


Common Core Instruction for ELA & Literacy Text Complexity, 6-12 Content Area Teachers

Area V Regional Superintendents of Schools
Robert Dalber • Keri Garrett • Marchelle Kassebaum •
Kelton Davis • Larry Pfeiffer • Susan Sarfaty • Julie Wollerman

Module 1: Common Core Instruction for ELA & Literacy


Text Complexity
Audience: 6-12 Content Area Teachers



Expected outcomes

- ▶ Become familiar with the CCSS criteria for text complexity.
- ▶ Become familiar with the “staircase” of text complexity from grade to grade.
- ▶ Explore some strategies and resources for making the grade-appropriate texts accessible to all students.


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Why do we need to raise the level of text complexity in K-12?

- ▶ Reported decline in high-school level text
 - More students are on track to being ready for college-level reading in 8th and 10th grade than are actually ready by the time they reach 12th grade. (ACT)
- ▶ Increased text difficulty of college/career texts
 - College professors assign more periodical reading than high school teachers.
 - The level of difficulty of scientific journals and magazines has increased.
- ▶ Decline in school text complexity overall
 - K-12 reading texts have actually trended downward in difficulty in the last half century.

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Why emphasize central, high-quality complex texts for all students?

- ▶ Complex text holds the vocabulary-, language-, knowledge-, and thinking-building potential of deep comprehension.
- ▶ If students have not developed the skills, concentration, and perseverance to read challenging texts with understanding, they will read less in general.
- ▶ Limited access to complex texts is an equity issue.
 - The consequences are disproportionately harsh for students in poverty or high-mobility situations.

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How is text complexity defined in CCSS?

- ▶ **Qualitative factors**
 - Levels of meaning
 - Text structure
 - Language conventionality and clarity
 - Knowledge demands
- ▶ **Quantitative factors**
 - Readability measures using word length or frequency, sentence length, text cohesion (for example, Lexiles)
- ▶ **Reader and task considerations**
 - Reader variables (motivation, knowledge, experiences)
 - Task variables (purpose, complexity of the task assigned)



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Qualitative factors of text complexity

- ▶ Levels of meaning/purpose
- ▶ Text structure
- ▶ Language conventionality and clarity
- ▶ Knowledge Demands: Life Experiences
- ▶ Knowledge Demands: Cultural/Literary Knowledge
- ▶ Knowledge Demands: Content/Discipline Knowledge



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Activity: What are the qualitative challenges in the text exemplars?

- ▶ Purpose and main idea
 - Explicit? Multiple?
- ▶ Structure
 - Organization of the whole? Sections? Paragraphs?
 - Sentence structures?
- ▶ Language
 - Familiar, contemporary? Specialized, arcane?
- ▶ Perspective
 - Familiar? Unusual? Multiple?
- ▶ Background or content knowledge required?

More text exemplars in Appendix B, *Common Core State Standards for ELA & Literacy*

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“A White Man’s War?”

- ▶ Language
 - Contemporary, common
 - ▶ Structure
 - Main distinctions explicitly stated in same order in paragraph one
 - Main ideas of second paragraph cued by repetition of title.
 - Short
 - ▶ Vocabulary
 - *Distinct*
 - Various terms for the two sides
 - ▶ Structure
 - Topic sentence of first paragraph buried in the paragraph and in the sentence; “each side representing...”
 - ▶ Cultural knowledge
 - American Revolution, Civil War
 - Black enslavement



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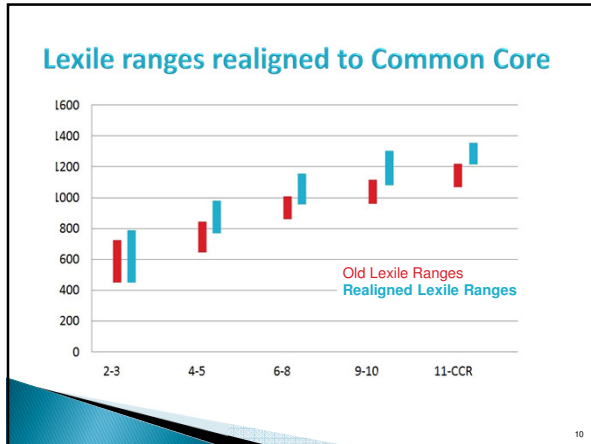
**Qualitative measures
Lexile ranges realigned to Common Core**

“MetaMetrics 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

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- ### Reader and task considerations
- ▶ Cognitive capabilities
 - Attention, memory, critical analytic abilities
 - ▶ Motivation and engagement with task
 - Purpose, interest in the content, confidence as a reader
 - ▶ Prior knowledge and/or experience
 - Vocabulary, domain and topic, comprehension strategies, linguistic structures, discourse styles, genres
 - ▶ Reader's purpose and intended outcome
 - ▶ Type of reading
 - Skimming to get the gist, studying for retention
- More in Appendix A, Common Core State Standards in ELA & Literacy*

- ### Scaffolding to support students' ability to read increasingly complex texts
- ▶ Non-text sources
 - For example, multi-media and class discussions, build the foundation of vocabulary, language and content knowledge
 - ▶ Easier, supplemental texts
 - can provide instructional-level reading material
 - ▶ Instructional scaffolding activities
 - For example, teacher-facilitated read-alouds, discussion of text excerpts, partner reading, peer coaching
 - ▶ Explicit instruction
 - on vocabulary, text structure, & comprehension strategies
 - ▶ Multiple texts

"A White Man's War?"

Confederate States of America	United States of America
Confederacy Confederates	Union Unionists
southern states southerners	northern states northerners
Rebels	Yankees

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Views of the war

- ▶ For the Confederates _____
("new war of Independence")
- ▶ For the Unionists _____
("war to preserve the Union")
- ▶ For African Americans _____
("war about slavery")

"— each side representing a distinct..."

	Economy	Labor System	Philosophy of Government
Confederacy	Agricultural	_____ <i>(Slave workforce)</i>	_____ <i>(States' rights)</i>
Union	_____ <i>(Industrial)</i>	_____ <i>(Wage labor)</i>	Strong federal government

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Activity: Scaffolding the text

- ▶ With partners, brainstorm scaffolding activities you might use with the text(s) you analyzed in the previous activity.

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Students need to engage with

- ▶ Grade-appropriate materials for exposure to structures, content, vocabulary;
- ▶ Instructional-level materials that allow them to progress;
- ▶ Easy materials that allow them to practice.
 - If familiar/interesting, material can be more challenging.
 - If unfamiliar/uninteresting, material may need to be less challenging.

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How did we do?

- ▶ *What are the three factors used to assess text complexity in the Common Core State Standards?*
- ▶ *Why have the Lexile ranges for grade bands been changed?*
- ▶ *Why is it important that ALL students engage with the central, grade-appropriate complex text?*
- ▶ *What are some comprehension/scaffolding strategies or activities that can make complex text more accessible to students with below-grade reading skills?*

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Suggested follow-up activities

- ▶ In grade level teams, create lesson(s) that include one or more text exemplars from *CCSS Appendix B*.
 - Include support/scaffolding strategies.
 - In cross-grade level teams, identify topics or concepts around which to select texts so that students continue to build in-depth knowledge across grades.

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