

# Oregon • English Language Arts

## DOCUMENTS REVIEWED<sup>1</sup>

*Oregon English Language Arts Standards: Standards by Design K-3*. June 2002  
Accessed from: <http://www.ode.state.or.us/teachlearn/real/standards/sbd.aspx>

*Oregon English Language Arts Standards: Standards by Design 4-12*. January 2003.  
Accessed from: <http://www.ode.state.or.us/teachlearn/real/standards/sbd.aspx>

*Writing Work Samples*. September 3, 2009.  
Accessed from: <http://www.ode.state.or.us/search/page/?id=524>

*Speaking Work Samples*. September 29, 2006.  
Accessed from: <http://www.ode.state.or.us/search/page/?id=639>

## Overview

Oregon’s standards are generally clearly written and presented and they include much essential ELA content. Unfortunately, the failure to provide any standards for grades 11 or 12, the inclusion of unnecessary and distracting standards that focus more on pedagogy than on content, and the omission of some critical reading and literature content leave Oregon teachers without the clear guidance they need to drive rigorous curriculum and assessment development and instruction.



Clarity and Specificity: 2/3  
Content and Rigor: 4/7  
**Total State Score: 6/10**  
(Common Core Grade: B+)

## General Organization

The Oregon ELA standards are divided into broad strands, four of which are common to all grade levels: Reading, Literature, Writing, and Speaking and Listening. Additional strands, such as “Concepts of Print,” are provided for certain grade levels, but do not include expectations across all grades.

At the high school level, standards follow the same organizational structure, but are provided only for grades 9 and 10.

## Clarity and Specificity

Oregon’s standards are well organized and well presented. They are generally written in precise language that is free from unnecessary jargon. In addition, the standards often include helpful examples that clarify expectations, such as:

Correctly use:

- apostrophes to show possession (Troy’s shoe, the cat’s food)
- apostrophes in contractions (can’t, didn’t, won’t) (grade 1)

Orally segment single-syllable spoken words into their components (e.g., cat=/c/a/t; splat=/s/p/l/a/t; rich=/r/i/ch) (grade 1)

Some standards, however, lack both precise language and examples, such as:

- Understand technical vocabulary in subject-area reading (high school)
- Recognize and analyze characteristics of persuasive text (grade 5)

The failure to give examples of the kinds of “technical vocabulary” or text “characteristics” that students should master prevents these standards from providing the guidance needed.

The high school standards are particularly inadequate both because they fail to provide grade-specific standards and because they provide no guidance whatsoever regarding what students should know and be able to do in grades 11 and 12.

These shortcomings detract from the overall strength of the K-8 standards’ clarity and rigor, and make it difficult to determine the scope and sequence of material, particularly in high school. Oregon earns two points out of three for Clarity and Specificity. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

## Content and Rigor

### *Content Strengths*

Oregon’s early-reading standards are clear and include expectations for mastery of essential phonics and phonemic awareness content and skills, including:

- Orally blend two to four spoken phonemes (sounds) into recognizable words (e.g., /c/a/t/=cat; /f/l/a/t/=flat) (grade 1)
- Add, delete, or change target sounds to change words (e.g., change cow to how; pan to an) (grade 1)

K-8 vocabulary standards delineate appropriate expectations, including a focus on etymology, synonyms, antonyms, prefixes, suffixes, roots, and, at the high school level, connotation and denotation. In addition, the standards include an appropriate focus on using both context clues and reference sources, such as dictionaries and thesauruses, to clarify the meaning of words.

The standards outline expectations for the analysis of both literary and non-literary texts, including a focus—in high school, in particular—on important text features and literary elements, such as:

- Analyze interactions between characters in a literary text (e.g., internal and external conflicts, motivations, relationships, influences) and how these interactions affect the plot (high school)
- Identify themes in literary works, and provide support for interpretations from the text (high school)
- Analyze an author’s development of time and sequence, including the use of complex literary devices, such as foreshadowing or flashbacks (high school)

The high school standards also admirably delineate expectations that ask students to judge the truth and validity of arguments, as demonstrated by the following:

- Evaluate if and how the author uses authoritative sources to establish credibility for arguments, proposed actions, or policies (high school)
- Make reasoned assertions about an author’s arguments by using elements of the text to defend and clarify interpretations (high school)
- Evaluate an author’s argument or defense of a claim by evaluating the relationship between generalizations and evidence, the comprehensiveness of evidence, and the way in which the author’s intent or bias affects the structure and tone of the text (e.g., in professional journals, sports journals, editorials, political speeches, primary source material) (high school)

The state provides explicit guidelines for the minimum amount of reading that students should do at each grade level.

In Writing, standards that outline the quality of writing expected across grade levels are included, such as:

- Write multi-paragraph compositions—descriptions, explanations, comparison-and-contrast papers, problem-and-solution essays—that:
  - State the thesis or purpose
  - Explain the situation

- Organize the composition clearly, following an organizational pattern appropriate to the type of composition-- comparison and contrast; organization by categories; and arrangement by spatial order, order of importance, or climactic order
- Provide evidence to support arguments and conclusions (grade 7)

Oregon also provides annotated examples of student writing that further clarify expectations for teachers and students.

Expectations for genre-specific writing are clearly defined, including standards focused specifically on research. The standards for English language conventions are also generally strong and demonstrate a clear progression of rigor, particularly for grades K-8.

Finally, the state includes standards focused on speaking and listening, including expectations for delivering formal oral presentations, and, in grades 5-10, for media and viewing.

### *Content Weaknesses*

In several areas, Oregon’s standards miss the mark. For starters, across all grade levels, the state provides two types of standards: assessed standards and “classroom” standards. Unfortunately, this distinction obfuscates more than it clarifies because the classroom standards are frequently focused more on pedagogy than on student outcomes. For example:

- Take part in creative response to text, such as dramatizations and oral presentations (grade 3)

Such “standards” do nothing more than suggest instructional activities that are not clearly focused on student mastery of anything in particular and that could take away valuable time from more purposeful, outcomes-driven instruction. Such suggestions may have value as part of a larger unit plan or curriculum map, but they add little value in a document that is designed to describe essential student learning outcomes.

In addition, while they do include expectations for the analysis of literary and non-literary texts (described above), Oregon’s standards lack the genre-specific detail necessary to ensure that students become proficient readers. For example:

- Differentiate among various imaginative forms of literature (e.g., fantasies, fables, myths, and fairy tales) (grade 4)
- Understand and analyze the differences in structure and purpose between various categories of informational text, including textbooks, newspapers, instructional manuals, essays, editorials, biographies, and autobiographies (grade 7)

While both standards list genres that students should read, gives neither sufficient detail nor examples to clarify the important differences among the genres that students should learn.

In addition, aside from a passing mention of the importance of reading historically or culturally significant works of literature that enhance the study of other subjects, the standards fail to prioritize important works of American literature that reflect our common heritage. And while the state provides clear guidance regarding the minimum *quantity* of reading that students should do each year, no guidance is provided about the *quality* and *complexity* of that reading.

Taken together, the inclusion of standards that infuse unnecessary and distracting pedagogy, coupled with the omission of some essential ELA content (and the last two years of high school), earn Oregon four points out of seven for Content and Rigor. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

## **The Bottom Line**

With their grade of C, Oregon’s ELA standards are mediocre. Those developed by the Common Core State Standards Initiative earn a solid B-plus. The CCSS ELA standards are superior to what the Beaver State has in place today.

1 The Oregon ELA standards have not changed since our last evaluation, the *State of State English Standards 2005*. The samples of student work, however, have been updated. Along with these minor changes, the evaluation criteria that we used to judge the 2010 standards have been substantially revised and improved since 2005. (See Appendix C for a complete explanation of changes in criteria.) These alterations contributed to a change in Oregon’s final ELA grade: from a B to a C. The complete 2005 review can be found here: [http://www.edexcellence.net/detail/news.cfm?news\\_id=337&pubsubid=1064#1064](http://www.edexcellence.net/detail/news.cfm?news_id=337&pubsubid=1064#1064).

# Oregon • Mathematics

## DOCUMENTS REVIEWED

*Standards by Design: Mathematics K-8 (2007) and High School (2009)*. 2007 and 2009.  
Accessed from: <http://www.ode.state.or.us/teachlearn/real/standards/sbd.aspx>

*Standards by Design: Mathematics Advanced Knowledge @ Skills (AK@S)*. 2009.  
Accessed from: <http://www.ode.state.or.us/teachlearn/real/standards/sbd.aspx>

## Overview

Oregon's standards are exceptionally well presented and easy to read and understand. They cover much of the essential content with both depth and rigor, particularly in high school. Their main weakness is in the coverage of arithmetic. Though it is well prioritized, some of the development is feeble.



Clarity and Specificity: 3/3  
Content and Rigor: 5/7  
**Total State Score: 8/10**  
(Common Core Grade: A-)

## General Organization

Oregon divides its K-8 standards into topics, which vary by grade, and then into grade-specific standards. In addition, the state provides a short introductory paragraph for each grade that broadly describes the content covered.

The high school material is organized similarly, except that standards are grouped together for grades 9-12. In addition, the state provides standards for advanced mathematics topics, such as advanced algebra, discrete mathematics, and advanced statistics.

## Clarity and Specificity

Oregon's standards are well presented and easy to read. Students learn different things in different grades, so the variation of topics across the grades is appropriate and results in a clear and focused set of standards. For example, there are no standards about probability in the early grades, which allows teachers to prioritize more essential and grade-appropriate content.

The standards are generally succinct, straightforward, and clear, such as:

- Demonstrate an understanding of time and use of time relationships (e.g., how many minutes in an hour, days in a week, and months in a year) (grade 2)
- Represent money amounts to \$10.00 in dollars and cents, and apply to situations involving purchasing ability and making change (grade 4)

A few standards, however, are subject to interpretation by the reader, for example:

- Identify and represent equivalent expressions (e.g., different ways to see a pattern) (grade 6)

It is unclear what kind of problems a student is expected to be able to solve.

Oregon's standards are extremely well presented and easy to read. They are admirably focused, and most are clear and specific. They receive a Clarity and Specificity score of three points out of three. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

## Content and Rigor

### Content Priorities

Implicitly, the standards demonstrate clear and appropriate priorities. There are only a few topics covered in each grade, and these are appropriately focused on the most important mathematics. For example, fourth grade has three topics:

Number and Operations and Algebra: Develop fluency with multiplication facts and related division facts, and with multi-digit whole-number multiplication (grade 4)

Number and Operations: Develop an understanding of decimals, including the connections between fractions and decimals (grade 4)

Measurement: Develop an understanding of area and determine the areas of two-dimensional shapes (grade 4)

This implicit focus on arithmetic is exemplary. More generally, over half of the standards in appropriate grades are about the development of arithmetic.

### Content Strengths

The standards develop and use the number line early and often, as in:

Represent whole numbers on a number line, demonstrating an understanding of the sequential order of the counting numbers and their relative magnitudes (grade 1)

Represent common fractions (e.g., halves, thirds, fourths, tenths) as equal parts of a whole, parts of a set, or points or distances on a number line (grade 3)

The development of area is strong and detailed:

Recognize a square that is one unit on a side as the standard unit for measuring area (grade 4)

Connect area measure to the area model used to represent multiplication and use this to justify the formula for area of a rectangle (grade 4)

Find and justify relationships among the formulas for the areas of triangles and parallelograms (grade 5)

In high school, the coverage of quadratic equations is often strong. It includes important, rarely seen analysis such as:

Given a quadratic equation of the form  $x^2 + bx + c = 0$  with integral roots, determine and interpret the roots, the vertex of the parabola that is the graph of  $y = x^2 + bx + c$ , and an equation of its axis of symmetry graphically and algebraically (high school)

Derive the quadratic formula (high school—advanced algebra)

In addition, much of the STEM-ready content is included.

### Content Weaknesses

As illustrated by the fourth-grade topics above, arithmetic is a strong focus in Oregon’s standards, and fluency with arithmetic operations is clearly stated as a goal. Unfortunately, the standards themselves do not adequately support such fluency. Instant recall of the number facts is replaced with the less stringent:

Apply, with fluency, sums to 20 and related subtraction facts (grade 2)

Apply with fluency multiplication facts to 10 times 10 and related division facts (grade 4)

In the continued development of arithmetic, standard procedures are not mentioned; instead, the use of multiple “efficient strategies” is specified. For example, the capstone standards for whole-number multiplication are:

Develop and use accurate, efficient, and generalizable methods to multiply multi-digit whole numbers (grade 4)

Develop fluency with efficient procedures for multiplying multi-digit whole numbers and justify why the procedures work on the basis of place value and number properties (grade 4)

Students who have developed their own methods rather than mastering standard algorithms may be unprepared to continue on to more difficult mathematics.

This approach continues with the arithmetic of fractions and decimals, such as:

Develop fluency with efficient procedures for adding and subtracting fractions and decimals and justify why the procedures work (grade 5)

In addition, common denominators are not mentioned.

In high school, there are a few issues with the content. Linear equations, though well covered, are missing point-slope form. In geometry, the coverage is not as strong. Constructions are not covered, and major theorems are not proven, but are “used” or “applied” as in:

Apply theorems, properties, and definitions to determine, identify, and justify congruency or similarity of triangles and to classify quadrilaterals (high school)

Standards on important algebra skills with rational functions are not quite strong enough to ensure that students have facility with all the operations:

Perform operations on rational expressions (high school—advanced algebra)

Oregon’s high school standards have a few weaknesses, particularly in geometry, but are generally strong and include much of the STEM-ready content. In the elementary grades, arithmetic is well prioritized, but the standards fail to culminate with appropriate capstone standards. These few “shortcomings” result in a Content and Rigor score of five points out of seven. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

### **The Bottom Line**

Oregon’s standards are generally clear and well presented. Standards are briefly stated and usually clear so that they are easier to read and follow than Common Core. In addition, the high school content is organized so that the standards about various topics, such as quadratic functions, are generally grouped together in a mathematically coherent way. The organization of the Common Core is more difficult to navigate, in part because standards on related topics appear separately rather than together.

While Oregon’s standards provide well-organized high school courses, they are missing some of the essential content that is covered in Common Core. In addition, the coverage of arithmetic displays some serious weaknesses. Common Core provides admirable focus and explicitly requires standard methods and procedures, enhancements that would benefit Oregon’s standards.