

Review of Third Draft ELA by Dr. Sandra Stotsky – September 24, 2015 email to Dr. Matt Hollrah

Dr. Stotsky's Comments	ELA Steering Committee and OSDE Response
<p><i>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."</i></p> <p>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.</p> <p>"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.</p>	<p>Composing narrative texts is based on Oklahoma's Priority Academic Student Skills (PASS), which included narrative text beginning in second grade and continuing through 12th grade.</p> <p>Narrative is in Virginia standards, as well, until ninth grade. We understand that writing a good story (narrative) can provide supporting evidence in argumentative and informative pieces.</p> <p>While Dr. Stotsky remarks that “most writing standards do not lead to an assessment of the kind of writing done in college or the real world of work,” a cursory review of college composition textbooks and first-year composition program assignments will reveal that the most common genres of writing in first-year composition classrooms are personal narratives/expressive writing, arguments, textual analyses, and source-based writing assignments. A look at the current list of college composition textbooks published by the nation's leading publishers (Bedford/St. Martin's, Pearson, McGraw-Hill, Cengage, W.W. Norton, etc.) will offer numerous titles that ask students to write in each of these genres. Since one of the primary goals of the new Oklahoma Academic Standards is to help student be college/career ready, and since the definition of college-readiness in English is increasingly defined as readiness for the first credit-bearing course in English, the attention of the committee was aimed at these kinds of assignments.</p> <p>It is unclear why the standards should use the word “persuasive” instead of “argument.” Clearly, one can be persuasive without making an argument, and one can write an argument that isn't persuasive. The ELA writing committee prefers the term “argument” because this is the term that most often appears in composition scholarship and in college composition textbooks as a teachable genre. Arguments have definable features—claims, support, warrants—whereas multiple different forms of writing might be persuasive. In other words, there is no single genre of writing that one might call “persuasive writing.” Writing is persuasive, regardless of form, when it connects with and moves its audience, and lots of different forms of</p>

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**.

writing can do that.

We kept the term "opinion" in earlier grades to indicate the progression towards writing arguments. The committee believes that learning to express an opinion is a crucial step on the way to supporting a claim with evidence and reasons.

Draft 4 contains an objective that requires students to write research papers every year beginning in 5th grade. Because reading and writing are recursive, this objective remains the same, but increases with difficulty every year because the topics and reading materials will become increasingly complex and challenging.

Standard 6: Research

9.6.W.1 Students will write research papers and/or texts independently over extended periods of time (*e.g., time for research, reflection, and revision*) and for shorter timeframes (*e.g., a single sitting or a day or two*).

Also, it is possible that because the OK ELA Standards do not separate reading and writing standards into their own categories—as is the case in many Common Core states—but embed them in the eight ELA standard categories, it may be somewhat difficult to see at a glance how many individual standards are devoted to teaching students to engage in written research. However, if one reads the writing standards as a group, especially as they appear in Draft 4, one should see significant attention to this genre of writing.

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.**

The Critical Reading and Writing Standard (Standard 3) is no longer divided into literary and informational. The intent is to bundle the objectives between the standards in order for the standard to apply to a variety of genres. Oklahoma provides Genre Guidance for districts to have local control about which genres are appropriate for each grade level.

The ELA Critical Reading Standards were written without consideration for any particular reading test, though we did keep their assessability in mind. The Critical Reading standards specifically reference “fiction, non-fiction, informational text, poetry, & drama” in the green section that appears at the top of the first page of Draft 3 of Standard 4 made available on the SDE website.

In Draft 4, the Critical Reading Standard is not broken down into Literary and Informational.

Regardless of what English teachers have traditionally been trained to teach, the fact is that first-year college students increasingly show difficulty in understanding informative non-fiction texts, especially research and theoretical articles that are the mainstay of academic work. Furthermore, whereas courses in college composition might have focused on reading and writing about literature twenty to thirty years ago, most college composition classrooms today ask students to read and evaluate multi-sourced, researched informative and argumentative texts.

The OK ELA standards do not ask teachers to be experts in the content of every discipline. Rather, the idea is that teachers would help students read informational/academic texts in exactly the rhetorically focused way that Dr. Stotsky suggests they have been trained to do with traditional literature. In other words, informational texts attempt to persuade, to make an argument, to inform, and even to please the reader, and they do so in ways that students must understand in order to fully grasp whatever content they might address.

Finally, HB 3399 states that “The subject matter standards for English Language Arts shall give Classic Literature and nonfiction literature equal consideration to other literature.” The committee believes our standards follow this mandate.

Dr. Stotsky's Comments	OSDE Response
<p>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.</p>	<p>The ELA writing committee interprets HB 3399 as mandating that local school districts have the sole authority in determining literary exemplars. Section 3. Amendatory 70 O.S. 2011, Section 11-103.6a.F. states that “School districts shall exclusively determine the instruction, curriculum, reading lists and instructional materials and textbooks, subject to any applicable provisions or requirements as set forth in law, to be used in meeting the subject matter standards.” In addition, the committee believes that there are better ways of determining when a text is grade-level appropriate rather than offering a particular literary text as an example. The final draft provides guidance</p>
<p>4. Processes for reading and writing are not standards but pedagogy. They belong in a pedagogical supplement to the standards document.</p>	<p>All of the strategy-specific objectives have been removed in Draft 4. What remains are objectives that focus on locating main idea, paraphrasing, summarizing and quoting and similar reading content and skills.</p> <p>However, based on collective research, the ELA writing committee simply determined that processes should be a part of the standards. Scholarship on reading and writing processes as an area of inquiry unto itself is extensive and robust. A search in ERIC or the MLA bibliography, two library subscription databases, will return thousands of articles.</p> <p>To teach students that there are phases of the writing process, including brainstorming, outlining, composing, editing, revision, and peer review, is not to adopt a method of teaching but rather to demystify what can be for students a major academic hurdle. Many students believe “they just can’t write” until they are shown that writing as a skill and a craft is made up of a series (or collection) of actions that occur in no particular order but that nevertheless need to be addressed if one is to write well. In fact, if one attempts to teach writing without teaching it as a process, then one adopts a pedagogy of imitating traditional forms by default.</p>
<p>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?</p>	<p>Again, the ELA writing committee interprets HB 3399 as mandating that local school districts have the sole authority in determining reading lists and text exemplars. Section 3. Amendatory 70 O.S. 2011, Section 11-103.6a.F. states that “School districts shall exclusively determine the instruction, curriculum, reading lists and instructional materials and textbooks, subject to any applicable provisions or requirements as set forth in law, to be used in meeting the subject matter standards.”</p>