

The College Board  
English Language Arts Framework

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

**Principal Writer – Ellen Brinkley**, Western Michigan University

*The College Board English Academic Advisory Committee:*

**Ronald Sudol** (Chair), Oakland University

**Ellen Brinkley**, Western Michigan University

**George Gadda**, University of California – Los Angeles

**Mary Jo Potts**, Webb School of Knoxville

**Sylvia Sarrett**, Hillsborough High School

**Alice Turner Venson**, National Center on Education and Economy

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## Introduction

English language arts plays a key role in students' high school and college success. That role is reflected in each of the major College Board programs as well--Advanced Placement courses and assessments in literature, language, and composition; Preliminary SAT/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test; College-Level Examination Program; and the new SAT in 2005, which includes an essay requirement for the first time. Given the key role of English language arts in College Board programs, and the fact that more than three million students participate in College Board programs each year, the College Board recognizes the need to develop an English language arts framework as a foundational document that can serve as a guide to assure that College Board English language arts programs are grounded in theory, research, and best practice.

*The College Board English Language Arts Framework* provides a curricular context for the Board's current English language arts programs. It situates the Board's English language arts courses, assessments, and professional development programs within the discipline of English language arts. It builds on the recent work of the National Commission on Writing and looks to the future to consider how the College Board might continue to strengthen and support the teaching and learning of English language arts.

The framework begins with an attempt to define the English language arts and to describe the consensus within the profession of English educators, to the extent that it exists, about what often seems an amorphous field of study. Grounded in research, theory, and best practice, the framework includes discussion of each of the major components that together constitute English language arts as a content area. It addresses complex issues related to the design of English language arts curricula and identifies some of the conflicting views that occasionally exist among English language arts professionals. It describes classroom assessment issues as well as external assessments beyond the classroom, and it discusses issues related to professional development needs of English language arts teachers.

Special attention is given to the integration of existing and emerging technologies into the English language arts classroom and to carrying out the College Board's commitment to equity and excellence for *all* students. Throughout the framework the needs and interests of learners, teachers, and the public are considered.

## The Challenge

In today's world, life itself depends on words that are spoken, written, and digitally transmitted. News, opinions, and entertainment appear in hard copy, online transmissions, and round-the-clock television. In such an environment, all students need to develop a range of rich language proficiencies and resources.

National studies and reports in the past have sounded alarms about students' English language arts performance. The titles of such reports have sometimes called attention to basic-skills problems by exploring *Why Johnny Can't Read* (Flesch, 1955) or by describing *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). Similarly, the College Board's recently published report on the teaching of writing describes writing as the *Neglected 'R'* and issues a call for a "writing revolution" (National Commission on Writing in America's Schools and Colleges, 2003).

Many states have recently developed, added to, or updated their English language arts standards and assessments. At the federal level, the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* has specified that student performance in reading/language arts and mathematics must improve year by year. In a related move, states and local districts are expected to ensure that English language arts teachers are well grounded in their content area and that they participate in high-quality professional development programs. In response to NCLB legislation, English educators at all levels are taking stock of what is needed to assure that *all students* have access to a quality English language arts education.

In most school districts, students' curriculum includes English language arts every year from kindergarten through twelfth grade. Even so, many students leave thirteen years of English language arts instruction with minimal reading and writing skills. National assessment and research data suggest a number of problems in the teaching and learning of English language arts. Recent NAEP (National Assessment of Educational Progress) data reveal that fewer than 6 percent of seventeen-year-olds perform at or above Level 350 in reading, the highest of four possible reading levels, described as follows: "Readers at this level can extend and restructure the ideas presented in specialized and complex texts. Examples include scientific materials, literary essays, and historical documents. Readers are also able to understand the links between ideas, even when those links are not explicitly stated, and to make appropriate generalizations. Performance at this level suggests the ability to synthesize and learn from specialized reading materials" (Perie, Meran, and Lutkus, 2005). Middle school teachers report that too many

students, especially young men, are turned off to reading and lack basic reading skills (Wilhelm, 1997). Meanwhile, high school English teachers notice that students in “basic” English classes resist writing and seem embarrassed by their lack of writing skill. Among students who go on to college, a significant number fail to meet entrance-level requirements in reading and writing and are required to take remedial, non-credit courses that add to their overall cost, slow their progress, and too often result in their leaving school without earning a degree.

The fact is that individual reading and writing needs are seldom addressed adequately in middle and high school classrooms. High school English language arts teachers frequently assume that students will already have overcome basic reading problems in the earlier grades. But in fact, middle and high school students at each grade level have wide ranging levels of knowledge, experience, and skills. Their individual reading levels may vary within a single class by three or four grade levels or more. Students who are English language learners face a host of additional language challenges, and many English teachers are unprepared to meet the needs of their ELL students. Furthermore, students’ home resources (books and magazines, television, computer with internet access, family travel) vary dramatically from town to town and state to state.

Another significant challenge is that at every level English language arts teachers are expected to teach a wide range of distinct English language processes, skills, and content—reading, writing, speaking, listening, literature study, research strategies, language skills, media literacy, and more. English teachers must be highly proficient in each area, and they face an ongoing challenge to skillfully integrate the study of the English language arts. Unless their undergraduate preparation and intern teaching experiences are especially strong and effective, new English teachers sometimes revert back into outdated teaching strategies that were used when they were students themselves.

From a practical perspective, middle- and high-school English language arts teachers across the country routinely work within a pressure-cooker environment. Typically they teach five classes a day or more, with at least two or three preparations a day, for up to 150 or more students each day. In such circumstances there is rarely enough time for even the best English teachers to read and provide individual feedback to students’ written assignments. There is often little opportunity to coordinate plans with their English colleagues or to collaborate with teachers in other content areas. They learn about new technologies and how to use them only when they can put everything else on hold. Of necessity (and for pleasure) they make a hobby of reading new novels they might want to teach.

## Meeting the Challenge

National English language arts standards documents (NCTE/IRA, 1996) describe the English language arts as an integrated collection of separate processes and content elements. Materials that accompany the national standards describe the skill and artistry of individual teachers who effectively integrate the language arts at particular grade levels. But even teachers who have read the standards documents, those who regularly read professional journals and who attend national conferences, are challenged by the complexities of English language arts as a discipline. To be an effective English language arts teacher requires a deep understanding of reading and the teaching of reading, writing and the teaching of writing, plus speaking and listening, viewing and visually representing, literature study, and the study of the English language.

Challenges related to the teaching of the English language arts deserve careful thought, action, and oversight by professional leaders and by local, state, and national stakeholders. The College Board can continue to play an important role by addressing issues of articulation between high school and college through its assessments, advanced placement courses in literature and composition, and professional development programs for teachers. In addition, through three new initiatives the College Board has moved toward taking a more active and public role toward strengthening English language arts:

- Revising the SAT to include an essay component increases the attention writing will get in high school classrooms and underscores the importance of writing as an essential career and life skill.
- Establishing the National Commission on Writing and publishing the Commission's report calls public attention to the power and value of writing and provides a "writing agenda for the nation."
- Developing *College Board Standards for College Success in English Language Arts* provides detailed performance expectations and a progression of skills that will guide teachers and their students toward more rigorous reading and writing performance.

## This Framework and Student Learning

It is important to call attention in this introduction to the fact that, generally speaking, funding for research in the English language arts is often minimal, with the notable exception of funding related to reading and the teaching of reading, especially at the elementary level. NAEP data is especially valued among English language arts leaders primarily because so few other sources of national data exist for English language arts. Large-scale English language studies, like those that

were conducted in the 1950s and 1960s (see Hook, 1961; Jewitt, 1959; Squire, 1962), are rare today.

It is also important to acknowledge that any document about the teaching and learning of English language arts is certain to be controversial in some ways. Discussions about the teaching of grammar, for example, almost inevitably arouse the passions of English language arts teachers and the general public as well, no matter what stand is taken. *The College Board English Language Arts Framework*, nevertheless, reflects a general consensus, as understood by the writers, about the teaching, learning, and assessing of English language arts and about professional development for English language arts teachers.

With these caveats in mind, *The College Board English Language Arts Framework* describes the factors central to the development and maintenance of high-quality programs in middle school and high school English language arts. In an era that calls for increasing accountability by all involved in public education, this framework attempts to provide answers or suggestions that will reflect the College Board's efforts relative to the following questions:

- What are the English language arts and what is English language arts as a school subject?
- What do we know about English language arts learning?
- What content and processes are central to successful English language arts curricula?
- What professional knowledge about English language arts and its teaching do teachers need in order to provide quality instruction in English language arts?
- How should English language arts be assessed to help improve instruction?
- How should learning in English language arts be evaluated and reported to students, parents, teachers, schools, and communities?
- How should professional development programs in English language arts be structured?
- What role should technology play in the teaching and learning of English language arts?

Over the last fifty years, a number of documents cited in this framework have attempted to address these questions. They have provided sets of recommendations describing what professionals in English language arts believe and value. Such statements reflect a combination of research findings, professional beliefs, and the experience of their authors.

*The College Board English Language Arts Framework* describes a structure that synthesizes and extends the varied recommendations for school-based English language arts. It highlights the interconnections of content, curriculum, instruction, assessment, and professional development that are driven by a view of student learning:

- The role played by the English language arts in today's world
- What constitutes learning within a disciplinary context

- A common language for College Board efforts to address the curricular knowledge, skills, and developed abilities expected from today's middle school and high school English language arts programs in an atmosphere centered on learning
- A discussion of what constitutes equity and excellence in diverse school settings
- A guide to the important aspects of instruction in today's English language arts classroom
- A discussion of the roles of assessment and evaluation in middle school and high school English language arts programs
- A consideration of the form and substances of quality programs of professional development of middle and high school teachers of English language arts
- A guide for the appropriate use of technology and learning materials that support and extend instructional programs in English language arts
- A stimulus for change in English language arts education

## Defining and Describing the English Language Arts

Since English emerged as a curricular area in the late 1800s, English scholars, language arts teachers, authors, and professional groups have proposed a range of definitions, descriptions, and configurations for organizing English language arts. In 1996, with federal funding, the National Council of Teachers of English and the International Reading Association published *Standards for the English Language Arts* (Appendix 1). Creating the standards involved the participation of thousands of teachers, dozens of committees, and two national professional organizations. It was not an easy task, but in the end the *NCTE/IRA Standards* included twelve interrelated standard statements that “should be considered as a whole” and that should not be thought of as “prescriptive” for a particular curriculum or instruction (p. 3).

Today many English teachers are aware of the national standards. These teachers may consult the standards infrequently but know they are available as a reference, especially during discussions about curriculum with colleagues or administrators. It is uncertain, however, the extent to which English language arts teachers actively use the standards as an ongoing reference. Some say the standards should serve simply as points of departure rather than as guidelines to follow regularly (Smagorinsky, 2002, p. 322). And creating national standards has not entirely settled questions about how to describe and define English language arts as a content area. Smagorinsky observes that the *NCTE/IRA Standards* reflect a “liberal” perspective in that they are student centered, activity oriented, constructivist, interaction based and collaborative, multidirectional, open-ended, exploratory and inquiry based, and built on the transaction between texts and students’ personal lives. The standards, then, “assume that education is an experience that changes people...rather than an institution designed to preserve and perpetuate historical values” (p. 331).

To the extent that the standards may be described as “liberal,” they serve as a response to the detailed specifications of content that E.D. Hirsch identified as part of “cultural literacy” (Hirsch, 1987) and that attracted public attention during the decade prior to the development of the *NCTE/IRA Standards*. Hirsch works from a more “conservative” perspective, insisting that education should function as a “community of acculturation” that “transmits specific information shared by the adults of the group or polis” (p. xvi). More recently Hirsch has created *About Core Knowledge*, a curriculum for elementary and middle school students that provides a “clear outline of content to be learned grade by grade” and “helps prevent the repetitions and gaps” (2004). Sixth grade English language arts students, for example, read fiction and drama (*The*

*Iliad*, *The Odyssey*, *The Prince and the Pauper*, and *Julius Caesar*) and write a research essay, through which they should learn research strategies and expository essay structure.

A newer initiative, the American Diploma Project (ADP) (2004), has constructed a somewhat similar national plan that promises to “re-establish the value of the high school diploma” (p. 1). Three groups (Achieve, Inc., The Education Trust, and the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation) have created ADP’s “college and workplace readiness” benchmarks that several states are using to anchor their assessments and graduation requirements that together “signify readiness for college and work” (p. 7). The benchmarks reflect the ideas of educators at all levels plus “front-line managers” who have defined “a common core of fundamental literacy and numeracy—what high school graduates must know and be able to do to be fully prepared to succeed in credit-bearing college courses or in high-growth, highly skilled occupations” (p. 21). The comprehensiveness of the ADP plan will raise important questions about who ultimately decides what should be taught and how.

### English Language Arts Processes

There is broad acknowledgment that at the heart of English language arts is a set of active language and thought processes that are used to construct meaning. When we speak, for example, we are simultaneously watching our listener and anticipating a response. When we listen, we are often simultaneously reacting to a speaker’s message, confirming or resisting what we hear, and deciding on the spot how or whether to respond. Each of the first four processes—writing, reading, speaking, and listening—is supported by a significant body of research that describes how each process functions. Research demonstrates, for example, that readers make sense of the squiggles on a page by transacting with and constructing meaning from written texts. Readers sample letters and words, and they make meaning by confirming and correcting the syntactic, semantic, and graphic cues they encounter. Then they begin to predict what is to follow (Weaver, 2002). Writers face the challenge of composing text onto a blank page or computer screen. Depending on audience and purpose, writers make meaning through a recursive thinking and writing process that involves prewriting/planning, drafting, revising, and editing (Emig, 1971).

The additional processes expand the language boundaries to include visual images and multimedia. There is less research that supports the fifth process—visually representing and creating multimedia—and the sixth—viewing and reading multimedia. But creators of multimedia “texts” make meaning by composing, selecting, and organizing written text, visual images, spoken words, music, and/or other sounds. Audiences for multimedia works use viewing

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¶ Insert Figure 1 - English Language Arts Processes ¶

¶ These designations are useful but are more fluid than the chart suggests.

and listening skills to construct meaning that can be as powerful, or possibly more so, as that created through written, spoken, or visual texts.

### Crossing Content Area Boundaries

English language arts processes and strategies also play an important role in the teaching and learning of mathematics, science, social studies, and more. In many middle and high school classrooms, teachers in a number of curricular areas use specific writing-to-learn and reading-to-learn strategies to support and strengthen students' learning of their content.

English language arts processes are (1) an essential part of the English language arts content area, (2) specific strategies for learning in a wide range of content areas, and (3) the means by which learning is constructed in virtually all content areas.

### English Language Arts = Processes + Literature and Language

Beyond the English language arts processes, there is general agreement that English language arts consists of two broad areas of knowledge—the study of literature and the study of language. It is tempting to try to list all the subtopics that might fit under each of these two umbrella terms. Certainly there is a place for spelling, research and research writing, vocabulary, critical thinking, literary theory, and grammar. But a number of these and other potential subtopics can be linked to more than one of the processes. Vocabulary, for example, fits with reading, speaking, and writing. Grammar fits with the same three processes. In the end, this categorization is open for discussion but potentially leads to important questions about curriculum and balance, and what it means to integrate the English language arts.

### Balancing and Integrating the English Language Arts

One of the attractions of teaching English language arts is that teachers often have considerable freedom regarding how they conduct their class sessions. Creative, experienced English teachers often thrive on the curricular choices. But even the best teachers struggle from time to time with balance as they teach processes and literature and language. Literature takes over when zealous teachers focus almost all of their students' attention on what they read, especially favoring particular authors or genres. And language issues take over when English teachers, sometimes with the best of intentions, focus most of their curriculum on the study of grammatical structures and conventions. Inexperienced teachers, especially, struggle to balance the process and content components of the English language arts.

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Across the Curriculum¶

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Even in classes where there is relatively little reading and writing, students still learn primarily through listening, speaking, and/or viewing. Language, therefore, provides the means by which learning is constructed in virtually all of the content areas, as represented in Figure 3. ¶

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Insert Figure 3 – Using English Language Processes to Teach and Learn¶

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English language arts teachers must figure out not only how much emphasis to place on specific components of English language arts, but also how to integrate these components into a cohesive curriculum. Currently many English teachers in middle and high schools organize units of their English curriculum around broad themes (e.g., the American dream). Each unit brings together relevant literature, other texts, language study, and English language arts processes over the course of at least a few weeks' time (Gaughan, 1997; Daniels and Bizar, 1998).

New evidence now suggests a need to further refine our understanding of what it means to “integrate” the language arts effectively. Through five years of study in middle and high school English classes, Langer (1999) found that among higher performing schools, “instruction in the knowledge and conventions of English and high literacy take place as separated and simulated as well as integrated experiences”:

Separated Instruction	What most educators would consider to be direct instruction of isolated skills and knowledge. Often this takes place separately from the context of a larger activity, primarily as introduction, practice, or review....
Simulated Instruction	Involves the actual application of those concepts and rules within a targeted unit of reading, writing, or oral language. These are often exercises prepared by the teacher or found in teaching materials, where the students are expected to read or write short units of text with the primary purpose of practicing the skill or concept of focus....
Integrated Instruction	Takes place when students are expected to use their skills and knowledge within the embedded context of a large and purposeful activity, such as writing a letter, report, poem, or play for a particular goal (not merely to practice the skill) or planning, researching, writing, and editing a class newspaper.

This study suggests that students need more than a mix of reading and writing, more than a mix of literature and language study. Students need some direct instruction focused on isolated writing and reading skills, and some direct instruction in literature and language. Students need to try out and apply specific concepts and rules within a broad unit of study. And they need the chance to use skills and knowledge within the “embedded context of a large and purposeful activity.” Such findings suggest the level of careful planning and artistry that English language arts teachers need as they make decisions about what to teach and how to integrate the English language arts skillfully.

**Guiding Principles: Integrated English Language Arts**

1. Reading, writing, speaking, listening, viewing and visually representing are essential forms of communication; powerful life skills; and sources of pleasure, understanding, and fulfillment.
2. English language arts is an integrated discipline that is grounded in theory, research, and effective classroom practices.
3. Effective instruction in English language arts includes direct instruction, practice, and application of skills and knowledge.
4. Teachers' modeling has a powerful impact upon learning. Students learn best from teachers who are eager, critical readers and effective writers, who love literature and the study of language.
5. English language arts teachers use a range of classroom strategies, experiences, and structures that are identified as effective practices through research and classroom experience: thematic instruction, writing workshop, writing response groups, reading workshop, literature circles, etc.
6. English language arts students construct meaning as they read, write, speak, listen, view, and visually represent.
7. English students use the arts of language as a means of gaining insight into, and reflecting on, their own and others' lives.
8. As productive citizens, students of English use language to speak out about important issues and to communicate effectively with others.
9. English language arts students possess a rich fund of prior knowledge, based on unique linguistic, cultural, socioeconomic, and experiential backgrounds.
10. Students of English participate as knowledgeable, reflective, creative and critical members of a variety of literacy communities.
11. English language arts students use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g., for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information).

### **Guiding Principles: English Language Arts Across the Curriculum**

1. English language arts is not only a vital object of study within the curriculum but also the means by which learning occurs in virtually all other content areas.
2. Reading, writing, speaking, listening, viewing, and visually representing are means of inquiry, reflection, and expression and thus are effective tools that support learning across the curriculum.

### **Teaching and Learning: Reading**

Few, if any, middle and high school English language arts teachers would agree with recommendations to eliminate literature study and replace it with teaching technical and textbook reading (Dagget, cited in Wilhelm, 1997, p. 37). Too often in the past, however, middle- and high-school English teachers have simply *assigned* literature to be read, discussed it (or lectured about it), and then tested students on their reading. Today middle and high school English teachers, as well as teachers in other content areas, feel a growing sense of responsibility to teach reading strategies and structures that support and strengthen reading and the teaching of reading.

Daniels and Zemelman (2004) place some of the blame for the reading problem across the curriculum on textbooks themselves. When they checked texts assigned to all juniors at one Chicago high school, they found that the British literature text had 1,152 pages; the Biology text had 1,164 pages; the French book had 620 pages; U.S. History textbook had 982; and the Advanced Algebra/Trigonometry book had 890 pages (p. 38). They discovered ironically that, even with so many pages written by authors who were expected to “cover” the subjects, the books “just scratch the surface.” That is, the textbooks contain so much material that “the really big concepts, the big ideas of the field, don’t stand out clearly, aren’t given enough time and depth for students to grasp them” (p. 39). Daniels and Zemelman further suggest that textbooks are hard to read, almost like dictionaries or encyclopedias in the sense that “they don’t attempt to provide the kind of coherent narrative you get in a *Time* magazine article” (p. 40).

### **Research**

The National Center for Education Statistics has released first results of a demographic description of a longitudinal study of the reading performance of high school sophomores, based on the class of 2002 (Ingels, Scott, & Owings, 2004). The results include both good and bad news: Nearly 90 percent of sophomores are proficient in simple reading comprehension, but less than half (46 percent) demonstrate proficiency in making “relatively simple inferences beyond the author’s main thought” or in “evaluating abstract concepts.” Furthermore, only 8 percent show

mastery at the highest level of reading proficiency — able to make “complex inferences or evaluative judgments that require piecing together multiple sources of information from a passage.” A research report to the Carnegie Corporation reveals a similar need for dramatic improvement in the reading performance of “approximately eight million young people between fourth and twelfth grade [who] struggle to read at grade level” (Biancarosa and Snow, 2004, p. 3) and the “70 percent of older readers [who] require some form of remediation, primarily needing help in comprehending what they read” (p. 3).

Such results confirm the positions articulated in an International Reading Association position statement (Moore, Bean, Birdyshaw, and Rycik, 1999). Many adolescents can comprehend specific factual information, but very few can extend or elaborate the meanings of the materials they read. “Typically, in the upper grades, reading fluency increases and students adjust their reading speed to the purposes for their reading” (p. 3). They learn to recognize distinctions between fiction and nonfiction materials, and “refine their tastes in reading and their responses to literature.” They also learn to “make sense of abstract, complex subjects far removed from their personal experiences” (p. 4). The authors point out, however, that “differences magnify as students develop from year to year,” and these differences are especially noticeable among students who speak different languages and come from different backgrounds and experiences.

### **Middle School and High School Readers**

At a basic level, most middle-school students already know well how to make meaning from texts. They have learned to read from left to right, to sample letters and words, and to predict what word or words, based on meaning, could logically fit with the preceding text. As they sample letters and words along a line of text, they recursively confirm or correct their earlier predictions based on meaning, even as they begin to sample the text just ahead (Weaver, 2002, pp. 41-60). Over time, they have learned to build on their knowledge of phonics and word recognition, and they have developed fluency by progressively reading, with support from their teachers, increasingly challenging texts.

But some middle school readers have not yet internalized even these basic processes. Wilhelm (1997) describes his experience with a middle school reader whose early reading instruction had consisted primarily of repetitively identifying letters and words (p. 8). The student reported that he had rarely read stories or been read to, and he had no memory of reading picture books as a child. He thought of reading as a process of pronouncing words, as his teacher discovered when the student was reading a baseball story. He read aloud: “Jack slid into second and kuh-nocked his kuh-nee.” When asked about what he could “see” as he read the passage, the

student said, “See? I don’t see anything, man, nuthin’ but words!” When questioned, the student acknowledged that he had played and watched baseball games, and eventually understood that what might get hit with a ball, the “kuh-nee,” would probably be a “knee” (p. 96).

Wilhelm’s later research, conducted with Smith (Smith & Wilhelm, 2002), involved a study of a diverse group of forty-nine young men in middle school and high school, who saw school as “routine, decontextualized, and separated from real life” (p. 142). The “features of literate experience” that helped intrinsically motivate the boys were linked to the social dimensions of the reading experience and depended on how engaging the materials were. Social interaction mattered in the selection of texts, in engaging in literate activity, and in the use of technology. Among the materials that were considered engaging are music as text, texts that are storied, texts that are visual, texts that could be easily used in conversation (such as scores of hockey games, headlines, jokes, ‘cool parts’ of books or movies, etc.), texts with multiple perspectives, texts that are edgy/subversive, and texts that are funny (pp. 146-152).

### **Reading to Learn in English Class and Reading Across the Curriculum**

Wilhelm’s middle school student might be labeled a “resistive reader” or a “word caller,” two types of struggling readers that Tovani (2000) has identified (p. 14). She herself confessed that even as a high school student, she “fake-read” by “attending classes, reading first and last chapters, skimming through Cliff Notes, and making Bs or better on essays and exams” (p. 4). As she works now with struggling readers, she teaches them specific strategies that good readers find effective (p. 5), such as the following that came from a synthesis of research on characteristics of proficient readers (Pearson et al, 1992):

- Use existing knowledge to make sense of new information.
- Ask questions about the text before, during, and after reading.
- Draw inferences from the text.
- Monitor comprehension.
- Use “fix-up” strategies when meaning breaks down.
- Determine what is important.
- Synthesize information to create new thinking.

Daniels and Zemelman (2004) identify the following curricular recommendations that are “based on major conclusions from six decades of reading research.” Most are appropriate across the curriculum (p. 252):

1. Kids should read a wide range of materials in all classes.

2. Students should read for the same purposes as literate adults, both for information and for pleasure. A sense of purpose is key to reading success.
3. Students need to read a lot; volume, quantity, and practice count.
4. Students should read plenty of books and articles written at a comfortable recreational level, not at a frustration level.
5. Kids need genuine choice of reading materials: at least half of what they read should be self-selected, based on interest and curiosity.
6. The classroom should become a reading community, a group of people who regularly read, talk, and write together.
7. Teachers must help students develop a repertoire of thinking strategies to handle challenging texts, and guide students to be increasingly aware and in charge of their own thinking processes.
8. Students should engage in frequent interdisciplinary inquiries and projects, and where possible, entire interdisciplinary courses, to explore topics in depth.
9. Students of all ages need to hear powerful writing through performance—reading aloud by the teacher and other students, dramatic interpretation, audiobooks, etc.
10. Adolescent students need opportunities to connect with the adult literate community, starting with teachers as readers who generously share their reading lives with young people.

The authors of a report to the Carnegie Corporation offer some of the same recommendations, along with recommendations about assessment and the professional development needs of teachers:

1. Direct, explicit comprehension instruction, which is instruction in the strategies and processes that proficient readers use to understand what they read, including summarizing, keeping track of one's own understanding, and a host of other practices
2. Effective instructional principles embedded in content, including language arts teachers using content-area texts and content-area teachers providing instruction and practice in reading and writing skills specific to their subject areas
3. Motivation and self-directed learning, which includes building motivation to read and learn and providing students with the instruction and support needed for independent learning tasks they will face after graduation
4. Text-based collaborative learning, which involves students interacting with one another around a variety of texts

5. Strategic tutoring, which provides students with intense individualized reading, writing, and content instruction as needed
6. Diverse texts, which are texts at a variety of difficulty levels and on a variety of topics
7. Intensive writing, including instruction connected to the kinds of writing tasks students will have to perform well in high school and beyond
8. A technology component, which includes technology as a tool for and a topic of literacy instruction
9. Ongoing formative assessment of students, which is informal, often daily assessment of how students are progressing under current instructional practices
10. Extended time for literacy, which includes approximately two to four hours of literacy instruction and practice that takes place in language arts and content-area classes
11. Professional development that is both long term and ongoing
12. Ongoing summative assessment of students and programs, which is more formal and provides data that are reported for accountability and research purposes
13. Teacher teams, which are interdisciplinary teams that meet regularly to discuss students' progress and align instruction
14. Leadership, which can come from principals and teachers who have a solid understanding of how to teach reading and writing to the full array of students present in schools
15. A comprehensive and coordinated literacy program, which is interdisciplinary and interdepartmental and may even coordinate with out-of-school organizations and the local community (Biancarosa & Snow, 2004).

### **Linking Reading and Writing**

Teachers in traditional English classes at the middle school and high school levels have typically asked students to read works of literature and then to write essays about the literature they have read. Teachers have asked students to locate and read relevant critical texts (books, articles, and online resources) linked to a selected topic. Students have then studied their gathered facts and opinions and have written a documented research paper that supports a thesis about the topic. Ideally, such assignments grow out of students' genuine interest in exploring critical texts that have been published about the literature that they are reading for the first time.

Good teachers still teach students the nuts and bolts about research strategies and documentation. But many teachers now think of research-based assignments as inquiry projects that involve an "I-search" process (Macrorie, 1988). Student researchers pose questions about their topic, then gather and read a range of traditional and sometimes unusual texts and artifacts.

Instead of looking simply for conclusions that can be drawn from their reading, students write the story of their search and explain the discoveries they have made through the research process. Somewhat similarly, teachers are asking students to create “multi-genre” papers that involve reading an eclectic set of texts about a topic or theme—ads, song lyrics, news clippings—in addition to library resources. Segments of the texts about topics and student commentary are composed and integrated into the multi-genre papers themselves and presented visually and/or in print (Romano, 2000), often juxtaposing quoted materials and students’ text to suggest multiple meanings.

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### **The College Board Standards for College Success**

Virtually all of the data and discussion included in this section of the framework focuses on the needs of struggling or disengaged student readers. The high stakes attached to *No Child Left Behind* legislation have led middle and high school English language arts teachers to take a new look at their students’ reading skills and interests. What seems clear is that great numbers of students read at levels that fall far short of the higher levels of the College Board’s performance expectations for reading comprehension in grades 6-12. This disconnection may mean that the College Board standards, if distributed widely, could be useful for middle and high school English teachers—especially for those who have never thought of themselves as reading teachers, though they work with students who read at all levels.

The *College Board Standards for College Success* (2005) includes a highly articulated set of statements that describe the levels of reading performance that students who are entering college should have achieved. (A correlation chart that demonstrates the alignment between these standards and the *NCTE/IRA Standards* is included in Appendix 2.) The Standards describe the “reasoning and mental processes that good readers use when interpreting and constructing meaning from texts,” including *linguistic processes* used to analyze text features, *cognitive processes* used to “construct and elaborate mental models of the world implied by the text,” *analytical processes* used to interpret an author’s intended meaning, and *metacognitive processes* used to monitor comprehension.

### **The College Board Standards for College Success– Reading**

Standard 1: Students construct a coherent understanding of a variety of literary and informational texts by comprehending the components of text, including the words, sentences, narrative elements, organizational patterns, graphical representations, and text features.

Standard 2: Students make connections among their prior knowledge and experiences; the social, cultural, and historical context; the author’s perspectives, attitudes, and beliefs; and knowledge of language to develop, extend, and elaborate multiple interpretations of texts.

Standard 3: Students analyze how authors use language, literary and stylistic devices, and genre elements to appeal to an audience and achieve purposes and goals.

Standard 4: Students use pre-reading, during-reading, post-reading, and metacognitive strategies to identify purposes and goals for reading; identify and elaborate key ideas; extend, elaborate, and deepen comprehension; organize, restructure, and synthesize representations of meaning; and monitor comprehension. Students adjust strategies based on the success or failure of comprehension.

### **Reading and Technology**

English language arts teachers find that guiding students’ reading of online texts presents challenges, given that online texts are often surrounded by distracting images, sidebars, and even flashing buttons and messages. The physical task is very different as well. Online readers must sit before a screen and scroll through electronic text that typically permits no response, whereas readers who hold books with paper pages can sit wherever they like and can bookmark, write a post-it note, underline, or make notes in the margin.

Nevertheless, students quickly learn to augment library research through the use of online resources, and they find a world of texts and visual materials that were previously unavailable. Search engines have become an easy-to-use tool for locating information on any topic, though student researchers need some direction when a Google search results in half a million links. At the same time, English language arts teachers are challenged to find time to search among an ever-expanding array of online classroom resources that might enrich their students’ reading.

### **Reading and Equity and Excellence**

Visually impaired students benefit from listening alternatives to reading, such as books on tape. MP3 players and iPods can accommodate downloaded books and provide another listening option.

Adolescent literature reaches across several grade levels and reading levels by addressing adolescent topics of interest.

For students who excel and seek out ever-more sophisticated texts and resources, online resources provide a wealth of additional texts, including obscure historical documents, such as early editions of Shakespeare's plays, etc.

Especially for student researchers in small town and rural schools, online resources put almost limitless information at their fingertips. As they research topics and write research papers and reports, they can supplement the information gleaned from library holdings with up-to-date materials accessed online.

### **Guiding Principles: Reading**

1. Readers transact with and construct meaning from texts within situations and social contexts, learning to distinguish between reading for efferent and aesthetic purposes.
2. English language arts students benefit from *writing* like a *reader*, integrating into the texts they write some of the sentence patterns and organizational patterns they have encountered in their reading. Similarly, students benefit from *reading* like a *writer*, noticing in the texts they read how authors construct sentences, sentence patterns, and texts.
3. Readers interpret and construct meaning from texts by making connections from the text to their prior knowledge and experience.
4. Readers interpret and construct meaning from texts by analyzing text elements and structures, including word meaning, sentence and paragraph structures, rhetorical and literary elements, and genres.
5. English language arts students read a wide range of print and nonprint texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world; to acquire new information; to respond to the needs and demands of society and the workplace; and for personal fulfillment. Among these texts are fiction and nonfiction, classic and contemporary works.
6. Student readers apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their word identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features (e.g., sound-letter correspondence, sentence structure, context, graphics).
7. English language arts students conduct research on issues and interests by generating ideas and questions, and by posing problems. They gather, evaluate, and synthesize data from a variety of sources (e.g., print and non-print texts, artifacts, people) to communicate their discoveries in ways that suit their purpose and audience.

## Teaching and Learning: Writing

During most of the twentieth century, many English teachers taught writing by focusing on the final “product.” They asked their students to study exemplar essays that ostensibly had been created through a straightforward process of writing a thesis, generating major points, and creating a formal outline. As a rule, they asked students to read and to write essays that were approximately 500 words long. They varied the assignments over time so that students got a chance to read and to write in four modes of writing—narration, description, exposition, and argumentation. Week after week students started a new essay on Monday and turned it in on Friday. On weekends, conscientious teachers read the essays, marking surface-feature errors and checking to see the extent to which each essay was unified, coherent, and well developed.

In the 1980s, classroom research revolutionized the teaching of writing and English language arts as a content area (Emig, 1971; Perl, 1979; Graves, 1983). Through direct observation, classroom conversations, and protocol studies with student writers, researchers learned how dramatically different real students’ writing and thinking processes were from the textbook model. They also learned that revision plays a bigger role in students’ writing processes, both during and following the composing phase. Real students wrote tentatively, scratching out and starting over, eventually pushing ahead, then circling back, stopping from time to time to read and revise, and then pressing on. Writing was redefined as a recursive process of making meaning and revising.

Milner and Milner (2003) have identified the following “foundational assumptions,” primarily about writing as process, as articulated by Atwell (1987), Calkins (1983), Graves (1983), Murray (1977), and others:

1. The writer is an autonomous self-starter who has a need to explore meaning and to communicate.
2. Writing is an extended process that includes prewriting, writing, and rewriting (revising and editing).
3. All modes of written discourse are equally respected.
4. Students are expected to write and are given responsibility for shaping their own writing.
5. Conferencing with student writers is a basic feature of instruction.
6. Student writers need many readers to respond to their work.

7. Ownership of writing begins with selecting a topic and extends to giving writing a public platform.
8. Writing is a whole process whose parts are not easily divisible but are recursive one with another. (pp. 295-296)

Some teachers today still link virtually all writing to the study of literature, but most want students to have a broader experience that will prepare them for a range of real-world writing needs. Current NAEP assessments ask students to write “narrative,” “informative,” or “persuasive” texts. The chart below provides for a somewhat wider range of choices: “expressive” writing (that is, exploratory writing, or writing that is close to the self); “informative” writing (texts that “transact” with readers by informing and/or persuading); and “imaginative” texts (creative writing that calls attention to itself artistically in fiction, drama, poetry, and creative nonfiction):

### **Current Challenges**

Across the nation NAEP writing performance (2002) remains low. Only 2 percent of both 8<sup>th</sup>-grade and 12<sup>th</sup>-grade writers scored at the “advanced” level, indicating that they can “express analytical, critical, and/or creative thinking.” Only 31 percent of 8<sup>th</sup>-grade, and 24 percent of 12<sup>th</sup>-grade writers scored at or above the “proficient” level, indicating that they can “create an effective response” and “use sufficient elaboration to clarify and enhance the central idea.”

Low national writing scores call further attention to writing as the “neglected” part of the nation’s curriculum. The National Commission on Writing in America’s Schools and Colleges (2003) has created a “writing agenda for the nation.” Two of the Commission’s five major recommendations focus specifically on the teaching and learning of writing:

1. We recommend that the nation’s leaders place writing squarely in the center of the school agenda and that policymakers at the state and local levels provide the resources required to improve writing.
2. We recommend that state and local education agencies work with writing specialists to develop strategies for increasing the amount of time students spend writing.

### From “Process” to “Post-Process” Teaching and Writing

Milner and Milner (2003) chart how teachers and researchers have shifted their thinking of writing primarily as “product” to writing primarily as “process,” but also suggest that the best teachers today are repositioning themselves to take a more central role as knowledgeable experts.

Many teachers who once assigned formulaic five-paragraph essays have cast off the rigid models and replaced them with a writing process that helps students learn not to be satisfied too quickly, but instead to play with possibilities, shaping their texts and sharpening their focus as they write multiple drafts. Sometimes, however, students who depended primarily on writing as process never got beyond superficial ideas and ended up in a muddle of details and possible directions. Directly teaching revision strategies and following up with teacher-student writing conferences has helped students learn to handle such circumstances on their own. And now, in a post-process environment, as Atwell (1998) points out, teachers feel the need to be directly involved: “I come on like gangbusters in terms of teaching and expecting a lot in writing and reading workshop. And instead of diminishing or silencing their voices, I think that raising my voice, in the company of students in the working shop, has had the effect of strengthening theirs” (p. 48).

Today’s “post-process” teaching practices continue to provide choices for student writers, but many teachers are assigning writing tasks that move students closer to the kind of writing that NAEP has identified as “advanced” and that only 2 percent of students are currently achieving. Partly in response to the narrow focus of *No Child Left Behind* legislation on reading and mathematics, middle and high school English language arts teachers today are taking a new look at informational or expository writing, while they are also beginning to teach more strategies for *reading* informational and expository texts. This approach does not signal a return to assigning perfunctory five-paragraph essays or to reading texts that “dumb down” more sophisticated texts. Instead, such actions teach students to compose informative texts that are well reasoned and lively and at the same time teach students to be better readers of such texts.

Sommers discovered that one of the “biggest revelations” among Harvard freshmen was that their writing work wasn’t finished when they completed a first draft. Students made this discovery when they received “sustained and detailed feedback” along with encouragement to “pose questions that are not exactly answered, to take positions that are truly independent, and to recognize how writing can be used as a tool of discovery and learning.” Sommers’ study concluded that teacher feedback is often the “primary form of writing instruction” at Harvard and “probably the most significant contribution an instructor can make to the education of a writer.”

Teachers of Advanced Placement (AP) English Language and Composition may ask students to do more of the kind of writing that Sommers describes. That is, they may be more likely to assign AP students to do close readings of difficult texts, and they may be more likely to give writing assignments that require that students argue original theses. They ask students to use the literature or other reading selections as topics to address or discuss within their writing. Responses to students' writing probably vary a good bit from teacher to teacher. But teachers may be more likely to respond more thoroughly, especially if they have a lighter teaching load, and nudge students to use literary terms and concepts as they move closer to taking their AP exam.

### **Small Classes, Talented Teachers, and Time**

Former U.S. Senator Robert Kerrey, who is leading a campaign to implement the proposals of the National Commission on Writing, recently described what it would take to teach writing effectively (Hurwitz and Hurwitz, 2004). He mentioned three requirements: small classes, talented teachers, and time. Even in AP courses, however, it seems unlikely in the current phase of cutbacks and limited resources that middle and high school English teachers across the country would ever be given small enough classes and enough time to provide the “sustained and detailed” individual feedback that Harvard students receive. But Sommers' study demonstrates the potential significance that writing—the “neglected R”—*could* have: “A writing-intensive education allows students to participate in the world of ideas as producers rather than solely as consumers of knowledge.”

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### **Writing To Learn and Writing Across the Curriculum**

The report of the National Commission on Writing describes the educational value of writing as “not simply a way for students to demonstrate what they know. It is a way to help them understand what they know. At best writing is learning” (p. 13). Thus, many middle and high school English language arts teachers teach writing not only as a part of the English language arts curriculum, but they also *use* writing as an occasion for students to think and write informally to support and strengthen what is being taught and learned. As students read a novel, plan a research project, or reflect on class discussion, they can use freewriting (writing that is tentative and exploratory) to discover new meaning. Many teachers and students in virtually all content areas—including art, music, and physical education—have discovered the positive impact of using writing to learn.

Writing across the curriculum (WAC) can also include writing-to-learn strategies, but it frequently goes further. It asks students in chemistry or history classes, for example, to study texts written by chemists or historians and invites students, through reading and writing, to “bridge the gap between their language and the discourse community of a specific discipline” (Strickland and Strickland, 1993, p. 121).

### **The College Board Standards for College Success**

The *College Board Standards for College Success* (2006) include a highly articulated set of statements that describe the levels of writing performance that students who are entering college should have achieved. The standards listed below will ground the teaching of writing for middle and high school English language arts teachers. They may also be useful in a practical way for preservice teachers and for teachers who have had limited preparation or professional development linked to the teaching of writing. A correlation chart that demonstrates the alignment between the College Board’s standards for writing and the NCTE/IRA standards relevant to writing is included in Appendix 3.

#### **The College Board Standards for College Success– Writing**

Standard 1: Writers determine their purpose for writing (e.g., to explore, to inform, to express, to persuade, to entertain, to share an experience or emotion) and consider possible audiences and genres. They analyze rhetorical tasks in a variety of ways and with an emerging sense of audience. In doing so, they reflect on, explore, define, and organize their thoughts in order to set goals about how best to accomplish their writing tasks. This process is recursive, not linear: writers redefine their goals and strategies in light of audience and context. Depending upon the task and upon their experiences, writers may compose written or mental lists, engage in fast writes, or even perform this process tacitly.

Standard 2: Writers evaluate and revise texts—revising for coherence, development, insight, and effect.

Standard 3: Writers present technically sound texts—employing conventions, grammar, and usage; and employing stylistic conventions.

Standard 4: Writers conduct research—creating a research design, evaluating sources, and citing sources.

## **Writing and Technology**

The National Educational Technology Standards for Students, created by The International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE, 2000, p. 4), include the following standards that are especially relevant to writing, the teaching of writing, and technology communication tools:

- Students use telecommunications to collaborate, publish, and interact with peers, experts, and other audiences.
- Students use a variety of media and formats to communicate information and ideas effectively to multiple audiences.

Electronic text that can be easily manipulated has dramatically altered the theory and practice of teaching writing. Freewriting that is quickly produced at the computer captures emerging ideas. Copying-and-pasting makes major revision an easier process that no longer requires laborious typing or retyping of handwritten text. Editing is supported by the spellchecker, grammar checker, and online thesaurus. “Publishing” word-processed documents involves a range of choices of font, boldface type, italicizing, highlighting, borders, color, images, spacing—all of which affect the visual representation of the text and help determine the extent to which the text will achieve the writer’s intended purpose for a particular audience. On the other hand, the clean, professional look of texts composed quickly on the computer has sometimes given students the mistaken impression that their writing itself is of high quality.

Most students welcome the chance to send and receive e-mail messages, create Web sites, and participate in web blogs, MOOS, and chat room conversations. Blogs are especially useful as a tool for writing since they allow students to collaborate on a writing project, respond to each other’s work, and receive advice and notes from their teacher. Students and teachers can also use the “track changes” and “split screen” features to respond to texts on the screen.

## **Writing and Equity and Excellence**

The equity issue that generates the most anxiety for English language arts teachers is the controversy about the extent to which student writers should be held to hard and fast rules about using standard English. Most English teachers believe that the same high expectations for the use of standard English should hold for all speakers for whom English is not a second language. Writing for some occasions and audiences, such as the writing of personal narrative or poetry, affords students the opportunity to code switch effectively for a particular effect or a particular

audience. Ultimately, the issue of equity involves holding high standards, providing high-quality instruction and equal access to standard English, which is in effect the “language of power” for all students.

Some English teachers find themselves challenged to meet the needs of students with a special talent for, or interest in, creative writing—which includes the traditional creative genres of poetry, fiction, and drama, plus the more recent addition of creative nonfiction. Unless the curriculum for a course focuses entirely on expository writing, teachers of English language arts should build into the curriculum at least some opportunities and encouragement for creative writing. Teachers can also create opportunities for publication of student work through essay and creative writing contests, letters to the editor, literary magazines, and classroom publications of a group of student writings.

### **Guiding Principles: Writing**

1. Writing is a recursive process in which writers revisit the stages of writing—prewriting, drafting, revising, and editing—on their journey to a finished product.
2. Writers use a variety of writing strategies to generate content, structure (e.g., literary analysis, creative nonfiction, or reflective nonfiction), and meaning to clarify understanding.
3. Student writers employ a wide range of strategies as they write and use different writing process elements appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes.
4. Student writers benefit from *reading* like a *writer*, noticing in the texts they read how authors construct sentences, organizational patterns, and whole texts. Similarly, students benefit from *writing* like a *reader*, integrating into the texts they write some of the sentence patterns and patterns of organization they have encountered in their reading.
5. Student writers conduct research on issues and interests by generating ideas and questions, and by posing problems. They gather, evaluate, and synthesize data from a variety of sources (e.g., print and non-print texts, artifacts, people) to communicate their discoveries in ways that suit their purpose and audience.
6. Student writers use telecommunications to write, collaborate, publish, and interact with peers, experts, and other audiences.
7. Student writers use a variety of media and formats to communicate information and ideas effectively to multiple audiences.

### **Guiding Principles: Argumentation**

1. The study of argument is a vital part of the English language arts curriculum.
2. Argument is central to the development of students' thinking in all disciplines and in the discussion of public issues. Speakers and writers marshal and interpret evidence in service of their ideas, interpretations, and recommendations for action.
3. Arguments are constructed for particular purposes, audiences, and contexts, and can employ a range of conventions of genre and presentational form.
4. The reading of argument helps readers understand how writers anticipate the beliefs and knowledge base of their audiences and structure the presentation of their own claims and the data that support them.
5. An important aspect of constructing argument is synthesizing data and viewpoints from diverse sources of information, not only written texts but also visual and quantitative data.

### **Teaching and Learning: The English Language**

When middle school and high school English teachers think and talk about their content area, they tend to focus most on the teaching of literature and writing. The study of the English language, however, cuts across all dimensions of the content area, thus integrating reading, writing, speaking, listening, visually representing, and literature study. Ultimately, language equips students with “the most powerful, most readily available tool we have for representing the world to ourselves and ourselves to the world” (NCTE/IRA Standards, p. 1). Language study, then, is important as “not only a means of communication,” but also “a primary instrument of thought, a defining feature of culture, and an unmistakable mark of personal identity” (NCTE/IRA standards, p. 12).

### **Vocabulary, Literature, and Language Study**

Some middle and high school English language arts teachers continue to assign a list of words a week or a month that students must “look up” and be able to spell and define on a test at the end of the study period. Few students, however, “own” any of these words after the test is over, not even if they were asked to use them in their writing. Before assigning a reading selection, teachers sometimes define key words that will appear in the text, knowing that once students encounter the new words in context, they are more likely to read with understanding and to remember the meanings of the new words. Some teachers choose not to pre-teach vocabulary,

instead encouraging students to use context clues when they encounter unfamiliar words. If they can't figure out the meaning, students can write down the unfamiliar word on a post-it note and place it next to the line with the unfamiliar word, then check dictionary definitions later to determine the appropriate meaning within the context of particular sentences. Such strategies can be reinforced if students are asked to keep a personal vocabulary list of new terms and their definitions.

Many English teachers believe, however, that if vocabulary is taught for its own sake, it needs to be taught in small doses so that more of the new information will be retained. Learning selected Greek and Latin roots, for example, allows students to see the array of words that may have common roots and to strengthen word-attack strategies for decoding unfamiliar words. Helping students see relationships between old and new words is another strategy that can be accomplished through grouping words or semantic mapping. English teachers generally underestimate the power of word play, but it is not at all frivolous; it is part of the exploration of the richness of language and the joy of manipulating it.

Some teachers today are linking the teaching of language and the teaching of literature more closely by embedding the vocabulary preview into pre-reading discussion related to difficult ideas and concepts in the literature that students will read (Barton, p. 82). For example, before Barton's students read John Updike's short story "A & P," Barton places on the board in a random list several new vocabulary words from the story related to the concept of gender politics (such as, "misogynist" and "egocentric"). He then asks students to work together to determine where each word should be placed on a visual positive-negative "vocabulary thermometer" to distinguish shades of meaning. As students read the story, then, they can use the new words to discuss the various characters' interactions and reactions. Such experiences improve the chances that the new terms will stick, since students have spoken and written them in the course of organizing them in some way. Students have debated the placement and meaning, and applied the words to the literature (p. 86). Students get even more practice with the terms during a follow-up lesson when they are asked to identify television characters who seem to epitomize each of the new terms (p. 85).

High school English teacher, John Gaughan, goes further by creating a thematic unit that explicitly focuses on language issues, titled "Understanding Language: Assumptions and Bias" (1997). Within this several-week study, Gaughan's students read historical documents, short stories, and newspaper clippings. They also draw on their memory of the literature they have read earlier in the year. Through their reading and discussion, students come to understand that language can "stir both patriotism and hatred" and that it "not only reflects reality but shapes it as

well” (pp. 86-87). At one point, for example, he asked students to look closely at a local news article that reported events from the Middle East, including the following sentences: “Arabs killed three Jews. A dozen Palestinians also died, most from Israeli army gunfire.” By noticing the reporter’s choice of words and sentence structure, students could identify the implicit bias in the phrasing that emphasized Arab aggression while glossing over the aggression of Israelis (p. 89).

### **Spelling, Writing, and Language Study**

English language arts teachers come to understand that spelling is *learned* primarily through reading, but it is needed and *used* primarily for writing. They often ask students to adopt a “being sure” policy that requires checking the spelling of any word that they are not sure about as they proofread their writing. Teachers hold their students responsible for correctly spelling words that appear on a list of “no excuse” words—a strategy that instills a sense of awareness, or a spelling “conscience,” in students who spell too casually. Sipe *et al* (2002) have identified the following “core understandings” about classroom practices that help meet the needs of middle school spellers:

- Students need strategies that promote reflection about spelling within the broader context of language study.
- Spelling instruction should generalize to larger groups of words so students begin to see order and logic in the language.
- Students need resources like spell checkers, dictionaries, mnemonic devices, and editors, as well as instruction on when and how to use them, to promote independence and ownership.
- Since a mere 500 words make up the bulk of the words used in routine communication, high-frequency words should be stressed and emphasized through personal dictionaries, wall charts, and frequent discussion.
- Students should always have opportunities for multiple drafts when correctness matters.
- Students should be given opportunities to play with words and develop investment in literacy—through rich oral and written language interactions. (p. 28)

## Grammar and Language Study

### Clarification of Terms:

Socially, the term *grammar* is often used to refer to a set of rules about the way we are “supposed to speak or write” (Tchudi & Mitchell, 1989, p. 251). Technically, however, *grammar* refers to “the structure or system of a language” (Calderonello, Martin and Blair, 2003, p. 1). It refers to components of the language system and how they fit together, and it describes “the language conventions that a speaker of the language has mastered in order to be able to communicate with other people” (Tchudi & Mitchell). *Usage*, on the other hand, is “concerned with the perceived social level of the speaker rather than with understanding or communication of messages.” Three sentence variations illustrate the important distinctions:

“Nobody ain’t and got me ain’t got nobody yet I.” = Ungrammatical  
 “I ain’t got nobody, and nobody ain’t got me yet.” = Grammatical  
 “I haven’t anyone, and no one has gotten me yet.” = “Standard” Usage

Middle and high school English teachers disagree more about the teaching of grammar and usage than about any other part of the curriculum. Some teachers simply take pleasure in the straightforward teaching of grammatical structures, usage, and mechanics. Others believe that targeted grammar instruction provides terminology and structures that help students improve their speech and compose more sophisticated sentences. Still other teachers agree with parents and the general public who often express strong approval of teaching the grammar text “cover to cover.” Too often, however, despite the emphasis—or lack of emphasis on grammar—students continue to write texts with comma splices, confusing pronouns, misplaced apostrophes, and dangling participles.

It is the perennial complaint about students’ grammar skills that led researchers to explore what might not be working. Braddock, Lloyd-Jones, and Schoer’s research (1963) led them to a profound and frequently quoted conclusion: “In view of the widespread agreement of research studies based upon many types of students, the conclusion can be stated in strong and unqualified terms: the teaching of formal grammar has a negligible or, because it usually displaces some instruction and practice in actual composition, even a harmful effect on the improvement of writing” (cited by Hillocks, pp. 37-38). More than twenty years later, Hillocks’ (1986) meta-analysis of research studies confirmed that teaching traditional grammar concepts does not produce positive results: “None of the studies reviewed for the present report provides any support for teaching grammar as a means of improving composition skills. If schools insist upon teaching the identification of parts of speech, the parsing or diagramming of sentences, or

other concepts of traditional school grammar (as many still do), they cannot defend it as a means of improving the quality of writing” (p. 138).

Certainly not all teachers were aware of these research conclusions, but those who were aware embraced them, or rejected them, or looked for new ways to address students’ needs regarding sentence structure and mechanics. Many learned from the research of Mina Shaughnessy, who worked following World War II with “basic writing” veterans for whom college was an “unexpected opportunity” (1977). Teachers have learned from Shaughnessy how to look for the “intelligence” of students’ mistakes and how to “harness that intelligence in the service of learning” (p. 12). Like Shaughnessy, they discovered the fear that gripped basic writers who didn’t know what to do about their errors (p. 7) and they learned to start with whatever understandings (or misunderstandings) students brought with them and then help them overcome the difficulties (p. 283).

Today, teachers who are grounded in theory and research know that they can tailor mini-lessons (Atwell, 1998, p. 152) and individual editing conferences (Brinkley, 1998, p. 125) to address sentence boundary issues or other needs that the teacher notices within students’ writing or speech. Some schools develop a well-articulated curriculum that allows teachers some flexibility in terms of when and how certain grammar and usage components are taught. Each year, instead of studying an entire grammar curriculum, students concentrate on a few new concepts while reinforcing what has been taught in previous years. The system works even better when teachers (including those in other disciplines), students, and parents all have a written description of the elements being featured for study that year so that everyone can reinforce the learning and the application of the featured elements.

Recent accounts from middle and high school teachers report the positive effect of focusing students’ attention on the rhetoric of the sentence. Through direct teaching and modeling of specific grammatical structures and sentence patterns, students are able, with little effort, to compose more effective sentences. Killgallon (1998) discovered how effective such strategies can be as he taught tenth graders, following a first-year teaching experience that had failed miserably. After a lengthy grammar unit, he had asked students to spend a fifty-minute period composing one “wonderful” and “memorable” sentence. To his dismay, students’ sentences fell well below his expectations, including, “The elephant is a slow person.” As he searched for alternatives, he noticed by chance an especially effective sentence in a book that he was reading (“This is a snail shell, round, full, and glossy as a horse chestnut.” –A. M. Lindbergh) and then offered the sentence as a structural model for his tenth graders to imitate. This time, the same student wrote, “There is a flag, striped, colorful, and starry as a night sky” (p. 172).

Middle school teacher Harry Noden (1999) learned from Killgallon's experience and showed his students Hemingway's use of participial phrases:

*Shifting the weight of the line to his left shoulder and kneeling carefully, he washed his hand in the ocean and held it there, submerged, for more than a minute, watching the blood trail away and the steady movement of the water against his hand as the boat moved.*

Noden discussed the uses of the *-ing* and *-ed* constructions, and then invited his students to revise a sentence in their own drafts by using a similar construction. Students' attention was thereby focused more on the craft of writing than on fixing errors. Middle and high school teachers across the country have recently begun following this method, with minimal teaching of grammatical terms, to teach students to use sophisticated grammatical structures that add life and visual detail to their writing, and that may influence students' speech patterns to some degree as well.

### **Grammar and the National Council of Teachers of English**

Members of the National Council of Teachers of English Assembly for the Teaching of English Grammar have identified three grammar goals that summarize a new comprehensive grammar curriculum:

- Goal A: Every student, from every background, will complete school with the ability to communicate comfortably and effectively in both spoken and written standard English, with awareness of when use of standard English is appropriate.
- Goal B: Every student will complete school with the ability to analyze the grammatical structure of sentences within English texts, using grammatical terminology correctly and demonstrating knowledge of how sentence-level grammatical structure contributes to the coherence of paragraphs and texts.
- Goal C: Every student will complete school with an understanding of, and appreciation for, the natural variation that occurs in language across time, social situation, and social group. While recognizing the need for mastering standard English, students will also demonstrate an understanding of the equality in the expressive capacity and linguistic structure among a range of language varieties both vernacular and standard, as well as an understanding of language-based prejudice. (p. 4)

The authors (Haussamen, Benjamin, Kolln, and Wheeler, 2003), writing on behalf of the NCTE Assembly, provide practical classroom vignettes and concrete classroom suggestions, along with chapters that review grammar “basics,” including sentence diagramming and an overview of linguistic grammar. The vignettes provide a glimpse of how teachers engage students’ interest in the study of grammar and how they address the special needs of English language learners. Their examples, however, do not entirely resolve the controversy about how much grammar to teach or how to teach it well.

The three grammar goals are all controversial in some way among English language arts teachers: Goal A is least controversial, though a few English teachers don’t place a high value on Standard English for all students. Goal B rejects the research conclusions cited by Hillocks (1986) and Braddock, Lloyd-Jones, and Schoer (1963). Thus, Goal B serves as a wake-up call for English teachers who have paid little attention to students’ sentence-level writing and speaking skills. Goal B might also be seen as giving permission to teachers who want to dust off their grammar police badges, ready to ticket all who break the grammar “laws.” And Goal C clearly affirms students’ right to their own social language, which may cause grammar purists to squirm.

The three goals together provide strong support for English language arts teachers who want students to preserve their home language but also to use standard English comfortably as well. In order to equip students with both choices, linguist Lisa Delpit (2002) insists that teachers must listen to students and refuse to view those who speak a particular language variation as deficient. Otherwise, Delpit believes, modifying instruction will not make much difference (p. 41-42). Similarly, Calderonello, Martin, and Blair (2003) explain that, “...what is most important is that teachers recognize this dialect as a language spoken in the home and not label it ‘wrong English’ or ‘bad English.’ Speakers of BEV [Black English Vernacular] need first to be introduced to the linguistic expectations the school system has of them and then be encouraged to regard standard English as a means of communicating with a broader and more varied audience” (pp. 10-11).

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## **The English Language and Equity and Excellence**

*ESL Standards for Pre-K-12 Students* (see also the “Teaching and Learning: Speaking and Listening” section of this framework, pp. 45-50) have been published by Teachers of English for Speakers of Other Languages, Inc. (1997). Included in the document are the following “General Principles of Language Acquisition” that are especially relevant to English language issues:

### General Principles of Language Acquisition

A number of general principles derived from current research and theory about the nature of language, language learning, human development, and pedagogy, underlie the ESL standards described in this document. These principles are described briefly here. (Note: Each principle is listed below, along with a summary sentence that appears at the end of the descriptive paragraph that follows each principle in the ESL standards document. For the full text, see the ESL Standards document.)

1. Language is functional. ... Therefore, what is most important for ESOL learners is to function effectively in English and through English while learning challenging academic content.
2. Language varies. ... What is most important for ESOL learners is to function effectively in academic environments, while retaining their own native language varieties.
3. Language learning is cultural learning. ... What is important for all language learners is to develop attitudes of additive bilingualism and biculturalism.
4. Language acquisition is a long-term process. ... This means that ESOL learners must be given the time it takes to attain full academic proficiency in English, often from 5 to 7 years.
5. Language acquisition occurs through meaningful use and interaction. ... This means that ESOL learners must have multiple opportunities to use English, to interact with others as they study meaningful and intellectually challenging content, and to receive feedback on their language use.
6. Language processes develop interdependently. ... This means that ESOL learners need learning environments that provide demonstrations of the interdependence of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. They also need to develop all of their language abilities through the use of varied modes and technologies.
7. Native language proficiency contributes to second language acquisition. ... This means that for ESOL learners the most effective environments for second language teaching and learning are those that promote ESOL students’ native language and literacy development as a foundation for English language and academic development.
8. Bilingualism is an individual and societal asset. ... This means that bilingualism benefits the individual and serves the national interest, and schools need to promote the retention and development of multiple languages.

**Guiding Principles: The English Language**

1. English has several levels of usage, and consequently the language considered appropriate and effective in some situations may not be appropriate and effective in others.
2. Vocabulary knowledge can be increased by reading or hearing new words in context, by relating new words to prior knowledge, and by using new words on multiple occasions.
3. Students apply knowledge of language structure, language conventions (e.g., spelling and punctuation), media techniques, figurative language, and genre to create, critique, and discuss print and nonprint texts.
4. Students develop an understanding of and respect for diversity in language use, patterns, and dialects across cultures, ethnic groups, geographic regions, and social roles.
5. Students whose first language is not English make use of their first language to develop competency in the English language arts and to develop understanding of content across the curriculum.
6. Teachers reinforce the need for and the learning of Standard Edited English, that is, the language of wider communication.

**Guiding Principles: English Language Learners**

1. Students who are English language learners use English to participate in social interaction; interact in, through, and with spoken and written English for personal expression and enjoyment; and use learning strategies to extend their communicative competence.
2. English language learners use English to interact in the classroom; use English to obtain, process, construct, and provide subject matter information in spoken and written form; and use appropriate learning strategies to construct and apply academic knowledge.
3. English language learners use the appropriate language variety, register, and genre according to audience, purpose, and setting; use nonverbal communication appropriate to audience, purpose, and setting; and use appropriate learning strategies to extend their sociolinguistic and sociocultural competence.

## Teaching and Learning: Literature

The NCTE/IRA *Standards for the Language Arts* (1996) define “literature” as “imaginative writings in prose or verse, as poems, plays, novels, and short stories.” An additional note explains that, “Although in its modern usage, *literature* is distinguished from historical writing, and increasingly from such popular forms as romance or mystery fiction, in this document we use a broad definition of literature that includes often excluded forms such as essays, journals, and autobiographies” (p. 73). The more inclusive definition also allows for adding creative nonfiction to the traditional broad literary genres of poetry, drama, and fiction. Creative nonfiction is currently referred to as the “fourth genre” that is simultaneously a “form of literature, a goal of creative writing, and the aesthetic impulse in composition” (Root & Steinberg, 1999).

Over the years, literature study has been valued for a variety of reasons. It was thought to improve students’ character, to develop intellectual rigor, to “socialize” immigrant students, and to help students understand themselves and their world (Beach & Marshall, 1991, p. 16). More recently, literature study has been valued as a way to preserve “cultural knowledge” of important events and people within our society (Hirsch, 1987) or to inspire civic courage and transform society (Giroux, 1992).

Two NCTE/IRA standards relate to literature and build on past rationales: One standard asserts that, “Students read a wide range of literature from many periods in many genres to build an understanding of the many dimensions (e.g., philosophical, ethical, aesthetic) of human experience.” Another standard affirms more broadly that, “Students read a wide range of print and nonprint texts, to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world; to acquire new information; to respond to the needs and demands of society and the workplace; and for personal fulfillment.”

Perhaps the best reasons for teaching literature lie beyond the classroom. Readers know that literature provides an escape from pressing problems and daily routines. It allows readers to walk vicariously in other people’s shoes, to know what they are thinking and how they deal with tough life circumstances and choices. Through literature, teachers may be teaching what is ultimately most important, as Probst (2001) explains in a piece written after 9/11: “We teach our students to read stories in part to prepare them to read such events as these. We teach them to consider their responses so that they won’t be trapped by their own impulses and reflexes; we teach them to imagine so that they can achieve some grasp on lives and happenings distant from them....” (p. 53).

### **How Literature is Taught and Learned**

In the best English language arts classrooms, students learn firsthand about the power of literature. Over the course of each year, their teachers provide them with literature selections from fiction, drama, poetry, and creative nonfiction. The boundaries between genres, however, seem to grow less stable over time, and seem somewhat less significant now, as multigenre texts and multimedia works purposefully blur the distinctions.

In the best classrooms, English language arts teachers share their own love of literature with their students, not by lecturing endlessly but by inviting them to read a wide range of literary texts and by engaging them in rich conversations about literature. Teachers provide a regular schedule of time for reading and discussion that allows students to think ahead about their own responses. They provide direct instruction on targeted topics through mini-lessons or think-aloud sessions that give students a chance to know how an experienced reader makes meaning from literary texts. As Atwell (1998) worked with middle-school students, she came to call such occasions “taking off the top of my head” (pp. 331-369). Wolf (1995) recommends inviting students to “read *resonately*, with an ear for the long running conversations that comment on our history and ways of being” (p. 39). Teachers can move toward this goal by showing students “how to hear the different conversations going on in works” and by making connections with other stories, images, or events that reveal where the different conversations came from (pp. 44-45). Teachers can encourage students to develop “peripheral vision” as they read so that they can see the way a work “shapes and is shaped by long-running conversations within a culture” (p. 61).

Clearly, students can benefit from teacher-led, whole class discussions, but they can also benefit from taking charge of some of their own learning through classroom “literature circles” (Daniels, 1994). Each student, initially at least, takes on a specific role, serving over time as discussion director, connector, literary luminary, illustrator, or summarizer, etc. Many teachers ask students to fulfill the roles just long enough to internalize the different perspectives from which to consider literary texts. Each small group, or “circle” of students, may be reading a different book. Their teacher will occasionally meet with them individually and as a group, but often members of the group make decisions about how many pages to read before their next session and how to present their book to their classmates. And their teachers often come to realize that such structures can increase students’ active participation and deepen students’ engagement with literature.

Teachers of literature often learn about new authors and teaching strategies from reading professional books and journal articles, many of which are written by middle- or high-school

classroom teachers. Teachers also learn from research studies that provide information and insights they can put to work in their classrooms, and some conduct their own classroom research that informs their teaching. Wilhelm (1997) identified the following dimensions of response that he observed his middle school students using as they “created, experienced, and responded to literary worlds”: *evocative dimensions* involved entering the story world, showing interest in the story, relating to characters, and seeing the story world; *connective dimensions* involved elaborating on the story world and connecting literature to life; and *reflective dimensions* included considering significance, recognizing literary conventions, recognizing reading as a transaction, and evaluating an author and the self as reader (pp. 46-47). Wilhelm, and teachers who read his work, have used such findings to discover new strategies, especially using drama and art, to support their own student readers.

### **Adding Theory and Criticism to the Literature Curriculum**

For at least a generation, English teachers learned about literary criticism as undergraduates and came to know that the critics often disagreed about interpretations of particular texts. Literature majors enjoyed taking sides and making a case for certain interpretations. Sometimes without knowing it, they were using New Criticism as a critical lens while their professors led them in close, intricate readings and explications of texts. When undergraduates began teaching English in their own secondary classrooms, they may not have fully realized that there was any other way to approach the study of literature. During the last twenty-five years, however, teachers have become more aware of literary theory and criticism. They have come to realize that teaching and learning about literature inevitably reflects a theoretical stance.

In many cases, English teachers have also learned from Rosenblatt’s theories about reading and about responding to texts. They have helped students understand that readers who seek factual information, as when consulting a dictionary or a telephone book, read with an “efferent” purpose—to get specific, practical information. When students read literature, however, they must “transact” with the literature. That is, they must bring their own prior knowledge, experience, understanding, and “meaning” to the reading of the text. Meaning, Rosenblatt insists, does not exist entirely in the text on the page but is “transacted” between the reader and the text (1978; 1994).

This shift did not preclude close readings, however, and many English teachers continue, at least some of the time, to use and teach close reading strategies. Teachers today often explore and use other contemporary theories as well—cultural studies, women’s studies, multicultural studies, New Historicism, postcolonial studies, and more. Many middle- and high-school English

teachers find that taking a cultural studies perspective expands their notion of literature in ways that are consistent with today's multi-genre world. That is, they link literature study to "other genres, disciplines, and topics, including film, music, testimonial, politics, history, and a wide range of issues relevant to today's students" (Carey-Webb, 2001). Cultural studies typically engage students in the thematic study of literature, within a context of exploring historical circumstances and residual effects that may exist today, and often with an ultimate emphasis on the need for social change.

### **Organizing Literature Study**

Some English teachers still look to their literature anthology to determine how to organize literature study. But many others want more choices and rummage through the school bookroom to search for multiple copies of paperback novels, even if there are just enough for one literature circle group. They often make more of their own decisions, usually in consultation with some of their colleagues, about when and how to organize literature study—by nationality, chronology, genre, or theme. They think through carefully how to integrate literature into a coherent and effective English language arts program.

Many English language arts teachers have learned that students respond positively to reading a mix of classic and contemporary works of literature, often within a thematic unit that includes a mix of longer fiction and short, additional pieces in several genres. The units also include both formal and informal writing assignments related to a topic or theme, such as "The American Dream" or "Constructing Relationships" (Gaughan, 1997). Reading, writing, speaking, listening, viewing, and representing activities are all included in the unit. Often students engage in a culminating experience ranging from dramatic readings to community-based service learning projects.

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### **Literature and Technology**

Online resources provide access to every kind of literary text. A number of Web sites feature archived texts—including e-books, poems, articles, short stories, and plays—as well as study guides to go with them. Many Web sites, some at major universities, provide original manuscripts and threaded discussions about literature. Some sites provide information about paintings and museum artifacts that are related to the study of literary works. Other Web sites feature new literary forms, such as e-zines (electronic magazines), blogs (networks of hyperlinked documents

that anyone can publish), and wikis (open-source web pages that can be modified by almost anyone who has a web browser).

### **Literature and Equity and Excellence**

Given the web resources mentioned above, many English teachers recognize that there is a “digital divide” that privileges affluent students who are more likely to be white and to have greater access to the literary resources available online.

But students from different ethnic, economic, religious, cultural, and political backgrounds all need literature study that includes access to literary and multimedia texts created in diverse cultural, social, and historical contexts. Discussions of literature in middle and high school English language arts classes sometimes create a “contact zone” (Pratt, 1996), that is, an occasion when cultures clash. Rosen and Abt-Perkins (2000) encourage English teachers to “be prepared to facilitate the process by which students discover and explore ethnic connections” and also to be aware of their own cultural values in order to “circumvent conflicts of interpretation and judgment toward the actions, voices, and texts of diverse student populations” in English language arts classrooms.

### **Guiding Principles: Literature**

1. The study of literature is a vital part of the culture and of the English language arts curriculum.
2. Literature study includes an extensive body of works and literary genres, in English and in translation, that are created in diverse cultural, social, and historical contexts.
3. Literature entertains and provides vicarious experience that allows readers to witness and take pleasure in the experience of others and to examine the thoughts, beliefs, and actions of others.
4. Students read a wide range of literature from many periods in many genres to build an understanding of the many dimensions (e.g., philosophical, ethical, aesthetic) of human experience.
5. The study of literature is both an intensely personal and intensely social experience that accommodates a wide range of critical and interpretative approaches.
6. The study of literature is grounded in particular literary theories, whether or not authors or readers understand or acknowledge them.
7. Literature promotes aesthetic and intellectual growth, fosters an awareness of society, builds a sense of rootedness, and challenges readers to develop a sense of ethical responsibility.

## **Teaching and Learning: Speaking and Listening**

Virtually all middle and high school English teachers, when introduced in a social setting still occasionally encounter the “I’d-better-watch-what-I-say” response. Such comments are grounded in prior encounters with teachers who saw error correction as their primary responsibility. Effective teachers, however, pay attention to everyday conversation. They know that teenagers learn from TV sitcoms and talk shows how to use informal speech to fit in with peers. They know that adults as well (including teachers) pick up the catch phrases that get integrated into everyday conversation to show that the speaker is linguistically “cool.” In today’s best English language arts classrooms, therefore, teachers teach and use a number of formal and informal oral language strategies and structures that help students become effective speakers and listeners.

### **Perceptions of Public Speaking**

Many English teachers spend little time teaching students to be effective speakers. They may occasionally ask students to prepare and deliver a formal speech, but speechmaking is not a regular event, partly because the individual delivery of speeches takes so long. More attention is given to formal speaking in one-semester, elective classes that may or may not be part of the English language arts curriculum.

Beyond the classroom, however, a number of extra-curricular programs provide a rich set of public speaking opportunities for students who choose to participate. Students in forensics programs choose from a range of options, such as storytelling, dramatic interpretation, or extemporaneous speaking. High school debate is another highly competitive, extra-curricular program that depends in part on oral language. Students conduct extensive research on an announced topic. Then in public competitions they demonstrate that they can cite evidence, build a persuasive case, and successfully refute their opposing team’s case in order to win the debate. Similarly, drama is usually offered as an elective or extra-curricular activity rather than as a part of English language arts. The emphasis is on learning lines, enhancing artistic expression, and presenting a polished performance. Some of today’s students also participate in extra-curricular poetry “slams” that typically emphasize a dramatic performance of one’s own work or someone else’s.

Too often, however, even college graduates who move into jobs that involve public speaking or interaction with the public feel self-conscious and uncomfortable as speakers. When 3,000 corporate managers were asked about what they feared most, 41 percent answered, “speaking in front of a group” (Williford, 2002). In another study cited by the National Communication Association (NCA), 95 percent of respondents reported “some degree of anxiety about communicating with a person or in groups” (Richmond & McCroskey, 1995).

### **Perceptions of Listening**

Many teachers who spend little time teaching formal speaking skills devote even less time to teaching listening skills. Of the four major English language arts processes, listening gets the least attention. Often middle and high school teachers mistakenly just assume that students listen. They expect it but seldom teach it, often because they do not know enough about teaching listening to teach it well. Students, meanwhile, need to develop a repertoire of listening strategies that can turn listening into learning.

Most people speak at about 125 words per minute, but listeners can think at about four times that speed. This skill gives listeners plenty of time to think about the speaker’s message while simultaneously interpreting non-verbal messages that appear in the speaker’s tone of voice and physical movements and expressions. Good listening, therefore, is not as passive as generally thought but requires discipline to consciously create a mental space that allows listeners to focus attention on the words and ideas being expressed.

### **Speaking and Listening as Real-World Skills**

In the business world, according to the Associate Director of the National Communication Association (NCA), people with good communication skills are more likely to get and to keep a job (Mann, 1999). The writers of the American Diploma Project report (2004) agree, pointing out that success in the workplace is “heavily dependent on one’s ability to listen attentively to colleagues or customers and to express ideas clearly and persuasively.”

NCA has developed K-12 standards (1996) for speaking and listening (along with media literacy). The standards identify knowledge, understanding, and abilities related to communication and specify that students in middle and high school should concentrate on an increasingly complex study of oral communication that includes small group communication; the influence of culture on communication; developing competencies in public speaking; understanding the context of mass communication; the dimensions and implications of persuasion, argumentation, and debate; and the study of the relationship between language and

environments. Ideally, these studies should be integrated within English language arts and across the curriculum. (See Appendix 4.)

### **Speaking and Listening Within English Language Arts**

The National Communication Association describes *speaking* as a process that includes “selecting a topic, gathering information, organizing the ideas, taking into account the characteristics of the listeners, and planning all aspects of the presentation.” Communicators are required to “design coherent messages, deliver them clearly, and adapt to their listeners.”

*Listening* is the “active process of receiving, interpreting, and responding to messages.” Listeners call on different listening skills “depending on whether their goal is to understand and retain information, analyze and evaluate a message, show empathy for the feelings expressed by others, or appreciate a performance.”

Spoken words disappear after they have been uttered, but they cannot be erased from the memory of listeners. Unlike written words, spoken words can only be revised when expressed as an afterthought. When we say that our words come back to haunt us, more often we refer to words that are spoken, rather than written. Thus, sticks, stones, and words can indeed hurt, as any middle schooler can confirm. With greater emphasis on diversity across the curriculum, effective English language arts teachers are learning to pay attention to teaching the ethical dimensions involved with speaking.

In a middle school classroom in Virginia, students study the elements of effective oral communication, and they practice their skills frequently. Following study and initial practice, the teacher from time to time uses the last five minutes of class time to invite a student to give an impromptu one- to two-minute speech. The teacher and classmates then point out effective features used by the speaker, such as structure, delivery, and clarity. Over time, students in this classroom grow in confidence through practice in using polished speaking skills, even within impromptu circumstances (Mann, 1999). Some might question the practice of asking students to give impromptu speeches, however, if the presentations are rated by criteria identified with “polished speaking skills” or “final draft speech” (Barnes, 1992). Instead, effective English language arts teachers often encourage and value “exploratory” talk that is “tentative, spontaneous, provisional, and constructive as students discover what they have to say by voicing their emerging thoughts.” Such talk “changes the purpose of discussion from transmitting official knowledge to constructing new knowledge” (p. 73).

A range of classroom strategies regarded as “best practices” fall into this category of speaking and listening. For example, Socratic Seminars (2004) create a dialectic that is linked to a specific text. The “text” can be selected from “readings in literature, history, science, math, health, philosophy” or can be works of art or music. Participants are expected to contribute to the discussion while the leader helps keep the group focused and also participates by guiding the students with provocative questions. In an atmosphere where there are no right (or wrong) answers, the purpose of a Socratic Seminar is to encourage students to explore what they think about a text. Participants must actively listen as well, and be ready to paraphrase another person’s ideas. As students learn to share ideas with respect, they gain confidence in their ability to express themselves verbally.

Scored discussions are used by many teachers as a means to guide students in meaningful discussion. Students’ participation is quantified based on the number and quality of their contributions. It is more important, of course, that students internalize the tenets of civility and relevance in order to count as valued contributors to the group. But scoring rubrics can clearly define what is expected of group members both as speakers and as listeners. Scoring is done by teachers, students, or others, who observe four or five students in a fishbowl configuration. Defining roles and describing behaviors along with modeling those behaviors means that more students can be successful.

Literature circles (Daniels & Bizar, 1998) provide another way to link literature and speaking skills. By virtue of learning to fulfill and report on a variety of roles—researchers, artist, summarizer, etc.—group members learn that they have choices to make in conversational settings. This curricular structure effectively teaches listening and speaking skills through a structured-discussion format that is sometimes used throughout the school year and across grade levels. Over time, students learn to be active listeners who decide when to speak, what to say, and how to frame their expressions.

These skills can be supported and strengthened through writing response groups that also invite exploratory talk. While a student writer reads his or her work aloud, others listen closely and learn to respond, to question, and to encourage their peers throughout the writing process. Such experiences also help students learn sophisticated conversational skills as they discuss nuances of meaning and offer and receive suggestions about their written work. When teachers instruct students to engage in rich language experiences such as these, students learn to express themselves well and to listen carefully to what others say—skills that lead to greater civility as well as sophisticated thinking and expression of ideas.

## Research

A research study that involved more than 200 eighth and ninth grade English and social studies classes provides a framework for examining class discussions so that teachers can better understand how discussions shift from being teacher-centered and “monologic” to being teacher and student-centered and “dialogic” (Nystrand, 2003). In the case of monologic dialogue, teachers ask questions that have “known answers” and lead discussions that provide “mainly literal levels of understanding.” The study revealed that this pattern is “the most common form of classroom discourse in K-12 education” (p. 88). In contrast, dialogic discussions include questions that do not have known answers. They “validate students’ responses” and invite speculation. Such conversations “prime cognitive and emotional pumps, invite imagination and speculation, and help students construct meaning.” The study found that the most significant contributor to “dialogic episodes” were questions raised by students (p. 89).

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## College Board Programs

At the heart of the College Board’s Advanced Placement courses in English (1999) is the opportunity for teachers and students to engage in “the most civilized of behaviors—talking about literature.” Teachers are encouraged to provide a range of oral language activities, such as panel discussions, individual presentations, role-playing, oral interpretation, debates, and more (p. 32). The College Board’s *Pacesetter English: Voices of Modern Cultures* (2001) was built on speech as a metaphor for the study of texts that represented “a medley of voices engaged in a conversation and/or a struggle for cultural space” (p. 3). Building on the value of voice as a means to power, the authors explained that, “In some cultures the ability to speak and listen carries the whole burden of communication” (p. 1). Each of the six *Pacesetter* units included a range of opportunities for speaking and listening, both structured and casual, in small groups and in front of the class or other large group.

## Speaking and Listening, Equity and Excellence

*ESL Standards for Pre-K-12 Students* (see the “Teaching and Learning: The English Language” section of this framework , pp. 31-39) have been published by Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, Inc. (1997). Included with the document are the following “Goals for ESOL Learners” that are especially relevant to speaking and listening issues:

### Goals for ESOL Learners

1. To use English to communicate in social settings

Standards for Goal 1 – Students will:

1. use English to participate in social interaction
2. interact in, through, and with spoken and written English for personal expression and enjoyment
3. use learning strategies to extend their communicative competence

2. To use English to achieve academically in all content areas

Standards for Goal 2 – Students will:

1. use English to interact in the classroom
2. use English to obtain, process, construct, and provide subject matter information in spoken and written form
3. use appropriate learning strategies to construct and apply academic knowledge

3. To use English in socially and culturally appropriate ways

Standards for Goal 3 – Students will:

1. use the appropriate language variety, register, and genre according to audience, purpose, and setting
2. use nonverbal communication appropriate to audience, purpose, and setting
3. use appropriate learning strategies to extend their sociolinguistic and sociocultural competence

### **Guiding Principles: Speaking and Listening**

1. The spoken word, essential to individual and social development, remains a central way of conveying messages.
2. Whether in daily informal interactions or more formal settings, communicators are required to design coherent messages, deliver them clearly, and adapt to their listeners.
3. The process of speaking includes selecting a topic, gathering information, organizing the ideas, taking into account the characteristics of the listeners, and planning all aspects of the presentation.
4. Listening is the active process of receiving, interpreting, and responding to messages.
5. Students call on different listening skills depending on whether their goal is to understand and retain information, analyze and evaluate a message, show empathy for the feelings expressed by others, or appreciate a performance.

6. Students adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language (e.g., conventions, style, vocabulary) to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes.

## **Teaching and Learning: Viewing and Visually Representing, Reading and Creating Multimedia**

For many decades, the English language arts were defined by traditional reading-writing-speaking-listening boundaries. The *NCTE/IRA Standards for the English Language Arts* (1996) expanded those boundaries by acknowledging, for example, that television commercials are *texts* that can be *read*<sup>1</sup> and *written*. The definition of English language arts itself has expanded as technology has made it possible, and easy, to compose multigenre and multimedia texts that can include written text, speech, visual images, computer graphics, sounds, music, and action.

### **Viewing and Visually Representing**

The profession of teaching and learning English language arts has changed as well. (See Figure 1: English Language Arts Processes, p.10) In 1996, an NCTE position statement “On Viewing and Visually Representing as Forms of Literacy” offered the following background statement:

To participate in a global society, we continue to extend our ways of communicating. Viewing<sup>2</sup> and visually representing<sup>3</sup> are a part of our growing consciousness of how people gather and share information. Teachers and students need to expand their appreciation of the power of print and nonprint texts.<sup>4</sup> Teachers should guide students in constructing meaning through creating and viewing nonprint texts.

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<sup>1</sup> In *Standards for the English Language Arts* (NCTE/IRA, 1996), reading refers to listening and viewing in addition to print-oriented reading (p. 75).

<sup>2</sup> Attending to communication conveyed by visually representing (NCTE/IRA, *Standards*, p. 76).

<sup>3</sup> Conveying information or expressing oneself using nonverbal visual means, such as drawing, computer graphics (maps, charts, artwork), photography, or physical performance (NCTE/IRA, *Standards*, p. 76).

<sup>4</sup> Any texts that create meaning through sound or images or both, such as photographs, drawings, collages, films, videos, computer graphics, speeches, oral poems and tales, and songs (NCTE/IRA, *Standards*, p. 74).

Be it therefore resolved, that the National Council of Teachers of English through its publications, conferences, and affiliates support professional development and promote public awareness of the role that viewing and visually representing our world have as forms of literacy.

Despite this charge, relatively little has yet been published about viewing or visually representing in the English language arts classroom. Milner & Milner (2003), in their comprehensive text for middle and high school English teachers, cite the following “habits of active viewing,” by Teasley and Wilder, that can be used with any film:

1. What changes did you notice in the film as you watched? What changes did you notice in your feelings or opinions as you watched?
2. Go back over your viewing guides looking at your ‘visual images’ and ‘sounds’ notations. Do you notice any patterns emerging? ...What do you think the director was trying to communicate by using these patterns?
3. Make a list of all the things that this film is about.
4. Make a list of all the conflicts you have seen in this film.
5. What characters, incident or objects in this film remind you of other stories you have read or movies you have seen?
6. In your opinion, is this film neutral, or does it clearly take a position on a particular issue? (Teasley and Wilder, 1997, p. 65)

### **Representing-to-Learn**

Daniels and Bizar include a chapter in *Methods that Matter* (1998) about “representing-to-learn,” which is one of six structures identified as reflecting best practice for classrooms. The chapter discusses traditional writing-to-learn strategies, such as, *clustering*<sup>5</sup> and *Venn diagrams*,<sup>6</sup> both of which ask students to think and write with the support of simple, hand-drawn circles.

Representing-to-learn describes strategies that might be classified as art—“drawing, sketching,

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<sup>5</sup> A visual form of prewriting that organizes circled words/ideas as they are generated. Developed by Gabrielle Rico, 1985.

<sup>6</sup> A visual form used by writers to organize ideas, with words/ideas listed in the outer areas to indicate items/ideas that are distinct and contrasting, and in the middle, overlapping area to indicate items/ideas that are true for both topics.

mapping, drama, movement, song” (p. 96)—and that are often used in conjunction with the study of literature.

There is still a place for more traditional written and representational assignments, which are generally “planned, lengthy, authoritative, transactional, formal, audience-centered, polished and graded” (p. 114). But best-practice teachers often use representing-to-learn strategies, along with reading-to-learn and writing-to-learn, to support the formal assignments and to make learning accessible to a wider group of students. Good teachers get a lot of teaching mileage out of such strategies, especially because they are usually spontaneous and short, exploratory and expressive, informal and personal, unedited and—a real timesaver—ungraded.

### **Reading and Composing Multimedia**

In 2003, NCTE approved a position statement on “Composing With Nonprint Media.” A background statement provided the rationale:

Today our students are living in a world that is increasingly non-printcentric. New media such as the Internet, MP3 files, and video are transforming the communication experiences of young people outside of school. Young people are composing in nonprint media that can include any combination of visual art, motion (video and film), graphics, text, and sound—all of which are frequently written and read in nonlinear fashion. We affirm, in our theory and practice of teaching English language arts, that reading and writing are ultimately different but inherently related aspects of the same process of meaning making.... Computer-based nonlinear video production alone provides a grand new palette for students and teachers. Teachers need both the theoretical and pedagogical base to guide their students in the best educational uses of multimedia composition.

The resolution itself calls on NCTE to

- Encourage programs that will focus on new literacies, multimedia composition, and a broadened concept of literacy;
- Encourage research and develop models of district, school, and classroom policies that would promote multimedia composition;
- Encourage integrating multimedia composition in English language arts curriculum and teacher education, and in refining related standards at local, state, and national levels; and
- Renew the commitment expressed in the 1983 *Resolution on Computers in English and Language Arts* to achieve equity of access to the full range of composing technologies.

Milner & Milner (2003) explain that involving students in media production can serve the goal of language enrichment: “Our objective is to harness the power that the visual and the auditory dimensions of media bring to the spoken and written word” (p. 266). They cite a teacher who discussed the effects that composing a TV sports report had on her students:

It gave the opportunity to introduce style and format of presentation. Indeed, a review of the football season, which had not been very eventful, would have been boring if recounted game by game. However, as students became more familiar and comfortable with editing, they saw that segments could be selected from the season and placed to music. Those who spent much time on the project found sequences with similar actions or camera positions and enhanced the sound tracks by inserting interviews or players’ comments.

As words and sentences are placed in an order and in a particular form to reveal style and tone, so sound and visual images must be ordered. The process of selection, of deciding what is to be included or excluded, continues throughout the production process. If composing involves talking, reading, writing, thinking, and communication, then video production is composing in a most exciting and creative way (Regina, p. 52).

### **What to Do with Media Literacy**

It is tempting to include a broader discussion of media literacy within a document that discusses “viewing and visually representing” and “reading and composing multimedia.” A survey of related documents, however, suggests that a fuller discussion of media literacy sometimes eclipses the English language arts. For example, a high school unit, titled “Discovering Ourselves in Literature and Life” (Chin, 2002), asks students to carry out a long list of tasks. During five 90-minute class periods students read from a long list of literary works, including novels, poems, memoirs, and essays. There are writing assignments as well. But during the five 90-minute sessions students are also asked to scan photos of themselves; collect examples of self-portraits from online resources; create their own multimedia self-portraits; select tools for assembling, synthesizing, and displaying multimedia materials; create an electronic bibliography; use automated search tools and presentation software; view a film; and create a web page and an electronic portfolio. Many of these activities could be used effectively within the English language arts curriculum, but the long list of technology tasks appears to outweigh the study of literature.

The National Communication Association, on the other hand, has created a description of “media literacy” that effectively links “literate” characteristics to those that are technological: “Being a critical and reflective consumer of communication requires an understanding of how words, images, graphics, and sounds work together in ways that are both subtle and profound. Mass media such as radio, television, and film, and electronic media such as the telephone, the Internet, and computer conferencing influence the way meanings are created and shared in contemporary society. So great is this impact that in choosing how to send a message and evaluate its effect, communicators need to be aware of the distinctive characteristics of each medium.”

Creating digital stories is a project that engages students or interested individuals in using a wide range of multimedia materials to achieve the bigger goal of creatively telling a story—a task that fits well within the English language arts curriculum but with potential applications across other content areas. Digital stories are short video projects that bring together multimedia, including still images, voice, video, music, sound, text, animation, artifacts and other materials. The focus throughout the process, however, is always on the story:

...we believe we can use media, ironically, to overcome the more troublesome residual effects of our consumer media culture. The digital storytelling community has described the Internet and new media explosion as a release to a century of pent up frustration at being involved in a one way discourse, electronic media speaks at us but we could not talk back. We want to talk back, not on the terms of the governors of media empires, but on our own terms. We want the full diversity of expressions to be available.... (Lambert, 2002, p. xix).

The three main components of digital storytelling—story, multimedia, and digital technology—result in context-rich presentations that can be disseminated on CD-ROM, videotape, or Website.

### **Viewing and Visually Representing, Reading and Composing Multimedia, and Equity and Excellence**

English language arts teachers understand how important it is that students have access to computers and other technology at school. This need is compounded when there is no computer at home. The following standards statements, from the International Society for Technology in Education (2000), spell out responsibilities for teachers that will help create equity and excellence related to viewing and visually representing, reading and composing multimedia: “Teachers

implement curriculum plans that include methods and strategies for applying technology to maximize students' learning. Teachers (a) facilitate technology-enhanced experiences that address content standards and student technology standards; (b) use technology to support learner-centered strategies that address the diverse needs of students; (c) apply technology to develop students' higher order skills and creativity; and (d) manage student learning activities in a technology-enhanced environment.

**Guiding Principles: Viewing and Visually Representing, Reading and Composing Multimedia**

1. Students who are media literate communicators demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the ways people use media in their personal and public lives.
2. Mediate literate students know and understand the complex relationships among audiences and media content.
3. Media literate students know and understand that media content is produced within social and cultural contexts.
4. Mediate literate students know and understand the commercial nature of media and demonstrate the ability to use media to communicate to specific audiences.
5. Mediate literate students understand, interpret, analyze, and evaluate media communication.
6. Media literate students use a variety of technological and informational resources (e.g., libraries, databases, computer networks, video) to gather and synthesize information and to create and communicate knowledge.
7. Mediate literate students understand, interpret, analyze, and evaluate media communication.

## Assessment of the English Language Arts

The best English language arts classroom assessments—from a ten-minute quiz to a comprehensive portfolio assessment of a service-learning project—reflect accurately what students know and are able to do at a given time. They reflect best teaching practices by asking students to perform tasks, recall information, and apply knowledge as they would in a classroom. They are based on clearly expressed standards at the classroom, school, district, state, and national level. They can be designed to serve any of a number of purposes—some ask students simply to recall information, while others ask them to apply, analyze, synthesize, or evaluate what they have learned. As much as possible, they sample knowledge directly, often through writing. They provide useful information about students' progress and about students' strengths and weaknesses. They are unbiased and fair for all students. They accurately identify students' areas of need. They produce results that can be clearly understood by students, teachers, parents, and others. And good assessments provide results in a timely fashion—the sooner the better.

### High Stakes

The dimensions of good assessment are especially important in light of how many decisions are currently based on test results. English language arts teachers make decisions based on test results about how and what to teach next time. They decide what portion of students' course grade will be based on tests and what portion will be based on other criteria. They make decisions about students' abilities to perform in AP, honors, college prep, or basic classes.

External, high-stakes English language arts test results sometimes provide a path of opportunity for students whose knowledge and abilities have not been visible in classroom settings. Students study such results and draw conclusions about their own abilities. Those with high scores win awards and recognition. They adjust their self-perceptions and often modify their expectations about future performances, future education, and career choices. But from year to year students often feel growing stress and pressure that affects them “all along the achievement spectrum” (Hardy, 2003). Low-performing students sometimes find that test results confirm their sense that English class, or even school, isn't working for them. The challenge for them is “simply staying in school” (Hardy, 2003). College admission officers publish the average test scores of incoming freshmen, in effect warning off prospective students with low scores. They award scholarships based on test scores. And the public uses district and building scores, easily accessed by web sites, to make decisions about where to purchase homes and in which

communities to settle. English language arts teachers are affected when test results linked to *No Child Left Behind* legislation raise the stakes so high that schools are threatened with loss of resources or even closure if students' reading and mathematics scores do not demonstrate "adequate yearly progress."

### **Reading**

Rigorous tests, such as state-mandated assessments and the SAT, ask students to read critically, make inferences, draw conclusions, and make connections—all the while building upon prior knowledge and monitoring their comprehension. Many of the tests ask students to work with data and respond to their reading by writing short and longer "constructed responses," which add a performance dimension to otherwise multiple-choice tests. By the time students reach middle school and high school, however, their English language arts teachers may give little attention to their reading skills. Too many secondary teachers assume that students have already acquired the reading skills they need. Reading, especially the reading of literature, is assigned and the content is assessed by means of quizzes, class discussions, and short or long writing assignments.

Sometimes the best English language arts teachers can spot struggling readers, but many struggling readers in middle and high school English classes have, unfortunately, been able to hide their reading problems. Middle and high school English language arts teachers are, however, beginning to give new attention to reading. The new attention is partly driven by high-stakes tests, but is also the result of new classroom roles for English language arts students and for their teachers. For example, as students lead more classroom discussions through literature circles,<sup>7</sup> their teachers are able to observe individual students' small-group participation more closely. As teachers listen to the discussions, in which everyone has a role and must participate, they can notice which students need special help with their reading.

### **Writing**

Enlightened English language arts teachers know to respond to student writing according to the purpose for which it was written. Admit slips and exit slips<sup>8</sup> require no response at all, a simple you-did-it-or-you-didn't check, or a brief teacher comment.

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<sup>7</sup> Structured, small-group discussions about a work of literature (often a novel that group members are reading) led by students, who usually take on a designated role with specific responsibilities, such as "passage master," "word wizard," "discussion director," or "artful artist" (Daniels and Bizar, 1998).

<sup>8</sup> Brief informal writing (collected at the beginning or ending of a class session) in response to the teacher's prompt, which might, for example, ask students to explain their progress and work still needed on a particular writing assignment.

Stacks of long writing assignments, on the other hand, are often weekend killers for English teachers. But there is no substitute for a caring teacher's careful reading and commenting about a piece of student writing. Good teachers come to know their students' strengths and weaknesses as students are learning to communicate effectively on paper. They know if a piece of writing is a best effort or a hasty, last minute job. Under the pen of a knowledgeable teacher, the feedback on student writing is invaluable. But good English teachers know that little, if any, learning occurs as a result of feedback unless the pieces are clearly still in process. Experienced teachers know that if a grade appears on the paper, few students pay much attention to even the most carefully composed teacher comments.

In best practice English language arts classrooms, teachers confer individually with student writers as they write particular pieces. As students read aloud from their own work, they often self-assess and hear where their own emerging text is strong and coherent, and where it still needs work. After the student has read, the teacher (who has listened and informally assessed) can call attention to what is working and what is not in particular passages and sentences. Teachers who feel comfortable as writers themselves often invite students to confer with each other, meeting in writing response groups, where honest feedback and discussion provides a real-world formative assessment of in-progress work. Within such settings, students often learn to internalize the teacher's questions and apply them to their own future writing tasks.

Holistic and analytic scoring have made writing assessment possible on large-scale district, state, and national tests. Often today's best English language arts teachers teach their students to use rubrics to score writing samples as well. In this case, the "test-prep" works, because students learn what an effective description or argument looks like in writing as they compare low-score pieces with stronger ones. They learn from noticing the effective word choices and patterns of organization found in other students' writing, and with practice, they can internalize the scoring criteria and better understand the features of effective writing.

As students are asked to do more writing for a greater range of purposes, their teachers are more likely to use portfolios. They provide a broader view and deeper understanding of individual students' performance than reading and responding to individual papers can provide. And they allow teachers to write insightful summative comments that respond to a body of work. The primary value of portfolios for students, however, is that they provide a place for students to be actively involved, especially when prompted by their teacher, in self-assessment by reflecting on their writing and observing their own growth over time.

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## **Language Issues**

Over the years, students have been heavily penalized for written and spoken language that falls outside the boundaries of what is generally referred to as “standard” English. Middle school and high school English language arts teachers hold a range of opinions about how strictly students should be held responsible for learning and using Standard English. In the best English classes, there is honest discussion about the impact that learning the “cash language” (Christensen, 2000) can have on students’ future opportunities and employment. But there is also an affirmation of home dialects and languages in speech and in writing. The best English language arts teachers include writing and speaking assignments that value what students say more than how they say it. And they include some writing and speaking occasions and assignments when spoken and written home dialects and languages are celebrated, not penalized.

Some English teachers have adopted a position of overlooking students’ sentence structure and surface feature errors, and have done so with their students’ best interests in mind, trying to avoid “any attempt to limit students’ linguistic expression to an arbitrarily established correct form” (NCTE, 1974). Today, the best English teachers provide occasions for celebrating diverse language features, but they also speak plainly about the negative impact students’ written and spoken language sometimes elicits in wider circles. Many teachers, therefore, explicitly teach, and hold students responsible for using, Standard English. At the same time, English teachers often provide formative assessments and individual responses that fit specific circumstances, especially for students who need special accommodations and for those whose first language is not English.

## **Literature Study**

For many decades the study of literature in middle and high school English classes was, and sometimes still is, accompanied by objective tests that require a knowledge of definitions of literary terms and factual recall of details, especially names of characters, plot structure, and sequence of events. Better tests also included essay questions that required students to demonstrate their understanding of historical context, theme, symbolism, character development, and nuances of language. Some tests today also require an understanding of key interpretations offered by literary critics who take a variety of critical approaches. Students who love the study of literature often handle such assessment tasks with ease.

Some English teachers also use more innovative, informal assessment tasks, such as, demonstrating knowledge and literary skills through a variety of discussion and dramatic interpretation experiences. They assess students’ knowledge of literature and their skills in

understanding and interpreting literature through literature circle tasks, including visually depicted elements of the plot, theme, or symbolism of the text being studied. Participants in the circle can also demonstrate their understanding and insight of the text being studied by viewing and then interpreting the visual representations created by others.

### **Standards for Assessing Reading and Writing**

Two years before the NCTE/IRA *Standards for the English Language Arts* document was published, the International Reading Association and the National Council of Teachers of English published *Standards for the Assessment of Reading and Writing* (IRA/NCTE, 1994), a document that grew out of the work of a Joint Task Force on Assessment. The document describes six standards that address “goals” and five that address “implementation.” The assessments envisioned in these standards contrast dramatically with state and national tests today, but the standards themselves serve at least as reminders of the ultimate assessment goals that most English language arts educators still hold:

#### The Standards

1. The interests of the student are paramount in assessment.
2. The primary purpose of assessment is to improve teaching and learning.
3. Assessment must reflect and allow for critical inquiry into curriculum and instruction.
4. Assessments must recognize and reflect the intellectually and socially complex nature of reading and writing and the important roles of school, home, and society in literacy development.
5. Assessment must be fair and equitable.
6. The consequences of an assessment procedure are the first, and most important, consideration in establishing the validity of the assessment.
7. The teacher is the most important agent of assessment.
8. The assessment process should involve multiple perspectives and sources of data.
9. Assessment must be based in the school community.
10. All members of the educational community—students, parents, teachers, administrators, policy makers, and the public—must have a voice in the development, interpretation, and reporting of assessment.
11. Parents must be involved as active, essential participants in the assessment process.

## **New SAT Writing Section**

The new SAT Essay requirement builds on the long history of successful large-scale writing assessment. It reflects authentic English language arts assessment practices in that it asks students to compose a piece of writing rather than artificially to ask students to answer questions about writing or to identify effective or less-effective passages written by someone else. English educators will appreciate the fact that the prompt asks students to draw on their knowledge and personal experience as they construct their response.

The best English language arts teachers are likely to express concern about the severe restriction on the time allotted for the actual writing, which works against the recursive nature of composing text and meaning. Those concerns will be mitigated to some degree by the fact that the scoring will be conducted with a clear understanding that the papers are considered first drafts.

The scoring guide reflects current understandings about what constitutes good writing, and can, if available to teachers, serve as a teaching tool. This is especially true if teachers encourage students to apply the features of good writing that are described in the scoring guide, that, while holistic, arranges the descriptors so that analytic features are easily identifiable. Readers for the SAT writing section are trained to recognize and reward a wide variety of essays at each score point and to allow the writers of those essays to develop them as they see fit. Formulaic approaches to writing, such as the five-paragraph essay, are neither rewarded nor punished (College Board, *A Guide to the New SAT*, 2004, p. 3).

### **Guiding Principles: Assessment**

1. External state and national assessments of English language arts must include performance tasks that involve real reading, writing, and—when possible—listening and speaking.
2. English language arts teachers use formative assessments that function as part of the learning process and summative assessments that are used to measure improvement over time.
3. English teachers adapt their content to the changing needs of the classroom and the individual students, providing accommodations for individual learning styles and needs.
4. English teachers use strategies for assessment that are aligned with curricular goals—authentic and embedded in learning tasks and based on performance.
5. English teachers provide assessments that build on diverse strengths and that permit students to demonstrate in a variety of ways what they know and can do.

6. English teachers use assessments to make instructional decisions, diagnose strengths and weaknesses, evaluate curriculum, and give feedback to students, parents, and other educational stakeholders.
7. All students, regardless of their backgrounds or aptitudes, need access to new ideas and opportunities to be challenged to achieve what they can.
8. All students benefit from striving to meet high but achievable expectations with adequate support and multiple paths to success.

## Professional Development for English Language Arts Teachers

Professional development programs for middle- and high-school English language arts teachers have frequently consisted of the traditional “sit-and-get” programs. Still, most English language arts teachers recognize their own need to stay current in their profession. For English teachers, there is always a new author to read, a new writing strategy to try, and a new technological tool that promises to support student readers and writers.

### National English Language Arts Programs

The best English language arts teachers can usually identify a half-dozen publishers and conferences that merit their professional development time and trust. Many teachers join the National Council of Teachers of English and their NCTE state affiliate. Thousands attend the NCTE annual convention every year, even if they have to pay for it themselves. Many English teachers also join the International Reading Association, especially those who work in their school districts as “literacy coaches” and those with a strong interest in reading and teaching reading. English teachers also subscribe to and read NCTE and IRA journals, especially NCTE’s *English Journal* and *Voices from the Middle* and/or IRA’s *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*. Electronic discussions and listservs, such as NCTE-talk, provide informal professional development, as does NCTE’s CoLEARN program, which features a structured, yet flexible series of readings and writings and provides facilitators for topics specific to reading, writing, and English as a second language. Every ten years NCTE publishes a new edition of the *Guidelines for the Preparation of Teachers of English Language Arts*. Colleges and university English educators use these guidelines when they prepare materials for accreditation by the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE). Each edition includes a variety of materials, several of which are useful for English language arts teachers to guide discussions about professional development needs and options and/or potential curriculum changes within their school or district.

Many middle and high school English teachers also find a professional home in the National Writing Project, which Lieberman and Wood (2003) have described as “arguably the most successful teacher network in the United States” (p. 5). NWP was originally built on the proposition that teacher knowledge is to be the starting point for learning. Other central principles from the inception of NWP include the following: (1) A “site” is a group of local teachers in partnership with a university or college; (2) Teachers teach one another their “best practices”; (3)

Teachers write and present their own work; and (4) Teachers read, discuss, and analyze research, reforms, and other literature (p. 7). As NWP has grown into a national network, another set of principles has guided its work: (1) Universities and schools are better able to improve students' learning if they work in a partnership; (2) Teachers are the key to educational reform; (3) Teachers are the best teachers of other teachers; (4) Writing deserves constant attention from kindergarten to the university; and (5) Exemplary teachers of writing are themselves writers (p. 8).

The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) provides English language arts teachers a highly respected, intensive, and rigorous professional development program. National Board Certification was developed “by teachers, with teachers, and for teachers” and requires proficient teaching that includes broad grounding in the liberal arts and sciences; knowledge of the subjects to be taught, of the skills to be developed, and of the curricular arrangements and materials that organize and embody that content; knowledge of general and subject-specific methods for teaching and for evaluating student learning; knowledge of students and human development; skills in effectively teaching students from racially, ethnically, and socioeconomically diverse backgrounds; and the skills, capacities and dispositions to employ such knowledge wisely in the interest of students. NBPTS seeks to recognize teachers who enhance student learning and who demonstrate a high level of knowledge, skills, abilities and commitments that are reflected in the following core propositions:

- Teachers are committed to students and their learning.
- Teachers know the subjects they teach and how to teach those subjects to students.
- Teachers are responsible for managing and monitoring student learning.
- Teachers think systematically about their practice and learn from experience.
- Teachers are members of learning communities.

Teachers who become NBPTS certified gain recognition and frequently get a salary increase as well.

The College Board also provides a range of professional development programs and services for English teachers. National conferences, workshops, institutes, instructors' guides, and online resources and discussion are available for those who teach AP English Literature and Composition and/or AP English Language and Composition, and for those who participate as members of school-based AP Vertical Teams. The College Board's new SpringBoard program offers a school-based program to support English language arts teaching and curriculum. It integrates “rigorous standards, professional development, instructional resources, and diagnostic assessments” and provides “content-based professional development activities that include

intensive face-to-face training” as well as “modeling of teaching strategies via instructional materials, online mentoring from master teachers, scheduled meetings with local colleagues, and online discussion groups with teachers using the same strategies and materials across the country.”

### **The Impact and Features of Effective Professional Development**

Linda Darling-Hammond’s work focused on professional development has produced convincing evidence (1999) of the profound impact professional development can have on classroom teachers and their students’ learning: “The conclusion is inescapable: No other intervention can make the difference that a knowledgeable, skilled teacher can make in student achievement. Further, other reforms, including the creation of high standards, rigorous testing and challenging curriculum, depend on skilled teachers for their successful implementation” (p. 5). Such evidence contradicts conventional wisdom about the relative impact of home vs. school: “Study after study has shown that school factors can make as much difference in student achievement as home and family factors, and that the most important school resource in determining student achievement is teacher expertise” (p. 4).

As English teachers and administrators work together to select from among professional development options, they may find research conducted by Lieberman and Grolnick (1996) useful. The study of sixteen education reform networks identified the following characteristics that were shared by all the networks:

- Agendas more challenging than prescriptive;
- Learning more indirect than direct;
- Formats more collaborative than individualistic;
- Work more integrated than fragmented;
- Leadership more facilitative than directive;
- Thinking that encouraged multiple rather than unitary perspectives;
- Values that were both context-specific and generalized;
- Structures that were more movement-like than organization-like. (pp. 4-5)

Another useful research study of what makes professional development programs effective involved eight schools that won the U.S. Department of Education’s National Award for Model Professional Development (WestEd, 2000). When a professional development program is effective, it

- Focuses on teachers as central to student learning, yet it includes all other members of the school community;
- Focuses on individual collegial and organizational improvement;
- Respects and nurtures the intellectual and leadership capacity of teachers, principals, and others in the school community;
- Reflects best available research and practice in teaching, learning, and leadership;
- Enables teachers to develop further expertise in subject content, teaching strategies, uses of technologies, and other essential elements in teaching to high standards;
- Promotes continuous inquiry and improvement embedded in the daily life of schools;
- Is planned collaboratively by those who will participate in and facilitate that development;
- Requires substantial time and other resources;
- Is driven by a coherent long-term plan;
- Is evaluated simultaneously on the basis of its impact on teacher effectiveness and student learning and this assessment guides subsequent professional development efforts.

### **Looking at Student Work**

One program that achieves a number of the criteria listed above is a simple, but powerful method of looking at students' written work (Little, Gearhart, Curry, and Kafka, 2003). It involves bringing English language arts teachers together—possibly across grade levels and content areas, and possibly including school administrators. The group follows a protocol, often with the help of a trained guide, to look closely at student work.

Holding a structured conversation about a student's written work with a group of colleagues can lead to a range of insights about what the student knows and can do, what the student may be struggling with, and what the student might be ready for. Often such practices also reveal the strengths, or weaknesses, of particular assignments. Those who have used the method point out that one reason the strategy is effective is that the protocols were designed "to interrupt or slow down teachers' usual responses to student work (to evaluate and grade it), and to stimulate an open-minded but focused examination of what that work can tell teachers about student understanding and teaching practice" (p. 188). The authors report that, "The value of looking at student work resides in its potential for bringing students more consistently and explicitly into deliberations among teachers. Looking at student work has the potential to expand

teachers’ opportunity to learn, to cultivate a professional community that is both willing and able to inquire into practice, and to focus school-based conversations directly on the improvement of teaching and learning” (p. 192).

### **Guiding Principles: Professional Development<sup>9</sup>**

1. English language arts teachers participate in processes of learning throughout their careers—across the transitions from preservice to induction phase to experienced teachers.

This goal is accomplished by emphasizing inquiry-based teaching and reflective practice, listening to students, continually improving their own practice, designing ongoing and formative assessment, experiencing and implementing variety in learning, and working with professional organizations.

2. English language arts teachers develop multiple perspectives on all learners as users of the English language arts in various communities.

This goal is accomplished by acquiring knowledge of the nature of students’ language learning at home, in the community, and at school; the influences of linguistic, ethnic, racial, gender, and socioeconomic factors on learners of English language arts; varied time, methods, and resource requirements for learning and development for a range of language learners (e.g., students of differing abilities, multiple intelligences and special needs); and the function of learning communities and their impact on students’ learning in English language arts.

3. English language arts teachers develop, within a context of intellectual freedom, their knowledge of the content and discourses of English language arts.

This knowledge includes interconnections among the language arts; national and state English language arts standards; processes of reading, writing, speaking, listening and viewing; contexts of different cultures; and the discourses of the English language arts.

4. English language arts preservice and continuing professional education develops inquiring and reflective teachers.

Teachers develop the knowledge and ability to use a range of teaching approaches, strategies, and ways of organizing curriculum that integrate English language arts and represent principles of authentic instruction of higher order thinking, deep knowledge, substantive conversation, and connections to the world beyond the classroom. They engage in pedagogy that empowers all learners, who possess a range of capacities and abilities such as linguistic, logical-mathematical, bodily-kinesthetic, spatial, musical, interpersonal, and

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<sup>9</sup> Each of the professional development guiding principles is adapted from the *Guidelines for the Professional Development of Teachers of English Language Arts*, developed by the Michigan English Language Arts Framework (MELAF) Teacher Education Task Force (September, 1996).

intrapersonal. They select instructional technology, materials, and resources. They assess and evaluate learners, and they communicate effectively about learners' progress and development.

5. English language arts teachers engage in inquiry-based English language arts learning similar to the learning their students experience.

Teachers take and retain responsibility for their own learning across their careers, create collaborative professional learning communities with multiple participants, advocate and seek explicit and tangible support for learning across their careers, become aware of policy decisions and engage in professional activities in the policy arena that support teachers as learners and thoughtful decision makers.

6. English language arts teachers demonstrate their own participation and delight in the English language arts.

Teachers show pleasure and fulfillment from lifelong habits of reading, writing, speaking, listening, and viewing. They use the arts of language to gain insight into and reflect upon their own and others' lives and to communicate effectively with others. They exhibit competent, knowledgeable, and self-confident language use in a variety of social and cultural settings. They share understandings and discuss with students their own writing, reading, viewing, and oral language processes and preferences.

#### **Additional Guiding Principles: Professional Development**

7. English language arts teachers participate in processes of learning throughout their careers—across the transitions from preservice to induction phase to experienced teachers.
8. English language arts teachers develop multiple perspectives on all learners as users of the English language arts in various communities.
9. English language arts teachers develop, within a context of intellectual freedom, their knowledge of the content and discourses of English language arts.
10. English language arts preservice and continuing professional education develops inquiring and reflective teachers.
11. English language arts teachers engage in inquiry-based English language arts learning similar to the learning their students experience.
12. English language arts teachers demonstrate their own participation and delight in the English language arts.

### **Conclusion: Putting It All Together**

The College Board English Language Arts framework provides a vision of English language arts across the span from the middle school to high school levels. It illustrates aspects of the content, processes, and student expectations that are defined by the *IRA/NCTE Standards for the English Language Arts* and by the College Board's *Standards for College Success in Reading, Writing, and Mathematics and Statistics*. The framework describes best classroom practices and articulates contemporary principles for integrated English language arts and for the productive learning, quality teaching, professional development of teachers, use of technology, and assessment and evaluation that can fulfill those principles.

The College Board can use the framework document to move the agenda forward focusing on the improvement of the learning and teaching of English language arts. Teachers can carefully select, adapt, and extend resources in helping their students successfully reach the objectives held for middle and high school English language arts. They can demonstrate the value of the English language arts for life as well as vocation.

Through professional development programs, the College Board can support the effective integration of the components of the English language arts, while encouraging a focus on particular components that need to be addressed in specific ways. Such professional development programs can be arranged so that teachers see vertical alignment of the ideas in the curriculum and are prepared to work with students across a span of time. These professional development programs can be structured around the guiding principles for the English language arts. Such activities will provide teachers with a strong background and personal experience in teaching from a reflective standpoint, listening to their students, and letting learning guide the way, while, at the same time, focusing on the core expectations of students.

Through coordinated work involving instruction, assessment, evaluation, technology, and changes in how to help students learn English language arts, the teaching and learning of English language arts will change for the better. The major component in achieving this goal is the high-quality professional development of teachers. The College Board has for over a century helped to define what constitutes quality content and instruction for students moving through a strong pre-college program. Achieving the goals described in this framework will assist all students and teachers to deepen their knowledge about English language arts content and processes, and to enrich their experiences in using the English language arts.

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**Appendix A**  
**NCTE/IRA Standards**

	<b>What Students Do</b>	<b>Why Students Do It</b>
1.	READ a wide range of print and nonprint texts...	to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the U.S. and the world; to acquire new information; to respond to the needs and demands of society and the workplace; and for personal fulfillment. Among these texts are fiction and nonfiction, classic and contemporary works.
2.	READ a wide range of literature from many periods in many genres...	to build an understanding of the many dimensions (e.g., philosophical, ethical, aesthetic) of human experience.
3.	APPLY a wide range of strategies...	to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their word identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features—e.g., sound-letter correspondence, sentence structure, context, graphics.
4.	ADJUST their use of spoken, written, and visual language (e.g., conventions, style, vocabulary)...	to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes.
5.	EMPLOY a wide range of strategies as they write and use different writing process elements appropriately...	to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes.
6.	APPLY knowledge of language structure, language conventions (e.g., spelling and punctuation), media techniques, figurative language and genre...	to create, critique, and discuss print and nonprint texts.
7.	CONDUCT research on issues and interests by generating ideas and question, and by posing problems. They gather, evaluate, and synthesize data from a variety of sources (e.g., print and nonprint texts, artifacts, people)...	to communicate their discoveries in ways that suit their purpose and audience.
8.	USE a variety of technological and informational RESOURCES (e.g., libraries, databases, computer networks, video)...	to gather and synthesize information and to create and communicate knowledge.
9.	DEVELOP an understanding of and respect for diversity in language use, patterns, and dialects across cultures, ethnic groups, geographic regions, and social roles.	
10.	Students whose first language is not English MAKE USE of their first language...	to develop competency in the English language arts and to develop understanding of content across the curriculum.
11.	PARTICIPATE as knowledgeable, reflective, creative, and critical members of a variety of literacy communities.	
12.	USE spoken, written, and visual language...	to accomplish their own purposes (e.g., for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information).

Source: NCTE/IRA Standards for the English Language Arts, 1996. Note: The original NCTE standards were not published in chart form but were listed as sentences. This chart attempts to make the standards easier to read and to call attention to the purpose(s) of each standard.

## Appendix B

### NCA Guiding Principles for Speaking and Listening

**Speaking:** The spoken word, essential to our individual and social development remains a central way of conveying messages. Whether in daily informal interactions or more formal settings, communicators are required to design coherent messages, deliver them clearly, and adapt to their listeners. The process of speaking includes selecting a topic, gathering information, organizing the ideas, taking into account the characteristics of the listeners, and planning all aspects of the presentation.

**Listening:** Listening is the active process of receiving, interpreting, and responding to messages. People call on different listening skills depending on whether their goal is to understand and retain information, analyze and evaluate a message, show empathy for the feelings expressed by others, or appreciate a performance.

Competent communicators demonstrate knowledge and understanding of ...

- the relationships among the components of the communication process;
- the influence of the individual, the relationship, and the situation on communication;
- the role of communication in the development and maintenance of personal relationships; and
- the role of communication in creating meaning, influencing thought, and making decisions.

Competent communicators demonstrate the ability to ...

- demonstrate sensitivity to diversity when communicating;
- enhance relationships and resolve conflict using appropriate and effective communication strategies;
- evaluate communication styles, strategies, and content based on their aesthetic and functional worth; and
- show sensitivity to the ethical issues associated with communication in a democratic society.

Competent speakers demonstrate ...

- knowledge and understanding of the speaking process;
- the ability to adapt communication strategies appropriately and effectively according to the needs of the situation and setting;
- the ability to use language that clarifies, persuades, and/or inspires while respecting differences in listeners' backgrounds; and
- the ability to manage or overcome communication anxiety.

Competent listeners demonstrate ...

- knowledge and understanding of the listening process;
- the ability to use appropriate and effective listening skills for a given communication situation and setting; and
- the ability to identify and manage barriers to listening.

The principles above are taken from *Standards for Speaking, Listening, and Media Literacy in K-12 Education* disseminated by the National Communication Association.