

CARS & STARS Online and the Queensland Curriculum

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D I G I T A L

Introduction

CARS & STARS Online is a **digital reading comprehension program** based around the repeated application of twelve core reading strategies to make students better readers who can analyse and interpret any text at a high level of understanding. The strategies that underpin the program represent distilled elements of word and reading comprehension that carry across all year levels. They are introduced in basic forms in Foundation Year and expanded upon throughout each level of the program.

The multi-level program is designed to be entirely paper-free, with all student answers entered directly into the software, and results being instantly recorded and corrected automatically, requiring no teacher marking. Students work at the level of their understanding, rather than year level.

In large part this is possible because CARS & STARS Online is not tied directly to any single curriculum – rather it’s designed to be able to **complement any existing literacy program or English subject plan**, as it focuses directly on reading skills and growing comprehension ability, regardless of student’s actual year level. Students are engaged at their point of need and instruction is provided directly at their current skill level, with multiple students undertaking CARS & STARS Online in the same classroom often being at different levels in the program at the same time – something for which the program is actually designed.

The twelve core reading comprehension strategies that underpin the entirety of the CARS & STARS Online program are all – explicitly or tacitly, directly or indirectly – concerned with the process of analysing and

understanding texts better, creating readers and students whose depth of understanding and ability to process information, both in English and consequently as learners in all subjects, will be of benefit to them throughout their lives.

However, it is important to always remember that because CARS & STARS Online is concerned with reading mastery and the gradual development of important reading skills from the very beginning of schooling it indirectly touches upon all aspects of English reading instruction as a matter of course across the whole program.

A student who is at year level with CARS & STARS Online might actually be slightly ahead of the relevant curricular designations for their year level, at least insofar as they are concerned with reading comprehension and general literacy, because they have been introduced to elements of textual analysis that are only explicitly stated in the curriculum at a later level.

The Queensland Curriculum and the Australian Curriculum: English (v 9.0)

Queensland schools now plan, teach, assess and report using the Australian Curriculum in Prep–Year 10.

The Australian Curriculum 9.0 supports students to become successful learners, confident and creative individuals, and active and informed citizens. Detailed information on how English subject area instruction has changed since the adoption of the Australian Curriculum 9.0, and how this area varies from that previously employed in the Australian Curriculum 8.4, is available on the website of the Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority at

www.qcaa.qld.edu.au. This website is the most useful resource for Queensland teachers transitioning to using the newer version of the national curriculum and has some great explainers on the changes.

This document includes information on how the Strands and Sub-Strands in the Australian Curriculum: English (v 9.0) align with the approach taken in CARS & STARS Online. For more information, including how specific Content Descriptions correlate with the CARS & STARS Online program, please see the full document we are quoting: CARS & STARS Online and the Australian Curriculum v. 9.0.

Strands and Sub-Strands

The Australian National Curriculum: English (ACARA, 2022) is presented in year levels from Foundation to Year 10. Content is organised into 3 interrelated strands:

- Language
- Literature
- Literacy

Language

As a digital reading comprehension program whose entire goal is the development of more capable readers who can engage with any text at an advanced level of understanding, CARS & STARS Online engages with elements of all three of these main strands, to a greater or lesser degree depending on the individual story and level being taught and the way in which it is being delivered to students.

Because it is primarily concerned with making students better readers, who can comfortably and capably engage with any text, CARS & STARS Online could be said to more directly and obviously tie into the strands of Literature and Literacy, as they are mainly concerned with approaching different and varied texts. However, many elements of the Language sub-strand are also amply reflected in the approach used in CARS & STARS Online.

For example, when we look at the sub-strands that make up the Language strand, we find that all three of them (**Language for interacting with others; Text structure and organisation; and Language for expressing**

and developing ideas) are all ideas that a truly adept and improving reader will touch upon as a matter of progressing through the CARS & STARS Online program.

In particular, the description under “Text structure and organisation” that outlines how students will “learn how texts are structured for different audiences and contexts, and to achieve particular purposes” could almost be a direct summation of a CARS & STARS Online mission statement for the program. The follow-up sentence outlining that students will also “learn the techniques that authors use to guide and influence the reader or viewer through effective use of resources at the level of the whole text, paragraph and sentence” (ACARA, 2022) is equally relevant to CARS & STARS Online.

Further exploration of the sub-strands under the Literature strand sees close correlations to CARS & STARS Online in three (emphasis ours):

Literature and contexts

Students learn how **characters, events, perspectives** and **issues** in literary texts are shaped by the historical, social and cultural contexts in which they were created.

Engaging with and responding to literature

Students learn to **respond personally** to literary texts and make **connections** to their own lives, other texts and the responses of others.

Examining literature

Students learn how to **explain, analyse** and **evaluate** the ways in which stories, characters, ideas, experiences, opinions and contexts are reflected in texts. They learn to **compare** and **appraise** the ways authors use **language**

and **literary devices** to influence readers. They also learn to **understand, evaluate, interpret** and **discuss** how certain stylistic choices can create multiple layers of **interpretation** and **effect**. (ACARA, 2022)

Similarly, we see close and direct correlations with the descriptive sub-strands that are present under the final strand, Literacy (emphasis ours again):

Texts in context

Students learn that texts are influenced by historical and cultural **contexts**, and particular **purposes** and **audiences**.

Interacting with others

Students learn how language is used to express **ideas, arguments** and **opinions** in spoken and **written presentations** by selecting and using linguistic and multimodal elements.

Analysing, interpreting and evaluating

Students learn to apply **text processing skills** and **strategies** to navigate increasingly complex texts. Students learn to comprehend what they read and view. They develop more sophisticated processes for **interpreting, analysing, evaluating** and **critiquing** ideas, information and issues from different sources. Students explore how **conventions** and **structures** are used in **written, digital**, multimedia and cinematic texts. They use their growing knowledge of **text structures**, language and visual features, and **literary devices** to explain how texts influence different audiences. (ACARA, 2022)

The twelve main reading strategies of CARS & STARS Online (Finding Main Idea; Recalling Facts and Details; Understanding Sequence;

Recognising Cause and Effect; Comparing and Contrasting; Making Predictions; Finding Word Meaning in Context; Drawing Conclusions and Making Inferences; Distinguishing Between Fact and Opinion; Identifying Author's Purpose; Interpreting Figurative Language; and Summarising) all tie directly into these areas, with each representing a different aspect of textual analysis applicable directly to both the Literature and Literacy strands, and building on a growing capacity for Language.

As CARS & STARS Online is a reading comprehension program and not directly concerned with writing (except for certain short-answer responses in the STARS and FOCUS Reading modules) it does not expressly focus on the fourth Literature sub-strand, Creating Literature, or the fifth sub-strand under the Literacy strand, Creating Texts. However, the kind of deep focus reading analysis and instruction that is fundamental to CARS & STARS Online necessarily reinforces teaching and learning about writing as well, because it is inherently concerned with the application of the written word and how it is used across a range of contexts and purposes. A student who becomes a better reader through CARS & STARS Online will therefore have a better grasp of skills and practices that will make them a better writer, too.

While CARS & STARS Online is primarily about reading text, the way in which it can be taught also indirectly correlates with elements of the curriculum concerned with oral language and communication items, particularly when reading the exercises to a class as a group, getting them to respond or allocating students to read texts out to the class or groups themselves.

Additionally, a recent update to CARS & STARS Online is the Read Aloud feature, which allows students to hear stories read directly to them by the

program at every level. This feature has been particularly valuable for students with word-processing variances, or even those who just prefer to hear something read to them first before they read it themselves.