

## About the American Diploma Project English and Communication Benchmarks, Grades 4 – 12.

### *What are the ADP English Benchmarks?*

In partnership with [The Education Trust](#) and the [Thomas B. Fordham Foundation](#), Achieve launched The American Diploma Project (ADP) and worked with postsecondary educators, employers in high-performance workplaces and K – 12 educators to define and refine a set of English benchmarks that describe the English competencies needed for high school graduates to be successful in postsecondary education or in high–performance, high-growth occupations.

### *What is included in the ADP English benchmarks?*

The ADP benchmarks describe expectations across eight strands: language, communication, writing, research, logic, informational text, media and literature.

### *How are the English and Communication Benchmarks, Grades 4 – 12 organized?*

Achieve organized the English and Communication Benchmarks, Grades 4 – 12 by the performances expected of students across the grade levels and are organized into the following strands:

In grades 4 – 12, students are introduced to text with appropriate **Text Complexity (T)** and have three ways to **Acquire Information (A)**

- A.1 Reading
- A.2 Listening
- A.3 Viewing

Whether they **Work in Teams (W)** or individually, students have three ways to **Communicate Information (C)**

- C.1 Writing
- C.2 Speaking
- C.3 Producing Digital Media

For future success in postsecondary education and work, students in grades 4 – 12 will need to **Create ADP Products (P)**

- P.1 Informational/Explanatory Essay
- P.2 Literary Analysis Essay
- P.3 Argumentative Essay
- P.4 Research Essay
- P.5 Work-Related Texts

### *Why are the English and Communication Benchmarks, Grades 4 – 12 organized by grade spans?*

The English and Communication Benchmarks, Grades 4 – 12 are written for grade spans (grades 4 – 5, 6 – 8, 9 – 10, and 11 – 12) for two reasons:

- English and communication is by nature recursive. English teachers teach the same type, but increasingly complex set, of skills and content from year to year. This movement to increasingly complex tasks and texts happens gradually and often not in a neat linear progression. Grade spans more accurately allow for a description of reasonable increase in rigor over the course of a longer period of time than one academic year.
- Because of the wide-ranging nature of the ADP benchmarks (which include reading, writing, speaking, listening, viewing, media and logic statements), states may decide to emphasize

specific aspects of these benchmarks at different grade levels and in different academic disciplines. Drafting the benchmarks in grade spans allows for state and district control in the variety of implementation. The grade span configuration allows flexibility: States can break down the benchmarks into grade-by-grade benchmarks and check their own standards against the benchmarks for a specific grade span. This flexibility may be particularly important in reading because of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) federal guidelines, which mandate grade-by-grade standards for reading for grades 3 – 8.

The grade span benchmarks for reading provide general guidance to states as to what seems appropriate at particular levels yet the benchmarks allow for flexibility in incorporating much of the work which states have already done along these lines. In addition, states may decide that the benchmarks represent too large a set of instructional objectives for a single year. They may decide to focus on certain benchmarks in one year and others in the subsequent year while still seeking to meet the benchmarks for the end of that grade span (such as by emphasizing argument in grade 11 and research in grade 12). The grade span structure allows for this kind of curricular flexibility.

### ***Why do the benchmarks begin at grade 4, not kindergarten?***

The expression that students learn to read up to grade 3 and then read to learn after grade 4 holds some truth. In grades K – 3, early reading instruction includes an emphasis on phonemic awareness, phonics, word recognition and fluency. Many state standards, as well as independent efforts, have already described early reading skills well and can be used as references for states updating their standards and expectations for these grade levels. Because the emphasis on the acquisition of literacy shifts after grade 3 to the acquisition of additional skills and the application of literacy, instruction in the intermediate grades often emphasizes those reading skills critical to comprehending a wide range of genres and content-area texts. Starting the benchmarks at grade 4 allows for an emphasis on the rigorous expectations for skills and performances in English courses and across the content areas in reading, writing, speaking, listening, viewing and logic.

### ***Why are these called “English and Communication” benchmarks and not “English” benchmarks as in the original ADP benchmarks?***

These benchmarks go beyond what typically occurs in an English class and involve expectations for communication in general. The original ADP English benchmark document also suggests this wider application, and the new title is intended to highlight this broad range of skills.

### ***What is unique about the English and Communication Benchmarks compared to other standards documents?***

The English and Communication Benchmarks, Grades 4 – 12 map backward from the ADP benchmarks and so share many of the same unique qualities. These materials emphasize the expectations of postsecondary education and work to a much greater degree than traditional English standards, providing a focus on logic, work-related text and work teams. Most significantly, specific performances and products anchor the English and Communication Benchmarks. These products, such as the research essay, an argument, a speech or a media production, presented as culminating experiences at each of the grade spans, clearly demonstrate student competence at those grades. The benchmarks also have a unique format. Many traditional standards present lists of skills and knowledge separated into categories (such as vocabulary, reading and writing). These lists may give the impression that literacy skills are acquired in a linear and piecemeal way, not through a cohesive curricular experience. The benchmarks emphasize students’ capacity to produce coherent oral, written and visual products, as well

as their ability to understand increasingly complex aural, visual and written text. Because of this emphasis on results, we have organized the benchmarks into three categories: Ways of acquiring information (reading, listening and viewing); ways of communicating information (writing, speaking and producing digital media productions); and ADP products of communication (informational/explanatory essays, literary analysis essays, argumentative essays, research essays and work-related texts). This format shows the interaction of decoding and encoding skills and abilities that more closely represents an effective instructional approach.

### ***What content is included in the English and Communication Benchmarks, Grades 4 – 12?***

Achieve based the English and Communication Benchmarks, Grades 4 – 12 on the content prescribed in the ADP high school exit benchmarks, which include expectations in the eight ADP strands: language, communication, writing, research, logic, informational text, media and literature. The English and Communication Benchmarks provide specificity not provided in the ADP benchmarks, detailing skills and products that lead to mastery of the exit benchmarks, including many specific examples of both texts and tasks. The "backmapped" benchmarks also remain general enough, however, to act as guides for standards development and curricular planning designed to meet the ADP high school exit benchmarks. Achieve references reading lists and uses text examples illustrating the quality and complexity of texts throughout the materials to guide curricular choices, not to constrict them. Although comprehensive and detailed, the English and Communication Benchmarks, Grades 4 – 12 stop short of creating an exhaustive list of everything that could be taught or would be desirable in an English literature curriculum, such as personal or creative writing or more detailed literary text expectations. The benchmarks also suggest many areas of study (such as logic, informational text analysis and media interpretation) that should not be relegated only to the English or language arts classrooms but that should inform other content areas as well.

### ***Why do the grades 4 – 12 benchmarks not include personal and creative writing or more detailed literary text expectations?***

The grades 4 – 12 benchmarks do not provide an exhaustive list of everything that could be taught in an English course. They link to the ADP benchmarks, which intentionally stop short of detailing all expectations for an English course. Instead, the benchmarks reflect the concerns of higher education and business regarding skills and products needed by students after graduation, and thus they reflect a broad spectrum of communication skills applicable to courses across the curriculum.

### ***Is the grade span for grades 11 – 12 the same as the high school exit ADP benchmarks?***

The grades 11 – 12 benchmarks link closely with the ADP high school exit benchmarks but have been expanded to provide greater detail and examples for specificity and clarity.

### ***What other standards and expectations were used in the development of the benchmarks?***

As an essential part of the development process for the English and Communication Benchmarks, Grades 4 – 12, the writing team reviewed the following national content standards and guidelines for the language and content used to describe the progression of skills and performance for grades 4 – 12:

- College Board Standards for College Success: English Language Arts (College Board, 2006);
- Standards for the English Language Arts (National Council of Teachers of English and International Reading Association, 1996);
- New Standards (National Center on Education and the Economy and the University of Pittsburgh, 1997);
- The K–12 Speaking, Listening, and Media Literacy Standards and Competency Statements, (1998);

- Standards for Middle and High School Literacy Coaches (International Reading Association, 2006);
- National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP) Reading and Writing Frameworks (ACT, pre-publication versions);
- ACT College Readiness Standards for Reading (ACT);
- Sequence (Core Knowledge);
- The District of Columbia Reading/English Language Arts Pre-K through Grade 12 Standards (District of Columbia);
- The Indiana Reading List (Indiana Department of Education, 2006);
- The Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks / Appendix A: Suggested Authors, Illustrators, and Works Reflecting Our Common Literary and Cultural Heritage and Appendix B: Suggested Authors and Illustrators of Contemporary American Literature and World Literature (Massachusetts Department of Education, 2001/2004)