

## Guide to Determining Text Complexity: Grades K-12

### Overview

Text complexity can be defined as the level of difficulty in reading and understanding a text based on a series of factors: the readability of the text, the levels of meaning or purpose in the text, the structure of the text, the conventionality and clarity of the language, and the knowledge demands of the text.

When planning instruction for English language arts, it is important to select texts that provide students with opportunities to meet [grade-level standards](#).

### Process

**To determine text complexity, there are three steps.**

1. Identify a grade-level band based on the text's readability. Use a quantitative measure<sup>1</sup> for determining readability and the [grade-level text complexity range](#).
2. Identify an appropriate grade for the text based on how hard it is to understand the text. Collaborate with colleagues to analyze the readability of texts using the [informational](#) or [literary](#) rubric.<sup>2</sup>
3. Determine how the text should be used in the classroom. Use the [Questions for Reader and Task Considerations](#).

**There are a few exceptions to this process:**

- The readability of narrative fiction in grades 6-12 is not always reliably measured through step one. For these texts, preference should sometimes be given to the results from step two. This type of exception should rarely be exercised with informational text. It is critical that students have extensive practice with texts whose readability falls in the appropriate grade-level band.
- The readability of poetry and drama is also not reliably measured; therefore, teachers should start the process at step two for these types of texts.
- Texts written for student learning to read should be written to correlate with students' independent reading and word knowledge level. As such, complex texts determined through this process should be used as read-aloud texts in grades K and 1.

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<sup>1</sup> To ensure that text increases in complexity adequately, a single quantitative measure such as Lexile (<http://www.lexile.com/fab>) or ATOSTM ([www.arbookfind.com](http://www.arbookfind.com)) should be used system-wide.

<sup>2</sup> The final results are used to justify the placement of a text in a specific grade; however, there is no exact result. As such, step two is best done in collaboration with colleagues, in the hopes of reaching consensus about the understandability of the texts.

## An Example of Text Complexity throughout the Standards




The following chart illustrates the different levels of text that meet the expectations of the English language arts standards.

Grade Level	English Language Arts Standard	Complexity of the Text	Use of Text
Kindergarten	Actively engage in group reading activities with purpose and understanding. (RL.K.10)	Texts with readability in grades 2 or higher	<b>Read aloud</b> by the teacher during whole-class instruction
Kindergarten	Read emergent-reader texts with purpose and understanding. (RF.K.4)	Texts written to match students' independent reading ability	<b>Read along</b> with the teacher or <b>read alone</b> by the student during small-group instruction or independent reading
Grade 1	With prompting and support, read informational texts appropriately complex for grade 1. (RI.1.10)	Texts with readability at the end of grade 1 or grades 2 or higher	<b>Read aloud, read along, or read alone</b> during whole-class instruction, small-group instruction, or independent reading
Grade 4	Read with sufficient accuracy and fluency to support comprehension. (RF.4.4a-c) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Read on-level text with purpose and understanding.</li> <li>b. Read on-level prose and poetry orally with accuracy, appropriate rate, and expression on successive readings.</li> <li>c. Use context to confirm or self-correct word recognition and understanding, rereading as necessary.</li> </ul>	Texts with readability in grades 4-5	<b>Read along or read alone</b> during whole-class instruction, small-group instruction, or independent reading
Grade 8	By the end of the year, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poems, at the high end of grades 6–8 text complexity band independently and proficiently. (RL.8.10)	Texts with readability in grades 6-8 or higher	<b>Read aloud, read along, or read alone</b> during whole-class instruction, small-group instruction, or independent reading

## Questions for Reader and Task Considerations: Determining Instructional Uses of Complex Texts

Before reading a text in the classroom, consider whether or not the text is appropriate for the age of the students. If not, the text should not be read with your students.

Use the information gathered from steps one and two of the process to plan for instruction. Consider the following:

What knowledge and skills should students demonstrate after reading this text?		Use the answer to this question to identify the grade-level English language arts standards to focus on with that text.
How can this text be used with other texts? How will students read this text? (e.g., Listen to the teacher reading aloud? Read along with a group? Read alone?)		Use the answers to these questions to determine when to teach this text in a unit. (e.g., Is it easier to read, so it goes well at the beginning? Does it require knowledge from other texts first, so it needs to go later in the unit?)
What aspects of the text will likely pose the most challenge for your students?		Use the answer to this question to design your instructional supports so that all students (even those who struggle) are able to access the text independently and proficiently through multiple and purposeful rereadings of the text.