

## Key Shifts in the CCR Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy

Through their selections, panelists validated three key shifts in instruction prompted by the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and outlined by Student Achievement Partners (2012). The shifts described below identify the most significant elements of the CCSS for English Language Arts and Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects (ELA/literacy). At the heart of these shifts is a focus in literacy instruction on the careful examination of the text itself. Thus the selections outlined below revolve around the texts that students read and the kinds of questions students should address as they write and speak about them. The standards sharpen the focus on the close connection between comprehension of text and acquisition of knowledge.

### **Shift 1 – Complexity:** *Regular practice with complex text and its academic language*

Underlying the standards—and panelists’ selections—is research indicating that the complexity of text that students are able to read is the greatest predictor of success in college and careers (ACT 2006). Other research shows that the current gap in complexity between secondary texts and college/career texts is roughly four grade levels (Williamson 2006). Therefore, the first key shift required by the standards is exposing students to appropriately complex texts in both instruction and assessment. This important shift finds explicit expression in CCSS Reading Standard 10, which includes a staircase of increasing text complexity for students to read independently and proficiently. Rather than focusing solely on how students read, the focus also is on the complexity of texts read by students. Closely related to text complexity and inextricably related to reading comprehension is a focus on frequently encountered academic vocabulary—language common to complex texts across the disciplines of literature, science, history, and the arts. Thus, panelists also selected several standards (Reading Standard 4 and Language Standard 6) that focus precisely on academic vocabulary.

### **Shift 2 – Evidence:** *Reading, writing, and speaking grounded in evidence from text, both literary and informational*

The second key shift required by the standards and reflected in panelists’ selections is the prioritization of textual evidence across the domains of reading, writing, and speaking and listening—a decision based on national assessment data and input from college faculty indicating that command of evidence is a key college and career readiness skill. For reading, the focus is on students’ ability to cite evidence from texts to present careful analyses, well-defended claims, and clear information, as described in Reading Standard 1. For writing, the focus is on analyzing sources and conducting research, as described in Writing Standards 7–9. For speaking and listening, the focus is on purposeful academic talk, in which students contribute accurate, relevant information about a multitude of ideas they have studied or researched in various domains, as described in Speaking and Listening Standard 1. The standards require students to answer questions based on their understanding of having read a text, or multiple texts, not entirely relying on prior knowledge or experience.

### **Shift 3 – Knowledge:** *Building knowledge through content-rich nonfiction*

The third key shift required by the CCSS and echoed in panelists’ selections is a focus not only on English language arts, but also on literacy across the disciplines of science, social studies, and technical subjects. Informational text makes up the vast majority of required reading in college and the workplace. Through an extended focus on literacy in the domains of science, history, and technical subject areas, students can build the knowledge that will prepare them for college and careers. Given that literacy across the disciplines is one of the goals of adult education, panelists placed special emphasis on standards for the comprehension of informational text.