

Teaching the Research Standards in EL Education Grades 3–8 ELA Curriculum

The purpose of this document is to highlight how research supports the three ELA shifts that the Common Core requires and meets the standards in EL Education Grades 3–8 ELA curriculum. Teaching students how to research and providing them with research opportunities is critical in addressing these shifts.

Shift 1	Regular practice with complex text and its academic language	Students closely read more complex texts with teacher support and less complex informational texts on a given topic more independently as part of the research process. They constantly build transferrable vocabulary through research texts.
Shift 2	Reading, writing and speaking grounded in evidence from text, both literary and informational	Students engage in rich and rigorous evidence-based conversations about the texts they have used for their research. They use the information and evidence they have collected through research to support their ideas and arguments in their writing.
Shift 3	Building knowledge through content-rich nonfiction	Students build knowledge of the world through the informational texts they read when researching.

In the CCSS, research is formally named in the writing standards W.7–W.9: Research to Build and Present Knowledge. Please note that CCRA stands for College and Career Readiness anchor standards.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.7	Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects based on focused questions , demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation .
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.8	Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources , assess the credibility and accuracy of each source, and integrate the information while avoiding plagiarism.
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.9	Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research .

Since research is the synthesis between reading and writing, research also lives in RI.7–RI.9: Integration of Knowledge and Ideas.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.7	Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.8	Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, including the validity of the reasoning as well as the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence.
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.9	Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take.

Careful analysis of the writing and reading standards above, particularly the words and phrases that have been boldfaced reveals that research is inquiry-driven, iterative, and inductive. Students read to answer a question and learn more about a topic, rather than just to “answer a thesis.” The standards emphasize critical thinking—students sort, sift, and weigh evidence, rather than simply “report” on a topic.

It is important to note that although Module 4 was designed specifically to focus on research skills, many of the modules in grades 3–8 include shorter research projects that help students develop research as a habit of mind and help students build knowledge about the world from topics ranging from “freaky frogs” (grade 3) to the universal refugee experience (grade 8). The checks below indicate which modules include research:

Module	1	2A	2B	3A	3B	4(A)*	4B
Grade 3		✓	✓			✓	
Grade 4			✓	✓	✓		
Grade 5		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Grade 6			✓	✓	✓	✓	
Grade 7		✓	✓			✓	✓
Grade 8	✓					✓	

* For seventh grade specifically, two options for Module 4 are available: 7M4A: “Screen Time and the Developing Brain” and 7M4B: “Water Is Life.”

Analyzing the progression in the standards

The research standards, W.7–W.9, articulate a clear progression from one grade level to the next in terms of the challenge for students. In the tables below, the boldfaced text shows how the requirements become more complex as students progress through the grade levels.

The work that students are asked to do in EL Education Grades 3–8 ELA curriculum reflect this progression.

Elementary (Grades 3–5):

	W.7	W.8	W.9
Grade 3	Conduct short research projects that build knowledge about a topic.	Recall information from experiences or gather information from print and digital sources; take brief notes on sources and sort evidence into provided categories.	Begins in grade 4

	W.7	W.8	W.9
Grade 4	Conduct short research projects that build knowledge through investigation of different aspects of a topic.	Recall relevant information from experiences or gather relevant information from print and digital sources; take notes and categorize information, and provide a list of sources.	Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research. a. Apply grade 4 Reading standards to literature (e.g., “Describe in depth a character, setting, or event in a story or drama, drawing on specific details in the text [e.g., a character’s thoughts, words, or actions].”). b. Apply grade 4 Reading standards to informational texts (e.g., “Explain how an author uses reasons and evidence to support particular points in a text”).
Grade 5	Conduct short research projects that use several sources to build knowledge through investigation of different aspects of a topic.	Recall relevant information from experiences or gather relevant information from print and digital sources; summarize or paraphrase information in notes and finished work, and provide a list of sources.	Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research. a. Apply grade 5 Reading standards to literature (e.g., “ Compare and contrast two or more characters, settings, or events in a story or a drama, drawing on specific details in the text [e.g., how characters interact]”). b. Apply grade 5 Reading standards to informational texts (e.g., “Explain how an author uses reasons and evidence to support particular points in a text, identifying which reasons and evidence support which point[s] ”).

- Example:** W.8 in grade 5 requires students to summarize or paraphrase relevant information, which is not a requirement in grade 4. As a result, in Grade 5 Module 4, students research using several sources about natural disasters and international organizations that offer international aid, and they summarize the information they gather through research. In Grade 4 Module 2B, however, students are not required to summarize the information they gather about animal defenses.

Middle School (Grades 6–8):

	W.7	W.8	W.9
Grade 6	<p>Conduct short research projects to answer a question, drawing on several sources and refocusing the inquiry when appropriate.</p>	<p>Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources; assess the credibility of each source; and quote or paraphrase the data and conclusions of others while avoiding plagiarism and providing basic bibliographic information for sources.</p>	<p>Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.</p> <p>a. Apply grade 6 Reading standards to literature (e.g., “Compare and contrast texts in different forms or genres [e.g., stories and poems; historical novels and fantasy stories] in terms of their approaches to similar themes and topics”).</p> <p>b. Apply grade 6 Reading standards to literary nonfiction (e.g., “Trace and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, distinguishing claims that are supported by reasons and evidence from claims that are not”).</p>
Grade 7	<p>Conduct short research projects to answer a question, drawing on several sources and generating additional related, focused questions for further research and investigation.</p>	<p>Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, using search terms effectively; assess the credibility and accuracy of each source; and quote or paraphrase the data and conclusions of others while avoiding plagiarism and following a standard format for citation.</p>	<p>Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.</p> <p>a. Apply grade 7 Reading standards to literature (e.g., “Compare and contrast a fictional portrayal of a time, place, or character and a historical account of the same period as a means of understanding how authors of fiction use or alter history”).</p> <p>b. Apply grade 7 Reading standards to literary nonfiction (e.g. “Trace and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, assessing whether the reasoning is sound and the evidence is relevant and sufficient to support the claims”).</p>

	W.7	W.8	W.9
Grade 8	Conduct short research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) , drawing on several sources and generating additional related, focused questions that allow for multiple avenues of exploration .	Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, using search terms effectively; assess the credibility and accuracy of each source; and quote or paraphrase the data and conclusions of others while avoiding plagiarism and following a standard format for citation.	Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Apply grade 8 Reading standards to literature (e.g., “Analyze how a modern work of fiction draws on themes, patterns of events, or character types from myths, traditional stories, or religious works such as the Bible, including describing how the material is rendered new”). Apply grade 8 Reading standards to literary nonfiction (e.g., “Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, assessing whether the reasoning is sound and the evidence is relevant and sufficient; recognize when irrelevant evidence is introduced”).

- **Example:** W.7 in grade 8 requires students to include a self-generated question, which is not a requirement in W.7 for grade 7. As a result, in Grade 8 Module 4, students are required to self-generate a research question on which to focus their inquiry into which of Michael Pollan’s four food chains would best feed the people of the United States, whereas in grade 7 students are given an overarching question about water management, which they then use to generate additional questions to focus their research.

Students are engaged in inquiry-driven research

EL Education Grades 3–8 ELA curriculum modules give students multiple opportunities for inquiry-driven research. In the earlier grades, this is guided and supported closely by the teacher, but as students move up the grades, this becomes more student-driven. The progression in terms of the expected level of student independence is driven by the language in the standards themselves.

- **Grades 3–5:** In the elementary grade levels, students are given a question on which to focus their research. This question will usually be drawn from an issue or idea presented in a central text that students read closely in the first unit of the module in order to spark their curiosity for the topic. Then they are given a range of pre-selected research texts of appropriate complexity for their age, relevant to the guiding question through which to pursue their inquiry and seek answers to the research question. During research, students are sometimes divided into groups, with each group building expertise on one particular area, enabling students to focus on a narrower area of study.
 - **Example:** In Grade 4 Module 2B, students research to answer the question: How do animals’ bodies and behaviors help them survive? They are given pre-selected resources from which to research including websites and books.

- **Grades 6–8:** As in the elementary modules, students are often divided into groups, with each group focusing on and becoming experts on one particular area of study. Yet in the middle school grade levels, there is a shift between grades 6 and 7 in terms of who “owns” the inquiry process. Through grade 6, the inquiry process is more teacher-led. From grade 7 onward, as students prepare for research at the high school level, they are encouraged to refine an overarching topic question in order to focus their inquiry on specific areas of interest. In grade 8, due to the requirement of that grade level’s specific language for standard W.8.7, students self-generate questions and continue to refine those questions throughout the research process in order to home in on a specific area.
 - **Example:** In Grade 8 Module 4, students self-generate a question on which to focus their research and inquiry into which of Michael Pollan’s four food chains would best feed the United States.

Students read deeply, widely, and thoroughly to build expertise on a topic, before and during the writing process

The shifts require students to read more of a balance between literary and informational texts, and to build knowledge of the world through the informational texts that they read. In the modules, before students engage in research on a topic, teachers lead them in close reading of a central text in order to begin building background knowledge and domain specific vocabulary, and also to spark their interest for inquiry in the topic. They then read a variety of informational texts in order to answer a research question and build expertise in that topic. Students are shown how to organize the information they gather as they read and research in journals, on graphic organizers, or in researcher’s notebooks. Throughout the process of reading a variety of texts on the topic, students write to record the information most relevant to their inquiry.

- **Grades 3–5:** At the elementary level during the research phase, students are provided with pre-selected texts for research. These texts have been chosen because they are of an appropriate complexity for independent or small group reading and because they contain information that will help students answer the research question(s). The pre-selected research texts are not as complex as the other texts in a given module, and are intended to be at a level that most students can read independently or with minimal teacher support. Often teachers circulate from one “expert group” to another to provide more scaffolding as needed. During the research process, students take notes to record the information they collect, often using a graphic organizer the teacher provides. In grade 5 specifically, in alignment with W.5.8, which requires students to “summarize or paraphrase information in notes and finished work,” students learn to summarize and paraphrase information in preparation for more rigorous research at the middle school level.
 - **Example:** In Grade 5 Module 3B, students are given a selection of texts about the natural resources found in Canada. These texts are of varying levels, as students work both independently and in small groups to research. Glossaries accompany the more challenging texts to support independent reading. As they read, students record notes on a graphic organizer in preparation for an oral discussion.
- **Grades 6–8:** During the research phase in select middle school modules, students work more independently to choose their own research texts. They continue to read a wide range of text-based resources deeply and thoroughly in order to become experts, but they begin to have more control over the texts they are reading. In grade 6, students choose the texts based on their interest and the level of the text from research folders of pre-selected texts. In grades 7 and 8, due to the increasing challenge of W.8 at those grade levels (W.8 in both grades 7 and 8 requests that students are “using search terms effectively”), students perform searches for research materials and then work more independently to read the informational texts they find and to gather evidence. During the research process, they write to

quote or summarize data and conclusions relevant to their focus topic in preparation for an authentic writing task at the end of the module.

- **Example:** In Grade 8 Module 4, in addition to reading *The Omnivore’s Dilemma* and other pre-selected informational texts about where food comes from, students learn how to use search terms effectively and how to evaluate resources in order to independently find and select appropriate and relevant informational texts. In contrast, in Grade 6 Module 2A students are given research folders containing pre-selected texts at a variety of levels on topics including bullying and recycling.

Engaging students in writing from sources strengthens students’ reading skills

The shifts require students to use the information and evidence they have collected through research to support their ideas and arguments in their writing. In the modules, students gather and record relevant evidence and information from informational texts in order to create a piece of writing that answers a research question or questions. In seeking information and evidence to answer research question(s) in writing, students learn reading skills that help them become stronger readers.

- **Grades 3–5:** In the elementary modules, students are guided through the research process by the teacher. They closely read and analyze texts together as a class or in groups in order to identify the information and evidence they need to answer a given research question.
 - **Example:** In Grade 3 Module 2B, students read *Exploring Countries* books in small groups called “Research Groups” to support one another in reading and researching to find out more about the culture in different countries.
- **Grades 6–8:** In the middle school modules, students learn how to find the gist (the basic sense of what a text is mostly about), how to carefully analyze and code a text in order to identify relevant evidence and information that can be used to answer the question in their writing, and how to take appropriate notes to capture the evidence and their thinking about the evidence in relation to answering the research question.
 - **Example:** In Grade 6, students learn how to find the gist of a text in Module 1. They then apply this to research in Module 2B, in which they research the adversities faced by people in the Middle Ages. First, they closely read a central informational text about the Middle Ages as a class, during which the teacher models how to analyze and code it to identify the information that answers the research question. They then move on to read pre-selected research texts to find the gist, and continue by carefully analyzing and coding the texts to identify the evidence and information that answers the research question. Students record the evidence and information they collect in their researcher’s notebook.

Teaching and assessing both research process and writing skills

To ensure student mastery of research and writing standards, in the Grades 3–8 ELA modules students learn research skills through the careful scaffolding of lessons, which include mini lessons on specific research and writing skills, each building on the previous skills learned. The skills are modeled for the class by the teacher or by a group of students as many times as necessary, before students are given the opportunity to practice through authentic research tasks. As they learn skills, students are given resources including step-by-step directions and specifically designed graphic organizers and note-catchers. Students are assessed on their mastery of these skills only once they have had time to work on the skills through multiple practice opportunities.

Grades 3–5: Research and writing skills addressed in the elementary grades include:

	Skills Taught and Assessed	Examples in the Modules
Grade 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “take brief notes on sources and sort evidence into provided categories” (W.3.8) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In Module 2B, students learn how to sort evidence and take brief notes as they research to find out about the culture of a country.
Grade 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “categorize information and provide a list of sources” (W.4.8) • “Explain how an author uses reasons and evidence to support particular points in a text” (W.4.9) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In Module 2B, students are provided with an Expert Group Animal research journal to help them collect and categorize notes. They record the sources in their journal. • As they research animal defenses through reading relevant informational texts in Module 2B, students are required to explain how the authors use reasons and evidence to support the points they make.
Grade 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “summarize and paraphrase information” (W.5.8) • “identifying which reasons and evidence support which point[s]” (W.5.9) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In Module 3B, students summarize the information and evidence they gather about the natural resources available in Canada and how those resources meet the wants and needs of people. • In Module 3B, students also identify which reasons and evidence in the informational texts they are given answer the two questions: What natural resources are available in Canada? How are those resources used to meet the needs and wants of people today?

Grades 6-8: Research and writing skills addressed in the middle school grades include:

	Skills Taught and Assessed	Examples in the Modules
Grade 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “refocusing the inquiry when appropriate” (W.6.7) • “assess the credibility of each source” (W.6.8) • “quote ... the data and conclusions of others while avoiding plagiarism” (W.6.8) • “providing basic bibliographic information for sources” (W.6.8) • “Trace and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, distinguishing claims that are supported by reasons and evidence from claims that are not” (W.6.9) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In Module 4 Unit 2, students refocus the inquiry once they have read a couple of informational texts. As they read more, they continue to refocus their inquiry. • In Module 4 Unit 2, when reading and analyzing the informational text “Rachel Carson: Environmentalist and Writer,” students learn through teacher modeling and practice how to provide basic bibliographic information. They are then required to do this throughout the rest of the module as they research. When working with this text, students also learn how to assess the credibility of a resource. They apply this learning in their own research later in the module. • In Module 4, students are required to quote the data and conclusions they find about the use of DDT in their position papers, avoiding plagiarism. • As students read informational texts about DDT in Module 4, they trace and evaluate the argument and specific claims, and they distinguish claims that are supported by reasons and evidence from claims that aren’t.
Grade 7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “generating additional related, focused questions” (W.7.7) • “using search terms effectively” (W.7.8) • “assess the credibility and accuracy of each source” (W.7.8) • “following a standard format for citation” (W.7.8) • “assessing whether the reasoning is sound and the evidence is relevant and sufficient to support the claims” (W.7.9) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In Module 2A, students evaluate whether research questions are “related” or “focused.” Then, in Module 4A, students self-generate questions for research. • In Module 2B and 4A/4B, students keep a researcher’s notebook where they assess the reasoning and evidence of several argumentative texts. • In Module 4A/4B, students participate in several mini lessons on using search terms effectively and the standard format for citation.

	Skills Taught and Assessed	Examples in the Modules
Grade 8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How to self-generate questions. (W.8.7) “Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text” (W.8.9) “recognize when irrelevant evidence is introduced” (W.8.9) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In Module 4, students self-generate questions to guide their inquiry about which of Michael Pollan’s four food chains would best feed the United States. In Module 4, students delineate and evaluate the claims in the central text <i>The Omnivore’s Dilemma</i> by Michael Pollan. In Module 4, students analyze excerpts of informational texts, including excerpts from <i>The Omnivore’s Dilemma</i>, and identify when irrelevant evidence is introduced.

Students create high-quality work through analysis of models, effective critique, and effective feedback

Since the shifts and the standards require students to write from sources (W.8 requires students to integrate the information while avoiding plagiarism), in the modules students complete short research projects tied to a performance task. Throughout the research process, including when closely reading a central text at the beginning of the module, students are gathering evidence that they can then use to answer a research question(s) in a final piece of writing.

At both the elementary and middle school grade levels when preparing to write, students analyze the content and structure of a model performance task against a rubric. This model may be an authentic piece of writing, or it may be a model created specifically for the module. Through carefully scaffolded lessons, they then begin organizing the evidence they have collected into a structured piece of writing using the model and the rubric as a guide.

W.5 requires students to strengthen their writing with guidance and support from peers and adults, so students are guided in how to provide constructive criticism in order to help a peer improve her or his work. Students in all grade levels often work through multiple rounds of revision using peer and teacher feedback to guide them in making improvements to their writing.

- Examples:** In Grades 6–8 Module 4, students research in order to write a position paper taking a stand on a current relevant topic; for example, in grade 7 students research to take a position on this question: “Which category of water management would be a good place to begin to make the way we manage water more sustainable?” Students use a model and a rubric to guide them in the writing of this position paper, and make multiple revisions based on peer and teacher feedback.

Use of Additional Resources in Middle School Modules

In Grades 6–8 Module 4, research is a particular emphasis, and makes use of a specific suite of resources.

The arc of these middle school modules follows the “Odell Research Unit outline” document. The researcher’s notebook, which students use in Module 4 to record the evidence they collect, is based on both the Odell “Potential Sources” model to log and evaluate sources and the “Taking Notes” model to keep

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notes and track one's own thinking regarding the various sources. For more information regarding the Odell research process, see <http://odelleducation.com/literacy-curriculum/research>.

Also in middle school Module 4, students use the researcher's roadmap, a document that EL Education designed to make the research process transparent to students. In particular, the researcher's roadmap prompts students to analyze their source before they begin taking notes. This is to scaffold toward W.8, which requires students to assess the credibility of a source and search the source for relevant information. The researcher's roadmap is a visual clue that the process of gathering and analyzing a source and then asking questions must be repeated several times before research is complete and students can synthesize and share their findings.

Since middle school Module 4 focuses on “science in society topics,” these modules also incorporate a resource to help students weigh decisions. As students are researching in order to write a position paper, they build “Cascading Consequences” and “Stakeholders” charts throughout the research process to show the consequences of each position and the stakeholders affected by each position. This approach is based on a resource called “Learning to Make Systematic Decisions” by Daniel C. Edelson, Adam Tarnoff, Kathleen Schwillie, Meridith Bruozas, and Anna Switzer. (This document can be found at http://education.nationalgeographic.com/education/media/learning-make-systematicdecisions/?ar_a=1).

To Conclude

Research is a habit of mind. If one looks at the portrait of a student who has met the standards, it is clear how research, particularly as implemented in the Grades 3–8 ELA curriculum, can help to build and fulfill many of those attributes:

- **They demonstrate independence:** As students learn and practice research skills in the modules, “they become self-directed learners, effectively seeking out and using resources to assist them, including teachers, peers, and print and digital reference materials.”
- **They build strong content knowledge:** Through research in the Grades 3–8 ELA curriculum, students “become proficient in new areas through research and study.” They build content knowledge in order to write or speak about it.
- **They respond to the varying demands of audience, task, purpose, and discipline:** Students use the evidence and information gathered through research to respond to the varying demands that the authentic tasks in the modules require. “They also know that different disciplines call for different types of evidence.”
- **They comprehend as well as critique:** In the modules, students learn reading and research skills that enable them “to understand precisely what an author or speaker is saying.”
- **They value evidence:** In the modules, students are required to “cite specific evidence when offering an oral or written interpretation of a text. They use relevant evidence when supporting their own points in writing and speaking.”
- **They use technology and digital media strategically and capably:** Through the learning of research skills in the modules, students learn to “tailor their searches online to acquire useful information efficiently, and they integrate what they learn using technology with what they learn offline.”
- **They come to understand other perspectives and cultures:** Students are encouraged through research in the modules to “actively seek to understand other perspectives and cultures through reading and listening, and they are able to communicate effectively with people of varied backgrounds. They evaluate other points of view critically and constructively.”