Learning is a process that incorporates key skills. Learning starts with inputting information through the skills of reading, listening, and informal speaking. This information must then be processed with the skill of analyzing. Writing and formal speaking skills allow a learner to communicate information to a target audience.

Elementary instruction focuses on exposing students to literacy skill experiences. Students participate in activities to support the learning of reading and writing. When students leave the elementary school, these experiences are exchanged for experiences in learning content-area information. As time goes by, students forget the learning skills that they once practiced in their early years of school. When confronted with a complex text to read or a video to listen to, students begin to have difficulty comprehending the information.

Both students and teachers benefit from providing secondary classroom instruction that includes continued practice and support of the key learning skills. All classroom teachers need to share in the responsibility for infusing the five key learning skills into their instructional program. Students benefit by gaining ownership of the learning skills to use in their future learning experiences in college, in their careers, and in their life time. Teachers benefit by enabling students to learn more effectively the content-area information.

The five learning skills are included in the New Jersey Student Learning Standards (NJSLS) and all instructional area standards. The learning skills in the instructional standards may be stated clearly, and sometimes the skills are not as obvious. One of the Social Studies Standards is a good example. “Analyze how ideas found in key documents (i.e., the Declaration of Independence, the Seneca Falls Declaration of Sentiments and Resolutions, the Emancipation Proclamation, and the Gettysburg Address) contributed to demanding equality for all” (6.1.12.A.4.b.). This standard states clearly the skill of analysis and implies the need for close reading of the suggested key documents.
Close reading and listening are two key skills that enable a learner to consume information. Close reading is the first anchor standard for all New Jersey students. “Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences and relevant connections from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text” (NJSLSA.R1). When faced with reading a complex text, far too many students will not read it for comprehension because they have forgotten how to read closely. Instead, they will choose to skim the text to gain a general overview of it, scan it to locate specific information, or choose to put the text aside. One way to help students develop close reading skills is to give them a purpose for reading. For example, teachers can tell students to identify and underline the main idea of the text and its supporting details. For students who are struggling with difficult vocabulary in a complex text, teachers can personally scaffold the reading for them with a suggestion to circle the difficult vocabulary and search for the textual clues for meaning. Additional scaffolding strategies may be needed for the struggling students.

Informal speaking is another skill to consume information. As students engage in reading or listening, they often need to ask questions to clarify points in the source. Informal conversations build comprehension. The following Life Science Performance Expectation of the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) is a good example: “Ask questions to clarify relationships about the role of DNA and chromosomes in coding the instructions for characteristic traits passed from parents to offspring” (HS-LS3-1).

Information that has been consumed must then be processed with the key skill of analyzing/evaluating. The importance of this skill is clarified for all New Jersey students in the following anchor standard: “Analyze and reflect on how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take” (NJSLSA.R9). Many instructional standards stress this skill as well, and they add in ways for learners to communicate their thoughts. For example, the Health and Physical Education Standard states: “Analyze current issues facing the disability community and make recommendations to address those issues” (2.12.C.3).

Writing and formal speaking skills allow learners to communicate information to a target audience. Many instructional standards not only stress these authentic performances, but they also add in effective learning elements. For example, the Visual and Performing Arts Standard identifies evidence in the standard: “Create and evaluate performances by citing evidence of specific physical choices, sustained vocal technique, and clearly motivated actions” (1.3.12.C.2). One of the Math Standards specifies the element argumentative writing in the standard: “Explain each step in solving a simple equation…starting from the assumption…Construct a viable argument to justify a solution method” (Content.HSA.REI.A.1). Finally, one of the Technology Standards identifies writing an explanatory piece/research piece: “Produce a position statement about a real-world problem by developing a systematic plan of investigation with peers and experts synthesizing information from multiple sources” (8.1.12.E.1).

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Although formal assessments are generally thought of as measurements of content information, assessments can also reinforce and develop learning skills by including key learning terms in the questions. For example, assessment questions effectively promote learning when the questions ask students to summarize an idea in the text, to identify textual evidence, or to infer what the evidence suggests. Not only are students demonstrating their comprehension of the content-area information, but they are also practicing their learning skills.

**Language is part of all communication.** The Next Generation Science Standards state this importance very clearly: “Any education in science and engineering needs to develop students’ ability to read and produce domain-specific text. As such, every science or engineering lesson is in part a language lesson, particularly reading and producing the genres of texts that are intrinsic to science and engineering.” (NRC Framework, 2012, p. 76). By placing an importance on the command of the English language, students develop a proficiency in the language for their future in college and career.

To promote learning skills for secondary students, time is needed for professional development. Providing appropriate time to identify and review the five learning skills and their key terms is necessary. Demonstrating how these skills and terms can be infused into the existing instructional program is a must. Finally, providing staff with time to collaborate on promoting these skills and terms is critical.

**Student learning is the goal of all instruction.** Promoting the five learning skills is a critical component that must not be pushed aside to focus on content information and assessment. Learning skills, content information, and assessment reinforce each other. The five learning skills are the keys to connecting all aspects of instruction. When students learn how to learn proficiently, they can learn independently in their future chosen experiences in college, careers, and life-time.

**Resources:**

New Jersey Student Learning Standards. [http://www.state.nj.us/education/cccs/](http://www.state.nj.us/education/cccs/)

New Jersey Student Learning Standards for Social Studies. [http://www.state.nj.us/education/aps/cccs/ss/](http://www.state.nj.us/education/aps/cccs/ss/)


New Jersey Student Learning Standards for Comprehensive Health and Physical Education. [http://www.state.nj.us/education/aps/cccs/chpe/](http://www.state.nj.us/education/aps/cccs/chpe/)


New Jersey Student Learning Standards for Math. [http://www.state.nj.us/education/aps/cccs/math/](http://www.state.nj.us/education/aps/cccs/math/)