



The Comprehensive Guide to Vetting K-8 Digital Content

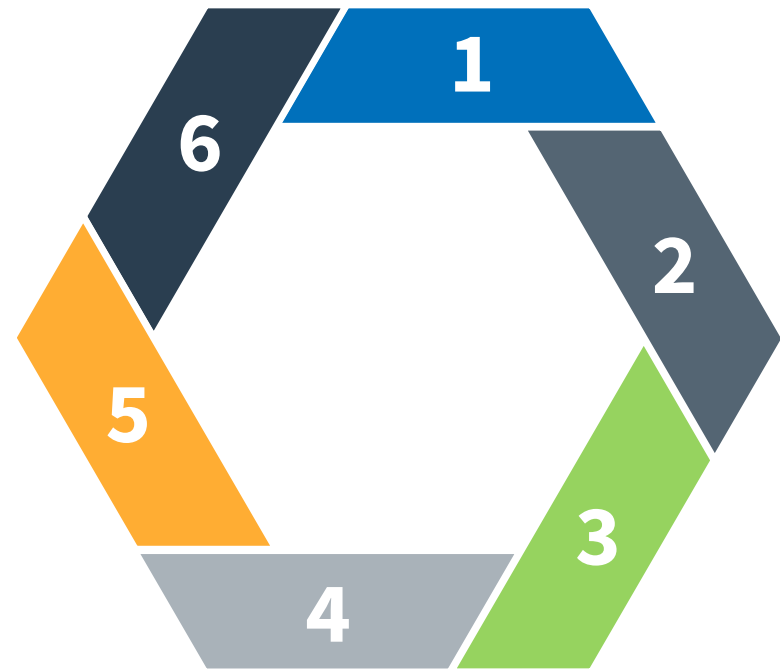
Before a piece of digital content is incorporated into your curriculum, it should be carefully vetted for rigor and relevance. To speed up this process, refer to the following six criteria for selecting high quality educational apps, videos, and digital resources for K-8 students. This guide is best used when shared amongst teachers, specialists, principals, and district leaders to set a standard of excellence and equity across schools and classrooms.

There are six key components to evaluating K-8 digital content:

- Alignment.....1**
- Risk Factors..... 2**
- Scaffolding of Learning..... 3**
- Intuitiveness.....4**
- Student Engagement..... 5**
- Text Complexity..... 6**

INCLUDED:

Digital Content Checklist



1 Alignment ✓ ✓ ✓

The digital resources used in your district should be aligned to the academic standards teachers need to cover and the needs of the students being taught.

For example, English language learners will benefit from audio and visual vocabulary support when learning how to respond to informational texts, while students with limited motor skills will be better able to respond to informational texts if they're given content that's supported by speech to text or touch screen technology.

Regardless of students' skill level or learning needs, great educational content should encourage exploration, allowing students to creatively apply a skill or standard to gain a better understanding of the world outside their classroom. In order to meet the needs of every learner, classrooms may require multiple digital resources that teach a particular skill or standard at a variety of levels.

Recommended Resource



Electric Sums

Price: \$2.99

Standard: 3.NBT.2
3rd Grade

Why it works: This app shows students two different methods of adding and subtracting, aligning to 3rd grade instructional goals while supporting a variety of learning styles and ways of thinking. In addition to reinforcing common core math standards, this resource develops 21st century skills by asking students to engage in problem solving and critical thinking.

2 Risk Factors

21st century students need the freedom to develop digital citizenship and the structure to stay safe and on task.

Good digital resources nurture effective technology use and avoid risk factors such as in-app purchases, ads, spelling or grammatical errors, and inappropriate content. Risk factors can vary from district to district, so before your team starts evaluating resources, define what risky content looks like for your students.



Recommended Resource



**Gracie & Friends
Treasure Bubbles**

Price: Free
Standard: PK.CC
Preschool

Why it works: Age appropriate and ad-free, this app uses modeling, interactive graphics, and audio support to help early learners consider the relationship between quantities and written numerals.

3 Scaffolding of Learning

Strong digital content will build student agency, freeing up teachers to give individuals and small groups targeted support.

That being said, many apps and websites aren't appropriately scaffolded for younger students, and teachers using these resources often spend most of class explaining instructions or trying to keep students on task. The digital resources you introduce to your district should adequately model for students what needs to be done, provide hints if students get stuck, and give feedback on any student responses.

Recommended Resource

[How Does Clay Animation Work?](#)

Price: Free **Standard:** RI.6.1 **6th Grade**

Why it works: This article about animated films features developmentally appropriate language, quick and easy definitions for challenging vocabulary, and optional audio support.



4 Intuitiveness

Digital content should keep students focused and on task.

Avoid resources with confusing interfaces. No matter how great the resource is, a confusing login or menu will distract students and delay learning.



Recommended Resource

[Why the Fist Bump is Better than the Handshake](#)

Price: Free

Standard: RI.5.7

5th Grade

Why it works: It doesn't get more intuitive than a YouTube video. To learn independently with this resource, all students have to do is press play. Serving as an excellent introduction to argumentative writing, this video highlights a science experiment that explored how handshakes spread germs and bacteria.

5 Student Engagement

Purposeful digital content can't be replicated with a pen and paper.

Look for resources that leverage the power of the laptop or tablet to offer an immersive learning experience and encourages students to creatively apply their knowledge. When used correctly, digital content offers districts the opportunity to tap into student choice by allowing students to choose from a selection of leveled digital resources about different topics.



Recommended Resource

[Youtube Star Revives Traditional Alaskan Culture](#)

Price: Free

Standard: RI.8.7

8th Grade

Why it works: This podcast proves that you don't necessarily need games or interactive graphics to engage students. Modelling for students how to creatively synthesize information to tell a story, Jennie Holtzman combines sound bites, interviews, and recorded narrative to show how an Alaskan teenager is using technology to bring attention to Alaskan culture.

6 Text Complexity

Regardless of the skill or standard that's being taught, in order to be effective, all digital content must align to each student's unique reading level.

Most digital content is not written with emergent readers in mind, so when selecting resources look for audio and visual vocabulary support, levels of meaning and purpose, readability, and text structures.

Curriculum directors and ELA teachers will play an important role in curating digital content at a district level.

Recommended Resource

[How Did Astronauts Build a Space Station?](#)

Price: Free

Standard: 3.RI.4

3rd Grade

Why it works: According to Flesch-Kincaid and SMOG measures of readability, this article about space stations is best for students reading at a third grade level. Audio and visual cues support vocabulary acquisition, allowing students to use context to identify academic or unfamiliar words.

When evaluating digital content to support your school's curriculum, consider curating resources from a variety of authors and developers.

Homogenous, in-house content can bore students and fail to address the diversity of needs found in most classrooms. Curating educational content is a great way to differentiate learning at scale and build a rigorous, culturally inclusive digital curriculum that can support a variety of learning styles and skill levels.

Ready to get started?

Use the digital content checklist on the next page to vet apps, videos, articles, and digital activities before sharing them with students.



Digital Content Checklist

Name of resource _____

To be used with students working at a _____ grade level to support the development of _____ skill or standard.

| Requirement | Check |
|---|-------|
| Supports state standards and instructional goals | |
| Accommodates multiple skill levels or the specific skill level of the students being served | |
| Leverages student choice, educational games, or creative activities to engage students | |
| Interactive elements go beyond multiple choice and fill in the blank questions | |
| Free of typos, grammatical errors, pop-ups, ads, and gated content | |
| Supports district mission, values, and strategic plan | |
| Models new skills and provides clear, intuitive instructions | |
| Checks for understanding and comprehension | |
| Provides prompt, actionable feedback on student work | |

| Requirement | Check |
|---|-------|
| Encourages students to work independently and engage in metacognition | |
| Provides explicit instruction | |
| Asks students to recall and creatively apply their knowledge | |
| Connects academic standards to a world outside the classroom | |
| Provides audio and visual vocabulary support where appropriate | |
| Texts are culturally relevant, exploring a variety of points of view | |
| All elements of the text align to students' reading levels as determined by Flesch-Kincaid, SMOG, or another readability formula. | |
| Asks students to engage in higher order thinking and respond to open ended questions | |
| Documents student usage, growth, and proficiency data to monitor efficacy | |