

# **CARS & STARS Online and the New South Wales 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.

## **Overview of Correlations to the NSW Curriculum: English**

While CARS & STARS Online is not specifically tied to it, the program directly complements the focus of the New South Wales Curriculum: English, that students engaged with it will “develop an understanding of how language use is determined by different contexts, audiences and purposes.”

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. This is fully in line with the NSW Curriculum’s statement that it “supports the development of early literacy knowledge and skills, while continuing to acknowledge the importance of learning about and enjoying literature”.

The New South Wales Curriculum: English organises English instruction into two overarching areas: “Understanding Texts” and “Creating Texts”.

### **Understanding Texts and Creating Texts**

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, the area of the New South Wales Curriculum: English that most directly aligns with CARS & STARS Online is “Understanding Texts”.

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 this area, with each representing a different aspect of textual analysis applicable directly to Understanding Texts.

In the Outcomes and Content Overview for the NSW Curriculum: English we can see that the items that most directly correlate to the CARS & STARS Online program are “Reading comprehension” (the program’s central focus) and “Understanding and responding to literature”. CARS & STARS Online also directly touches on “Vocabulary” (perhaps most directly in the strategies Finding Word Meaning in Context and Interpreting Figurative Language), as well as “Print Conventions” (though the program is delivered digitally, the reading passages within it explore a wide variety of formats, textual styles and genres) and “Reading Fluency” (improved throughout the program through repeated practice and exposure to more complex and varying texts).

This reinforces the NSW Curriculum’s stated aim that “a well-chosen text enables students to practise, enhance and transfer knowledge and skills they already have and apply this learning to new contexts”, something that is a central tenet of the thinking behind CARS & STARS Online as well. The consistent framework of CARS & STARS Online and its flexible design, which aims to meet each student at their point of need while allowing multiple levels to be taught simultaneously, is reflected in the textual selections across the program and directly matches the NSW Curriculum’s direction that “text selections should respond to the individual needs of students” and

that “texts should be selected that either support or extend students’ reading”.

In this way, then, the NSW Curriculum’s approach could not more directly align with the approach of CARS & STARS Online, which throughout the program introduces readers to elements of lower-order textual analysis concerned with concrete textual elements – through strategies such as Finding Main Idea; Recalling Facts and Details; Understanding Sequence, etc – that they will later be using, unconsciously, as the foundation for strategies that require them to engage in more higher-order thinking and analysis in a more abstract mode – namely Drawing Conclusions and Making Inferences; Distinguishing Between Fact and Opinion; Identifying Author's Purpose; Interpreting Figurative Language and others.

While the CARS section of CARS & STARS Online is based around multiple-choice questions, both STARS and the recently added FOCUS Reading module require written responses that tie into the “Creating Texts” area. Additionally, 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 correlates with elements of the “Oral language and communication” item, 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.

## **Conclusion**

CARS & STARS Online is 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. As a digital reading comprehension program its applications and benefits are primarily found in the areas of textual analysis, which has flow-on effects for the entirety of English subject instruction but specifically those concerned with reading and the context of language use, primarily in regard to the written word.

It's important to note that with precise details of the New South Wales Curriculum: English, a student who is at year level with CARS & STARS Online might actually be slightly ahead of stated goals (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 curriculum documents at a later level.

As outlined above, CARS & STARS Online strategies and the program as a whole will have direct and indirect correlations to a wide swathe of elements

in any English program, but the extent to which they align with specific standards or content descriptions will vary. The centrality of the skills of reading and textual analysis to instruction, as well as the shared goal of helping students to become readers who are both more engaged and more able to respond to any text with high levels of comprehension, mean that CARS & STARS Online can complement any English curriculum or learning plan to an extent determined by the discretion of the teacher.