



Essential English Skills for the Scholar

Entering Ninth 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 9. Please practice these skills with your scholar from now and throughout the summer to ensure he's ready to rock 9th grade English!

Most Important Skill - Reading - Scholars entering the 9th grade should be able to sit down for **at least 45-60 minutes 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 – Free-writing - Scholars entering the 9th grade should be able to sit down and free-write **at least 1 piece of loose-leaf (front-side) in at least 10 minutes**.

Freewriting is open-ending writing about a topic. The writing does not have to follow any structure or essay format. Many prompts can be found online.

Skill #2 - Central Idea - Scholars entering the 9th grade should be able to read an article or story and then give a **clear, one-sentence explanation of the main point** of the text.

Examples of Central Ideas:

-The article, "100 Days After Its First Case," is about the status of businesses opening back up in New York City: which are allowed to open, which are allowed to but aren't opening yet, and how some New Yorkers feel about it all.

-The story, "Eleven," is about a girl who is humiliated in school on her 11th birthday, and all the complicated feelings she experiences.

Skill #3 - Theme - Scholars entering the 9th 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 #4 - Analyze Language – Scholars entering the 9th 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 #5 - Academic Discussion – Scholars entering the 9th grade should be able to have a **15-20 minute discussion** about something they've read, watched, or experienced. In that conversation 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:*

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 _____.

Skill #6 - Utilize Evidence in Strong Paragraphs – Scholars entering the 9th grade should be able to find strong, relevant evidence from texts to prove their point in writing. 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 #7 - Utilize Conventions of Academic Writing - Scholars entering the 9th 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 #8 - Typing - Scholars entering the 9th 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 #9 – Email Etiquette – Scholars entering the 9th grade should be able to write professional e-mails, 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