

ELA Unit Internalization Habits

How to use this resource

Unit internalization is the process by which teachers study a unit (i.e., module) to deeply understand what students are expected to learn, how students will be assessed, and the arc of learning over the course of the unit.

This resource provides an overview of habits for strong unit internalization in ELA—and includes specific teacher actions and guiding questions to support the internalization process. Note that this document is not a protocol. It is not necessary (or even feasible) for teachers to work on all of these habits at once. Rather, we suggest that PLC leaders:

1. Determine the outcome you want from unit internalization.
2. Identify which internalization habits will help achieve that outcome.
3. Develop a protocol using the associated teacher actions and guiding questions below, ensuring there is sufficient time allocated to address them. (See an example protocol [here](#).)

Purpose

These habits support teachers in deepening their understanding of a unit by:

- articulating the unit's focus (including word knowledge and literacy skills);
- understanding how the unit's standards, tasks, and assessments contribute to the overall arc of learning;
- examining the texts through the lens of a student and a teacher;
- identifying how students will demonstrate their learning; and
- considering students' readiness for the work of the unit.



Unit Internalization Habits

Examine anchor texts

Teacher actions	<input type="checkbox"/> Skim the texts identified as “core” or “anchor” texts in the curriculum, along with any supplementary materials.
Guiding questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What text genres will students encounter (e.g., fiction, non-fiction, poetry)?• How complex are the texts?• How do the texts contribute to the unit’s themes and goals?

Identify the knowledge story in the unit

Teacher actions	<input type="checkbox"/> Orient to the unit at a high level—read the overview and skim through the unit.
Guiding questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What is the knowledge story—what knowledge of the world will students gain through reading, writing, speaking, and critical thinking?• What are the essential questions in this unit?• How does each text contribute to the unit’s knowledge story? • Why is the content in this unit important for students to learn?• What parts of the unit will connect to students’ interests, experiences, and prior knowledge?• How can you make the content relevant and engaging for your students?



Consider the arc of learning

Teacher actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Identify the grade-level standards that will be assessed for mastery in the unit.<input type="checkbox"/> In your own words, describe the literary skills students will learn in this unit.<input type="checkbox"/> In your own words, describe the writing skills students will learn in this unit<input type="checkbox"/> Identify content learned in previous units or grade levels that is prerequisite for the new learning.<input type="checkbox"/> Review the lessons.
Guiding questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Which parts of the standards will demand the most time and attention?● What informal or formal assessments can you use to gauge student readiness?● What do you notice about how the content builds and evolves from lesson to lesson?<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ How do the lessons scaffold toward the culminating assessment?○ How do lessons build on one another?● What is the connection between the knowledge story and the standards of the unit?

Analyze the unit assessments

Teacher actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Review the unit’s culminating assessment.<input type="checkbox"/> Read and annotate the rubric provided.<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Read the entire rubric to get a sense of what’s being assessed (e.g., content, skills, organization, etc.).<input type="checkbox"/> Compare performance levels on the rubric (e.g., “excellent” vs. “satisfactory”) and note what differentiates each level. This helps clarify expectations and instructional priorities.<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Highlight or underline key words. Focus on action verbs (e.g., “analyze,” “demonstrate”) and qualifiers (e.g., “some,” “minimal”)—that show how well something must be done at each level.<input type="checkbox"/> Write notes in the margin or beside each criteria to explain what it means in your own words.
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Review the exemplar student response against the rubric.<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Read the exemplar student response from beginning to end without stopping to get a general sense of its quality and flow.<input type="checkbox"/> Read the response again, this time alongside the rubric and note where you see evidence of the rubric criteria being met.
Guiding questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● How will students be expected to demonstrate learning in this unit?● What skills are being assessed in the unit’s culminating assessment?● What content knowledge is being assessed in the unit’s culminating assessment?● What do you anticipate will be easy for students in the culminating assessment? What will be challenging?● What are the categories on the rubrics? What does each category measure?● What distinguishes a “beginning” student response from an “advanced” one? What does this tell you about possible challenges and areas to focus on in instruction?

Anticipate areas where students might need targeted support

Teacher actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Consider background knowledge (review our background knowledge guidance)<input type="checkbox"/> Use the questions for qualitative analysis to think about what barriers may impede students’ ability to access anchor texts.<input type="checkbox"/> Consider potential misconceptions.
Guiding questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● What are some typical misconceptions that might lead students to incorrect answers?● Where are opportunities for just-in-time supports?● What knowledge is necessary to build in advance of or while reading the texts? (i.e., knowledge that the author assumes the reader already has and/or knowledge that is not provided in the text or in other texts in a unit but is critical to helping a reader unlock meaning).● What background knowledge might students need to build before reading the text(s)?



Plan for pacing

Teacher actions	<input type="checkbox"/> Make informed and strategic decisions about which lessons to prioritize and which to compress.
Guiding questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● What, if any, adjustments need to be made to the scope and sequence?● What are the lessons for which you anticipate increasing and/or reducing allotted time?● Where are there opportunities within the unit for pause points to reteach or differentiate?● What are the key lessons that will be covered during PLCs?