The Linguistic Demands of the Common Core State Standards for Reading and Writing Informational Text in the Primary Grades

Kathryn L. Roberts, Ph.D.¹

ABSTRACT

Forty-five states and four U.S. territories have committed to implementing the new Common Core State Standards, with the goal of graduating students from our K–12 programs who are ready for college and careers. For many, the new standards represent a shift in genre focus, giving much more specific attention to informational genres. Beginning in the primary grades, the standards set high expectations for students’ interaction with informational text, many of which are significantly more linguistically demanding than the standards that they replace. These increased demands are likely to pose difficulties not only for students currently receiving language support, but also for students without identified delays or disabilities. This article describes several of the kindergarten through fifth-grade standards related to informational text, highlighting the linguistic demands that each poses. In addition, instructional strategies are provided that teachers and speech-language pathologists can use to support the understanding and formulation of informational text for listening, reading, speaking, and writing.

KEYWORDS: Common Core State Standards, informational text, literacy, linguistic demands, speech-language pathologists

Learning Outcomes: As a result of this activity, the reader will be able to: (1) describe the content of several of the new Common Core State Standards related to informational text in the primary grades; (2) identify the particular language demands of each; and (3) identify instructional strategies for the implementation and teaching of standards related to informational text.

¹Department of Reading, Language, and Literature, Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan.

Address for correspondence and reprint requests: Kathryn L. Roberts, Ph.D., Department of Reading, Language, and Literature, 227 Education Building, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI 48202 (e-mail: Eo9096@wayne.edu).

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The Common Core Standards for English Language Arts (CCSSs) were developed by a panel of teachers, school administrators, and experts, coordinated by the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and the Council of Chief State School Officers, in response to growing concern about the preparation of American students to compete globally in the arenas of higher education and the workforce. Subsequently, they were revised based on the feedback of organizations representing teachers; community college, college, and university educators; civil rights groups; English language learners; and students with disabilities, among others. Broadly speaking, the specific content of the standards at each grade level was informed by the highest and most effective standards from both individual states in the United States and nations around the world. The standards, which have been adopted by 45 of the 50 states and four of the six U.S. territories, are designed to align with the expectations held for students as they enter higher education and the workforce and to prepare students to compete globally. In addition, the standards were created to intentionally push students to apply knowledge, use higher-order thinking skills, and master complex content.

So what exactly did the states and territories that adopted the standards agree to? Most of the states that have adopted the standards have agreed to begin implementing them within the next 2 years. However, it is important to note that the standards, although uniform, will not create complete curricular uniformity across states for two reasons: (1) the standards, as with all standards, are the minimum required content—states, districts, and teachers are always welcome and encouraged to go above and beyond; and (2) states that have agreed to take on the CCSSs have agreed to adopt them in their entirety, but the standards only need to represent 85% of the standards for any given state, which means the remaining 15% may vary considerably from state to state. Nevertheless, for many states, adoption of the standards is going to result in significant changes in terms of expectations, particularly in regards to the teaching and learning of genres and technology and the expectations for complexity of the text that students will read and write. In addition, and of particular interest to speech and language professionals, the CCSSs represent a considerable increase, in many cases, in the demands of language knowledge and use.

Perhaps the biggest shift for many teachers, particularly those in the primary and intermediate grades, is the shift in genre focus. Traditionally, the narrative genre has dominated literacy instruction in the elementary years, which has been reflected in the consistent disparity of our students’ performances on narrative and nonnarrative assessments of reading and writing. Although narrative skills are important for our students (and represented in the CCSSs), the CCSSs make a clear statement about the need for genre diversity by focusing explicitly on two broad categories of reading: informational and narrative (each of which encompass subgenres), and three broad categories of writing: informational, narrative, and persuasive (each of which encompass subgenres). Though lackluster test scores may have been what alerted the educational community to a need for greater focus on nonnarrative genres, there are far more practical and important reasons why we should take this call to action seriously, many of which speak to the issue of graduating college and career-ready students. In the remainder of this article, I will focus specifically on the reasons we need these new standards for informational text, as well as discuss key CCSSs and instructional practices related to those needs, many of which may be new to educators.

**WHY INFORMATIONAL TEXT?**

First, both college courses and careers require the ability to read and write informational text. In college courses, students are expected to know how to effectively read informational text, inclusive of textbooks, trade books, reports, and journal articles, to gain content knowledge necessary for successfully completing courses. In addition, outside of literary courses, the vast majority of communication (oral and written) that students are expected to produce is informational (e.g., history papers, biology laboratory reports) or persuasive (e.g.,
persuasive speeches in political science classes, rationale support for budget solutions in business classes). This focus on informational communication doesn’t stop at the classroom door; much of the talk and writing that employees are expected to engage in involves informational genres (and very rarely involves narrative text). For example, depending on the field of employment, when our students begin (or continue) their working lives, they may be asked to produce budget reports, report on scientific experiments, deliver information in training sessions for other employees, teach information to students, read and synthesize information to inform best practices in a field, keep abreast of the latest medical advances, communicate information about a product to a customer, and so on—the list is nearly limitless.

Second, to be contributing members of adult society, our students are going to need to be able to read, and in many cases write, informational text. For example, our national political system hinges upon informed voters. That means that the average citizen, to make informed decisions, needs the ability to critically read and listen to informational and persuasive texts, including the important skill of distinguishing the persuasion from the information. These skills, however, are important in months other than November. Depending on life circumstances, productive adults also need to be able to read and interpret their children’s report cards and notes from school, Transportation Security Administration regulations for travel, fine print on credit card applications, and newspapers. Additionally, there are times when reading informational text is something that we want to do and contributes to our quality of life: reading the sports page, talking about issues about which we are passionate, and reading up on different breeds of dogs before purchasing a new puppy.

Finally, there is a more immediate need for increasing the amount of informational text used in our classrooms: motivation. There are certainly many children who love to get lost in a good novel or picture storybook or read and write poetry, and many teachers who feel the same way. However, we have to remind ourselves that all of our children are different, and some of them do not love to do those things. For a variety of reasons ranging from simple interest to genre familiarity, some children gravitate toward or are more successful with informational topics such as worms, planets, or the inner workings of a 747 airplane. Interestingly, there is some indication that this may be the trend for some of our most at-risk groups of children, including children living in poverty and boys.5–7 This is also an important issue because children who have positive, enjoyable experiences reading read more both in and outside of school, and kids who read more become better readers.8 That same principle can also be logically extended to other literacy skills: speaking, listening, writing, viewing, and creating. It is easy to overlook the importance of enjoying the learning experience, particularly when we are under pressure to “cover” so many standards and high-stakes tests are always on the horizon. However, motivation and attitude toward literacy are step one—children who do not enjoy literate activities have little incentive to engage in them other than when they are made to, and the research is clear: that just simply is not enough time on task to do the job. We owe it to our students to engage them in a variety of genres so that all students have ample opportunity to explore the ones that most appeal to them.

WHY ARE THESE SHIFTS IN GENRE IMPORTANT TO SPEECH-LANGUAGE PATHOLOGISTS?

Speech-language pathologists (SLPs) stand to play a pivotal role in this particular shift in the standards because genre is defined as “patterns in the way language is used . . . [texts’] language, format, structure, and content.”9 Furthermore, by definition, the purpose of informational genres is to communicate information, presumably from someone who knows more about a topic to someone who knows less.3 Thus, the underlying skills entailed in understanding the differences between genres and using them effectively clearly lay within the areas of expertise of SLPs. As we work in school- and district-wide teams to adapt to the changing rules of the “game,” the expertise that SLPs offer will be crucial in supporting both classroom teachers and students as they teach and learn new skills and knowledge.
Genre Specificity

Children do not comprehend all genres equally well, nor do they process them in the same ways. Although there are many probable reasons for this, a particularly likely reason is that the use and structure of language varies greatly across genres, and knowledge of one genre does not necessarily transfer to knowledge of another. As an illustrative example, consider a comparison between fictional narrative text and informational text (Table 1). Although it is important to note that there is also significant variation within each of these larger genres (for example, there are vast differences between a memoir and a folktale), the contrast between the larger genre categories is particularly striking.

These differences pose critical implications for instruction. For example, when reading narrative text, we often encourage children to read at a relatively quick pace—in fact, we become quite concerned if that facet of children’s reading fluency is not up to par. However, when reading informational texts, children should be encouraged to vary their pace based on the demands of the task and text. This may sound strange at first, but if we envision our own reading, it seems considerably less so: How does your pace differ between reading a contemporary novel and reading about, for example, a research study that you need to understand well enough to explain it to a group of peers? By definition, we read informational texts to become better informed, which means we are reading information that we do not already know. To process and retain that information, we slow down and do some intentional processing. In instances in which we attempt to read through at a quick, even clip, we often find ourselves at the end, unable to summarize what we have read. This is a perfect teachable moment for the concept that reading is not a one-size-fits-all endeavor. Sometimes reading fairly quickly helps you maintain momentum of a plot and better understand a story; other times it is more appropriate and productive to read slowly and even reread some sections several times to help you understand new information. This lesson is critical because if children associate slow reading with being a poor reader and try to rush through informational text, they stand to miss out on important information.

Table 1 Typical Linguistic Characteristics of Fictional Narrative and Informational Genres

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Commonly included elements</th>
<th>Fictional Narrative*</th>
<th>Informational*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Formulaic opening (e.g., “Once upon a time”)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Meaning-bearing graphics (e.g., tables, diagrams, timelines)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attributive adjectives (e.g., “wicked witch”)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Navigational features (e.g., index, table of contents, headings and subheadings)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Verb constructions                  | Past tense (e.g., “Abby woke up on the wrong side of the bed.”) | Timeless, present tense (e.g., “Ants have six legs”) |
| Noun structures                     | Specific (e.g., “Eddy the ant”) | Generic (e.g., “ants”) |
| Typical text structure(s)           | Chronological | Compare/contrast  |

| What “good” readers do              | Read linearly (beginning to end), at about the same pace throughout the text | Read nonlinearly (reading only certain sections, dictated by need or interest) at varied paces, depending on the complexity, familiarity, and relevance of the information |

*Note that there are various subgenres within each of these genre categories, so some features may not apply to all texts. For example, “Once upon a time” is typical of a certain kind of fictional narrative text, fairy tales, but would not likely be found in other types, such as realistic fiction.
Some children, whether by exposure or natural ability, are quite good at distinguishing between and applying the linguistic features of specific genres from a very young age. However, this is not the case for all children, and making these distinctions may prove particularly challenging for students who have already demonstrated some sort of language difficulty or disability. Children who require assistance structuring their language to express a sequenced series of events using transition words may also struggle to compose and comprehend text written using structures typical of informational text, such as cause and effect (e.g., “We experience day and night because the Earth rotates on its axis.”) and compare/contrast (e.g., “Frogs and toads are different in many ways. First, toads have dry, bumpy skin, while frogs’ skin is smooth and wet.”). Changes in the linguistic demands of the classroom, in many cases, may result in changes and reevaluations of the kinds of support children need to be successful.

Linguistic Demands
In addition to working with the children identified for speech and language services, SLPs serve as an important source of expertise for classroom teachers. There are many children who do not qualify for speech and language services, but are likely to struggle with the linguistic demands of informational text and of differentiating between genres. Under the new standards, teachers will be expected to teach language structure and use specific to the three broad genres encompassed in the CCSSs (narrative, informational, and persuasive). Depending on the content of previous state standards and curricula, this may not be something with which they have a great deal of experience. These changes will make it increasingly important that SLPs and teachers develop a more synergistic relationship between classroom instruction and speech and language efforts. Depending on the level of support needed, this may involve SLPs modeling language lessons and teaching methods for classroom teachers, co-teaching select lessons, leading staff development on the topic, or simply making themselves available to teachers as a consultation resource.

WHAT ARE THE EXPECTATIONS?
The Common Core Standards for English Language Arts can be found at http://www.corestandards.org/the-standards/english-language-arts-standards. For kindergarteners through fifth graders, the standards are presented in two broad categories (Anchor Standards and Range, Quality and Complexity [of text]), and five specific categories (Reading: Literature; Reading: Informational Text; Reading: Foundational Skills; Writing; and Speaking and Listening). The standards that relate to informational text can actually be found in four of these categories: Reading: Informational Text (RI), Writing (W), Speaking and Listening (SL), and Language (L; see Fig. 1 for information on how standards are identified by number). Within each of these categories, there are subcategories (e.g., Key Ideas and Details) with strands that carry through from one grade to the next. For example, the first standard for reading informational text under the heading of “Key Ideas and Details” addresses the need for students to identify key details from a text, and use them in grade-appropriate ways, ranging from answering direct questions in kindergarten to using details to support inferences in fifth grade. The remainder of this article will focus on five of the standards related to informational text that depend most heavily on language knowledge and use, and tracing the demands of those standards backward, from the fifth-grade goal for the end of elementary schooling, to their roots in kindergarten. In each section, you will first see the full fifth-grade standard, followed by an explanation of that standard and the component skills that feed into it, as described in the same standard strand, but younger grades. Finally, at the end of each section, you will find one suggested method that might be used to address all or part of the standard (though note that the proposed method is just one of many possibilities).
Report on a topic or text or present an opinion, sequencing ideas logically and using appropriate facts and relevant, descriptive details to support main ideas of themes; speak clearly at an understandable pace.

This standard encompasses a variety of skills and knowledge. First, students must be able to identify linguistic cues used by authors (and use them, themselves) that signify that a statement is fact or an opinion (Table 2). For example, in the phrase “elephants are pachyderms,” the word are signals to the reader that it is a factual statement. The word have plays a similar role in the phrase “countries that are monarchies have . . . .” In contrast, direct phrases such as in my opinion indicate to the reader that the piece is based on the author’s opinion. More subtly, an opinion may be indicated by a word or phrase that indicates subjective judgment, such as most interesting in the phrase “England is the most interesting country because. . . .” Second, readers must be able to determine the relationship between pieces of information to distinguish between main ideas and the details that support them. Relatedly, they must be able to identify pieces of information that are and are not relevant to each other. Making these distinctions may involve using linguistic markers (e.g., There are many different types of mammals. One type of mammal is . . . ), but also often require an understanding of categories of words/concepts (e.g., red, blue, and green are colors; spiders and ants are both things that people might call “bugs”). Finally, speakers need to consider their audience, attending to issues such as enunciation, volume, and specifically pace.

This standard, like many of the CCSSs, is demanding. However, the onus is not on fifth-grade teachers to teach all of these skills. In kindergarten, children, with the support of their teachers, are to ask and answer questions about key details in text, which will require that they understand question words such as who, what, where, when, why, and how, as well as signal words that will help them identify necessary information to answer the question (e.g., for where questions, looking for words such as in and at, or place words, such as park and home). In first and second grades, children are expected to do this without the assistance of a teacher. By third grade, when children ask and answer these questions, they are expected to be able to justify their responses by referring to...
particular parts of the text, and the fourth-grade standard demands that they do so for both literal and inferential questions. For example, after reading an informational text about camels, a student might ask about the type of climate in which camels live, information not stated explicitly in the passage. That same student or a classmate might then respond that camels must live somewhere dry because the text said that they can go many days without water, which allows them enough time to travel from one watering hole to another. The linguistic demands, in this example, include students being able to group language into related categories: climate has to do with the physical environment, as does the presence or absence of water, but information on the color of a camel’s tongue is likely irrelevant to this particular question.

The methods used to teach these skills differ, naturally, depending on the particular grade-level demands. For this standard, we will look at the kindergarten to grade 2 demands: asking factual questions about the text and identifying signal words to help answer those questions. One way in which we can teach children these skills (and many others) is through think-alouds and the use of self-talk. Because children cannot see adults comprehending a text, it is often difficult for them to find models to emulate. For example, when reading a book about a dairy farm, the teacher might muse aloud, “Hm. I wonder where the truck will take the milk when it leaves the farm. . . . How can I find out? I need a plan. OK. I’m going to keep that question in my head as I read, and listen for words that name places to help me answer it.” Then, later on in the text, she might say something like, “Oh! I was trying to figure out where the milk would go next, and I just read some words that I think might give me the answer. Listen: The truck pulls into a large factory called a dairy. Here, the milk will be unloaded into large vats to be pasteurized. I heard two things that might be clues. First, I heard large factories; a factory is a place. Then, I heard the word here. I know that when someone tells me where something is, they often use the word here, like, ‘It’s right here!’ Let’s see if those two things help me answer my question. Hm. Where was the truck going? It went to the large factory, which is called a dairy! I listened for clue words about a place and it helped me to answer my question. My plan worked! When good readers are reading and think of a question, they make a plan for how they will try to answer it. This time, I tried to think of what kinds of words might give me a clue that I had found the answer, and I looked for those words as I read.”

Modeling, of course, is not sufficient. Teaching students to think strategically on their own is also important. For example, in this scenario, the teacher might also explicitly teach the generic self-talk strategy of asking questions to monitor comprehension: (1) What do I want to know? (2) What is my plan for finding the information? (3) Did my plan work? (4) If it did not work, what will my new plan be? In addition, as with most new skills, the use of a gradual release of control method (i.e., model, work with students, allow students to work independently) would be appropriate.

Reading Informational Text, Standard 5.2

Determine two or more main ideas of a text and explain how they are supported by key details; summarize the text.

This standard requires that students are able to distinguish between superordinate and subordinate ideas, determining which ideas or information supports and which are supported. Linguistically, this may involve signal words or phrases (e.g., There are three ways in which . . . One reason for . . . ) or knowledge of the structure of some informational texts (e.g., commonly, a paragraph or book section opens with a claim, followed by evidence; often main ideas are stated in headings or subheadings, and the information that follows contains key details). Finally, to summarize, students must be able to combine related ideas and cull out the most important information in the context of their purposes for reading. Unlike narrative text, which is typically chronological, recalling individual facts will not necessarily trigger memory of other facts. For example,
remembering that Little Red Riding Hood cut through the woods to get to her grandmother’s house might prompt the memory that she met someone in the woods. However, remembering that camels have long eyelashes might not trigger memory of information related to what they eat. Therefore, the ability to mentally categorize information by main idea and supporting details plays a significant role because remembering that the text talked about where camels live, what they look like, and what they eat (all main ideas) might prompt memory and retrieval of specific details in each category, such as they have long eyelashes, short fur, and are usually the same color as the sand.

Like the previous standard, kindergarteners are expected to carry out their version of the standard, identifying a main topic and retelling key details, with the support of the teacher. First graders are expected to do the same, but independently. Second graders, who are presumably reading longer and more complex texts, are expected to identify main topics both for a whole text, as well as for individual paragraphs within the text. Third graders have the added expectation of explaining how the details they recount support the main idea—which entails both use of complex language to link ideas and an understanding of the perspective of the audience, whether they are readers or listeners. Fourth graders are expected to do the same, but also to summarize the text, as a whole.

Informational text presents an interesting case when we think about identifying main and supporting ideas and summarizing. Comprehension of informational text, perhaps much more so than comprehension of narrative or other genres, is a product of textual, reader, and task factors. Task, or purpose for reading, has a particularly strong influence on which elements of text students select as most important or include in a summary. If two children both read an informational text on ancient Egypt for enjoyment, the main ideas may be largely dictated by what each finds most interesting. If a third child reads that same text with the purpose of discovering the lineage of King Tut, the main idea she draws from the text (ideally) will relate to that specific subtopic. Similarly, summaries of text will vary based on purpose for reading and, in some cases, which segments of text are read—one of the advantages of well-designed informational texts is that a reader in search of specific information does not have to read the entire text, but rather can use navigational features (i.e., indices, tables of contents, and headings) to strategically read only the relevant segments.

The techniques that we might use to teach this standard vary with the purpose of reading, as well. With that caveat in mind, one way in which we might instruct students is by using a strategy called “3-2-1,” which, depending on the amount of information provided in the text, can be useful when reading for enjoyment, general information, or specific information. In this strategy, children are asked, postreading, to use their own words to identify three things that they discovered, two interesting things, and one question that they still have. If students are doing a more focused read, they might identify, for example, three things that bears need to survive, two things that endanger bears, and one surprising fact related to bear survival mechanisms. The purpose of this strategy is to actively engage children with the text and scaffold them as they learn to identify main ideas relevant to their purpose for reading—a hallmark of skilled reading.

**Reading Informational Text, Standard 5.3**

Explain the relationships or interactions between two or more individuals, events, ideas, or concepts in a historical, scientific, or technical text based on specific information in the text.

This standard, in particular, addresses the necessity of using text structure to aid in the understanding of text. As mentioned above, unlike narrative text, which is typically written chronologically, the structure of informational text can vary, and can be, among others, chronological, compare/contrast, cause and effect, main idea and details, or a list of attributes. Therefore, effectively defining the relationships between pieces of information
usually entails that the reader recognizes the structure being used for the particular text and uses that information to understand the connections between the different ideas in the text. For example, in a compare/contrast structure, you can expect to find information about each of the two topics (e.g., crocodiles and alligators) organized topically (e.g., what they eat, what they look like, where they live), as opposed to a section about each animal. In a text on the same topic, but utilizing a main idea and supporting detail structure, you might expect to first read about one animal, and then the other. In the latter case, to explain the relationship between the two, the reader would have to first understand the text in the format in which it is presented, realize that it doesn’t explain how the two are related, and then mentally reorganize the information into a more amenable structure, such as compare/contrast.

Students begin to build their capacity for this standard in kindergarten, starting with the expectation that, with support, they explain connections between just two individuals, events, ideas, or pieces of information presented in a text; first graders do the same, but independently. Second graders are expect to describe one way in which several events, ideas, concepts, or steps are related; and third graders are expected to do so using specific signal words related to time, sequence, and cause/effect. The aim of the fourth-grade standard is much more focused on cause/effect relationships, specifically asking students to include information explaining both what happened and why (e.g., a shift in tectonic plates can cause an earthquake). Linguistically, to meet the demands of this standard across the grades, students must attain productive and receptive mastery of vocabulary concepts such as same and different (compare/contrast structure), chronology (chronological structure), and causation (cause-effect structure). For examples of words and phrases that signal that each of these structures is being used, see Table 3.

This standard provides an excellent opportunity to teach children, as they read, to think like writers (which in turn can also help them write like a reader—making their texts more comprehensible). Children do not need to guess how two or more elements of a text are connected; the author leaves very intentional clues—typically in the form of the signal words noted in Table 3. One way in which children can be taught to recognize and use these clues is by reading aloud to children and pointing them out using the think-aloud procedure described in the beginning of this section. In addition, anchor charts (large charts with frequently used information, derived from common experiences or familiar texts) to which students can refer for reminders on the structures signaled by different cue words may also be helpful. In this case, an anchor chart might closely resemble Table 3. When integrating the use of a think-aloud and an anchor chart, a teacher might say something like, “Oh, listen: Alligators and crocodiles may look a lot alike, but they are actually very different. That sentence makes me think that this book is going to be a compare/contrast book because the author used the words alike and different. OK. As I read, I’m going to listen for ways in which they are the same and different because I know that good readers use what they know about how the author organized a text to help readers organize their thinking about that text. If this is a compare/contrast book, what other clue words should I be listening for that will tell me when the author is comparing or contrasting alligators and crocodiles? Let’s look at our anchor chart and see what words gave us those clues in other compare/contrast books.”

Reading Informational Text,
Standard 5.8

Explain how an author uses reasons and evidence to support particular points in a text, identifying which reasons and evidence support which points(s).

This standard, again, draws attention to the structures used in informational text. Recognizing the rhetorical moves made by the author is one way in which young readers both plan to interpret print and learn to organize their own writing. This standard is also somewhat dependent on the previous two standards dis-
cussed because students must use their knowledge of text structure to identify main and supporting ideas before they can explain how the author used reasons and evidence to support particular points. Although the underlying skills and knowledge (linguistic and otherwise) are very similar to those in the other two standards, the ways in which students are expected to use them are very different—which is important to note because we know that it is often difficult for students to apply knowledge in contexts that differ from those in which it was learned.17

Kindergarten and first graders are expected, with and without teacher support, respectively, to “identify the reasons an author gives to support points in a text.” Second graders are then to describe, specifically, how the reasons support particular points made. By the end of third grade, students are expected to describe how parts of a text (i.e., sentences and paragraphs) are related to each other. In the case of this standard, there is very little substantive difference between the fourth- and fifth-grade standards, other than the fourth-grade standard does not include the last segment of the fifth-grade standard (“identifying which reasons and evidence support which points”).

One method we can use to teach children to think about information in these ways as they read is through the use of graphic organizers. Graphic organizers make spatial/visual and logical connections between pieces of information. For example, a graphic organizer depicting the relationship between claims and evidence used by kindergarteners and first graders (with appropriate teacher scaffolding) might look something like Fig. 2. As the standard becomes more complex, a graphic organizer that elicits both main ideas and relationships between ideas in a text could be used to scaffold thinking about those connections (e.g., Fig. 3). There are two cautions to the use of graphic organizers. First, the organizers themselves do not teach. Use of the graphic organizer should be scaffolded via a gradual release of control, beginning with the teacher modeling both use of the graphic organizer and the thought processes used in determining which information to include at which points. Second, it is important to note that using graphic organizers is not an end unto itself—rather, we need to teach children that using graphic organizers helps teach their brains how to organize information in ways that makes it easier to understand and remember. After practicing quite a bit on paper, students will eventually be able to go through these thought processes in their heads.

Reading Informational Text, Standard 5.9

Integrate information from several texts on the same topic in order to write or speak about the subject knowledgeably.
This is perhaps the most complex and difficult standard discussed in this article. Referencing multiple sources before making an informational speech or writing a report of some sort is not a new idea. However, this standard pushes students to think deeply about the connections, and perhaps contradictions, in what they read. To meet this standard, fifth graders must be able to accurately obtain information from a variety of texts, compare and

Figure 2  Graphic organizer depicting claim-evidence relationships.

Figure 3  Graphic organizer depicting relationships between text segments.
contrast that information, sort it into categories, and summarize learning. This task is made even more demanding in light of new standards on source attribution that require students to be able to do things such as, “gather relevant information from print and digital sources; summarize or paraphrase information in notes and finished work, and provide a list of sources” (Writing Standard 5.8). Linguistically, students need to be able to understand cues as to the structure of texts (e.g., words such as whereas signal comparison and contrast, if–then phrases signal cause and effect structures) to accurately extract meaning from them. They also need to be able to use those types of words and phrases to accurately portray the relationships between the information that they are sharing (see standard Writing Standard 5.2 for specific demands for use of linking phrases and use of domain-specific language). In addition, combining pieces of information to better convey meaning or improve the piece stylistically entails knowledge of how to use language to expand, combine, and reduce sentences (Language Standard 5.3), a difficult skill for many children, but one which will likely be even more challenging for students already identified as having difficulty with language.

Again, as demanding as this standard seems, it is important to remember that the expectation is not that this will happen overnight. Beginning in kindergarten, the foundation is being laid. Our youngest students are expected, with prompting and support, to be able to identify similarities and differences between two texts on the same topic, and first graders are expected to do the same, independently. By second grade, students are expected first to identify the most important points in two texts on the same topic, and then to compare and contrast them, and third graders are expected to do the same, but also compare and contrast key details. Finally, in fourth grade, students are asked not only to compare and contrast two texts, but to integrate the information to write or speak about it. So, by the time students reach fifth grade, the majority of instruction should be focused on making the shift from integrating information from two texts to integrating information from several texts, a much more narrow focus.

To integrate information culled from multiple texts, students need to be able to organize that information in a way in which they can see the connections. The Comprehension Windows Strategy is one way in which students can physically connect pieces of related information from multiple sources, without losing track of the origins of each. First, students are provided with a prop: a modified file folder, one side of which has two cuts, running from the edge of the folder to the middle fold. The modified folder is then used a bit like a lift-the-flap book. Each of the three flaps is labeled, by the teacher or students, with a topic relevant to the task at hand. For example, a student writing a report about an animal might use “habitat,” “food,” and “physical appearance” as his or her categories. As students gather pieces of information from various sources, they write them down on sticky notes and place them under the appropriate flap (e.g., a note about skunks being black and white would go under the “physical appearance” flap). To keep track of sources, students write the bibliographic information requested by the teacher for each source on a reference list, on or attached to the folder, itself. Each source is written next to a number, and that number is also recorded on any sticky note used to take notes from that source. Finally, when the student is ready to write, he or she can use the sticky notes with the categories as main ideas (e.g., topic sentences, section headings, etc.) and the sticky notes under each flap as supporting details. During the prewriting stage, the notes themselves can be rearranged multiple times as writers think about the connections between them and the most logical order for presentation. This strategy was originally used in grades 3 through 6, but could be easily tailored to the needs of younger students by doing things such as using a larger version in whole- or small-group lessons, decreasing the demands of source attribution, using fewer categories, or encouraging pictorial notes.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, two challenges for SLPs will be addressed. First, all individuals involved in the education of children must rethink how we define the phrase “my kids” in the education
field. For teachers, this has traditionally meant the students in their class; for principals, the students in their buildings; and for social workers, occupational therapists, physical therapists, speech and language pathologists, and other specialists, the students on their caseload. Although this may have worked at some point, the nation is moving toward a model of education that is much more interdisciplinary. This entails all professionals working with children collaboratively, each discipline adding their expertise. It takes a village to raise a child and it is time to rally the villagers, each with their own specialized knowledge and skills, to raise our children. Teachers are being asked to teach about language in ways that are often much more in-depth than required by previous standards documents, and SLPs are needed to share their knowledge of best practices in teaching language with teachers so that they can apply them in classroom settings. We need teachers to keep the lines of communication open with SLPs about the new demands for language in the classrooms so that SLPs can determine how to best support students receiving services. We need administrators to recognize the wealth of resources represented in their staffs and structure and support opportunities for them to do what they do best—teach (in this case, teach each other).

The second, though related, challenge is for SLPs to find creative ways to expand their influence. It is unlikely that these standards will result in additional funding to hire more SLPs. Increased language demands, at least in the short term, are also not likely to reduce caseloads. This presents something of a dilemma because increasing your influence in the classroom via actually spending more time there is likely to be difficult. Instead, SLPs need to find creative ways to help teachers channel their expertise. For example, an SLP might volunteer to lead a brief professional development session at a staff meeting, send out a weekly teaching tip via email, or invite a teacher to observe a session as a particular standard with which he or she is struggling is addressed. The particular ways in which SLPs support teachers and children may vary; the important thing is to be proactive and seek out practical ways in which to share expertise.

Change is difficult, but necessary. It is frustrating for everyone in the field of education when it feels like the sands are shifting under our feet and we are being asked to do more, often with less support and resources. However, change can also be inspiring and exhilarating. For example, the focus on linguistic demands in the CCSSs, for many states, represents a shift in focus in response to recognition of the important role that linguistic skills play in students’ learning and abilities to succeed in the realms of higher education and the working world. In this article, the standards for informational text that are particularly demanding in terms of language use have been presented, but the CCSSs also include an entire section at each grade level specifically devoted to language—inclusive of the things that SLPs have been focusing on for years. State by state, educators, administrators, policy makers, and other important stakeholders are recognizing the importance of SLPs’ contribution to education, not only for students with identified needs or disabilities, but for all children, which is certainly a change in the right direction.

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