**Text Complexity and the Common Core State Standards**

**What is text complexity?**

**Text complexity** – The inherent difficulty of reading and comprehending a text combined with consideration of reader

and task variables (*Common Core State Standards for ELA*)

**Three Features of Text Complexity**

*Quantitative Features (best measured by a computer)*

* Readability measures (Lexiles are most commonly used)
* Often involve analysis of word length or frequency, sentence length, and text cohesion



*Qualitative Features (best measured by a human)*

* Levels of meaning or purpose
* Structure
* Language conventionality and clarity
* Knowledge demands

*The Reader and the Task (best measured by a human)*

* Variables specific to particular readers (such as motivation, knowledge, and experiences)
* Variables specific to particular tasks (such as purpose and the complexity of the task assigned and the questions posed)

**The Change in Literacy Demands**

**(**From *Time to Act: An Agenda for Advancing Adolescent Literacy for College and Career Success*)

***Adolescent Literacy: Grades 4-12***

“Literacy demands—meaning the specific combination of texts, content, and the many learning tasks to be performed at any given grade level—change and intensify quickly for young learners after fourth grade. Primary grade students typically read texts containing words they already know, often about topics that already interest them. Comprehension tests require them to summarize stories and to retrieve items stated in the text, while mathematics tests require applying well-learned procedures. By contrast, secondary grade students are expected to learn new words, new facts, and new ideas from reading, as well as to interpret, critique, and summarize the texts they read. The literate practices embedded in these tasks, combining literacy skills and content knowledge, are often invisible (or taken for granted) and yet require a high level of sophistication, making adolescents especially vulnerable to underperformance and failure” (2010, p. 11)

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***What Are the Changes****?* (these are explained on pages 10-13 of *Time to Act*)

1. Texts become longer.
2. Word complexity increases.
3. Sentence complexity increases.
4. Structural complexity increases.
5. Graphic representations become more important.
6. Conceptual challenge increases.
7. Texts begin to vary widely across content areas.

**Quantitative Analysis of Text **

*What is a Lexile Measure?*

* Provides one piece of information about a student’s reading ability or the difficulty of a text

*How Are Lexile Measures Determined?*

* A Lexile measure is determined using two strong pieces of information which predict how difficult a text is: word frequency and sentence length. **Many other factors are also important, but this is a helpful starting point.**

*How Can You Find out a Student’s Lexile Reader Measure?*

* The North Carolina Reading EOGs and English I EOC report a student’s Lexile measure.
* This information is in Quickr under “Student Lists” for middle schools; for English I, a conversation chart is necessary to convert scale scores into Lexiles.

*How Can You Find out the Lexile Measure of a Text?*

* Anyone can use “Quick Search.”
* To use other features, go to <http://www.lexile.com> and create a free account under “Register.”
* You can search their database of texts by going to “Lexile Tools” and then “English Titles Database” (look carefully because many texts have adapted versions or texts which have been written about the text).
* You can also enter text (must save it as “plain text” – <http://www.lexile.com/tools/lexile-analyzer/step-1-what-texts-can-be-measured/>) (follow the steps on the left of the page).

*What Can Lexiles Do?*

* If a student knows his or her Lexile measure, the student can search for books based on that range as well as interest at <http://www.lexile.com> .
* A student’s Lexile reader measure can predict which texts he or she is likely to be able to read with 75% comprehension (other factors come into play, but it can be a starting point).
* A teacher can use the Lexile measure of a text as one piece of information when planning instruction. For example, if the Lexile measure of the text is higher than the Lexile reader measure of a student(s), the teacher can provide additional pre-teaching and/or scaffolding during instruction to help the student access the text.
* A teacher might decide to find additional texts on a particular topic at a variety of Lexile levels in order to individualize instruction for students (providing support or a challenge).

*What Can Lexiles Not Do?*

* A Lexile measure cannot take the place of the professional judgment of a teacher. It is **one** piece of information to be considered.
* A Lexile measure cannot determine whether or not a student can read a text; many other factors come into play as well (student motivation, interest, etc.).
* A Lexile measure cannot measure content or quality of a text.

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| **Grade Band** | **Current Lexile Band** | **"Stretch" Lexile Band** |
|  K–1 |  N/A | N/A |
|  2–3 |  450L–725L | 450L–790L |
|  4–5 |  645L–845L | 770L–980L |
|  6–8 | 860L–1010L | 955L–1155L |
| 9-10 | 960L–1115L | 1080L–1305L |
| 11–CCR |  1070L–1220L | 1215L–1355L |

**Qualitative Analysis of Text**

(from *Common Core State Standards for ELA Appendix A*)

*Levels of Meaning (literacy texts) or Purpose (informational text)*

 Single level of meaning → Multiple levels of meaning

 Explicitly stated purpose → Implicit purpose, may be hidden or obscure

*Structure*

 Simple → Complex

 Explicit → Implicit

 Conventional → Unconventional (chiefly literacy texts)

 Events related in chronological order → Events related out of chronological order (chiefly

 literary texts)

 Traits of a common genre or subgenre → Traits specific to a particular discipline (chiefly

 informational texts)

 Graphics unnecessary or merely → Graphics essential to understanding the text and may

 supplemental to understanding provide information not otherwise conveyed

 text in the text

*Language Conventionality and Clarity*

 Literal → Figurative or ironic

 Clear → Ambiguous or purposefully misleading

 Contemporary, familiar → Archaic or otherwise unfamiliar

 Conversational → General academic and domain-specific

*Knowledge Demands: Life Experiences (literary texts)*

 Simple theme → Complex or sophisticated themes

 Single themes → Multiple themes

 Common, everyday experiences or clearly → Experiences distinctly different from one’s own

 fantastical situations

 Single perspective → Multiple perspectives

 Perspective(s) like one’s own → Perspective(s) unlike or in opposition to one’s own

*Knowledge Demands: Cultural/Literary Knowledge (chiefly literary texts)*

 Everyday knowledge and familiarity with → Cultural and literary knowledge useful

 genre conventions required

 Low intertextuality (few if any references/ → High intertextuality (many references/allusions

 allusions to other texts) to other texts)

*Knowledge Demands: Content/Discipline Knowledge (chiefly information texts)*

 Everyday knowledge and familiarity with → Extensive, perhaps specialized discipline-specific

 genre conventions required content knowledge required

 Low intertextuality (few if any references to/ → High intertextuality (many references to/citations

 citations of other texts) of other texts)

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**Analysis of the Reader and the Task**

Students’ ability to read complex text does not always develop in a linear fashion. Although the progression of Reading standard 10 (see below) defines required grade-by-grade growth in students’ ability to read complex text, the development of this ability in individual students is unlikely to occur at an unbroken pace. Students need opportunities to stretch their reading abilities but also to experience the satisfaction and pleasure of easy, fluent reading within them, both of which the Standards allow for. As noted above, such factors as students’ motivation, knowledge, and experiences must also come into play in text selection. Students deeply interested in a given topic, for example, may

engage with texts on that subject across a range of complexity. Particular tasks may also require students to read harder texts than they would normally be required to. Conversely, teachers who have had success using particular texts that are easier than those required for a given grade band should feel free to continue to use them so long as the general movement during a given school year is toward texts of higher levels of complexity (p. 9).

from *Common Core State Standards for ELA Appendix A*

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For a list of sample questions teachers might ask themselves when considering the reader and the task,

see <http://www.ksde.org/Default.aspx?tabid=4605> (draft of document developed

by Kansas State Department of Education)

**For More Information on Text Complexity and Common Core State Standards for ELA**

* <http://www.corestandards.org/assets/CCSSI_ELA%20Standards.pdf> (*Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts & History/Social Studies, Science and Technical Subjects*)
* <http://www.corestandards.org/assets/Appendix_A.pdf> (*English Language Arts Appendix A: Research Supporting Key Elements of the Standards and Glossary of Key Terms*)
* <http://www.corestandards.org/assets/Appendix_B.pdf> (*English Language Arts Appendix B: Text Exemplars and Sample Performance Tasks*)
* <http://www.corestandards.org/assets/Appendix_C.pdf> (*English Language Arts Appendix C: Samples of Student Writing*)
* <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/docs/acre/standards/common-core-tools/exemplar/ela.pdf> (this document contains ordering information for texts listed as exemplars; also indicates which are available in public domain)