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Common Core State Standards and *SRA FLEX Literacy*:
Moving from Novice to Expert
in 21st Century English Language Arts
Skills and Strategies

The purpose of this paper is to describe the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in English Language Arts (ELA) and how *SRA FLEX Literacy* addresses them. An overview of the topic is provided along with detailed information about the CCSS for ELA. Further, information is provided on how the CCSS are used with struggling readers, including students identified to receive special education services. Finally, details are included on how *FLEX Literacy* teaches important 21st century reading skills and strategies to ensure success with the CCSS. Thus, students move from reading novice to reading expert as they become more literate individuals.

Overview

Educational standards have long been at the forefront of discussion in schools and districts across the United States. These standards drive how teachers do business in the classroom; they describe the skills and strategies that should be taught to enhance student learning. Enhanced student learning promotes success in present and future environments, particularly in postsecondary education and the workplace. Standards-based education has been aligned with a high quality education for our students.

Educational standards provide the roadmap of what to teach our students, but they do not tell teachers how best to navigate this educational roadmap. Getting from place to place, so to speak, is based on understanding the literature on effective teaching. Educators are on a constant quest to gather as much information as possible on how best to deliver instruction to their students. They read the research and attend conferences and workshops to enhance their teaching practices. Many times, educators are left to their own devices to develop effective lesson plans to traverse this educational landscape. They must juggle lesson development with the myriad of other responsibilities they face in the classroom. Educational programs designed to teach students how to navigate this roadmap are highly sought after because they free teachers from having to design lessons and learning environments when new educational standards are written.

Traditionally, standards have been developed by individual states, resulting in 50 different educational roadmaps (or more if we include U.S. territories). For this reason, The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) were developed to ensure consistency across states. Consistency helps ensure that students receive a high quality education across states and districts and provides greater opportunities for educators to share best practices in educational roadmap navigation. In addition to consistency, the CCSS ensure student and teacher success in important 21st century literacy skills and strategies.

What are the Common Core State Standards (CCSS)?

The Common Core State Standards Initiative (2012) describes how the standards were developed. (See corestandards.org; best sources of information for the CCSS can be obtained from the Teacher Librarian [Anonymous, 2012].) The National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and the Council of Chief State School Officers coordinated the development of the CCSS, calling upon educators from across the country to assist in the effort. The central goal of the standards was to prepare United States students for college and the workforce (Daggett & Gendron, 2010). National organizations representing teachers, civil rights groups, students with disabilities, and English language learners as well as the general public provided feedback on the standards. According to the Common Core State Standards Initiative (2012),

[T]he standards are informed by the highest, most effective models from states across the country and countries around the world, and provide teachers and parents with a common understanding of what students are expected to learn. Consistent standards will provide appropriate benchmarks for all students, regardless of where they live. These standards define the skills and strategies students should have within their

K–12 education careers so that they will graduate high school able to succeed in entry-level, credit-bearing academic college courses and in workforce training programs. (*corestandards.org*)

Further, these standards

- are aligned with college and work expectations;
- are clear, understandable, and consistent;
- include rigorous content and application of knowledge through high-order skills;
- build upon strengths and lessons of current state standards;
- are informed by other top-performing countries, so that all students are prepared to succeed in our global economy and society; and
- are evidence-based. (*corestandards.org*)

Focused standards were developed for (1) ELA and Literacy in history and social studies; science; and technical subjects, and (2) mathematics. The final versions of these standards were published in June 2010. To date, 45 states and three territories have adopted the CCSS. Statements of support have been provided by numerous societies and organizations, including the International Reading Association, Core Knowledge Foundation, National Education Association, U.S. Department of Education, American Federation of Teachers, the College Board, Alliance for Excellent Education, and the National Association of State Boards of Education.

The CCSS are divided into two grade sets—Grades K–5 and 6–12. Additionally, standards are noted for each grade in grades K–8, with grouped standards provided for grades 9, 10, 11, and 12 respectively. The standards

establish a ‘staircase’ of increasing complexity in what students must be able to read so that all students are ready for the demands of college- and career-level reading no later than the end of high school. The standards also require the progressive development of reading comprehension so that students advancing through the grades are able to gain more from whatever they read. (*corestandards.org*)

Thus, prerequisite skill development is central to developing more complex reading skills and strategies. Students must go beyond “learning to read” to “reading to learn” to gain as much information as they can from increasingly more complex text. The Common Core State Standards Initiative (CCSS, 2012) provides a portrait of students who advance through the grades and master identified standards in reading, writing, speaking, listening, and language strands. Literate students can

- demonstrate independence across a range of text and are self-directed learners;
- build strong content knowledge by reading and writing purposefully and listening attentively;
- respond to the varying demands of audience, task, purpose, and discipline by adjusting their purpose when necessary;

- comprehend as well as critique to remain open-minded readers and listeners who work diligently to understand what an author or speaker is saying;
- value evidence using relevant reasons to support their own points and to weigh the evidence provided by others;
- use technology and digital media strategically and capably to acquire and integrate useful information; and
- understand other perspectives and cultures to communicate with others from diverse backgrounds.

Reading

The CCSS address reading standards in literature, informational text, and foundational skills. (See *corestandards.org*.)

Literature and Informational Text. College and career readiness anchor standards for literature and informational text include four aspects:

- **Key Ideas and Details.** Students should understand and be able to do the following: (1) Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text; (2) determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas; and (3) analyze how and why individuals, events, and ideas develop and interact over the course of a text.
- **Craft and Structure.** Students should understand and be able to do the following: (4) Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone; (5) analyze the structure of texts, including how specific sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text (e.g., a section, chapter, scene, or stanza) relate to each other and the whole; and (6) assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.
- **Integration of Knowledge and Ideas.** Students should understand and be able to do the following: (7) Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words; (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; and (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.
- **Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity.** Students should understand and be able to (10) read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiency.

Foundational Skills. Foundational skills include focused standards in print concepts, phonological awareness, phonics and word recognition, and fluency. They are not ends in themselves but serve to develop proficient readers who can comprehend a variety of text types. Students should understand and have working knowledge of

- **Print Concepts.** Organization and basic features of print
- **Phonological Awareness.** Spoken words, syllables, and sounds (phonemes)
- **Phonics and Word Recognition.** Grade-level phonics and word analysis in decoding words
- **Additionally, students should read with Fluency.** Purpose and understanding and orally read on-level text with accuracy, appropriate rate, and expression

Writing

College and career readiness anchor standards for writing include

- **Text Types and Purposes.** Students should understand and be able to do the following: (1) Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence; (2) write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content; and (3) write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.
- **Production and Distribution of Writing.** Students should understand and be able to do the following: (4) Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience; (5) develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach; and (6) use technology, including the Internet, to produce and publish writing and to interact and collaborate with others.
- **Research to Build and Present Knowledge.** Students should understand and be able to do the following: (7) Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation; (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; and (9) draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.
- **Range of Writing.** Students should understand and be able to do the following, according to one specific grade-level standard: (10) Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences.

Speaking and Listening

College and career readiness anchor standards for speaking and listening include

- **Comprehension and Collaboration.** Students should understand and be able to do the following: (1) Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively; (2) integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally; and (3) evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric.

- ***Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas.*** Students should understand and be able to do the following: (4) Present information, findings, and supporting evidence such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience; (5) make strategic use of digital media and visual displays of data to express information and enhance understanding of presentations; and (6) adapt speech to a variety of contexts and communicative tasks, demonstrating command of formal English when indicated or appropriate.

Language

College and career readiness anchor standards for language include

- ***Conventions of Standard English.*** Students should understand and be able to do the following: (1) Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking, and (2) demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.
- ***Knowledge of Language.*** Students should understand and be able to do the following: (3) Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.
- ***Vocabulary Acquisition and Use.*** Students should understand and be able to do the following: (4) Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases by using context clues, analyzing meaningful word parts, and consulting general and specialized reference materials, as appropriate; (5) demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings; and (6) acquire and use accurately a range of general academic and domain-specific words and phrases sufficient for reading, writing, speaking, and listening at the college and career readiness level; demonstrate independence in gathering vocabulary knowledge when encountering an unknown term important to comprehension or expression.

Note: For purposes of this document, the literacy standards in history/social studies, science, and technical subjects (grades 6–12) will not be discussed.

Should the CCSS be used with struggling readers?

The CCSS are inclusive in nature and are designed for all students, including those at risk for school failure and those who are identified to receive special education services. Consider the following:

The goal of the Common Core State Standards is to focus on the skills and strategies needed by all students so they can be successful in college and careers. This goal applies for all students. Students who are receiving special education services are no exception. They too are expected to be challenged to excel within the general education curriculum based on the Common Core State Standards . . . as districts and

schools across the country prepare to transition from their existing state standards to the Common Core State Standards they must address the needs of students receiving special education services and other struggling students from the outset. (McNulty & Gloeckler, 2011, pp. 4-5)

Thus, struggling readers are not excluded and should abide by the same rigorous standards as all other students (McNulty & Gloeckler, 2011). According to Conley (2011), we should think of students as moving from “novice to expert in their strategic thinking as the result of frequent practice on progressively more complex tasks, assignments, and activities” (p. 19). The novice must proceed step by step in a linear fashion, according to Conley, to ensure prerequisites are mastered to lay a foundation for more complex literacy skills and strategies. Only then can students become “experts.”

High expectations for *all* students are the central tenet of quality education when the CCSS are used in the classroom. According to the Council for Exceptional Children (2011), students with disabilities continue to demonstrate the capacity to succeed and should be included in efforts to teach skills and strategies that align with the CCSS. Further, all students would benefit from the “greater emphasis on higher order cognitive demand” (Porter, McMaken, Hwang, & Yang, 2011, p. 115) that the CCSS provide. However, it is important to consider the following:

It is not enough for teachers to believe that all students are entitled to a high-quality education and that all students can learn; teachers must also have the skills to act on those beliefs in their teaching. Caring about students, although important, is insufficient for responsible practice. Skillful teaching involves facilitating in-depth analysis of ideas through reading, writing, and discussion; scaffolding students’ knowledge and skill development through assignments and projects that require in-depth explanation, the sophisticated use of argument and evidence, and the strategic employment of technology; and encouraging growth in interpersonal skills through whole- and small-group work, oral argument, and other opportunities for social interaction. (Ball & Forzani, 2011, p. 20)

Students with disabilities who have individualized educational programs (IEPs) should have standards-based goals (with accompanying short-term objectives and benchmarks). Thus, educators should first determine a student’s present level of performance, choose the standard to teach, “unpack the standard,” analyze the sub-skills or prerequisites needed to achieve each aspect of the “unpacked standard,” develop the goal, write short-term objectives and benchmarks, and monitor the goal (Samuels, 2012). Therefore, students with disabilities are challenged yet accommodated in their IEPs by powerful best practices and differentiated instruction using the CCSS.

SRA FLEX Literacy was designed to address important 21st century skills and strategies in ELA. The goal is for all students to become expert readers, taking into account their unique, and sometimes intensive, skill needs.

How does *SRA FLEX Literacy* address the CCSS?

FLEX Literacy was designed with the CCSS in mind. In fact, this program meets 85 percent or more of the CCSS in ELA across two systems—elementary and secondary. Approximately 300 ELA objectives are covered through Digital, Print, and Project Experiences across both systems.

The Digital Experience

In the Digital Experience, 110 objectives are taught with approximately 5,000 activities across the elementary and secondary systems. The Digital Experience addresses these objectives in the reading (literature, informational text, and foundational skills) and language strands. (See Figure 1.)

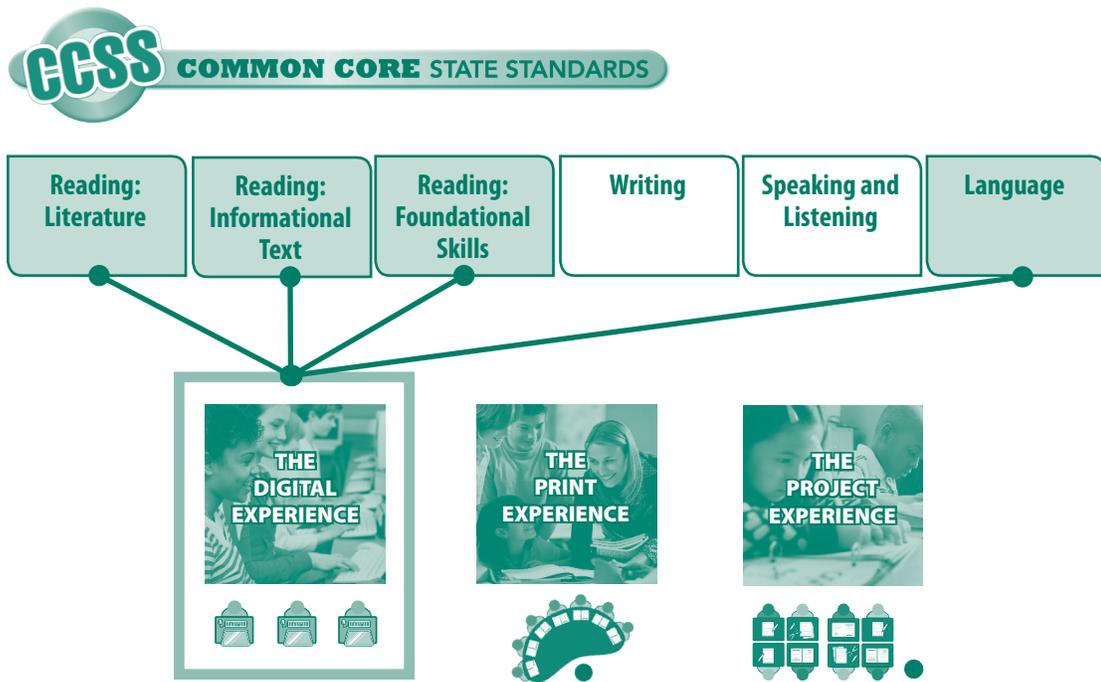


Figure 1. Common Core State Standard Strands addressed by **The Digital Experience** in *SRA FLEX Literacy*

The Print Experience

In the Print Experience, 25 objectives are covered for each of two volumes for the elementary system, and another 25 objectives are covered for each of two volumes for the secondary system. Thus, 50 separate objectives are covered across the elementary and secondary systems. Each of the four volumes spans 32 weeks. The Print Experience addresses objectives in all strands. (See Figure 2.)

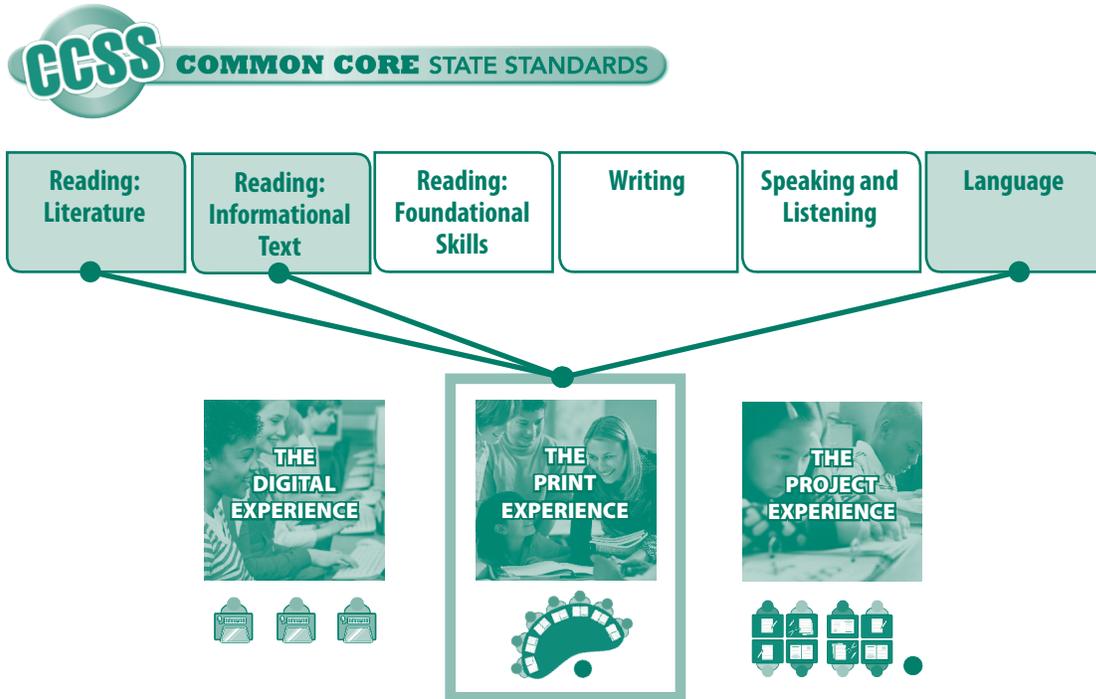


Figure 2. Common Core State Standard Strands addressed by **The Print Experience** in *SRA FLEX Literacy*

The Project Experience

In the Project Experience for the elementary system, approximately 70 objectives are covered across 20 three-week projects. Similarly, in the Project Experience for the secondary system, approximately 70 objectives are covered across 20 three-week projects. Thus, approximately 140 separate objectives are covered across the elementary and secondary systems. The project experience addresses skills and strategies in the areas of reading (informational text), writing, speaking and listening, and language. (See Figure 3.)

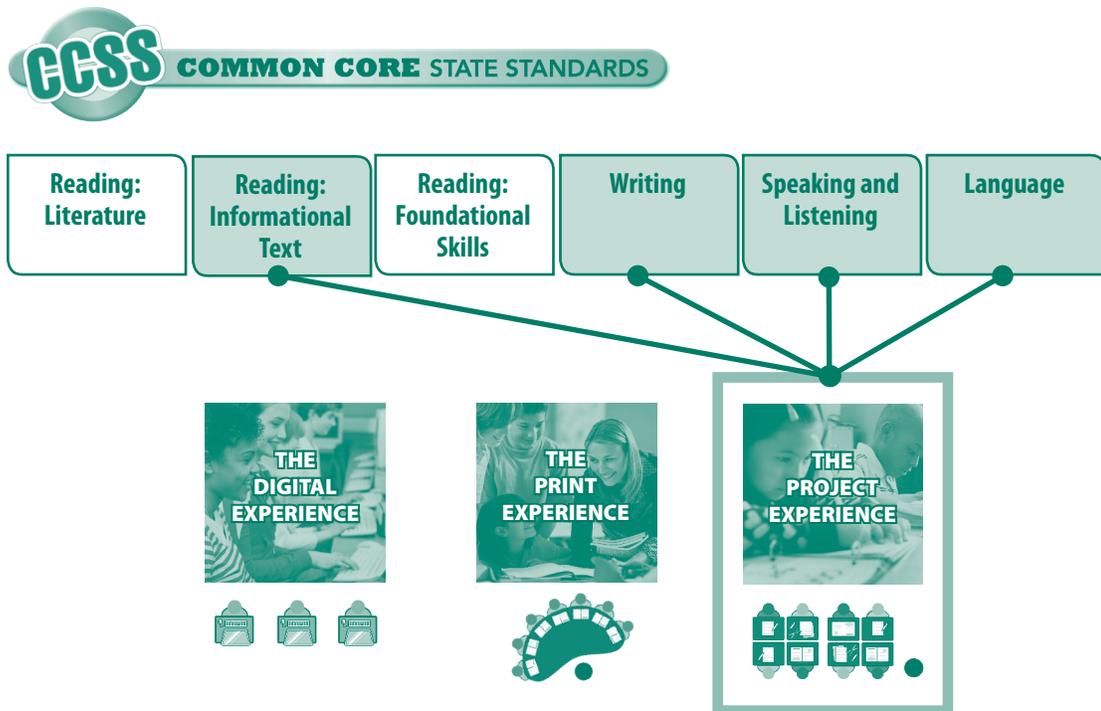


Figure 3. Common Core State Standard Strands addressed by **The Project Experience** in *SRA FLEX Literacy*

Moving from Novice to Expert

FLEX Literacy is based on an explicit instructional framework (Archer & Hughes, 2011; Marchand-Martella & Martella, 2013). In this framework, students receive strong support when they are “novice learners,” which fades to guided practice and then independent monitoring when they become “experts.” Reading skill levels improve as the result of frequent practice on progressively more complex tasks, assignments, and activities (Conley, 2011).

Figure 4 shows how skill-building over time is conducted in *FLEX Literacy* as students learn important skills and strategies based on the CCSS. Students receive explicit modeling, guided practice, independent practice, assessment, and maintenance opportunities. Text complexity increases over time from beginning reader to Lexile™ measures of 1150.

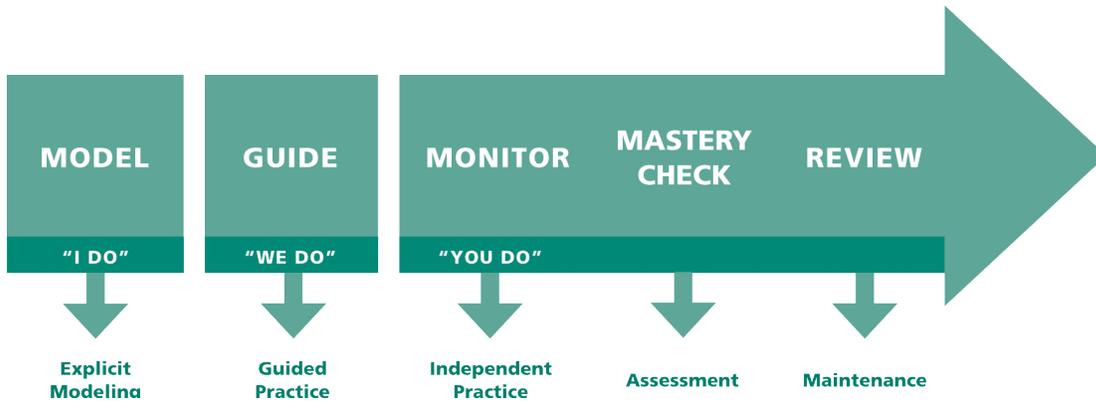


Figure 4. Skill-Building over time in *FLEX Literacy*

Summary

In summary, the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) were developed to ensure consistency and student and teacher success in important 21st century English Language Arts (ELA) skills and strategies. *SRA FLEX Literacy* was designed with the CCSS in mind. In fact, *FLEX Literacy* meets 85 percent or more of the CCSS in ELA across two systems—elementary and secondary. Approximately 300 ELA objectives are covered through Digital, Print, and Project Experiences across both systems. College and career-readiness anchor standards in the reading, writing, speaking and listening, and language strands are met through carefully designed instruction across these learning experiences. Appendices A-E show how each CCSS anchor standard is addressed by the three Learning Experiences within *SRA FLEX Literacy*.

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Appendix A

LITERATURE AND INFORMATION TEXT

	The Digital Experience	The Print Experience	The Project Experience
Key Ideas and Details			
1. Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.	X	X	X
2. Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.	X	X	
3. Analyze how and why individuals, events, and ideas develop and interact over the course of a text.	X	X	
Craft and Structure			
4. Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.	X	X	
5. Analyze the structure of texts, including how specific sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text (e.g., a section, chapter, scene, or stanza) relate to each other and the whole.	X	X	
6. Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.	X	X	
Integration of Knowledge and Ideas			
7. Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.	X	X	X
8. Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in the text, including the validity of the reasoning as well as the sufficiency of the evidence.	X		X
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.	X		X
Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity			
10. Read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently.	X	X	X

Appendix B

FOUNDATIONAL READING SKILLS

	The Digital Experience	The Print Experience	The Project Experience
Print Concepts			
Organization and basic features of print	X	X	
Phonological Awareness			
Spoken words, syllables, and sounds (phonemes).	X		
Phonics and Word Recognition			
Grade-level phonics and word analysis in decoding words.	X		
Fluency			
Purpose and understanding and orally read on-level text with accuracy, appropriate rate, and expression.	X	X	X

Appendix C

WRITING

	The Digital Experience	The Print Experience	The Project Experience
Text Types and Purposes			
1. Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.			X
2. Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.			X
3. Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.			X
Production and Distribution of Writing			
4. Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.		X	X
5. Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach.			X
6. Use technology, including the Internet, to produce and publish writing and to interact and collaborate with others.			X
Research to Build and Present Knowledge			
7. Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.			X
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.			X
9. Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.		X	X
Range of Writing			
10. Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences.			X

Appendix D

SPEAKING AND LISTENING

	The Digital Experience	The Print Experience	The Project Experience
Comprehension and Collaboration			
1. Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.		X	X
2. Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.	X	X	X
3. Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric.		X	X
Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas			
4. Present information, findings, and supporting evidence such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.		X	X
5. Make strategic use of digital media and visual displays of data to express information and enhance understanding of presentations.			X
6. Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and communicative tasks, demonstrating command of formal English when indicated or appropriate.			X
Purpose and understanding and orally read on-level text with accuracy, appropriate rate, and expression.			
7. Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.	X	X	X
8. Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in the text, including the validity of the reasoning as well as the sufficiency of the evidence.	X		X
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.	X		X
Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity			
10. Read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently.	X	X	X

Appendix E

LANGUAGE

	The Digital Experience	The Print Experience	The Project Experience
Conventions of Standard English			
1. Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.	X	X	X
2. Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.	X		X
Knowledge of Language			
3. Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.	X	X	X
Vocabulary Acquisition and Use			
4. Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases by using context clues, analyzing meaningful word parts, and consulting general and specialized reference materials, as appropriate.	X	X	X
5. Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.	X	X	X
6. Acquire and use accurately a range of general academic and domain-specific words and phrases sufficient for reading, writing, speaking, and listening at the college and career readiness level; demonstrate independence in gathering vocabulary knowledge when encountering an unknown term important to comprehension or expression.	X	X	X

