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Key Considerations in Implementing Text Complexity

Texts and Measurement Tools

The tools for measuring text complexity are at once useful and imperfect. Each of the qualitative and quantitative tools described above has its limitations, and none is completely accurate. The development of new and improved text complexity tools should follow the release of the Standards as quickly as possible. In the meantime, the Standards recommend that multiple quantitative measures be used whenever possible and that their results be confirmed or overruled by a qualitative analysis of the text in question.

Certain measures are less valid or inappropriate for certain kinds of texts. Current quantitative measures are suitable for prose and dramatic texts. Until such time as quantitative tools for capturing poetry's difficulty are developed, determining whether a poem is appropriately complex for a given grade or grade band will necessarily be a matter of a qualitative assessment meshed with reader-task considerations. Furthermore, texts for kindergarten and grade 1 may not be appropriate for quantitative analysis, as they often contain difficult-to-assess features designed to aid early readers in acquiring written language. The Standards' poetry and K–1 text exemplars were placed into grade bands by expert teachers drawing on classroom experience.

Many current quantitative measures underestimate the challenge posed by complex narrative fiction. Quantitative measures of text complexity, particularly those that rely exclusively or in large part on word- and sentence-level factors, tend to assign sophisticated works of literature excessively low scores. For example, as illustrated in example 2 below, some widely used quantitative measures; including the Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level test and the Lexile Framework for Reading, rate the Pulitzer Prize–winning novel *Grapes of Wrath* as appropriate for grades 2–3. This counterintuitive result emerges because works such as *Grapes* often express complex

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ideas in relatively commonplace language (familiar words and simple syntax), especially in the form of dialogue that mimics everyday speech. Until widely available quantitative tools can better account for factors recognized as making such texts challenging, including multiple levels of meaning and mature themes, preference should likely be given to qualitative measures of text complexity when evaluating narrative fiction intended for students in grade 6 and above.

Measures of text complexity must be aligned with college and career readiness expectations for all students. Qualitative scales of text complexity should be anchored at one end by descriptions of texts representative of those required in typical first-year credit-bearing college courses and in workforce training programs. Similarly, quantitative measures should identify the college- and career-ready reading level as one endpoint of the scale. MetaMetrics, for example, has realigned its Lexile ranges to match the Standards' text complexity grade bands and has adjusted upward its trajectory of reading comprehension development through the grades to indicate that all students should be reading at the college and career readiness level by no later than the end of high school.

Figure 3: Text Complexity Grade Bands and Associated Lexile Ranges (in Lexiles)

Text Complexity Grade Band in the Standards	Old Lexile Ranges	Lexile Ranges Aligned to CCR expectations
K-1	N/A	N/A
2-3	450-725	450-790
4-5	645-845	770-980
6-8	860-1010	955-1155
9-10	960-1115	1080-1305
11-CCR	1070-1220	1215-1355

[4]RAND Reading Study Group. (2002). *Reading for understanding: Toward an R&D program in reading comprehension.* Santa Monica, CA: RAND. The quoted text appears in pages xiii-xvi.

TEXT COMPLEXITY: QUALITATIVE MEASURES RUBRIC

INFORMATIONAL TEXT

Text Title: _____ **Text Author:** _____

PURPOSE			
High	**Middle High**	**Middle Low**	**Low**
☐ Complex, implied, and/or difficult to determine; may have multiple purposes	☐ Implied, but can be inferred; may have multiple purposes	☐ Implied, but easy to identify based on context	☐ Explicitly stated
STRUCTURE			
High	**Middle High**	**Middle Low**	**Low**
☐ **Organization:** highly complex; implicit connections between ideas; conforms to the conventions of a specific content area or discipline	☐ **Organization:** complex; some explicit connections between ideas; may exhibit traits common to a specific content area or discipline	☐ **Organization:** may be complex; largely explicit connections between ideas; generally follows the conventions of the genre	☐ **Organization:** simple; explicit connections between ideas; conforms to the conventions of the genre
☐ **Text Features:** if used, are essential in understanding content	☐ **Text Features:** if used, greatly enhance the reader's understanding of content	☐ **Text Features:** if used, enhance the reader's understanding of content	☐ **Text Features:** if used, help the reader navigate and understand content but are not essential
☐ **Use of Graphics:** if used, interpretation of complex graphics essential to understanding the text; may also provide information not conveyed in the text*	☐ **Use of Graphics:** if used, some graphics are complex and may occasionally be essential to the understanding of the text	☐ **Use of Graphics:** if used, graphics are mostly simple and supplementary to understanding the text	☐ **Use of Graphics:** if used, graphics are simple and unnecessary to understanding the text
LANGUAGE			
High	**Middle High**	**Middle Low**	**Low**
☐ **Conventionality:** contains abstract and/or figurative language or irony	☐ **Conventionality:** occasionally contains abstract and/or figurative language or irony	☐ **Conventionality:** largely contemporary, conversational language	☐ **Conventionality:** contemporary, conversational language
☐ **Clarity:** dense and complex language that is generally unfamiliar, archaic, discipline-specific, or overly academic; language may be ambiguous or purposefully misleading	☐ **Clarity:** somewhat complex language that is occasionally unfamiliar, archaic, discipline-specific, or overly academic	☐ **Clarity:** largely explicit, familiar language; easy-to-understand and rarely archaic, discipline-specific, or overly academic	☐ **Clarity:** clear, explicit, literal, easy-to-understand language
KNOWLEDGE DEMANDS			
High	**Middle High**	**Middle Low**	**Low**
☐ **Subject Matter Knowledge:** requires extensive, perhaps specialized or even theoretical discipline-specific content knowledge	☐ **Subject Matter Knowledge:** requires moderate levels of discipline-specific content knowledge; some theoretical knowledge may enhance understanding	☐ **Subject Matter Knowledge:** everyday, practical knowledge is largely necessary; requires some discipline-specific content knowledge	☐ **Subject Matter Knowledge:** requires only everyday, practical knowledge and familiarity with conventions of the genre
☐ **Intertextuality:** many references to/citations of other texts or outside ideas, theories, etc.	☐ **Intertextuality:** some references to/citations of other texts or outside ideas, theories, etc.	☐ **Intertextuality:** few references to/citations of other texts or outside ideas, theories, etc.	☐ **Intertextuality:** no references to/citations of other texts or outside ideas, theories, etc.

*NOTE: Many books for the youngest students rely heavily on graphics to convey meaning and are an exception to this generalization.

TEXT COMPLEXITY: QUALITATIVE MEASURES RUBRIC

LITERARY TEXT

Text Title: _____ **Text Author:** _____

MEANING			
High	**Middle High**	**Middle Low**	**Low**
☐ Multiple levels/layers of complex meaning	☐ Multiple levels/layers of meaning	☐ Single level/layer of complex meaning	☐ Single level/layer of simple meaning
STRUCTURE			
High	**Middle High**	**Middle Low**	**Low**
☐ **Narrative Structure:** complex, implicit, and unconventional ☐ **Narration:** many shifts in point of view ☐ **Order of Events:** frequent manipulations of time and sequence (not in chronological order)	☐ **Narrative Structure:** some complexities, more implicit than explicit, some unconventionality ☐ **Narration:** occasional shifts in point of view ☐ **Order of Events:** several major shifts in time, use of flashback	☐ **Narrative Structure:** largely simple structure, more explicit than implicit, largely conventional ☐ **Narration:** few, if any, shifts in point of view ☐ **Order of Events:** occasional use of flashback, no major shifts in time	☐ **Narrative Structure:** simple, explicit, conventional ☐ **Narration:** no shifts in point of view ☐ **Order of Events:** chronological
LANGUAGE			
High	**Middle High**	**Middle Low**	**Low**
☐ **Conventionality:** heavy use of abstract and/or figurative language or irony ☐ **Clarity:** generally unfamiliar, archaic, domain-specific, and/or academic language; dense and complex; may be ambiguous or purposefully misleading	☐ **Conventionality:** contains abstract and/or figurative language or irony ☐ **Clarity:** somewhat complex language that is occasionally unfamiliar, archaic, domain-specific, or overly academic	☐ **Conventionality:** subtle use of figurative language or irony ☐ **Clarity:** largely contemporary, familiar, conversational language that is explicit and literal; rarely unfamiliar, archaic, domain-specific, or overly academic	☐ **Conventionality:** little or no use of figurative language or irony ☐ **Clarity:** contemporary, familiar, conversational language that is explicit and literal; easy-to-understand
KNOWLEDGE DEMANDS			
High	**Middle High**	**Middle Low**	**Low**
☐ **Life Experiences:** explores multiple complex, sophisticated themes; multiple perspectives presented; experiences portrayed are not fantasy but are distinctly different to the common reader ☐ **Cultural/Literary Knowledge:** requires an extensive depth of literary/cultural knowledge; many references/allusions to other texts and/or cultural elements	☐ **Life Experiences:** explores multiple themes of varying levels of complexity; experiences portrayed are not fantasy but are uncommon to most readers ☐ **Cultural/Literary Knowledge:** requires moderate levels of cultural/literary knowledge; some references/allusions to other texts and/or cultural elements	☐ **Life Experiences:** explores a single complex theme; experiences portrayed are common to many readers or are clearly fantasy ☐ **Cultural/Literary Knowledge:** requires some cultural/literary knowledge; few references/allusions to other texts and/or cultural elements	☐ **Life Experiences:** explores a single theme; single perspective presented and everyday experiences are portrayed that are common to most readers or experiences are clearly fantasy ☐ **Cultural/Literary Knowledge:** requires only common, everyday cultural/literary knowledge; no references/allusions to other texts and/or cultural elements

Suggested Considerations for
Reader and Task

Cognitive Capabilities

- Do readers at this grade level possess the necessary **attention** to read and comprehend the text?
- Will the readers at this grade level be able to **remember and make connections** among the various details presented in the text?
- Do readers at this grade level possess the necessary **critical/analytical thinking skills** to understand the relationships between the various parts of the text?
- Will the text help to develop the **attention**, **memory**, and **critical/analytic thinking skills** necessary for future reading endeavors?

Reading Skills

- Do readers at this grade level possess the necessary **inferencing skills** to "read between the lines" and make connections among elements that may not be explicit in the text?
- Do readers at this grade level possess the necessary **visualization skills** to imagine what is occurring or what is being described in the text?
- Do readers at this grade level possess the necessary **questioning skills** to challenge the ideas being presented in this text and consider those ideas from multiple points of view?
- Do readers at this grade level possess the necessary **comprehension strategies** to manage this text?
- Will the text 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 **understand the purpose**—which might shift over the course of the reading experience—for reading the text (i.e., skimming, studying to retain content, close reading, etc.)?
- Will the readers at this grade level be **interested in the content** of the text?
- Might the readers at this grade level **develop an interest in this content** because of this text?
- Do readers at this grade level believe that they will be able to read and understand the text?
- Will the readers at this grade level be **interested and engaged with the style of writing and the presentation of ideas** within the text?
- Will the text **maintain the reader's motivation and engagement** throughout the reading experience?

Prior Knowledge and Experience

- Do readers at this grade level possess **adequate prior knowledge and/or experience regarding the topic** of the text to manage the material that is presented?
- Are there any **explicit connections** that can be made between what content the readers at this grade level will encounter in the text and other learning that may occur in this or another class?
- Do readers at this grade level possess **adequate prior knowledge and/or experience regarding the vocabulary** used within the text to manage the material that is presented?
- Do readers at this grade level possess **adequate knowledge of and/or experience with the genre** of the text to manage the material that is presented?
- Do readers at this grade level possess **adequate knowledge of and/or experience with the language** (i.e. syntax, diction, rhetoric) of the text to manage the material that is presented?

Content and/or Theme Concerns

- Are there any **potentially concerning elements of content or theme** that might contribute to students, teachers, administrators, and/or parents feeling uncomfortable with reading the text?
- Do readers at this grade level possess the **maturity** to respond appropriately to any potentially concerning elements of content or theme?

Complexity of Associated Tasks

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