

Disciplinary Literacy in Career and Technical Education

Text Types in Career and Technical Education

Scientific career and technical education (CTE) students must be able to read and write a wide range of complex industry-specific texts to succeed in the field of study. These texts describe processes and procedures; out-line laws, guidelines and regulations; show relationships (e.g., relationships among all the components of a heat pump); and dictate professional practice. For instance, CTE students might encounter texts such as career manuals, posters with visual representations (e.g., diagrams, flow charts), procedural guidance (e.g., recipes, medical procedures), reports, laws, regulations, guidelines, project plans, instructional videos, web content and blueprints, among others.

To ensure CTE students have the knowledge and skills they need to succeed, it is critical to explicitly teach career-specific literacy practices. The next section describes several key CTE literacy practices.

“Career-specific literacy empowers students to build their careers, become innovators in their chosen fields and contribute as skilled professionals to society.”

(Oregon’s Adolescent Literacy Framework, page 149)

Explicitly Teaching Literacy Practices in Career and Technical Education

PRACTICE: Leverage background knowledge to teach specialized language.

Students bring valuable knowledge of the world and, at times, the industry, to the classroom. Teachers can support their students’ success by honoring and leveraging students’ background knowledge to teach discipline-specific terminology and access CTE texts.

EXAMPLE: *When studying an HVAC manual, students identify terms they already know. The instructor then demonstrates how to use these terms to help them understand new terms. For example, if students know the word thermometer, they can use the meaning of “thermo” (heat) to understand that the word “thermostatic” is related to heat.*

PRACTICE: Teach comprehension strategies for Career and Technical Education texts.

Professionals read career-related texts using specific reading comprehension strategies. Teachers can demystify these strategies by using authentic texts to explicitly teach the why, when and how of the strategies.

EXAMPLE: *In a nursing program, an instructor teaches students how to synthesize information. The instructor explains what text synthesis is and why it is an important skill for nurses, and then uses a chart to model gathering evidence across multiple texts. Students practice the strategy in partners using a diabetic patient’s medical chart, an article on diabetes and a video lecture on the risks of uncontrolled diabetes. Based on their syntheses, students identify new insights and correct misunderstandings about diabetes. Finally, students collaboratively apply this knowledge by recommending a treatment plan for the patient.*

PRACTICE: Provide opportunities for career-specific writing.

Writing industry-specific texts requires students to understand the intended audience (e.g., clients, supervisors, colleagues) and tailor content to meet their specific professional needs. Professionals adjust their writing to achieve certain purposes. Teachers can support students by identifying authentic purposes and audiences within their fields and giving students opportunities to practice writing for those audiences.

EXAMPLE: *In an agricultural program, the teacher models how to read drought reports by thinking aloud while examining rainfall charts from the Klamath Basin. After explicitly teaching students how to identify key data points and trends, the teacher guides them through writing conservation plans that help local farmers adapt to changing weather patterns.*

PRACTICE: Support structured opportunities for discussion and collaboration.

Students develop crucial industry-specific communication skills by participating in authentic discussions. Through activities such as peer critiques, technical talks and role-played client interactions, they learn to express ideas clearly, use precise terms and respond effectively in professional settings.

EXAMPLE: *In a forestry program, the teacher organizes a role-play in which students act as forestry professionals and landowners to discuss sustainability practices. Before the role-play, students work in groups to anticipate potential questions and concerns related to environmental impact and economic feasibility. They prepare responses based on industry-specific guidelines and best practices.*



Questions for teachers reflecting on and discussing their practice:

- ⦿ What texts are relevant to your industry?
- ⦿ What makes those texts challenging for students to read, and what skills and strategies help students to comprehend them?
- ⦿ What role do discussion, explicit teaching of comprehension strategies and opportunities to practice authentic writing play in making those texts accessible to your students?

Learn more about disciplinary literacy in career and technical education in [Oregon's Adolescent Literacy Framework, pages 149–158.](#)