

Guide to Text Complexity

What is Text Complexity?

Every text has a level of complexity or readability that affects the way the reader interacts with it. Novels, articles, poems, short stories, textbooks, etc. have wide ranges of complexity that are appropriate at different grade levels and for a variety of purposes. An important focus of Indiana's Academic Standards is making sure students are being exposed to texts with increasing complexity in all subject areas as they move toward being college and career ready. While determining the appropriate placement of a text in accordance with the reading standards for text complexity (Learning Outcome Standards RL.1 and RN.1), it is important to evaluate quantitative measures, qualitative measures, and reader and task considerations.

Quantitative Measurements of Complexity

Quantitative dimensions and factors are those aspects of a text (e.g., word length and frequency, and sentence syntax) that are not easily measurable by a human and are typically measured by a program. While these tools are helpful, they should NOT be the only measures for determining text complexity. Poetry, plays, and texts below a second grade reading level cannot typically be measured by quantitative means.

Multiple measures are recommended when possible.

Qualitative Measurements of Complexity

Qualitative dimensions and factors are those aspects of text complexity (e.g., levels of meaning and structure) only measureable by an attentive reader.

The **Qualitative Considerations for Literature** and **Qualitative Considerations for Nonfiction** worksheets can assist in making finer distinctions about where a text should fall in the grade-level span. There are three categories: accessible, moderately complex, and highly complex. An accessible text should be accessible for students to be able to interact with independently at the low end of the grade-level span. A moderately complex text may require scaffolding for students at the low-end of the grade-level span, but should be accessible with no scaffolding once they reach the middle or high-end of the grade-level span. A very complex text will require scaffolding for students until they reach the high-end of the grade-level span, at which point they should be able to interact with the text independently.

Reader and Task Considerations

Reader and task considerations can be individual to schools, classrooms, and students. This includes taking factors like cognitive capabilities, reading skills, and motivation into consideration.

Suggested Considerations for Reader and Task

Cognitive Capabilities

Do readers at this grade level possess the necessary...

- attention to read and comprehend this text?
- ability to remember and make connections among the various details presented in this text?
- visualization skills to imagine what is occurring or what is being discussed in the text?

Also consider if this text will help to develop the attention, memory, and critical/analytical thinking skills necessary for future reading endeavors.

Reading Skills

Do readers at this grade level possess the necessary. . .

- inferencing skills to make connections among elements that may not be explicit in this text?
- visualization skills to imagine what is occurring or what is being described in this text?
- questioning skills to challenge the ideas being presented in this text and consider multiple points of view?
- comprehension strategies to manage this text?

Also consider if this text will help to develop the inferencing skills, visualization skills, questioning skills, and comprehension strategies necessary for future reading endeavors.

Motivation and Engagement with Task and Text

Will the readers at this grade level be able to. . .

- understand the purpose of reading this text- which might shift over the course of the reading experience?
- be engaged with the topic of this text?
- be engaged with the style of writing and the presentation of ideas within this text?

Also consider if this text might help readers develop an interest in the content.

Prior Knowledge and Experience

Do the readers at this grade level possess adequate prior knowledge and/or experience regarding the. . .

- topic of this text to manage the material that is presented?
- vocabulary used within this text to manage the material that is presented?
- genre of this text to manage the material that is presented?
- language (i.e. syntax, diction, rhetoric) of this text to manage the material that is presented?

Also consider if this text might help readers develop knowledge of topic, vocabulary, genre, or language.

Content and/or Theme Concerns

Do the readers at this grade level possess the. . .

- maturity to respond appropriately to any potentially concerning elements of content or theme?

Also consider if there are any potentially concerning elements of content or theme that might contribute to students, teachers, administrators, and/or parents feeling uncomfortable with the reading of the text.

Complexity of Associated Tasks

Will the complexity of. . .

- any tasks associated with this text interfere with the reading experience?
- any questions asked or discussed concerning this text interfere with the reading experience?

This guide was developed using the Reader and Task Consideration document created by the Kansas Department of Education.

<http://communities.ohiorc.org/ela-supervisors/files/2012/05/KansasReaderconsiderations.pdf>

References

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