Text Complexity

There is not a single factor that defines text complexity. The following are all considerations in determining the difficulty of a text for any student.

LEAST COMPLEX → MOST COMPLEX

Quantative Complexity
Measures of word and sentence length and complexity (e.g., Lexile, Flesch-Kincaid).

LEAST COMPLEX			MOST COMPLEX
• Simple and familiar words. • Few and short sentences.	• Many familiar words. • Unfamiliar words are easily decodable. • Sentence structure is simple, and text has a logical and straightforward structure.	• Multisyllabic words. • Frequently used words intermixed with unfamiliar words or new academic vocabulary. • Sentence structure is more complex and varied.	• Mostly multisyllabic words. • Use of unfamiliar words and/or academic vocabulary. • Sentence structure may be highly complex and varied.

Qualitative Complexity
Measures of text complexity including text structure, levels of meaning, etc.

LEAST COMPLEX			MOST COMPLEX
• Clear, literal language. • Simple and linear text structure. • Single themes. • Single level of meaning. • Single perspective.	• Common language. • Simple themes. • Common knowledge.	• Use of more sophisticated structure, such as flash-backs and foreshadowing. • Multiple levels of meaning. • Use of figurative language. • Multiple perspectives or themes.	• Multiple levels of meaning. • Multiple and/or complex themes. • Ironic and/or ambiguous language. • Archaic or unfamiliar language. • Culture or content-specific knowledge.

Reader & Task Interactions
Considerations related to motivation, background knowledge, life experience and maturity, and/or the type of task with which a student may interact.

LEAST COMPLEX		MOST COMPLEX
• Familiar text structure. • Appropriate for attention level. • High interest text. • Familiar and/or motivating task. • Basic comprehension and/or teacher guided task.	• Makes use of common background knowledge. • Questions and/or tasks are straightforward and focus on basic comprehension skills. • May require more focused attention to an unfamiliar or unmotivating topic.	• Increasing use of critical/analytical thinking skills required to respond to increasingly complex and multi-faceted tasks, including written comparisons and critiques of text. • Increased reliance on prior knowledge or related experience to comprehend texts.

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