

English / Language Arts

Eighth Grade

Eighth grade marks the beginning of yet another significant transition for students—that of preparing for the high school years. The curriculum for this grade signifies the readiness required of students preparing for the secondary content in grades nine through twelve. Not surprisingly, the eighth-grade standards represent an important culmination of curriculum activities emphasized throughout grades four through eight.

Curriculum Outline

Below are the Montana content standards for the English / Language Arts and the local Ronan School District #30 standards that further explain the goals of our program:

MONTANA STANDARDS FOR READING

Reading is essential to learning. It is the pathway to lifelong learning and the key to life's opportunities. Reading is a strategic problem-solving process of gaining personal meaning from text. Students use a range of skills and strategies in the process of reading to comprehend what they read. Reading is not only a basic skill, it is an indispensable tool for critical and creative thinking. There are a diversity of purposes for which readers read a variety of materials. Reading literacy allows students to make connections between their own and others' experiences, to inquire systematically, to access, analyze, synthesize, and critically evaluate information. Early reading achievement is a reliable predictor of later school performance. Success in school is often determined by student proficiency in reading. Proficient readers monitor and evaluate their own progress in reading.

Montana Standard 1—Students construct meaning as they comprehend, interpret, and respond to what they read.

Montana Standard 2—Students apply a range of skills and strategies to read.

Montana Standard 3—Students set goals, monitor, and evaluate their progress in reading.

Montana Standard 4—Students select, read, and respond to print and nonprint material for a variety of purposes.

Montana Standard 5—Students gather, analyze, synthesize, and evaluate information from a variety of sources, and communicate their findings in ways appropriate for their purposes and audiences.

MONTANA STANDARDS FOR LITERATURE

Literature, a primary vehicle for teaching reading, attempts to show life in its uncertainties, complexities, and imperfections, offering many insights for the reader. Responding to print and nonprint media allows participants to experience vicariously other lives and to measure their own experiences against those of others. The exploration of literature and films encourages students to become critical and reflective thinkers and to develop personal aesthetic standards for print and nonprint media as art forms.

Montana Standard 1—Students construct meaning as they comprehend, interpret, analyze and respond to literary works.

Montana Standard 2—Students recognize and evaluate how language, literary devices, and elements contribute to the meaning and impact of literary works.

Montana Standard 3—Students reflect upon their literary experiences and purposefully select from a range of works.

Montana Standard 4—Students interact with print and nonprint literary works from various cultures, ethnic groups, traditional and contemporary viewpoints written by both genders.

Montana Standard 5—Students use literary works to enrich personal experience and to connect to the broader world of ideas, concepts and issues.

1.0 Word Analysis, Fluency, and Systematic Vocabulary Development

Students use their knowledge of word origins and word relationships, as well as historical and literary context clues, to determine the meaning of specialized vocabulary and to understand the precise meaning of grade-level appropriate words.

Vocabulary and Concept Development

- 1.1 Analyze idioms, analogies, metaphors, and similes to infer the literal and figurative meanings of phrases.
- 1.2 Understand the most important points in the history of English language and use common word origins to determine the historical influences on English word meanings.
- 1.3 Use word meanings within the appropriate context and show ability to verify those meanings by definition, restatement, example, comparison, or contrast.

2.0 Reading Comprehension (Focus on Informational Materials)

Students read and understand grade-level appropriate material. They describe and connect the essential ideas, arguments, and perspectives of the text by using their knowledge of text structure, organization, and purpose. The selections in *Recommended Readings in Literature, Kindergarten Through Grade Eight* illustrate the quality and complexity of the materials to be read by students. In addition, students read one million words annually on their own, including a good representation of narrative and expository text (e.g., classic and contemporary literature, magazines, newspapers, online information).

Structural Features of Informational Materials

- 2.1 Compare and contrast the features and elements of consumer materials to gain meaning from documents (e.g., warranties, contracts, product information, instruction manuals).
- 2.2 Analyze text that uses proposition and support patterns.

Comprehension and Analysis of Grade-Level-Appropriate Text

- 2.3 Find similarities and differences between texts in the treatment, scope, or organization of ideas.
- 2.4 Compare the original text to a summary to determine whether the summary accurately captures the main ideas, includes critical details, and conveys the underlying meaning.
- 2.5 Understand and explain the use of a complex mechanical device by following technical directions.
- 2.6 Use information from a variety of consumer, workplace, and public documents to explain a situation or decision and to solve a problem.

Expository Critique

- 2.7 Evaluate the unity, coherence, logic, internal consistency, and structural patterns of text.

Evaluation of Progress in Reading

- Self monitor reading progress before meeting with teacher to determine progress in reading goals.
- Understand their reading fluency and comprehension.
- Set realistic goals in reading; monitor timeline of improvement.
- Reflect on their progress.
- Set goals of reading at home each evening for 20 minutes.

3.0 Literary Response and Analysis

Students read and respond to historically or culturally significant works of literature that reflect and enhance their studies of history and social science. They clarify the ideas and connect them to other literary works. The selections in *Recommended Readings in Literature, Kindergarten Through Grade Eight* illustrate the quality and complexity of the materials to be read by students.

Structural Features of Literature

- 3.1 Determine and articulate the relationship between the purposes and characteristics of different forms of poetry (e.g., ballad, lyric, couplet, epic, elegy, ode, sonnet).

Narrative Analysis of Grade-Level-Appropriate Text

- 3.2 Evaluate the structural elements of the plot (e.g., subplots, parallel episodes, climax), the plot's development, and the way in which conflicts are (or are not) addressed and resolved.
- 3.3 Compare and contrast motivations and reactions of literary characters from different historical eras confronting similar situations or conflicts.
- 3.4 Analyze the relevance of the setting (e.g., place, time, customs) to the mood, tone, and meaning of the text.
- 3.5 Identify and analyze recurring themes (e.g., good versus evil) across traditional and contemporary works.
- 3.6 Identify significant literary devices (e.g., metaphor, symbolism, dialect, irony) that define a writer's style and use those elements to interpret the work.

Literary Criticism

- 3.7 Analyze a work of literature, showing how it reflects the heritage, traditions, attitudes, and beliefs of its author. (Biographical approach)

Cultural Reading

- Read grade appropriate American Indian Text
- Read Text from various cultures and ethnic groups.
- Read texts written by both genders.
- Read about traditional and contemporary viewpoints.
- Listen and discuss.

Literary works from various cultures, ethnic groups, traditional and contemporary viewpoints written by both genders will be used.

MONTANA STANDARDS FOR WRITING

The standards set in this document represent what research and experience have described as important in the process of writing. Writing is essential to thinking and learning. As a strategic, problem-solving process, writing is a key element of communication and a critical part of comprehension. In addition to being a developmental basic skill, writing is also indispensable to critical, ethical, and creative thinking. Writers use a range of skills and strategies in the process of writing to communicate with diverse audiences and for diverse purposes. Writing proficiency enables individuals to learn, make connections between their own and others' experiences, create meaning, and evaluate information.

Montana Standard 1—Students write clearly and effectively.

Montana Standard 2—Students apply a range of skills and strategies in the writing process.

Montana Standard 3—Students evaluate and reflect on their growth as writers.

Montana Standard 4—Students write for a variety of purposes and audiences.

Montana Standard 5—Students recognize the structures of various forms and apply these characteristics to their own writing.

Montana Standard 6—Students use the inquiry process, problem-solving strategies, and resources to synthesize and communicate information.

1.0 Writing Strategies

Students write clear, coherent, and focused essays. The writing exhibits students' awareness of audience and purpose. Essays contain formal introductions, supporting evidence, and conclusions. Students progress through the stages of the writing process as needed.

Organization and Focus

- 1.1 Create compositions that establish a controlling impression, have a coherent thesis, and end with a clear and well-supported conclusion.
- 1.2 Establish coherence within and among paragraphs through effective transitions, parallel structures, and similar writing techniques.
- 1.3 Support theses or conclusions with analogies, paraphrases, quotations, opinions from authorities, comparisons, and similar devices.

Research and Technology

- 1.4 Plan and conduct multiple-step information searches by using computer networks and modems.
- 1.5 Achieve an effective balance between researched information and original ideas.

Evaluation and Revision

1.6 Revise writing for word choice; appropriate organization; consistent point of view; and transitions between paragraphs, passages, and ideas.

2.0 Writing Applications (Genres and Their Characteristics)

Students write narrative, expository, persuasive, and descriptive essays of at least 500 to 700 words in each genre. Student writing demonstrates a command of standard American English and the research, organizational, and drafting strategies outlined in Writing Standard 1.0. Using the writing strategies of grade eight outlined in Writing Standard 1.0, students:

- 2.1 Write biographies, autobiographies, short stories, or narratives:
 - a. Relate a clear, coherent incident, event, or situation by using well-chosen details.
 - b. Reveal the significance of, or the writer's attitude about, the subject.
 - c. Employ narrative and descriptive strategies (e.g., relevant dialogue, specific action, physical description, background description, comparison or contrast of characters).
- 2.2 Write responses to literature:
 - a. Exhibit careful reading and insight in their interpretations.
 - b. Connect the student's own responses to the writer's techniques and to specific textual references.
 - c. Draw supported inferences about the effects of a literary work on its audience.
 - d. Support judgments through references to the text, other works, other authors, or to personal knowledge.
- 2.3 Write research reports:
 - a. Define a thesis.
 - b. Record important ideas, concepts, and direct quotations from significant information sources and paraphrase and summarize all perspectives on the topic, as appropriate.
 - c. Use a variety of primary and secondary sources and distinguish the nature and value of each.
 - d. Organize and display information on charts, maps, and graphs.
- 2.4 Write persuasive compositions:
 - a. Include a well-defined thesis (i.e., one that makes a clear and knowledgeable judgment).
 - b. Present detailed evidence, examples, and reasoning to support arguments, differentiating between facts and opinion.
 - c. Provide details, reasons, and examples, arranging them effectively by anticipating and answering reader concerns and counterarguments.
- 2.5 Write documents related to career development, including simple business letters and job applications:
 - a. Present information purposefully and succinctly and meet the needs of the intended audience.
 - b. Follow the conventional format for the type of document (e.g., letter of inquiry, memorandum).
- 2.6 Write technical documents:
 - a. Identify the sequence of activities needed to design a system, operate a tool, or explain the bylaws of an organization.
 - b. Include all the factors and variables that need to be considered.
 - c. Use formatting techniques (e.g., headings, differing fonts) to aid comprehension.

1.0 Written and Oral English Language Conventions

The standards for written and oral English language conventions have been placed between those for writing and for listening and speaking because these conventions are essential to both sets of skills.

Students write and speak with a command of standard English conventions appropriate to the grade level.

Sentence Structure

1.1 Place modifiers properly and use the active voice.

Grammar

- 1.2 Identify and use infinitives and participles and make clear references between pronouns and antecedents.
- 1.3 Identify all parts of speech and types and structure of sentences.
- 1.4 Demonstrate the mechanics of writing (e.g., quotation marks, commas at end of dependent clauses) and appropriate English usage (e.g., pronoun reference).

Punctuation

- 1.5 Identify hyphens, dashes, brackets, and semicolons and use them correctly.

Capitalization

- 1.6 Use correct capitalization.

Spelling

- 1.7 Spell derivatives correctly by applying the spellings of bases and affixes.

Evaluation and Reflection of Writing

- Use Step Up as model.
- Apply the six-trait rubric to evaluate their own writing.
- Meet with the teacher to identify strengths and weaknesses in writing.
- Evaluate their growth with regards to writing over the course of the year.
- Choose best writing products to include in their portfolios demonstrating proficiency.

MONTANA STANDARDS FOR SPEAKING AND LISTENING

Oral communication is the bridge to the future. It provides the basis of language development, thinking, gathering information, and shaping how we see ourselves and how others see us. Studies show that over 80 percent of communication is spent in speaking and listening, which lends credence to the belief that teaching these skills is not just desirable, but critical. It is the responsibility of education to ensure that students are prepared for their roles as family members, workers, and citizens through oral communication instruction. The National Communication Association defines speaking as “the uniquely human act or process of transmitting and exchanging information, ideas, and emotions using oral language” while listening is “the process of receiving, constructing meaning from, and responding to spoken and/or nonverbal messages.”

Montana Standard 1—Students demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the communication process.

Montana Standard 2—Students distinguish among and use appropriate types of speaking and listening for a variety of purposes.

Montana Standard 3—Students apply a range of skills and strategies to speaking and listening.

Montana Standard 4—Students identify, analyze, and evaluate the impacts of effective speaking and evaluative listening.

MONTANA STANDARDS FOR MEDIA LITERACY

We have long understood the importance of literacy to becoming productive citizens in a democratic society. In our world of powerful images, sounds and words, students must be media literate. Studies show that students view an average of 3,000 or more hours of television prior to graduation from high school than they spend in class. Media literacy is the tool students need to access, analyze, evaluate and produce communication in a variety of forms. Students need to understand the ways words, images and sounds influence the way meanings are created and shared in our contemporary global society.

Montana Standard 1—Students recognize that media messages are constructed using specific techniques which manipulate sound, image, text and movement to convey meaning.

Montana Standard 2—Students distinguish among and use appropriate types of media for a variety of purposes.

Montana Standard 3—Students apply knowledge, skills and strategies to design and create media messages.

Montana Standard 4—Students identify, analyze and evaluate the impacts of media on individuals and societies.

1.0 Speaking, Listening, and Media Strategies

Students deliver focused, coherent presentations that convey ideas clearly and relate to the background and interests of the audience.

They evaluate the content of oral communication.

Comprehension

- 1.1 Analyze oral interpretations of literature, including language choice and delivery, and the effect of the interpretations on the listener.
- 1.2 Paraphrase a speaker's purpose and point of view and ask relevant questions concerning the speaker's content, delivery, and purpose.

Organization and Delivery of Oral Communication

- 1.3 Organize information to achieve particular purposes by matching the message, vocabulary, voice modulation, expression, and tone to the audience and purpose.
- 1.4 Prepare a speech outline based upon a chosen pattern of organization, which generally includes an introduction; transitions, previews, and summaries; a logically developed body; and an effective conclusion.
- 1.5 Use precise language, action verbs, sensory details, appropriate and colorful modifiers, and the active rather than the passive voice in ways that enliven oral presentations.
- 1.6 Use appropriate grammar, word choice, enunciation, and pace during formal presentations.
- 1.7 Use audience feedback (e.g., verbal and nonverbal cues):
 - a. Reconsider and modify the organizational structure or plan.
 - b. Rearrange words and sentences to clarify the meaning.

Analysis and Evaluation of Oral and Media Communications

- 1.8 Evaluate the credibility of a speaker (e.g., hidden agendas, slanted or biased material).

1.9 Interpret and evaluate the various ways in which visual image makers (e.g., graphic artists, illustrators, news photographers) communicate information and affect impressions and opinions.

2.0 Speaking Applications (Genres and Their Characteristics)

Students deliver well-organized formal presentations employing traditional rhetorical strategies (e.g., narration, exposition, persuasion, description). Student speaking demonstrates a command of standard American English and the organizational and delivery strategies outlined in Listening and Speaking Standard 1.0. Using the speaking strategies of grade eight outlined in Listening and Speaking Standard 1.0, students:

- 2.1 Deliver narrative presentations (e.g., biographical, autobiographical):
 - a. Relate a clear, coherent incident, event, or situation by using well chosen details.
 - b. Reveal the significance of, and the subject's attitude about, the incident, event, or situation.
 - c. Employ narrative and descriptive strategies (e.g., relevant dialogue, specific action, physical description, background description, comparison or contrast of characters).
- 2.2 Deliver oral responses to literature:
 - a. Interpret a reading and provide insight.
 - b. Connect the students' own responses to the writer's techniques and to specific textual references.
 - c. Draw supported inferences about the effects of a literary work on its audience.
 - d. Support judgments through references to the text, other works, other authors, or personal knowledge.
- 2.3 Deliver research presentations:
 - a. Define a thesis.
 - b. Record important ideas, concepts, and direct quotations from significant information sources and paraphrase and summarize all relevant perspectives on the topic, as appropriate.
 - c. Use a variety of primary and secondary sources and distinguish the nature and value of each.
 - d. Organize and record information on charts, maps, and graphs.
- 2.4 Deliver persuasive presentations:
 - a. Include a well-defined thesis (i.e., one that makes a clear and knowledgeable judgment).
 - b. Differentiate fact from opinion and support arguments with detailed evidence, examples, and reasoning.
 - c. Anticipate and answer listener concerns and counterarguments effectively through the inclusion and arrangement of details, reasons, examples, and other elements.
 - d. Maintain a reasonable tone.
- 2.5 Recite poems (of four to six stanzas), sections of speeches, or dramatic soliloquies, using voice modulation, tone, and gestures expressively to enhance the meaning.

Media

Analyze propaganda techniques, bias, fact, fiction and opinion in various media messages.
Determine how forms of media influence individuals and society.

Below is a narrative that describes and elaborates best practices research in English Language Arts and is the standard to which we strive.

Reading

Word Analysis, Fluency, and Systematic Vocabulary Development

Eighth-grade students apply the vocabulary skills developed in earlier grades in more sophisticated contexts. The strategies for vocabulary instruction discussed in the seventh grade continue to apply in the eighth grade.

Reading

Reading Comprehension

(Focus on Informational Materials)

Although teachers have always taught reading-comprehension skills in relation to informational texts, the content standards at this level focus more attention on that segment of the language arts curriculum. The term *informational materials* refers not just to nonfiction works such as biographies but to a variety of reading that is expository rather than narrative. In the school setting informational texts are generally textbooks or reference works but may include a host of print and nonprint materials. Instructional strategies used with information materials are often different from those used to comprehend literary texts.

In a departmentalized school, responsibility for improving reading comprehension of instructional materials should be shared by teachers of all subjects, particularly teachers of history–social science and science.

Seventh-grade students study the structural features of consumer materials (warranties, contracts, product information, and instructional manuals). The seventh-grade focus on the cause-and effect pattern in expository text is replaced in the eighth grade by the pattern of a proposal and its support. In addition, students should be able to explain the use of a complex mechanical device. Students are expected to demonstrate their ability to grapple with the treatment, scope, and organization of ideas by finding similarities and differences between texts. They are also expected to compare an original text with a summary to determine whether it accurately captures the main ideas, includes critical details, and conveys the underlying meaning. Finally, students are expected to evaluate the unity, logic, internal consistency, and structural patterns of text. This curriculum recommends a strategy of helping students master these relatively sophisticated aspects of reading informational discourse; that is, contrasting good examples of various concepts with poor examples.

Reading

Literary Response and Analysis

This strand of the reading domain is designed to ensure that eighth-grade students are thoroughly familiar with the basic elements of story grammar. Specifically, students are required to (1) evaluate the structural elements of the plot; (2) compare and contrast the motivations and reactions of literary characters; (3) analyze the relevance of the setting; (4) identify and analyze recurring themes; and (5) identify elements of the writer’s style.

As to the structural features of literature, eighth-grade students are expected to understand the different kinds of prose. They are also expected to understand the purposes and characteristics of different kinds of poetry (e.g., ballad, lyric, couplet, epic, sonnet).

Extensive independent reading, which in the eighth grade increasingly takes place outside the classroom, is an important element of the language arts curriculum.

The standards require that by the end of middle school, students will have read one million words annually on their own, including a good representation of narrative (classic and contemporary literature) and expository (magazines, newspapers, online) instructional materials.

One million words translate to about 15 to 20 minutes of reading per day. Instructional formats and strategies used for outside reading have much in common with those used in teaching core literature works but differ significantly. Student choice is a more important element in outside reading and may result in fewer diverse selections because young readers typically choose to focus on a single author, topic, or genre for a period of time. Their reading should not be limited to works of fiction or nonfiction but should include magazines, especially those in areas of special interest to the students, newspapers, and online sources. A variety of methods are available to assess reading done outside the classroom, including student-maintained reading logs and book reports in various formats. According to the standard, instruction should be focused on the reading itself rather than on the final report on the reading.

Independent reading significantly improves students' reading comprehension and vocabulary and increases their familiarity with models of good writing and conventions of writing and spelling. It also serves an important affective purpose; that is, in helping to develop a lifelong appreciation for reading for pleasure and information. Recent research indicates that the volume of reading also affects general cognitive development (Cunningham and Stanovich 1998).

Writing

Writing Strategies

Writing strategies called for in the eighth grade differ in degree from those used in the seventh grade. Students' writing should continue to be characterized by a controlling thesis well supported by details or evidence from the text but should now begin to display more sophistication and polish, including such features as transitions, parallelism, and a consistent point of view. When conducting research with the aid of technology, students are expected to build on the foundation of research and technological skills developed in the earlier grades. Eighth-grade students should be able to plan and conduct multiple-step information searches, using Internet-based resources. They should be taught how to achieve an effective balance between researched information and original ideas in their written or oral presentations, a difficult issue for middle school students. Teachers need to assist students in evaluating data and evidence and matching them with thesis statements. Students need frequent opportunities to grasp the idea of preponderance of evidence versus isolated data. The importance of a thesis statement—a single, generalized statement that drives the entire work—cannot be overemphasized.

Students with weak language arts skills may not recognize their need to have something to say before they can write a composition. If so, they may be helped by being encouraged to think of speaking as writing out loud because they often find themselves able to articulate and organize thoughts more easily in speech than in writing. Such oral statements can be bridges to the creation of a written thesis statement.

All of these across-the-board standards for writing strategies can be taught *initially* in isolation. For instance, teachers can initially focus on a skill such as paraphrasing before requiring students to incorporate that skill into their written compositions.

Doing so reduces the cognitive and organizational burden on students to incorporate all aspects of writing into an assigned composition. The standards warn, however, against teaching writing

concepts in isolation without immediately incorporating them into writing assignments.

Writing

Writing Applications (Genres and Their Characteristics)

Eighth-grade students should continue to produce major texts of 500 to 700 words (two to three pages, typed and double-spaced) in these categories: fictional or autobiographical narratives, responses to literature, research reports, and persuasive compositions.

The eighth-grade curriculum describes the more sophisticated elements now expected in student writing. For example, in writing narratives, students in the seventh grade are expected to develop the standard elements of plot (e.g., beginning, conflict, rising action). But in the eighth grade students are expected to go beyond the structural elements (e.g., to reveal the writer's attitude about the subject).

However, the depth and duration of the instruction provided should be adjusted to the achievement level of the students in a given classroom. Well-developed instructional units have long been used in National for many categories of writing, although the titles may be slightly different (e.g., autobiographical incident, report of information).

The seventh-grade requirement to write summaries of reading materials no longer appears in the eighth grade, and two new categories of writing are introduced:

- (1) documents related to career development, including simple business letters and job applications; and
- (2) technical documents that explain a complex operation or situation (e.g., design a system, operate a tool, or develop the bylaws of an organization).

Instruction in the business-related documents should go beyond the mechanics and conventional forms for such writing to include important rhetorical considerations, such as clear attention to the audience and purpose, clarity and succinctness, consideration of all appropriate variables, and coherence and logical sequencing.

Written and Oral English-Language Conventions

Eighth-grade students are expected to have mastered four of the five subsections in this standard: grammar, punctuation, capitalization, and spelling. Only in the fifth subsection, sentence structure, is new learning introduced. In that area students are expected to vary sentence types and sentence openings, use parallel structures appropriately, and indicate relationships between ideas by using such devices as subordination, coordination, and apposition.

Students' strengths and deficits in using Communication conventions are likely to vary considerably in the eighth grade. An important skill to be learned in improving that use is to train the eye and ear to recognize errors in conventions found in reading and writing. Extensive student experience in reading and writing helps to build those skills. Teachers should provide models of both outstanding and poor use of written conventions and help students develop editing skills. Explicit instruction in the conventions is also needed. Individualized instructional software can be used to address efficiently the problem of significant differences among students in their ability to use conventions.

Skills students possess in mechanics and conventions are most often described in relation to writing. But, as the title of this strand indicates, the skills also apply to speaking. In addition to learning correct speech, students should recognize that the structures of spoken language are generally more informal than the structures of writing and depend on audience and

purpose. They should be able to recognize instances in which formal standard English is required.

Listening and Speaking

Listening and Speaking Strategies

Many of the skills and strategies used in speaking are the same as those for writing (e.g., organizing information for audience and purpose; including an introduction, transitions, a logically developed body, and an appropriate conclusion; using correct language and grammar). Some of the rhetorical considerations, however, are unique to oral communications. In speaking, students should be able to match their voice modulation, tone, and pacing to the purpose of the presentation. Explicit instruction in speaking skills must go well beyond the traditional three elementary rules of speaking: speak audibly, speak clearly, and maintain eye contact with your audience.

Students are expected to use audience feedback in both speaking and listening. After listening to verbal cues and observing nonverbal cues, students are expected to be able to modify their original plan of organization to clarify meaning and counter potential opposition. They should be able to ask relevant questions concerning a speaker's content, delivery, and purpose and evaluate the credibility of a speaker. Students are also expected to continue to analyze and evaluate media presentations, noting various techniques used by graphic artists, advertisers, and electronic journalists to influence the viewer.

Listening and Speaking

Speaking Applications

(Genres and Their Characteristics)

The speaking applications discussed in the seventh grade reappear in the eighth grade: narrative, research, and persuasive presentations, which are areas of focus in writing as well. Students should, therefore, deliver some of their written compositions orally. Doing so is efficient in the use of instructional time and effective because it makes overt the differences and similarities between written and oral presentations. Oral responses to reading shift from an expository focus in the seventh grade, when students deliver oral summaries of articles and books, to a literary focus in the eighth grade, when students interpret their reading orally and analyze it. Eighth-grade students are also expected to recite, with expression, poems of four to six stanzas, sections of speeches, or dramatic soliloquies.

Content and Instructional Connections

The teacher can help students integrate mastery of standards across domains, strands, and academic disciplines by having students:

1. Use word meanings within the appropriate context and show an ability to verify those meanings by definition, restatement, example, comparison, or contrast.
2. Use vocabulary, concepts, and writing related to the science, history–social science, and mathematics standards in some activities and assignments.
3. Compare and contrast motivations and reactions of literary characters from different historical eras or cultures who confront similar situations or conflicts.
4. Establish coherence within and among paragraphs through effective transitions, parallel structures, and similar writing techniques.
5. Achieve an effective balance between researched information and original ideas.
6. Revise writing for word choice, appropriate organization, consistent point of view, and transitions between paragraphs, passages, and ideas.
7. Write narratives, employing narrative and descriptive strategies.

8. Use correct punctuation, capitalization, and spelling.
9. Organize information to match the message, vocabulary, voice modulation, expression, and tone to the audience and purpose.
10. Deliver narrative presentations.

Writing

Write a well-structured persuasive composition, using rhetorical devices, relevant evidence, and responses to readers' counterclaims. Initial instruction should begin with students reading examples of persuasive writing. The examples may be of professional writing or student writing and should vary in quality to enhance students' ability to evaluate critically and understand fully the elements of persuasive discourse.

Prerequisite standards. Seventh-Grade Writing Strategies Standard: Use strategies of notetaking, outlining, and summarizing.

Seventh-Grade Writing Applications Standard: State a clear position in support of a proposition.

Seventh-Grade Written and Oral Communication Conventions Standard:

Demonstrate the mechanics of writing and appropriate English usage.

Corequisite standards. Eighth-Grade Writing Strategies Standards.

- 1: Create compositions that establish a controlling impression, have a coherent thesis, and end with a clear and well-supported conclusion.
- 2: Support conclusions with paraphrases, quotations, and opinions from authorities.

The number of examples should vary according to student mastery of the persuasive text structures. Although students should be familiar with the elements of persuasive discourse by this time, the level of previous knowledge is likely to vary. Fewer examples should be used with students who already have a good mastery of the text structure and more examples with students who do not.

After their critical reading of persuasive texts, students should have a good command of the basic elements of text structure common to most similar texts. They can then apply that understanding to writing their own persuasive compositions. The instruction in writing persuasive compositions should follow the same steps in the writing process used for all written compositions:

- Students should first plan their compositions and outline their arguments, possible reader objections to their arguments, and their own responses to those objections.
- During the revision phase of writing, teachers should focus on the elements of revision emphasized in the standards for this level as well as the standards for grammar and usage and manuscript form.

If teachers anticipate that students will have significant difficulty in writing a persuasive composition, they should consider having all students write on the same topic or have half of them take the *pro* position and half the *con* position on an issue. This approach offers more opportunities for students to help one another with the writing process and makes it easier for teachers to evaluate compositions, giving them more time to deliver additional instruction when needed.

Once students have successfully completed a persuasive composition, teachers can turn their attention to having the students deliver the same composition orally. Doing so saves instructional time that would otherwise be required to start from scratch to develop an oral persuasive

argument. Moreover, teachers can focus directly on the rhetorical elements unique to oral presentations (e.g., gestures, intonation).

Note: Students will have an opportunity to develop an oral presentation from scratch elsewhere because the standards call for delivering an oral descriptive presentation but not for writing descriptive discourse. Initially, students may be allowed to read their oral presentations and then work gradually toward delivering presentations from notes.

Teachers introduce new concepts, using models and detailed strategies for acquiring new skills and knowledge. They should explicitly identify the elements of good discourse in argument and persuasion before the students analyze good and poor models. The greatest number of students will experience success with the standards if teachers plan for scaffolded instruction, with varying levels of assistance being provided before students are expected to apply their knowledge and skill independently. A simple scaffolding device, for example, is a think sheet that students use during the prewriting stage of writing. The think sheet shows the basic outline for argument or persuasion discourse, helping to ensure that students do not omit crucial elements during their planning and helping them prepare better drafts.

Another scaffolding device particularly well suited to writing instruction is peer-mediated instruction or cooperative learning. This approach not only gives students additional instructional opportunities as they assist one another but helps establish the writer-reader relationship in a manner more realistic than having students write principally for the teacher.

Note: Caution is in order regarding peer-mediated instruction. As with all scaffolded instruction, peer-mediated instruction should be gradually eliminated for each topic taught to ensure that each student learns to use skill and knowledge completely and independently.

Ultimately, students should be held individually accountable for meeting standards.

Assessment

1. *Entry-Level Assessment for Instructional Planning.* The nature of the material at this level makes it impractical to pretest students formally for prerequisite knowledge or knowledge of upcoming instruction. Each time new instruction begins, teachers should assess students' entry knowledge informally and briefly with questions or very short assignments (such as a short in-class writing assignment, which can indicate a great deal about student knowledge of several standards).
2. *Monitoring Student Progress Toward the Instructional Objective.* All assignments can serve to assess student progress. Teachers must examine performance on such assignments and analyze the results to discover areas that require more explicit instruction, an alternative instructional strategy, or other supportive instructional methods.
3. *Post-test Assessment Toward the Standard.* State-required or district-required formal assessments give part of the picture of how well students achieve the standards. In addition, the assignments that teachers use to grade students give a more complete picture of achievement. For example, examination of a written composition in final form should be part of the summative evaluation for students. That evaluation should assess individual accountability on assignments that students complete on their own rather than those completed cooperatively.

Meeting Students' Diverse Needs

1. *Students with Reading Difficulties or Disabilities.* Students are likely to encounter two major obstacles to meeting the standards for persuasive discourse as well as many other standards at this level. First, difficulties in reading can forestall critical and analytical reading of appropriate grade-level examples of persuasive writing. Alternative reading material below grade level may be substituted. Although these students may not achieve the desired goals as to reading level, they should be able to reach other standards as their reading level improves. In addition, the use of aides or peer-mediated instruction can provide the students with additional assistance in their study of difficult vocabulary and syntax in their reading assignments.

As much as possible, struggling readers should be encouraged to work on reading fluency itself as an ongoing activity outside the language arts classroom. They might be helped by being tutored or by receiving assistance in study hall or in classes designed to address more serious reading problems.

Other obstacles for lower performers at this level are writing mechanics in general and handwriting and spelling in particular. Research shows that students identified as having learning disabilities are often preempted from success in writing because the cognitive requirements of writing mechanics are too demanding.

General education teachers may be limited in accommodating major deficiencies they observe in their students' use of writing mechanics. Such students can benefit from peer-mediated, scaffolded instruction and from any outside support that can be arranged. Ultimately, the most successful accommodation for students at this level may be word processing or typing. Additional strategies may include the use of oral presentations, dramas, models, or dictation.

2. *Students Who Are Advanced Learners.* Higher-performing students can follow the same curriculum as their normally achieving peers but should do so in greater depth and complexity and with more independence. Their persuasive arguments can be longer, more sophisticated, or better researched. Those who have mastered text structures can work on more complex writing involving a mixture of structures and can study the rhetorical devices and organizational patterns commonly found in speeches that can be used to recast their essays. Students can also be asked to argue both sides of an issue or be paired with another highly able student in a debate style arrangement.
3. *Students Who Are English Learners*
 - a. English learners benefit from specific instruction concerning argumentation.
 - b. English learners should be taught to avoid relying on such common slang words as *guy*, *kid*, *by the way*, and *stuff* as well as such general words as *thing*, *nice*, and *kind* in their writing.
 - c. English learners will experience difficulty in paraphrasing because they lack depth of vocabulary. They should be taught how to incorporate quotations into their texts to support their arguments and to reference appropriately and correctly.
 - d. Because students will present opposing views and explain why their view is better than that of others, they must be taught such grammatical structures as comparisons. Transitional devices (such as *first*, *second*, *to conclude*, and *in summary*) might also be taught.
 - e. English learners should be encouraged to practice before giving an oral presentation and should be allowed to use a prop or visual that will aid them during their presentation.

- f. Teachers should provide corrective feedback consistently at the revising and editing stages to help English learners develop their English skills.
- g. Teachers must provide students with straightforward assessments of their proficiency in English at every stage of instruction so that students understand what they can do to improve.