

PARCC MODEL CONTENT FRAMEWORKS

for ELA/LITERACY

October 2011



INTRODUCTION TO THE PARCC MODEL CONTENT FRAMEWORKS FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS/LITERACY

As part of its proposal to the U.S. Department of Education, the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) committed to developing Model Content Frameworks for English language arts/literacy (ELA/Literacy) to serve as a bridge between the Common Core State Standards and the PARCC assessments.¹

The PARCC Model Content Frameworks were developed through a state-led process including ELA content experts in PARCC member states and members of the Common Core State Standards writing team. The Model Content Frameworks are voluntary resources offered by PARCC to help *curriculum managers* and *teachers* as they work to implement the standards in their states and districts. They illustrate one of a number of ways the standards could be organized over the course of the school year and are designed with the following purposes in mind:

- supporting implementation of the Common Core State Standards
- informing the development of the PARCC assessments in grades 3-11, including aligned materials such as item specifications and assessment blueprints.

Connections to Assessment

The proposed PARCC Assessment System will be designed to measure knowledge, skills, and understandings essential to achieving college and career readiness. In ELA/Literacy, these include the following areas as defined by the standards:

- *Reading complex texts*: This requires students to read and comprehend a range of grade-level complex texts, including texts from the domains of ELA, science, history/social studies, technical subjects, and the arts. Because vocabulary is a critical component of reading comprehension, it will be assessed in the context of reading passages. Both close analytic reading and comparing and synthesizing ideas across texts are expected.
- *Writing effectively when analyzing and responding to sources*: This requires students to demonstrate the interrelated literacy activities of reading, gathering evidence about what is read, and analyzing and presenting that evidence in writing.
- *Conducting and reporting on research*: This expands on “writing using sources” to require students to demonstrate their ability to gather resources, evaluate their relevance, and report on information and ideas they have investigated (i.e., to conduct research to answer questions or to solve problems).
- *Speaking and listening*: This requires students to demonstrate a range of interactive oral communication and interpersonal skills, including (but not limited to skills) necessary for making

¹ The Model Content Frameworks, from grade 3 through grade 11, align with the PARCC Assessment System for those grades. A companion document with model content frameworks for kindergarten to grade 2 will be written in 2012.

formal presentations, working collaboratively, sharing findings, and listening carefully to the ideas of others.

- *Language use for reading and writing:* This requires students to have a strong command of grammar and spoken and written academic English.

The importance of these skills is reflected in the emphasis the Model Content Frameworks place on students needing regular opportunities to grapple with the close analytic reading of grade-level complex texts and to construct increasingly sophisticated responses in writing. The Model Content Frameworks therefore provide a helpful guide in preparing students for the proposed PARCC assessments.

Structure of the Model Content Frameworks for English Language Arts/Literacy

The Model Content Framework for each grade level (grades 3-11) is divided into four sections:

1. Narrative Summary of the ELA Standards,
2. The Model Content Framework Chart,
3. Key Terms and Concepts for the Model Content Framework Chart, and
4. Writing and Speaking and Listening Standards Progressions Charts.

As described below, the four sections capture the key priorities within the standards for reading (including text complexity and foundational skills), writing, speaking and listening, and language (including vocabulary). These priorities reflect the extensive research basis for the standards found in [Appendix A](#) of the Common Core State Standards. ***These priorities will also be reflected on PARCC assessments.***

Section 1: Narrative Summary of the ELA Standards

The first section highlights the big ideas from the ELA/Literacy standards for grades 3–5 and the ELA standards for grades 6–11. This succinct overview of the standards sets the stage for Section 2: The Model Content Framework Chart.

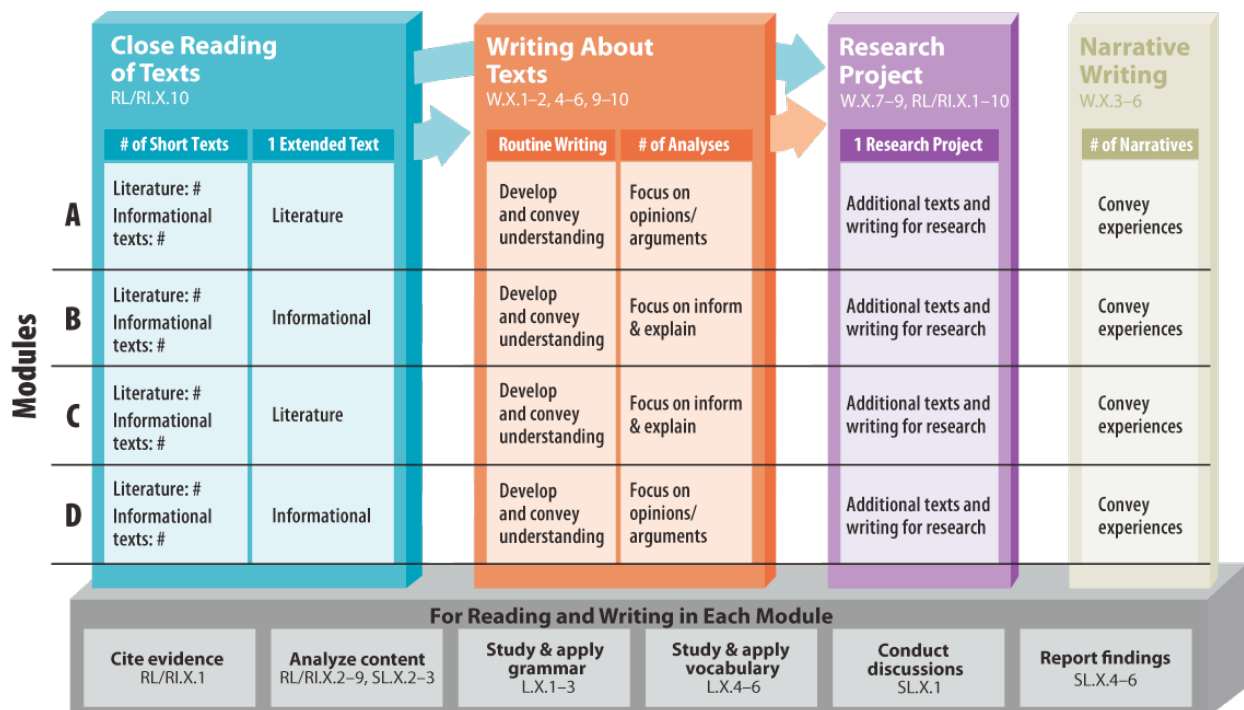
Section 2: The Model Content Framework Chart

The second section includes the Model Content Frameworks Chart (found in each grade-level framework) showing how the standards for each grade could be organized based on the key priorities identified by the standards and intended for the PARCC assessments. The Model Content Frameworks Chart has four instructional modules—A, B, C, D—that include the knowledge and skills students will learn and apply over the course of the year. The chart is meant to illustrate and provide context for the standards, ***but not replace the standards themselves.*** It is one way of organizing the standards, and equally successful models could be based around semesters, trimesters, or other school schedules.

The Model Content Frameworks Chart reflects the integrated nature of reading, writing, and research (as indicated by the arrows illustrating the connections among them). This is why within each module, students read and analyze a suggested number and type of texts (literature or informational) and then write about those texts (either to express an opinion/make an argument or inform/explain). In addition, a research task based on close, analytical reading and writing appears in each module, as does narrative writing. As indicated by the bar that stretches across the full chart, reading, writing, and research rest on

a fundamental skill set that includes citing evidence, analyzing content, using correct grammar, acquiring and applying vocabulary, conducting discussions, and reporting findings.²

Sample Model Content Framework Chart



It is important to note that the Model Content Frameworks allow educators the flexibility to order the modules and the content within the modules in any way that suits their desired purposes. Because the knowledge and skills embedded across the four modules address all the standards for a given grade level, the order in which the four modules may be used is not critical. What changes from module to module is the focus and emphasis on the types of texts read and written about; what remains constant across all four modules is the cultivation of students’ literacy skills in preparation for college and career readiness as well as the proposed PARCC assessments.³

Section 3: Key Terms and Concepts for the Model Content Framework Chart

This section explains the elements that appear within the Model Content Framework Chart. As noted above, these elements not only play a key role within the standards, but also reflect critical priorities that will be addressed within the PARCC Assessment System.

Reading complex texts: The Model Content Frameworks highlight the importance of focusing on the close, sustained analysis of complex text.⁴ A significant body of research links the close reading of

² In grades 3–5, the charts also reference the Foundational Skills in Reading.

³ It should be noted that while the modules above articulate a baseline of essential knowledge and skills derived from the standards, they do not intend to limit the types of texts educators may use.

⁴ Complex text is typified by a combination of longer sentences, a higher proportion of less-frequent words, and a greater number and variety of words with multiple meanings. In higher grade levels, complex text involves higher levels of abstraction, more subtle and multidimensional purposes, and a wider variety of writing styles—all of which place greater demands on working memory. Research is under way to develop clear, common definitions for measuring text complexity that can be

complex text—whether the student is a struggling reader or advanced—to significant gains in reading proficiency, and finds close reading to be a key component of college and career readiness.⁵

Close, analytic reading stresses engaging with a text of sufficient complexity directly and examining its meaning thoroughly and methodically, encouraging students to read and re-read deliberately. Directing student attention on the text itself empowers students to understand the central ideas and the key supporting details. It also enables students to reflect on the meanings of individual words and sentences; the order in which sentences unfold; and the development of ideas over the course of the text, which leads students to ultimately arrive at an understanding of the text as a whole. Close, analytic reading entails the careful gathering of observations about a text and careful consideration about what those observations taken together add up to—from the smallest linguistic matters to larger issues of overall understanding and judgment.

Reading complex text also encompasses the productive comparison and synthesis of ideas. Readers use the meaning developed through the analysis of particular words, phrases, sentences and paragraphs to elaborate on the connections among ideas across multiple texts. Once each source is read and understood, students can give attention to integrating what they have recently read with readings they have previously encountered and knowledge they have previously acquired. By drawing on relevant prior knowledge, students can make comparisons between what they have just read to previous learning and assess how the text expands or challenges that knowledge. Comparison and synthesis of ideas across multiple texts allows students to thoroughly demonstrate reading comprehension as defined by the entirety of the reading standards.

Each module in the Model Content Frameworks suggests that educators select a minimum number of grade-level-appropriate short texts of sufficient complexity for close, analytic reading as well as one extended text.⁶ While short texts might include a poem, short story, or magazine article, extended texts would include novels or book-length informational texts, a magazine with a series of related articles or stories, or even a website with multiple related pages of grade-level complex text to navigate. Choosing short texts that complement the extended text will create coherence in a module.

consistent across different curricula and publishers. The immediate recommendation is for teachers to select texts that are within the appropriate band of complexity (like those listed in [Appendix B](#) of the standards), using currently available quantitative measures, and then make keener distinctions using a blend of qualitative measures (such as a text’s levels of meaning or purpose, structure, language conventionality and clarity, and knowledge demands) to determine when to teach a given text. See [Appendix A](#) and especially the chart on pages 13 and 14 in the standards for a preliminary list of qualitative measures.

⁵ Ericcson, K. A., and W. Kintsch. 1993. The Role of Deliberate Practice in the Acquisition of Expert Performance. *Psychological Review* 100(3):363–406; Plant, E. A., et al. 2005. Why study time does not predict grade point average across college students: Implications of deliberate practice for academic performance. *Contemporary Educational Psychology* 30; Ericcson, K. A., and W. Kintsch. 1999. The Role of Long Term Working Memory in Text Comprehension. *Psychologia*; Kintsch, W. 2009. Learning and constructivism. *Constructivist Instruction: Success or failure?* eds. Tobias and Duffy. New York: Routledge; Hampton, S., and E. Kintsch. 2009. Supporting Cumulative Knowledge Building Through Reading. In *Adolescent Literacy, Field Tested: Effective Solutions for Every Classroom*, eds. Parris, Fisher, and Headley. International Reading Association; Heller, R., and C. Greenleaf. 2007. *Literacy Instruction in the Content Areas: Getting to the Core of Middle and High School Improvement*. Washington, DC: Alliance for Excellent Education; The Education Trust. 2006. *Gaining Traction, Gaining Ground: How Some High Schools Accelerate Learning for Struggling Students*; ACT. 2006. *Reading Between the Lines*.

⁶ Leveled texts that are below grade-band level in complexity are not a substitute; the standards indicate students should be reading grade-band-level, complex text. Flexibility is built in for educators to build progressions of more complex texts within grade-band levels (e.g., grades 4–5, 6–8, 9–12) that overlap to a limited degree with earlier bands, but reading text from the appropriate band level lies at the core of the Model Content Frameworks.

In lower grades, texts should reflect a range of content readings. In upper grades, other content area teachers are encouraged to consider how best to implement reading across the disciplines while retaining the appropriate mix of literary and informational texts appropriate to the grade level.⁷ To become career and college ready, students must have access to and grapple with works of exceptional content and craft that span many genres, cultures and eras both for the insights they offer and as models for students' own thinking and writing.⁸ Texts should be selected from among the best contemporary fiction and nonfiction and from a diverse range of authors and perspectives. These texts should also include classic works that have broad resonance and are alluded to and quoted often, such as foundational literary works, influential political documents, and seminal historical and scientific texts. These complex texts should allow students to draw ample evidence from them and present their analyses in writing and speaking. They should also vary in type (including new media texts), length, and density, requiring students to slow down or read more quickly depending on their purpose for reading. Not only do students need to be able to read closely, but they also need to be able to read larger volumes of text when necessary for research or other purposes.

In addition, all students need access to a wide range of materials on a variety of topics and genres in order to develop their knowledge and joy of reading. Students' classrooms and school libraries need to provide this wide array of texts to ensure that students have opportunities to independently read texts of their own choosing during and outside of the school day. Independent reading should include texts at a student's independent reading level and texts with complexity levels that are challenging and motivating.

Writing about texts: The Model Content Frameworks reflect the emphasis found in the Writing Standards that students must develop the ability to write effectively and proficiently. While narrative writing is given prominence in early grades, as the grade level increases, the standards (and therefore the Model Content Frameworks) shift the focus to writing arguments or informational reports from sources (including writing about research they have performed). Studies show that learning to present important information in an organized piece of writing helps students generate a deeper understanding of a text. Indeed, whether taking notes or answering questions about a text, or crafting a summary or an extended response regarding what they have read, students improve both their reading comprehension and their writing skills when writing in response to texts.⁹ Thus, each module includes routine writing in response to prompts designed to answer questions and even to brainstorm ideas—the type of writing critical for improving reading comprehension as well as for building writing skills. This writing can take the form of notes, summaries, learning logs, writing to learn tasks, or even a response to a short text selection or an open-ended question.¹⁰

In addition, each grade level framework addresses more formal, structured analytic writing that either advances an argument or explains an idea. The Model Content Frameworks are organized with the

⁷ In elementary grades, there is a 50/50 balance of literature and non-fiction texts, whereas in high school, informational texts are to be more prominently featured.

⁸ An extensive list of grade-level-appropriate complex texts appears in Appendix B of the standards. Though it offers numerous examples, instructors and curriculum planners are encouraged to go beyond this list to select other grade-level complex texts.

⁹ Graham, S., and M. A. Hebert. 2010. *Writing to read: Evidence for how writing can improve reading*. A Carnegie Corporation *Time to Act Report*. Washington, DC: Alliance for Excellent Education.

¹⁰ In keeping with the standards, such responses should leverage technology, expanding on more traditional modes of written expression to include using digital sources to draft, revise, and edit work and to conduct research, including evaluating websites for authenticity and credibility.

expectation that students will respond to high-quality, text-dependent prompts about what they have read by framing a debate or informing the reader about what they have learned through writing. Rigorous, text-dependent questions require students to demonstrate that they can follow the details of what is explicitly stated and make valid claims and inferences that square with the evidence in the text. These responses can vary in length based on the questions asked and tasks performed, from answering brief questions to crafting multi-paragraph responses in upper grades.

Just as the standards suggest, this should include writing under time constraints as well as engaging in longer writing projects that last several days (including possibly requiring students to make revisions to strengthen a piece of writing over multiple drafts). As a result, this array of writing tasks will prepare students for critical college and career readiness skills: presenting credible evidence from texts, crafting coherent and well-developed prose, and writing clearly with sufficient command of academic English.

Research project: The Model Content Frameworks give special prominence to research tasks, reflecting the deep connection research has to building and integrating knowledge while developing expertise in various topics. Where possible, research should connect to texts selected for close readings, requiring students to closely read and respond to additional texts. Through a progression of short research tasks, students are called upon to present their findings in a variety of modes in informal and formal contexts appropriate to the grade level (e.g., through oral presentations, argumentative or explanatory compositions, or multimedia products).

Narrative writing: In addition to the analytic and explanatory writing expected of students, the standards also reflect the need for students to write narratives.¹¹ From the importance of organization to the nuance of word choice, shaping narratives that reflect real or imagined experiences or events reinforces what students are learning elsewhere. Narratives also provide an additional opportunity for students to reflect on what they read through imaginative writing. The close attention to detail required by students to craft an effective and coherent narrative calls upon a skill set similar to that being developed by other writing tasks. As students mature as writers, their skill with narrative techniques also advances their analytic and explanatory prose. To tell an interesting story effectively or to provide an accurate account of an historical incident requires students to present vivid, relevant details to situate events in a time and place and also to craft a structure that lends a larger shape and significance to those details. As an easily-grasped and widely-used way to share information and ideas with others, narrative writing is a principal ingredient to writing forms directly relevant to college and career readiness.

For reading and writing in each module: Lastly, each module includes an explanation of the knowledge and skills that span the standards. This section of the chart emphasizes the critical role of building content knowledge by learning and using new vocabulary, engaging in focused formal and informal discussions, and reporting findings in multiple formats. As demonstrated in the standards, each of these skills is an essential element when reading and writing about texts. (In addition, for grades 3–5, students acquire and develop foundational reading skills throughout the academic year.)

Cite evidence and analyze content: The Reading and Writing Standards highlighted within the Model Content Frameworks stress that students learn to draw sufficient evidence from a range of different types of complex text from across the disciplines. For example, depending on the

¹¹ In grade school, students write narratives 35% of the time; that amount is reduced gradually to 20% in high school.

text, students may be asked to determine the main idea, the point of view, and even the meaning of words and phrases as part of gathering and analyzing evidence.

Understand and apply grammar: The Model Content Frameworks reflect the standards' expectation that students will gain a strong command of the grammar and usage of spoken and written academic English through extensive practice, which is needed to be college and career ready.¹² They call for students to be able to discern the difference between a formal and an informal speaking occasion and use appropriate diction and tone.

Understand and apply vocabulary: Encouraged in the Model Content Frameworks is a systematic approach to teaching academic vocabulary in context, giving students a sense of the connections and patterns in language and providing them with opportunities to acquire word meanings through reading and listening as well as through writing and speaking.¹³ By focusing on academic vocabulary, or Tier 2 words, students will build fluency, improve reading comprehension, and be more prepared to access a wide range of complex texts.¹⁴ Students will learn to pay attention to the impact of specific word choices when reading and choose words deliberately to shape their own writing and speaking.

Conduct discussions and report findings: Besides having intrinsic value as modes of communication, listening and speaking are necessary prerequisites of reading and writing well, and research shows that oral language competence is strongly predictive of the ease with which students learn to read and write.¹⁵ The Model Content Frameworks reinforce habits of mind that aid in the mastery of the printed word and directly target speaking and listening skills in a purposeful and systematic way. They direct students to learn how to participate effectively in real, substantive discussions around text-related topics and issues to provide them with opportunities to build confidence and extend knowledge regarding a text by connecting their ideas with those of others through reporting their findings.

Foundational reading skills: In addition to the knowledge and skills noted above, based on a substantial body of research, the Model Content Frameworks address the standards' expectation that students in grades 3–5 acquire and develop an understanding of phonics and word analysis skills and to build their

¹² Weaver, C., et al. May 2006. Grammar intertwined throughout the writing process: An “inch wide and a mile deep.” *English Teaching: Practice and Critique* 5(1):77–101.

¹³ Reflecting the latest research in vocabulary instruction, the standards divide words into three tiers: everyday words like “boat” and “red” (Tier 1), academic words like “principle” and “courage” (Tier 2), and domain-specific terminology like “photosynthesis” (Tier 3). While Tier 1 words are implicitly learned by students and Tier 3 words are terms specific to a discipline and typically defined within texts, Tier 2 words provide the critical word knowledge needed for understanding all types of texts. See Appendix A of the CCSS for a more extensive explanation of the research behind vocabulary acquisition.

¹⁴ National Institute of Child Health and Human Development. 2000. *Report of the National Reading Panel. Teaching children to read: An evidence-based assessment of the scientific research literature on reading and its implications for reading instruction.* NIH Publication No. 00-4769. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

¹⁵ Pence, K. L., and L. M. Justice. 2007. *Language development from theory to practice.* Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall; Sticht, T. G., and J. H. James. 1984. Listening and reading. In *Handbook of reading research*, eds. Pearson et al., 1:293–317. White Plains, NY: Longman.

fluency through independent reading and opportunities to analyze closely how the syntax and meaning of the text influence expression and phrasing.¹⁶

Section 4: Writing and Speaking and Listening Standards Progressions Charts

The fourth and final section includes two standards progression charts for each grade level: a Writing Standards Progression Chart and a Speaking and Listening Progression chart. The charts trace (in side-by-side fashion) the changes to the standards between the previous and current grade level. Each row of the chart is devoted to highlighting the shifts in a single standard. Below is a sample of an overview chart for Writing Standard 1 in grade 5:

Grade 4, Standard 1 (W.4.1)	Grade 5, Standard 1 (W.5.1)
<p>Write opinion pieces on topics or texts, supporting a point of view with reasons and information.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Introduce a topic or text clearly, state an opinion, and create an organizational structure in which related ideas are grouped to support the writer’s purpose. b. Provide reasons that are supported by facts and details. c. Link opinion and reasons using words and phrases (e.g., for instance, in order to, in addition). d. Provide a concluding statement or section related to the opinion presented. 	<p>Write opinion pieces on topics or texts, supporting a point of view with reasons and information.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Introduce a topic or text clearly, state an opinion, and create an organizational structure in which ideas are logically grouped to support the writer’s purpose. b. Provide logically ordered reasons that are supported by facts and details. c. Link opinion and reasons using words, phrases, and clauses (e.g., consequently, specifically). d. Provide a concluding statement or section related to the opinion presented.

Literacy Standards for Other Disciplines and the Model Content Frameworks

Central to the vision for literacy embedded within the standards and the Model Content Frameworks is that instruction in reading, writing, speaking, listening, and language is a *shared responsibility* within schools. All fields of study demand analysis of complex texts and strong oral and written communication skills using discipline-specific discourse. Since each discipline acquires, develops, and shares knowledge in distinct ways, educators in each field must take ownership of building robust instruction around discipline-specific literacy skills to better prepare students for college and careers. Accordingly, educators in all disciplines bear some responsibility for ensuring the literacy of the students in their classes. The Model Content Frameworks provide all educators with foundational ideas for incorporating disciplinary literacy skills and practice into instructional programming.

The standards for grades 3–5 include expectations regarding reading, writing, speaking, listening, and language that apply to a range of subjects, *including but not limited to English language arts*. Accordingly, in the Model Content Frameworks for grades 3–5, some texts will involve reading from across the disciplines. The standards for grades 6–12 include standards for ELA and separate but closely related literacy standards for history/social studies, science, and technical subjects. This dual set of standards reflects the primary role ELA teachers have in developing students’ literacy skills while at the same time acknowledging that teachers in other disciplines play a critical role in developing student

¹⁶ National Institute of Child Health and Human Development. 2000. *Report of the National Reading Panel. Teaching children to read: An evidence-based assessment of the scientific research literature on reading and its implications for reading instruction*. NIH Publication No. 00-4769. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.



literacy. History/social studies, science and technical subject area teachers are encouraged to review the Model Content Frameworks collaboratively with ELA teachers to coordinate literacy instruction, especially in the key areas of reading and writing.

Using the Model Content Frameworks to Support All Students

To help state and local curriculum developers and teachers support all students, the Model Content Frameworks provide foundational information necessary for the development and revision of curricular and instructional materials. It is critical in the development of these materials that all students are able to access the standards and demonstrate mastery of the skills and knowledge embedded within them. The Model Content Frameworks are therefore written to support the use of the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL). By offering curriculum developers and teachers a research-based blueprint for designing instructional materials that accommodate individual learning differences, UDL provides guidance regarding how to provide “cognitive as well as physical access to the curriculum.”¹⁷ Just as the standards and curriculum should be accessible to all students, so should the assessments that align to the standards; accordingly, the PARCC Assessment System will be designed and developed using the principles of universal design.

Some students will need additional scaffolding and coordinated interventions designed to accelerate their development toward the independent reading of grade-level complex texts. Depending on the student’s need, such interventions could include (but are not limited to) the following:

- Extended time to work with grade-level texts;
- Fluency instruction and practice;
- Phonics instruction and practice;
- Vocabulary building; and
- Practice with texts from the prior grade band of complexity to build content knowledge and strategic reading skills.

Conclusion

Guided by the above considerations, the Model Content Frameworks offered in this document present the standards in an integrated fashion that will be useful for curriculum developers and teachers alike, while also providing insight and guidance for the development of the proposed PARCC Assessment System. By systematically weaving together the standards into modules that progressively develop student understanding from grades 3 through 11, the Model Content Frameworks offer one way of envisioning how to emphasize the critical advances in the standards by focusing on essential knowledge and skills that students must develop for college and career readiness.

¹⁷ Please see the Center for Applied Special Technology (CAST) website for suggestions on how to differentiate learning for all students. The CAST website can be accessed at www.cast.org/index.html. See frequently asked questions and answers at <http://www.cast.org/udl/faq/index.html>.