

We have designed each “White Paper” to explore a fundamental educational principle and key issues engaging the education community we serve. It is our goal to partner with our readers as they meet the challenges they face.



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The Critical “Basics” in the Classroom & Castle Learning Online

We hear it from educators and parents, whether at meetings or on the phone—*Castle Learning Online* is a quality learning tool boasting features that reinforce course content, thus truly engaging students in the **critical basics**.

Educators, along with supportive parents, consistently describe reading and writing, with its requisite spelling and grammar, along with skills in problem solving for arithmetic, as well as critical thinking at the most sophisticated level, as **critical basics** they personally have focused on, beginning in the primary grades and following through into high school. They believe that children need to function and compete in their world as they grow.

An elementary 4th grade teacher wrote about a **critical basic** that combined several content areas using *Castle Learning Online*. She explained that “their Math has improved in the problem solving areas” and added that their “awareness of social studies and science 'concepts' seems stronger as a result.”

In an effort to address the **critical basics** of reading and spelling, *Castle Learning Online* has added an audio spelling component for students in grades 1–5. Here’s how it works: (a) Supply brief instructions about what word to spell, (b) hear it in a sentence, (c) type the word in a short answer response field that is automatically scored, (d) view hints, reasons, visual clues, along with short written explanations for common spelling rules, and (e) provide general spelling rules to beginner spellers and readers. This is a great way for students to practice their spelling skills!

Another level of the **critical basics** for students is an ability to understand course content vocabulary. Another 4th grade teacher I met observed that “I feel that having the flashcards is a great way to increase student knowledge of the content areas. It is a different way for the students to learn, especially at this level.” From its inception in the early 1990s, *Castle Learning Online* students have had built-in defined vocabulary, hints that guide understanding and full sentence reasons for correct answers, all wrapped around a question.

Educators recognize that a child who cannot rapidly compute numbers will have difficulty in a highly technical and sophisticated business world. As a result, *Castle Learning* uses a Math Skills component, as another piece of our **critical basics**. Our randomly generated math problems in elementary and middle school courses cover topics such as simple addition, subtraction, decimals or fractions to Algebra equations and functions, and problem solving skills.

Considering the higher level of thinking, the **critical basics** are even necessary when students are involved with critical thinking skills. Defined as a mental process of analyzing or evaluating information, *Castle Learning* can supply a question such as: A hot pack contains chemicals that can be activated to produce heat. A cold pack contains chemicals that feel cold when activated. Based on energy flow, state the type of chemical change that occurs in a hot pack.

Although dating myself, I can easily say that *Castle Learning Online* has produced a “**buzz**” amongst educators and we couldn’t be more delighted by their responses. Success and growth for students in these **critical basics** are built into every assignment. The explanation given by everyone is that the features of *Castle Learning*, as one educator stated, are what can “separate your product from so many other products on the market.”