



Essential English Skills for the Scholar

Entering Tenth Grade

Below is a list of reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills that are most essential for scholars to have fully mastered before starting English 10. Please practice these skills with your scholar from now and throughout the summer to ensure he's ready to rock 10th grade English!

Most Important Skill – Reading

Scholars entering the 10th grade should be able to sit down for **at minimum 1 hour straight a day and read**, both for pleasure (for example, reading a novel or comic), and to gather information (for example, reading the latest information about protests around the world).

Skill #1 – Paraphrasing & Summarizing

Scholars entering the 10th grade should be able to easily paraphrase (say in their own words) and summarize what they read.

Examples:

- *In this chapter, the main plot development is that Harry Potter discovers... We also learn more about Hermione's character...*
- *This article mentions 3 main climate studies and their major findings, including...*

Skill #2 – Identifying Theme

Scholars entering the 10th grade should be able to read a story or poem and give a **clear, 1-sentence explanation of the theme, or life lesson**, the text is trying to teach.

Examples of Themes:

- The theme in the story, "Eleven," by Sandra Cisneros, is that even as you grow up, you still carry all your emotions and experiences with you from when you were younger.*
- The theme of the poem, "Still I Rise," by Maya Angelou, is that someone who has self-confidence and believes in herself cannot be defeated by haters.*

Skill #3 – Analyzing Characters in Literature

Scholars entering the 10th grade should be able to analyze complex characters and use evidence from the text to infer things such as the character's:

- *Motivations*
- *Personality traits*
- *True feelings about a person or event*
- *Relationships with others*
- *Changes over the course of the text*

Skill #4 – Finding Common Threads Across Texts

Scholars entering the 10th grade should be able to read a variety of texts (both literature and informational texts) and identify common threads across those texts, such as:

- *themes*
- *opinions or ideas on a topic*
- *perspectives on life / the world*

Example: *The story "Eleven" and the poem "Still I Rise" both discuss differences of perspective. In these texts, the narrator sees or feels things about themselves very differently than others.*

Skill #5 – Analyze Author's Purpose

Scholars entering the 10th grade should be able to identify why an author has written a text. This is especially important with informational texts.

Examples:

- *NYT's Paul Krugman wrote "The Deadly Delusions of Mad King Donald," to convince and warn people that President Trump's leadership decisions during the COVID pandemic are leading to more deaths. Krugman is reporting specific facts to bias the reader against Donald Trump.*
- *The Atlantic's Annie Lowrey wrote "The Pandemic Proved that Cash Payments Work" to inform people that the additional \$600 a week the government gave to people on unemployment helped keep millions out of poverty throughout the pandemic,*

and in fact, helped many be more financially stable than before. Lowrey is reporting all factual information so readers understand the full situation.

Skill #6 - Analyzing Language

Scholars entering the 10th grade should be able to look closely at specific words or phrases an author uses in the text and explain the meaning added to the text by that specific word choice.

Examples of Analyzing Language:

- The use of the word “eerie” to describe the night creates a mood of danger or suspense.
- Jayson Reynolds writes, “The bottle she was holding shattered, sudsy beer splattering everywhere.” The repetition of the letters ‘s’ and ‘t’ mimics the sound of the drink when it crashes and spreads over the floor.
- Maya Angelou writes, “But still, like air, I rise.” Her comparison of herself to air signifies that nothing can contain her or control what she does, because air is literally everywhere.

Skill #7 - Academic Discourse

Scholars entering the 10th grade should be able to have a **20-minute discussion** about something they’ve read, watched, or experienced. In that discussion they should:

- clearly state their opinions or ideas
- use concrete evidence (facts, information, texts, experts, data, etc.) to support their main points
- listen to their conversation partner, and directly respond to their conversation partner’s ideas and examples OR ask follow-up questions to keep the conversation going deeper
- use accountable talk stems:

Skill #8 - Citing Evidence to Support a Claim

Scholars entering the 10th grade should be able to find strong, relevant evidence from texts to prove their point in writing or speech. This includes:

- Citing the evidence (saying where exactly the evidence came from)
- Either quoting it directly or paraphrasing it
- Explaining the meaning of the evidence and how it proves their point

Example: In “Still I Rise,” you can tell the narrator is self-confident because she says in stanza 5: “I laugh like I’ve got gold mines / Diggin’ in my own backyard.” Her laugh signifies she knows she has a strong and rich spirit, and she doesn’t need to worry about what others think.

Skill #9 – Argumentative Writing

Scholars entering the 10th grade should be able to write an argumentative essay with **one clear point**, and support that point with strong, compelling reasons and evidence, in **less than 45 minutes (one class period)**.

Examples of clear point & compelling reasons to include in an introductory paragraph:

- Schools should not re-open in the fall. There is too great a risk to both students and staff both during commuting and in the building together.
- Video games are healthy for kids. Video games teach kids how to think through problems, develop strategy, and how to collaborate with others.

Skill #10 - Creating Counterclaims with Rebuttal in an Argumentative Essay

Accountable Talk



- Can you tell me more?
- Can you give me another example so I can understand?



- This reminds me of _____ because _____.
- I believe this is true because.....



- Why do you think that?
- Could it also be that.....?



- Can you give me an example from the text?
- Where can I find that in the text?



- I agree with _____ because _____.
- I would like to add _____.



- I disagree with _____ because _____.
- I respect your opinion but _____.

When writing an argumentative essay, scholars entering the 10th grade should be able to identify the counterclaim (the opposite of their opinion) and then explain why the counterclaim is wrong.

Example of a counterclaim if you were writing an essay arguing that the government should be able to enforce mask-wearing for public health.

The counterclaim is in yellow and the rebuttal is in green:

- Some people think that the government shouldn't be allowed to force Americans to wear masks. In his letter to the editor of the *Missourian*, Joseph Anderson writes, "The gains masks provide... are non-existent," meaning that wearing a mask doesn't actually help keep anyone healthier. This is just not true. As explained by the Hospital at the University of California – San Francisco, "An experiment using high-speed video found that hundreds of droplets ranging from 20 to 500 micrometers were generated when saying a simple phrase, but that nearly all these droplets were blocked when the mouth was covered by a damp washcloth." Science shows that wearing some kind of covering over your mouth WILL reduce the spread of airborne COVID-droplets.

Skill #11 - Utilize Conventions of Academic Writing

Scholars entering the 10th grade should be able to write utilizing the conventions of academic writing, including:

- Capitalizing proper nouns and the first word in sentence (Example: "Jamal currently lives on Pitkin Ave in Brooklyn.")
- Using commas in clauses, phrases, and lists (Example: "Even though my teacher, Mrs. Haggins, taught me how to do it, I have since forgotten.")
- Maintaining subject-verb agreement (Example 1: "The subway and the bus are both good options." Example 2: "The number of trains has decreased during the pandemic.")
- Identifying parts of speech and changing a word into different parts of speech to fit a sentence (Example: "I analyze when I read (verb); I can write a good analysis (noun); I want to show off my analytical thinking (adjective).")

Skill #12 – Typing

Scholars entering the 10th grade should be able to type at least 40 words per minute.

Search for websites that help you practice typing, such as typingclub.com.

Skill #13 – Email Etiquette

Scholars entering the 10th grade should be able to write professional emails, including:

- A short subject to capture the main point of your email
- A professional greeting, such as:
 - Dear Mr. Morgan,
 - Good Morning Ms. Jones,
- An opening greeting sentence, such as:
 - I hope you are doing well.
 - I hope you're having a good day.
 - I hope you and your family are safe during this time.
 - Happy Monday!
- Complete sentences clearly and politely explaining their point, question, etc.
- A closing sentence thanking the person for their time or help, such as:
 - Thank you for reading my email.
 - I appreciate any help you can offer.
 - Thank you so much for considering my request.
 - Thank you for your time.
- A professional closing, such as:
 - Sincerely,
Jordan Pierre
 - Be Well,
Neo Fleurimond
 - With Gratitude,
Tarif Rose