



Utah State Office of Education

Department of Teaching and Learning

What Are the New Utah Core Standards for English/Language Arts?

Utah has always had standards for English/Language Arts (ELA) to establish specific K-12 grade-by-grade benchmarks (or grade spans in high school). The most current Utah Core Standards provide a breakdown for ELA in four areas: reading, writing, speaking and listening, and language. The progression of the Standards, beginning in kindergarten, will develop students' knowledge and skills so they are ready for college or a career when

they graduate from high school.

In **reading**, the new Utah Core Standards (UCS) establish a continuum of increasingly complex reading of classic and contemporary literary and informational texts. The Standards do not provide a reading list, but Appendix B offers sample readings to help teachers and parents determine high-quality texts that are appropriate for the age and reading level of the student. *(Continued on page 2)*



What Do the Utah Core Standards Say About Reading Literature and Informational Text?

“To become college and career ready, students must grapple with works of exceptional craft and thought whose range extends across genres, cultures, and centuries. Such works offer profound insights into the human condition and serve as models for students’ own thinking and writing. Along with high-quality contemporary works, these texts should be chosen from among seminal U.S. documents, the classics of American literature, and the timeless dramas of Shakespeare. Through wide and deep reading of literature and literary nonfiction of steadily increasing sophistication, students gain a reservoir of literary and cultural knowledge, references, and images; the ability to evaluate intricate arguments; and the capacity to surmount the challenges posed by complex texts.”

—from the Utah Core Standards

Many people have heard that the new Utah Core Standards (UCS) advise that up to 50% of the texts students should be reading in elementary school and 70% of texts in high school should be rigorous informational text. This strikes to the hearts of literature lovers who fear that students will lose exposure to the stories and books that help them develop understanding and empathy for people, characters, and situations that they might not experience in real life.

Do the Standards say that students will stop reading literature? No!

The Standards do focus on making sure that students have opportunities to focus on many different types of reading, including informational text, in all their school classrooms. Reading informational text is an important skill that requires teaching so that students can do it effectively—in all the subjects in which it occurs! High school students should be reading informational text 70% of the school day—yes, in English class where it illuminates and enhances the teaching of literature and writing, but also in science, social studies, and any other class where information is critical. Students should be reading plans, patterns, or recipes in their FACS classes; business plans or financial statements in their accounting classes; and program notes, director’s comments, and composers’ instructions in music courses.

Reading many kinds of texts helps all students learn; building literacy skills is the responsibility of every teacher in every subject.

What Are the New Utah Core Standards for English/Language Arts?

(Continued)

In **writing**, students focus on developing the ability to create progressively more complex and logical arguments based on substantive claims, relevant and supported evidence, and sound writing. This begins with opinion writing in the elementary grades and extends into research papers demonstrating short, focused projects and sustained inquiry.

Speaking and listening standards focus on students' need to take in, evaluate, and present increasingly complex ideas. Purposeful speaking and listening should demonstrate respectful consideration of ideas in small or large groups and help students collaborate to answer questions, solve problems, and build understanding.

Language standards focus on students' ability to use formal English conventions of grammar and word choice to communicate and express themselves in a variety of contexts.

What Can I Do To Help My Child Succeed Using the new Core Standards?

"Communication is the key.

- Talk to your children about what they are learning; let them "teach" you.
- Contact your child's teachers if either of you have concerns.
- Encourage your children to be persistent, to put effort in their work.
- Praise their accomplishments.
- And, most importantly, let your children know that their education is important."

—Deon Turley,
Utah PTA Education Commissioner

Where Can I Read the New Utah Core Standards and Give Feedback About Them?

The Utah State Office of Education is collecting feedback about the new Utah Core Standards. The survey is at

www.schools.utah.gov

Click on "Utah Core Standards Survey" in the right-hand "Popular Links" window.

What Are Core Standards? What Subjects Have Them?

Utah has Core Standards for all the academic areas taught in our K-12 public schools. These Standards establish a framework for high quality instruction. They help Utah teachers ensure academic achievement for Utah students by defining the essential knowledge, concepts, and skills to be mastered at each grade level or within critical content areas. They define what students should know and be able to do to be ready for post-high school jobs and schooling.

State standards help us ensure students are measured against a stable target. Utah has had standards for decades. They help us develop and provide high-quality curriculum and courses. Research tells us that our students need effective communication, literacy, and numeracy skills if they want to be ready to compete in the emerging global marketplace, at a college or university, or in occupational certificate programs after high school.

The Standards provide a consistent, clear understanding of what students are expected to learn, so teachers and parents know what they need to do to help them. The standards are designed to be robust and relevant to the real world, reflecting the knowledge and skills that our young people need for success in college and careers. With American students fully prepared for the future, our communities will be best positioned to compete successfully in the global economy.

"...the new standards are more rigorous, which will provide our students a better opportunity to compete not only within our nation, but globally as well..."

—Utah elementary teacher



How Is the USOE Supporting the Implementation of the New Utah Core Standards?

Professional learning is an ongoing and continuous process in any profession, and the USOE has supported new learning every year to ensure that teachers have access to the best knowledge and research available to inform their teaching.

Beginning after the adoption of the new English/Language Arts Core Standards in 2010, the Utah State Office of Education created a plan to support the rollout of the new Core Standards on a program level. To help create broad understanding of the Standards, the summer Core Academy began in 2011 with courses in English/Language Arts for teachers teaching grades K-12 as well as Mathematics 6 and 9. During the subsequent summer, professional learning focused on mathematics and literacy in secondary content areas (science and social studies). The focus of the first two years of Academy was to create a broad understanding of the changes in focus and rigor in the new Standards.

Professional learning from the USOE will continue with more differentiated—but still big-picture—offerings in the future to help new and expert teachers continue to become master teachers. Districts and schools will continue to develop opportunities for professional learning to meet the needs of their specific settings.

“The new [Utah Core] Standards show me a progression to teach writing across all the grades that develops skills logically and results in deep thinking and meaningful expression. My students are learning more than ever, and it will only get better with time.”

—Utah middle school teacher

What Is Utah Doing About *Cursive Writing*?

The Utah Core Standards do not currently include the teaching of either manuscript or cursive writing. This is not because the Standards say we should not teach children to write; rather, when the consortium created the Common Core State Standards document, this decision was left to individual states to act in the way they decided was most responsive to the needs of their students and schools.



Cursive writing has long been a rite of passage in schooling; getting to write in “big people” writing—or, as Professor Lockhart called it in the Harry Potter series, “joined up” writing—is a sign of growing up to many students. Teaching cursive also means students learn to read cursive.

Utah is studying cursive writing during the 2012-2013 school year. A committee of teachers, university faculty, and district specialists is meeting to look at the relevant research and data. After considering all the information, this committee will make a recommendation to the State Board of Education in the spring about the inclusion of cursive writing in the Standards. The committee will include in their recommendation a suggested beginning grade, amount of time, and strategies for teaching.

In the meantime, schools and districts should continue to teach writing as they have been doing. There has never been a restriction placed on the teaching of writing.



How Can Students Become Career and College Ready?

What does it mean to be career and college ready?

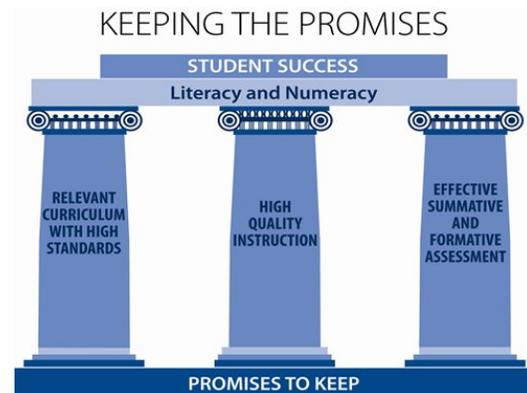
The ACT defines college readiness as “the level of achievement a student needs to be ready to enroll and succeed—without remediation—in credit-bearing first-year postsecondary courses.” ACT also places workplace readiness at the “same level of knowledge and skills as college readiness...while not every student plans to attend college after high school, many of the jobs that can support a family require knowledge and skills comparable to those expected of the first-year college student” (2006).

We can no longer think that students who aren’t planning on going to college need to be any less prepared for the demands of rigorous reading and writing than students who are planning to earn two- or

To be successful after high school, today’s graduates must be prepared for the ever-increasing demands of college and the workplace.

four-year degrees immediately after high school. If we want all students to be competitive for jobs that pay a living wage, have potential career advancement, and will demonstrate job growth in the next five to ten years, we must make sure that all students have access to courses that build a strong foundation of academic skills, including the ability to read and comprehend difficult texts, problem solve, explain and communicate complex ideas, and use technology appropriate to the task at hand.

The Utah State Board of Education made a promise to all parents and students in Utah. They promised that every student will attend a school where there is a relevant curriculum is based on high-quality standards to help students develop critical skills and abilities.



The new Utah Core Standards do not tell teachers how to teach; they do not tell schools or districts what materials must be used in classrooms. They do clarify what knowledge and skills students should have, building progressively from grade to grade. The new UCS are a first step to meet the promise that every student leaves high school with a high-quality, relevant education—ready for his or her future.

View the Utah Core Standards for all subjects
at
<http://www.schools.utah.gov/core/>

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