Oregon's Instructional Frameworks | Adolescent Literacy

Adolescent Literacy

Walkthrough, Planning and Discussion Guide

Part 2: Disciplinary Literacy Noticing Tools

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Walkthrough, Planning and Discussion Guide Overview

All students in grades 6–12 need access to high-quality, culturally responsive literacy instruction across all disciplines. In middle and high school, literacy is a tool for thinking, meaning-making, identity expression and knowledge acquisition - not just a set of general reading and writing skills.

This set of noticing tools is designed for use during classroom walkthroughs, collaborative lesson planning, peer observation and instructional coaching. Noticing tools are resources to support educators and leaders to observe, identify and reflect on specific literacy teaching and learning practices as they occur. Their purpose is to help educators and leaders notice literacy teaching and learning when it's happening, celebrate what is going well and identify areas for improvement. Educators can use this set of guiding questions individually or collaboratively. The tool can be adapted depending on context and use.

This resource features six disciplinary literacy noticing tools: social science, language arts, mathematics, science, career and technical education, and health/physical education. Each tool highlights the unique ways literacy lives in a discipline. For example, disciplinary literacy can include analyzing historical sources, crafting literary arguments, reasoning mathematically, or making sense of scientific data. By focusing on how literacy shows up in every discipline, these tools help educators recognize patterns across classrooms, spark new insights, and reinforce the shared responsibility of ensuring all students have equitable opportunities to read, write, and think in every subject.

Noticing tools like this are most powerful when they surface insights that foster dialogue and collaborative reflection about literacy practice. Observation data can be shared with groups of educators alongside prompts such as:

- What experiences with text, disciplinary discourse, and writing are reflected in the data?
- What types of literacy opportunities are missing or underrepresented?
- How does this data align with or challenge your own practice?
- What supports might teachers need to deepen disciplinary literacy practices?

When framed as a resource for shared reflection and problem-solving rather than judgment, the data invites educators to learn from one another and co-create stronger approaches to literacy instruction.

Disciplinary Practices in Action

A disciplinary literacy-rich classroom and learning community is defined by the following essential characteristics:

- A focus on comprehension, sensemaking and communication
- A climate of collaboration
- An emphasis on student agency

These descriptions can help paint a picture of literacy practices in action. They can be used as reflection tools and for lesson planning and observation.

A Focus on Comprehension, Sensemaking, and Communication

Literacy in the disciplines includes reading, writing, speaking and listening as integrated tools for thinking, meaning-making and communicating understanding. Disciplinary literacy depends on opportunities where

- Reading is embedded in disciplinary learning: students develop strategies, identify and use text features, build topic knowledge and carry out discipline-based activities using course-related materials.
- The work of comprehension takes place in the classroom, where the teacher scaffolds the learning and serves as a model and guide.
- Students develop and apply strategies for comprehending, analyzing and creating texts in the discipline. They use writing to clarify thinking, synthesize ideas and consolidate new knowledge.
- Students identify and use text features, structures and genres that are authentic to the field.
- Students write in discipline-specific ways to explain reasoning, construct arguments, synthesize information or narrate processes.
- Writing is centered as a way to communicate ideas clearly to an intended audience. Students make strategic choices about genre, modality, audience and purpose.

The work of comprehending is metacognitive: how readers make sense of text is as important as what sense they make of it and how they craft written and oral responses that demonstrate understanding. Additionally, how students write to make meaning, for themselves and others, is equally important.

A Climate of Collaboration

Collaboration in the classroom is a way to make sense of complex material and engage in disciplinary discourse routines. Collaboration supports students in building and co-constructing knowledge, practicing communication, reasoning and argumentation. In well-designed learning environments

- Class members draw on each other's knowledge, serving as resources to make sense of text together through dialogue.
- Disciplinary discourse—the ways of talking, questioning and reasoning used by experts in the field—is explicitly taught, modeled and practiced.
- Classroom norms support risk-taking, respectful disagreement, sharing knowledge and confusion and building on one another's ideas in both speaking and writing.
- Grouping arrangements (independent work, pairs, small groups, whole class) support collaboration and inquiry and are responsive to the oral, written and literary skills students are developing.
- A shared vocabulary to describe reading, writing and disciplinary discourse processes and text features is evident in classroom talk, materials in use and materials on display.

An Emphasis on Student Agency in Literacy

Agency in literacy means that students take ownership of their reading, writing, speaking and listening as part of learning in the discipline. In classrooms that foster agency

- Students are agents in the process of reading, writing and learning: they actively inquire into text meaning, their own and others' reading processes, the utility of reading strategies, and their preferences, strengths and weaknesses as readers.
- Students are expected and supported to read extensively. Course-related materials are available on various levels, and accountability systems are in place to ensure that students read large quantities of connected text.
- Over time, students are expected and able to do more reading, make more sophisticated interpretations and accomplish more work with texts with less support from the teacher during class time.
- Students refine their writing through planning, drafting, soliciting feedback, revising and editing, making choices based on audience and purpose.
- Students use writing to synthesize relationships among ideas and have confidence in the power of their voice to enter the conversation and impact its direction.
- Students produce more sophisticated disciplinary writing with less support over time.

Helpful Indicators for Planning and Observing

Classrooms that center literacy can also be recognized by several classroom characteristics, including how materials and student groupings are used, the types of learning activities students undertake and the roles of the teacher, students and classroom talk in the learning environment. Educators can use the questions as they plan to enhance disciplinary literacy or engage in peer observation.

Materials

Look for materials that invite reading, writing, speaking and listening in authentic disciplinary ways. Notice whether the materials are high-quality and appropriate for the grade level and task. Look for evidence that students—and not just the teacher—are doing the intellectual work.

- Are a range of authentic text types present (e.g., primary sources, scientific articles, technical manuals, literary works, data displays, visuals)?
- How are these materials being used? What kind of work is displayed in the classroom? On the walls? On the board? In the online learning environment?
- Does work include student writing, evidence-based arguments, annotated texts or project work that demonstrates thinking?
- What do these displays indicate about how reading is approached and the role it plays in the class?

Physical and Social Arrangements of the Classroom Support Literacy

Look for a physical arrangement of the classroom that allows for student collaboration, discussion and meaningful grouping.

- How is the classroom arranged? Is it arranged in a way to make it easy for students to read, write and talk together?
- What kinds of groupings (pairs, small groups, whole class) are students in as they carry out classroom tasks?
- Do these groupings give students chances to engage in collaborative meaning-making and disciplinary discussion?
- How do seating arrangements and grouping choices signal that student talk and collaboration are important to learning?

Tasks and Activities

Look for activities that position students as active readers, writers and thinkers.

- Are the rigor of activities aligned to the rigor of grade-level standards?
- What activities seem to be routine in the classroom?
- Who is doing the work of reading, comprehending, discussing and writing to make meaning from texts?
- Are students writing to capture new learning and articulate a point of view?
- Are students producing writing that reflects disciplinary thinking (e.g., lab reports, historical arguments, literary analysis)?
- Are students using discipline-specific language?
- Are these discourse and writing activities connected to authentic disciplinary purposes rather than just isolated exercises?

Teaching and Learning Roles

Look for how responsibility for literacy learning is shared.

- What roles do the teacher and students play in classroom activities?
- Does the teacher model, guide and collaborate in comprehension, writing and disciplinary discourse as well as give instructions, assign and question students?
- Are students encouraged to pose questions, share interpretations and problem solve, as well as respond to questions about course readings?

Reaching All Learners

> “Core instruction within each discipline provides critical access to standards-aligned learning experiences. Thus, the highest leverage for adolescent literacy development comes from investing in core instruction. Consistent access to core instruction—which includes engagement with discipline-specific grade-level text, tasks and talk—is also a key equity lever, improving the literacy achievement of all students in middle and high school.” (Oregon Adolescent Literacy Framework, page 42)

Supporting Multilingual Learners

- Are students engaged in meaning-making across content areas, beyond isolated grammar or spelling practice?
- Do materials and activities affirm and build on students' home languages and cultural practices?
- Are students given opportunities to analyze how language works (metalinguistic awareness) and transfer skills across languages?
- Do multilingual learners have equal access to graduation requirements, career pathways and college programs?
- Are students developing content knowledge and language simultaneously, rather than waiting until they reach proficiency?
- Are complex texts made accessible through scaffolds?
- Do teachers use collaborative models (co-planning, co-teaching, co-assessing, co-reflecting) with multilingual specialists to integrate language and content?

Supporting Students Experiencing Literacy Difficulties or Disabilities

- Is core instruction provided first, with high-leverage practices, in the general classroom?
- Are accessible materials and technologies (e.g., text-to-speech, alternate formats, digital supports) being used to remove barriers?
- Are targeted literacy interventions (Core+More) connected back to disciplinary learning, rather than replacing it?
- Are educators collaborating across roles (teachers, specialists, families) to support students through Individualized Education Programs, 504s and inclusive practices?

Noticing Tools Introduction

There are six discipline-specific noticing tools: social science, language arts, mathematics, science, career and technical education, and health. Each tool is aligned with the Oregon Adolescent Literacy Framework. These tools illuminate the distinct ways literacy lives within each discipline, such as interpreting evidence in historical texts, modeling scientific phenomena, or constructing arguments in literary analysis. A focus on relevance, student agency, and meaningful communication is central.

These tools are designed to help educators notice how literacy practices appear within specific disciplines, revealing the ways students read, write, think, and communicate like experts in different fields. By paying attention to classroom texts, tasks, talk, and roles, educators and leaders can better understand how disciplinary literacy is—or is not—being supported across subjects. The tools are not evaluative of teachers or students; rather, they provide a structure for surfacing insights that can guide instruction, inquiry, professional learning, and strengthen disciplinary literacy opportunities for all students.

Social Science

For a comprehensive overview of literacy in social science, see the *Disciplinary Literacy in Social Science Spotlight*.

Tasks and Activities

- Are students using diverse types of historical documents and artifacts (e.g., primary documents, maps, infographics) to develop claims and counterclaims?
- Are students being asked to contextualize, corroborate and source documents?
- How are students articulating historical significance or explaining causality and continuity and change over time?
- Do learning activities ask students to make connections between past and present or between differing historical perspectives?
- Are students formulating critical questions about the sources and the content that deepen their understanding of the concepts and ideas in the grade-level social sciences standards?

Task and Activities Observation Notes

Materials and Resources

- Are there diverse historical texts, including primary and secondary sources, that represent multiple perspectives?
- Are tools like timelines, maps and graphic organizers available to support student thinking?
- Are scaffolds in place to support the interpretation of complex historical texts (e.g., sentence starters, sourcing heuristics)?
- Are multilingual supports available (glossaries, translated terms, visual supports)?

Materials and Resources Observation Notes

Student Grouping and Classroom Climate

- How are students grouped to support disciplinary discussions (e.g., document-based seminars)?
- Is there evidence of academic discourse norms, such as citing sources and engaging with counterclaims?
- Are students invited to build their own cultural, historical and experiential background knowledge to support reading comprehension and discourse?

Student Grouping and Classroom Climate Observation Notes

Language Arts

For a comprehensive overview of literacy in language arts, see the *Disciplinary Literacy in Language Arts Spotlight*.

Tasks and Activities

- Are students analyzing how authors use literary devices, language and structure to convey meaning?
- Do learning tasks include crafting evidence-based interpretations across genres?
- Are students comparing texts (literary and informational) to build thematic or conceptual understanding?
- Are students writing to analyze, reflect or build arguments based on texts?

Task and Activities Observation Notes

Materials and Resources

- Are there grade-appropriate texts that reflect cultural, linguistic and identity diversity?
- Are digital annotation tools or other supports available for close reading?
- Are mentor texts available that model analytical or reflective writing?
- Are multilingual supports available (glossaries, translated terms, visual supports)?

Materials and Resources Observation Notes

Student Grouping and Classroom Climate

- Are students discussing texts with peers using discipline-specific language?
- Is peer feedback part of the writing or interpretation process?
- How are students encouraged to see their identities and experiences as lenses for literary analysis?

Student Grouping and Classroom Climate Observation Notes

Mathematics

For a comprehensive overview of literacy in mathematics, see the *Disciplinary Literacy in Mathematics Spotlight*.

Tasks and Activities

- Do the tasks encourage students to make sense of mathematical ideas and connect them to underlying concepts?
- Do the materials prompt students to justify their reasoning both orally and in writing, using accurate mathematical vocabulary?
- Do the tasks support students in constructing viable arguments and critiquing the reasoning of others?
- Do the tasks help students see the relevance of mathematics through modeling, by asking them to formulate problems, make assumptions and interpret results within meaningful contexts?
- Do tasks include questions that allow for multiple solution paths, offer students choice in their problem-solving strategies and prompt students to explain why their strategies work?
- Are students encouraged to articulate their mathematical thinking in writing or orally during discussions using accurate mathematical vocabulary?

Task and Activities Observation Notes

Materials and Resources

- Are the tasks designed to be inclusive by offering multiple resources for students to engage with and demonstrate understanding of mathematical concepts, such as visual models, manipulatives or digital tools?
- Are the tasks designed to encourage students to make connections between representations, strategies, procedures and concepts?
- Are multilingual supports designed to affirm students' linguistic identities while promoting access to rigorous mathematical content, such as translated key terms, bilingual glossaries or sentence frames to support meaning-making across languages?

Materials and Resources Observation Notes

Student Grouping and Classroom Climate

- Are students encouraged to ask questions of one another to clarify or challenge ideas?
- Are students critiquing the reasoning of others and encouraged to comment on each other's work?
- Are students collaborating on complex problems and comparing solution pathways?
- Do ideas from the classroom community build on one another as students explain their ideas and listen to the explanations of others?
- How do classroom routines encourage students to view mistakes as valuable contributions to collective learning? Is mathematical discourse normalized—with students questioning, justifying and revising ideas?

Student Grouping and Classroom Climate Observation Notes

Science

For a comprehensive overview of literacy in science, see the *Disciplinary Literacy in Science Spotlight*.

Tasks and Activities

- Are students engaging in scientific practices, such as asking questions, developing and using models and analyzing and interpreting data?
- Do tasks involve other practices, such as constructing explanations, engaging in argument from evidence or obtaining, evaluating and communicating information?
- Are students engaging with scientific texts as part of their scientific practice and understanding of natural phenomena?
- Is there explicit attention to disciplinary vocabulary and text structures?

Task and Activities Observation Notes

Materials and Resources

- Are there authentic data sets, lab materials and texts, such as scientific reports, available?
- Are multimodal texts used to explain phenomena, such as videos, diagrams and interactive simulations?
- Are supports available for interpreting complex graphs or experimental procedures?
- Are multilingual supports available (glossaries, translated terms, visual supports)?

Materials and Resources Observation Notes

Student Grouping and Classroom Climate

- Are students collaborating during investigations and reflecting on processes and data gathered?
- Are students participating in activities that reflect expectations for scientific engagement and interaction?
- Are students encouraged to draw on lived experiences and community-based knowledge to explore and make sense of scientific phenomena?

Student Grouping and Classroom Climate Observation Notes

Career and Technical Education

For a comprehensive overview of literacy in career and technical education, see the *Disciplinary Literacy in Career and Technical Education Spotlight*.

Tasks and Activities

- Are students engaging with authentic industry-specific tasks (e.g., interpreting blueprints, analyzing technical manuals, following procedural guides)?
- Are students reading and analyzing multiple text types to solve problems or complete projects (e.g., reports, regulations, charts, diagrams)?
- Are comprehension strategies for industry-specific texts explicitly taught and modeled (e.g., synthesizing across charts, manuals and video instructions)?
- Do students write for authentic professional purposes (e.g., project proposals, safety guidelines, maintenance reports, client communications)?
- Are collaborative activities (e.g., peer critiques, role-played client interactions) designed to strengthen both technical skills and communication skills?

Task and Activities Observation Notes

Materials and Resources

- Are a variety of authentic Career and Technical Education texts available, including visual, digital and print formats (e.g., diagrams, flow charts, regulations, web content, blueprints)?
- Are supports provided for interpreting complex, discipline-specific vocabulary and structures (e.g., glossaries, models, annotated exemplars)?
- Are materials used in ways that connect to real-world industry contexts?
- Are tools for modeling industry tasks (e.g., software, specialized equipment, simulation environments) available and integrated into literacy learning?
- Are multilingual supports available (glossaries, translated terms, visual supports)?

Materials and Resources Observation Notes

Student Grouping and Classroom Climate

- Are students working collaboratively to complete industry or professionally relevant projects or solve technical problems?
- Are students practicing professional communication in discussions, critiques and presentations?
- Do grouping arrangements encourage shared problem-solving, diverse perspectives and peer-to-peer teaching?
- Are agreements for precision, safety and professional accountability evident in classroom interactions?

Student Grouping and Classroom Climate Observation Notes

Health

For a comprehensive overview of literacy in health, see the *Disciplinary Literacy in Health and Physical Education Spotlight*.

Tasks and Activities

- Are students analyzing health-related texts that surface multiple perspectives (e.g., scientific research, policy briefs, community narratives)?
- Do tasks engage students with public health issues, such as individual responsibility vs. systemic influences on health, personal freedoms vs. public health imperatives, short-term vs. long-term health priorities?
- Are students taught explicit strategies to evaluate sources for credibility, bias and cultural relevance?
- Do students synthesize information from multiple sources to make evidence-based recommendations?
- Are students writing for authentic purposes (e.g., health education campaigns, position statements, policy recommendations) with clear intended audiences?

Task and Activities Observation Notes

Materials and Resources

- Are diverse, authentic health texts available (e.g., public health campaigns, infographics, epidemiological reports, case studies)?
- Are students exposed to texts representing scientific, community and cultural viewpoints?
- Are scaffolds provided for interpreting technical vocabulary, data visualizations and statistical claims?
- Do materials help students examine and navigate complexity in health discourse?
- Are multilingual supports available (glossaries, translated terms, visual supports)?

Materials and Resources Observation Notes

Student Grouping and Classroom Climate

- Are students engaging in structured discussions that require considering and responding to multiple perspectives?
- Are students encouraged to connect health concepts to their own identities, communities and lived experiences?
- Are classroom agreements in place that support respectful disagreement, active listening and reasoning based on evidence?
- Are students collaborating to design solutions or recommendations that balance multiple health priorities and perspectives?

Student Grouping and Classroom Climate Observation Notes