

Identify Grade-Level Content Standards (Part 1)

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As I mentioned in the Introduction, when I first started as an educator I was unaware that there were content standards that were supposed to guide my teaching. Maybe I was absent for that session during my credentialing program when this topic was discussed. But I contend that it would have been important enough to mention standards to us future teachers more than once. I clearly missed out. So I visited my Aunt Selma in Miami the summer before my first year of teaching. She was a master, veteran teacher with 35 years to her credit. We sat in her kitchen, coffee cup in her hand, pencil and pad in mine. I was prepared to write each word she uttered because my anxiety about my impending first year was extraordinarily steep. My newly acquired hives told their own story.

Aunt Selma began with an innocent enough question: "So, Kathy, what have you mapped out for your U.S. History or Language Arts curriculum for your first year?"

I paused, I scratched, then sighed, "The whole year? I'm supposed to map it out for the whole year?"

"Well," she started. Then seeing my panic, she digressed. "Did you get a list of standards that detail what you are expected to teach?"

"No, but I have a couple of textbooks. I plan to read them cover to cover along with the teachers' guides and then write or revise lessons as I see fit." An imaginary question mark hovered above my head. Aunt Selma sensed my distress and kindly walked me through the essential pieces I needed to successfully launch my career. A week after our talk, I headed back to California ready to ask the questions and obtain the content standards documents necessary to do my job. I was hive-free.

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Once I figured out the format of the content standards and flipped to the right page, it was a matter of picking and choosing from a list to determine which ones would work for a particular unit of study. The aura of doubt dissipated, and I began to see that identifying standards was not as difficult as I had once thought. Standards became my friend—well, at least most of them. At that time, I had a long way to go before I felt confident deciding what to teach and when. Curriculum mapping is something I've honed through the years, but that discussion is for another day. The epiphany I had as a new teacher was that I had to identify standards before I could begin writing lessons and creating assessments. The standards provided the means for grouping several related lessons in a logical way.

■ STEP-BY-STEP DETAILS FOR IDENTIFYING GRADE-LEVEL CONTENT STANDARDS

As I delineated in the Introduction, I write curriculum from a four-part process. So let's start from the beginning of how I meet my students' needs in curriculum design Part 1: *Identifying Standards*. It is essential that I first get comfortable in sweatpants and a T-shirt—preferably sweatpants a little large, so they're roomy. I then grab a cold Diet Coke (no glass of ice necessary) and lay out all my "supplies." It is much like a chef prepares for cooking. My supplies include the content standards document for the grade level I teach, a pad of paper, and a Bic pen (my all-time favorite). I like to print out the standards from the Department of Education Web site or make a copy so I can highlight or write on it. You can also have the document open and record standards information on paper or on the computer. Now the ride begins, so take heed, and I will guide you:

1. Target writing type

Peruse all the writing standards, and then zero in on one that is the focus for your targeted writing unit. For primary grades, it would probably be *write brief narratives describing an experience* or *write brief expository descriptions of a person, place, or event using sensory details*. In upper elementary grades and beyond, it would most likely be *response to literature*, *persuasive composition*, *narrative writing*, *business letter*, *summary*, or something similar. For some grades, we're not talking about a small writing unit, like a 1-week assignment. For certain grades, this is a comprehensive 3- to 6-week writing unit for a particular genre. Some standards documents specifically dictate how many words the students should produce. In California, the State Department mandates in its standards document that students in Grades 5 through 8 create a 500- to 700-word paper. Up until fourth grade, there are no length requirements, but you still might consider the unit to be

comprehensive. So my advice is to plan well, beginning with this first step and beyond for any age of student. I wager that the unit will soar beautifully, and you will have improved student achievement if you follow this choreographed process that begins with standards identification.

Using the writing content standards documents from the district, the state, or both, record the entire writing standard or highlight it if you have a copy of the standards for the grade you teach. In California, Pennsylvania, Texas, Michigan, and other states, the writing standards dictate a *purpose for writing* (e.g., *write to entertain as in a short story* or *write fluently for multiple purposes to produce compositions, such as personal narratives, persuasive essays, lab reports, and poetry*) and a *genre* (e.g., narrative, persuasive, research, etc.), so I have categorized the examples I provide by writing application. In reviewing several state writing content standards, writing genres are included, although they may not be listed as a section heading but might be embedded within a writing standard. Nonetheless, I believe that taking the writing genre and using it as the overarching standard makes sense because somewhere in each state document it is listed. I find it easier to plan a writing unit around a writing type than a process or strategy piece. For instance, I plan to teach a short story unit and then include writing process (brainstorming, revising, editing, etc.) and writing strategies (multiparagraph writing, sensory details, strong verbs, etc.) as specific lessons to produce the finished product of a sound short story. In the following section (“2. Identify ‘supporting standards’”), I guide you to find supporting standards to fully develop the standard expectations with the writing process and strategies fully in mind.

Here are Web sites that you can search to find your state’s writing standards. I have provided several sites in case some Web sites change.

Arizona: <http://www.ade.state.az.us/standards/language-arts/std2.pdf>

California: <http://www.cde.ca.gov/standards/reading/>

Florida:

Grades 6 to 8: <http://www.firn.edu/doe/curriculum/crscodes/basic612/lnart68.htm>

Grades 9 to 12: <http://www.firn.edu/doe/curriculum/crscodes/basic612/lnart912.htm>

Pre-K to Grade 8/all subjects: <http://www.firn.edu/doe/curric/prek12/frame2.htm>

Michigan: http://www.michigan.gov/documents/MichiganCurriculumFramework_8172_7.pdf

Pennsylvania: <http://www.pde.state.pa.us/k12/lib/k12/Reading.pdf>

Wisconsin: <http://www.dpi.state.wi.us/standards/elab4.html>

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Links to content standards for 15 states and 3 Canadian provinces:
http://in.dir.yahoo.com/education/primary_and_secondary/english_language_arts/curriculum_standards

Links to all content standards for 50 states (Council of Chief State School Officers): http://www.ccsso.org/projects/State_Education_Indicators/Key_State_Education_Policies/3160.cfm

**Overarching Standard—
Expository Description Writing
Application (First Grade)**

Write brief expository descriptions of a real object, person, place, or event using sensory details.

**Overarching Standard—
Narrative Writing Application
(Second Grade)**

Write brief narratives based on personal experience that move through a logical sequence of events and describe the setting, characters, objects, and events in detail.

**Overarching Standard—
Expository Composition
Writing Application (Third to
Fifth Grades)**

Write an expository composition that identifies and stays on the topic; develops the topic with simple facts, details, examples, and explanations; excludes extraneous and inappropriate information; uses structures such as cause and effect, chronology, similarities and differences; uses several sources of information; and provides a concluding statement.

**Overarching Standard—
Research Report Writing
Application (Sixth to Eighth
Grades)**

Write a research paper that separates information into major components based on a set of criteria, examines critical relationships between and among elements of a research topic, addresses different perspectives on a topic, achieves balance between research information and original ideas, integrates a variety of information into a whole, draws conclusions, uses a variety of resource materials to gather information, and uses appropriate methods to cite and document reference sources.

**Overarching Standard—
Narrative Writing Application
(Sixth to Eighth Grades)**

Write a narrative account, such as a short story, that establishes a context that enables the reader to imagine the event or experience; develops characters, setting, plot, and point of view; reveals a theme; creates an organizing structure; sequences events; uses concrete sensory details; uses a range of strategies and literary devices, such as dialogue, tension, suspense, figurative language; uses narrative action, such as movement, gestures, and expressions; and uses an identifiable voice.

2. Identify “supporting standards”

Once the writing standard is identified and recorded (or highlighted), you need to decide on other “supporting standards” that can accompany this assignment. For example, what writing strategies, writing process steps, grammar, and conventions standards are needed to support this standard? Write down or highlight all of those standards that apply to your targeted writing assignment. To illustrate, if your targeted writing assignment is a research report, then record or highlight the writing strategy for *multiparagraph composition*. That would entail an introduction, paragraphs with topic sentences and supporting details, and so forth. See these “supporting standards” for a narrative piece of writing; note that some line items could clearly work for other types of writing:

Supporting Standards—Strategies

Needed for Narrative Writing Application:

- Prewriting
- Drafting and revising
- Editing and publishing
- Peer review
- Uses strategies to write for different audiences and purposes
- Uses descriptive language that clarifies and enhances ideas
- Uses paragraph form in writing
- Uses a variety of sentence structures to expand and embed ideas (e.g., complex sentences, parallel structure)
- Uses explicit transitional devices
- Uses coordinating conjunctions in written composition
- Uses verbs in written composition (e.g., uses a wide variety of action verbs, verbs that agree with the subject)
- Uses adjectives in written compositions
- Uses conventions of spelling in written compositions
- Uses conventions of capitalization in written compositions
- Uses conventions of punctuation in written compositions

3. Note existing lessons and resources

At this point, the dendrites are probably making music in your head as you recall assignments in your files or lessons you have already conducted that work for this targeted writing assignment. With your trusty Bic in hand, write down these assignment ideas. If you know of any good resources or materials you or colleagues have, record these, too. These notes are like a sketch for a drawing. It is obviously not complete, but it is taking shape. Later, you will return to these notes to create and refine lessons.

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4. Determine timing of unit

Be realistic in terms of *when* you plan to teach this targeted writing assignment. If it is in the fall, then your expectations will be different than if you focus on a spring assignment. Write down the title of the assignment and a time frame, for example “Persuasive Letter: March” or “Personal Narrative: Fall.” This helps to focus the assignment even more and identify the standards expected at a particular point in the school year.

Standards Identification Samples

Following are two samples of the process for standards identification that I have explained in this chapter. Included are “supporting standards” to illustrate how I have selected those that specifically accompany the targeted writing application (or type).

LESSON TITLE: Personal Character/Fall (2nd grade)

SELECTED STANDARDS	LESSON IDEAS/RESOURCES
<p>WRITING APPLICATIONS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> write brief narratives based on their experiences: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. move through a logical sequence of events b. describe the setting, characters, objects, and events in detail <input type="checkbox"/> write a friendly letter complete with the date, salutation, body, closing, signature <p>WRITING STRATEGIES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> group related ideas and maintain a consistent focus <input type="checkbox"/> create readable documents with legible handwriting <input type="checkbox"/> understand the purposes of various reference materials (e.g., dictionary, thesaurus, atlas) revise original drafts to improve sequence and provide more descriptive detail <p>CONVENTIONS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> distinguish between complete and incomplete sentences <input type="checkbox"/> recognize and use the correct word order in written sentences <input type="checkbox"/> identify and correctly use various parts of speech, including nouns and verbs, in writing and speaking <input type="checkbox"/> use commas in the greeting and closure of a letter and with dates and items in a series <input type="checkbox"/> use quotation marks correctly <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> capitalize all proper nouns, words at the beginning of sentences and greetings, months and days of the week, and titles and initials of people <input type="checkbox"/> spell frequently used, irregular words correctly (e.g., <i>were, says, said, who, what, why</i>) <input type="checkbox"/> spell basic short-vowel, long-vowel, <i>r</i>-controlled, and consonant-blend patterns correctly <p>READING COMPREHENSION</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> state the purpose in reading (i.e., tell what information is sought) <input type="checkbox"/> use knowledge of the author's purpose(s) to comprehend informational text <input type="checkbox"/> ask clarifying questions about essential textual elements of exposition (e.g., <i>why, what if, how</i>) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> restate facts and details in the text to clarify and organize ideas <p>LITERARY RESPONSE AND ANALYSIS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> compare and contrast plots, settings, and characters presented by different authors <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> generate alternative endings to plots and identify the reason or reasons for, and the impact of, the alternatives (orally) <input type="checkbox"/> compare and contrast different versions of the same stories that reflect different cultures <input type="checkbox"/> identify the use of rhythm, rhyme, and alliteration in poetry 	<p>Narrative: Students write character sketch describing self. Focus: <u>characters and events</u></p> <p>Reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students discuss and focus on the following elements ONE at a time from literature: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <u>CHARACTER</u> – <i>Rumpelstiltskin, An Anteater Named Arthur</i> <u>EVENTS</u> – <i>Lillie's Purple Plastic Purse, Bread & Jam for Francis</i> • Have Students talk about feelings, actions, and behaviors of characters • Have children discuss and notice descriptive word choice <p>Writing:</p> <p>The culminating writing assignment is a description of self using events to illustrate certain characteristics.</p> <p>Resources:</p> <p>See books listed above in "Reading" and others that focus on character and events.</p> <p>Rubric:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • main idea, details (Ideas/Content) • beginning, body, paragraphs (Organ.) • strong adjectives (Word Choice) • capitalization, punctuation (Conventions)

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LESSON TITLE: Slavery Journal/Spring (8th grade)

WRITING STANDARDS		LESSON IDEAS/RESOURCES
<p>GENRE</p> <p>2.1 write biographies, autobiographies, short stories, or narratives:</p> <p>a. relate a clear, coherent incident, or event, or situation by using well-chosen details</p> <p>b. reveal the significance of, or the writer's attitude about, the subject</p> <p>c. employ narrative and descriptive strategies (e.g., relevant dialogue, specific action, physical description, background description, comparison or contrast of characters)</p>	<p>STRATEGIES</p> <p>Select those that apply:</p> <p>1.1 create compositions that establish a controlling impression, have a coherent thesis, and end with a clear and well-supported conclusion</p> <p>1.2 establish coherence within and among paragraphs through effective transitions, parallel structures, and similar writing techniques</p> <p>1.3 support theses or conclusions with analogies, paraphrases, quotations, opinions from authorities, comparisons, and similar devices</p> <p>1.4 plan and conduct multiple-step information searches by using computer networks and modems</p> <p>1.5 achieve an effective balance between researched information and original ideas</p> <p>1.6 revise writing for word choice; appropriate organization; consistent point of view; and transitions between paragraphs, passages, and ideas</p>	<p>Assignment: Students write a slavery journal from the point of view of anyone living during the slave trade time period: slave, slave owner, captain of a slave ship, abolitionist, etc.</p> <p>Focus for assignment: <u>SEE Columns 1 & 2</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • maintain consistent point of view - 1st person ("I") • strong description and word choice so reader can feel the emotions of the "writer," specific actions, setting • factual information of time period woven into journal • journal entries describe an experience or event with a beginning, middle, and end; organization intact through parallel structure and transitional phrases <p>Resources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • various primary and secondary source materials (teacher's library, textbook) • novels: <i>Nightjohn</i>, <i>Slave Dancer</i>

Figure 1.2 Slavery Journal/Spring (Grade 8)