

# Determining Text Complexity

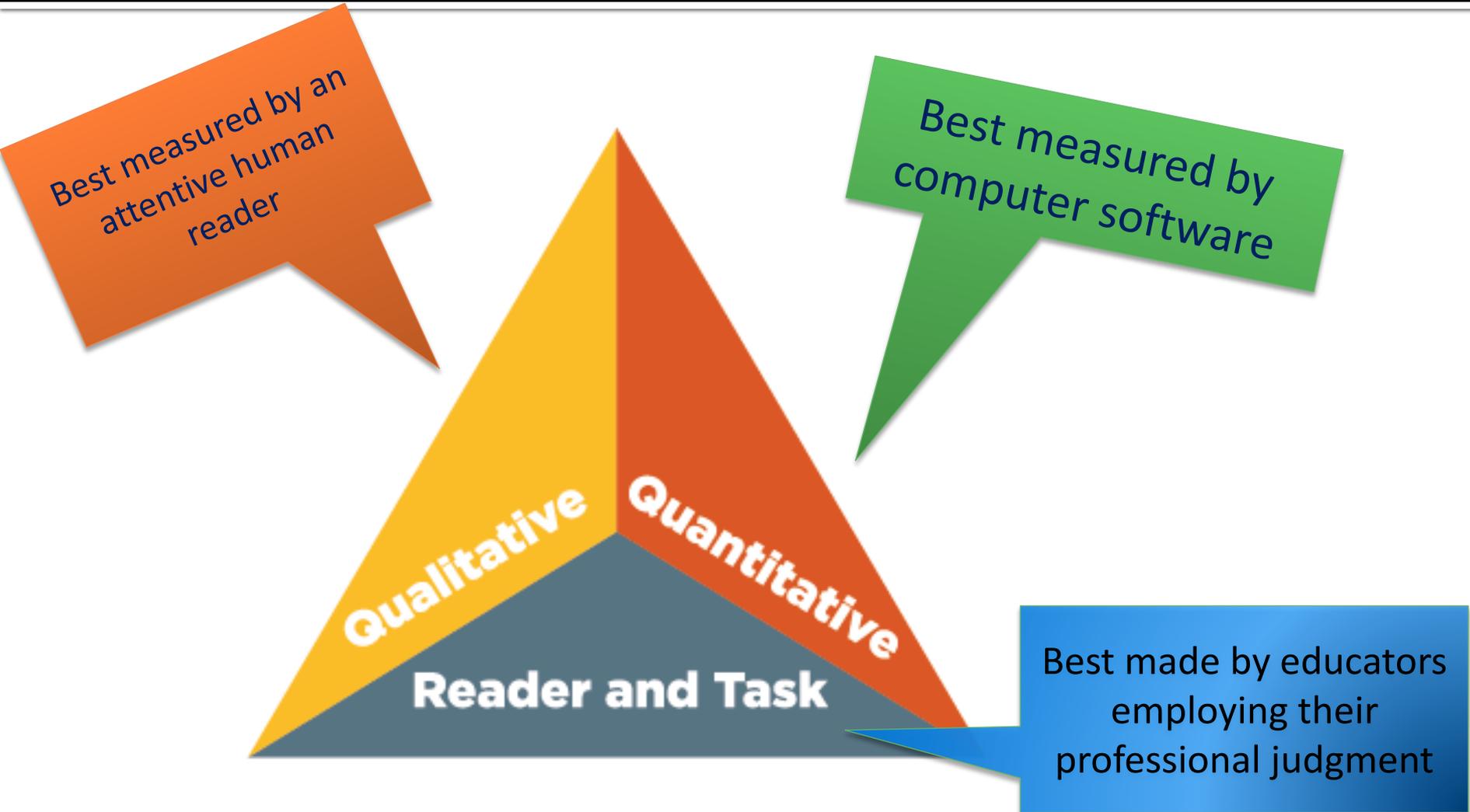
Cindy Knisely, Secondary Assessment Specialist

Liisa Moilanen-Potts, Teaching & Learning, ELA Director

Beth Simpson, Elementary Assessment Specialist



# Text Complexity Model



# A Three-Part Model for Measuring Text Complexity

## **Quantitative measure:**

- Word difficulty (frequency, length)
- Sentence length and syntax

## **Qualitative measures:**

- Levels of meaning (literary) or purpose (informational)
- Structure
- Language conventionality and clarity
- Knowledge demands

## **Reader and Task Considerations:**

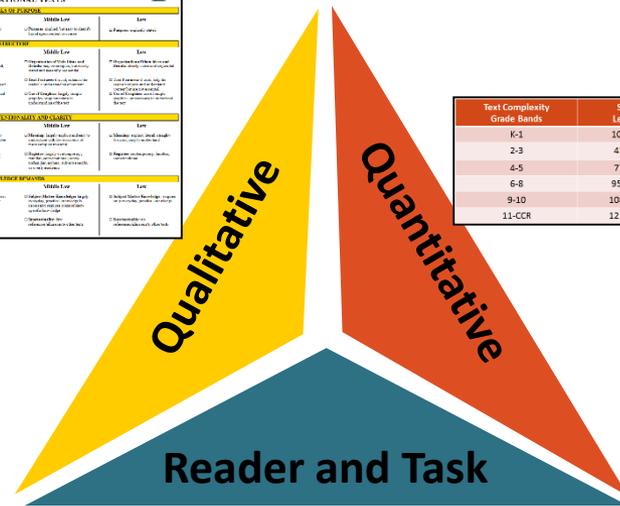
- Cognitive capabilities
- Motivation
- Knowledge

# The Right Text at the Right Time for the Right Learning Experience

1. Determine the quantitative measures of the text.
2. Analyze the qualitative measures of the text.
3. Reflect upon the reader and task considerations.
4. Recommend placement in the appropriate text complexity band.

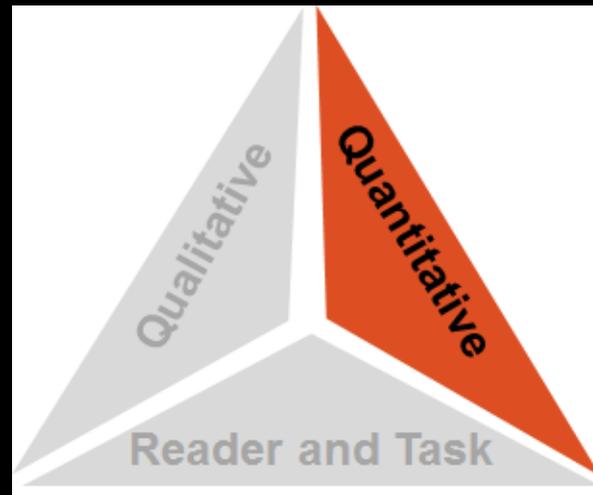
TEXT COMPLEXITY: QUALITATIVE MEASURES REVIEW			
INFORMATIONAL TEXTS			
STRUCTURE			
High	Middle-High	Middle-Low	Low
1. Purpose of the text is clearly stated.	1. Purpose of the text is clearly stated.	1. Purpose of the text is clearly stated.	1. Purpose of the text is clearly stated.
LANGUAGE COMPLEXITY AND LEXICALITY			
High	Middle-High	Middle-Low	Low
1. Multiple domain-specific and cross-domain terms are used.	1. Multiple domain-specific and cross-domain terms are used.	1. Multiple domain-specific and cross-domain terms are used.	1. Multiple domain-specific and cross-domain terms are used.
KNOWLEDGE DEMANDS			
High	Middle-High	Middle-Low	Low
1. Subject Matter Knowledge Demands are high.			

Text Complexity Grade Bands	Suggested Lexile Range	Suggested ATOS Book Level Range**
K-1	100L – 500L*	1.0 – 2.5
2-3	450L – 790L	2.0 – 4.0
4-5	770L – 980L	3.0 – 5.7
6-8	955L – 1155L	4.0 – 8.0
9-10	1080L – 1305L	4.6 – 10.0
11-CCR	1215L – 1355L	4.8 – 12.0



Questions for Professional Reflection on Reader and Task Considerations	
<b>Cognitive Capabilities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Does the reader possess the necessary attention to read and comprehend this specific text?</li> <li>Will the reader be able to remember and make connections among the various details presented in this specific text?</li> <li>Does the reader possess the necessary critical-analytic thinking skills to understand the relationships between the main idea, purpose, and/or theme of the text and the various details used to support that main idea, purpose, and/or theme?</li> <li>Will this specific text help to develop the attention, memory, and critical-analytic thinking skills necessary for future reading endeavors?</li> </ul>
<b>Reading Skills</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Does the reader possess the necessary inferencing skills to “read between the lines” and make connections among elements that may not be explicit in this specific text?</li> <li>Does the reader possess the necessary visualization skills to imagine what is occurring or what is being described in this specific text?</li> <li>Does the reader possess the necessary questioning skills to challenge the ideas being presented in this text and consider those ideas from multiple points of view?</li> <li>Does the reader possess the necessary comprehension strategies to manage the material in this specific text?</li> <li>Will this specific text help to develop the inferencing skills, visualization skills, questioning skills, and comprehension strategies necessary for future reading endeavors?</li> </ul>
<b>Motivation and Engagement with Task and Text</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Will the reader understand the purpose—which might shift over the course of the reading experience—for reading this specific text (i.e., skimming, studying to retain content, close reading for analysis, etc.)?</li> <li>Will the reader be interested in the content of this specific text?</li> </ul>

## The Quantitative Measurement



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



Quick Book Search:

Title, Author, or ISBN  [Advanced Search](#)

Put an exact title or author in quotes (ex: "new moon")

About Lexile Measures

Using Lexile Measures

Common Core

Lexile Tools

Lexile Training

Lexile® Measure

1190L

Mean Sentence Length

17.56

Mean Log Word Frequency

3.27

Word Count

439

Lexile Analyzer

## Lexile Analyzer: Results

These results are not saved in any retrievable way. You should print this screen and note your filename or the title of your sample text. If you do not print or record the results, you will have to re-analyze your sample text to know its Lexile measure.

### Submit another file

File to Analyze:

<http://www.lexile.com/analyzer/>

# The Qualitative Measurement



## TEXT COMPLEXITY: QUALITATIVE MEASURES RUBRIC LITERARY TEXT

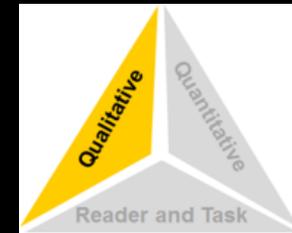


Text Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Text Author: \_\_\_\_\_

MEANING			
High	Middle High	Middle Low	Low
<input type="checkbox"/> Multiple levels/layers of complex meaning	<input type="checkbox"/> Multiple levels/layers of meaning	<input type="checkbox"/> Single level/layer of complex meaning	<input type="checkbox"/> Single level/layer of simple meaning
STRUCTURE			
High	Middle High	Middle Low	Low
<input type="checkbox"/> Narrative Structure: complex, implicit, and unconventional <input type="checkbox"/> Narration: many shifts in point of view <input type="checkbox"/> Order of Events: frequent manipulations of time and sequence (not in chronological order)	<input type="checkbox"/> Narrative Structure: some complexities, more implicit than explicit, some unconventionality <input type="checkbox"/> Narration: occasional shifts in point of view <input type="checkbox"/> Order of Events: several major shifts in time, use of flashback	<input type="checkbox"/> Narrative Structure: largely simple structure, more explicit than implicit, largely conventional <input type="checkbox"/> Narration: few, if any, shifts in point of view <input type="checkbox"/> Order of Events: occasional use of flashback, no major shifts in time	<input type="checkbox"/> Narrative Structure: simple, explicit, conventional <input type="checkbox"/> Narration: no shifts in point of view <input type="checkbox"/> Order of Events: chronological
LANGUAGE			
High	Middle High	Middle Low	Low
<input type="checkbox"/> Conventuality: heavy use of abstract and/or figurative language or irony <input type="checkbox"/> Clarity: generally unfamiliar, archaic, domain-specific, and/or academic language; dense and complex; may be ambiguous or purposefully misleading	<input type="checkbox"/> Conventuality: contains abstract and/or figurative language or irony <input type="checkbox"/> Clarity: somewhat complex language that is occasionally unfamiliar, archaic, domain-specific, or overly academic	<input type="checkbox"/> Conventuality: subtle use of figurative language or irony <input type="checkbox"/> Clarity: largely contemporary, familiar, conversational language that is explicit and literal; rarely unfamiliar, archaic, domain-specific, or overly academic	<input type="checkbox"/> Conventuality: little or no use of figurative language or irony <input type="checkbox"/> Clarity: contemporary, familiar, conversational language that is explicit and literal; easy-to-understand
KNOWLEDGE DEMANDS			
High	Middle High	Middle Low	Low
<input type="checkbox"/> Life Experiences: explores multiple complex, sophisticated themes; multiple perspectives presented; experiences portrayed are not fantasy but are distinctly different to the common reader <input type="checkbox"/> Cultural/Literary Knowledge: requires an extensive depth of literary/cultural knowledge; many references/allusions to other texts and/or cultural elements	<input type="checkbox"/> Life Experiences: explores multiple themes of varying levels of complexity; experiences portrayed are not fantasy but are uncommon to most readers <input type="checkbox"/> Cultural/Literary Knowledge: requires moderate levels of cultural/literary knowledge; some references/allusions to other texts and/or cultural elements	<input type="checkbox"/> Life Experiences: explores a single complex theme; experiences portrayed are common to many readers or are clearly fantasy <input type="checkbox"/> Cultural/Literary Knowledge: requires some cultural/literary knowledge; few references/allusions to other texts and/or cultural elements	<input type="checkbox"/> Life Experiences: explores a single theme; single perspective presented and everyday experiences are portrayed that are common to most readers or experiences are clearly fantasy <input type="checkbox"/> Cultural/Literary Knowledge: requires only common, everyday cultural/literary knowledge; no references/allusions to other texts and/or cultural elements

# The Qualitative Measurement



## TEXT COMPLEXITY: QUALITATIVE MEASURES RUBRIC INFORMATIONAL TEXT



Text Title: \_\_\_\_\_ Text Author: \_\_\_\_\_

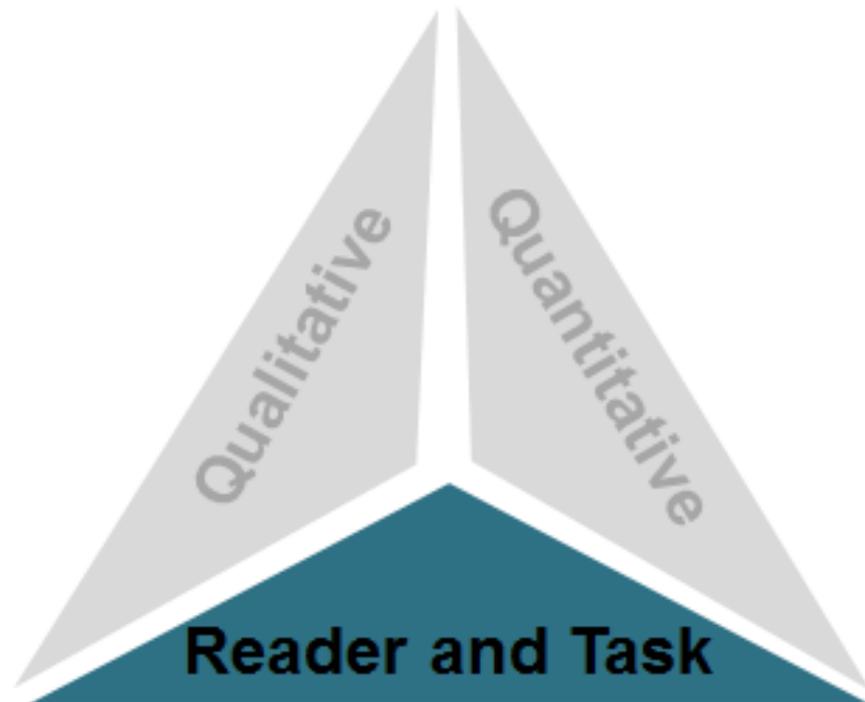
PURPOSE			
<b>High</b>	<b>Middle High</b>	<b>Middle Low</b>	<b>Low</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Complex, implied, and/or difficult to determine; may have multiple purposes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Implied, but can be inferred; may have multiple purposes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Implied, but easy to identify based on context</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Explicitly stated</li> </ul>
STRUCTURE			
<b>High</b>	<b>Middle High</b>	<b>Middle Low</b>	<b>Low</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Organization:</b> highly complex; implicit connections between ideas; conforms to the conventions of a specific content area or discipline</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Text Features:</b> if used, are essential in understanding content</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Use of Graphics:</b> if used, interpretation of complex graphics essential to understanding the text; may also provide information not conveyed in the text*</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Organization:</b> complex; some explicit connections between ideas; may exhibit traits common to a specific content area or discipline</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Text Features:</b> if used, greatly enhance the reader's understanding of content</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Use of Graphics:</b> if used, some graphics are complex and may occasionally be essential to the understanding of the text</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Organization:</b> may be complex; largely explicit connections between ideas; generally follows the conventions of the genre</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Text Features:</b> if used, enhance the reader's understanding of content</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Use of Graphics:</b> if used, graphics are mostly simple and supplementary to understanding the text</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Organization:</b> simple; explicit connections between ideas; conforms to the conventions of the genre</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Text Features:</b> if used, help the reader navigate and understand content but are not essential</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Use of Graphics:</b> if used, graphics are simple and unnecessary to understanding the text</li> </ul>
LANGUAGE			
<b>High</b>	<b>Middle High</b>	<b>Middle Low</b>	<b>Low</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Conventionality:</b> contains abstract and/or figurative language or irony</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Clarity:</b> dense and complex language that is generally unfamiliar, archaic, discipline-specific, or overly academic; language may be ambiguous or purposefully misleading</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Conventionality:</b> occasionally contains abstract and/or figurative language or irony</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Clarity:</b> somewhat complex language that is occasionally unfamiliar, archaic, discipline-specific, or overly academic</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Conventionality:</b> largely contemporary, conversational language</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Clarity:</b> largely explicit, familiar language; easy-to-understand and rarely archaic, discipline-specific, or overly academic</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Conventionality:</b> contemporary, conversational language</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Clarity:</b> clear, explicit, literal, easy-to-understand language</li> </ul>
KNOWLEDGE DEMANDS			
<b>High</b>	<b>Middle High</b>	<b>Middle Low</b>	<b>Low</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Subject Matter Knowledge:</b> requires extensive, perhaps specialized or even theoretical discipline-specific content knowledge</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Intertextuality:</b> many references to/citations of other texts or outside ideas, theories, etc.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Subject Matter Knowledge:</b> requires moderate levels of discipline-specific content knowledge; some theoretical knowledge may enhance understanding</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Intertextuality:</b> some references to/citations of other texts or outside ideas, theories, etc.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Subject Matter Knowledge:</b> everyday, practical knowledge is largely necessary; requires some discipline-specific content knowledge</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Intertextuality:</b> few references to/citations of other texts or outside ideas, theories, etc.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Subject Matter Knowledge:</b> requires only everyday, practical knowledge and familiarity with conventions of the genre</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Intertextuality:</b> no references to/citations of other texts or outside ideas, theories, etc.</li> </ul>

# The Reader and The Task

The questions included here are largely open-ended questions without single, correct answers, but help educators to think through the implications of using a particular text in the classroom.

Considerations such as:

- Motivation
- Knowledge and experience
- Purpose for reading
- Complexity of task assigned regarding text
- Complexity of questions asked regarding text



# Suggested Considerations for Reader and Task

## Cognitive Capabilities

- Do readers at this grade level possess the necessary **attention** to read and comprehend the text?
- Will the readers at this grade level be able to **remember and make connections** among the various details presented in the text?
- Do readers at this grade level possess the necessary **critical/analytical thinking skills** to understand the relationships between the various parts of the text?
- Will the text help to develop the **attention, memory, and critical/analytic thinking skills** necessary for future reading endeavors?

## Reading Skills

- Do readers at this grade level possess the necessary **inferencing skills** to “read between the lines” and make connections among elements that may not be explicit in the text?
- Do readers at this grade level possess the necessary **visualization skills** to imagine what is occurring or what is being described in the text?
- Do readers at this grade level possess the necessary **questioning skills** to challenge the ideas being presented in this text and consider those ideas from multiple points of view?
- Do readers at this grade level possess the necessary **comprehension strategies** to manage this text?
- Will the text help to develop the **inferencing skills, visualization skills, questioning skills, and comprehension strategies** necessary for future reading endeavors?

## Motivation and Engagement with Task and Text

- Will the readers at this grade level **understand the purpose**—which might shift over the course of the reading experience—for reading the text (i.e., skimming, studying to retain content, close reading, etc.)?
- Will the readers at this grade level be **interested in the content** of the text?
- Might the readers at this grade level **develop an interest in this content** because of this text?
- Do readers at this grade level believe that they will be able to read and understand the text?
- Will the readers at this grade level be **interested and engaged with the style of writing and the presentation of ideas** within the text?
- Will the text **maintain the reader’s motivation and engagement** throughout the reading experience?

# The Placemat for determining text complexity

## Worksheet: Text Complexity Analysis

Title	Author	Text Description



## Recommended Placement for Assessment:

Qualitative Measures	Quantitative Measures
<p><b>Meaning/Purpose:</b></p> <p><b>Text Structure:</b></p> <p><b>Language Features:</b></p> <p><b>Knowledge Demands:</b></p>	<p><b>Common Core State Standards Appendix A Complexity Band Level</b> (if applicable):</p> <p><b>Lexile or Other Quantitative Measure of the Text:</b></p> <p><b>Considerations for Passage Selection</b></p> <p><b>Potential Challenges a Text May Pose:</b></p>

# Text Complexity Analysis of *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee

## Qualitative Measures

### Levels of Meaning/Purpose:

The book has multiple levels of meaning. Set in Alabama, the female main character Scout Finch struggles to understand issues of race and prejudice when her lawyer father defends a black man accused of raping a white woman.

### Structure:

Although the story has a largely simple structure with a straightforward writing style, several issues complicate the narration and structure. Scout's narration is as an adult reflecting back on a few pivotal years of her childhood; flashback is used throughout. And at several points it seems as though the narration is from the point of view of a less-reliable Scout still in her childhood.

### Language Conventionalty and Clarity:

The characters speak in easily readable, conversational language. Some of this is indicative of the time period in which the novel is set, and there is some dialect.

### Knowledge Demands:

Higher level themes of justice, prejudice, and civil rights are applied. Thinking at deeper levels is required to contemplate the personal, moral, and ethical struggles of the characters as set against the culture and society of the time period.

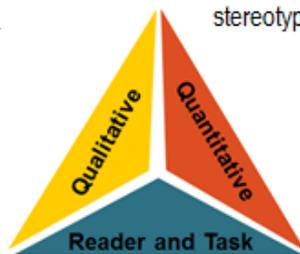
## Quantitative Measures

The ATOS formula (used with the Accelerated Reader program) identifies this title as having a book level of 5.6. A Lexile measure for this novel is 870L. Although the Lexile and ATOS levels fall in the 4<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> grade text complexity band, the complexity of the book's theme, the issue of rape, and the length of the book would indicate that higher level reading skills are necessary, along with a consideration for the maturity level of the reader regarding the book's subject matter.

## Reader-Task Considerations

These are to be determined locally with reference to such variables as a student's maturity, knowledge, and experiences as well as purpose and the complexity of the task assigned and the question posed. However, the complexity of the book's theme, the issue of rape, and the length of the book would indicate that higher level reading skills are necessary, along with a consideration for the maturity level of the reader regarding the book's subject matter.

Here in Kansas, educators might want to examine the following elements or issues: social and historical events of the late 50s, early 60s, and issues surrounding racial stereotyping and prejudice in the Deep South at this same time period.



## Recommended Placement

*To Kill a Mockingbird* is a Pulitzer prize winner. It is a classic, and many teaching resources are available online at various websites. Although the quantitative measures suggest placement in the 4<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> grade level text complexity band, the qualitative measures and reader and task considerations suggest that the novel is best placed at the **9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> grade complexity band**. The Common Core Standards Text Exemplars also places the novel in the 9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> grade complexity band.