

Feedback on Final Recommendations for English Language Arts and Reading TEKS

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General comments: The current ELAR draft alignment is much improved over the last several drafts. It is easy to see how one specific standard can be followed from K through grade 12, if appropriate. The framework with the 8 strands will most certainly have redundancies, but current research for each of the 8 strands is clear and strongly supports this type of organization. I applaud the very hard work of the writing team along with their knowledge of current research associated with the English, language arts, and reading standards. I suggest we consider adding one word, “thinking” to the other four components of ELAR and explained throughout as reading, writing, speaking, listening, and thinking. All the language arts involve thinking.

The standards as drafted are more specific for the grade levels and they reflect an understanding of how each standard increases in difficulty. Of course, in the English and language arts domains, much is driven by the difficulty and complexity of the text to be read and studied, rather than the specific standard of complexity increasing. Additionally, it also must be understood that many standards cannot and should not be measured through multiple choice assessments, but rather focus should be placed upon teacher training to develop specific rubrics that measure speaking, listening, and writing. To this point, TEA has done an outstanding job with the development of the writing rubrics under the guidance of Victoria Young.

At each grade level it is also easy to develop and teach all specified standards within each specified year because of the rich overlay of the 8 strands of the framework. For example, a standard such as “text structure” would be part of comprehension, composition, author’s craft, multiple genres, response, and could even be part of collaboration. The foresight of the 8 strands of the framework is brilliant and teachable, and will clearly drive an assessment process that will enhance teaching and learning. Additionally, at the high school level, it will better prepare students to be successful on both SAT and ACT examinations.

Strand 1: Foundations

Currently, tremendous research for early literacy focuses upon the importance of oral language development. Unless children have a firm foundation in oral language, vocabulary, and grammar, their development in reading, listening, speaking, and writing will be limited. The recent publication by Dana Suskind entitled, “Thirty Million Words: Building a Child’s Brain,” speaks clearly to the tremendous need to build oral language in all children during the early years. This means that third grade reading levels will not be achieved if children do not have adequate oral language skills. I would suggest adding additional sub items to the four currently included for oral language proficiency to provide much more emphasis on developing oral language skills. Suggestions might include a point on oral language skills that are developed through

experiential learning, connections to known words and experiences, work with expanding sentences in oral language, attention to rich descriptions, modeling through children's literature, and connections to first languages (e.g. Spanish cognates). Children must be influenced by examples of rich language, encouraged to share from their own experiences, introduced to multiple rich experiences of others, and encouraged to ask many questions. Under the Research Strand, oral language development is mentioned in terms of asking questions for research, but an emphasis upon rich oral language development at the K-1 level is vital for success in later years.

The rest of the K-1 foundations are constructed with a heavy emphasis upon word decoding and encoding in the early years and progressing to the study of etymology in upper levels. Phonics generalizations are thorough and extensive.

Fluency from third grade up should focus on silent reading fluency unless it is for performance, for poetry or for drama that is written for oral discourse.

Including handwriting progression from manuscript to cursive in the Foundations Standard is logical.

Strand 2: Comprehension

Under Comprehension, I appreciated the attention to “self-selected readings” at all levels. This is probably the best way to increase reading fluency, vocabulary and word knowledge. I also applaud the continued focus from grades K-12 upon reading process: before, during and after reading. Student ability to set a purpose for reading is also a strong component of this strand from K-12. The one area of omission in this strand is attention to listening comprehension that can be easily measured through mind maps and rubrics. Listening comprehension is critical in our media-crazed society, higher education, and life in general. Perhaps it is embedded in the description at the beginning of the strand explanation, but explicit inclusion is important.

Strand 3: Response

The framework strand of Response is nicely aligned in most areas. At grade 1, “retells” are suggested and research strongly supports the power of retells for measuring reading comprehension. Higher grades use the words “paraphrase and summarize,” but they are not the same as a “retells.” I would suggest that retells be used throughout the grades, even in high school. Highly developed rubrics are an effective way to measure the increase in retelling competency as well as being a great measure of oral language proficiency.

Strand 4 - Collaboration

Collaboration is one of the most important additions to the 2016 ELAR TEKS revision. Like the other ELAR standards, it communicates process. After visiting 10 Texas

universities last month with my grandson, collaboration became a major component of all learning in the new environments of multimedia learning and group discussions. Universities had specific criteria for student collaborative work in all disciplines even to the point of assigning regular meeting space for collaboration in all classes. In a University of California study (Treisman, 1985) to determine if Asian students were “smarter” than Anglo and African American students in math, the findings resulted in one word: collaboration. Asian students worked in collaboration during their learning of math, asking questions, correcting each other, and challenging each other. Contrasting this collaborative learning to the isolated learning of African American and Anglo students revealed results that were significantly higher for those students who learned through collaboration. Measuring outcomes through collaboration are simple, because the process is easily measured through rubrics with established criteria. In addition, a meta-analysis also indicated that the power of collaborative learning is far superior to learning in isolation. Of course, collaboration should be a process for all content area learning, but because it includes reading, writing, speaking, listening and thinking, it should belong in English language arts and reading standards and then encouraged for all content learning.

Strand 5: Multiple Genres

I appreciate the connections at all grade levels to digital texts that are so critical at all levels. Purpose and audience might be added throughout. The inclusion of multiple genres is a highly important standard based upon all reading today from media to textbooks to most articles and research. Many literary pieces also include multiple genres. Instruction in multiple genres includes shifting writing modes within a piece and using graphs, charts, and other visual representations. Reading, writing, listening and speaking all must adapt to the shifts in multiple genre because multiple genre understandings are critical to both comprehension and composition process. This strand has been well developed and aligned across the grade levels.

Strand 6: Author’s Purpose and Craft

Outstanding professional writers who are queried about their writing process indicate they “study” writing of others as much as they spend in writing time. This standard was well aligned and written to emphasize the importance of purpose and audience throughout. Similarly, words like “identify,” and “analyze” are dominant throughout this strand emphasizing the importance of a student’s ability to identify what is effective in a piece. Even at the primary level, students can identify through listening how something is described or how it made him/her visualize or feel. The study of author’s craft is one of the most powerful ways of learning to read and write as well as speak and listen. Testimonials from students in classes where author’s craft is regularly studied continue to comment that it makes them both better readers and writers.

Strand 7: Composition

This strand demonstrates excellent use of writing and speaking processes throughout the grades K-12. In writing, the revision process is vital. I was surprised to see “editing” broken into so many pieces, whereas “revision” did not receive much attention. Revision is the place where the teaching and learning of writing craft should be placed.

Furthermore with the editing focus upon grammar, punctuation and spelling items, specific examples and rules do not need to be included in the standards. Using correct orthography/spelling, grammar, and punctuation inclusion with suggestions for increased difficulty and technicality is sufficient. In addition, oral composition, spoken grammar and elocution are also part of composition. I am pleased that the term “register” is used, because it is an important aspect in audience understanding and appeal. I was also pleased to see that “voice” is prominent throughout. Voice is the part of writing and speaking that speaks to the reader/listener.

Strand 8: Research – Inquiry

The Research/Inquiry strand is well defined from grades K-12 with systematic processes delineated for research and inquiry. I would suggest that technology is as powerful with K-2 levels as it is currently in grades 3-12. The “gathering information from multiple sources” is certainly relevant at the K-1 level because this is an excellent way to build oral discourse. Young children love to investigate and ask questions! In addition, I would also add technology at the K-2 levels because a great deal of research has been conducted with children working together to solve problems and research questions using technology at the K-2 level.

In conclusion, this draft of the ELAR TEKS is an excellent example of well-constructed, cogent, and congruent learning from K-12. With a few minor changes or additions, the piece should be ready for the first and second reading. This ELAR standard’s document is beautifully constructed and poised to help teachers and students organize and learn information, react, respond, create, and develop thoughts. It is also constructed to prepare the secondary students to succeed in career and college preparation being well aligned to the college and career standards. I have aligned the ELAR standards to the College and Career Readiness Standards and found them to be in close parallel.