

GRADES K-3 OVERVIEW

In Kindergarten through Grade 3, the standards focus on essential foundational skills needed to support literacy development. Standards are written in a way that promotes direct, explicit, systematic, sequential, and cumulative instruction with extensive practice in these essential foundational skills: oral language, concepts of print, phonological and phonemic awareness, phonics (decoding), fluency, vocabulary, comprehension, and writing (including encoding). Reading standards, which incorporate reading and responding to multiple types of texts in various ways, start in Kindergarten and continue throughout the grades. Grades K-3 standards encompass all components of grade-appropriate proficient reading, from decoding words to adding literacy knowledge, building and accessing background knowledge, understanding language structures, and using verbal reasoning.

Standards for Grades K-3 are explicit, rigorous, and comprehensive, providing structures to scaffold reading and writing development from simple to more complex skills within and across the grade levels. This level of specificity is essential for students to learn the phonemic awareness and phonics skills they need to become successful readers and writers. Standards emphasize the practice of writing in many forms, which promotes growth in language arts. The writing process begins with the speech-to-print connection at the phoneme level and grade-appropriate assignments in Kindergarten, then progresses through increasingly more comprehensive and challenging assignments in subsequent grades. Students learn to express their thoughts effectively in a variety of formats and situations and to assess and improve their own written work.

The development of the K-3 standards was guided by the science of reading, which is the body of research that has emerged from multiple disciplines (including cognitive psychology, neuroscience, and linguistics) to discover how the brain learns to read and write and why some students experience difficulty doing so. The Simple View of Reading (Gough and Tunmer) and the Simple View of Writing (Berninger et al.), Scarborough's Reading Rope, and Ehri's Phases of Word Reading Development are only a few examples of the models that guided the development of the Grades K-3 standards. All standards align with and fully support all requirements of the Alabama Literacy Act and are written in a way that will help classroom teachers, special education teachers, and EL teachers identify students' lowest level deficit skill(s) and differentiate instruction to meet students' individual needs.

While prescribing the minimum standards for Grades K-3 English Language Arts, the standards in this document also represent content that promotes high expectations and defines high levels of literacy acquisition for all students in Alabama. The standards outline what a student should know and be able to do at the end of each grade level. Categories will change from one grade level to the next as readers become more proficient in mastering foundational skills throughout each grade level.

An effective instructional program will capitalize on the interrelated nature of the standards and connect content in ways that allow standards to be taught simultaneously. For example, aligning phonemic awareness, decoding, fluency, and encoding standards according to skills being taught allows students to focus on specific patterns and progressions as they practice identifying phonemes, decoding, encoding, and working on fluency.

For each grade band, a list of Recurring Standards for English Language Arts has been created to focus on integral content which must be taught in each grade within the band. These standards are to be embedded in daily instruction. Because content increases in rigor throughout the Course of Study, the recurring standards change from one grade band to the next, reflecting the increasing scope and complexity of the scaffolded content.

When “including” appears in content standards, it should be construed as “including but not limited to.” The items listed after “including” must be taught; other items not listed may also be included in instruction.

Examples represent options that might prove useful in instruction of the standard. They are not intended to be exhaustive lists and the suggestions listed do not have to be taught.