

## **LRA Position Paper Reading and Writing in All Content Areas**

**Adopted January 10, 2015**

Reading and writing in all content areas, also known as *content literacy*, provides a way for students to review their own learning, organize their thinking, evaluate their understanding, and demonstrate their knowledge through meaningful communications with real audiences. As the teacher shifts from one subject area to another within the school day, students must tap into entirely different sets of vocabulary, text structures, and background knowledge. They must learn to write in many styles, applying a myriad of conventions and rules to match the purpose of the task.

Direct, explicit instruction – with special attention to vocabulary, reading comprehension, writing, and sharing ideas with others – is necessary to develop the skills required to meet the demands of content mastery. The Louisiana Reading Association believes that incorporating reading and writing into all content areas is not an add-on but reflects a commitment to helping students achieve mastery of Common Core State Standards and become independent, lifelong thinkers and learners. With appropriate instruction, students as young as kindergarten age can use literacy to support their learning in the content areas.

Research indicates that young children, given appropriate opportunity and instruction, can be successful with informational text. Even young children can:

- learn content from informational text;
- understand and retell informational texts;
- learn about the language, text structures, and access features of informational texts
- respond to and discuss informational texts; and
- write informational texts.

Moreover, young children often prefer informational texts and are more interested in the topics found in these texts (Duke, 2003). In addition, educational publishers have provided well-written informational texts that can be used both during literacy instruction and to supplement the textbooks used in content area classrooms.

### **Reading in the Content Areas**

Comprehension strategies help students construct meaning from text. These strategies are instructional practices that combine reading, writing, and thinking with content understandings. In addition, strategy use by students enables independent strategic reading and writing processes. The use of direct, explicit instruction in comprehension strategies advances both content-area achievement and literacy development. These strategies include:

- Summarizing;
- Asking and answering questions;
- Paraphrasing;
- Word learning; and
- Finding the main idea.

Teachers have an obligation to help students navigate informational texts, during literacy and content area lessons. The following table (Hoyt, Mooney, & Parkes, 2003) illustrates some of the many features of informational texts that students need to recognize, understand, and use during reading and content lessons.

<b>ACCESS FEATURES</b>	<b>WHAT STUDENTS NEED TO KNOW</b>
Table of contents, index, glossary, and headings/subheadings	How to quickly and efficiently glean information and make decisions about what to read
Bold, colored, or italicized print	Why authors use these to highlight text
Charts, diagrams, maps, drawings, and other forms of visual literacy	How to access and interpret the information in combination with the written text
Photographs	How to look for detail, draw conclusions, and connect photograph with the written text
Captions, labels, and continuous text	How to read and integrate this information
<b>LANGUAGE FEATURES</b>	<b>WHAT STUDENTS NEED TO KNOW</b>
Language choice and text organization	How the author’s purpose and subject matter affect these features
Specialized language	The different ways this is introduced and explained
Nonfiction language structures (cause/effect, problem/solution, compare/contrast, descriptive sequence)	Why the author chose to convey the particular information through these structures and the language that often describes their use
Organization of the content	How to recognize and use organizational patterns to predict and confirm

Using the table above, teachers can communicate how they navigate informational texts during modeled and shared reading tasks and during content area instruction. Students can then apply their knowledge of how to read informational texts during guided reading, independent reading, and content area learning.

### **Writing in the Content Areas**

Writing activities are essential learning experiences and should be a part of every teacher’s routine practice. Research shows that combined instruction in reading and writing leads to improvements in content retention and creation of meaning. The Southern Regional Education Board (2004) recommends, and the Louisiana Reading Association supports, three types of writing activities – *writing to learn*, *writing to demonstrate learning*, and *authentic writing* – to help students develop their writing skills and content understandings. These types of writing are not necessarily discrete and disconnected from one another. For example, a student studying the community may write about what he recalled after listening to a guest speaker (writing to learn), write a brochure about particular community landmarks (writing to demonstrate learning), and write a story about a time he visited one of the community landmarks (authentic writing).

### **Writing to Learn**

The purpose of writing to learn is for students to capture and express their thoughts, ideas, and questions about the content taught. When students are writing to learn, their attention focuses more on ideas than on “correctness.” Writing to learn emphasizes what is said (new ideas and concepts) rather than how it is said (correct spelling, grammar, and usage). Often, less structured and more informal writing to learn can take forms such as journals, summaries, responses to oral or written questions, observation logs, learning logs, free writing, and notes. Even our youngest children can use written forms, utilizing drawings and invented spelling, to show what they are, or are not, understanding in relation to the content the teacher is teaching.

## **Writing to Demonstrate Learning**

When writing to demonstrate learning, students convey what they have learned, how they have synthesized information, and what new understandings they have constructed. The purpose is for students to show what they know about the content and to make their knowledge understandable to an audience for a specific purpose. Some common examples of ways in which young students can write to demonstrate learning include brief reports, constructed response and short answer items, brochures, letters, and posters. In addition, teachers of students in kindergarten through grade three can complete shared writing activities that allow students to contribute what they have learned to a whole class written piece.

## **Authentic Writing**

Authentic writing asks students to synthesize, analyze, or evaluate what they have learned in order to communicate with a wider audience, usually outside the classroom. It is written with a specific, authentic purpose with awareness of authentic readers, in real-world forms such as short stories, letters, brief speeches, poems, memoirs, brochures, and reviews. Students follow the recursive steps of the writing process: prewriting, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing. For young children, it is expected that students will need assistance at the publishing stage to ensure that their final products have conventional spelling and mechanics.

## **Our Position**

It is the position of the Louisiana Reading Association that reading and writing must be integrated in all content areas. Informational texts comprise the majority of reading and writing done by adults and represent the majority of passages on standardized tests. Therefore, it is the responsibility of all teachers to ensure that students develop competencies as they read and write informational texts in math, social studies, science, and other content areas. The skills and strategies that students learn in the ELA classroom are not just practiced during reading and writing instruction, they also are applied in all academic disciplines. This is clearly to the benefit of all students throughout Louisiana.

## **References**

- Duke, N. (2003). Informational text? The research says, "Yes!" In L. Hoyt, M. Mooney, & B. Parkes (Eds.) *Exploring informational texts: From theory to practice* (pp. 2-7). Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
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