



Office of Teaching and Learning

Literacy Instruction Standards

Grades 6-8

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Introduction

On October 7, 2021, the North Carolina State Board of Education approved the Literacy Instruction Standards (LIS) as outlined in Section V of SB 387: Excellent Public Schools Act of 2021. The LIS serve as a framework for the development and alignment of curriculum and instruction for all public schools. These standards are defined as a level of quality and equity to be used consistently within core literacy instruction statewide.

While the NC Standard Course of Study (NCSCOS) sets student expectations, the LIS and their associated instructional practices set expectations for teaching literacy. The Grades 6-8 LIS are anchored by eight components: 1) Reading Materials, 2) Academic Language & Vocabulary, 3) Comprehension: Discussion & Writing, 4) Comprehension: Strategy Instruction, 5) Comprehension: Knowledge-building, 6) Writing, 7) Observation & Assessment, and 8) Engagement. Grounded in these eight components of literacy instruction, the LIS can be used to ensure that all 6-8 teachers across North Carolina have a common understanding and delivery of literacy instruction.

The purpose of this document is to outline research-informed practices for each LIS for grades 6-8. These practices should be integrated into content-area instruction to assist students in acquiring the advanced literacy skills they need as they move toward career and college readiness. While the LIS and their accompanying practices offer content area teachers instructional methods they can use to improve content-area literacy, they also include practices that should be adapted and focused on addressing the specific literacy demands of different disciplines. Please note that the LIS should not take the place of robust content area instruction, but instead be used to enhance and support.

While the LIS have been developed by grade bands, they should be used in tandem with appropriate grade-level texts of increasing complexity in order for students to fully meet the demands of the English Language Arts NCSCOS.

The LIS framework does not indicate an exhaustive list of literacy instruction practices. Practices included in this framework are representative of methods that have the strongest research support and are appropriate for adolescents. Additionally, new literacy research could modify and/or add to the instructional practices listed.

The 6-8 and 9-12 LIS and associated instructional practices are designed to be read in concert with one another. Some students in grades 9-12 may benefit from some of the standards and instructional practices included in the 6-8 LIS, based on their observed and assessed needs. Similarly, some students in the early grades may demonstrate readiness for instructional practices that are included in the grades 9-12 LIS.

Reading Materials

Intentional opportunities and instructional support for students to access, read, and interpret a variety of types and modes of text

The teacher:

Carefully selects high-quality texts by

- Ensuring the text is appropriately complex for the student and his/her grade-level
- Using texts and media that reflect the diversity of student interests, backgrounds, languages, and experiences
- Using multi-modal texts, including prose, expository texts, and textbooks
- Incorporating genres of argumentation, informational writing, and narrative so students can see the relationships among content appropriate to each genre element
- Using exemplary, single-structured texts as model texts to prepare students to comprehend multiple structured texts
- Planning extensive reading instruction using grade-level complex texts

Plans for differentiated reading materials by

- Providing students with age-appropriate and engaging texts that are relevant to the learner
- Selecting appropriate literacy tools based on student need
- Providing students with opportunities to self-select grade-level complex texts for independent reading
- Assigning texts that allow students to read for a variety of purposes
- Providing complementary materials, including a set of reading materials on the same topic that range in complexity

Utilizes content and disciplinary literacy practices to inform instruction by

- Possessing knowledge of how texts work in their discipline
- Assigning increasingly complex disciplinary texts
- Choosing texts that build and enhance background knowledge
- Choosing texts that utilize specific syntactical and organizational structures
- Exposing students to content area texts (outside of textbooks) that include specialized vocabulary, jargon, and discipline-related concepts

“When done well, a teacher differentiating instruction will focus on clear conceptual goals; consider a wide variety of assessment data; carefully plan lessons and units considering students’ needs, preferences, and strengths; and flexibly adapt the curriculum and instruction to suit his or her students.”

– K. Puzio, G.T. Colby, & D. Algeo-Nichols, 2020

Academic Language & Vocabulary

Intentional instructional opportunities for students to learn and use academic language skills, including discipline-specific vocabulary

The teacher:

Provides multiple opportunities for students to encounter and actively engage with new vocabulary by

- Integrating vocabulary instruction within reading comprehension instruction, discussion, and writing
- Selecting conceptually-related texts to use for instruction of content
- Supporting incidental word learning by providing students with opportunities to read
- Utilizing texts slightly above grade-level that include unknown words and target words
- Providing a purpose for reading to aid students in identifying and deciphering related words and their meanings
- Setting high expectations for vocabulary used during discussion and in writing

Explicitly teaches high-utility academic and domain-specific words by

- Teaching grammar strategies that incorporate activating vocabulary knowledge
- Selecting vocabulary using disciplinary knowledge and content area standards
- Investing instructional time in words that are closest to the key ideas and themes of the text
- Utilizing semantic mapping
- Supplying students with mnemonic devices
- Explicitly teaching students the definitions of words
- Teaching strategies to derive the meaning of unfamiliar words, including context clues, morphology, and utilization of reference materials

**Academic language is the oral and written language of school that is necessary for thinking about and communicating content within and across disciplines (Nagy & Townsend, 2012)*

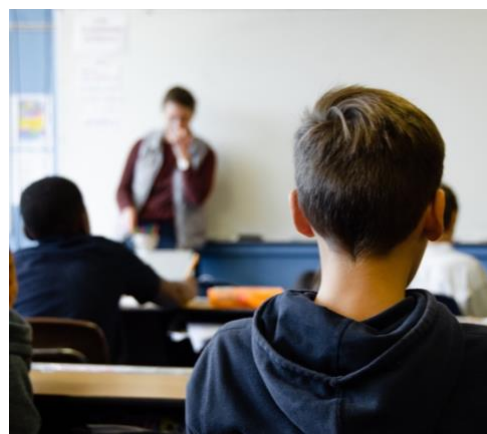
Comprehension: Discussion & Writing

Intentional instructional opportunities for students to construct meaning through higher-order discussion and writing about/in response to the ideas within disciplines

The teacher:

Provides explicit instruction and opportunities for extended discussion on text meaning and interpretation by

- Using whole-class and teacher-led group discussions to support students' critical thinking
- Setting high expectations for classroom discourse
- Asking stimulating questions and follow up questions to maintain productive discussion
- Promoting high-level comprehension of the text through questioning the author, shared inquiry, and collaborative reasoning
- Having students use a discussion format or protocol to guide small and whole group discussion
- Using the problem-based learning model method, giving students time to think together to find information and develop problem-solving strategies



Engages and supports students in writing to analyze, interpret, and apply content information by

- Using journaling, informational writing, argumentative writing, and graphic representation to guide and reveal students' thinking processes
- Incorporating metacognition strategies into writing instruction
- Engaging students in writing activities to personalize information presented in text or write to defend a point of view related to the reading material and discuss how it helped to understand, remember, and apply information from the text
- Providing opportunities for students to write summaries and notes about the text or to review new material
- Incorporating oral discussion into writing tasks
- Matching writing tasks with the goals of content area instruction to facilitate learning and extend students' knowledge of material
- Asking students to synthesize, reflect, and assess validity of information in writing

Comprehension: Strategy Instruction

Explicit comprehension strategy instruction, including text structure and metacognitive strategies, both general and discipline-specific

The teacher:

Explicitly teaches and supports students to flexibly use a repertoire of reading comprehension strategies by

- Utilizing a gradual release model of instruction
- Modeling and providing instruction on reading graphics, providing opportunities for students to evaluate, create, and redesign
- Modeling how to question and reflect during and after reading and apply newly learned strategies to text
- Using think alouds while reading a text and modeling reading strategies to use for understanding
- Providing an appropriate amount of modeling and guided practice until students show a level of proficiency
- Intentionally selecting increasingly complex texts that provide opportunities to use the comprehension strategy being taught
- Planning explicit comprehension strategy instruction that provides information about what the strategy is, how to use it, and when and why readers use the strategy
- Describing, modeling, and providing opportunities for students to practice using a variety of reading comprehension strategies, including making predictions, activating prior knowledge, setting reading goals, visualizing, questioning, making inferences, and summarizing
- Modeling and teaching students to monitor comprehension and to use strategies to repair comprehension when they do not understand what they read

Describes, models, and provides opportunities for students to practice identifying a variety of text structures and features of increasingly complex text by

- Intentionally selecting increasingly complex texts that reflect the text structure being taught
- Planning explicit text structure instruction that provides information about what the structure is, how it is used, and when and why readers use text structure when comprehending
- Providing instruction on common structures of literary texts, including key story elements
- Teaching common structures of informational text, including cause-effect, description, sequence, compare-contrast, and problem-solution
- Building students' knowledge of features of informational text including captions, diagrams, index, and table of contents
- Engaging students in using a variety of tools and strategies to visualize and use text structure to support comprehension

Engages students to become actively involved in monitoring their comprehension by

- Asking students to plan and set goals to assist them in self-evaluation of their reading
- Supporting students in monitoring their understanding and processing of text meaning
- Encouraging students to apply comprehension strategies to other types of texts in all content areas
- Making the reading purpose clear to students
- Asking questions that elicit the awareness of the reading purpose
- Supporting students with setting reading goals related to the purpose for reading

Comprehension: Knowledge-building

Intentional and ongoing instructional opportunities for students to build and connect knowledge to support their understanding of ideas within and across text

The teacher:

Extends students' knowledge of content material by

- Planning activities that include a combination of answering questions, note-taking, summary writing, and extended writing about texts
- Intentionally structuring instruction around related informational texts to develop rich content knowledge
- Increasing students' exposure to informational text genres to develop discipline-specific and general world knowledge
- Providing inquiry-based assignments to increase student engagement in learning

Improves students' comprehension and application of content knowledge by

- Matching writing activities with goals for promoting content learning
- Supporting students in making connections between content and personal experiences and/or previous knowledge
- Asking students to predict, infer, and question new content
- Collaborating with students on setting reading goals or a purpose for reading
- Promoting structured academic discourse around content area topics

“...all teachers—despite their content area focus—should integrate a set of evidence-based literacy practices into their instruction.”

– A. Shelton, J. Wexler, L.A. Kurz, & E. Swanson, 2020

Writing

Explicit writing instruction that includes writing processes and meaningful writing opportunities for students to apply and practice strategies

The teacher:

Engages students in meaningful writing opportunities by

- Extending student knowledge of content material through essay, summary, note-taking, and journal writing
- Offering regular opportunities for students to write across genres and content areas
- Providing opportunities for students to use digital tools as they engage in the writing process
- Engaging students in collaborative writing tasks
- Engaging students in inquiry-based writing tasks
- Having students complete writing-intensive assessments to measure their understanding of content
- Increasing time for writing
- Providing opportunities for students to make interest-based choices about their writing
- Making students' writing visible through supporting them to publish and share their writing, both within the classroom and for audiences beyond the classroom



Provides explicit writing instruction by

- Teaching students components of the writing process, including researching, planning, drafting, revising, and editing, and supporting them to flexibly use those components when writing
- Engaging students in prewriting to help students generate or organize ideas for their composition
- Utilizing grammar strategies to teach writing
- Ensuring students understand the purpose of writing strategies and how to select appropriate strategies for particular audiences and purposes
- Using the gradual release model when teaching writing strategies
- Providing students with mentor texts for modeling high-quality writing
- Supporting students in setting and achieving writing goals to build independence
- Providing opportunities to give and receive feedback and self-reflect throughout the writing process
- Creating a workshop environment that emphasizes writing for authentic audiences, personalized instruction, and the writing process

Observation & Assessment

Ongoing observation and assessment of students' language and literacy skills to design responsive instruction

The teacher:

Uses a variety of observation and assessment tools to gather data to guide literacy instruction by

- Intentionally observing students during instruction and cooperative learning to gather information about their reading, writing, and language use
- Using a variety of formative, benchmark, and progress monitoring assessment tools and practices to guide and adjust whole-class and small-group instruction over time

Organizes instruction and provides multiple forms of feedback based on ongoing observation and assessment by

- Providing timely, specific, and formal feedback on skills and standards
- Analyzing instructional practices and making needed adjustments to improve student outcomes
- Providing opportunities for students to actively engage in the formative assessment process through self-assessment and data analysis
- Collaborating with additional school personnel, including specialists, to conduct additional assessments, as needed
- Collaborating with additional school personnel, including specialists, to select, plan, and/or provide enrichment or intensive, systematic instruction for students who need additional support
- Providing small group intervention sessions for students who need more intensive support, working with a specialist as needed

Engagement

Intentional efforts to foster literacy engagement as students learn and use reading, writing, and oral language within content-area instruction

The teacher:

Creates and maintains a positive literacy learning environment by

- Inviting students to work in independent or teacher-directed groups to complete literacy tasks
- Setting and sharing learning intentions and success criteria
- Understanding learners and how literacy activities shape the social context of the classroom
- Allowing for student choice in texts and tasks
- Giving students opportunities to write freely about a combination of self-reflective and thematic topics

Facilitates student use of metacognitive strategies to support independence by

- Engaging students in the metacognitive strategies of planning, monitoring, and evaluating during instructional activities
- Engaging students in reflective practices using goal-setting tools

Provides authentic and relevant literacy experiences by

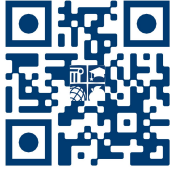
- Differentiating instruction based on individual learner needs of content, process, and product
- Selecting texts that are relevant to students
- Integrating reading skills into discipline-specific content instruction
- Providing content-based texts of varying levels
- Integrating direct reading skills instruction and individualized engagement strategies as needed

“Literacy research has noted that to draw students into reading and ignite their desire for reading enjoyment, there needs to be a shift in focus from teacher-assigned texts to more student-driven reading classroom reading experiences.”

– J.B. Allred & M.E. Cena, 2020

Contact Information

For more information about the Literacy Instruction Standards, contact NCDPI's English Language Arts team at <https://go.ncdpi.gov/4579f>



Literacy Instruction Standards are a critical component of the North Carolina Read • Lead • Succeed program.