The Academic Discourse Playbook

Introduction

On October 7, 2021, the North Carolina State Board of Education approved the Literacy Instruction Standards (LIS) as outlined in Section V of SB 387: Excellent Public Schools Act of 2021. The LIS serve as a framework for the development and alignment of curriculum and instruction for all public schools. These standards are defined as a level of quality and equity to be used consistently within core literacy instruction statewide and entered the implementation phase in all districts beginning in the 2024-2025 school year.

While both the ELA NC Standard Course of Study (NCSCOS) and LIS are aligned to the Science of Reading, the NCSCOS sets student expectations and the LIS and their associated instructional practices set expectations for teaching literacy. The LIS are organized by grade-band and can be used to ensure that all educators across North Carolina have a common understanding and delivery of literacy instruction. View the LIS for each grade-band.The NCSCOS for English Language Arts sets the expectation for students to engage in frequent, regular, and routine opportunities for composition in various modes. The LIS emphasize discussion and writing to support comprehension as a skill essential to literacy.

This Playbook
The purpose of this playbook is to provide K-12 educators with specific recommendations for increasing the frequency and efficacy of student discussion and writing to support comprehension and analysis of texts and content. This playbook highlights three recommendations, each supported by research-based strategies.

While the recommendations and strategies found within this playbook are not an exhaustive list, practices described represent research-based, high-leverage actions teachers can implement to embed discussion and writing within instruction and foster discourse-rich, interpretive, and discursive learning communities. View the External Implementation Guide to access content-area specific resources, including question and sentence frames to support academic speech and writing.

A Note on Resource Usage, Organization, and Adaptation
The hyperlinked resources within this document include both teacher-facing and student-facing materials. Some resources span multiple pages and have been intentionally sequenced to show varying levels of task complexity. This approach allows all teachers, independent of grade-level, to review and adapt resources for their students and content. All linked resources are editable within Canva or Google Docs and can be adapted as needed.

North Carolina is a local-control state, which means all decisions about curricular and instructional materials are made by individual public school units (PSUs). Prior to implementing any suggestions reflected in this resource, educators should follow their school and district's procedures/policies to ensure the content has been vetted and approved by their school and/or district leaders. Educators have autonomy to use or edit any of the suggestions provided here and should only use materials if appropriate, after receiving approval from a direct supervisor, as necessary. This material reflects example approaches; they are not official or required resources from the Department of Public Instruction.

A Note on Text Selection and Feedback
This playbook centers engaging, rigorous student discourse around grade-appropriate, complex texts. Additionally, this playbook acknowledges that academic discourse, both spoken and written, represents skills that students develop over time that benefit from teacher and peer feedback. For guidance and resources for choosing texts as stimuli for student discourse and providing timely, specific feedback to students on the development of their discourse skills, see Recommendation 2 and Recommendation 4 of The Writing Guidebook.

A Note on Technology Integration

This playbook intentionally focuses on specific instructional practices for the teaching discussion and writing to support comprehension. Since multiple technology platforms exist and are emerging that support the integration of discussion and writing, educators should seek opportunities to interweave the practices described in this playbook with appropriate and strategic digital tools where appropriate.

For AI Guidance, see the Office of Digital Teaching and Learning's [Generative AI Implementation Recommendations](#).

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