

JOURNALISM IS THE NEW ENGLISH

A special report from the Colorado High School Press Association – February, 2011

Use whatever terms you wish – Media Literacy, Writing for Audience, Technical Communications, Mass Communications – but the evidence from the latest English Language Arts standards from Colorado and from the Common Core Standards is clear: journalism, and all the skills surrounding this broad area, is the ideal curricular vehicle to help our students gain 21st century skills and demonstrate them to a variety of audiences.

Prepared Graduate Competencies in Reading, Writing, and Communicating

The preschool through twelfth-grade concepts and skills that all students who complete the Colorado education system must master to ensure their success in a postsecondary and workforce setting.

* Adopted from the Colorado Academic Standards in Reading, Writing and Communicating, revised December, 2010

Prepared Graduates:

Collaborate effectively as group members or leaders who listen actively and respectfully pose thoughtful questions, acknowledge the ideas of others, and contribute ideas to further the group's attainment of an objective

Journalism courses combine both group work (in the form of editorial boards, reporting teams, publication or media staffs) and individual leaders (editorial writers, editors, directors and producers). The ability to form well-developed questions is essential in a student's education, and students are always aware that their objective is to reliably inform the audience.

Deliver organized and effective oral presentations for diverse audiences and varied purposes

Journalism courses develop the skills necessary for students to communicate with the school community, through a variety of electronic media, including websites, podcasts, broadcast programs and online video. Personal interviews are the bedrock of journalism, but the modern journalist is taught to use all the visual and aural aspects of electronic media to reach a diverse audience.

Use language appropriate for purpose and audience

Journalism courses uniquely focus on audience beyond teachers, with the goal of reaching diverse readers, viewers and listeners. The general purposes of this communication are to inform, to entertain and to persuade. At its best, journalism educates the audience, helping that audience make better decisions as citizens of our democracy.

Demonstrate skill in inferential and evaluative listening

Journalism courses stress careful, objective and skilled interviewing and note taking, to gather information and to insure the accuracy of the information. No other course can provide the regular practice in active listening and in producing inferential questions that is prompted by statements from interview subjects.

Interpret how the structure of written English contributes to the pronunciation and meaning of complex vocabulary

Journalism courses encourage vocabulary building among journalists and audience, including specialized language unique to a profession or pursuit (e.g. medical terminology, government jargon, sports terms). Students must be aware of the vocabulary level of the audience, and at times introduce new words and concepts. Students often stretch their vocabulary when interviewing expert sources and conducting research.

Demonstrate comprehension of a variety of informational, literary, and persuasive texts

Journalism courses include extensive reading of contemporary informational and persuasive texts, often literally from that day's professional press. Students regularly read non-fiction narratives, descriptive essays, analytical essays, and persuasive essays of all sorts. Journalism texts can include video media and other electronic media, and learning to synthesize such a wide variety of material is essential to journalists.

Evaluate how an author uses words to create mental imagery, suggest mood, and set tone

Journalism courses encourage clarity of imagery (through vivid descriptive writing and reading), and accuracy of mood (through well-chosen, personality-revealing direct quotations from sources). Recognizing mood and tone of sources is essential to accurate reporting, and personal opinion writing provides opportunities to explore tone in student writing. Journalism provides an avenue for students to actually make use of figurative language, syntax, diction and tone that they have studied in literature courses.

Prepared Graduates:

Read a wide range of literature (American and world literature) to understand important universal themes and the human experience

Journalism courses focus on helping students recognize universal themes in events, and provide students with a forum to explore the human experience. Student journalists, at their best, are storytellers, using literary techniques and background, to tell true stories. Journalism can provide the link between the truths of fiction and the truths of real life and real people.

Seek feedback, self-assess, and reflect on personal learning while engaging with increasingly more difficult texts

Journalism courses demand that students distribute their communication to a diverse audience, and students then receive a variety of feedback from that audience. Self-assessment and reflection are an essential part of journalism courses, along with regular analysis (often led by advisers or experienced editors) of student performance in their publications, broadcasts and other electronic communications.

Engage in a wide range of nonfiction and real-life reading experiences to solve problems, judge the quality of ideas, or complete daily tasks

Journalism courses provide a wide range of nonfiction reading and writing experiences, focused on helping readers, viewers and listeners understand an increasingly complex world, find effective ways to solve problems, and sort and evaluate a wide range of ideas. Journalism courses provide a rich array of nonfiction texts and develop student ability to produce compelling and clear nonfiction texts of all kinds.

Write with a clear focus, coherent organization, sufficient elaboration, and detail

Journalism courses are unique in their focus on clarity, coherence and observational detail. Strong writing skills lie at the heart of journalism, whether it involves print or electronic media. Most importantly, students must always write with a diverse audience in mind. The primary audience may be students, but there is a broad secondary audience of faculty and community that must be considered.

Effectively use content-specific language, style, tone, and text structure to compose or adapt writing for different audiences and purposes

Journalism courses develop student understanding of the importance of specific language (as in sports reporting or academic reporting), while using the appropriate style, tone and text structure for a particular need (e.g. an objective tone for news reporting, and a more personal tone for personal opinion columns). Students explore the use of charts, maps, and other short-form approaches for reporting that does not demand traditional text.

Apply standard English conventions to effectively communicate with written language

Journalism courses develop an appreciation of standard English in students, with the goal of clear communication with a wide audience. Journalism courses also use widely recognized style guides, such as the Associated Press Style Guide, to guarantee consistency in written and oral communication.

Implement the writing process successfully to plan, revise, and edit written work

Journalism courses emphasize the writing process, from planning coverage (individually and in groups), to establishing deadlines for reporting and drafts, to the final proofing process, emphasizing clarity, correctness of expression, and appropriate journalistic style.

Master the techniques of effective informational, literary, and persuasive writing

Journalism courses focus on developing strong informational, descriptive, analytical and persuasive writing. All those writing skills have a strong correlation to literary writing and analysis.

Discriminate and justify a position using traditional lines of rhetorical argument and reasoning

Journalism courses develop persuasive writing and thinking skills, through formal essays (editorials) and informal essays (personal opinion commentary and review writing). With a diverse audience, the importance of logic and well-reasoned appeals is paramount in successful arguments.

Articulate the position of self and others using experiential and material logic

Journalism courses provide unique opportunities for students to explore their sense of self and their relationship to a broader community through personal opinion writing, often using events of the day as the gateway to exploring larger themes.

Prepared Graduates:

Gather information from a variety of sources; analyze and evaluate the quality and relevance of the source; and use it to answer complex questions

Journalism courses demand the gathering of information from various informed sources, sorting and evaluating the information gathered, and then presenting the relevant information to readers, viewers and listeners in ways that communicate effectively with the audience. Student journalists often explore complex questions, with a focus on how those questions affect real people in a community.

Use primary, secondary, and tertiary written sources to generate and answer research questions

Journalism courses focus on answering research questions in ways that will appeal to a diverse audience, and students learn to do rich, in-depth research, utilizing a variety of sources (e.g. the Internet, published documents, experts, informed observers and participants).

Evaluate explicit and implicit viewpoints, values, attitudes, and assumptions concealed in speech, writing, and illustration

Journalism courses provide students with tools to evaluate their research, whether information comes from print or broadcast sources, the Internet, or live interview subjects.

Demonstrate the use of a range of strategies, research techniques, and persistence when engaging with difficult texts or examining complex problems or issues

Journalism courses provide a range of strategies for students to use in engaging with a diverse audience. Some reporting demands a narrative approach, while other complex reporting requires more data presentation, in the form of charts, diagrams or timelines. Reporters are asked to read and interview deeply, with the goal of providing a synthesis of opinions and facts, and to provide the audience with new insights and understanding. The very essence of reporting involves persistence: sources are often reluctant to provide information and in-depth research and analysis forces students to go beyond superficial facts and opinions

Exercise ethical conduct when writing, researching, and documenting sources

Journalism courses focus on citizenship and the rights and responsibilities contained in the U.S. Constitution, the First Amendment in particular. Knowledge of press law and ethics is key to the success of any student journalist, and those students practice that knowledge daily. The proper use of direct quotations, stressing accuracy and fairness, lies at the heart of journalism, as is the proper use of attribution of all other sourced material. Journalism courses emphasize the difference between objective reporting and opinion, and publications and broadcasts are careful to separate the objective and the subjective.

So what does all this look like in the actual English Language Arts Curriculum?

On the following pages, you will find the extracted Colorado Reading and Writing Content Standards for Ninth Grade. This report does not attempt to break down curriculum to the monthly, weekly or daily level, but does highlight the areas that are directly addressed by journalism and/or media education. You will also find occasional commentary further explaining journalism education's role in mastering skills needed by 21st Century learners.