

To: Cheri Yecke  
From: Sandra Stotsky  
Date: March 22, 2003  
About: 3/10 Draft of MN English academic standards

This draft is in much better shape than the earlier draft I commented on. I can see that the committee on its own did some of the things that needed to be done. It's decided upon four major strands: Reading, Writing, Speaking/Listening, and Literature, and has also decided upon substrands for each of these. Most of these seem fine but:

- (1) "Viewing" should not be attached to Listening and Speaking since it has little if anything to do with these two language processes. It could be a subsection under Reading since much of what is to be viewed is reading material on the Internet. Perhaps leave it out altogether, but include under Reading at various grade levels appropriate objectives capturing whatever is wanted by Viewing.
- (2) A distinction must be made by grade 3 if not earlier between informational reading and literary/imaginative reading. It is crucial for getting the distinct components of each addressed correctly by teachers and assessment developers. This means that if you want Reading to continue from K-12, it should (maybe by grade 3) refer only to informational/technical reading. From grade 3 on then, literature should refer to modes of literature, with distinctions made for fiction, poetry, and drama.
- (3) The Writing strand needs to have better subsections. Types of Writing is OK, but Writing Strategies is not. Elements of Composition is the sort of thing needed. Also needed is a separate subsection on Grammar and Writing Conventions. It's fine to put Research as a subsection here, but see comments in (6) below

In addition:

- (4) All items need to be reviewed to make sure that the objectives in each substrand reflect what you want students to know/be able to do, NOT learning strategies. Right now a number of items throughout reflect strategies (e.g., previewing text or setting purposes for reading). These are not academic goals but means for achieving academic goals. Strategies are also unmeasurable.
- (5) All grade levels need to be consistent about the differences between "unfamiliar" words and "unknown" words (or however the two terms are used). The former are part of Vocabulary Identification under Reading, the second are part of the Comprehension section. Students "use context to identify unfamiliar words—printed words whose meanings they know." That will convey the idea that words in their oral vocabulary are to be described as "unfamiliar words." After grades 3 or 4, under the Comprehension section, they "use context to determine the meanings of unknown words." That will convey that these are words not in their oral vocabulary but coming into their reading vocabulary. Whatever the committee decides to use for these two meanings, the main point is that they should be consistently used across grades that way. Avoid using context to "predict" or "find" meanings; it doesn't make sense.
- (6) I very much like the idea of a subsection beginning in grade 1 or K called Handwriting and Word Processing. A great idea. I haven't noticed this in other documents I've seen. Handwriting then merges into keyboarding and other

computer-based skills (like using an editing package), and the latter can all be placed in this subsection if it is made to extend through grade 12. Research can then be confined to substantive aspects of the process (such as plagiarism or using multiple sources of information). In other words, Handwriting and Word Processing can be another subcategory in the Writing section.

Let me go grade by grade. There's much more that needs to be done, especially in grades 9-12. But that work can go fast if the committee of English teachers for the high school grades looks at the comments for earlier grades, and if the above suggestions are implemented.

K:

1. The first substrand might better be labeled "Word Identification and Fluency." Analysis can be subsumed under identification.
2. Most of the objectives begin with the right kind of action verb (e.g., identify, blend, use), lending themselves to some form of measurement. There are still a few that need to be reworded or omitted. 1.5 ("Experience working with...") is non-measurable. So is 2.4 ("Orally relate texts with life experience"); in general, any objective asking students to bring in personal experience is non-measurable and should be eliminated.
3. Try for subcategories under a substrand when you have a lot of objectives so you don't end up with what looks like a laundry list. Good subcategory headings will be more informative to teachers as well.
4. Under Word Identification and Fluency here and in other primary grades, students should "use context to identify printed words whose meanings they know, or unfamiliar words." That will convey the idea that words in their oral vocabulary are to be described as "unfamiliar words." After grades 3 or 4, under the Comprehension section, they "use context to determine the meanings of unknown words." Avoid using context to "predict" meanings; it doesn't make sense.
5. Under Comprehension, 2.4, 2.5, and 2.6 are unmeasurable. These are learning strategies, not standards.
6. Under Writing, I don't understand 1.1. Maybe something like: "Express ideas in writing using sound-letter relationships, word boundaries, and sentence form."
7. Combine Listening and Speaking and eliminate Viewing (which doesn't belong here at all). Then eliminate 2.1, and 2.4, 2.5, and 2.5, which are unmeasurable. Retain 2.3 as "Share ideas, facts, and opinions with others" to follow 1.1 and 2.1. 2.2 not possible for most K children.
8. Under Literature, eliminate in 1.1 "Read from." Not possible in K. Make 1.2 simpler for K: maybe "Identify the main characters in the stories they listen to."
9. Eliminate 1.3 (not measurable) and 1.4 (not possible in K). Maybe add: "Retell familiar stories."
10. Maybe add: "Repeat orally familiar rhymes and poems."

Grade 1:

1. First section is very good, with measurable verbs. Try to develop with K, 2, and 3 teachers meaningful subcategories for Word Identification and Fluency.

2. Under Comprehension, I certainly support 2.1 but it's not measurable as a standard/objective. Perhaps make Independent Reading a separate section of the document, with some indication of amount/quality, suggested author lists, genres, etc. Could be K-12. Try to play with this idea.
3. 2.3 is meaningless; eliminate. The goal of these objectives is to show what should be taught to achieve comprehension.
4. Fix up 2.4 as suggested for K.
5. Eliminate 2.5 and 2.9. Children's purposes for reading is a strategy, not a standard. What is absolutely needed here is the distinction between author's purpose for informational reading, and what a story or poem is about, to start getting at an understanding of theme in imaginative texts.
6. 2.7 could be just "Explain main idea" for grade 1.
7. 2.8 should be: Draw and support conclusions with evidence from what has been heard or read."
8. 2.10 should simply be: "Use illustrations to ...." That is measurable. "Use writing" is a learning strategy.
9. Under "Vocabulary Expansion," eliminate 3.2, 3.6, and 3.7 (these are not ways to expand vocabulary in grade 1).
10. 3.4 needs to have something more in it. This is a more general concern of mine throughout when "use" is used. Just "Use knowledge of antonyms, etc." doesn't tell the teacher/assessor for what purpose. Check all objectives beginning with "Use." Maybe: "Use vocabulary learned in science study in a science log to demonstrate understanding." Or "Generate lists of antonyms and synonyms to demonstrate an understanding of these categories."
11. Put 3.5 under Grammar section.
12. Under Research, eliminate reference materials as an objective and put in something related to asking good questions and getting answers from appropriate sources. At this grade level, people could be resources. Check with a few school librarians about what is recommended from research on the research process.
13. Under Spelling et al, eliminate 5.5. Combine 5.6 and 5.7. Put 5.8 under Research.
14. As noted for K, combine Listening and Speaking and eliminate Viewing. Eliminate whatever is under Speaking except 2.3 and reword as suggested for K.
15. Under Literature, eliminate 1.3 (not measurable). Make 1.2 simpler. Maybe "Identify main characters and settings in stories heard or read.
16. 1.4 is strategy as now worded. "Use titles and illustrations to predict what a passage is about and then confirm predictions" is an objective.
17. Eliminate 1.5. This is strategy. Put in "Identify the author's purpose for an informational selection."

#### Grade 2:

1. Some of the remarks above apply here. Try for similar subcategories across the primary grades, with some coming in, others going out.
2. Under Comprehension, get independent reading in another kind of section of its own. It's not a measurable objective as is.
3. Eliminate 2.2, 2.3, 2.5, 2.7. They are strategies and not measurable as objectives.

4. 2.8 and 2.17 are meaningless objectives. The objective must identify measurable elements that lead to comprehension.
5. 2.16 is not appropriate for grade 2. "Paraphrase information in a text" is a very good and very measurable objective for a higher grade.
6. 2.12 is basically strategy. Reword or eliminate.
7. 2.14 needs to be cleaned up. "Create graphic organizers" is not an objective. "Summarize the main points in an informational passage" is a standard but probably not for grade 2.
8. Under Vocabulary Expansion, a lot of work needs to be done. 3.2, 3.6, and 3.9 do not expand vocabulary: eliminate. 3.5, 3.7, 3.8 belong under grammar. Add something about classifying words under abstract category titles (like "furniture" "types of boats" etc.) Also add: "identify the meaning of compound words on the basis of the individual words in them."
9. 3.1 is not a measurable objective. Try to do something with word categories.
10. 3.4 needs to say what students use knowledge of these categories for. Eliminate "homonyms." They are another name for synonyms. Homographs are relevant here, but multiple meaning words captures this. Put homophones in the Spelling section at all grade levels.
11. Under Research, change 3.1 to what I suggest above, and also put in 5.9 under Spelling. Alphabetizing doesn't belong there.
12. Fix up Listening/Speaking as suggested for K and 1.
13. Under Literature, make the separation between imaginative/narrative literature and informational/expository literature and put the right elements/objectives under each. Author's purpose belongs only in latter category; theme belongs in first category. You need a few more objectives here.

#### Grade 3:

1. Under Comprehension, by grade 3, this should focus only on expository/informational materials. Fictional narratives should be treated under literature. Sort these out.
2. Eliminate 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, and 2.8. Most are learning strategies and are not measurable. 2.1 is meaningless. The standards need to specify the elements that will contribute to comprehension, such as identifying main idea, supporting details, etc.
3. 2.5: "use context to determine meaning of unknown words."
4. 2.10 could be put under Research (except dictionary)
5. Under Vocabulary Expansion, eliminate homonyms in 3.1.
6. If "unknown" words in 3.2 is different from unfamiliar words, then that needs to be made clear somewhere. It's fine to say that unfamiliar words are to be identified in early grades if those are words whose meanings are known but not yet identified in print. Unknown words then become part of vocabulary expansion. Unfamiliar words remain as part of decoding and word recognition (analysis).
7. Eliminate 3.4. It does not expand vocabulary. You need to add something about word roots or base words and compounds.
8. Fix up research section as suggested above.

9. Fix up Listening/Speaking section as suggested above. Eliminate 1.4 under listening; it is a learning strategy, not an objective.
10. Again, literature needs a clean list of objectives that relate to imaginative literature. Or figure out another way to distinguish informational reading objectives and literary reading objectives.
11. Under Literature, 1.1 cannot include author's purpose, and tone is not for grade 3.
12. Eliminate 1.5. it is not measurable. 1.7 is too broad. You may want to subdivide Literature into several sections, one focusing on literary elements introduced at each grade level (with differences that are grade appropriate) and another on genres, such as poetry, fiction, non-fiction (to include biography), and drama, and then address genre questions here.

#### Grade 4:

1. 1.1 in first section is right. "Identify unfamiliar....words...." ("identify" is better than "recognize.")
2. Under Comprehension, eliminate 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.14.
3. For 2.5, add some word: "make, confirm, or modify predictions using evidence from the text."
4. 2.6 should be "Use context to determine the meaning of unknown words." You've got to keep the distinction between "unfamiliar words" in the first section and "unknown words" for Comprehension.
5. Under Vocabulary Expansion, remove homonyms in 3.1. It's a synonym.
6. 3.2. Change "find" to "determine."
7. Eliminate 3.4. It does not build vocabulary.
8. Keep a separate subsection for Grammar and Spelling.
9. Research strand needs improvement.
10. See suggestions in earlier grades for Listening, Speaking, and Viewing
11. Literature: Remove purpose and tone from 1.1. Purpose doesn't apply to literature and tone is not developmentally appropriate.
12. 1.5 should be eliminated. It says nothing.
13. The literature section needs lots of work. First make the distinction between expository writing and literary writing. Or divide into four major modes of poetry, drama, fiction, and non-fiction.

#### Grade 5:

1. Under Comprehension, eliminate 2.2, 2.3, 2.5, and 2.15. Not measurable. These are strategies.
2. Eliminate 2.1. Too broad and vague.
3. 2.6. Reword as Use context to determine meaning of unknown words.
4. 2.9 not really a standard. Could be a question on a test. What students need to learn is to identify these literary elements and determine relationship to theme of work.
5. 2.16. Unmeasurable.
6. Under Vocabulary, eliminate 3.4. This does not expand vocabulary knowledge.
7. Eliminate homonyms. Use homographs or multiple-meaning words.

8. For Research, add much more than this. See other standards documents for specific research skills through the elementary grades. Or consult librarians.
9. For Listening, Speaking, and Viewing, see earlier grade comments.
10. The Literature section needs a lot more work. It needs subcategories, and items that are relevant to different types of literature. The Literature and Reading sections need to be sorted out. Most of what's under Reading relates to informational reading. That's fine. Get literary stuff under Literature.

Grade 6:

1. Under Word Identification and Fluency, 1.3 is developmentally inappropriate. Some etymology work is fine, using a dictionary and words from Greek, Latin, and Norse.
2. For Comprehension, by now this has got to be clearly related to informational reading. Most of the good items are.
3. Eliminate 2.1, 2.2, 2.4, 2.5, 2.8, 2.12, 2.13, 2.16. Most of these are learning strategies, not academic objectives. A few can be salvaged. E.g., 2.9. Use the structural features of an informational text.....to determine its main topics (or some such goal).
4. 2.14 (and others that require prior knowledge) are not measurable as such. Objectives must require students to draw conclusions (or identify the main idea, etc.) from what is before them in their reading material, using evidence from the text as support.
5. Vocabulary Expansion section needs to be cleaned up. See several other states' standards documents for how to sequence different topics/kinds of vocabulary over the grades so that there is cumulative and progressive learning. 3.2 doesn't belong in this section. 3.3 does but must refer to unknown words.
6. Under Writing, take out Grammar, Spelling, and Written Language Conventions and put in separate category as it was in earlier grades. Grammar, usage, and other conventions of written language need to be treated separately, on their own, with some guidance to teachers throughout the grades of what grammatical points and conventions can be taught at different grade levels as most grades are doing.
7. For Listening, Speaking, and Viewing, see earlier comments. Only objectives that clearly relate to listening and speaking should be here. Thus, distinguishing between supported and unsupported statements belongs in the Reading section. Viewing finally has some objectives, but they can all be placed under Reading.
8. Literature section badly needs cleaning up and expansion. Technical reading items should all be under the Reading section—as part of informational reading in general. Literature should be literary in nature. Subcategories are needed here for the different modes of literature. There's no one clear way to address these modes and their features without some overlap (literary elements can be common to poetry and novels, but there are some elements specific to each).

Grade 7:

1. 1.3 doesn't belong under Word Identification

2. Comprehension section here is now for the first time clearly on informational reading except for few items that are strategies or unmeasurable for other reasons. Eliminate 2.1, 2.2, 2.4, 2.7, 2.9, and 2.18.
3. For 2.14, delete “using prior knowledge and”
4. For 2.16, delete “point of view” and in any other grades where it appears in the Informational Reading section. It is a literary term with specific meaning relating to narrator stance. Author’s purpose(s) is what has to be addressed with increasing sophistication for informational/expository materials. Young students cannot deal with the philosophical stance implied by the way in which “point of view” is used in the academic world.
5. Vocabulary Expansion needs to be cleaned up. One small subcommittee composed of experienced English/literature teachers should go through every Vocabulary Expansion section from K-12 to work out a clear progression of items that are successively more intellectually/literarily demanding.
6. Writing section needs more and better subsections.
7. See earlier comments on Listening/Speaking/Viewing
8. Literature section needs cleaning up. All informational/technical items should go under Reading. Literary modes should by now get distinct treatment. Literary study is completely lost here.

Grade 8:

1. The Comprehension section under Reading needs to be cleanly focused on informational reading. Eliminate all strategies, point of view, and prior knowledge.
2. Vocabulary Expansion section needs cleaning up. Most items should be eliminated. See earlier comments. Derivations doesn’t belong in the same item with figurative language. Work out a progression of specific kinds of figurative language to teach over the grades. See other documents. Get some experienced English teachers to work on this section.
3. 3.9 shows the different ways to use context to determine the meanings of unknown words. These need to be introduced gradually over the grades, not all in one year.
4. Writing section needs better subsections.
5. See earlier comments on Listening/Speaking/Viewing
6. Literature section needs to be cleaned up. Ban all informational reading items and put them under Reading and let a group of experienced English/literature teachers take over to come up with subsections and subitems.

Grade 9 to Grade 12:

1. Still too underdeveloped for more comments other than those I made in my earlier set of comments and those I have made above.
2. I don’t understand the fixation on “Describe the influences of other languages on the English language” at all grade levels. This is basically a grade 12 topic. Earlier grades can look at etymology and go into Greek, Latin, and French influences with specific groups of words. But as an item on its own below grade 12 it makes no educational sense. It certainly won’t expand vocabulary.

It could be part of dictionary work and learning how to use the various elements in an entry.