

Area V Regional Superintendents of Schools  
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**Module 1:**  
**Common Core Instruction**  
**for ELA & Literacy**

Text Complexity  
Audience: K – 5 Teachers

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**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 is text complexity important?**

- ▶ The ACT report, *Reading Between the Lines*, shows that the key predictor for career and college readiness is not just success with individual reading skills but with the level of complexity of the text.
- ▶ The CCSS “staircase” of text complexity begins at kindergarten.



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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 8<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade than are actually ready by the time they reach 12<sup>th</sup> 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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### “Garden Helpers” (K-1)

- ▶ Main idea explicitly stated in first two lines.
- ▶ Structure is consistent
  - First line names beneficial insect and says what it does.
  - Second line(s) explains how this helps the garden.
- ▶ Simple sentences & words
  - S-V & S-V-O
  - “bugs,” “plants” “garden”
- ▶ Vocabulary
  - “rich” -- \$\$\$?
- ▶ Content Knowledge
  - How can dirt be “rich and healthy”?
  - How do earthworms make soil rich and healthy?
  - What is a praying mantis?



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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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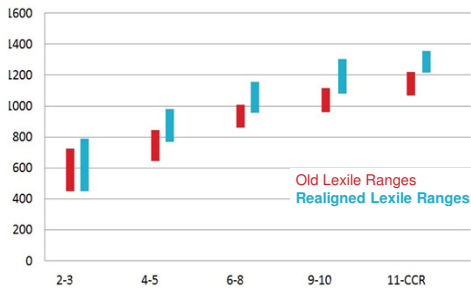
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#### Lexile ranges realigned to Common Core



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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

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### 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



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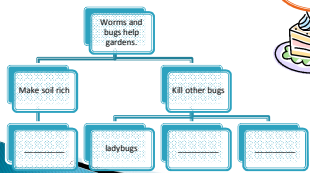
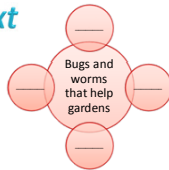
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### Activity: Scaffolding the text

- ▶ 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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### Timing matters

- ▶ Greater scaffolding is provided at the beginning of tasks.
- ▶ Scaffolding supports an increasing level of complexity.
- ▶ Include a plan for removing the scaffolding.



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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 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, brainstorm themes or topics around which to select texts so that students continue to build in-depth knowledge across grades.

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