

# Position Statement on the ELAR TEKS

By Stephen Winton

Educator Responses by  
Shona Rose and  
Malene Golding

✓ BEST  
✓ PRACTICE!  
1.  
2.

Stephen Winton is a literacy specialist at Kaiser Elementary in Klein ISD and an adjunct professor at the University of Houston and the University of Houston–Downtown. His research interests include reading comprehension and the reading and writing connection. He can be reached at [stephenjoelwinton@gmail.com](mailto:stephenjoelwinton@gmail.com).

Shona Rose serves Region 16 as the Learning Leader for ELAR 9-12, Reading Academies, and Instructional Materials. When she's not playing with her grandchildren and puppy dog, she researches solutions for feedback in the writing conference and ways to improve reading and writing performance on standardized assessments. She can be reached at [shonarose67@gmail.com](mailto:shonarose67@gmail.com).

Malene Golding is a literacy consultant and an adjunct professor at University of Houston–Clear Lake. Her research interests include using the four domains of language to grow skilled and critical readers and writers. She can be reached at [goldingtouchedcon@gmail.com](mailto:goldingtouchedcon@gmail.com).

**Abstract:** The 2017 English Language Arts and Reading (ELAR) standards from Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) reflect best-practice literacy instruction. The seven strands of Foundational language skills, Comprehension skills, Response skills, Multiple genres, Author's purpose and craft, Composition, and Inquiry and research form an integrated approach to literacy instruction. The student expectations contained in these strands are vertically aligned to support students' development of knowledge and skills. The 2017 ELAR TEKS address critical components of instruction including a balanced approach to literacy, student

choice of texts, independent reading volume, diverse literary texts, comprehension skills, purposeful talk, the reading and writing connection, inquiry, and research. Because these standards are research-based, implementation can support positive student outcomes. The Texas Council of Teachers of English Language Arts supports the implementation of the 2017 ELAR TEKS. Responses to this position statement from Texas-based educators reflecting on the 2017 ELAR TEKS are included.

**Keywords:** standards, comprehension, independent reading, writing, inquiry

## Overview

In 2017, the Texas State Board of Education adopted the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) for English Language Arts and Reading (ELAR). Written with consideration of feedback from stakeholders across the state and based on research and best-practice instruction, the 2017 ELAR TEKS are a positive step forward in literacy for Texas.

The ELAR TEKS are organized by seven strands: Foundational language skills, Comprehension skills, Response skills, Multiple genres, Author's purpose and craft, Composition, and Inquiry and research (Texas Education Agency, 2017). The strands are connected, forming an integrated approach to literacy instruction. The student expectations contained in these strands are vertically aligned to support students' development of knowledge and skills.

The Texas Council of Teachers of English Language Arts (TCTELA) supports the implementation of the 2017 ELAR TEKS as educators

work toward positive outcomes in literacy for students. Some key principles contained in the TEKS are outlined below.

### A Balanced Approach to Literacy

For decades, educators on either side of the “reading wars” debate championed either a phonics-based or whole-language-based approach to literacy (National Education Association, 2019). The consensus of scholarship is that a balance between phonics instruction and meaning making through authentic reading is required for positive student outcomes (Allington, 2018; Fisher et al., 2019; National Council of Teachers of English, 2019).

In the Foundational language skills strand of the TEKS, elements of the phonics-based approach such as phonological awareness, phonetic knowledge, and spelling knowledge are balanced with the meaning-making approach such as vocabulary, fluency, and self-sustained reading. As such, the standards provide both explicit phonics instruction and authentic exploration of texts for meaning.

### Student Choice of Texts and Independent Reading Volume

Under the Foundational language skills strand of the TEKS, the student is expected to “self-select text and interact independently with text for increasing periods of time” (Texas Education Agency, 2017). This addresses two core principles in reading instruction: student choice of texts and independent reading volume. Kylee Beers and Robert Probst note that successful schools “provide big blocks of time for kids to read, and . . . recognize that giving kids choice in what they read isn’t restricted to a particular level” (2017, p. 146).

Providing students choice of texts that they can and want to read helps readers develop (Allington 2002; Allison 2008; Ally & Morrell, 2015; Beers & Probst, 2017; Gallagher, 2009; Kittle, 2013). Too often, reading instruction follows a “one-size fits all” approach, where all texts are teacher-selected and all children read the same text (Allington, 2002, p. 743). While at times whole-group texts may be appropriate, student choice is also needed. Providing scaffolded opportunities for students to select just-right texts builds engagement in reading and supports students’ individual needs as readers. The focus on self-selected texts in the TEKS requires that teachers provide opportunities for student choice.

The amount of time that students spend independently reading correlates with reading achievement (Allington 1977; Anderson et al., 1988; Beers & Probst, 2017; Krashen, 2004; Miller, 2015). Richard Allington (2002) notes that in many schools, less than ten percent of instructional time is spent reading. Independent reading is often relegated to homework or decreased in class due to time spent on test preparation. Research and common sense suggest that for students to become better readers, they need to read a lot. The sustained independent reading in the TEKS requires time be spent in class on independent reading.

### Diverse Literary Texts

The standards require reading “diverse literary texts” (Texas Education Agency, 2017). Texts that reflect the diversity of our community might serve as mirrors of the reader, windows into other worlds, and sliding glass doors through which the reader can step (Bishop, 1990, p. ix). Reading diverse texts can promote empathy, help fight against racism and oppression, and further the work of social justice.

## Comprehension Skills

In *Visible Learning: A Synthesis of Over 800 Meta-Analyses Relating to Achievement*, John Hattie (2009) notes a large effect size of .69 for teaching metacognitive strategies, equivalent to two or more years of student growth. The metacognitive strategies of reading comprehension include generating questions, making predictions, creating mental images, making connections, making inferences, determining importance, synthesizing information, and monitoring comprehension (Harvey & Goudvis, 2005; Keene & Zimmerman, 2007). These metacognitive strategies are found in the 2017 ELAR TEKS Comprehension skills strand.

In the 2009-2010 ELAR TEKS, comprehension skills were found in a separate document, Figure 19. Their placement apart from the rest of the standards caused challenges. In the 2017 TEKS, comprehension skills are integrated in the standards. Another point of note is that synthesizing information to create new understanding is included in elementary grades. This allows our youngest readers to synthesize what they read and apply it to their own lives or their understanding of the world. For example, after reading *The Other Side* by Jacqueline Woodson and E. B. Lewis (2001), students might synthesize the theme of racial equality by applying this to their own lives and community.

### Purposeful Talk

Douglas Fisher, Nancy Frey, and John Hattie (2016) record a significant effect size of .82 for classroom discussion related to student achievement. Often, the best way to understand what we read is to talk about it (Allington 2002; Beers & Probst, 2017; Johnston, 2004). Yet too often, the teacher’s voice dominates classroom talk. In the TEKS Response skills strand, students respond to texts in multiple ways including talking, writing, or drawing. This might help create a dialogic classroom where students share their ideas and build upon each other’s learning.

### The Reading and Writing Connection

Katie Wood Ray (1999) argues that to support student’s composition, students should read like writers. Wood Ray suggests writers notice and name what other writers do and then apply this to their writing. Many writing practitioners concur that writers use mentor texts to notice author’s craft and genre characteristics in their reading to be applied in their writing (Gallagher, 2011; Kittle, 2008; Laminack, 2016; Ray, 2006).

This reading and writing connection does not only improve composition, it makes better readers. M. Colleen Cruz notes that “when writers of all ages write a lot, they become better readers because they have the inside scoop on the work writers do” (2018, xvii).

In the 2017 ELAR TEKS, reading and writing are connected. In the Multiple genres strand, the student is expected to “recognize characteristics and structures” of various genres (Texas Education Agency, 2017). In the Author’s purpose and craft strand, the student “analyzes and applies author’s craft purposefully in order to develop his or her own products and performances” (Texas Education Agency, 2017). Then in the Composition strand, “The student uses genre characteristics and craft to compose multiple texts that are meaningful” (Texas Education Agency, 2017). Thus, what students learn about genre and author’s craft in their reading is applied to their writing. This emphasis on the reading and writing connection in the 2017 ELAR TEKS shifts away from



formulaic approaches to writing and centers on learning to write through authentic examples.

### **Inquiry and Research**

Kylene Beers and Robert Probst posit that learning should take a “questioning stance” (2016, p. 76). Cornelius Minor states, “Change begins with a question,” arguing that questioning is essential in a democratic society (Minor & Feigelson, 2019). Readers question both the author’s point of view and how the information read changes their understanding of the world. Such a questioning stance is core to the TEKS Inquiry and research strand, as “the student engages in both short-term and sustained recursive inquiry processes for a variety of purposes” (Texas Education Agency, 2017). Authentic inquiry and research skills are needed for students to be successful in a complex, 21<sup>st</sup> century world. Further, inquiry and research help students to be responsible citizens in a democratic society.

### **Supporting the TEKS Implementation**

TCTELA created a video-based resource called *PD2Teach*, with discussion and classroom examples of the seven strands of the ELAR TEKS, which can be found here: [https://www.tctela.org/about\\_community](https://www.tctela.org/about_community). Articles on the TEKS can be found in TCTELA’s publications *English in Texas* and *Texas Voices*. Professional development on the TEKS can be found in various sessions at TCTELA’s Annual Conference.

The 2017 ELAR TEKS represent what is right for teachers and students and TCTELA supports their implementation.

### **Responses From Texas-Based Educators**

“The 2017 ELAR TEKS represent what is right for teachers and students.” What is right, indeed. The organizing structure and design of the standards were purposefully grown from sound research about what practices help people become readers and

writers capable of participation and contribution as joyfully literate citizens. Far too often, our ill-informed pedagogy *and* selection of a small range of canonical texts from a list that hasn’t changed much since the Industrial Revolution have produced students who face challenges in literacy and who might be able to regurgitate content if they are forced.

By incorporating knowledge of the people and the art of teaching *as well as* the science of that impact, the ELAR standards represent a tremendous opportunity to shift paradigms that will

- invigorate and include instead of prompting apathy, inaction, and disenfranchisement
- spur creativity and solutions as opposed to avoidance and retreat
- empower instead of oppress.

As such, teachers will need significant advancements in building and refining their knowledge, skills, and repertoire of textual knowledge, forming a pedagogy of promise that leads to advanced learning outcomes for the very ones we choose to serve: our students.

—Shona Rose, Ph.D., Region 16 Education Service Center

The new TEKS provide an instructional roadmap for teachers across the state to truly connect the four domains of language (listening, speaking, reading, writing) and thinking to effective literacy instruction. For years, literacy leaders across the state worked to show the interconnectivity of the language domains while working with standards that were written in silos. As a teacher of teachers, I appreciate the various explicit ways that the reading and writing standards are integrated through the new standards. While these updates are subtle, they will make monumental shifts in teaching practices that will lead to developing critical readers and skilled writers across all grade levels.

Regarding the writing standards, I like that there are specific examples for the drafting standard, but I most appreciate that grammar standards are part of the editing TEKS. This ensures teachers truly understand that grammar instruction must be taught within context and not in isolation. It makes grammar instruction more meaningful for student writers as they are taught to focus on their craft and ensure their message is clearly communicated in a manner that meets their purpose. The new ELAR/SLAR TEKS support my belief that standards are designed to teach scholars how to be strategic readers and writers. We must teach students how understanding and applying standards and strategies will help them become better readers and writers. I cannot wait to see this shift across the state.

—Malene Golding, M.Ed., University of Houston–Clear Lake

## References

- Allington, R. L. (1977). If they don't read much, how they ever gonna get good? *Journal of Reading*, 21(1), 57-61.
- Allington, R. L. (2002). What I've learned about effective reading instruction from studying exemplary elementary reading classroom teachers. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 83(10), 740-747.
- Allington, R. L. (2018). Children's literature in the reading program: Engaging young readers in the 21st century. *The Reading Teacher*, 68(7), 491-501.
- Allison, N. (2008). *Middle school readers*. Heinemann.
- Ally, P., & Morrell, E. (2015). *Every child a super reader: 7 strengths to open a world of possible*. Scholastic Professional.
- Anderson, R. C., Wilson, P. T., & Fielding, L. G. (1988). Growth in reading and how children spend their time outside of school. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 23(3), 285-303.
- Beers, K., & Probst, R. E. (2016). *Reading nonfiction: Notice & note stances, signposts and strategies*. Heinemann.
- Beers, K., & Probst, R. E. (2017). *Disrupting thinking: Why how we read matters*. Scholastic.
- Bishop, R. S. (1990). Mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors. *Perspectives*, 1(3), ix-xi.
- Cruz, M. C. (2018). *Writers read better nonfiction: 50+ paired lessons that turn writing craft work into powerful genre reading*. Corwin.
- Fisher, D., Frey, N., & Akhavan, N. (2019). *This is balanced literacy: Grades K-6*. Corwin.
- Fisher, D., Frey, N., & Hattie, J. (2016). *Visible learning for literacy: Implementing the practices that work best to accelerate student learning*. Corwin.
- Gallagher, K. (2009). *Readicide: How schools are killing reading and what you can do about it*. Stenhouse.
- Gallagher, K. (2011). *Write like this: Teaching real-world writing through modeling and mentor texts*. Stenhouse.
- Harvey, S., & Goudvis, A. (2005). *The comprehension toolkit: Language and lessons for active literacy, grade 3-6*. Heinemann.
- Hattie, J. (2009). *Visible learning: A synthesis of over 800 meta-analyses relating to achievement*. Routledge.
- Johnston, P. H. (2004). *Choice words: How our language affects children's learning*. Stenhouse.
- Keene, E. O., & Zimmerman, S. (2007). *Mosaic of thought*. Heinemann.
- Kittle, P. (2008). *Write beside them: Risk, voice, and clarity in high school writing*. Heinemann.
- Kittle, P. (2013). *Book love: Developing depth, stamina, and passion in adolescent readers*. Heinemann.
- Krashen, S. (2004). *The power of reading: Insights from the research*. Heinemann.
- Laminack, L. (2016). *Cracking open the author's craft: Teaching the art of writing*. Scholastic.
- Miller, D. (2015). I've got research, yes I do. I've got research. How about you? <https://bookwhisperer.com/2015/02/08/ive-got-research-yes-i-do-ive-got-research-how-about-you>
- Minor, C., & Feigelson, D. (2019, November 24). Radical listening: Taking an inquiry stance in the reading and writing workshop [Workshop]. National Council of Teachers of English 2019 Conference, Baltimore, MA.
- National Council of Teachers of English. (2019). The act of reading: Instructional foundations and policy guidelines. <https://ncte.org/statement/the-act-of-reading>
- National Education Association. (2019). Reading wars. <http://www.nea.org/home/19392.htm>
- Ray, K. W. (1999). *Wondrous words: Writers and writing in elementary classrooms*. National Council of Teachers of English.
- Ray, K. W. (2006). *Study driven: A framework for planning units of study in writer's workshop*. Heinemann.
- Texas Education Agency. (2017). 19 TAC chapter 110. Texas essential knowledge and skills for English language arts and reading. <http://ritter.tea.state.tx.us/rules/tac/chapter110/index.html>
- Woodson, J., & Lewis, E. B. (2001). *The other side*. Putnam.
- The TCTELA Board reviewed, provided feedback, and approved this position statement.

*This position statement may be printed, copied, and disseminated without permission from TCTELA. Note, this position statement reflects the views of the author and TCTELA and not necessarily the author's associated schools or other associated organizations. The responses from Texas-based educators reflect the views of the authors and not necessarily the authors' associated schools or other associated organizations.*