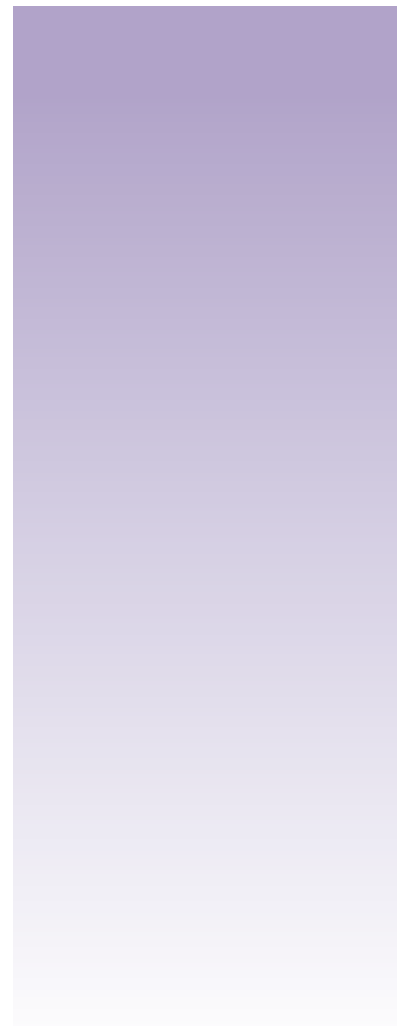


# Common Core State Standards Based Reading Instruction



—*Sarah Adams Morton*



## What It Is and What Research Can Tell Us

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The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) are college and career ready student learning outcomes. The standards were created after an intensive national data analysis concluded that a majority of students graduating high school did not have the skill sets needed to be successful in college or in workforce training programs. The CCSS were developed using a backwards design—beginning with skills that are essential in college and career training and distilling those down through every single grade. The standards define what students need to learn but not how to teach them; teachers will continue to develop lessons and refine instruction based on the needs of their students. Currently adopted in 45 states, the CCSS create a common educational language and are internationally benchmarked targeting students success in a global economy and society.

The standards:

- Are aligned with college and work expectations;
- Are clear, understandable and consistent;
- Include rigorous content and application of knowledge through high-order skills;
- Build upon strengths and lessons of current state standards;
- Are informed by other top performing countries, so that all students are prepared to succeed in our global economy and society; and
- Are evidence-based (NGA Center and CCSSO, 2010).

Reading as a subject matter is part of the English Language Arts (ELA) section of the CCSS—also known as English Language Arts and Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects. The ELA Standards are organized into three main sections: a comprehensive K–5 section; and two content-area-specific sections for grades 6–12, one for ELA and one for history/social studies, science, and technical subjects. One premise of Common Core implementation is that *all teachers are reading teachers* and all are required to support students with deep comprehension of complex texts. The reading standards call attention to text complexity and the growth of comprehension, placing equal emphasis on what students read and the skill with which they read.

In Reading, there are ten anchor standards that include essential reading skills. You can think of an anchor standard as an anchor keeping our students from floating away at anytime during their K–12 education. Each anchor standard is developed further through grade level progressions for reading literature and informational text. Additionally, students in grades K–5 are expected to master foundational skills, named appropriately *Reading: Foundation Skills*, which include concepts of print, the alphabetic principle, and other basic conventions of the English writing system.

Anchor standard 10 defines a grade-by-grade “staircase” of increasing text complexity that rises from beginning reading to the college and career readiness level (NGA Center and CCSSO, 2010). Text complexity considers qualitative, quantitative, as well as reader and task considerations. Qualitative evaluation of the text includes levels of meaning, structure, language conventionality and clarity, and knowledge demands. Quantitative measures can be calculated by computer programs and include readability measures. Variables specific to individual readers (such as motivation, knowledge, and

experiences) and to tasks (such as purpose and the complexity of the task assigned and the questions posed) must also be considered when determining whether a text is appropriate for a given student. Students, especially striving students, need books written at their current reading levels to practice and build confidence. They also need to have regular interactions with more difficult, “complex” texts that challenge and push them forward. Just as it is impossible to build muscles without weight resistance, it’s impossible to build robust reading skills without reading challenging text” (Shanahan, Fisher, & Frey, 2012).

Close, analytic reading stresses engaging students in examining text of sufficient complexity through deliberate reading and rereading. Reading and writing must also be grounded in evidence from text with students using the text first for responses in conversations and in writing about what they read. Directing student attention on the text itself empowers students to understand the central ideas and key supporting details . . . and ultimately leads students to arrive at an understanding of the text as a whole” (PARCC, 2011). Content-rich informational texts are highlighted as most required reading in college and workforce training programs is informational in structure and challenging in content. According to the standards, half of what elementary students read must be information. By 12th grade 70 percent of required reading must be informational texts. Instruction in academic vocabulary then becomes critical—this vocabulary is made up of mostly abstract words that appear in a wide variety of texts. These words are rarely well defined by context clues and are frequently encountered in complex text.

## Teacher Behaviors

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- Use student data and the CCSS as the basis of every lesson.
- Select increasingly complex text to build skill and stamina. Be familiar with the text you are teaching from.
- Integrate informational and content area literacy.
- Model close reading of all texts and include text dependent questions. Text dependent questions require specific reference to text and promoting deeper thought about the topic being addressed.
- Model questioning for students.
- Focus on academic vocabulary.
- Incorporate student discussion and written response to reading in all reading lessons.
- Create challenging lessons that gradually release responsibility and increase student independence.
- Provide time each day for independent reading of texts—at least 30 minutes.
- Integrate media and technology into all lesson sequences.

## Teaching Strategies

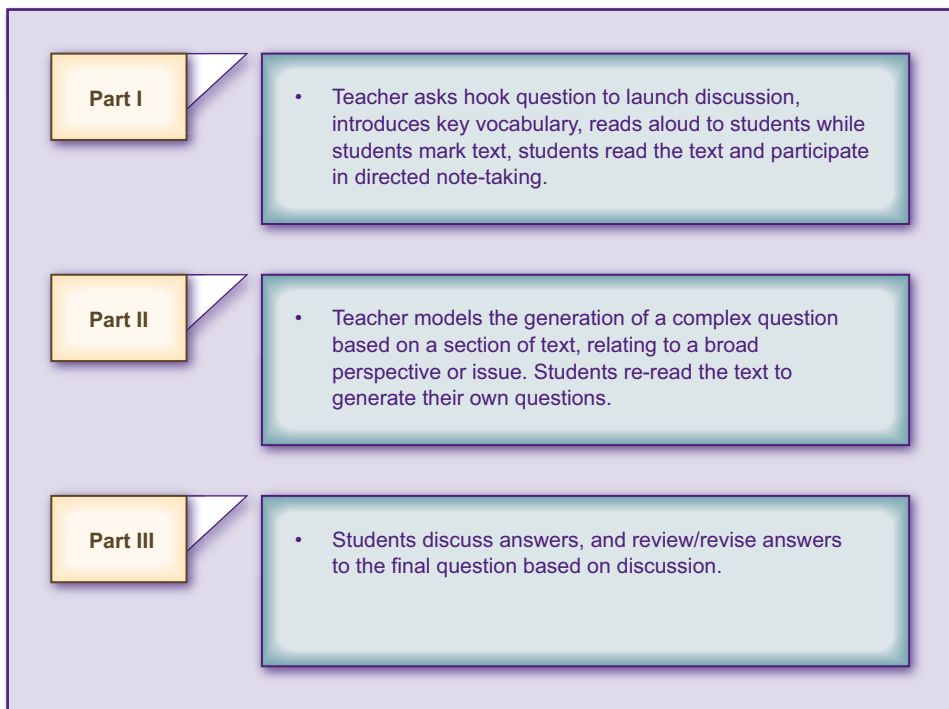
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1. Focus on comprehension from day one. Even beginning readers are capable of making sense of read-alouds.
2. Start with shorter passages. Use of short texts proves to be a promising practice for teaching students to read closely. Try short stories, articles, and poetry to begin. As students become more familiar with close reading, increase the amount of text used for this purpose.
3. Use student interests when choosing complex texts. Many students have natural interests in content area information which are by nature complex. Use information from student interest inventories to select challenging texts that your students want to read.
4. Don't give too much upfront (known as front-loading). Allow students to draw conclusions and make inferences through close reading of text. Make sure to not provide information that the student can learn through reading—this undermines reading as a learning tool.
5. Use directed text coding as a method to promote text-based evidence discussion and writing. When guiding students to read closely, give them a tool for marking the text for a specific reason.
6. Teach questioning directly. Students do not automatically know how to ask and answer questions. Create an anchor chart of question words (who, what, why, could, etc.) with students and post as a visual reference. Model question generation while reading. Importantly, respond to student's questions.
7. Use Pair-Share to encourage active writing and discussion. After posing a text based question, have students draft a written response. After adequate time has been given to write an initial response, have students pair up and choose one response to revise. Give students time to revise and then share with the rest of the class.
8. Base vocabulary lessons on words that will directly impact the student's level of understanding. The common core discourages use of prefab vocabulary lists and demand students learn strategies for learning new vocabulary words. Once you have selected key words, decide whether the text gives enough information to teach a strategy. If it does not, provide a simple definition to the students.
9. Directly teach word structure and context as the means to figuring out unknown vocabulary words. As you model reading aloud, stop at a challenging word and model both of these methods as a means to derive meaning. Let the students figure out the word using these strategies as soon as possible.
10. Provide daily opportunities for independent reading and writing. Nothing is better for reading and writing than reading and writing. Set aside time each day for students to read self-selected appropriate texts. It is important for you to model this behavior during this time.

11. Emphasize reading stamina. Reading complex text requires stamina from your readers. Encourage students to track their independent reading outside of school using incentive based rewards.
12. Practice “Close” Reading. In general, close reading requires multiple readings of complex texts—reading each time to find specific information. After at least two to three readings for specific purposes, students return to the text and read independently for an additional purpose. Close reading requires students to glean new information and often eliminates the need for students to pre-read the text. Pre-reading strategies are only used in cases where students cannot determine the learning goal from closely reading text. *See the lesson planning model exemplar below.*

### Close Reading Lesson Planning Model Exemplar

To read closely, readers must interact repeatedly with text for specific purposes. The following provides guidelines for planning a close reading lesson.



**BEGIN WITH DATA AND THE STANDARDS** When designing a Common Core reading lesson begin with a data analysis of your students and look across grade levels to determine gaps in the ELA standards for Literacy and Informational Text.

**TEXT SELECTION** must be appropriate in content and adequately complex for the students intended, lend itself to opposing views and deep discussion, allow for cross-curricular discussion and encourage students to think more globally.

**VOCABULARY** Vocabulary lessons are not required. When context clues or word structure assist with meaning, share that briefly with the students. Include general academic vocabulary as well as content-specific words in your preview of the text.

**CODING (TEXT MARKING) AND NOTE TAKING** Use the text structure and content to create categories for coding and note-taking. Always try to code and mark yourself first to make sure your categories work with that text.

**CREATING THE “HOOK” QUESTION** Make the question broad enough so that all students will be able to contribute. The question should activate prior knowledge that will help students better understand the concepts for the lesson.

**WRITTEN RESPONSE** Throughout a close reading lesson, students actively engage in short response writing. The first written response can be built upon the hook question and the same as the second question, if you write “according to the text” before your second question. The final written response is more specific, asking students to cite textual evidence. All written response questions are tied to standard and are developed at the same time.

**TEXT BASED DISCUSSION THROUGHOUT** Questions should stay focused on helping students comprehend the lesson goals and text based evidence while stimulating discussion.

**STUDENT QUESTION GENERATION** Start by modeling for students. You may want to let students experiment at first with open questions. Questions can be developed before, during, and after reading and can be discussed either before or after the final writing.