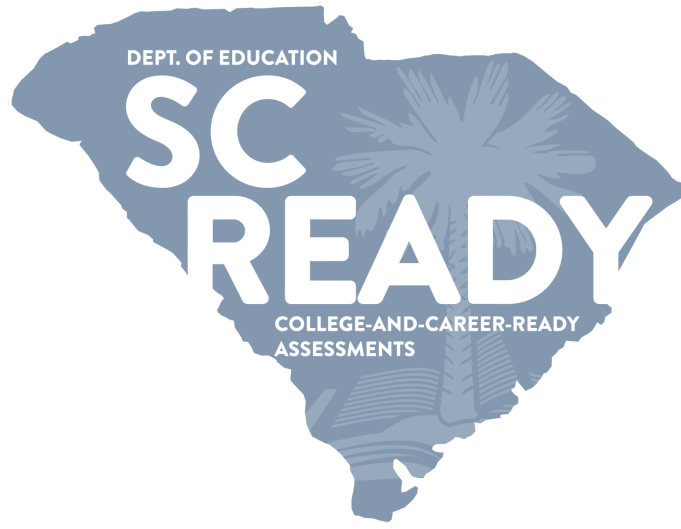




2026 Data Review Report Statewide Instructional Recommendations ELA Grade 4

Office of Assessment and Standards

Updated October 2026

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Introduction

The [South Carolina Department of Education](#) (SCDE) Office of Assessment and Standards (OAS) extends our deepest gratitude to the hard-working teachers across our state. We are especially thankful for the educators who dedicate their time to participate in our annual assessment meetings. Your collaboration is what makes these reports possible.

What is the Data Review Committee?

As part of our [Test Development Cycle](#) every year, the SCDE gathers educators from across South Carolina for virtual Data Review Meetings. This group of dedicated educators forms our *Data Review Committee*, a specialized team tasked with examining state-level, item-by-item test data to better understand student ability and identify where students are struggling with specific standards.

From Numbers to Strategies

For this report, the Committee focused on the Spring SC READY ELA Grade 4 assessment, which measures the *2024 South Carolina College- and Career-Ready ELA Standards (2024 SC CCR ELA Standards)*. While every standard is assessed on the SC READY ELA Grade 4 assessment, this report selectively highlights key standards where statewide trends point to clear, actionable recommendations for the classroom.

The Committee looks closely at the *quantitative* data, how students across the entire state responded to test items. They use these numbers to produce a *qualitative* analysis. In other words, they look at the data to figure out *why* students are struggling, and then they offer actionable, instructional recommendations on how to improve student achievement on those topics.

A Redesigned Format

Based directly on feedback from teachers across the state, we have redesigned the Data Review Reports to be more useful for your daily practice. The reports are now organized by standards and indicators. Within each section, you may find:

- **Observation:** What the data tells us about student understanding and misconceptions.
- **Historical Trends:** Years in which similar trends or observations were noted.
- **Instructional Recommendations:** Practical strategies to address learning gaps.

How to Use This Report

The goal of this report is to provide clear suggestions to improve instructional practice and inspire collaborative discussions at your school. Offered in a spirit of helpfulness and collaboration, these recommendations reflect broad, statewide trends. Because every classroom is unique, we recognize that certain identified gaps or suggestions may not align with every individual school or district.

Get Involved and Learn More

The OAS provides numerous resources for districts, schools, and teachers to help clarify the standards, understand how our assessments align with them, and make the most of test data.

Our [Assessment Quick Links for Teachers Page](#) includes the following resources for ELA educators:

- [Applications for Assessment Committees](#): Apply to Content Review Committees, Data Review Committees, and more.
- [Test Blueprints](#): Broadly outline the test construct in terms of content and rigor.
- [Assessment Specifications for Teachers](#): Guidance on how standards are assessed on SC READY (distinct from how a concept is taught).
- [Data Review Reports](#): Access older reports from various content areas.
- [Item Type Descriptions](#): Breakdown of the item formats students encounter on SC READY.
- [Sample Items](#): Grade- and content-aligned items demonstrating SC READY formats.
- [Online Tools Training \(OTT\)](#): Allows students to practice interacting with sample items in the official testing environment.
- [Information on the Text-Dependent Writing \(TDW\)](#): Scoring Guideline, Rubrics, and Sample responses.

Our [ELA Standards Page](#) includes:

- [Standards](#): The *2024 South Carolina College- and Career-Ready ELA Standards*
- [Instructional Resources](#): Support materials designed to help teachers instruct the *2024 SC CCR ELA Standards*.
- [Professional Learning Opportunities](#): District-level professional learning menus and recordings of past webinars.

Interested in Statewide Assessment Data?

[State-level assessment data](#) is published each year on our website. You can explore the [2026 SC READY Test Scores](#) directly through our online interactive tools or download full data files from the right side of the page.

Want to make an impact?

If you are interested in joining an annual assessment committee, we invite you to [apply through our website!](#)

Have a recommendation for how to make this report better?

Fill out the [Data Review Report: Statewide Instructional Strategies Feedback Form](#) and let us know how we can make this report more helpful.

Statewide Trends for ELA Grades 3-5

After reviewing operational and field test items from the Spring 2026 administration of SC READY ELA Grades 3-5, the committee identified four strengths and five areas for growth in student performance statewide.

Strengths

1. Students were consistently able to explain how characters develop and the impact of setting and/or conflict on the plot of a literary text (AOR.1.1).
2. Students were consistently able to explain the meaning of and/or impact of figurative language in a literary text (AOR.1.2).
3. Students were consistently able to determine an explicit or implied theme (AOR.2.1) and stated or implied central idea (AOR.2.2).
4. Students were consistently able to use their knowledge of affixes and/or Latin and Greek roots to determine the meaning of unknown words (AOR.9.1).

The committee noted that while students performed well in the aforementioned areas, it is of the utmost importance that teachers continue to teach the concepts and skills in the indicators listed above to their intended depth and rigor. The committee emphasized that rigorous, indicator-aligned instruction must continue in order to maintain these academic gains.

Areas for Growth

1. Students need support with determining the key details in a literary text and explaining how the key details develop the theme in a text (AOR.2.1).
2. Students need support with determining the supporting details in an informational text (AOR.2.2). For students in 4th and 5th grade, they also need support with explaining how the supporting details develop the central idea in a text.
3. Students need support with identifying an author's claim and explaining how the author uses reasons and/or evidence to support their claim (AOR.5.3). For students in 5th grade, they also need support with determining an author's argument and tracing the development of the argument.
4. Students need support with summarizing both literary (AOR.6.1a) and informational (AOR.6.1b) texts.
5. Students need support with all modes of writing (C.1.1, C.2.1, C.3.1) and especially with the planning stage of the writing process.

These areas for growth were identified as instructional needs for students in 3rd, 4th, and 5th grade. As such, the observations and instructional recommendations included in this report are targeted at supporting these needs.

NOTE: While the observations and instructional recommendations included in the 3rd, 4th, and 5th grade reports are largely the same, they have been adjusted to reflect the language of the respective grade-level indicators.

Committee Observations and Recommendations

The following is a collection of the committee's observations and instructional recommendations aimed at addressing the top five areas for growth as noted on page 2 of this report. The following is not a comprehensive list of every observation and instructional recommendation made by the committee. As such, it remains of the utmost importance that teachers continue to teach the concepts and skills in all grade-level indicators to their intended depth and rigor. For additional instructional recommendations refer to the [2025 Test Data Review Report](#). Where appropriate, connections to the concepts and skills in related indicators have been noted.

General Observations and Recommendations

General Observation #1: Ensure that students regularly read texts with varied text structures, including the literary text structures of narratives, poems, and dramas, and the informational text structures of sequence, description, cause/effect, chronological, problem and solution, and compare and contrast.

General Observation #2: Students must be explicitly taught how to make inferences. While not directly represented on the SC READY ELA 3-5 Test Blueprint, the skill of making inferences (OE.3) is embedded within all of the Applications of Reading (AOR) and Research (R) indicators. If students are not able to make inferences, they will not be able to master the concepts and skills outlined in the AOR and R indicators.

General Observation #3: Instruction should intentionally focus on using the language of the indicators. As the foundation for both instruction and assessment, regularly incorporating the language of the indicators into classroom discussions, tasks, and learning experiences helps students develop the vocabulary and conceptual understanding necessary for success.

- Use systematic, direct instruction to teach students the meaning of unfamiliar language in the grade-level indicators.
 - The committee noted that students would benefit from systematic, direct instruction around the following terms (where appropriate based on grade-level indicators): develop, development, contributes, impacts, adds meaning, relevant, central idea, supporting details, key details, point of view, perspective, opinion, claim, reasons, argument, and trace.

General Observation #4: Teachers must intentionally create opportunities across various ELA contexts (reading, writing, research, listening and speaking) for students to apply what they've learned. Much like how students are expected to represent numbers in different ways in math, students should be given the opportunity to represent their knowledge and skills in different ways within ELA.

- For example, if fourth grade students learn how to determine the supporting details in an informational text when reading (4.AOR.2.2), they should be given the opportunity to apply that skill in research when determining which information is relevant to a topic (4.R.1.3), and in writing when deciding which information to include to develop their topic (4.C.2.1b).

General Observation #5: Teachers should be assessing students in a variety of ways.

- Varied modes of assessment include: individual conferences, small group conversations and observations, whole group conversations and observations, exit slips, quick writes, sorts, games, rubrics, and tests. Tests should include items of various Depths of Knowledge (DOKs) and difficulties, as well as various item types (open-ended, fill-in-the-blank, multiple choice, etc.).

General Observation #6: Writing instruction needs to be more authentic to the writing process. Instructional recommendations to address this observation are elaborated on in the Writing section of this report.

Reading Literary Texts

AOR.6.1a

Observation: To write better summaries, students need intensive instruction on how to determine the relevant key details in a literary text. While determining key details is an instructional focus of AOR.2.1, a student’s ability to determine the relevant key details in a text greatly impacts his/her ability to summarize the text.

Historical Trends: Similar concerns identified in the [2025 Test Data Review Report](#)

Instructional Recommendation(s):

- Teach students the difference between retelling (stating events in chronological order) and summarizing (stating the most important events and information).
 - Retelling heavily relies on the use of a chronological or sequential structure to restate events. For example, retelling “The Boy Who Cried Wolf” could sound like:
 - One day, a boy was bored so he decided to play a trick on the villagers. He ran toward the village and shouted that he had seen a wolf. The villagers ran to help him, but when they arrived, they saw that there was no wolf. The boy laughed and admitted that he was only joking. A few days later, the boy was bored again and decided to play the same trick. He ran to the village again and shouted that he’d seen a wolf. Once again, the villagers rushed to help him. And so on...
 - Summarizing utilizes a combination of structures (description, cause and effect, problem and solution) to describe the significant moments in and/or outcomes of a text. For example, summarizing “The Boy Who Cried Wolf” could sound like:
 - A young boy repeatedly tricked the people around him by lying and saying a wolf was attacking his sheep. When a wolf really did attack his sheep, nobody believed the boy and nobody came to help him. As a result, the boy learned that breaking people’s trust can have serious consequences, and that it is not easy to regain trust once it’s lost.
- Ensure that students know that summarizing requires them to prioritize information. Information that should be prioritized when summarizing a literary text includes:
 - Conflict,

- Main characters,
- Most important moments/events that move the story forward, including how the characters attempt to solve the conflict, and
- Theme.
- Use mentor texts to help students understand the difference between a retelling of a literary text and a summary of a literary text.
 - As a class, first, read and then annotate a retelling of a literary text. Next, read and then annotate a summary of the same literary text. When annotating, be sure to model and verbalize your internal process for students.
 - To meaningfully annotate a text, students will have to reread the text multiple times.
 - When annotating the retelling:
 - Use one color to highlight the character(s) mentioned in the retelling.
 - Use a second color to highlight the key details in the retelling.
 - Use a third color to highlight the conflict in the retelling.
 - Write down any questions, thoughts, or connections in the margins of the retelling.
 - When annotating the summary:
 - Use the same color used to highlight the character(s) in the retelling to highlight the character(s) in the summary.
 - Use the same color used to highlight the key details in the retelling to highlight the key details in the summary.
 - Use the same color used to highlight the conflict in the retelling to highlight the conflict in the summary.
 - Use a fourth color to highlight the theme in the summary.
 - Write down any questions, thoughts, or connections in the margins of the summary.
 - Then, as a class, use the annotated retelling and summary to compare and contrast the information included in both, as well as the structure used to write both.
- Guiding questions to help students summarize literary texts include:
 - Who is the main character? Who are the main characters?
 - What problem did the main character(s) want to solve?
 - How did the main character(s) try to solve the problem?
 - What happened as a result of the main character's/characters' actions?
 - What does the author want us to learn?
 - What is the shortest way to tell what happened?

Reading Informational Texts

AOR.2.2

Observation: Students need intensive instruction on how to determine the relevant supporting details in an informational text. Ensuring that students know how to determine the relevant supporting details in a text will positively impact their ability to master the concepts and skills in AOR.4.1, AOR.5.2, AOR.6.1b, R.1.1, R.1.3, and C.2.1.

Historical Trends: Similar concerns identified in the [2025 Test Data Review Report](#)

Instructional Recommendation(s):

- After determining the central idea of a text, have students convert the central idea into a question. For example, “the benefits of recycling” could turn into “what are the most impactful benefits of recycling?”
 - Then, have students look for information in the text that directly answers the central idea-based question.
 - Information that directly answers the question is a supporting detail.
- Use a supporting details sorting activity to help students differentiate between details that an author includes to develop the central idea and details that an author includes for other purposes in an informational text.
 - Have students sort the information provided into three buckets:
 - Need to know (supporting details),
 - Cool to know (information that’s interesting, but doesn’t directly develop the central idea), and
 - Background information (information the author includes to introduce the central idea).
 - An author including background information is analogous to an author establishing the setting in a literary text.
- Use a supporting details puzzle piece sort to help students understand the connection between the central idea and the supporting details in an informational text.
 - On the front of each puzzle piece include a supporting detail and a cool to know detail or background information detail.
 - On the back of each puzzle piece include a color or part of a picture that directly connects to the central idea.
 - Students should have two or three puzzle pieces of the same shape that could fit into the puzzle, but only one of those pieces should include a supporting detail.
 - For example, students might be given two L-shaped puzzle pieces in their set. One L-shaped puzzle piece would include a supporting detail on the front. The second L-shaped puzzle piece would have a cool to know detail on the front.
 - Students must determine which puzzle pieces in their set have supporting details on the front in order to solve the puzzle.

- Once students have determined the supporting details and put the pieces together, they can turn the puzzle over to see if they have chosen correctly.
 - For example, if the back of the puzzle was supposed to all be green, but students see that one of their pieces is orange, that tells them that they choose a cool to know or background information detail.

AOR.5.3

Observation: Teach students the difference between an author’s opinion and an author’s claim. Ensuring that students have a clear understanding of the difference between an opinion and a claim will help strengthen their skills as argumentative writers (C.1.1).

Historical Trends: First identified as a concern in 2026

Instructional Recommendation(s):

- Use an opinion vs claim sorting activity to help students differentiate between an author’s opinion and an author’s claim.
 - An author’s opinion is a feeling or personal preference, while an author’s claim is a factual statement that can be supported by reasons, facts, and/or evidence.
- Use a mentor text to help students understand how authors support their claim through elaboration by using reasons, facts, and/or evidence.
 - As a class, first, read and then annotate a short argumentative text. When annotating, be sure to model and verbalize your internal process for students.
 - To meaningfully annotate a text, students will have to reread the text multiple times.
 - When annotating the text:
 - Use one color to highlight the author’s claim.
 - Use a second color to highlight the reasons the author uses to support the claim.
 - For each reason, explain how the reason supports the claim. This explanation can be written in the margins of the text, on a sticky note, in a graphic organizer, etc., but should be recorded in some way.
 - Use a third color to highlight the facts and/or evidence the author includes to support his/her reasons.
 - For each fact or piece of evidence, explain how the fact or piece of evidence supports the reason. This explanation can be written in the margins of the text, on a sticky note, in a graphic organizer, etc., but should be recorded in some way.
 - Write down any other questions, thoughts, or connections in the margins of the text.
 - Then, as a class, have students rank the reasons based on how effectively each reason supports the author's claim and/or persuades the reader to agree with or believe that claim.

- Ensure that students know that an author can make multiple claims in the same text.
 - Use a claim hunt activity to help students identify multiple claims in a text.

AOR.6.1b

Observation: To write better summaries, students need intensive instruction on how to determine the relevant supporting details in an informational text. While determining supporting details is an instructional focus of AOR.2.2, a student’s ability to determine the relevant supporting details in a text greatly impacts his/her ability to summarize the text.

Historical Trends: Similar concerns identified in the [2025 Test Data Review Report](#)

Instructional Recommendation(s):

- Teach students the difference between retelling (stating events in chronological order) and summarizing (stating the most important events and information).
 - Retelling heavily relies on the use of a chronological or sequential structure to restate events. For example, retelling a text about battles that took place in South Carolina during the Revolutionary War could sound like:
 - There were over 200 battles fought in South Carolina during the Revolutionary War. The Battle of Cowpens was fought in January 1781 in Spartanburg County. Around 2,000 Patriots fought about 1,000 British soldiers. During the battle, the Patriots faked a surrender by running away. This drew the British in closer and allowed the Patriots to surround the British and win the battle. Another battle in South Carolina was the Battle of Eutaw Springs in Orangeburg in September 1781. And so on...
 - Summarizing utilizes a combination of structures (description, cause and effect, problem and solution) to describe the significant moments in and/or outcomes of a text. For example, summarizing a text about battles that took place in South Carolina during the Revolutionary War could sound like:
 - South Carolina was the location of hundreds of battles during the Revolutionary War. Some of these battles, like the Battle of Cowpens and the Battle of Eutaw Springs, were turning points that helped the Patriots win the Revolutionary War. According to the author, even the battles the Patriots lost in South Carolina helped them eventually win the Revolutionary War.
- Ensure that students know that summarizing requires them to prioritize information. Information that should be prioritized when summarizing an informational text includes:
 - Central idea,
 - Information that supports the central idea (supporting details), and
 - Author’s perspective, author’s purpose, and/or author’s claim(s).

- Give students the opportunity to summarize informational texts, as well as literary texts, in a variety of ways, including:
 - Verbally,
 - By using a graphic organizer,
 - By using an interactive notebook,
 - By building a summary using sentence strips,
 - By filling in a partial summary, and/or
 - By independently generating a written summary from start to finish.

Writing

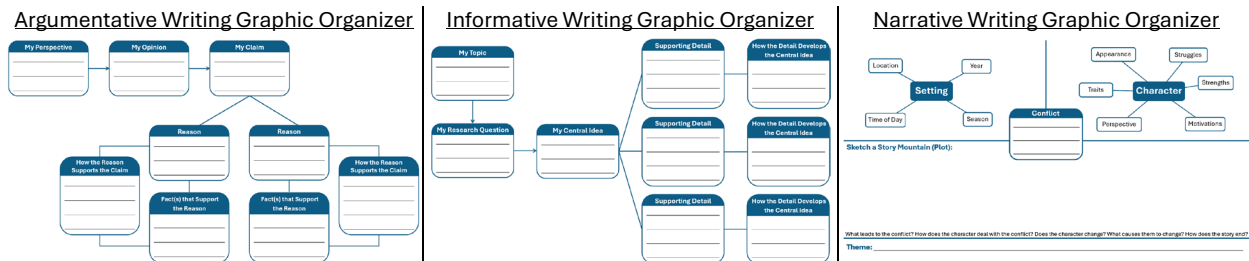
Planning in the Writing Process

Observation: While the overuse of graphic organizers can lead to formulaic, inauthentic writing, the strategic use of graphic organizers during the planning stage of the writing process can help students intentionally and systematically organize their thinking before beginning larger pieces of writing. The use of graphic organizers during the planning stage of writing can also help reinforce students’ understanding of the concepts and skills in the AOR and R indicators.

Historical Trends: First identified as a concern in 2026

Instructional Recommendation(s):

- The following [sample graphic organizers](#) were developed based on the committee’s observations and conversations. These graphic organizers can be used in part or in whole and should always be adapted to fit students’ specific instructional needs.



Note: While intentional planning is a key part of the writing process, it is only one part of the process. To help students improve the overall quality of their writing, teachers should:

- Use mentor texts and/or exemplars to help students notice and name effective and engaging authors’ craft moves.
- Extensively model their thinking throughout the writing process.
- Provide specific, actionable feedback that students can immediately apply to their writing.

Targeted Mini Writing Cycles

Observation: Teachers should adopt a targeted mini-cycle approach to help students master “bite-sized” parts of the writing sub-indicators. If students are able to do the small things really well, the big picture comes together more effortlessly.

Historical Trends: First identified as a concern in 2026

Instructional Recommendation(s):

- Steps to the mini cycle approach to writing
 - Step 1: Decompose the writing sub-indicators to identify the prerequisite concepts and skills embedded within each grade-level sub-indicator.
 - Step 2: Use the decomposed sub-indicators to choose one “bite-sized” instructional focus for the mini cycle.
 - Mini cycles can last anywhere between 4 days to 14 days (or more), depending on the instructional focus and students’ needs.
 - Step 3: Deliver a lesson that teaches students a concept or skill required for the mini cycle’s instructional focus.
 - Step 4: After the lesson, give students the opportunity to practice applying the concept or skill from the lesson via a quick write activity.
 - Examples of quick writes include:
 - Having students come up with and write reasons that support an opinion or claim.
 - Giving students facts, definitions, and/or details and having them choose which facts, definitions, and/or details should be included to develop a central idea or topic.
 - Showing students a picture and having them write a paragraph that establishes the setting or introduces a character.
 - Students should collect their quick writes in a “writing scrapbook.”
 - Students can revise and improve upon a quick write in their scrapbooks during the current mini cycle or in a future mini cycle.
 - Students can also use a quick write in their scrapbooks as the basis for a larger end-of-unit writing piece.
 - Step 5: Give students specific, actionable feedback related to the concept or skill taught in the lesson.
 - When conferring with students, ask questions and offer suggestions as a reader first and teacher second.
 - Celebrate students’ growth as writers by highlighting their craft moves, style, and/or voice.
 - Ask yourself, “Is the advice I’m giving students something that they can use to make their next piece of writing more interesting to read?”
 - Feedback should primarily focus on the content of a student’s writing, as opposed to the student’s use of grammar and mechanics.
 - Step 6: Repeat steps 3 through 5 as many times as instructionally appropriate.
 - Step 7: Once students have demonstrated an acceptable amount of growth, start a new mini cycle by choosing a new instructional focus based on the decomposed sub-indicators in Step 1.

- To write better arguments, students:
 - Need to be given the opportunity to develop their own perspectives and opinions by reading texts that represent varied perspectives and by having conversations/debates with their peers.
 - Must choose **one** clear side of an argument and “stick with it.”
 - When students attempt to go beyond the grade-level expectations by trying to acknowledge an alternative perspective (a 6th grade indicator) or refute a counterclaim (an 8th grade indicator), their writing becomes wishy-washy and lacks focus and clarity.
 - Must be able to clearly elaborate on:
 - How their reasons support their claim, and
 - How the facts they’ve included support their reasons.
- To write better informative/explanatory texts, students:
 - Need to be given the time to investigate research questions.
 - Must be taught how to research effectively.
- To write better narratives, students:
 - Need to be given lots of opportunities to write for fun.
 - Should be given creative writing prompts to nurture imaginative thinking.
 - Creative writing prompts **are not** TDW-style prompts.
 - Creative writing prompts could include:
 - Reading only the beginning and end of a picture book and having students write what happens in the middle of the story.
 - Rewriting a story from the perspective of a different character.
 - Reinventing a traditional fable by adding a twist (e.g., Little Red Riding Hood set in outer space).
 - Showing students a wordless picture book and having them write a poem or drama that is inspired by the images in the book.
- **All modes of writing must be taught to the intended depth and rigor of the grade-level indicators, regardless of what mode is assessed by the Text-Dependent Writing (TDW) item.**
 - Instruction should spiral back through all three modes of writing throughout the year.
 - Writing instruction should not take a “one-and-done” approach when teaching any mode of writing (e.g., narrative writing is taught during the first 9 weeks only and never revisited).