

# The Common Core Writing Book, 6–8

## Study Guide

The *Common Core Writing Book, 6–8*, study guide is designed to support school teams in developing writing instruction across content areas through a systematic, schoolwide approach.

Under the leadership of a principal, literacy coach, or lead teacher, the team may select any or all of the meeting topics listed below, and proceed with planning as suggested. (Alternatively, an outside consultant may lead the meetings.)

The meetings are listed in the order in which they are most logically implemented; three 80-minute sessions are suggested:

- **Meeting 1:** Identifying Areas for Schoolwide Improvement
- **Meeting 2:** Planning for Writing and Research Across Content Areas and Grade Levels
- **Meeting 3:** Helping Students Move Forward with Revision and Editing: Who Does What?

Before each meeting, a brief amount of preparation is required.

- Preparation for the **participants** involves reading or reviewing sections of *The Common Core Writing Book, 6–8*, and bringing related ideas and materials to the sessions.
- Preparation for the **session leader** involves coordinating the sessions, guiding the discussions, and bringing and distributing the materials needed. All participants should have a copy of this study guide and follow the instructions for each meeting.

### For schools recording the meetings as professional development

A school-based staff member or an outside consultant can organize and provide the professional learning experience by following the suggestions provided for each meeting. Each meeting plan contains two items for participants to prepare before the meeting, two related items to accomplish during the meeting, and a suggested pathway the leader can take to help participants work through the session. Four hours of activity are planned in total (three 80-minute sessions).

<b>MEETING 1</b>	Identifying Areas for Schoolwide Improvement
<b>Who could attend</b>	Teachers from all grade levels and content areas
<b>What to read</b>	Overview and Chapters 1–3
<b>Recommended Time</b>	1 hour and 20 minutes

## To Prepare for Meeting 1

For each educator:

### 1. **Consider possibilities for schoolwide improvement in the area of writing instruction.**

The International Literacy Association offers eight guiding principles that may be used to shape and develop writing instruction across the content areas. (See Table 1.) For each principle, rate your content area for what you perceive as its “current status” in relation to writing instruction. Focus on your own grade level. As you are preparing your ratings, you may wish to consider any schoolwide assessments the students have taken, and any existing school improvement plan items related to writing.

#### **Current Status**

1 = well developed

2 = adequately developed

3 = partially developed

4 = minimally developed

Use your ratings to identify the one item you think most warrants attention in your content area and also any item you think would be beneficial to pursue as a collaborative effort across content areas and/or grade levels. Bring your findings to the meeting.

### 2. **Consider possibilities for enhancing writing instruction in your content area.**

The Common Core State Standards require that students develop their skill at writing across text types and content areas. Middle school students are expected to write for a variety of purposes and audiences, including in history, social studies, science, and technical subjects. The standards categorize this writing into three specific text types: argument (Anchor 1), informative/explanatory (Anchor 2), and narrative (Anchor 3). Requirements associated with each text type, with grade-level and content-area specifics, are laid out at the beginnings of Chapters 1–3. Teaching ideas and assignments for the text types are included within each chapter.

Bring to the meeting a list of major writing assignments already given in each class you teach and a list of possible new or enhanced assignments based on your reading of Chapters 1–3. Also write down the month each assignment is due.

## To Accomplish During Meeting 1

### 1. **Establish a plan for schoolwide improvement in the area of writing instruction.**

Participants come to consensus on one or two areas from Table 1 to use as a focus for supporting schoolwide improvement in the area of writing.

**Suggested path for the meeting leader:** Project a copy of Table 1. Tally the results of the individual ratings that participants have prepared. Then, use the tallies as a starting point for helping the participants come to consensus on one or two areas for improvement. The chosen area(s) will be considered further in Step 2 (Meeting 1) and again in Meeting 2 as content-area teams or departments do more specific planning.

### 2. **Lay out a plan for enhancing writing instruction across content areas.** Participants list the writing assignments that will occur across the school year, across content areas and grade levels, and develop a list of possibilities for connecting the plan with goals established in Step 1.

**Suggested path for the meeting leader:** Project a copy of Table 2. Have available a red pen to designate assignments being implemented already, a black pen to designate new assignments, and a highlighter to designate the assignments that are research-based. (You will be addressing the first two bolded items below. Table 3 shows an example of a filled-in chart with research-based projects highlighted.) Then, work with the team to generate a list of possible ways to connect the assignments to the plans for schoolwide improvement generated under Step 1, above. After the meeting, send out a copy of both documents to the whole school team.

#### Items to address

##### **What are we doing already? (Use the black pen and Table 2.)**

- What major writing assignments are given in each grade? (Record the dates each will be due in order to ensure appropriate spacing.)
- What text types (see Anchors 1–3) are we teaching?
- Which assignments involve research? (Highlight.)

##### **Where do we want to go from here? (Use the red pen and Table 2.)**

- What major writing assignments do we want to add, revise, or change?
- Will this allow for adequate representation of all three text types?
- Which assignments involve research? (Highlight.)

##### **How can we support our schoolwide improvement goals (as identified in Step 1) through the writing that will be occurring across the content areas? (Start a bulleted list.)**

- What specific efforts will be made in each classroom? (This topic will be picked up again in Meeting 2.)

**Table 1**

<b>Position of the International Literacy Association</b>	<b>How the principles could be enacted in relation to the Common Core State Standards for Writing</b>	<b>Rating</b>
1. Adolescents benefit from “content area teachers who provide instruction in the multiple literacy strategies needed to meet the demands of the specific discipline.”	Students write for a variety of purposes and audiences, including in social studies, science, and math. Discipline-specific practices for argument writing, informative/explanatory writing, and narrative writing are taught by content area teachers.	1 2 3 4
2. Adolescents benefit from “a culture of literacy in their schools with a systematic and comprehensive programmatic approach to increasing literacy achievement for all.”	Educators work schoolwide to support students’ development as writers. They use the Common Core literacy standards as a unifying frame for planning and collaborating across disciplines and grade levels, and teachers within each discipline plan together to ensure a systematic experience.	1 2 3 4
3. Adolescents benefit from “access to and instruction with multimodal, multiple texts.”	A plan is in place for students to receive guidance as they both read and publish multimodal texts.	1 2 3 4
4. Adolescents benefit from “differentiated literacy instruction specific to their individual needs.”	Instruction is planned in response to students’ needs. Times are planned for whole-class, small-group, and individual conferences as appropriate. The team ensures extra support or accommodations for students who are progressing slowly or need extra attention.	1 2 3 4
5. Adolescents benefit from “opportunities to participate in oral communication when they engage in literacy activities.”	Students have opportunities to engage in collaborative assignments as well as informal and formal sharing of the writing they are producing.	1 2 3 4
6. Adolescents benefit from “opportunities to use literacy in the pursuit of civic engagement.”	Teachers plan for students to use competencies related to the CCSS to engage in civic activities they find meaningful. Rather than learning skills or strategies “just” to demonstrate competency at school, students write in relation to wider aspects of their worlds.	1 2 3 4
7. Adolescents benefit from “assessments that highlight their strengths and challenges.”	Assessments are used to determine individual students’ strengths and challenges in light of the standards. Instruction is planned accordingly.	1 2 3 4
8. Adolescents benefit from “access to a wide variety of print and nonprint materials.”	Students use a wide range of print and nonprint materials to support their writing. The materials are connected to the curriculum, plentiful and varied enough to capture interests and allow for choice, and an effort is made to render them accessible/understandable for students who may need extra support.	1 2 3 4

*Adolescent Literacy: A Position Statement of the International Reading Association*  
[www.reading.org/Libraries/resources/ps1079\\_adolescentliteracy\\_rev2012.pdf](http://www.reading.org/Libraries/resources/ps1079_adolescentliteracy_rev2012.pdf)



Table 3

Planning Across Content Areas and Grade Levels						
Subject	Grade 6	Month	Grade 7	Month	Grade 8	Month
<b>Language Arts</b>	Literary Essay (A1)		Literary Essay (A1)		Literary Essay (A1)	
	Book Review (A1)		Book Review (A1)		Book Review (A1)	
	Memoir (A3)		Oral History (A3)		<i>Testimonio</i> (A3)	
	Short Story (A3)		Short Story (A3)		Short Story (A3)	
	Three Poems (A3)		Three Poems (A3)		Three Poems (A3)	
	Journalistic Report (A3)		Journalistic Report (A3)		Journalistic Report (A3)	
<b>Science</b>	Persuasive or Open Letter (A1)		Persuasive or Open Letter (A1)		Persuasive or Open Letter (A1)	
	Research Report (A2)		Research Report (A2)		Research Report (A2)	
	Research Brief (A2)		Research Brief (A2)		Research Brief (A2)	
	Informational Poster or Brochure (A2)		Informational Web Page (A2)		Informational Web Page (A2)	
<b>Math</b>	Blog (A1)		Blog (A1)		Blog (A1)	
	All-About Page (A2)		All-About Page (A2)		All-About Page (A2)	
	How-to Video Tutorial (A2)		How-to Video Tutorial (A2)		How-to Video Tutorial (A2)	
<b>Social Studies</b>	Topic/Issue Essay (A1)		Topic/Issue Essay (A1)		Topic/Issue Essay (A1)	
	Persuasive or Open Letter (A1)		Persuasive or Open Letter (A1)		Persuasive or Open Letter (A1)	
	Informational Article (A2)		Informational Article (A2)		Informational Article (A2)	
	Biography (A3)		Biography (A3)		Biography (A3)	
	Narrative History (A3)		Narrative History (A3)		Narrative History (A3)	
<b>Choir/ Band</b>	Evaluation of a Performance (A1)		Evaluation of a Performance (A1)		Evaluation of a Performance (A1)	
	Informational Page or Essay (A2)		Informational Page or Essay (A2)		Informational Page or Essay (A2)	
<b>Foreign Language</b>	French or Spanish Picture Book Review (A1)		French or Spanish Picture Book Review (A1)		French or Spanish Picture Book Review (A1)	
	Informational Picture Book in French or Spanish (A2)		Informational Picture Book in French or Spanish (A2)		Informational Picture Book in French or Spanish (A2)	
	All-About Web Page (A2)		All-About Web Page (A2)		All-About Web Page (A2)	
	Comic in French or Spanish (A3)		Narrative Fiction in French or Spanish (A3)		Narrative Fiction in French or Spanish (A3)	

**Anchor 1: Argument (A1); Anchor 2: Informative/Explanatory (A2); Anchor 3: Narrative (A3)**

<b>MEETING 2</b>	Planning for Writing Across Content Areas and Grade Levels
<b>Who could attend</b>	Teachers from all grade levels and content areas, breaking into <b>content-area groups</b> (or content-area teams could meet separately)
<b>What to read</b>	Read Chapters 6–9; also, review Chapters 1–3 as needed
<b>Recommended Time</b>	1 hour and 20 minutes

## To Prepare for Meeting 2

For each educator:

- 1. Gather all of the assignment sheets you plan to use for writing across the school year. Consider how you might develop the assignments in light of the CCSS.**

The assignments should be referenced on the schoolwide planning document—see Table 2 from Meeting 1.

- Consider any revisions or additions you might make in light of the CCSS and Chapters 1–3.
- Read Chapter 6, which addresses CCSS requirements for using technology to produce and publish writing and interact and collaborate with others, and consider how you might enhance your assignments in light of these requirements.
- Read Chapters 7–9, which address the research standards, and consider whether your assignments involving research are designed to meet these standards.

- 2. Consider how you can develop and tweak the assignments to help meet the schoolwide improvement goal(s) for writing established during Meeting 1.**

(Meeting 1, Step 2 involves participants in listing a beginning set of ideas.)

## To Accomplish During Meeting 2

- 1. Within content-area teams, discuss the writing assignments being implemented by each content area across the school year and grade levels.** Participants discuss ideas for developing and tweaking their assignments in light of the general requirements for text types outlined in Chapters 1–3, the technology standards outlined in Chapter 6, and the research standards outlined in Chapters 7–9.

**Suggested path for the meeting leader:** Open the meeting by bringing the whole group together to describe the goals for the day's session. Then, arrange the group into content-area teams to address items 1 and 2.

- 2. Record each content-area team's specific plan for working toward the schoolwide goal and connecting it with the writing/research assignments being implemented in the content area.** Participants develop and tweak the assignments as appropriate. Record the plan using Table 4.

**Suggested path for the meeting leader:** Create a recording form to be used during the session (see Table 4) and make it available on Google docs (or a similar document authoring/sharing platform). Or bring a hard copy of the form for each content-area team to use and then compile the information. Each content-area team should record on the form a specific plan for working toward the schoolwide goal(s) established during Meeting 1 and for connecting them with the assignments being implemented.



<b>MEETING 3</b>	Helping Students Move Forward with Revision and Editing: Who Does What?
<b>Who could attend</b>	Teachers from all grade levels and content areas, breaking into <b>grade-level groups</b> (or each grade-level group may meet separately)
<b>What to read</b>	Chapters 4–5
<b>Recommended Time</b>	1 hour and 20 minutes

### To Prepare for Meeting 3

For each educator:

- 1. Prepare a list of the Chapter 4 and 5 lesson topics/types of support you would be likely to implement (or are already implementing) at the grade level(s) you teach.**

For example, topics from Chapter 4 include: working toward a logical sequence in written text, emphasizing one key idea per paragraph, using effective transition language, considering completeness of sentences, considering relevance of details, attending to points of possible confusion, evaluating appropriateness to audience, and considering voice. Topics from Chapter 5 include: using an editing checklist, using editing symbols, addressing spelling, addressing punctuation, and attending to language variations. Do you explicitly address these concepts, and how?

Discussion around topics from Chapters 4 and 5 will allow grade-level teams to understand what is being addressed at the grade level and to discuss what might need further attention. It will also help the team members build on what other teachers are doing. (“In Science, you are learning to intentionally choose the appropriate voice for the task at hand” or “In Language Arts, you have reviewed all elements on our editing checklist.”)

- 2. Review the editing checklist (Table 5 in this study guide or Figure 5–2 in the book).**

The editing checklist integrates key CCSS language conventions from grades K–5 with the more advanced key conventions listed for middle school. This checklist could be used as it stands (it appears in many of the lessons in Chapter 5) or, more ideally, each grade-level team could adapt and develop it using the grade-level standards as a reference and attending to the particular needs of the students in the school. In the interest of adapting and developing:

- Place a star by each item you think should be kept. Revise the wording if needed.
- Place an X by each item you think could be removed.
- Add any items you feel are missing.
- Highlight any areas you think would be particularly helpful for additional emphasis in the Language Arts classroom.

## To Accomplish During Meeting 3

1. **Share the types of revising and editing lessons and support being implemented across the grade level.** (Chapters 4 and 5 will provide a good starting point.) Determine whether any key concepts might need further attention and identify which teachers might take them up.

2. **Revise the editing checklist (Table 3 in this study guide or Figure 5–2 in the book).**

Discuss the following questions and emerge with a final draft.

- Which items should be kept?
- Which items could be removed?
- Do we want to add any items?
- Which areas have been addressed in recent years but still need more attention?

**Suggested path for the meeting leader:** Open the meeting by bringing the whole group together to review the two goals for the day’s session. Then, have everyone arrange into grade-level groups to address items 1 and 2. Ask that the last ten minutes be reserved for the whole group to look at the final checklist drafts from Step 2 above. Before teams set to work, provide a quick reminder that collaboration to develop the checklist can be useful in many ways:

- The collaboration can lead to conversations about issues of convention and style that may be troubling students across disciplines.
- The team can determine which items on the checklist are most appropriate for explicit instruction in the Language Arts classroom (there will be many), and which are more appropriately taught in all classrooms (such as issues related to style or voice).
- The team can consider whether one teacher (such as ELA) could be designated to review student work using a detailed editing checklist (such as the one featured in Table 5/Figure 5–2), allowing the other teachers to use more general criteria, as in the Assessment Records from Chapters 1–3.
- The team can share information about *when* certain concepts will be taught, allowing teachers to draw from and build on what others have done.
- The team can determine which teacher(s) might explicitly review the expectations for Anchor 5 (as in Figure 5–3 in the book) and talk with students about writing processes (as in Figure 5–4 in the book).

After the groups have worked together, show the final draft for each grade level and take any final feedback. (After the meeting, prepare a clean draft for each team.)

Table 5

Editing Checklist			
Convention	Author	Peer	I checked for . . .
<b>Grammar</b>			Complete sentences
			Clear and appropriate use of pronouns
			Consistency in verb tense
			Appropriateness of any variations from standard English
<b>Capitalization</b>			Capitalization of sentence beginnings
			Capitalization of appropriate words in titles
			Capitalization of proper nouns, dates, holidays, and the pronoun "I"
<b>Punctuation</b>			Correct beginning and end punctuation
			Appropriate comma use
			Appropriate punctuation to set off dialogue and quotations
			Apostrophes for contractions and possessives
			Appropriate use of parentheses, dashes, and ellipses
<b>Spelling</b>			Correct spellings
<b>Language</b>			Consistency in style and tone
			Concise and precise writing
			Varied sentence patterns