

## WRITING FUNDAMENTALS: Connecting the Common Core to Best Practice

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.

Across the grade levels, the Writing Fundamentals Units of Study provide a balance of genres and tasks that expose students to opportunities to produce writing that includes sophisticated vocabulary and varied text structures and features while also conveying clear meanings and purposes that are connected to the genres.

Specific to vocabulary and syntax, students will have explicit models of tiered vocabulary used throughout the Immersion phase of the writing process. Considerations regarding multiple-meaning, academic, and domain-specific vocabulary have been addressed across the grade levels, with specific attention to providing a scaffold of tiers depending on the grade level. Starting in our primary grade units, the foundation for academic or instructional vocabulary has been fostered through consistent use of terms that are familiar to students. Use of consistent genre-specific instructional terms, along with the names for the stages of the writing process, can be found across all units of study and across all grade levels.

The intermediate and middle school units address sentence structure through a combination of mentor texts and the use of short shared texts where students are able to recognize how sentence structure impacts the message, purpose, and impact on readers.

Students will engage in a full range of writing, including writing narratives, writing to inform, and forming and writing arguments.

- Students will write arguments to support claims as they analyze substantive topics or texts.
- Students will write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information.
- Students will write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events.

The Writing Fundamentals Units of Study address all three text types that are reflected in the Common Core State Standards. For each grade level K–8, the units allow for a full range of writing across the text types. Our product sampler includes a text-type continuum and suggested curriculum calendar that reflects this comprehensive exposure across the text types and genres. Through the Immersion and Generating Ideas lessons, students will gain an understanding of the different purposes for each text type and how writers present these purposes with details that support the genre(s). Purpose and meaning play integral roles in all of

our units as students begin to write arguments, write informational pieces, and create narratives.

Each unit also provides multiple opportunities for students to practice the qualities of writing through each stage of the writing process. When students are called upon to generate ideas, they are thinking about purpose and genre. As they move into drafting, they must consider the structures and organizational features of each text type. The Revising and Editing lessons allow students to consider the voice and tone of their pieces, again reminding them of genre and purpose. As students participate in the Editing lessons, they are asked to look closely at their pieces to ensure they are conveying clear meanings that are appropriate to the genre and text type. While conventional decisions are also examined during this stage, students are again reminded to be cognizant of the text type, purpose, genre, meaning, and message.

Writing tasks will provide opportunities for self-expression and exploration and a means of communicating thoughts and answering questions.

The Interactive Read-Alouds and Mini-Lessons for each unit of study prompt student thinking and learning about writing while also providing multiple opportunities for them to explore and reflect. During the “Engage” section of the Mini-Lessons, students are prompted and encouraged to share their thinking with the entire class, their partners, or in small groups.

Students also communicate ideas that reflect their own thoughts or wonderings and/or address questions through the writing conferences that take place throughout the stages of the writing process. These conferences occur during the independent practice time of the workshop. Time allocations and instructional components of the workshop can be found in the Introduction section of each unit, along with an appendix that includes a pie chart of the components.

Teachers can pause during a lesson or discussion to allow students to formulate their thoughts in writing. Students might be asked to respond to a provocative question, identify a key piece of learning that has emerged that day, or question something they are having trouble understanding or applying.

Writing assignments will ask students to draw on their experience, on their imagination, and most frequently on the texts and sources they encounter through reading or read-alouds.

The current research reveals that writing and the writing process are best understood as complex phenomena that include not only procedural strategies for going through the writing process to generate text but also a multitude

of other strategies to develop specific schemata. These include strategies to help writers understand the context for writing, to tap into general background knowledge and reading ability, to sharpen cognitive processes for problem solving, and to create emotional dispositions and attitudes about writing, audience, genre, and topic. The aforementioned strategies are attained through the Immersion phase of the Writing Fundamentals lessons when students are guided through Interactive Read-Alouds, which often connect with their personal experiences or wonderings. The mentor authors of the texts that were selected for all of the K–8 units engage students with strong models of craft, grammatical structures, and attention to genre. Both the Interactive Read-Aloud lessons and Mini-Lessons guide teachers to not only model features of author’s craft but also provide explicit lessons that address skills and strategies connected to genre, structure, organization, tone, and style.

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**Common Core Instructional Shift (Writing): Materials emphasize use of evidence to inform or make an argument. Students will develop writing skills through written arguments that respond to the ideas, events, facts, and arguments presented in the texts they read.**  
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The Writing Fundamentals Opinion/Argument Units of Study provide opportunities for students to create pieces that change a reader’s point of view, bring about some action on the reader’s part, and/or ask readers to accept the writer’s explanation or evaluation of a concept, issue, or problem. This is done through a balanced combination of using mentor texts and explicitly teaching and modeling this through the Mini-Lessons. The lessons guide students through the process of responding to the ideas, facts, and arguments presented in the texts they read, from their personal lives, and/or from discussion and conversation.

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**Students will develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach.**  
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Writing Fundamentals Units of Study provide multiple opportunities for students to think deeply and critically about what they read and write, from analyzing author’s craft, to planning and revising their drafts, to publishing a piece of writing with evidence of purpose and audience awareness.

Included in every K–8 unit are Mini-Lessons that address the stages of the writing process. Following the Immersion experience, students will be exposed to Generating Ideas Mini-Lessons that encourage students to think, list, brainstorm, and develop entries that support the genre in which they are writing. As students transition from generating ideas, they are reminded to think about the criteria writers consider when selecting the topic or idea about which they will write. In grades 2–8, the step

of collecting information follows the step of selecting ideas to write about and allows students to research or add more to their selected ideas or topics. Once students approach the drafting stage of the writing process, the Mini-Lessons begin to address all of the organizational and structural considerations for a piece of writing.

Lessons in the revising and editing stages are geared toward encouraging students to go back to their drafts. During revision, students look at their word choices, their voice or tone, and the structure of their sentences. During editing, the Mini-Lessons address the conventional decisions each writer has made and encourage use of editing checklists for students to either use individually or with their peers. Finally, students will consider including covers, book flaps, Author Notes, and Dedication pages during the Publishing Mini-Lessons.

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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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Students will be exposed to Mini-Lessons that were created to develop micro-level skills such as spelling, transcription, and sentence construction as well as to be exposed to and develop macro-level understanding about organization of text/ideas and conventions.

In each Writing Fundamentals Unit of Study (K–8), there are multiple editing Mini-Lessons that explicitly model for students how to use peer editing and individual checklists. Teachers will be guided to teach and model Mini-Lessons that encourage students to determine if their pieces reflect proper conventional choices that are inclusive of mechanics, grammar, spelling, parts of speech, and tense.

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**Students will use technology to produce and publish writing.**  
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When students are producing published pieces, they are called upon to make decisions about the appearances and formats of their pieces. Using grade-appropriate technology is an option for students. During the Nonfiction, Feature Article, Book Review, and Essay units, students are exposed to mentor texts and student exemplar pieces that reflect effective and creative uses of technology. There are lessons that explicitly demonstrate the different features of published pieces that integrate technology and/or multimedia. Varied uses of technology and digital sources (e.g., photographs) are introduced to students to demonstrate how to enhance a piece of writing for the purpose of entertaining, informing, and/or persuading readers. Multimedia is also explained to the students as a means to evoke an emotional response and further engage readers.

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**Students will conduct research on different aspects of a topic by gathering relevant information from multiple sources.**  
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Through the Writing Fundamentals Nonfiction and Opinion Units of Study, students develop plans to conduct and organize their research in order to help readers achieve a deeper understanding of the topic. They are exposed to a variety of mentor models that demonstrate different “looks” and formats of information. That way, when the release of responsibility occurs for independent work, students will feel comfortable and confident when gathering information that supports their topic(s).

As students in grades 2–8 engage in the Collecting lessons, they are exposed to multiple examples of research. Depending on the genre, research takes on a variety of forms. If students are engaged in a Narrative Unit of Study, research encompasses a more informal approach (e.g., photo albums, conversation). As students participate in Informational or Opinion/Argument Units of Study, the collecting stage explicitly models the research process and guides students to use mentor texts, short texts, reference materials, interviews, questionnaires, the Internet, and writing to an expert as means of gathering information from a variety of sources.

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**Students will draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.**  
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Throughout all of the Writing Fundamentals units, students will examine texts during the Immersion stages in order to gain deeper understanding of a topic, idea, or event. Through the Collecting lessons, students will use some of the evidence from the read-aloud texts to enhance the idea they have selected to research and write about. Finding this evidence supports students as readers, writers, and listeners and helps bolster their reflections, analyses, and research.

In each K–8 Writing Fundamentals unit, the students will consistently encounter quality texts (literary and informational) through both the Immersion lessons and Mini-Lessons. It is through these lessons that students will be drawing evidence from the mentor and short texts to support analysis, reflection, and research. The process of drawing on evidence may be demonstrated by modeling a writing technique that was examined and analyzed in a mentor text (e.g., a narrative) or with actual information, facts, or details encountered in a mentor or short shared text (e.g., articles).

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**Students gain, evaluate, and present increasingly complex information, ideas, and evidence through listening and speaking as well as through media.**  
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Throughout these units, students participate in rich, structured conversation with an adult in response to written texts that are read aloud during the Immersion phase. Students will compare, contrast, notice, analyze, and evaluate the decisions that mentor authors have made and decide whether or not to incorporate or replicate these qualities as they work on their own writing pieces.

During both the Interactive Read-Aloud Lessons and the “Engage” portion of our Mini-Lessons, there is an emphasis on building on other people’s ideas in conversation by responding to the comments of others through multiple exchanges.

Students will confirm their understanding of a text read aloud or information presented orally or through other media by asking and answering questions about key details and requesting clarification if they do not understand something.

Students will have opportunities to present their thoughts and ideas to members of the class for the purpose of sharing their ideas, gathered information, stances, opinions, and/or arguments.

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**Students will write routinely for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences. Students will devote significant time and effort to writing, producing numerous pieces over short and extended time frames throughout the year.**  
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Students will spend significant time writing a variety of original pieces (a whole published piece, along with additional shorter pieces derived from content areas, notebook work, and daily practice) as teachers work toward the goal of establishing real purposes for writing and student involvement in the task. This writing occurs during many phases of the writing process. Following each Interactive Read-Aloud lesson, teachers will find that the “After the Read” portion of the lessons leads right into an independent writing task for students. During the Generating Ideas Mini-Lessons, students will not only be generating ideas but will also be using their notebooks to develop ideas. While students will be working toward publishing one piece for each unit, there are opportunities for them to go back into their notebooks for the purpose of developing entries in the genre that they are currently studying.

There will be a marked difference in time spent on isolated drills regarding “subskills” of grammar, vocabulary, spelling, paragraphing, penmanship, etc. as these skills are woven into authentic examples of literature, exemplars, notebook work, and shared writing experiences.

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**Writing materials allow for flexibility in meeting the needs of a wide range of students.**  
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Throughout all of the units, the lessons were created in order to focus on students as individual writers so that teachers can nurture each student’s writing identity and develop a repertoire of writing skills and strategies. There are also extension suggestions that follow each Mini-Lesson for the purpose of differentiation and meeting the needs of all learners (e.g., ELL suggestions, small-group work, multisensory activities).

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**Materials are designed for whole-group, small-group, and individual instruction.**  
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Throughout the Immersion lessons, students are encouraged to work as members of a writing community. Before, during, and after the read, students are interacting and sharing as a whole group. Following the read-aloud, teachers will find explicit suggestions on how to transition from the whole group to small-group or individual writing or response tasks. These suggestions reflect the gradual release of responsibility as the instructional model moves from the whole group to small-group sharing, discussing, noticing, and teaching followed by individual work and/or instruction. There are also specific lessons that demonstrate how to listen and respond as a member of a whole group, small group, or partnership. As teachers move from the Interactive Read-Aloud lessons during the Immersion phase, 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 about the approximate time allotment for each lesson type (Interactive Read-Aloud or Mini-Lesson).

The circular nature of Mini-Lessons invites teachers to begin their lessons by addressing the whole group (“Inform” phase). Following this portion, teachers present information to the whole group (“Present” phase) and then transition to smaller group modeling and sharing during the “Engage” portion. Finally, as the Mini-Lesson comes to a close through the “Reiterate” phase, students are reminded of the lesson’s teaching point and are released from the whole-group setting into individual work and/or instruction. Following each Mini-Lesson, teachers will find extension pages that reflect suggestions for partnership, small-group, guided reading, and/or differentiation activities. These extensions reflect opportunities for teachers to engage in both small-group and individual instruction while students begin their independent practice.

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**Materials offer multiple assessment opportunities that genuinely measure progress.**  
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Each Mini-Lesson provides conference questions that will help you decide how to best support and guide your

students. This type of formative assessment allows teachers to maintain ongoing notes on their students as writers and independent learners. In addition to these conference questions, at the end of each unit there is a lesson that includes a self-reflection questionnaire, which focuses students’ attention on the work they have done and their growth as writers during the unit. As a culmination to each unit, teachers will find a lesson that includes a rubric that assesses students’ performance levels for each of the strategies and skills taught throughout the unit. This “process” rubric allows teachers to gather information that will inform their instruction and approaches to each individual student. At the back of the unit binder, teachers may decide to use a standards-based rubric that is meant to assess each student’s final published piece using CCSS grade-level expectations as the criteria. The information gleaned from these assessments helps teachers understand what their students have learned about writing and who they are as writers. It also provides a glimpse at the areas students are proficient in and areas that need to be re-taught and/or reviewed.

**ANCHOR TEXTS & NEW RESEARCH ON TEXT COMPLEXITY**

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**Anchor texts align with the complexity requirements outlined in the standards.**  
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Because students can listen to much more complex material than they can read independently, the read-aloud selections that are included in Writing Fundamentals units reflect complex text(s) that contain more sophisticated academic vocabulary, lend themselves to more complex tasks, and support rich dialogue. The units in grades K–5 each come with ten mentor texts that reflect the CCSS rigor that researchers are suggesting for younger elementary school-aged students. In grades 6–8, the units contain seven mentor texts that not only reflect the rigor of the standards but also engage students in contemporary, social, historical, and environmental themes that require critical thinking and synthesizing of ideas and lend themselves to rich discourse, conversation, analysis, and debate.

Complex text is typified by a combination of longer sentences, a higher proportion of less common words, and a greater number and variety of words with multiple meanings. In addition to the aforementioned criteria, qualitative dimensions such as knowledge demands, language, text structure, and levels of meaning were strong considerations when selecting mentor texts for each unit. Text cohesion, word length, and sentence length were also analyzed when considering the quantitative dimensions. Finally, an emphasis on reader and task consideration was addressed specific to student motivation, knowledge, and experiences. In the intermediate and middle school grade levels, complex



text selection involved analyzing the content for higher levels of abstraction, more subtle and multidimensional purposes, and a wider variety of writing styles, all of which place greater demands on working memory.

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**All students have the opportunity to encounter grade-level text.**  
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There is a balance between mentor and shared texts at students' own reading levels as well as texts with complexity levels that will challenge and motivate students in all of the Writing Fundamentals units. Texts vary in length and density, requiring students to slow down or read more quickly depending on their purposes for reading.

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**The quality of the mentor texts is high, and the materials provide opportunities for students to build knowledge through close readings of specific texts, including read-alouds.**  
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Each Writing Fundamentals Unit of Study includes five to ten texts. These pieces of literature and/or short shared texts are used by a writing community to study craft, genre, and other aspects of writing. Each mentor text was carefully selected in order to address text complexity and scaffold the approaches needed for students to attain and build knowledge through deeper reading and understanding of content. Mentor texts have been selected from amongst a wide variety of over seventy publishers, with particular consideration given to selecting texts that represent cultural diversity with regards to author as well as content and characters.

The Interactive Read-Aloud lessons provide a clear roadmap for teachers and guide them through the process of reading the mentor texts as writers (i.e., to read like a writer) while also encouraging close readings. During the Immersion phase, close readings of Interactive Read-Aloud texts allow for and encourage careful, sustained interpretation of a brief passage of text. Such reading emphasizes 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.

The Interactive Read-Alouds also alert teachers (through a change of font type) when to think aloud, pose questions, discuss content, notice craft, note text type, and discuss purpose and genre characteristics.

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**Anchor texts include literary and informational text.**  
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In each grade level, the anchor texts that are included in the units of study provide students with both literary and informational experiences. Focusing on text type and genre leads students to a rich, deep exposure to genre and sub-genre studies. In addition, the lessons focus on genre features, purposes, and structures and allow students to identify texts that blend genres (e.g., literary nonfiction, biography) and determine the author's intent when he or she wrote a text. Examples of these informational and literary texts that are found in Writing Fundamentals units include fiction, nonfiction, poetry, biographies, feature articles, memoirs, and editorials.