

## **Advanced Language & Literature** | Response to EdReports Program Review

### **Program Overview**

*Advanced 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 10th grade English class. Generally, there is little opportunity for rhetorical analysis, synthesis, or close reading in the typical textbooks designed for 10th 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 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.

In 2010, the Common Core State Standards were developed in an effort to bring consistency to grade-level expectations. Though *Advanced Language & Literature* was designed with the CCSS in mind, our aim was always a different—and higher—one: to prepare ALL 10th 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 exceed the expectations identified in the CCSS, and would leave them well prepared for college and career. One result is that in a report based solely on alignment with the CCSS, there may be gaps, not because this book does not provide appropriate grade-level support, but because our focus was on AP®, 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 believe it’s important to mention that our materials 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. 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, in the Teacher’s Edition of *Advanced Language & Literature*, we include information on text pacing, and provide optional pre-built units for each theme that focus on developing a specific skill. We built *Advanced 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.

One unfortunate way this manifested in this review was by discounting materials that might be used in more than one way, or whose use is at the discretion of the teacher. For instance, the report claimed that there were not frequent opportunities for speaking and listening. Of course, many of the questions following a reading could readily be used in that way—as a one-on-one, small group, or full class discussion, rather than as a written response—and support and ideas for that exist in the Teacher’s Edition. But because those prompts were not labeled as such, nor mandated to be used in that way, they were not considered. Similarly, vocabulary is built throughout the book by including rich complex texts, and investigating the language choices in those texts through the Analyzing Language, Style, and Structure questions, but since those were not part of a specific scope and sequence, they did not count as part of a “cohesive, consistent approach” despite appearing after every piece in the book.

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 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 *Advanced 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. For that reason, we provided a series of flexible options for building targeted grammar skills: The book includes a thorough grammar handbook in the back of the book, GrammarGirl podcasts, online grammar exercises, and adaptive LearningCurve activities. In short, this book moves students a step closer to the reality of college-level classes, where grammar becomes the student's responsibility, but we have provided many supports to guide that transition. 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 found in the Grammar Handbook, but recognizes that simple correctness in grammar should never be the end goal of its study. The EdReports indicator would make it seem as though grammar were absent from this book, but in fact grammar is addressed, just not as direct instruction, and not as part of a mandatory scope-and-sequence.

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 thinking and writing skills needed to work effectively with multiple sources, assess credibility, and write an evidence-based argument. The book provides direct instruction of how to assess and use sources (Chapter 4 - Synthesis), in-context practice in every Entering the Conversation section, and a wealth of opportunities throughout the book in Topics for Composing prompts labeled "Research." We provide these key building blocks and opportunities, 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 *Advanced 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 10th grade class.