

FUNDAMENTALS OF GRAMMAR AND CONVENTIONS: Connecting the Common Core to Best Practice

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Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.
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In 2007, in her book titled *The Grammar Book*, Constance Weaver presented a framework for teaching grammatical structures. Included in this structure was an emphasis on sharing a “mentor model” from a variety of possible sources: mentor texts, literature created by the teacher, literature created by students during a writing conference, and literature created spontaneously during a class lesson.

The Fundamentals of Grammar and Conventions is founded on a similar principle. Teaching and modeling grammar and conventions in context helps students to be able to gain command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage as readers, writers, listeners, and speakers.

Each Fundamentals of Grammar and Conventions program or unit includes 6–10 mentor texts (for modeling), 18–20 Interactive Read-Aloud lessons and Mini-Lessons, and follow-up extension activities and tasks.

The mentor texts that accompany *The Fundamentals of Grammar and Conventions* units serve as models for students to identify the conventional choices that mentor authors have made. Teachers are guided through read-aloud lessons and mini-lessons to highlight the proper usage of parts of speech, sentence structure, and conventions. As students actively notice, name, and develop theories and understandings about this usage, they then move to apply these grammatical structures to their own reading, writing, and speaking.

Extension activities and tasks focus on reflection responses, which ask students to write about the newly learned skills, their process of using them in pieces of writing, and how these new skills have helped them grow as writers.

With regards to the independent application of grammar and usage when speaking, lessons call on students to confirm understanding of a text read aloud or information presented orally by asking and answering questions about key details and requesting clarification if they do not understand something. More specifically, the lessons encourage student discourse and sharing of ideas connected to both conventional and unconventional decisions included in the mentor texts. In addition to the conventional components of the conversations and lesson content, students in grades 2–8 are also asked to discuss the fluency and structure of sentences.

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Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.
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Each Fundamentals of Grammar and Conventions program for grades K–8 consists of three units of study. Each unit includes 6–8 lessons and focuses on a particular aspect of standard English such as punctuation, parts of speech, capitalization, sentence structure, sentence fluency, paragraphing, text features, and layout.

The units of study within *The Fundamentals of Grammar and Conventions* rely on the belief that the constructivist or transitional model of learning—the view that learners make their own meaning based upon their background knowledge, experiences, and purposes—connects well to the “learning in context” model. This model contrasts significantly to the reductionist (or transmission) model in which the teacher (or the possessor of the ready-made knowledge) delivers information and instruction to the students as single skills, or in isolation.

The lessons in *The Fundamentals of Grammar and Conventions* foster a model wherein students are instructed and work both as a whole class and in small groups. During the Interactive Read-Aloud lessons and Mini-Lessons, students are interacting and sharing as a whole group. They are engaging in noticing syntax and language while also homing in on both conventional and unconventional decisions the mentor authors have made. Following the read-aloud lesson or mini-lesson, teachers will find explicit suggestions for transitioning from the whole class to small-group or individual writing or response tasks and instruction. Students’ work in their Practice Packets and their connections to other parts of the literacy block (e.g., writing workshop) enable teachers to modify or differentiate their instruction; assess their students’ ability to demonstrate command of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing; and determine how to work with students, either using small-group or individualized instruction.

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To build a foundation for college and career readiness in language, students will gain control over many conventions of standard English grammar, usage, and mechanics as well as learn other ways to use language to convey meaning effectively.
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Through an inquiry study approach of grammar and mechanics in context (using authentic literature and exemplars) as opposed to in isolation, students notice, learn, and gain command over grammatical and conventional concepts through repeated independent practice and application. They also understand how grammar and conventions impact meaning.

Each year in their writing, students will demonstrate increasing sophistication in all aspects of language use, from vocabulary and syntax to the development and organization of ideas, and will address increasingly demanding content and sources.

The Fundamentals of Grammar and Conventions units for grades K–8 are aligned to the Common Core State Standards for Language and Speaking and Listening, and they increase in sophistication each year in all aspects of language use. Each grade-level unit includes 6–10 mentor texts that similarly increase in qualitative and quantitative text complexity.

The sophistication and gradient of sentence structure lessons address syntax in a variety of ways across the grade levels. As students move from the primary grades (K–2) to the intermediate (3–5) and middle school grade levels (6–8), there is a deeper focus on cadence and fluency as well as the arrangement of words and phrases to create well-formed sentences. In the primary grades, mentor texts are used to model syntax and organization of ideas. As students reach the intermediate and middle school levels, the complexity of the tasks increases so that students are exposed to the function of phrases and clauses; simple, compound, and complex sentences; recognition of fragments and run-ons; subject/verb and pronoun/antecedent agreement; and producing complete sentences.

Additionally, in grades 6–8, attention to clarifying the meaning of unknown words and multiple-meaning words is addressed with short text samples.

Students will develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach.

Students will incorporate the knowledge they glean from The Fundamentals of Grammar and Conventions in the editing phase of the writing process. As reinforced in The Fundamentals of Grammar and Conventions, editing is not only about “fixing” writing. Instead, the emphasis is placed on conveying clear meaning. Students must look closely at their writing to ensure that the conventional decisions they have made create opportunities for them to present clear and coherent messages and meaning while following the standard rules for English grammar.

Materials allow for flexibility in meeting the needs of a wide range of students.

The Fundamentals of Grammar and Conventions provides teachers with multiple options for differentiation and small-group instruction. In grades K and 1, teachers will engage students in multisensory tasks to provide them

with an alternate approach to understanding the different formations of end mark punctuation. In grades 2–5, guided reading extensions allow for practice with end marks and sentence fluency while Readers Theater allows for students to actively engage in dialogue and note the rationale for using dialogue in writing and speaking. Suggestions for home/school connections allow for extended practice for students who may need further reinforcement.

Materials are designed for whole-group, small-group, and individual instruction.

Interactive Read-Aloud lessons in The Fundamentals of Grammar and Conventions foster a model wherein students are instructed and work both as a whole class and in small groups. Before, during, and after the read, students are interacting and sharing as a whole group. They are engaging in noticing syntax and language while also homing in on both conventional and unconventional decisions the mentor authors have made.

Following the read-aloud, teachers will find explicit suggestions on how to transition from the whole class to small-group or individual writing or response tasks and instruction. Students’ work in their Practice Packets and their connections to other parts of the literacy block enable teachers to modify or differentiate their instruction and determine how to work with students, either using small-group or individual instruction.

As teachers move from the read-aloud lessons during immersion, they are guided by the icons on the upper right-hand side of each lesson template. Specific minute allocations are included for the purpose of informing teachers of the approximate time allotment for each lesson type (read-aloud or mini-lesson).

Throughout each mini-lesson, the teacher is first addressing the whole class, quickly followed by small-group noticings and discussions about the explicit skill that was modeled during the “Inform” phase. As the mini-lesson is completed, teachers will find extension suggestions for partnership, small-group, guided, and/or independent work.

Readers Theater suggestions are also included as a way to practice skills while also participating in small groups who cooperate and share responsibilities for a common purpose.

Materials offer multiple assessment opportunities that genuinely measure progress.

Formative assessment suggestions are available following each mini-lesson for the purpose of collecting additional

data about your students, differentiating instruction, evaluating students, and planning future curricula.

Following each unit, teachers will be able to use checklists to collect additional data about their students and make anecdotal comments about the application of grammar and conventions to everyday writing. These checklists are provided in all of the K–8 programs or units.

MENTOR/ANCHOR TEXTS & NEW RESEARCH ON TEXT COMPLEXITY

Mentor/anchor texts align with the complexity requirements outlined in the standards.

When selecting the 10 mentor/anchor texts for the K–5 grammar and conventions programs, consideration was placed on using a balance of high-quality picture books and books that explicitly present grammar and conventions skills in an engaging manner.

For the middle school programs (grades 6–8), 6 mentor/anchor texts were selected, along with additional short shared texts, that together reflect a broad selection of genre, text type, content, and theme. Because students can listen to much more complex material than they can read independently, the read-aloud selections that are included in The Fundamentals of Grammar and Conventions include complex texts that contain more sophisticated academic vocabulary, lend themselves to more complex tasks, and support rich dialogue.

Complex text is typified by a combination of longer sentences, a higher proportion of less-frequent words, and a greater number and variety of words with multiple meanings. To support the language strand of the standards specific to grammar and conventions, qualitative and quantitative dimensions and reader and task consideration were used when determining texts that would not only engage and challenge students but would also provide strong models of syntax, structure, and language.

All students have the opportunity to encounter grade-level text.

There is a balance between mentor/shared texts at students’ own reading levels and texts with complexity levels that will challenge and motivate students. Texts vary in length and density, requiring students to slow down or read more quickly depending on their purpose for reading.

For students in the primary grades (K–2), emphasis was placed on finding large, bold examples for easy access for shared reading purposes.

The quality of the anchor texts is high, and the materials provide opportunities for students to build knowledge through close readings of specific texts, including read-alouds.

The Fundamentals of Grammar and Conventions units for grades K–5 provide 10 mentor texts while the grades 6–8 programs provide 6 mentor texts and 4–6 short shared texts.

Students use these mentor texts and short shared texts not only to study craft, genre, and other aspects of writing but also to focus on grammatical structure and application of conventional rules. Each mentor text was carefully selected in order to address text complexity and scaffold the approaches for students to attain and build knowledge through deeper reading and understanding of content. In the read-aloud lessons, close readings allow for and encourage careful and sustained interpretation of brief passages or sections of texts. This approach to the read-aloud lessons places greater emphasis on the particular over the general, paying close attention to individual words, syntax, and the order in which sentences and ideas unfold as they are read.

Mentor/anchor texts include literary and informational text.

Each Fundamentals of Grammar and Conventions unit includes both literary and informational texts as well as a wide variety of sub-categories of these text types, including poetry, biographies, literary nonfiction, feature articles, realistic fiction, and historical fiction. In addition, lessons focus on genre features, purposes, and structures and allow students to identify texts that blend genres together (e.g., literary or narrative nonfiction, biography). The lessons also reveal to students each author’s intent when creating a text.

The lessons that address text layout also emphasize the features of informational and narrative text and allow students to understand how layout decisions impact how meaning is conveyed.