



# Comprehensive Curriculum

Revised 2008

## English Language Arts



Louisiana Department of  
**EDUCATION**

Paul G. Pastorek, State Superintendent of Education



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- Senior Applications in English

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The following individuals were instrumental in the development of the courses for the English language arts curriculum.

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**Jane J. Thomas**  
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## Preface

### Purpose of the Louisiana Comprehensive Curriculum

*“How well a school system works depends, in large part, on how well it aligns curriculum and assessment with standards throughout the district. In practical terms, this means that for students to succeed, they should be taught what they are expected to learn and assessed on what they are taught.”—Rebecca Burns, Curriculum Mapping*

The Louisiana Department of Education is providing this revised version of the *Louisiana Comprehensive Curriculum* to every district in the state. The curriculum is aligned with state content standards, as defined by grade-level expectations (GLEs), and organized into coherent, time-bound units with sample activities and classroom assessments to guide teaching and learning.

### Focus on What Is Important to Teach

A written, aligned curriculum brings academic expectations into sharp focus by describing what instruction will be presented, to whom, when, and how. Without a written curriculum, textbooks often become the de facto curriculum of a school or district. Unfortunately, so much is included in textbooks that they have little ability to focus instruction or to provide the depth needed for good teaching and learning. While the Comprehensive Curriculum may be used in conjunction with textbooks, it will help teachers limit the topics they address to those the Louisiana standards define as important. This alignment with standards can focus classroom activities and ensure a depth of coverage that will help students achieve mastery (Schmidt et al., 2001; Alexander, 1960; FitzGerald, 1979; Palmer, 1967; White, 1988; Beck & McKeown, 1994; Kulm et al, 1999; Loewen, 1995; [www.project2061.org](http://www.project2061.org); Crismore, 1985; Rowe, 1985; Harste, 1989).

### Align Content, Instruction, and Assessment to State Standards

Research indicates that alignment is a powerful indicator of academic achievement (Cohen, 1987; English & Steffy, 2001; Moss-Mitchell, 1998; Neidermeyer & Yelon, 1981; Porter et al., 1994; Porter & Smithson, 2001; Price-Braugh, 1997; Wishnick, 1989). Curriculum alignment is more than establishing a scope and sequence of instruction. Aligning the curriculum is the process of ensuring a good match between the state standards—specifically the GLEs—and the lessons taught in classrooms every day (Corallo & McDonald, 2002). This process ensures that instructional activities are aligned to standards, that an appropriate amount of time is devoted to the activities, that unnecessary repetitions in the instructional program are removed, that gaps in content are identified, and that classroom assessments are appropriate.

## **Ensure Access for All Students**

The Comprehensive Curriculum aligns with Louisiana standards, benchmarks, and the Grade-Level Expectations. Research indicates that an aligned curriculum can increase student achievement and helps to overcome the usual predictors of socioeconomic status, gender, race, and teacher quality variables (Laboratory Network Program, 1998; Moss-Mitchell, 1998; Wishnick, 1989). A pre-condition of a successful educational program is a clear and agreed understanding that instructional content and classroom assessments should reflect the instructional standards. In a district with a well-aligned curriculum, *all* students have the opportunity and responsibility to master the instructional content.

## **Organize Content into Coherent, Time-Bound Units**

Structure and content sequence of curriculum has an effect on its outcomes (Schmidt et al., 2001). Simply teaching the GLEs fragments knowledge and skills into bits and pieces, much like a collection of puzzle pieces that don't mean anything taken alone. Units of instruction create coherent curriculum contexts that organize and connect learning experiences. The Comprehensive Curriculum is organized into units that bring together groups of GLEs that make sense as a whole, thus helping students get the “big picture,” like putting all the puzzle pieces together.

Each unit of this curriculum also includes time frames for mastering grade-level expectations included in the unit. The time frames help to govern time distribution among competing subject matter and topics (Zimmerman, 2001). When curriculum appropriately governs time *and* content, academic learning time—time students are on task while learning challenging content not learned previously—increases, and so will student achievement (Squires, Huitt, & Segars, 1983).

## **Create Feedback Systems**

The Comprehensive Curriculum units include assessment components that strengthen curriculum by providing feedback that students have learned what was taught. Many activities in the curriculum were designed to have products, and these products should be assessed using a rubric to determine whether the products indicate student mastery (Ceperley & Squires, 2000).

For the curriculum to have an effect, it must be implemented. To know whether a curriculum is implemented, someone must monitor. The district needs to decide who will monitor and when and how the appropriate information will be collected. Unit time frames may be the most convenient points to collect data on student progress, but other strategies also may be employed. These include peer observations, forums with stakeholders, surveys, and the like (Ceperley & Squires, 2000).

Continuous improvement of the curriculum is another important aspect of monitoring. If districts gather data on how students did on the unit assessments, they can then compare those results with how the students did on the state assessments. This information can inform further curriculum development, assessment revision, policies about course-taking sequences for students, and remedial or enrichment opportunities for students. Updating of curriculum should occur on a continuous basis (Ceperley & Squires, 2000; Schmoker, 1999).

### **Serve as the Core of Professional Development**

Introducing a new curriculum often means introducing new content, teaching strategies, and administrative responsibilities. The district has the responsibility to ensure that all faculty and staff participate in appropriate professional development activities that will result in the successful implementation of the written curriculum (National Staff Development Council, 2001).

### **Summary**

The Comprehensive Curriculum indicates one way to align instruction with Louisiana standards, benchmarks, and grade-level expectations with the goal of improving student achievement across the state. The curriculum has been developed to help districts build a bridge between classroom activities and state standards, so what happens in the classroom will indeed reflect Louisiana's vision for student learning.

## English Language Arts and the Curriculum

The role of English language arts, like curriculum itself, has evolved through the years. Although still the cornerstone of basic communication and literary skills, the English language arts today embody many concepts new and foreign to the traditional ideals of the English teacher of several decades ago. No longer a grammarian for half the school year and a teacher of literature for the other half, the English language arts teacher of the twenty-first century realizes the importance of integrating reading, writing, and higher-order thinking throughout every classroom experience. The emphasis now is on creating a student-centered classroom where the teacher performs less as a disseminator of information and more as a facilitator of the learning experience. As such, the voice of the English language arts teacher fades into the background as the student voice becomes more prominent.

One of the most prominent forces bringing change to the English language art curriculum has been the national standards and assessment movement that began in the last decade of the twentieth century. Following the development of national and state standards in the core subjects (i.e., the IRA/NCTE English Language Arts National Standards in 1995 and the Louisiana English Language Arts State Standards in 1996), curriculum supervisors and specialists turned their attention to standards-based learning, a practice that became even more critical and more prevalent with the development and implementation of high-stakes state assessments. As a result, in Louisiana, the English language arts curriculum begins with the seven content standards, as follows:

Standard One: Students read, comprehend, and respond to a range of materials, using a variety of strategies for different purposes.

Standard Two: Students write competently for a variety of purposes and audiences.

Standard Three: Students communicate using standard English grammar, usage, sentence structure, punctuation, capitalization, spelling, and handwriting.

Standard Four: Students demonstrate competence in speaking and listening as tools for learning and communicating.

Standard Five: Students locate, select, and synthesize information from a variety of texts, media, references, and technological sources to acquire and communicate knowledge.

Standard Six: Students read, analyze, and respond to literature as a record of life experiences.

Standard Seven: Students apply reasoning and problem solving skills to their reading, writing, speaking, listening, viewing, and visually representing.

The content standards serve as the foundation, but they do not stand alone. Under each standard are four to six benchmarks—statements that further delineate the standards. All the standards, except number four, are tested on the state tests. As a whole, the standards encompass the basic English language arts skills that teachers, both present and past, acknowledge their students should “know and be able to do” to succeed in life. Standards, not strands, were selected by the committee of Louisiana teachers who developed the standards and benchmarks because of the committee’s strong belief that standards are more appropriate to maintain the interrelatedness of the English language arts. Because skills such as reading, writing, and critical thinking are by their very nature related, the teaching of those skills should also be interrelated.

The English language arts curriculum has also been influenced by the increasingly complex and rapidly changing technology of an age daily bombarded with information in such mass that it is impossible to keep up. Charged for decades with the task of teaching not only reading and writing but also research skills, the English language arts teacher now faces the task of instruction in the access and use of the vast and often intricate and complicated resources available in the Age of Information. Like others affected by the paradigm shift to a post-modern society, the teacher of English language arts must make a shift, herself, from teacher to media specialist to Web expert. Once again, the discipline has added another dimension, and this time the medium is such a powerful one that it is imperative the teacher possess the essential skills, not just to instruct students in basic operations, but, more important, to instruct them in the absolute necessity of analysis and judgment of accurate and reliable information.

Thus, the English language arts curriculum in Louisiana, as in many states, was established as a frame for the practitioner: the state standards and benchmarks provided direction for the district curriculum guidelines, and the district guidelines provided direction for the teacher. The teacher, the individual most critical to the process, provided the final component: the standards-based lesson and activities most appropriate for her students’ needs and abilities. In the ideal world, this might have been sufficient, but in the real world of real teachers and real students, it simply was not. In the beginning, many teachers did not understand fully the standards-based process because they were not given the time and the space to understand; many districts could not afford to provide adequate professional development opportunities to educate them. As a result, teachers, caught in the middle of the huge reform that was taking place in curriculum theory, as well as in their own classrooms, recognized that the change that was occurring so quickly was leaving them some of them behind. For this reason, the Louisiana Department of Education turned its attention to providing support and assistance for the classroom teacher. Many projects were developed and implemented, some in the districts, like the SAGE Project, which used the K-12 SAGE document to develop standards-based model lessons, and some on the Louisiana Department of Education Web site, like the Focused Learning Lessons, which provided model lessons on standards-based topics. Much has been accomplished in a short time, but much remains to be done. Professional development for the English language arts professional must be developed, implemented, and continued.

Research tells us that in order for professional development to be effective, it must be an ongoing process. The English language arts professional must be given TIME plus SPACE plus an opportunity to DIALOGUE with other professionals, and the conversation must continue. Furthermore, the English language arts teacher must be given a voice in the process. Who knows what is needed in the English language arts classroom better than the classroom teacher? Only through the incorporation of teacher voice is the teacher going to buy into the process. The English language arts curriculum has changed, is changing, and will continue to change; however, there is a prodigious amount of content that has not changed. What needs to be accomplished more than anything else in many classrooms is what might be called “minor adjustments,” simple alignments of the content with the instruction and assessment. It is *not* necessary to throw away everything and start over; it *is* necessary to change strategies and assessment. Today’s students are different from their parents, and educators know more about the cognitive processes than their teachers did. This must be a prime consideration in the English language arts classroom. In the final analysis, the “interconnectedness” of the English language arts must be “connected” to content, instruction, and assessment by a “connection” of English teachers who are provided a means of networking to support and assist their coworkers in their quest to provide growth and learning for both themselves and their students.

### **Reading and Language Arts Essentials**

Phonological awareness is the understanding that words are made up of parts, such as syllables, onset and rime, and phonemes. Phonics is the systematic relationship between sounds and letters. Word study includes understanding word parts, such as suffixes, prefixes, and roots. It is well documented that students who are given systematic, structured, and explicit instruction in phonological awareness, phonics, and word study have fewer reading difficulties and score higher on reading comprehension assessments than those who receive little or no instruction in these areas.

The Comprehensive Curriculum emphasizes phonological awareness activities in prekindergarten, kindergarten, and first grade; phonics activities in first and second grades; and word study activities in third and fourth grades. At least thirty minutes daily should be spent on explicitly and systematically teaching the concepts and skills detailed in the Comprehensive Curriculum lessons. (This is in addition to the time spent on language art instruction that includes activities such as guided reading, read-alouds, and vocabulary and comprehension activities.)

Phonics is most effective when taught explicitly and systematically. Explicit teaching means that the concept or skill is introduced to the students in a structured manner, with modeling from the teacher and ample opportunity for the students to practice the concept or skill until students achieve mastery. Systematic teaching means that the skills are taught in an intentional order, building from the simplest to the most complex. The Comprehensive Curriculum is designed to provide systematic order to the teaching of

concepts and skills. The activities in the curriculum provide opportunities for student practice, but these activities are not all-inclusive, and it is expected that they will be supplemented.

Extensions of some of the phonological awareness, phonics, and word study activities can be used throughout the day—in various subject areas—as a way for students to practice the skills they have learned, but this practice should be considered in addition to, and not as a replacement for, explicit instruction so that students understand and master phonological awareness, phonics, and word study skills.

## Organization of the Comprehensive Curriculum

### Components of the Comprehensive Curriculum

The components of the Comprehensive Curriculum are intended to be reflective of the components that should be included in any good curriculum. The components are described below.

<b>Curriculum Component</b>	<b>Explanation</b>
<b>Cover page</b>	Displays content area and courses included in the document, name of the agency that developed the document, and the date the document was developed
<b>Title page</b>	Displays content area and courses included in the document, name of the agency that developed the document, and the date the document was developed
<b>Board of Education</b>	Lists the names of board members who approved the use of the curriculum document and the name of the superintendent
<b>Acknowledgments (optional)</b>	Lists individuals or groups who contributed to the development of the local curriculum
<b>Table of Contents</b>	Lists the courses and other curriculum components and where they can be found in the document
<b>Preface</b>	Provides background information including underlying law and policies that led to the development of the document
<b>Purpose</b>	Provides a statement of the intended purpose of the written, aligned curriculum, expectations for its use in the classroom, and the expected results in terms of student performance.
<b>Principles of teaching and learning for specific content area</b>	States beliefs about the content area and research-based principles of successful teaching and learning
<b>Professional Development</b>	Provides a summary statement of how appropriate professional development ensures that teachers possess knowledge and skills needed to teach the new curriculum
<b>PreK–12 Courses</b>	Includes a copy of each course in the relevant content area

## Elements of the Comprehensive Curriculum Units

The unit organizer format allows teachers to see the interrelationships among the GLEs and indicates best practice activities that should be used when teaching a particular concept or skill.

<b>Unit Element</b>	<b>Explanation</b>
<b>Time Frame</b>	An approximate time frame is specified for each unit of instruction (e.g., approximately two to three weeks). The time frame helps teachers pace instruction and learning. The time frame also helps administrators monitor the implementation of the curriculum.
<b>Course Name</b>	The course name specifies the grade level and the content area for courses Prekindergarten through Grade 8 (e.g., Grade 3 English Language Arts). For high school courses (Grades 9–12), the name specifies the content (e.g., Algebra I).
<b>Unit Title</b>	Each unit has a title designed to bring further focus to the collection of ideas and concepts to be learned in that unit (e.g., Poetry, Measuring and Comparing, and so on).
<b>Unit Number</b>	Units are numbered sequentially (e.g., Unit 1, Unit 2, and so on).
<b>Unit Description</b>	The unit description states broadly, in one or two sentences, the intent of the unit (e.g., The focus of this unit is how the availability of resources influences economic decisions).
<b>Student Understandings</b>	Student understandings are a brief description of the overarching concepts to be learned by the student.
<b>Guiding Questions</b>	This element contains a list of questions that teachers can use to determine if students understand the concepts being taught (e.g., Can students use the structure of the article to find information they need?)
<b>Grade-Level Expectations (GLEs)</b>	For each unit, there is a table that lists the number and the text of each GLE to be addressed by the unit. Benchmark codes are included at the end of each GLE.
<b>Sample Activities</b>	Each activity is numbered, named, and lists the GLE(s) that are addressed by the activity. It provides guidance to teachers as they plan their lessons throughout the school year.
<b>Sample Assessments</b>	At the end of each unit are suggested assessments that are linked to the processes of teaching and learning (e.g., graded homework, class projects, performance tasks, discussions with teachers, parents, classmates, diagnostic tests, teacher-made tests and quizzes, observation systems, performance assessment based on performance levels as defined by rubrics, portfolios, and so on).
<b>Blackline Masters</b>	Blackline masters are provided in a separate document for each course and are designed to assist in the implementation of an activity. Most blackline masters are for student use; however, some provide rubrics for evaluating student work or provide solution keys for student worksheets.

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