

A Report of the National Council of Teachers of English Review Team on the November/December 2009 Draft of the Standards for English Language Arts: Grades K-8

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Introduction

As members of the NCTE Review Team of the Common Core State Standards K–12 Benchmarks, we are pleased to provide this critique. We approached this task guided not only by NCTE policy and practices but also by the growing understanding of what it means to educate students for productive life in the early 21st century.

We first acknowledge that turning to standards as a solution to concerns about education is not new. Gerald Bracey (2009) reported recently on the rather steady stream of calls for improved standards across the last century, ranging from 1892, when James Mayer Rice called for higher standards in a series of articles in *The Forum*, to *Life* magazine’s five-part series called “Crisis in Education” in 1958, to the College Board’s 1977 report on the decline of SAT scores which was followed five years later by *A Nation at Risk*. Perhaps this trend of continually searching for new standards is merely a natural response to, or a by-product of, our educational system’s role of being charged with simultaneously reminding students of what has come before them while also preparing them for what awaits them in the future.

In most other points in history, however, the gap between what came before and what was to come was narrow—the occupations and experiences of one’s parents were markedly similar to those that could be expected in the next generation. This is not the reality of today. In his 2001 essay “The Law of Accelerating Returns,” Raymond Kurzweil states, “An analysis of the history of technology shows that technological change is exponential, contrary to the common-sense ‘intuitive linear’ view. So we won’t experience 100 years of progress in the 21st century—it will be more like 20,000 years of progress (at today’s rate).” Put another way, “We are currently preparing students for jobs that don’t yet exist . . . using technologies that haven’t yet been invented . . . in order to solve problems we don’t even know are problems yet” (Fisch, 2006).

The literacy landscape of today (and most certainly of tomorrow), has greater linguistic and cultural diversity than at any point in our history. The technologies for engaging in literacy offer more possibilities and require highly developed skills of both creating and navigating complex, multimedia texts. Problem-solving, thinking critically, being adept at collaboration and able to communicate orally, in writing, and through other media types will be essential. Remaining flexible enough to deal with innovation and change, and being willing to be always in “the process of becoming” will be imperative. The 2006 report *Are They Really Ready to Work?* explained that the top-rated skills employers want in workers today for all levels of jobs—those requiring advanced college degrees and those requiring only high school diplomas—included professionalism, collaborating, oral communication abilities, and critical thinking. These skills were rated as more valuable than the basic skills of reading and writing.

While establishing shared expectations for what constitutes scholastic achievement is a goal that has remained consistent across prior standards initiatives, the avowed goal of *this* effort is to produce the broadest possible consensus around “fewer, clearer, higher” standards, a Common Core of Standards. The indisputable logic of this approach is that it leaves room for local innovation in selecting and implementing approaches to advance student learning—something that highly detailed, prescriptive standards do not invite.

In light of this, NCTE recognizes that instructional practices and assessments must attend to the literacy demands of this time and age. Subsequently, any standards that might guide these practices and assessments must do the same. Though working to provide “fewer, higher, and clearer standards” so that all students are prepared for the 21st century, this current draft of K–8 standards is sometimes focused too much on traditions of the past and may fall short of adequately preparing students for success in the future. What follows is a critique that we hope provides direction as the work continues on the creation of the K–8 common core standards.

Specific Critique

Below is our response to the draft language of the November/December 2009 K–8 English/language arts common core standards. Because many portions of the grade-level standards, including all of the 9–12 standards, were not released to us in their entirety, we found ourselves making many comments on what was not included. We are operating from positive presuppositions and hope that what we propose was fully intended to be represented in the document but could not be provided by the review time. Because of incomplete documents, changes in the documents that happened while we were reviewing, and an abbreviated turn-around time to review nine grade levels, this response itself has many limitations, but we hope that it will serve its intended purpose nonetheless.

Positive Contributions in the Draft Document

In our opinion, the skills listed in each section of the document do represent, for the most part, the rigor and content necessary for K–8 teachers to adequately prepare students for high school, and we applaud the notion that the basis of success in college and beyond begins in elementary and middle school. We contend that, although this list does not encompass all the literacy skills that students may need to

acquire, they are consistent with the NCTE/IRA Standards for the English Language Arts and most NCTE positions.

- We appreciate the discipline required to keep this list short, for it is intended to serve as a basis for states to add to as they see fit. Having a manageable number of skills of higher importance allows teachers and schools to create rich experiences to develop fully the skills enumerated, rather than having a lengthy litany of literacy topics where teachers and students cannot manage such demands and the system is diminished to coverage and exposure rather than depth and development.
- We are generally pleased that the standards support the use of a variety of genres, text types, and complexity levels, although we are concerned that issues regarding the representation and support of linguistic and cultural diversity seem to be missing entirely.
- We appreciate references to the limitations of current readability formulas for judging text complexity. While providing a list of texts that exemplify appropriate complexity *might* be helpful, we have serious concerns about what criteria would be used. The document says that you are “. . . working to evaluate current readability measures and determine what more needs to be done to improve upon them.” If such lists are to be added, we recommend that a stronger statement be included with each list clarifying that the texts listed are NOT a mandatory reading list. Many states or districts may see this as the “core” list, something you did not intend to provide, and thus a statement to that effect would be warranted.
- We applaud, again, that the document refrains from defining writing narrowly in terms of rules and conventions, which can too easily become the sole focus of writing instruction. These standards actively require students to produce writing with qualities beyond the application of conventions.
- We appreciate the revisions regarding the inclusion of writing narrative as a means of self-expression and creativity.
- We are gratified that writing receives ample and much deserved attention across K–8. We further support the notion that writing is an essential 21st century skill but lament the exclusion of references to writing as a process, which we will consider later in the review.
- We appreciate language within the standards which supports writing strategies, and were particularly pleased with language in the 6–8 Writing section that invites synthesis of multiple sources for developing writing.

Concerns & Omissions

In this section, we name and address omitted concepts that need consideration for this document to achieve the intended purpose of being a guide for K–8 classrooms to develop students who are well prepared for college and careers.

Before addressing the suggested revisions and flagging omissions, the review group also wanted to make a clear statement about the format of the K–8 Common Core Standards. We noted that you must be aware that the document, as it stands, is very difficult to navigate, as indicated by the fact that you had a two-page letter explaining “how to read” the standards document. Generally speaking, readers should be able to come to that conclusion on their own, and though we appreciate your attempt to scaffold our experiences with the documents, we were still left with many unanswered questions about the intentions of portions of the document that went beyond the standards. In each section, Reading, Writing, Speaking, and Listening, there were a host of secondary “interpretations” of the core standards. It is within these documents that we had the greatest concern and confusion. Specifically, we offer these recommendations regarding these materials:

- a. We urge the removal of the Foundations of Literacy sections of the K–3 standards to a separate document. The standards, working to be “fewer, higher, and clearer,” are intended to provide states with guidelines of what students should be able to do by particular benchmarks, not to provide the instructional pedagogy. Instructional decisions are best left to teachers. We recommend this for several reasons. This list of skills, again found only in the Foundations section, is extremely reductionist in its view of reading development, and seems antithetical to the actual core standards. Inclusion of such a document invites and will result in great confusion about which set to follow, for this section also reads like a set of standards. More worrisome is that this portion supports only one theory of reading development. In the 109 named skills and sub-skills, the word *comprehension* appears only three times. Overwhelmingly the Foundations skills name item knowledge, including references to such oddities as “*short y*” and “*nuclear short vowels*” and “*alphabetized compendia*,” with copious references to accuracy and fluency of decoding words, “*whether in isolation or in text.*” Statements such as “*Demonstrate fluency and accuracy with instructional level text by third reading*” again exemplify our concerns that meaning is not the goal or basis of reading, a position we cannot support. Perhaps the goal of bringing greater clarity was the impetus behind this section, but deconstructing the reading process into a litany of finite sub-skills undercuts the goal of producing “fewer standards.” Finally, statements such as “*by year end, read aloud unpracticed text designed for the first half of second grade with fluency and comprehension*” as an “end of year” standard seem alarmingly low, especially when the expressed goal is for “higher” standards.
- b. Remove or house in a different document the sections that show how the Core Skills could be applied to Text Types. These sections are troubling because what they describe may be read as if they were a curriculum, not mere suggestions. We presume this was not your intention here, but caution is warranted. Additionally, these sections contain many content errors, too numerous to mention individually, such as: “*Students pay attention to the patterns and repetitions in letters or word sounds and discuss how they help the reader to picture, feel, and imagine*” (p. 7 of Dec 1, 2009 Draft). The patterns and repetitions in *letters* or *word sounds* do not help a reader to feel or imagine anything. It is the repetition of key words, phrases, and sentence patterns, often important to poetry, and the meaning of these words that help a reader feel or imagine. The repetition of sounds merely creates a lyrical quality or rhythm that adds to the enjoyment. If it were true that a simple repetition in letters or word sounds did what is expressed in this interpretation, any child would surely enjoy the following poem: oy, oy oy, ock, ock, ock, which, of course, would be unlikely to say the least. These sections, or additions, seem to be an interpretation of how the standards

might be applied in real settings. Actual application and interpretation of implementation should be left to the discretion of states, districts, schools, and teachers. Inclusion of these sections detracts from the message that the Core Standards are not a curriculum.

- c. Likewise, we suggest omitting or moving the location of the Appendix: Language Table, which appears at the end of each grade band section. This table is troubling for many of the same reasons listed already: an additional set of skills not mentioned specifically in the Core Standards seems to be required, dependent upon how one views this section of the document. With phrases such as *“Students must master the following terms: paragraph, adjective, adverb, conjunction, preposition, interjection,”* it is hard to interpret that this section is a non-binding appendix. If, indeed, these things are to be required, they should be named in the actual standards, not as a bullet that says, *“See the Language Table for 4–5 for more details,”* as is stated on page 26 of the Dec 1, 2009, version.

Omissions

In the 2006 report *Are They Really Ready To Work? Employers’ Perspectives on the Basic Knowledge and Applied Skills of New Entrants to the 21st Century U.S. Workforce*, ten skills were named by employer respondents as being very important to success in the 21st Century workforce: professionalism/work ethic, teamwork/collaboration, oral communications, ethics/social responsibility, reading comprehension, English language (spoken), critical thinking/problem-solving, information technology application, written communication, and dealing with diversity. Of these ten skills, 50 percent are addressed only perfunctorily or not at all in the common core standards as they are currently written. Not coincidentally, these omissions comprise many of the review team’s criticisms and are dealt with first, followed by more content-specific considerations.

- **Collaboration:** While there is mention of collaboration in constructing meaning in reading (which we support), we encourage additional emphasis in this area. Incorporating collaboration into the standards is an international benchmark, in that all of the countries that routinely out-perform the United States have collaborative practices named within their content standards. As noted in our previous response to the College Readiness Standards, “communicative competencies, especially in writing and reading, are stated as if they occur in solitary situations . . . and without social interaction as a goal. 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.”
- **Oral Communication:** Though addressed, this skill is weakened by the addition of the Core Skills Applied to Various Communications portion of the documents. In this section, appears the surprising suggestion of having students *“recite or perform readings, varying intonation and phrasing to emphasize key ideas and communicate meaning”* (p. 53 of the November 13, 2009, version). While it is true that learners benefit from hearing the language structures and word choices of published authors, we must consider that this is different than the intention of the actual standards, which, as stated, indicate that children are to communicate effectively using such important tools as organization of ideas, emphasis on important facts and details, use of multimedia, and a change in register appropriate to the situation. The sole illustration of students engaging in performance and recitation of poetry or other texts is incongruent to the development of the ability to communicate.

- **Dealing with Diversity & Ethics/Social Responsibility:** With these areas, named above as critical to success in the workforce, the standards and accompanying documents have the greatest room for improvement. Never mentioned is the use of multicultural literature, of capitalizing on student background knowledge, including cultural and linguistic knowledge, and no statement or standards mention appreciation of languages and cultures other than English or the United States. By not outwardly exploring and valuing cultural and linguistic diversity, the common core standards risk adding to the marginalization of underrepresented populations. Direct reference to the use of multicultural material in reading and listening should be added, as well as inclusion within the core text exemplars of texts from multiple perspectives.
- **Information/Technology Application:** Humans use the tools of their society, like language, to communicate (Vygotsky, L., 1978; Lave & Wenger, 1991). Electronic technology has emerged as one of those tools. The critical thinking required to navigate and gain information from non-print media is not fully addressed in this document as it now stands. Specific references to reading electronic texts, the Internet, and use of electronic and online tools are sadly neglected throughout the reading portion, although more references are embedded in the Core Skills Applied to Core Text Types. Additionally, there is no mention of being able to manage, analyze, and synthesize multiple streams of simultaneous information, all of which we see as Core Skills in some capacity.
- **Choice and Purpose:** There was little mention of the role of student choice in regard to reading materials, nor of the multiplicity of purposes that readers may have for reading, including for pure aesthetic purpose. As is noted in numerous research findings, student choice is critical in increasing engagement and motivation. Whether it be minimal task choice or choice about reading material, the evidence is clear: students have increased interest in the activity, increased likelihood of engaging in more reading, and increased effort and commitment to reading. (Cordova & Lepper, 1996; Iyengar & Lepper, 1999; Worthy & McKool, 1996; Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000).
- **Role of Prior Knowledge in Reading:** The importance of activating background knowledge and capitalizing on student diversity, whether cultural, linguistic, or experiential, is critical. Activating prior knowledge has been proven by extensive research to increase comprehension (Narvaez, 2002, Trabasso & Bouchard, 2002, Au, 1980, Hansen & Pearson, 1983, Neuman, 1988, Palinscar & Brown, 1984, Tharp, 1982, Wood, Winnie & Pressley, 1988, Block & Pressley, 2002).
- **Clear Inclusion of Comprehension Strategies:** Block and Pressley (2002) state that comprehension involves more than 30 cognitive and metacognitive processes, including clarifying meaning, summarizing, inferring, and predicting. Inclusion of many such strategies are evident throughout the document to the trained eye, but we recommend a more explicit approach, as was done in the proposed language for K–3 and 4–5 standard: *“Draw inferences that the text invites or requires and explain how those inferences stem from information explicitly stated.”* In some places, strategies are required but are clothed in low-level language, as in the instance of this K–3 standard: *“Explore the different ways various kinds of texts present information and stories.”* This standard requires that a reader engage in making connections to compare and contrast structures and then engage in analysis and perhaps synthesis or evaluation. Naming the strategy emphasizes the fact that readers need to engage

in strategic thinking before, during, and after reading.

- **Writing as a Process:** As drafted, the standards essentially ignore the fact that writing occurs as a process. Effective writers go through stages in order to complete a piece of writing, moving fluidly through them, in an order that matches the purpose of the writing and needs of the writer. To this end, we reiterate the recommendations of our previous review team: “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.” We have embedded specific references in many standards in the following section for your consideration.
- **Choice, Purpose:** As noted in the previous review of the Core College Readiness Standards, there are problems with regard to the concept of purpose in both writing and reading. The standards fail to mention the varied purposes that writers have beyond school curriculum: to communicate informally (notes, letters, email, texts), to maintain relationships (notes, letters, email, texts), to organize thoughts or capture important ideas for consideration (lists and notes), or to capture and reflect on personal memories (diaries and memoir). Many of these purposes have, at their core, the concept of self-expression and personal growth. We recommend including strong references to the importance of personal purposes for writing.
- **Multimedia Composition:** Though many students today compose and develop multimedia texts for their own purposes, references to composing electronic or multimedia texts and the use of technology in general are not present in the standards. Beyond a reference to technology as a tool for revision and editing as needed, using technology to compose is not mentioned or elaborated upon. Again, we offer as a possible source of information the NCTE 21st Century Curriculum and Assessment Framework for guidance.

Suggested Revisions of Specific Standards

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| Section: | Standards for Reading: Core Skills K–3, p. 5 |
| Current Language: | Standard 3. Support statements about what the reading passage says by finding and citing specific language in the text, both in conversations with other readers and in writing. |
| Suggested Language: | <i>Support statements about what the reading passage means by finding and citing specific language in the text, both in conversations with other readers and in writing.</i> |
| Rationale: | In order to foster higher-level thinking, discussions about reading should not be limited to what the text “says” but should invite interpretation, thinking, and discourse by focusing on what the text “means.” |

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| Section: | Standards for Reading: Core Skills K–5 |
| Current Language: | Standard 4. Explain or rephrase the meanings of words and phrases as they are used within the passage. |
| Suggested Language: | <i>Use context and word part clues to explain or rephrase the meanings of words and phrases as they are used within the passage.</i> |
| Rationale: | “Explain or rephrase the meaning of words” does not imply an active stance of |

reading per se and could be an after-reading activity: defining a list of words at the end of a selection, for example. Using “context and word part clues” suggests that it is happening as the reader is engaged with the text rather than afterward. Since using other resources to find the meanings of words is covered in another standard, this distinction seems warranted.

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| Section: | Standards for Reading: Core Skills K–3, p. 5 |
| Current Language: | Standard 6. Articulate the overarching lessons or messages. |
| Suggested Language: | <i>Articulate the overarching lessons or messages of written, electronic or multimedia texts.</i> |
| Rationale: | To encourage 21 st century literacy skills, specifying texts as print, electronic, or multimedia, helps to broaden the concept of what we are reading. We encourage this substitution across all grade bands of the document, whenever text is mentioned. |
| Section: | Standards for Reading: Core Skills K–3, p. 5 |
| Current Language: | Standard 9. Identify words and phrases that suggest feelings or appeal to the senses and discuss how they help the reader to picture, feel, imagine, or understand what the author is trying to convey. |
| Suggested Language: | <i>Identify words and phrases that create a visual or sensory experience, and discuss how they help the reader imagine or feel what the author is trying to convey.</i> |
| Rationale: | Using language from the 4–5 standards makes this standard clearer. |
| Section: | Standards for Reading: Core Skills K–3, p. 5 |
| Current Language: | Standard 10. Explore the different ways various kinds of texts present information and stories. |
| Suggested Language: | <i>Analyze the characteristics and features of various genres and how authors present information and stories in different ways.</i> |
| Rationale: | Texts don’t present information and stories, authors do. Again, the word <i>explore</i> is vague and can imply that little outcome is expected. |
| Section: | Standards for Reading: Core Skills K–3, p. 5 |
| Current Language: | Standard 11. Explore graphs, maps, and other visual elements, and explain how this information clarifies and contributes to the text. |
| Suggested Language: | <i>Identify and discuss information found in graphs, maps, and other visual elements, and explain how this information clarifies and contributes to the text.</i> |
| Rationale: | The verb <i>explore</i> is not specific enough. |
| Section: | Standards for Reading: Core Skills K–3, p. 5 |
| Current Language: | Standard 12. Use text features, such as the table of contents, chapter headings, and page numbers, to navigate the text. |
| Suggested Language: | <i>Use text features, such as the table of contents, titles, headings, visual elements, and page numbers, to navigate the text and to locate information.</i> |
| Rationale: | <i>Headings</i> covers a broader range than just chapter headings and applies as well to shorter articles, and these other text features are also helpful for locating information. |

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| Section: | Standards for Reading: Core Skills K–3, p. 5 |
| Current Language: | Standard 13. Notice words, names, and terms that are unfamiliar and take steps to find out what they mean. |
| Suggested Language: | <i>Self-monitor by noticing when words, names, and terms are unfamiliar and take steps to find out what they mean.</i> |
| Rationale: | Naming the strategic thinking involved with this concept adds clarity. |
| Section: | Standards for Reading: Core Skills K–3, p. 5 |
| Current Language: | Standard 15. Compare what is presented in a text with relevant prior knowledge and beliefs, making explicit what is new or surprising. |
| Suggested Language: | <i>Compare what is presented in a text with relevant prior knowledge and beliefs, making explicit what information is known, new, or surprising.</i> |
| Rationale: | While a worthy endeavor, asking students to identify what is new or surprising will, based on experience, always result in some students claiming that nothing is new or surprising, which may be the case in reading about a very familiar topic. Identifying what matches the reader’s schema and what is already known helps to discourage such responses. |
| Section: | Standards for Reading: Core Skills K–3, p. 5 |
| Current Language: | NA |
| Suggested Language: | <i>Use a variety of comprehension strategies, such as activating prior knowledge, self-monitoring, self-correcting, inferring, questioning, clarifying, making connections, summarizing, comparing and contrasting, predicting, and analyzing to enhance comprehension before, during, and after reading.</i> |
| Rationale: | There is currently no language that explicitly calls for use of a range of strategies for comprehension and likewise no language that suggests that many of these strategies are used <i>across</i> the reading process and not simply <i>after</i> reading. |
| Section: | Standards for Reading: Core Skills K–3, p. 5 |
| Current Language: | ADD Fluency standard |
| Suggested Language: | |
| Rationale: | Rapid recognition of words and phrases in text is not the real goal of reading. The current emphasis on fluency as a measure of accuracy and speed is often counter to the higher purpose of making meaning. Comprehension is often compromised with an overemphasis on speed/accuracy. Fluency teaching, practice, and assessment should include accuracy, rate, prosody, and a measure of comprehension. |
| Section: | Standards for Reading: Core Skills K–3, p.5 |
| Current Language: | ADD Quantity of reading standard |
| Suggested Language: | |
| Rationale: | Emphasizing mere quantity of reading is limiting in scope and often confounds the |

higher challenge of having students read a wide range of high-quality print, electronic, and multimedia texts, across many genres. Please consider some language that goes beyond a numerical tally of texts read.

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| Section: Current Language: Suggested Language: | Standards for Writing: Core Skills K-3, p. 9 Standard 2. Develop a focus with purposefully chosen observations. <i>Write with a clear focus.</i> In reviewing the writing standards generally, the review team noticed that the verb <i>write</i> does not appear in any grade band standards. Without this purposeful word, many standards can be interpreted as activities that do not require actual composition. For instance, in this standard, as written, a student could be asked to simply develop (or create) a focus and list the purposeful observations, which would negate the intention of the standard. By occasionally using the word <i>write</i> within select standards, this confusion is avoided. Additionally, dependent upon the purpose and audience, observations are not always required to develop something. To develop an argument, details and examples are more powerful than mere observations. And because development is addressed in a separate section (Standard 6), dropping this reference would seem appropriate. |
| Section: Current Language: Suggested Language: | Standards for Writing: Core Skills K-3, p. 9 Standard 3. Create a simple organizational structure. <i>Create and use a simple organizational structure for writing.</i> As currently written, this standard leaves open the interpretation that a student could simply have to create an organizational structure but not necessarily use it for its intended purpose. |
| Section: Current Language: Suggested Language: | Standards for Writing: Core Skills K-3, p. 9 Standard 6. Provide reasons and descriptive details. <i>Provide descriptive details, reasons, or examples to support a focus.</i> This expands the standard to be able to be applied across multiple genres. And, as currently written, the standard implies that reasons or details about anything, without regard to the focus, could be acceptable in writing, which negates the point of the standard. |
| Section: Current Language: Suggested Language: | Standards for Writing: Core Skills K-3, p. 9 Standard 7. Exclude extraneous information. <i>Revise to exclude extraneous information.</i> Writers generally do not exclude extraneous information as they write, but rather as a part of revision. Again, naming revision honors the writing process. |

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| Section: | Standards for Writing: Core Skills K–3, p. 9 Standard 9. Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard written English, including grammar, usage, and mechanics, paying particular attention to those conventions that help students add details to show close observation. |
| Current Language: | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete simple sentences • Common and proper and singular and plural nouns • Capitalization of proper nouns • End marks • Precise everyday language • <i>See the Language Table K–3 for more details.</i> |
| Suggested Language: | <p><i>Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard written English, including grammar, usage, and mechanics, paying particular attention in writing or editing to correct application of:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Complete simple sentences</i> • <i>Common, proper, singular, and plural nouns</i> • <i>Capitalization of proper nouns</i> • <i>End marks</i> |
| Rationale: | <p>Inclusion of the word <i>editing</i> honors the process of writing and reflects the reality that writers, especially young writers, often attend to conventions <i>after</i> rather than <i>during</i> writing. The reference to conventions “that help students add details to show close observation” is unclear, especially in light of the bullets. Using complete simple sentences is unrelated entirely to adding details. Omitting the reference to “precise everyday language” avoids confusion in that there is no such thing as “precise everyday language” across diverse populations or perhaps even across homogeneous populations. Standard 8 already covers word choice and using precise language. Omitting the reference to the Language Table is advisable because this table offers opportunities for confusion in that, in other sections, it names concepts not specified in the standards themselves.</p> |

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| Section: | Standards for Writing: Core Skills K–3, p. 9 |
| Current Language: | Standard 10. Gather from a text, experience, or lab the information needed to communicate an opinion or provide an explanation. |
| Suggested Language: | <i>Gather information from texts, experiences, or electronic resources to write an opinion or provide an explanation.</i> |
| Rationale: | Reference to a lab is included in experiences. “Gathering from electronic resources” should be included as it moves students to use often the most current resource available. And replacing <i>communicate</i> (which can be interpreted as orally) with <i>writing</i> avoids ambiguity. |

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| Section: | Standards for Writing: Core Skills K–3, p. 9 |
| Current Language: | Standard 11. Use technology as a tool to produce, edit, and distribute writing. |
| Suggested Language: | Use technology as a tool to produce, revise, edit, and publish writing. |
| Rationale: | Incorporating the use of technology should be included, but it is also highly useful in revising. Distributing writing could mean emailing a thought, which is covered by the |

term *publish*, meaning to make public, not just to distribute. Inclusion of both *revise* and *publish* also honors the writing process.

Section: Standards for Reading: Core Skills 4–5, p. 22
Current Language: Standard 4. Explain or rephrase the meanings of words and phrases as they are used within the passage.
Suggested Language: *Use context and word part clues to explain or rephrase the meanings of words and phrases as they are used within the passage.*
Rationale: “Explain or rephrase the meaning of words” does not imply an active stance of reading per se and could be an after-reading activity: defining a list of words at the end of a selection, for example. Using “context and word part clues” suggests that it is happening as the reader is engaged with the text rather than afterward. Since using other resources to find the meanings of words is covered in another standard, this distinction seems warranted.

Section: Standards for Reading: Core Skills 4–5, p. 22
Current Language: Standard 6. Articulate the overarching theme, thesis, or purpose of a reading passage and how they are supported by various elements of the text.
Suggested Language: *Analyze text to determine the overarching themes or theses as supported by key points and details.*
Rationale: Again, naming the strategy directly used is preferred.

Section: Standards for Reading: Core Skills 4–5, p. 22
Current Language: NA
Suggested Language: *Use a variety of comprehension strategies, such as activating prior knowledge, self-monitoring, self-correcting, inferring, questioning, clarifying, making connections, summarizing, comparing and contrasting, predicting, and analyzing to enhance comprehension before, during, and after reading.*
Rationale: There is currently no language that explicitly calls for use of a range of strategies for comprehension and likewise no language that suggests that many of these strategies are used *across* the reading process and not simply *after* reading.

Section: Standards for Reading: Core Skills 4–5, p. 22
Current Language: Standard 7. Explain when, where, how, and why a specific event unfolds relative to each other.
Suggested Language: *Explain when, where, and how a critical event unfolds and analyze its relationship to other events in the text.*
Rationale: First, the standard is unclear in that “why a specific event unfolds relative to each other” fails to reference what the “each other” might entail. Second, in replacing “specific event” with “critical event,” the emphasis is placed on more substantive consideration—simply naming where, when, and how a character did something specific is not a particularly high-level task unless the specific action is significant to the text. Finally, the complexity is enhanced by naming the process desired, which is analysis of relationships between two or more events.

Section: Standards for Reading: Core Skills 4–5, p. 22

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| Current Language: | Standard 10. Analyze how texts of various kinds organize and present information and stories in different ways. |
| Suggested Language: | <i>Analyze the characteristics and features of various genres and how authors present information and stories in different ways.</i> |
| Rationale: | Texts don't present information and stories, authors do. Again, the word <i>explore</i> is vague and can imply that little outcome is expected. |
| Section: | Standards for Reading: Core Skills 4–5, p. 22 |
| Current Language: | Standard 11. Outline the information or evidence used to support an explanation or an argument, including the logical connections between key points. |
| Suggested Language: | <i>Organize and explain the information or evidence used to support an explanation or an argument, including the logical connections between key points.</i> |
| Rationale: | Using the verb <i>outline</i> is too narrow and suggests there is only one way to show such evidence, which is limiting. |
| Section: | Standards for Reading: Core Skills 4–5, p. 22 |
| Current Language: | Standard 12. Detect distinctions about the strengths and limitations of resources, including print and online sources. |
| Suggested Language: | <i>Make judgments about the strengths and limitations of resources, including print and online sources.</i> |
| Rationale: | "Detect distinctions" is too vague. |
| Section: | Standards for Reading: Core Skills 4–5, p. 22 |
| Current Language: | Standard 13. Explain information presented graphically in diagrams, maps and charts, and other visual elements and illustrations. |
| Suggested Language: | <i>Draw conclusions from information presented in graphs, diagrams, maps and charts, and other visual elements and illustrations, and explain how this information clarifies and contributes to the text.</i> |
| Rationale: | "Explain" simply means that the reader has to identify the information. In order to foster higher-level skills, readers at these levels should also be drawing conclusions from this information. |
| Section: | Standards for Reading: Core Skills 4–5, p. 22 |
| Current Language: | Standard 14. Use text features, such as the table of contents, index, headers, page numbers, and key terms, to gain an overview of the information contained within the text. |
| Suggested Language: | <i>Use text features, such as the table of contents, index, headings, layout elements, page numbers, and key terms, to gain an overview of the information contained in a text, to navigate the text, and to locate information within texts.</i> |
| Rationale: | "Headings" and "headers" are two different text features. Headings are more likely seen in texts at this grade band. Again, the language added about what is done with information from text features expands the possibilities from the rather limited purpose of providing an overview of the text only. |
| Section: | Standards for Reading: Core Skills 4–5, p. 22 |
| Current Language: | Standard 16. Note when the text depends on unfamiliar vocabulary or other background information, and consult relevant sources to enhance understanding. |

Suggested Language: *Self-monitor to note when understanding depends on unfamiliar vocabulary or other background information, and consult relevant print or electronic resources and sources to enhance understanding.*
Text doesn't depend on unfamiliar vocabulary, but the reader's comprehension does. When vocabulary is an issue, we consult resources, but when background information is needed, we consult sources (books, Internet, a more expert other, etc.). Also the reference to electronic media as a source/resource is warranted for 21st century competency.

Section: Standards for Reading: Core Skills 4–5, p. 22
Current Language: Standard 17. Compare what is presented in a text with relevant prior knowledge and beliefs, making explicit what is new or surprising.
Suggested Language: *Compare what is presented in a text with relevant prior knowledge and beliefs, making explicit what information is known, new, or surprising.*
Rationale: While a worthy endeavor, asking students to identify what is new or surprising will, based on experience, always result in some students claiming that nothing is new or surprising, which may be the case in reading about a very familiar topic. Identifying what matches the reader's schema and what is already known helps to discourage such responses.

Section: Standards for Reading: Core Skills 4–5, p. 22
Current Language: Standard 18. Apply knowledge and concepts gained through reading to build a more coherent understanding of a subject, to inform reading of additional texts, and to solve problems.
Suggested Language: *Apply knowledge and concepts gained through reading to build more coherent understanding within other contexts, to inform reading of additional texts, and to solve problems.*
Rationale: It is limiting to aim for the purpose of gaining a deeper understanding of other subjects when understanding within a multitude of contexts would be a higher standard.

Section: Standards for Writing: Core Skills 4–5, p. 26
Current Language: Standard 2. Develop a focus with purposefully chosen observations.
Suggested Language: *Write with a clear focus.*
Rationale: In reviewing the writing standards generally, the review team noticed that the verb *write* does not appear in any grade band standards. Without this purposeful word, many standards can be interpreted as activities that do not require actual composition. For instance, in this standard, as written, a student could be asked to simply develop (or create) a focus and list the purposeful observations, which would negate the intention of the standard. By occasionally using the word *write* within select standards, this confusion is avoided. Additionally, dependent upon the purpose and audience, observations are not always required to develop something. To develop an argument, details and examples are more powerful than mere observations. And because development is addressed in a separate section (Standard 6), dropping this

reference would seem appropriate.

Section: Standards for Writing: Core Skills 4–5, p. 26
Current Language: Standard 3. Use an organizational structure and transitions to focus reader attention in a particular way in each paragraph and in the piece of writing as a whole.
Suggested Language: *Create and use an organizational structure that matches the purpose and audience of the writing.*
Rationale: Transitions are covered in another standard, as is focus. Structures vary according to purpose and audience.

Section: Standards for Writing: Core Skills 4–5, p. 26
Current Language: Standard 4. Explicitly tell the reader the relationship among ideas or events.
Suggested Language: *Use transitions to signal relationships among ideas, events, and other elements of the text.*
Rationale: This language from the 6–8 band is clearer.

Section: Standards for Writing: Core Skills 4–5, p. 26
Current Language: Standard 6. Provide concrete support for explanations and opinions.
Suggested Language: Standard 7. Use appropriate details related to a particular focus.
Suggested Language: *Provide descriptive details, reasons, or examples to support a focus, explanation, or opinion.*
Rationale: Collapse these two standards because they address the same concept.

Section: Standards for Writing: Core Skills 4–5, p. 26
Current Language: Standard 8. Exclude extraneous details and clear inconsistencies.
Suggested Language: *Revise to exclude extraneous information and resolve inconsistencies.*
Rationale: Writers generally do not exclude extraneous information as they write, but rather as a part of revision. They likewise don't see inconsistencies until after getting further into the writing.

Section: Standards for Writing: Core Skills 4–5, p. 26
Current Language: Standard 9. Use language to make clear distinctions for a reader.
Suggested Language: Standard 10. Choose words and phrases to express ideas precisely, with a particular focus on strong verbs.
Suggested Language: *Choose words and phrases to express ideas precisely and make clear distinctions for readers, with a particular focus on strong verbs.*
Rationale: These standards can be combined because they both focus on the same aspect of writing, that of language choice.

Section: Standards for Writing: Core Skills 4–5, p. 26
Current Language: Standard 11. Expand, combine, and reduce sentences for meaning, reader interest, and style.

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| Suggested Language: | <i>Revise to expand, combine, and reduce sentences for meaning, reader interest, and style.</i> |
| Rationale: | Since this is largely the result of revising, naming it as such is helpful and honors the writing process. |
| Section: | Standards for Writing: Core Skills 4–5, p. 26 |
| Current Language: | Standard 12. Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard written English, including grammar, usage, and mechanics, paying particular attention to those conventions that help clarify the distinctions between ideas. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Basic paragraphing and paragraph indentations • Sentence boundaries (fragments, run-ons and rambling sentences, and comma splices) • Words in a series • Possessive nouns and pronouns • Quotation marks for direct speech and for quotations from a text • See the Language Table 4–5 for more details. |
| Suggested Language: | <i>Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard written English, including grammar, usage, and mechanics, paying particular attention in writing and editing to:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Basic paragraphing and paragraph indentations</i> • <i>Sentence boundaries (fragments, run-ons and rambling sentences, and comma splices)</i> • <i>Commas to separate words in a series</i> • <i>Possessive nouns and pronouns</i> • <i>Quotation marks for direct speech and for quotations from a text</i> |
| Rationale: | “Words in a series” could mean that the writer is supposed to add them or delete them. More clarity is added by saying there should be commas between words in a series. Again, removing the reference to the Language Table discourages confusing the purpose of the language table with the standards themselves. |
| Section: | Standards for Writing: Core Skills 4–5, p. 26 |
| Current Language: | Standard 13. Gather the information needed to support an opinion, provide an explanation, or address a research question. |
| Suggested Language: | <i>Gather information from texts, experiences, or electronic resources to write an opinion or provide an explanation.</i> |
| Rationale: | Gathering information from electronic resources should be included as it moves students to use often the most current resource available. |
| Section: | Standards for Writing: Core Skills 4–5, p. 26 |
| Current Language: | Standard 14. Represent and cite accurately the data, conclusions, and opinions of others, effectively incorporating them into one’s own work while avoiding plagiarism. |
| Suggested Language: | <i>Represent and cite accurately the data, conclusions, and opinions of others, effectively incorporating or paraphrasing into one’s own work while avoiding plagiarism.</i> |
| Rationale: | We often represent the ideas of others by simply quoting them directly, but we also paraphrase and cite. |

Section: Standards for Writing: Core Skills 4–5, p. 26
Current Language: Standard 15. Assess the quality of their own writing, and, when necessary, strengthen it through revision.
Suggested Language: *Self-assess the quality of writing and strengthen through revision and editing.*

Rationale: The standard, as previously written, implies that revision is done only when necessary. The revised version sends the stronger message that some aspect of revision is always part of the writer’s process. Furthermore, editing should be included in self-assessment.

Section: Standards for Writing: Core Skills 4–5, p. 26
Current Language: Standard 16. Use technology as a tool to produce, edit, and distribute writing.
Suggested Language: *Use technology as a tool to produce, revise, edit, and publish writing.*

Rationale: Technology is also highly useful in revising. “Distributing” writing could mean emailing a thought, which is covered by the broader “publish,” meaning to make public, not just to distribute. Inclusion of both *revise* and *publish* honors the writing process.

Section: Standards for Reading: Core Skills 6–8, p. 42 of **November 13, 2009 Version**

Current Language: NA

Suggested Language: *Use a repertoire of comprehension strategies, such as activating prior knowledge, determining importance, self-monitoring, self-correcting, questioning, clarifying, making connections, summarizing, synthesizing, analyzing, and critiquing before, during, and after reading, to enhance understanding.*

Rationale: Currently, no language explicitly calls for use of a range of strategies for comprehension and likewise no language suggests that many of these strategies are used *across* the reading process and not simply *after* reading.

Section: Standards for Reading: Core Skills 6–8, p. 42 of **November 13, 2009 Version**
Current Language: Standard 3. Interpret the meanings of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including connotative and figurative meanings.
Suggested Language: *Use context and word part clues to interpret the meanings of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including connotative and figurative meanings.*

Rationale: Simply interpreting meanings of words does not imply an active stance of reading *per se* and could be an after-reading activity: defining a list of words at the end of a selection, for example. Using context and word part clues suggests that it is happening as the reader is engaged with the text rather than afterward.

Section: Standards for Reading: Core Skills 6–8, p. 42 of **November 13, 2009 Version**
Current Language: Standard 4. Discern the most important ideas, events, or information and summarize them accurately and concisely.
Suggested Language: *Summarize accurately and concisely the most important ideas, events, or information without taking a position or expressing an opinion.*

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| Rationale: | Begin by naming the strategy/skill and move to specific criteria. |
| Section: Current Language: Suggested Language: Rationale: | Standards for Reading: Core Skills 6–8, p. 42 of November 13, 2009 Version Standard 5. Articulate the overarching themes or theses that best express what the key points and details have in common. <i>Analyze to name the overarching themes, theses, or purposes of the text using details to support.</i> Begin by naming the strategy/skill and move to specific criteria. |
| Section: Current Language: Suggested Language: Rationale: | Standards for Reading: Core Skills 6–8, p. 42 of November 13, 2009 Version Standard 6. Analyze when, where, and why specific events unfold in the text, and explain how they relate to one another. <i>Analyze and explain how events in a plot relate to or influence one another.</i> This clarifies and widens the process required. |
| Section: Current Language: Suggested Language: Rationale: | Standards for Reading: Core Skills 6–8, p. 42 of November 13, 2009 Version Standard 12. Follow the reasoning that supports an argument or explanation, including assessing whether the evidence provided is relevant and sufficient. <i>Evaluate whether the evidence provided in text is relevant and sufficient to support the argument or explanation.</i> Revised in order to begin with the strategy, and for clarity. |
| Section: Current Language: Suggested Language: Rationale: | Standards for Reading: Core Skills 6–8, p. 42 of November 13, 2009 Version NA <i>Use text features, such as the table of contents, index, headings, layout elements, page numbers, and key terms, to gain an overview of the information contained in a text, to navigate the text, and to locate information within texts.</i> Using text features continues to be vitally important to reading beyond grade 5 and should be added. |
| Section: Current Language: Suggested Language: Rationale: | Standards for Reading: Core Skills 6–8, p. 42 of November 13, 2009 Version Standard 15. Note when the text depends on new vocabulary or other background information and consult relevant sources to enhance understanding. <i>Self-monitor to note when understanding depends on unfamiliar vocabulary or other background information, and consult relevant print or electronic resources and sources to enhance understanding.</i> Text doesn't depend on unfamiliar vocabulary, but the reader's comprehension does. And when vocabulary is an issue, we consult resources, but when background information is needed, we consult sources (books, Internet, teacher, documents). Also the reference to electronic media as a source/resource is warranted for 21 st century competency. |
| Section: Current Language: Suggested | Standards for Reading: Core Skills 6–8, p. 42 of November 13, 2009 Version Standard 17. Compare what is presented in a text with relevant prior knowledge and beliefs, making explicit what is new or surprising. <i>Compare what is presented in a text with relevant prior knowledge and beliefs, making</i> |

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| Language: | <i>explicit what information is known, new or surprising.</i> |
| Rationale: | While a worthy endeavor, asking students to identify what is new or surprising will, based on experience, always result in some students claiming that nothing is new or surprising, which may be the case in reading about a very familiar topic. Identifying what matches the reader’s schema and what is already known helps to discourage such responses. |
| Section: | Standards for Reading: Core Skills 6–8, p. 42 of November 13, 2009 Version |
| Current Language: | Standard 18. Apply knowledge and concepts gained through reading to build a more coherent understanding of a subject to inform reading of additional texts, and to solve problems. |
| Suggested Language: | <i>Apply knowledge and concepts gained through reading to build more coherent understanding within other contexts, to inform reading of additional texts, and to solve problems.</i> |
| Rationale: | It is limiting to aim for the purpose of gaining a deeper understanding of other subjects when understanding within a multitude of contexts would be a higher standard. |

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| Section: | Standards for Writing: Core Skills 6–8, p. 48 of November 13, 2009 Version numbered as they appeared |
| Current Language: | Standard 19. Engage the reader’s interest and provide an introduction that identifies the topic, makes a claim, or establishes a situation. |
| Suggested Language: | <i>Write an introduction that identifies the topic, makes a claim, or establishes a situation to engage the interest of the intended audience.</i> |
| Rationale: | Begin with the verb of the action required and move to specific criteria. |

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| Section: | Standards for Writing: Core Skills 6–8, p. 48 of November 13, 2009 Version numbered as they appeared |
| Current Language: | Standard 21. Create an organizing structure that is appropriate for the type of writing, that meets the needs of the reader, and that arranges details, reasons, examples, and/or anecdotes effectively. |
| Suggested Language: | <i>Create an organizing structure that is appropriate for the audience, purpose, and type of writing, that meets the needs of the reader, and that arranges details, reasons, examples, and/or anecdotes effectively.</i> |
| Rationale: | Questions of writing structure hinge on more than just the type of writing—purpose and audience are also key and should be included. |

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| Section: | Standards for Writing: Core Skills 6–8, p. 48 of November 13, 2009 Version numbered as they appeared |
| Current Language: | Standard 22. Signal relationships among ideas, events, and other elements of the text. |
| Suggested Language: | <i>Use transitions to signal relationships among ideas, events, and other elements of the text.</i> |
| Rationale: | Revised for clarity. |

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| Section: | Standards for Writing: Core Skills 6–8, p. 48 of November 13, 2009 Version numbered as they appeared |
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| Current Language: Suggested Language: Rationale: | <p>Standard 25. Exclude irrelevant details, events, and information.</p> <p><i>Revise to exclude irrelevant details, events, and information.</i></p> <p>This action is almost exclusively done as a part of revision; a writer cannot always see what is irrelevant until completing the piece and then weighing significance.</p> |
| Section: Current Language: Suggested Language: Rationale: | <p>Standards for Writing: Core Skills 6–8, p. 48 of November 13, 2009 Version numbered as they appeared</p> <p>Standard 27. Use varied sentence structures and patterns for meaning, reader interest, and style.</p> <p><i>Vary sentence structures and patterns for meaning, reader interest, and style.</i></p> <p>Revised for clarity.</p> |
| Section: Current Language: | <p>Standards for Writing: Core Skills 6–8, p. 48 of November 13, 2009 Version numbered as they appeared</p> <p>Standard 29. Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard written English, including grammar, usage, and mechanics, paying particular attention to those conventions that help relate ideas within and between sentences.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. sentence boundaries (fragments, run-ons and rambling sentences, and comma splices) b. items in a series c. verb tense consistency d. placement of phrases and clauses e. dependent clauses and subordinate conjunctions f. progressive and perfect verb tense g. commas or parentheses to set off nonrestrictive elements <p>See the Language Table 6–8 for more details.</p> <p><i>Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard written English, including grammar, usage, and mechanics, paying particular attention in writing or editing to correct application of:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. <i>transitions</i> b. <i>sentence boundaries (fragments, run-ons and rambling sentences, and comma splices)</i> c. <i>items in a series</i> d. <i>verb tense consistency</i> e. <i>placement of phrases and clauses</i> f. <i>dependent clauses and subordinate conjunctions</i> g. <i>progressive and perfect verb tense</i> h. <i>commas or parentheses to set off nonrestrictive elements</i> |
| Suggested Language: | |
| Rationale: | <p>Revised for clarity. Remove reference to language table for reasons stated earlier. Clarify that correct application of these principles often come in editing as part of the writing process.</p> |

Section: Standards for Writing: Core Skills 6–8, p. 48 of **November 13, 2009 Version numbered as they appeared**
Current Language: Standard 30. Gather the information needed to build an argument, provide an explanation, or address a research question.
Suggested Language: *Gather information using a variety of technological and informational resources to build an argument, provide an explanation, or address a research question.*
Rationale: Incorporates 21st century technologies into standards.

Section: Standards for Writing: Core Skills 6–8, p. 48 of **November 13, 2009 Version numbered as they appeared**
Current Language: Standard 31. Represent and cite accurately the data, conclusions, and opinions of others, effectively incorporating them into one’s own work while avoiding plagiarism.
Suggested Language: *Represent and cite accurately the data, conclusions, and opinions of others, effectively incorporating, paraphrasing, or synthesizing into one’s own work while avoiding plagiarism.*
Rationale: In citing sources, we sometimes simply quote directly, or we paraphrase and cite, or we often pull together ideas from several sources with our own, synthesizing into a new whole.

Section: Standards for Writing: Core Skills 6–8, p. 48 of **November 13, 2009 Version numbered as they appeared**
Current Language: Standard 33. Assess the quality of their own writing, and, when necessary, strengthen it through revision.
Suggested Language: *Self-assess the quality of writing and strengthen through revision and editing.*
Rationale: The standard, as previously written, implies that revision is done only when necessary. The revised version sends the stronger message that some aspect of revision is always part of the writer’s process. Furthermore, editing should be included in self-assessment.

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