



# NEW STANDARDS NEWS LETTER

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Volume VII

**Greetings!** Welcome to volume VII of the *New Standards Newsletter*. Today we will continue to focus on English/Language Arts. Specifically, we will explore the idea of building knowledge through content rich non-fiction.

**Don't forget to set aside 30 minutes in this week's Collaboration Meeting to work on a group activity.**

There are some aspects of the new ELA Standards that have not changed. The primary part that has remained the same is the expectation that students meet standards in the area of the five components of reading.

\*Comprehension      \*Phonics  
\*Vocabulary          \*Fluency  
\*Phonemic Awareness

## Using reading to building knowledge as opposed to following the narrative of a story

Increase in reading of non-fiction, informational text increases through the grades (50/50 in K-5, 55/45 in middle school, 70/30 in high school). *These percentages include the reading that they should be doing in Social Studies, Science, and Health classes.*

Informational text includes literary nonfiction, as well as, historical, scientific, and technical texts. *While the latter group is addressed in the content areas, in ELA, the focus is literary nonfiction.* The emphasis is on a text structure other than narrative.

Informational/Content rich non-fiction would include biographies, memoirs, speeches, opinion pieces, historical documents, and essays about art, literature, journalism, etc.

What is "literary nonfiction" within the context of the CCSS? While we find many views of what constitutes literary nonfiction, we need to keep in mind the purpose behind its emphasis in the CCSS: To help ensure that all students are college and career ready in literacy by the time they graduate; they are capable of reading high quality, complex text independently.

Please check out the EED's on-line toolkit for more detailed information  
<http://education.alaska.gov/standards/toolkit.html>

The standards demand that students work on literacy in all the content areas, not as a distraction or as an addition to their study of content, but to build their understanding of the content being studied. This is displayed most prominently in two ways.

- 1) Every grade level has a set of standards for informational text and a set for literary standards.
- 2) Reading Standard 10 calls for students to read a wide range of informational text. *It is actually a standard to read informational text.*

# Using text as a source of knowledge

Typically students are more familiar with the narrative structure found in stories and have difficulty with the text structures found in most informational text. So, it is important that the literary nonfiction selections chosen for students include structures other than the more familiar narrative. Argument, for instance, is especially emphasized throughout, not only in the Reading Informational Text standards, but also in the Writing and Speaking/Listening strands.

The first shift in ELA/Literacy is to build knowledge through content-rich nonfiction. Think of the two parts of this statement— first, we are building knowledge from text. Students use the text as a source of knowledge. This means that in addition to reading stories, students are reading nonfiction. The CCSS requires that in elementary school about half of what students read should be fiction and about half of what they read should be nonfiction.

In middle and high schools the standards require attention to literacy across the content areas. In order to work toward college and career readiness students need the specific literacy skills of science and social studies. This means that science teachers and social studies support student literacy *as a way to enhance knowledge and skills in the content area.*

In order for these texts to support the building of knowledge, students should read texts that actually support the building of knowledge through text. This is different from what is typically happening in classrooms now. Currently as much as 80% of what students read is fiction and when they do read nonfiction, it is often as an isolated “experience in reading nonfiction” such as in a weekly news magazine.

There are standards included in the Common Core that specifically describe these expectations. They are an important component - not a suggestion for implementation, not an appendix, but an essential part. In looking at a student’s reading requirements across all classes, middle and high school students should be reading about 70% nonfiction and 30% fiction. When the content areas are on board, this means that the English class still focuses on literature with some addition of nonfiction.

**If we are as smart and committed as we say we are, then we can use the new standards as a stepping stone to better learning, engagement, and success for our kids.**

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