# How to Design Projects Around Common Core Standards

Call me bass-ackwards, but I don't design projects around the Common Core Standards. I design projects based on what I believe are engaging topics that encourage my curriculum. Having said that, I don't neglect them either. In fact, by the end of my design process, I would say that I've become rather intimate with the series of standards I'm trying to hit.

I should back up and say that I teach using project-based learning, and PBL is very different from just assigning projects. A project is a kind of assessment. PBL, however, is the unit that encompasses all of the lessons, all of the explorations, the research, and the delivery of a solution that the students are trying to present. Driven by an essential question, a PBL unit may culminate in a "project" in order to be the vehicle of the information being presented, but the end result isn't the proof of the learning. What is accomplished on the journey, however, is. It's about the process, not the end project.

In fact, designing and developing a project-based learning outcome is its own process, and while I don't tend to invite the standards to the party first off, they do end up being the guest of honor.

Now, I have a two-prong approach to designing PBL units or even developing the Performance Based Assessments for my own district. The first way, of course, is to look at the standards and work through each trying to sometimes fit a square peg in a round hole.

I prefer, however, a different way to design.

### Do What You Want First

I prefer to enjoy what I'm doing. I want to be excited about what I'm about to present to the kids. That way, my excitement trickles down to my students. Working with the standards at the forefront of my mind and the content in the background is a stinky model. I prefer to flip that way of thinking.

For instance, when I first began building my Superhero unit, a unit based on developing everything from origin stories to advocacy speeches presented to a mythical United Nations, I didn't think at all about the Common Core Standards until my checklists and lessons were designed and in front of my face.

I knew I wanted my students to write origin stories as their narratives. I knew I wanted them to watch TED Talk speeches and model their blended-genre, advocacy presentations on those that included elements of memoir, persuasion, incorporated digital media, and website design.

But once the unit had been created, I knew that the next step was to see what standards my enthusiasm had hit all by itself. So I developed a simple checklist of Common Core Standards that I keep tacked up on my corkboard for just such moments.

Using that tool, I saw that all on my own, I had hit key standards for my ELA class. For instance, just based on the basic genres my unit was covering, I knew that I had hit:

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.8.1:** *Write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence.*

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.8.2:** *Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas, concepts, and information through the selection, organization, and analysis of relevant content.*

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.8.3:** *Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences..*

I also knew that I would walk the students through the writing process multiple times throughout the unit. So I knew that I had hit:

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.8.5:** *With some guidance and support from peers and adults, develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on how well purpose and audience have been addressed.* (Editing for conventions should demonstrate command of [Language standards 1-3](http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/L/8/) up to and including eighth grade.)

But once done, I looked at the matrix of standards and I looked at my lessons and student objectives, and I realized that I hadn't naturally gravitated towards something like :

**CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.8.2.A:** *Introduce a topic clearly, previewing what is to follow; organize ideas, concepts, and information into broader categories; include formatting (e.g., headings), graphics (e.g., charts, tables), and multimedia when useful to aiding comprehension.*

I backwards planned and put in a series of lessons that guided students to develop infographics about their advocacy topic. They needed to embed subheadings into their argument to divide up their claims from their evidence from their results. To support each subheading, they we required to provide evidence, not only in textual references, but also in graphics. They created a visual using Piktochart.com, incorporating text, icons, and data to support their problems and proposed solutions.

So designing towards the Common Core Standards becomes a basic process made up of three steps:

1. Design towards what you love. Think about your own interests and the interests of the age group you teach.
2. Look back at the Common Core Standards
3. Fill in the gaps

### Share the Burden

Of course, it's not always possible to fill in every gap. After all, at least in secondary, you really are limited by time. So that's where cross-curricular planning comes in. Find someone to partner with who might share your interest in your unit. Or, look towards what other subjects are doing at your grade level and see if their curriculum naturally fills the gaps in your own matrix.

We have to remember that we aren't the only ones with our hands on those students during their school year. There are others who, combining forces with your efforts, can share the burden of hitting those standards.

It's vital we collaborate. It's vital that we open our doors and utilize the strengths of a team of teachers per student. The Standards are broad and vast and deep, so much so that one teacher cannot possibly hit them all with the depth necessary for true learning and transfer.

That being said: plan enthusiastically. Go hog wild designing something that will spark your own excitement to teach. That alone will undoubtedly hit many requirements. Some targeted reflection might just reach some more. But without permitting yourself the freedom of curricular expression, you won't be hitting the most effective teaching standard of them all: enjoying the job.

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English Language Arts Standards » Language » Grade 5

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Standards in this strand:

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.5.1](http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/L/5/#CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.5.1)

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.5.2](http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/L/5/#CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.5.2)

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.5.3](http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/L/5/#CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.5.3)

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.5.4](http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/L/5/#CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.5.4)

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.5.5](http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/L/5/#CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.5.5)

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.5.6](http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/L/5/#CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.5.6)

Conventions of Standard English:

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.5.1](http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/L/5/1/)
Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.5.1.A](http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/L/5/1/a/)
Explain the function of conjunctions, prepositions, and interjections in general and their function in particular sentences.

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.5.1.B](http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/L/5/1/b/)
Form and use the perfect (e.g., *I had walked; I have walked; I will have walked*) verb tenses.

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.5.1.C](http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/L/5/1/c/)
Use verb tense to convey various times, sequences, states, and conditions.

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.5.1.D](http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/L/5/1/d/)
Recognize and correct inappropriate shifts in verb tense.\*

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.5.1.E](http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/L/5/1/e/)
Use correlative conjunctions (e.g., *either/or, neither/nor*).

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.5.2](http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/L/5/2/)
Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.5.2.A](http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/L/5/2/a/)
Use punctuation to separate items in a series.\*

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.5.2.B](http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/L/5/2/b/)
Use a comma to separate an introductory element from the rest of the sentence.

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.5.2.C](http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/L/5/2/c/)
Use a comma to set off the words *yes* and *no* (e.g., *Yes, thank you*), to set off a tag question from the rest of the sentence (e.g., *It's true, isn't it?*), and to indicate direct address (e.g., *Is that you, Steve?*).

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.5.2.D](http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/L/5/2/d/)
Use underlining, quotation marks, or italics to indicate titles of works.

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.5.2.E](http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/L/5/2/e/)
Spell grade-appropriate words correctly, consulting references as needed.

Knowledge of Language:

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.5.3](http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/L/5/3/)
Use knowledge of language and its conventions when writing, speaking, reading, or listening.

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.5.3.A](http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/L/5/3/a/)
Expand, combine, and reduce sentences for meaning, reader/listener interest, and style.

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.5.3.B](http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/L/5/3/b/)
Compare and contrast the varieties of English (e.g., *dialects, registers*) used in stories, dramas, or poems.

Vocabulary Acquisition and Use:

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.5.4](http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/L/5/4/)
Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases based on grade 5 reading and content, choosing flexibly from a range of strategies.

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.5.4.A](http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/L/5/4/a/)
Use context (e.g., cause/effect relationships and comparisons in text) as a clue to the meaning of a word or phrase.

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.5.4.B](http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/L/5/4/b/)
Use common, grade-appropriate Greek and Latin affixes and roots as clues to the meaning of a word (e.g., *photograph, photosynthesis*).

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.5.4.C](http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/L/5/4/c/)
Consult reference materials (e.g., dictionaries, glossaries, thesauruses), both print and digital, to find the pronunciation and determine or clarify the precise meaning of key words and phrases.

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.5.5](http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/L/5/5/)
Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.5.5.A](http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/L/5/5/a/)
Interpret figurative language, including similes and metaphors, in context.

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.5.5.B](http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/L/5/5/b/)
Recognize and explain the meaning of common idioms, adages, and proverbs.

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.5.5.C](http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/L/5/5/c/)
Use the relationship between particular words (e.g., synonyms, antonyms, homographs) to better understand each of the words.

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.5.6](http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/L/5/6/)
Acquire and use accurately grade-appropriate general academic and domain-specific words and phrases, including those that signal contrast, addition, and other logical relationships (e.g., *however, although, nevertheless, similarly, moreover, in addition*).