

Deciding on Learning Content

*Increasing Student Achievement
Advancing Teacher Practice*



About this document: This document is designed to guide a teacher's SLO development specifically with regard to the element of learning content. It contains a four-step protocol for thinking through this important element and an example of how a teacher might engage in this protocol.

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As confirmed in research, the element of learning content is vital to an SLO. It truly anchors the SLO by providing the content to measure, staging the interval during which strategies are employed, and setting up the level of growth students will attain for the standards. Below is a guide to support the selection of focused, coherent, and pivotal learning content.

1. Begin by looking at the entire set of applicable course standards.

➤ Scan the document(s)

- Becoming familiar with the entire scope of content for the course is important, along with any accompanying narrative. Note how the standards are structured (e.g., broad headings, subsection headings, areas of emphasis) and referenced (e.g., letters, numbers, sub-bullets).

2. Analyze the importance of the standards through two lenses:

➤ Content Needs (the “timeless”)

- What fundamental standards must be mastered by students in this course?
- What have I typically found during the years to be difficult but important content for students to master?
- How can I best prepare students for deeper learning in subsequent courses for this content area?

➤ Current Student Needs (the “timely”)

- Have I broadly assessed my students in all of the various areas for this course?
- What are the current needs my students?
- What do students’ baseline assessment results demonstrate as specific areas of need for students?

3. Select focused, coherent, and pivotal standards that will both ensure students have a strong foundation in the course, and are areas of needs for the students. In ELA, create “dovetailed” standards that combine the content standards in a meaningful way.

➤ Focused

- Is the selection too narrow or broad in scope?
- Can I measure all of these standards in my baseline and summative assessments?

➤ Coherent

- Have I linked the selection to other aspects of the course of study as appropriate?
- Is there a common theme or interrelatedness connecting these standards?

➤ Pivotal

- Are the standards important from a perspective of content need and student need?
- Have I balanced these two perspectives appropriately to warrant this focus?

4. Craft a rationale.

➤ Reflect on the above steps

- Think back to your analyses above. Tell why these standards are focused in terms of quantity, coherent in terms of their relationship to one another, and pivotal from a perspective of both content need and current student need.

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The following is a systematic approach to how a teacher will select the learning content.

1. Begin by looking at the entire set of applicable course standards.

➤ Scan the document(s)

- The teacher looks at the *Missouri Learning Standards for English Language Arts*. He knows there are six grade-specific strands to the standards rooted in anchor standards: Reading Standards for Literature, Reading Standards for Informational Text, Reading Standards for Foundational Skills, Writing Standards, Speaking and Listening Standards, and Language Standards. The narrative sections, such as the introduction along with the charts for language progressions and text complexity, add to the understanding of the course content.

2. Analyze the importance of the standards through two lenses:

➤ Content Needs (the “timeless”)

- Literacy is important to everyday life and the expectations have really been elevated in our new standards. I know one of the shifts in ELA is to infuse more informational texts at the early grades.
- Students often struggle with aspects of reading comprehension, and given the increase in text complexity throughout ELA standards across the grades, this will be particularly important to focus on, "selecting texts using both quantitative and qualitative measures"
- In our new standards there are shifts needed, such as practicing regularly with complex texts, using evidence from texts, and building knowledge through nonfiction.
- By ensuring students perform at the new and higher levels of text complexity for my grade level; I will be helping them tackle progressively more complex texts in the future.

➤ Current Student Needs (the “timely”)

- Our school-wide diagnostic assessment from this year and our summative assessment from last year both measure all strands of ELA, except speaking.
- I have observed during my first month with students need more practice and guided support with their oral language and listening skills. Overall, my students need to engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade level topics and texts, building on building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly. Our reading scores stand out as the lowest area that our students need the most help with—even more than math.
- The baseline results (which are pulled from our diagnostic assessment data) show a clear need in the area of reading. Specific to literature, we need to focus on characters, story structure, and vocabulary. With regard to informational texts, the lowest scores show a need in the areas of connections, text structure, and key ideas.

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The following are several examples of selected learning content using the protocol from page 2.

3. Select focused, coherent, and pivotal standards that will both ensure students have a strong foundation in the course, and are areas of needs for the students.

- **Grade 3 ELA:** Ask and Answer Questions to Clarify Meaning
Pivotal Standards - RL.3.1, RI.3.1, W.3.5, SL.3.3, SL.3.1, L.3.1, L.3.4

Ask and answer questions of a speaker and engage in collaborative discussions on topics and texts. Then, read literary and informational texts on the same topic, ask and answer questions of the text to clarify meaning while referring explicitly to the text and specific words and phrases. With guidance and support from peers and adults, plan, revise and edit writing while demonstrating a command of conventions.

- **Grade 8 ELA:** Argumentative
Pivotal Standards – RI.8.8, W.8.1, W.8.8, SL.8.2, SL.8.3, L.8.4, L.8.1

Using various formats, gather information from speaker/s to evaluate the argument and its specific claims focusing on evidence to support the claim and clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words or phrases. Analyze the purpose of the information gathered from the speaker/s to compose an original argument while demonstrating a command of conventions.

- **Grade 8 ELA:** Narrative
Pivotal Standards – RL.8.4, RL.8.5, W.8.3, SL.8.1, L.8.4, L.8.1

Through collaborative discussion, analyze the structure of two or more literary texts and determine the meaning of words and phrases as well as the author’s use of language (figurative & connotative). Use the analysis as a model to develop a narrative (real or imagined experiences) text and demonstrate a command of conventions.

- **Grade 9-10 ELA**
Pivotal Standards - SL.9-10.1, RI.9-10.8, RI.9-10.1, L.9-10.5, W.9-10.1, L.9-10.1 Additional standards to consider incorporating over the course of the year: RI.9-10.6, RI.9-10.5, SL.9-10.3

Through collaborative discussion, evaluate an argument and its specific claims in a text focusing on textual evidence as it supports a claim and the author’s use of language (figurative and meaning nuances) while composing an original argument that displays a command of conventions.

4. Craft a rationale.

➤ **Reflect on the above steps**

- The selection(s) above focuses on critical aspects of English Language Arts that are emphasized by our district and school priorities. Student abilities in these standards have so far proven to be lacking by quite a bit more than in previous years. Focusing on these standards will provide our students the needed opportunity to make up important ground as we close the gap on these standards.