AR (Accelerated Reader) Rationale and Explanation of Points

From the LCA Language Arts Policy Statement comes the following:

*Reading is an essential skill, but the goal of the language arts department is to produce proficient, critical, lifelong readers. Students will be expected to complete independent readings outside of class in addition to assigned readings. To help strengthen literacy skills, a summer reading program is conducted.*

**Why do we “force” students to read? Doesn’t it ruin the fun of it?**

According to national research, over 95% of independent student reading is explained, defined, and analyzed / defined by the teacher the next day in class, with notes for the student to take for testing and assessment purposes. In today’s internet, television, and other media-driven society, the majority of students, struggling readers or competent readers, do little or no independent reading. College students, however, have a large burden of required reading for each class, each day. Sometimes, parents make their children do what is best for them, even if, at the time, the children do not *like* to do it, and without a grade, few children will choose to read. Strong reading skills are essential as they build critical thinking skills, analytical skills, and reading opens a world of learning and other opportunities to serve God effectively.

**Does research demonstrate our need to improve in reading?**

Nationwide, standardized college entrance exams (both SAT and ACT) reveal weaknesses in Reading Comprehension across the board. Our own SAT Reading Comprehension scores are lower than we would wish them to be. *Every* Reading Comprehension score on the SAT taken by LCA students between December 2009 and June 2011 were averaged. The average Reading Comprehension score for our students is not where we would wish it to be. While we can incorporate more reading comprehension activities into our classes, AR offers the opportunity to support that teaching with practical application.

**Why did we choose Accelerated Reader?**

In an effort to enhance and modernize our reading program and to improve our reading comprehension scores on standardized tests, we chose to forgo the expense of vocabulary workbooks (all the research demonstrates vocabulary builds by reading, not by lists studied out of context) and use that portion of the budget to purchase school-wide rights to the Accelerated Reader (AR) program both for honors summer reading and for reading during the school year. We started AR during the summer of 2010 with the honors classes and planned to eventually begin a required AR component for all English classes 6-12 starting second semester 2012. The AR program is a computerized program which objectively grades comprehension and literary skills awareness for books that are read. AR has been extensively researched and its effectiveness documented in many independent studies (see table #1 attached and can be viewed at [http://www.renlearn.com/research/](http://www.renlearn.com/research/)). According to one government education organization, *What Works Clearinghouse*, the “beneficial effect on students’ reading and achievement” has been well documented ([http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/reports/beginning_reading/topic/](http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/reports/beginning_reading/topic/)).

**What does AR offer our students?**

Accelerated Reader offers our students a number of important benefits. The AR program meets the student at his or her own reading level. With this program, each student selects books from his/her Zone of Proximal Development (or ZPD) – (ZPD coined by Lev Vygotsky)

A struggling reader chooses books which are at his reading level regardless of his grade level. If a 10th grade student reads at the 8th grade level, that student can choose books at the 8th grade level. If a 10th grade student reads at a higher level, he or she can choose those books. Another benefit is
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the myriad choices of books offered the students. Thousands of books are listed on the AR BookFinder website (http://www.arbookfind.com/). In addition, more and more Christian authored books are added continually. Presently, AR has over 3500 Christian titles in its database, with more added each month. LCA has an additional 200 books which will be placed on its AR website within the next month.

AR Point Goals for Honors Level Courses
Accelerated Reader points for honors level courses were set with a couple of criteria in mind. The Language Arts Department members met with the librarian, researched the average goal for students per grade level, consulted the Renaissance Learning “Goal-Setting Chart,” interviewed teachers at LCA with extensive AR experience, and finally arrived at our decision corporately. According to our findings at LCA, at the fourth grade level, students’ goals were between 12 AR points and 20 AR points depending upon their reading level. The Renaissance Learning chart offered a suggestion, based on their extensive research, of 20.5 points for 6th graders reading between a 4th-6th grade level and 25 points for 8th graders reading between a 4th-8th grade reading level, based on 30 minutes of daily practice reading. We chose our honors level point requirements based upon that chart, the findings of our lower school AR requirements, and the recommendations of our librarian and teachers with AR experience.

- **30 AR points—8th grade honors** (25 points recommended for average readers)
- **35 AR points—9th grade honors** (28.5 points recommended for average readers)
- **40 AR points—10th grade honors** (31 points recommended for average readers)
- **45 AR points—11th grade honors** (34 points recommended for average readers)

How does my student receive AR Points? How many pages? How many books?
For a 25 AR point goal, one student reads two books (under 400 pages total) for her AR points for the quarter. Another student reads four books (over 800 pages total) for her AR points for the quarter! Why the discrepancy? AR points are not granted based upon page numbers, but based upon reading level and based upon how well the student does on her AR quiz.

- *Silas Marner* by George Eliot—14 AR points—183 pages
- *The Last Song* by Nicholas Sparks—14 AR points—432 pages
- *Winter of Candy Canes*—7 AR points—202 pages

Each student is free to choose what books interest him and follow his own course in reading. Honors students are required to choose only one book each quarter from the college bound reading list, but they may make up the rest of their points with their own choices of reading material.

How is my student’s grade for AR determined?
The student’s AR grade is determined by averaging two different numbers—percentage of AR Points goal reached and percentage of quiz grades. The first number is the percentage of the AR points earned. If the student earned 100% of the points required, that first number would be 100. If the student earned 20 of the 25 points required, the first number would be an 80. The second number is the percentage correct on the AR quizzes for all quizzes in which they earned points. If the student took four AR quizzes and earned a 100%, an 80%, a 95%, a 40% and a 70%, his average is 86.25%. [No points awarded for failing quizzes, so that grade is dropped so that it doesn’t pull the true average down.] Added to his first score, if he received the required points, his AR Test grade for the quarter would be a 93%.
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What about books with objectionable elements for my child?
AR books may contain passages which some parents find objectionable. However, the AR database has over 3500 Christian authored titles, and our own LCA library has over 200 additional titles with more added every month. If potential objectionable elements are a concern for you, then your student may choose his or her book from the LCA library only. These books comply with the LCA Materials Selection Policy which appears below.

“LCA screens and selects educational materials to be consistent with the school’s philosophy. However, the fallen human condition depicted in literature (as in Scripture itself) is not always pleasant. Valuable works sometimes have objectionable or profane elements. Good books provide four recognized values: 1. They build godly attitudes and character traits. 2. They deepen our social and cultural awareness. 3. They strengthen our use of written language. 4. They provide a lifelong source of enjoyment and relaxation. In order to instill these values in our students and fulfill the stated objectives of our school, all LCA students are expected to read and study good books on a regular basis. Recognizing that materials designed for one level may not be appropriate for another, three levels of criteria are applied.

1. Elementary materials must contain no objectionable material.
2. Objectionable elements in 6th-8th grade materials must be limited and clearly justified by overwhelming literary, curricular, or Christian value.
3. Objectionable content may be included in high school materials but must be outweighed by positive literary, curricular, or Christian value.”

How can my student be successful with AR?
For this category, the department members drew from their own experience with AR as teachers, from experience with their children involved in AR, and from a discussion with the 11th grade and 12th grade honors English students. A consensus follows:

✓ Don’t wait to take the test after reading; you forget things. ~student
✓ Don’t rush to finish at the last moment! Start early. ~student
✓ Pay attention to the story, oh, and don’t procrastinate! ~student
✓ Plan, read, succeed, don’t be lazy, and this assignment will be an easy A and helps your GPA. ~student
✓ Choose books you enjoy some of the time; choose books that will challenge you other times. Try to find a good balance to lower your stress level. Practice good time management. ~student
✓ Actually read the material; don’t skim through! ~student
✓ Spark Notes are not enough by themselves but can help you if you really did read the book. ~student
✓ Instead of a ½ hour of TV, use it to read your book, and choose books you can comprehend. Having to read a page 10 times gets you nowhere, but that doesn’t mean you can slack off and read a third grade level book either. ~student
✓ Start reading right away! Don’t wait until the last minute. Take advantage of study hall or the few minutes at the end of a class or test. Use that time to read and work toward your goal instead of goofing off. ~student
✓ Read for 15 minutes a night. ~student
✓ I choose quality books with higher point values and read them slower and more carefully in order to do well on the quizzes. ~student
✓ Push yourself to do daily work or so many days per week! Few people can run for five miles at the end of a month unless they have been training everyday to work up to that ability. ~teacher
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- “Train on the hills to play on the field.” Work hard “conditioning” your mind for challenging reading now, and when assessments come, you'll be more than trained to perform.
- “Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman who needs not be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of truth.” (II Tim 2:15) A Christian must have good reading skills to understand difficult texts, both secular and Biblical.

We hope this has been helpful. If you have any further questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact your teacher or the Language Arts Department Chair by e-mail edalenberg@liberty.edu.