



## **Foundations of Language & Literature | Response to EdReports Program Review**

### **Program Overview**

*Foundations of Language & Literature* is a textbook and supplements program designed to prepare all students for success in both AP® English courses, college, and career. The skills and knowledge that students are expected to demonstrate in both AP® courses often goes far beyond what is expected of most high school students and requires a thoughtful foundation that supports AP®-bound students throughout their development. The goals of both AP® courses—close reading, literary and rhetorical analysis, and synthesis writing—are built deeply into this book’s DNA, but at a level that is developmentally appropriate for a 9th grade English class. Generally, there is little opportunity for rhetorical analysis, synthesis, or close reading in the typical textbooks designed for 9th grade, yet teachers know that building these skills in early grades is crucial for success in AP® and beyond. This book has two goals: to provide teachers with the rigorous, high-interest materials designed for developing adolescent minds; and to provide students with the opportunities they need to learn, practice, and develop the skills and knowledge they’ll put to use when they walk into their AP® classrooms on Day One.

### **Response to EdReports Results**

We would like to begin by thanking EdReports for the positive and thorough review of our materials. We have been overwhelmingly impressed by the care and attention to detail of the EdReports team and methodology. We wanted to take this opportunity to address a few places where our materials either appeared to fall short or did not fit the usual mold, to give you—the customer—as much context as possible as you consider our program.

In 2010, the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts and Math were developed in an effort to bring consistency to grade-level expectations, which varied widely across the country. Though *Foundations of Language & Literature* was absolutely designed with the CCSS in mind, our aim was always a different—and higher—one: to prepare ALL 9th grade students for success in the two Advanced Placement® English courses. Our rationale was that if students could be successful in these college-level English classes, this would far exceed the expectations identified in the CCSS, and would leave them well prepared for college and career. One result is that when an organization such as EdReports reviews our materials’ alignment with the CCSS, there will inevitably be some gaps, not because this book does not provide appropriate grade-level support, but because our focus was on AP® preparation, not on a strict alignment with CCSS.

For instance, CCSS barely mentions the word “synthesis,” even though we know that this is a thinking and writing skill that is essential to the AP® Language and Composition course and success in college across almost all disciplines. Therefore, we chose to dedicate an entire chapter in each book and a number of specific activities to synthesis, because it fits with our focus on AP® and college preparation, rather than strict CCSS alignment.



In addition to this difference in focus, we also think it's important to mention that our materials are different from other offerings because they are not a packaged curriculum that imposes one year-long pathway on teachers and students. Rather, we have provided a flexible resource and tools to help teachers and districts make instructional choices that are most relevant for their students. We believe that no one knows their students' needs better than classroom teachers and local administrators. The result of this decision in supporting local choice is that an analysis by an organization like EdReports may include comments such as: the materials fail to provide "increasingly sophisticated contexts" for a particular skill, or "include a rationale for purpose and placement," or may not "support students' literacy skills over the course of the school year through increasingly complex texts." This review frequently judged the materials not based on quality, but on whether they mandated a strict scope and sequence. We believe that it is not the role of a publisher to dictate a lock-step curriculum, but to provide high quality materials and tools that help teachers create their own curriculum that supports the needs of their students. To that end, we have included detailed suggestions for teachers to help them design a curriculum from our materials. In the Teacher's Edition of *Foundations of Language & Literature*, we include a pacing guide for each text and Workshop, as well as an optional pre-built unit covering each specific genre and mode. We built *Foundations of Language & Literature* to foster local choice, allow for authentic differentiation, and provide in-depth support for constructing a curriculum that fits *your* school and *your* students.

With that in mind, we would like to address the ways that we have included grammar in our materials and why an organization such as EdReports' reliance on the CCSS won't be able to quite capture the realities of grammar instruction in a contemporary English classroom. As a discipline, English teachers have long wrestled with how to teach grammar and conventions: we've used copying of famous passages, sentence-diagramming, daily fix-its, peer editing, and many more approaches. The field has, for the most part, settled on the idea that grammar and conventions reflect a student's own cultural, social, developmental, and educational contexts and that any improvement in the use of conventions must be done within the context of the students' own writing. [Research has shown](#) that stand-alone, isolated, class-wide grammar instruction has no impact on students' writing skills. And while EdReports recognizes this importance—for instance evaluating materials on whether there are "opportunities for application in context"—their reliance on the CCSS Language Standards makes these evaluations problematic. The CCSS identifies, for example, specific grade-levels when certain punctuation must be mastered:

- Grade 7: Use a comma to separate coordinate adjectives
- Grade 8: Use punctuation (comma, ellipsis, dash) to indicate a pause or break
- Grade 9/10: Use a semicolon to link two or more closely related independent clauses. Use a colon to introduce a list or quotation.
- Grade 11/12: Observe hyphenation conventions.



As any classroom teacher can tell you, there are 7th graders who are absolutely ready for semicolons and hyphens, and 11th graders who are still mastering the comma. And that's okay. The CCSS, inexplicably, ignores what the field has learned long ago: conventions are developmental and students have widely varying needs for grammar instruction.

Therefore, in *Foundations of Language & Literature*, we focus on providing teachers and students with the resources they need to make their own choices for grammar instruction, since student needs and contexts vary widely. That is why we tackled grammar in the opening chapter on writing, laying out how and why sentences are built in certain ways. We then included Grammar Workshops that students can work through independently, or in small groups for students who have similar needs. These workshops are flexible, and as such they can be used to provide exactly the help that individual students need when it is relevant for them. The workshops ramp up in complexity: moving from instruction, to identifying errors, to revising sentences, to revising paragraphs, then returning to the student's own writing to revise. Points were lost on this EdReports review because of this flexibility—because they weren't rigidly integrated throughout the book. Additionally, questions on grammatical concepts throughout the book tend to move past the baseline of simply understanding grammar, and focus on the effects of grammatical choices. This inherently requires a knowledge of grammar that is reinforced in the Grammar Workshops, but recognizes that simple correctness in grammar should never be the end goal of its study.

This book encountered a similar rigidity in the evaluation of research. While EdReports was looking for evidence of a “progression” or “series of research tasks throughout the school year,” what our book does is teach the foundational skills needed to research effectively, assess credibility, and write an evidence-based argument. The book provides direct instruction of how to find, assess, and use sources (Chapter 4 - Using Sources), in-context structured practice in every Conversation section, and a wealth of opportunities throughout the book in questions labeled “Research.” We provide these key building blocks, and let teachers decide when and how to deploy them, which is not what the standards that EdReports works from are designed to assess.

In closing, while the Common Core State Standards certainly have done a lot to bring some necessary order to the chaos of the various grade-level expectations around the country, and have allowed organizations like EdReports to provide a coherent benchmark for teachers and school districts to easily evaluate the wide variety of materials available for purchase with limited resources, we would like to make clear that the CCSS does not paint the whole picture of what we are providing in *Foundations of Language & Literature*. We are committed to ensuring that all students, regardless of background and skill-level, can be successful in the AP<sup>®</sup> English courses and in college, by providing clear and aligned preparation in their 9th grade class.