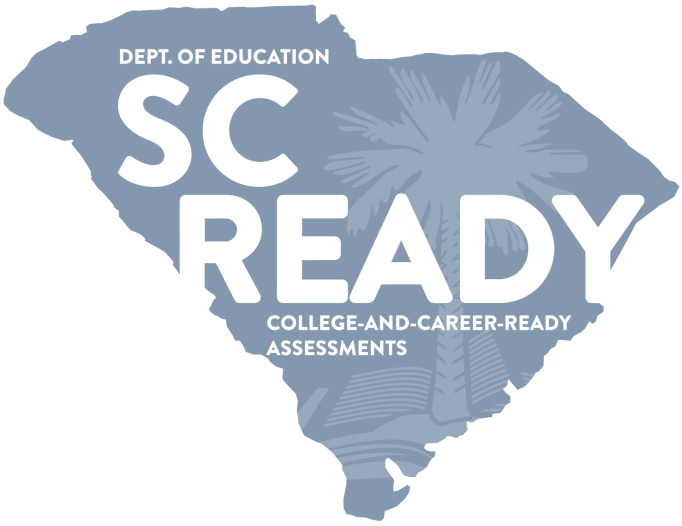
SOUTH CAROLINA
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



2026 Data Review Report
Statewide Instructional Recommendations
English Language Arts GRADE 8

Office of Assessment and Standards

October 2026

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Introduction to the Data Review Reports

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 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 6 assessment, which measures the *2024 South Carolina College- and Career-Ready ELA Standards* (*2024 SC CCR ELA Standards*). While every standard on the SC READY ELA Grade 6 blueprint is assessed, 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 will find:

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

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!

Statewide Trends for English Grades 6-8

After reviewing operational and field test items from the Spring 2026 administration of SC READY for grades 6-8, the committee identified five strengths and five areas for growth in student performance statewide.

Strengths

1. Students were consistently able to analyze how supporting details contribute to the development of a central idea(s) over the course of an informational text (AOR.2.2).
2. Students were consistently able to explain how figurative language impacts mood, tone, and meaning (AOR.1.2).
3. Students were consistently able to analyze word relationships and nuances in word meanings within literary and informational texts specifically related to the function of figures of speech (metaphor) (AOR.8.1a) and distinguish connotations of words with similar denotations (AOR.8.1c).
4. Students were consistently able to use critical thinking skills to investigate, evaluate, and synthesize a variety of sources to obtain and refine knowledge related to generating a question(s) about a topic (R.1.1a), analyze the credibility and relevance of sources for a topic and the purpose of inquiry (R.1.2), and determine which source(s) and/or information is relevant to the topic (R.1.3).
5. Students were consistently able to determine which source(s) and/or information is relevant to the topic (R.1.3).

The committee noted that while students performed well in the aforementioned areas, it is critical 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 to maintain these academic gains.

Areas for Growth

1. Students need support with evaluating and critiquing key literary elements that enhance and deepen meaning within and across texts (AOR.1.1).
2. Students need support with analyzing how key details contribute to the development of a theme(s) over the course of a literary text (AOR.2.1).
3. Students need support with analyzing how individual text sections (e.g., a particular sentence, paragraph, chapter, or section) fit into the overall structure of an informational text (6th), and/or text features convey an author's purpose in an informational text (7th and 8th) (AOR.5.2).
4. Students need support tracing the development of an author's argument related to the usage of rhetorical appeals in an informational text (AOR.5.3).
5. Students need support with summarizing and paraphrasing text to support comprehension and understanding (AOR.6.1).

These areas of growth were identified as instructional needs for students in grades 6-8. The observations and instructional recommendations included in this report are targeted at supporting these needs.

Committee Observations and Recommendations

The following section is a collection of the committee's observations and instructional recommendations aimed at addressing the top six areas of growth as noted on page 3 of this report. It is not intended to be 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: Students need routine and ongoing learning opportunities to develop the skills involved with using context clues. Context clues must extend beyond the meaning of unfamiliar words or phrases in each sentence, which includes how to understand meaning in each paragraph based on the information provided.

- Context for unfamiliar words and phrases is not always found in the same sentence. Students need additional practice using the information from surrounding sentences to determine meaning.

General Observation #2: Ensure that students have been introduced to close reading skills and comprehension tracking strategies such as graphic organizers and annotation models when reading literary and informational texts.

- Students need exposure to rigorous and grade-level appropriate texts to actively develop skills related to:
    - inferences
    - characterization
    - theme/central idea development
    - figurative language
    - summary/paraphrase

General Observation #3: Ensure that instruction reflects the intent of the indicators and aligns with the assessment specifications. This includes the language used to introduce, explain, and assess the indicators at the class (quizzes, tests, etc.) and school levels (benchmarks, common formative assessments, etc.).

- Explicitly use the academic language of the state standards to promote success for all students. The language of the indicators serves as a foundation for both instruction and assessment. Regularly incorporating this language into classroom discussions, tasks, and learning experiences helps students develop the vocabulary and conceptual understanding necessary for success on assessment items aligned to those indicators.
    - Routine and repeated exposure to the language of the indicators in daily instruction makes the language of the assessment more familiar to students when they are assessed at the end of the year.

General Observation #4: Design instruction to build on students' prior knowledge, learning experiences, and previous instruction to deepen comprehension and make meaning of the text throughout the instructional process.

- Students need to know how to combine their own experiences with what is presented in a text to support inferential thinking. The requirement for students to make inferences is an Overarching Expectation (OE) beginning at the kindergarten level. Students are expected to refine the skill of making inferences to draw conclusions as the rigor and text complexity increases between kindergarten and grade 12.

General Observation #5: Writing exercises should be a routine part of daily instruction. Writings could come in the form of, but not limited to:

- quick writes
- exit tickets
- journals

Reading Literary Texts

AOR.1.1

Observation: Provide instruction that focuses on the character's development based on the action presented in a literary text.

Historical Trends: Not previously mentioned in 2025 for Grade 8.

Instructional Recommendations:

- Students will benefit from close reading and taking explicit notes on what characters say, do, how he or she acts or interacts with others, the character's perspective, etc.
    - These notes help students infer character motivations and understand how characterization shapes complex interactions through connections to their own experiences.
    - Use other annotation methods to document the nuanced portions of a literary text and have students:
        - Explain how the nuances better develop the text
            - Teachers are better able to address gaps in comprehension as a text unfolds.
    - Ask targeted questions about the author's language choices, including dialogue, to help students make inferences and draw conclusions about characters and the text.

AOR.2.1

Observation: Students display gaps in their understanding of what a text's theme is, how it is developed, which hinders students from successfully identifying the overarching message (theme) of a literary text.

Historical Trends: Not previously mentioned in 2025 for Grade 8.

Instructional Recommendations:

- Emphasize that the theme of a text is a complete idea and not a single word.
    - "Challenges are a common aspect of life" rather than "Hardships"
    - "Friends are just as important as family members" rather than "Friendships"
- Communicate that a literary text can have more than one theme, but all themes are based on the explicit nature of the text and the inferential understanding that students gain from applying the text's action to real-life experiences.
    - Provide students with thematic options prior to reading for students to select.
        - As the action unfolds, students use graphic organizers to cite evidence about the theme related to:
            - dialogue
            - setting
            - characterization
            - shifts in perspective
            - resolution of the conflict

- Explicit instruction on the definition of theme as *the major idea or underlying **message** that a literary text communicates; often, the theme begins with an identification of a **lesson***.
    - Emphasize how a text's theme can apply to the lives of the reader and not just the characters within the text.
    - Distinguish between main idea and theme for students.
        - Main idea applies to a singular text/topic, whereas the theme extends to multiple texts.
    - Analyze the plot and conflict to examine the uncovering of the theme for readers.

AOR.6.1

Observation: Students need instruction that fortifies the idea that the summary of any text should follow the same flow as the original text, but without a word-for-word retelling of the information.
Historical Trends: Not previously mentioned in 2025 for Grade 8.
Instructional Recommendation(s):

- Implement the use of graphic organizers for students as they progress through any text read during instruction.
    - Students benefit from guided instruction in identifying and highlighting key information in a text. This helps them understand what is most important and how supporting details contributes to the overall meaning of the text.
- Provide opportunities for students to experience texts used for instruction in multimedia ways to better support all students.
    - This approach may support multilingual, visual, and other types of learners during the instructional process.
- Utilize the "summarize-as-you-read" method as a scaffolding strategy for all students.
    - The goal is to summarize an entire piece in a systematic and strategic manner that allows students to highlight important information in real-time.
        - Students can have opportunities to summarize from:
            - paragraph to paragraph
            - section to section
            - chapter to chapter
        - Incremental summaries reinforce the skill that students need to be successful with this indicator, as well as provides opportunities for teachers to offer additional support to the students still working on skill mastery.

Reading Informational Texts

AOR.5.2

Observation: Students need instruction that provides strategies for determining how text sections and text features fit into the structure of an informational text.

Historical Trends: Not previously mentioned in 2025 for Grade 8.

Instructional Recommendations:

- Students need continued exposure to the different text structures as these structures contribute to an author's purpose for creating an informational text.
    - Chronological, compare-and-contrast, sequence, cause/effect, problem and solution, and description
        - Students need explicit instruction devoted to how graphs, charts, images, etc. add to the structure of the text.
- Allow students to synthesize the function and overall fit of text sections (graphics) together with a text.
    - Explicitly model the analysis process through think-alouds, guide students with text-dependent questions, and provide opportunities for collaborative discussion so students can explain how each text feature contributes to the author's message and overall purpose.
    - Provide students with a text and have them create a graphic that visually represents the key information presented. Students can be asked about the impact of the new graphic on the text.
        - The goal is to communicate to students that authors are intentional about what is presented in an informational text.
- Guide students in examining text, sections, and graphics separately to understand how each contributes to the text's meaning. Have students then analyze the separate components together to find the intended meaning presented by the author.
    - Provide an opportunity for students to write about how pieces function together, and how the intentional placement of graphics and text sections contribute to the whole text.
        - Consider providing any graphics, charts, images, etc. to half of the class for analysis, while the other half of the class has the text. Each group discusses how the pieces function and exchanges their findings with a classmate with the opposite resource to discuss how all parts function together.

AOR.5.3

Observation: Students must have explicit instruction focusing on the ability to explain how authors use rhetoric within an informational text.
Historical Trends: Previously mentioned in 2025 Test Data Review Report
Instructional Recommendation(s):

- Provide instructional opportunities for students to interact with an author's use of rhetoric in informational texts.
    - Instruction should begin with the basic identification of rhetorical appeals.
        - Students have background knowledge on what the appeals are and the functions. Provide a diagnostic to gauge what students know.
    - Implement the use of annotation guides and graphic organizers to track and analyze the function of rhetorical appeals within a given text.
        - This strategy can be used to scaffold students up to the point where they are able to identify and explain rhetoric through the author's use of language.
- Implement the use of graphic organizers for students as they progress through any text read during instruction to track supporting details and the central idea of an informational text.
    - Informational texts are rich with supporting details, so students require guided instruction on how to identify which details are most important to uncovering the central idea of a text.
        - Modelling how analyzing the inclusion of text structures and text features contributes to the accurate identification of the central idea.
        - Provide students with a list of details from the guided reading used during instruction.
        - Have students categorize the details into categories (least important, important, most important) and provide justifications for how they interpret the details.
            - Teachers can clarify any misunderstandings and/or provide scaffolds to fill in gaps with students.
- Provide students with the central idea of an informational text prior to reading the text to scaffold for all students, as well as a measure to support the information that is collected on the organizers.
    - Students begin to identify a text's central idea using a backwards design strategy.
        - Discover details throughout the text that supports the central idea.
        - Students learn to align details with the intended idea/perspective presented by an informational text.

Writing

General Writing Recommendations

Observation: For grades 6-8 English Language Arts, the committee noted that many students continue to need support in applying grade-level grammar, language conventions, and usage effectively in their writing. Strengthening writing achievement requires regular opportunities for students to read and analyze strong mentor texts, practice writing skills through meaningful and authentic writing tasks, receive timely feedback, and engage in revision.

Historical Trends: Previously mentioned in the 2025 Test Data Review Report.

Instructional Recommendations:

- Effective writing instruction should provide students with a variety of writing experiences and purposes. Authentic tasks may include argumentative essays, literary analysis, narratives, research projects, book reviews, reflections, blogs, and writing for real audiences. Frequent low-stakes writing activities, such as quick-writes, journals, and exit tickets, help students build writing fluency, confidence, and stamina.
- Teachers can support student growth through writing workshops, modeled writing, think-alouds, small-group instruction, and individual conferences that provide targeted feedback and goal setting. Collaborative experiences such as peer review, writing circles, classroom discussions, debates, and Socratic seminars help students develop ideas, refine their writing, and learn from one another. By engaging students in the full writing process of planning, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing, teachers help students understand that strong writing develops over time through practice, feedback, and reflection.
- Authentic writing opportunities may include composing:
    - argumentative essays on relevant issues, writing letters or emails to community leaders, creating blog posts, developing research-based multimedia presentations, crafting narratives, producing book reviews, and writing for school or community audiences.
- Students need opportunities to apply the feedback given during the writing process.
    - Use peer review to develop all writers.
- The focus should be on the overall development of the piece and not the finished product.
    - This reinforces the recursive process of writing that supports students on both sections of the writing portion of SC READY.
    - Revisions based on feedback can mean adding to a piece, not just taking away or fixing grammar/mechanics errors.