

**From:** Sandra Stotsky <[sgstotsky@gmail.com](mailto:sgstotsky@gmail.com)>

**Date:** Thursday, September 24, 2015 at 4:07 PM

**To:** Matt Hollrah <[mhollrah@uco.edu](mailto:mhollrah@uco.edu)>

**Subject:** Re: Request for Feedback on Draft 3 of the Oklahoma ELA PK-12 Standards

Thank you for the opportunity of communicating again with you--and others on the committee. I'm not sure why the committee thinks (if it does) that a set of standards has to be at one end of a skills/content continuum. All of one, none of the other. I frankly don't see any content indicated yet when I look at the high school grades for ELA. In Massachusetts, we didn't have an all-or-nothing approach to whatever strand we addressed. Some content, some skills. It doesn't matter how a "field" moves; what is important to keep in mind is that in K-12 kids have to learn something and acquire some content knowledge. A reading and literature curriculum needs to be coherent so that cumulative learning is possible. I don't see the ingredients for a coherent reading and literature curriculum for K-12 in this document. Where are developmental progressions from, say, 7-12? The ballgame is far from over by grade 8.

Here are some specific concerns:

**1. Under "Critical Writing"--Most writing standards do not lead to an assessment of the kind of writing done in college or the real world of work.** OK's draft organizes the writing standards under "narrative," "informative," and "argument."

The "narratives" (most of which is creative writing) are curriculum-relevant chiefly in the early grades and are not desirable in college or the world of work. "Informative" is fine, but "argument" should be changed to "persuasion" and "opinion" eliminated in the elementary grades. "Informative" better prepares kids for college and career writing if that is what you want.

More important, why can't OK require all local school districts to assign and assess a research paper or senior thesis for English and history or science in grade 11 and/or 12 to prepare students in an authentic way for college and career. That is precisely where authentic research standards, as in the strand in my 2013 document, should be assessed. I don't see where kids are taught to formulate an open-ended question for research or a thesis. They are always expected to use their own question or thesis, but I haven't found, yet, where they are taught the critical components of a research paper.

2. Why are the "Critical Reading" standards divided into Literary and Informational? So that a Common Core-based test can be given to OK students? The Critical Reading standards should be divided into (1) Fiction, (2) Nonfiction, (3) Poetry, (4) Dramatic Literature), and (5) Classical and Traditional literature, with standards that develop their knowledge of these major genres from grade to grade. That's what English teachers have usually been trained to teach and know how to teach. They have never been taught how to teach informational reading on topics that belong to other areas of the curriculum. They have been expected to take courses in rhetoric and learn how to read both rhetorically and aesthetically.

3. I think the OK drafting committee should be challenged to come up with an example of a literary text that could be used (and how) for every single standard so that teachers understand what reading level is required or desirable at every grade level (and what the standard means). Make it clear these texts are not required; only examples of reading levels. We did that in MA and it helped us to keep out gibberish.

4. Processes for reading and writing are not standards but pedagogy. They belong in a pedagogical supplement to the standards document.

5. Can't the ELA committee put in Oklahoma-related reading standards at the high school level-grades 11 and 12? One standard for texts by major authors born in or who wrote about Oklahoma, and one standard for biographies/autobiographies about famous Oklahomans through history. Aren't there any recognized authors/texts/people Oklahoma students should know about?

A piano teacher who focuses chiefly on trills, pedaling, and scales, and has students study only Prokofieff and never introduces her students to a Bach prelude or a Mozart or Beethoven sonata should be fired.

On Wed, Sep 23, 2015 at 5:57 PM, Matthew Hollrah <[MHollrah@uco.edu](mailto:MHollrah@uco.edu)> wrote:  
Dear Dr. Stotsky,

The third draft of the Oklahoma ELA PK-12 Standards are now available for review, and I wonder if you would have time to provide the writing team with feedback. I understand that the last time we spoke you were undergoing some surgery, and I do hope everything went smoothly and that you have recuperated easily and well.

The third draft of the standards may be accessed here: <http://ok.gov/sde/newstandards>. As you scroll down the page, you will see the standards presented by grade and by standard. I prefer the format that is arranged by grade because it highlights the reading/writing connection that has been centrally important to the writing committee. You will also find an overview of the standards entitled the "Eight Is Great Overview." This overview will provide some of the philosophical justification that may have been missing in earlier drafts. We do not yet have a list of research sources, as this bibliography is still being compiled.

After our last conversation, the committee worked very hard to tackle the question of balance between content-based standards and skills-based standards. You were quite clear in stating that the second draft of our standards were skills heavy. I suspect this more recent draft will still look lopsided in favor of skills-based standards, but it is so because the committee wants it to be so. Arpeggios aside, the committee understands the difference, as Gilbert Ryle taught us, between *knowing how* and *knowing that*. We simply believe that knowing how to do certain things with texts (rather than only knowing that certain texts say this or that) is where the field has moved in recent decades, and we want the standards to reflect this shift. I think of the good work of Robert Scholes in this regard.

Our premises regarding standards may very well be different from yours. Nevertheless, the committee very much respects your feedback as a scholar and an experienced writer of standards. Thank you in advance for any feedback you are able to provide.

Sincerely,

Matt

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