of each grade-level band across narrative, drama, poetry, and informational text. Since different genres appear in different places, is the intention that the named genres are to be used exclusively or with teacher judgment? Also, there are many typographical errors in these sections, such as: “At this level, includes nursery rhymes and the subgenres of narrative poems, limericks, and free verse” (p. 23). As written, the standard could be read to mean “subgenres of narrative poems, of limericks, and of free verse” which is not your intention. Another such typo exists on p. 80, where the narrative suggestions include “mysteries, science fiction, mysteries, science fiction . . . .”

## **2. Does the document present a rigorous, yet reasonable continuum of expectations for student learning in each discipline?**

**Positive Directions:** We could see a defined continuum of expectations throughout the document that seems, in present form, to represent a logical progression across time. The specific concerns about “rigor” being too much or too little are addressed here and under Question 4.

**Concern 2-1:** “Reasonableness” was interpreted by our review team to mean both reasonable for developmental stages of students and also in terms of how reasonable it would be for teachers to manage the number of concepts. On both counts, our committee has serious concerns. Our concerns are two-fold: Are these sections merely interpretations of the actual standards, or do they represent additional expectations? In either case, we are cautious. Interpretations of the main core standards should, in our view, be left to states, districts, and teachers. Also, these interpretations should not contain additions to the actual standard or the “reasonableness” of coverage is compromised. One example of this can be found in the Kindergarten section where the Core Standards say the following:

### **Grasping specific details and key ideas**

Core Standards — Students can and do:

1. Retell key details and information drawn from the text.
2. Explain the subject of the text or the problem the characters face.
3. Answer questions about characters and events that take place in the text.

Standards — Students can and do (by key text type): Narratives, Drama, and Poetry

- a. retell the beginnings, middles, and endings of stories
- b. ask and answer questions about details of a text
- c. identify the problems that characters face in a story and the lessons learned
- d. identify the feelings of characters and the reasons for their actions
- e. differentiate between realistic and fantastical elements within a story

Figure 1

The underlined portions of the lettered standards read as actual *additions* to the Core Standards. Identifying the theme, in the form of “lesson learned,” is considerably harder than what seems appropriate for Kindergartners and seems to go beyond the actual language in Core Standard 1, 2, and 3. As a further example, Core Standard 3 states that students should “answer questions about characters and events that take place in the text,” which could be interpreted to include questions about whether events were “realistic or fantastical” (from Standard “e”), but this requires additional teaching and learning that was not evident in the actual standard. Our concern here is one of clarity and quantity of concepts to teach. If the lettered standards are interpretations, they should not include concepts that go beyond the actual standards because state and local curriculum developers will feel obligated to include these for the purpose of teaching and testing. Again, using the above Kindergarten example, a simple tally of all the discrete concepts covered in these “Core Standards” shows about six concepts to be taught. A tally of the lettered standards (with their additional interpretations) adds five more concepts that would need to be taught, including how to (1) ask questions, (2) identify the lesson learned, (3) identify the feelings of characters, (4) identify the reasons for characters’ actions, and (5) differentiate between fantasy and realistic elements. While this example shows only one section of the Kindergarten standards, in looking across the entire reading standards, this confusion over the intention of two sections represents the difference between teaching the 18 concepts actually named in the Kindergarten Core Standards or having to teach approximately 60 concepts when figuring in all the ancillary concepts enumerated in the lettered

“standards” for reading alone. Clarification, again, is warranted.

**Suggestion 1:** Further define the intentions of the “standards” that appear under the Core Standards.

**Suggestion 2:** If these are, in fact, binding standards, make every effort to eliminate additions or redundancy to keep the number of standards “fewer.”

**Concern 2-2:** In the *Foundations* section of Kindergarten and Grade 1, there are too many recommended standards, many of which are redundant. For example: if a child can “demonstrate basic knowledge of letter-sound correspondence by producing the primary or most frequent sound for each consonant” (p. 17), then the standard “demonstrate phonemic awareness by isolating and producing the initial and final phonemes (sounds) in three-phoneme /CVC/ words without consonant blends (e.g., /road/, /save/, /him/ (p. 16)” is redundant and unnecessary. Because many of the *Foundations* concepts seem to occur in isolation, an issue we raised in the last review, being able to identify the initial or final sound of a word is fully covered if you know the sounds of the letters. Likewise, in the core standards for Kindergarten, the meaning of “demonstrate understanding of the most frequently occurring prepositions (e.g., to/from, in/out, on/off, for, of, by, with)” (p. 20) is confusing. First, as written, it seems to be a vocabulary concept, but it is listed under grammar and usage. More problematic, though, is the reality that even in just defining the terms, this task is deceptively hard for any age. (Try to define the word “of” to a colleague and you realize that something which seems so basic is actual nearly impossible to define by itself; worse yet, try to come up with the over 17 uses of the word.)

**Suggestion 1:** Perhaps “demonstrate understanding by using in oral or written language, the most frequent prepositions . . .” would make more sense.

**Suggestion 2:** Remove unnecessary items and redundant items to reduce the number of concepts.

### **3. Is the language in this draft clear, concise, and precise? Will teachers be able to readily identify the standards within the document?**

**Positive Directions:** Compared to the first draft, the language in this draft is significantly more clear and concise in most places. We particularly appreciate the added language regarding revision in writing across the document, as well as more clarity regarding the use of technology. Also noteworthy are the inclusion of language about “writing over extended timeframes (time for reflection and revision) and shorter timeframes (a single sitting or day or two)” (p. 57), as well as language such as “with guidance and support

from peers and adults, strengthen writing through revision, editing, or beginning again to maintain a clear focus throughout” (p. 57). The complete overhaul of the *Foundations* section for K–3 was substantial and helps tremendously with being succinct and clear, though more work on this section seems warranted and is noted throughout the review.

**Concern 3-1:** Some language is not precise, and some standards remain unclear as written. There are also many terms used in the standards document that do not represent typical education language and that may, in fact, cause confusion.

**Suggestion 1:** Incorporate or replace areas of confusion with more precise language such as:

- i. Replace the term “vowel teams” with “vowel clusters” (p. 25 and 35).
- ii. Throughout the writing section, in all grade levels K–8, the phrase “use words to link ideas together” (p. 70) should include the word *transition*: “use *transition* words to link . . .”
- iii. The term “temporal words” is confusing and should be replaced with “transitions that signal time” (pp. 38, 48, 58, and 70).
- iv. Replace the word “trace” as used in the standard “trace the specific comparisons made by similes, metaphors, and analogies and explain how they contribute to the meaning of the text” with a more precise verb such as “identify” or “recount” (pp. 67, 93, and 94).
- v. Revise standard g. (p. 70) to read “show internal mental processes in developing and conveying the needs, motives, and emotional responses of complex characters” (p. 70).
- vi. Replace “headers” on pp. 38, 48, and 60 with “headings.” *Headers* come only at the top of pages, whereas *headings* are located throughout a text; *headings* is more likely the term intended.
- vii. The standard “combine information from two different parts of a text and identify how they are related” (p. 46) is completely unclear as written.
- viii. The standard “Use precise everyday language” (p. 50) is problematic in that it seems to suggest that there exists a common, precise everyday language shared by all. This suggestion is incorrect. Language and word choice and use change contextually with users as they “code-switch” to use language which fits a particular context in time. Perhaps just “use precise language” or “use everyday language” would be clearer.
- ix. The standard “perform short, focused research projects that demonstrate understanding of the material under investigation” should read “write short, focused . . .” The word “perform” is not precise to the intent of the task.

**Concern 3-2:** Additionally, some language seems redundant in that it simply restates the core standard or asks for the same action in more than one setting. An example that illustrates this redundancy is shown with the Core Standard below which is followed by two Lettered Standards below that:

Core standard (p. 26) says: “Identify words in a text that link ideas and events together.”

Lettered Standard “b”: “identify words in a story that link events together (e.g., first/second, then, next, before/after, later, finally)

Lettered Standard “a”: “identify words that link ideas together (e.g., also, in addition, for example, but). “

In essence all three say the same thing or could be said in one statement.

**Suggestion:** Check for, remove, reword, or combine places where redundancy may exist, particularly among the “Lettered Standards.”

**Concern 3-3:** A different aspect of precision comes, at times, in the form of being overly precise in enumerating grammar and phonics concepts.

**Suggestion:** This issue and suggestions for improvement appear in other sections.

**4. One of our stated goals for the common core state standards is that they are fewer, clearer, and higher. Do these standards meet those criteria? Please be specific in areas where we can be more concise.**

**Positive Directions:** In most cases, clearer language and higher standards are evident. Regarding fewer standards, other iterations about confusion over the intent of certain sections and language precludes us from determining this. If the “Core Standards” themselves are the only part to reflect upon, then yes, they are fewer, clearer, and higher with few exceptions. However, if the “Standards,” “Key Terms,” “Foundations,” and “Conventions” portions are intended as standards, then the stated goal of “fewer, clearer, and higher” has not been achieved.

**Concern 4-1:** Exclusion of metacognitive strategies is particularly contentious for us, as it is referenced in the introduction to the standards: “Similarly, the Standards, with their emphasis on observable outcomes, do not enumerate various metacognitive strategies that students may need to use to monitor and direct their thinking and learning” (p. 4). First, the notion that only observable outcomes are worthy of being named in the standards seems spurious. Perhaps current standardized tests are not sensitive enough to measure such outcomes, but teachers have been, in fact, measuring “in-the-head processes” for decades. Miscue analysis of a running record, for instance, offers insightful and critical information for teachers and researchers about the processes that are intact or under construction for readers. Close observation and reflection protocol tools also offer measurable and quantifiable methods of collecting information on metacognitive strategies across language arts settings. Granted, such measurements require far more than paper-pencil products from students, but that should not limit the inclusion of processes that can only be measured by observation and analysis. Additionally, the exclusion of metacognitive strategy instruction

negates a vast body of reading research, both quantitative and qualitative, which has demonstrated overwhelmingly that children benefit from direct strategy instruction. To quote the National Reading Panel, “The general finding is that when readers are given cognitive strategy instruction, they make significant gains on measures of reading comprehension over students trained with conventional instruction procedures (Pressley et al., 1989; Rosenshine & Meister, 1994; Rosenshine, Meister, & Chapman, 1996)” (2000, p. 4–40). “The empirical evidence reviewed favors the conclusion that teaching a variety of reading comprehension strategies leads to increased learning of the strategies, to specific transfer of learning, to increased retention and understanding of new passages, and, in some cases, to general improvements in comprehension” (National Reading Panel, 2000, p. 4–6). In fact, the effect of strategy instruction on increasing children’s comprehension of texts (the ultimate goal of reading instruction) is far superior to instruction which emphasizes word decoding and sound segmentation and blending, which has less effect on comprehension beyond grade 1 (National Reading Panel, 2000 p. 2–116). Removing strategy references entirely, while retaining multiple references to decoding, represents a privileging that is potentially harmful to overall reading development. It is not a question of whether one or the other should be taught—both aspects deserve attention. Omission of strategy language represents a grave concern and jeopardizes the viability of these standards to be able to achieve their intended outcome. Additionally, metacognitive strategies such as making connections, seeing relationships between items, questioning and determining importance, as well as demonstrating an awareness of one’s thinking, are all needed for success in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Furthermore, **a review of the high school standards of the ten nations/regions identified by your organizations as exemplars for international benchmarking shows that 70% of these standards make direct reference to metacognitive strategies as being important, even at the high school level** (see Table 1 below for language from Benchmark Curricula regarding metacognition).

**Suggestion:** We strongly recommend that including language supportive of strategy instruction is necessary for the developers to have achieved their expressed goals of being internationally benchmarked, producing higher standards, using available research, and preparing students for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Add specific references across the standards regarding metacognitive strategies, such as language featured in the Standards from Ontario, Canada, or Singapore, listed on your website. (Additional examples of metacognitive language can be found in Table 1 at the end of the review.)

From: The Ontario Curriculum, English, 2007. p. 50	From: Singapore: English Language Syllabus, 2001. p. 63
<i>Metacognition 4.1 explain which of a variety of strategies they found most helpful before, during, and after reading, then evaluate their strengths and weaknesses as readers to help</i>	<i>“Use reading strategies to construct meaning a) Use phonological awareness strategies: - Use known parts of a word to make sense of the whole word - Read aloud to check pronunciation and understanding b) Use meaning-based strategies:</i>

<i>identify the steps they can take to improve their skills (e.g., record their reflections about how often and how proficiently they use various strategies; set targets for improving their use of particular strategies; confer with the teacher to develop new strategies for understanding more challenging texts)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Construct meaning from visuals: pictures, diagrams, symbols, graphs</li> <li>- Monitor and confirm understanding of texts read e.g., re-read, read on</li> <li>- Use knowledge of cohesive devices: connectors to do with time, sequence, contrast, reason, choice, place, condition, cause-and-effect, purpose</li> <li>- Use contextual clues: visuals, headings, sub-headings, word formation, punctuation</li> <li>- Use prior knowledge: familiar words, word association, knowledge of the topic / similes / idioms / proverbs</li> <li>- Skim for gist</li> <li>- Scan for specific information</li> </ul>
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Figure 2

**Concern 4-2:** Another major issue regards the unfortunate omission of standards for narrative writing beyond Grade 8. As stated in the writing section for high school, “By High School, students are most often using narrative writing as a technique embedded within other genres. They use narrative writing to inform and persuade. They may, for example, provide a brief anecdote to support a point made in an argument or a scenario to illustrate an explanation. In such cases, narrative writing is a technique rather than a form itself” (p 96). To state that narrative writing is, or should be (as would be the case if narrative were omitted entirely), used only as “a technique rather than a form itself” is misguided for many reasons. First, narrative writing, like poetry, represents perhaps more rigor than other forms of writing because it requires the writer to create and weave multiple fictional and literary elements into a cohesive whole, all stemming from the imagination and invention of the writer. Without negating the importance of and relative difficulty of other forms of writing, omitting narrative writing as a form does not represent the rigor that is possible and necessary within these documents. Additionally, loss of narrative writing will undoubtedly impact the well-established relationship between reading and writing; the literary concepts such as figurative language explored by readers within these standards are solidified and expanded upon by employing figurative language in narrative writing to see the effect it can have from the opposite side. Granted, some literary elements are applicable in forms beyond just narrative, but many are unique to it, such as theme, character development, and plot. Again, a search of the benchmark standards, listed in the table below, demonstrates that 90% of these nations/regions that outperform the United States in student achievement actually do emphasize narrative writing at the high school level. (See Table 1 below for more references.) And finally, the role of fiction writers is profound: writers have used story to push the thinking of scientific and social communities, resulting in tangible action that moved human development forward. From Greek myths that talked of men making wings to fly, to Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* and its social impact, to the works of Jules Verne leading us to contemplate explorations of space, narrative writing has had tremendous power and will likely continue to lead to new thinking necessary for humanity to both thrive and survive in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Omitting or reducing the role of narrative writing to a technique does

not represent your stated goals of being more rigorous, or of being internationally benchmarked, or of trying to ensure that students are well prepared for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

**Suggestion:** Reinstate narrative writing in the same format as used in the K–8 Writing sections.

**Concern 4-3:** As noted in our December Review, the issue of determining text complexity was problematic due to the stated limitations of quantified readability formulas as well as considering aspects of texts such as sentence and text structures, layout issues, content, etc. While the current draft sheds far more light on the issue, we still have some concern. While the triangulation of quantitative, qualitative, and teacher professional judgment has decidedly more merit than simplistic readability formulas of the past, the fact that we have not yet seen the final recommendations regarding the aspect of quantitative readability (as it is still under development) remains troubling. Our fear lies in the distinct possibility of overreliance on readability formulas, with all their foibles that were previously enumerated by your team’s earlier draft, as an equal third of what goes into determining text complexity, which is likely not your intention at all, based upon conversations of December 2009.

**Suggestion:** Perhaps revise the statement, “The Core Standards’ model of text complexity—in the simplest terms, how easy or difficult a text is to read—blends qualitative and quantitative measures of inherent text difficulty with educators’ knowledge of their students. All three elements should be considered together when evaluating a text’s appropriateness for particular students” (p. 103) to read “All three elements should be considered together, with greater emphasis on qualitative and educator knowledge, when evaluating a text’s appropriateness for particular students.”

**Concern 4-4:** Knowing *about* grammar is important because it represents the language that makes it possible for us to talk *about* language—grammar names the types of words and word groups that make up sentences not only in English but in any language. And using the rules and conventions of grammar is important for effective communication. But students benefit much more from learning a few grammar keys thoroughly than from trying to remember many terms and rules (NCTE Guideline: *Some Questions and Answers about Grammar*, 2002). Including the array of grammatical terms currently present in the standards is problematic on several fronts, most notably its interference with the goal of “fewer.” Additionally, the danger with having so many grammar skills enumerated is that teachers or districts become overly focused on grammar instruction, a practice that research has widely shown to be unhelpful to developing quality writers. Several comprehensive reviews of research on the impact of teaching grammar on writing have all come to similar conclusions. “The teaching of formal grammar has a negligible or, because it usually displaces some instruction and practice in actual composition, even a harmful effect on the improvement of writing” (Braddock, Lloyd-Jones, & Schoer, 1963, pp. 37–38). Subsequent reviews

(Hillocks, 1986; Hillocks & Smith, 2003; Smith, Cheville & Hillocks, 2006) all showed similar findings. “School boards, administrators, and teachers who impose the systematic study of traditional grammar on their students over lengthy periods of time in the name of teaching writing do them a gross disservice which should not be tolerated by anyone concerned with the effective teaching of writing” (Hillocks, 1986, p. 248). Referring to a myriad of grammar rules in the standards documents without properly situating the purpose of including such rules may leave states, districts, teachers, students, and parents with a false impression as to the role of grammar instruction.

**Suggestion 1:** Include some statement about the role of grammar, such as the one found in the British Columbia Standards, listed as one of the sources for international benchmarking on your website: “Grammar instruction in the studies reviewed in this report involved the explicit and systematic teaching of the parts of speech and structure of sentence; i.e., a traditional teaching of grammar as an independent activity. The meta-analysis found a negative effect for this type of traditional grammar instruction for students across the full range of ability, indicating that traditional grammar instruction is unlikely to improve the quality of students’ writing. However, other instructional methods, such as sentence combining, provide an effective alternative to traditional grammar instruction, as this approach improves students’ writing quality while at the same time enhancing syntactic skills” (*English Language Arts Integrated Resource Package, Prescribed Learning Outcomes, 2007 Grades 11–12*, British Columbia, p. 29).

**Suggestion 2:** As mentioned earlier, attempts to weed out redundancy would be most helpful in all the standards.

**Concern 4-5:** Also troubling is the reality that many of the listed grammar skills or terms are developmentally beyond the range of students at particular grade levels. Grade 3 students would do well to recognize a pronoun, let alone know the terms “pronoun-antecedent agreement” or “comma splice.” Likewise, middle school students would struggle with the concept of “avoiding inappropriate shifts in verb voice and mood.”

**Suggestion:** Remove references to the following grammar terms/concepts for each grade level:

- i. K: singular and plural noun
- ii. G1: pronoun
- iii. G2: possessive
- iv. G3: subject-verb agreement, pronoun-antecedent agreement, comma splice
- v. G4–5: progressive and perfect tense
- vi. G6–8: nonrestrictive/parenthetical element; indicative, imperative, interrogative, conditional, and subjunctive mood

Table 1. Regarding Narrative Writing and Metacognition as Included in International Standards Used for Benchmarking Purposes

Country Document	Writing of Narrative	Reference example	Use of strategies/metacognition	Reference example
<b>Alberta, Canada:</b> <i>English Language Arts Curriculum Outcomes, 2003.</i>	√	“develop content appropriate to audience and situation [for example, use descriptive details to capture events in a narrative, and craft rich visual images to develop a video that will engage an audience” (p. 48)  “use words and expressions appropriately [for example, use words with straightforward denotations to strengthen clarity in informative and persuasive texts, and use words with connotative meanings to evoke images in poetry and narrative texts” (p. 52)	√	“select appropriate strategies to extend awareness and understanding of new perspectives, monitor their effectiveness, and modify them as needed [for example, record new understandings in a learning log; develop new group perspectives using a fish bowl organization]” (p. 17)  “reflect on and describe strategies used to engage prior knowledge as a means of assisting comprehension of new texts; and select, monitor and modify strategies as needed” (p. 24)
<b>British Columbia, Canada:</b> <i>English Language Arts Integrated Resource Package, Prescribed Learning Outcomes, 2007.</i>	√	“Writing in different forms for the subject area (e.g., lab reports, persuasive essays, procedures, narratives, recounts)” (p. 40)	√	“during reading and viewing, select, adapt, and apply a range of <b>strategies</b> to construct, monitor, and confirm meaning, including – comparing and refining predictions” (p. 59)
<b>England:</b> <i>English Programme of Study for Key stage 4, 2007.</i>	√	“ <b>Linguistic and literary forms:</b> This could include using particular forms for writing poetry, using pastiche and parody to demonstrate understanding of stylistic features, using satire and caricature, experimenting with different narrative voices, and understanding and using key features of literary genres.” (p. 9)	no	
<b>Finland:</b> <i>National Core Curriculum for Upper Secondary Schools for Mother Tongue and Literature, Finnish as the mother tongue, 2003.</i>	√	“learn to edit and analyse relatively lengthy narrative texts” (p. 38)	√	“Students will practise various strategies for reading comprehension.” (p. 81)
<b>Hong Kong:</b> <i>English Language Curriculum and Assessment Guide, 2007.</i>	√	“express experiences, views, observations and imaginative ideas through descriptive and narrative texts, stories, playlets, simple poems, etc. with attempts to make good use of the salient features of these text-types” (p. 154)	no	
<b>Ireland:</b> <i>Leaving Certificate/English Syllabus for Higher Level and Ordinary Level.</i>	√	“Students should be able to compose in a range of contexts: * Anecdote * Parable, Fable * Short Story * Autobiographical sketch * Scripts * Dialogues” (p. 13)	no	
<b>New South Wales:</b> <i>English Stage 6 Syllabus, 1999.</i>	√	“Students must complete a short story or a selection of stories within the 6,000 – 8,000 word limit. The word limit does not include the Reflection Statement.” (p. 132)	√	“...reading strategies for particular purposes, for example, skimming, scanning, and slower, close reading, selecting key information and predicting.” (p. 69)  “...assessing the effectiveness of their various learning strategies” (p. 56)

<b>Ontario, Canada:</b> <i>The Ontario Curriculum, English, 2007.</i>	√	“build vocabulary for writing by confirming word meaning(s) and reviewing and refining word choice, using a variety of resources and strategies, as appropriate for the purpose (e.g., <i>confirm or adjust meaning by relating words to their context</i> ;9 <i>consult thesauruses to find more evocative words for their narratives and poems</i> ; <i>maintain their own lists of specialized business and technical vocabulary associated with careers of their choice</i> ” (p. 122)	√	“ <b>Metacognition</b> 4.1 explain which of a variety of strategies they found most helpful before, during, and after reading, then evaluate their strengths and weaknesses as readers to help identify the steps they can take to improve their skills (e.g., <i>record their reflections about how often and how proficiently they use various strategies</i> ; <i>set targets for improving their use of particular strategies</i> ; <i>confer with the teacher to develop new strategies for understanding more challenging texts</i> )”(p. 50)
<b>Singapore:</b> <i>English Language Syllabus 2001.</i>	√	“Expositions e.g., reviews of books / films # Narratives e.g. stories # Personal recounts e.g. oral anecdotes, journal entries, autobiographies” (p. 58)	√	“ <b>Use reading strategies to construct meaning</b> a) Use phonological awareness strategies: - Use known parts of a word to make sense of the whole word - Read aloud to check pronunciation and understanding b) Use meaning-based strategies: - Construct meaning from visuals: pictures, diagrams, symbols, graphs - Monitor and confirm understanding of texts read e.g., re-read, read on - Use knowledge of cohesive devices: connectors to do with time, sequence, contrast, reason, choice, place, condition, cause-and-effect, purpose - Use contextual clues: visuals, headings, sub-headings, word formation, punctuation - Use prior knowledge: familiar words, word association, knowledge of the topic / similes / idioms / proverbs - Skim for gist - Scan for specific information” (p. 63)
<b>Victoria, Australia:</b> <i>Victorian Certificate of Education Study Design: English/English as a Second Language, 2006.</i>	no		√	“discuss different ways of interpreting texts as well as the strategies used by readers to make meanings” (p. 12)

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