



# Supporting Literacy in the Content-Area Classroom

## *Tips and Resources*

Educators throughout Florida are working hard to increase literacy in the content areas with the aim of supporting deeper learning and critical thinking. The **Florida Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science and Technical Subjects** provide a roadmap for where we want to go, but effective implementation requires professional development and resources.

Below are some ideas and a few links that may be helpful:

### *Some points to consider*

- **The purpose of literacy** - The literacy standards now found in all course descriptions are intended to enhance content area instruction by deepening student learning, thinking and ability to communicate in that particular discipline.
- **Literacy is not an add-on** - Content area teachers should think of literacy strategies as an integral part of their instructional toolbox, “an effective alternative to” rather than “in addition to” some other classroom activities.
- **Text types** - Content area teachers should be using the text types found in their specific disciplines in developing reading and writing tasks. Where possible, authentic texts should be the focus, along with simpler supporting texts when necessary to differentiate instruction. (The types of writing found in science, social studies or math will be very different from the literature and essay writing taught in the language arts classroom.)
- **Design tasks with the outcome in mind** - Determine the understandings the student product is expected to demonstrate, create a rubric or other criteria describing this, and then scaffold instruction to guide students through the process. The rubric may then be used to assess the final student product.
- **Scaffold writing instruction:**
  1. **Present & analyze** - Find several examples of authentic texts (mentor texts) of the type you expect the students to produce. With the class, read and analyze these examples for purpose, format, text features, vocabulary, language and logical flow. With the class, develop a template or list of critical features (which should closely align with the rubric you’ve created).
  2. **Model** - Introduce a topic and as a class together, work through the creation of a piece of writing using the template.
  3. **Gradually release** - Introduce a second similar topic and have students working alone or in pairs to write the piece while you circulate to support their work. You may wish to have them exchange papers and evaluate their classmate’s paper according to the rubric or the checklist created by the class.

4. **Independent work** - Finally, assign the culminating task which the students will complete on their own.
  5. **Teacher response** - After reviewing the student work, the teacher may find they need to reteach, or on the other hand, find that students are ready to move forward.
- **Assess for target concepts** - In assessing the written product, content area teachers should be evaluating how well the student has demonstrated mastery of the target concepts. It is not necessary to mark the paper for grammar, spelling and so on (unless those language features have been specifically taught), except to the extent that the writing flaws interfere with the reader's ability to follow the student's ideas.
  - **Leverage your resources** in choosing authentic texts to use for instruction and working with student writing.
    - **Consult your language arts colleagues.** They can:
      - Help you determine whether a text's level of difficulty is appropriate for your students.
      - Offer ways to help your students attack more complex text. Challenging text is a good thing, but students may need your help to deconstruct, decipher and make meaning of it, and that is important because that is where a lot of the learning happens.
      - Make you familiar with the writing processes and instructional language taught in language arts. This does not mean content area teachers become writing teachers, but it will help if a similar approach and similar terms are used in all of the students' classes.
    - **Consult your media specialist.** Media specialists are experts at finding materials. They can help you locate the kinds of authentic text that will enrich your students' learning and provide the models for their writing.

## Resources

### General

- <http://www.cpalms.org/> - CPALMS is the official website for Florida educators. It includes standards, course descriptions, cognitive complexity information, a vast collection of vetted lesson plans, formative assessment materials and other resources and educator tools.
- *What it Means to Teach Disciplinary Literacy*, Dr. Tim Shanahan PPT: <https://drive.google.com/viewerng/viewer?a=v&pid=sites&srcid=ZGVmYXVsdGRvbWFpbnxzaGFuYWhhbN0dWZmfGd4OjM4OGRhY2M0M2E2MzY1N2U>
- *What to do to help middle and high school students read in their content classes?* Dr. Cynthia Shanahan PPT: <https://sites.google.com/site/timothyshanahan8/arkansas>
- Literacy Design Collaborative (LDC) - <http://www ldc.org/how-ldc-works/overview> offers teachers, coaches and leaders an instructional system for developing students' literacy skills in the content areas. A large number of Florida districts have received LDC training and are developing resources. These are listed here: <http://nationalliteracyproject.org/florida-academic-literacy-network/> .
- [http://www.ttms.org/PDFs/06%20Writing%20Across%20the%20Curriculum%20v001%20\(Full\).pdf](http://www.ttms.org/PDFs/06%20Writing%20Across%20the%20Curriculum%20v001%20(Full).pdf) – *Writing Across the Curriculum* by Steve Peha, contains some excellent, practical, classroom-ready ideas. The full text is online.

- <http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/summer12/vol69/num09/Summarize-to-Get-the-Gist.aspx> Collins, J. (2012). *Summarize to Get the Gist* argues that frequent written summaries of complex texts are a great way to develop students' reading comprehension and argument-writing skills, while minimizing the time the teacher spends correcting.

#### Science

- *Science Literacy Q & A* with Dr. Elizabeth Birr Moje, [http://education.illinoisstate.edu/downloads/casei/5-B-18Science\\_Complete%20Set\\_Final.pdf](http://education.illinoisstate.edu/downloads/casei/5-B-18Science_Complete%20Set_Final.pdf)
- <http://www.heinemann.com/shared/onlineresources/e01070/chapter2.pdf> - includes some helpful information on how to approach writing in science

#### Social Studies

- LDC example lessons <http://educore.ascd.org/channels/c8920746-9ae8-49bf-bae3-f8b6cac46173>
- LDC (above) and the Document-Based Questions (DBQ) approach are used in many Florida districts.
- *Social Studies Literacy Q&A* with Dr. Cynthia Shanahan, [http://education.illinoisstate.edu/downloads/casei/5-B-10%20SS\\_Complete%20Set\\_Final.pdf](http://education.illinoisstate.edu/downloads/casei/5-B-10%20SS_Complete%20Set_Final.pdf)

#### Mathematics

- *Math Literacy Q&A* with Russell Gersten, [http://education.illinoisstate.edu/downloads/casei/5-B-14%20Math\\_Complete%20Set\\_Final.pdf](http://education.illinoisstate.edu/downloads/casei/5-B-14%20Math_Complete%20Set_Final.pdf)