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# R

One of the key requirements of the Common Core State Standards for Reading is that all students must be able to comprehend texts of steadily increasing complexity as they progress through school. By the time they complete the core, students must be able to read and comprehend independently and proficiently the kinds of complex texts commonly found in college and careers. The first part of this section makes a research-based case for why the complexity of what students read matters. In brief, while reading demands in college, workforce training programs, and life in general have held steady or increased over the last half century, K–12 texts have actually declined in sophistication, and relatively little attention has been paid to students' ability to read complex texts independently. These conditions have left a serious gap between many high school seniors' reading ability and the reading requirements they will face after graduation. The second part of this section addresses how text complexity can be measured and made a regular part of instruction. It introduces a three-part model that blends qualitative and quantitative measures of text complexity with reader and task considerations. The section concludes with three annotated examples showing how the model can be used to assess the complexity of various kinds of texts appropriate for different grade levels.

# C

# M

In 2006, ACT, Inc., released a report called *What Matters Most* that showed which skills differentiated those students who equaled or exceeded the benchmark score (21 out of 36) in the reading section of the ACT college admissions test from those who did not. Prior ACT research had shown that students achieving the benchmark score or better in reading—which only about half (51 percent) of the roughly half million test takers in the 2004–2005 academic year had done—had a high probability (75 percent chance) of earning a C or better in an introductory, credit-bearing course in U.S. history or psychology (two common reading-intensive courses taken by first-year college students) and a 50 percent chance of earning a B or better in such a course.<sup>1</sup>

Surprisingly, what chiefly distinguished the performance of those students who had earned the benchmark score or better from those who had not was not their relative ability in making inferences while reading or answering questions related to particular cognitive processes, such as determining main ideas or determining the meaning of words and phrases in context. Instead, the clearest difference was in their ability to read and understand complex texts. Students who earned the benchmark score or better were more likely to read and understand complex texts than those who did not. This finding is significant because it suggests that the ability to read and understand complex texts is a key skill for success in college and careers.

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<sup>1</sup> ACT, Inc., *What Matters Most* (2006).

rarely held accountable for what they are able to read independently (Heller & Greenleaf, 2007). This discrepancy in task demand, coupled with what we see below is a vast gap in text complexity, may help explain why only about half of the students taking the ACT Test in the 2004–2005 academic year could meet the benchmark score in reading (which also was the case in 2008–2009, the most recent year for which data are available) and why so few students in general are prepared for postsecondary reading (ACT, Inc., 2006, 2009).

### **K–12 Schooling: Declining Complexity of Texts and a Lack of Reading of Complex Texts Independently**

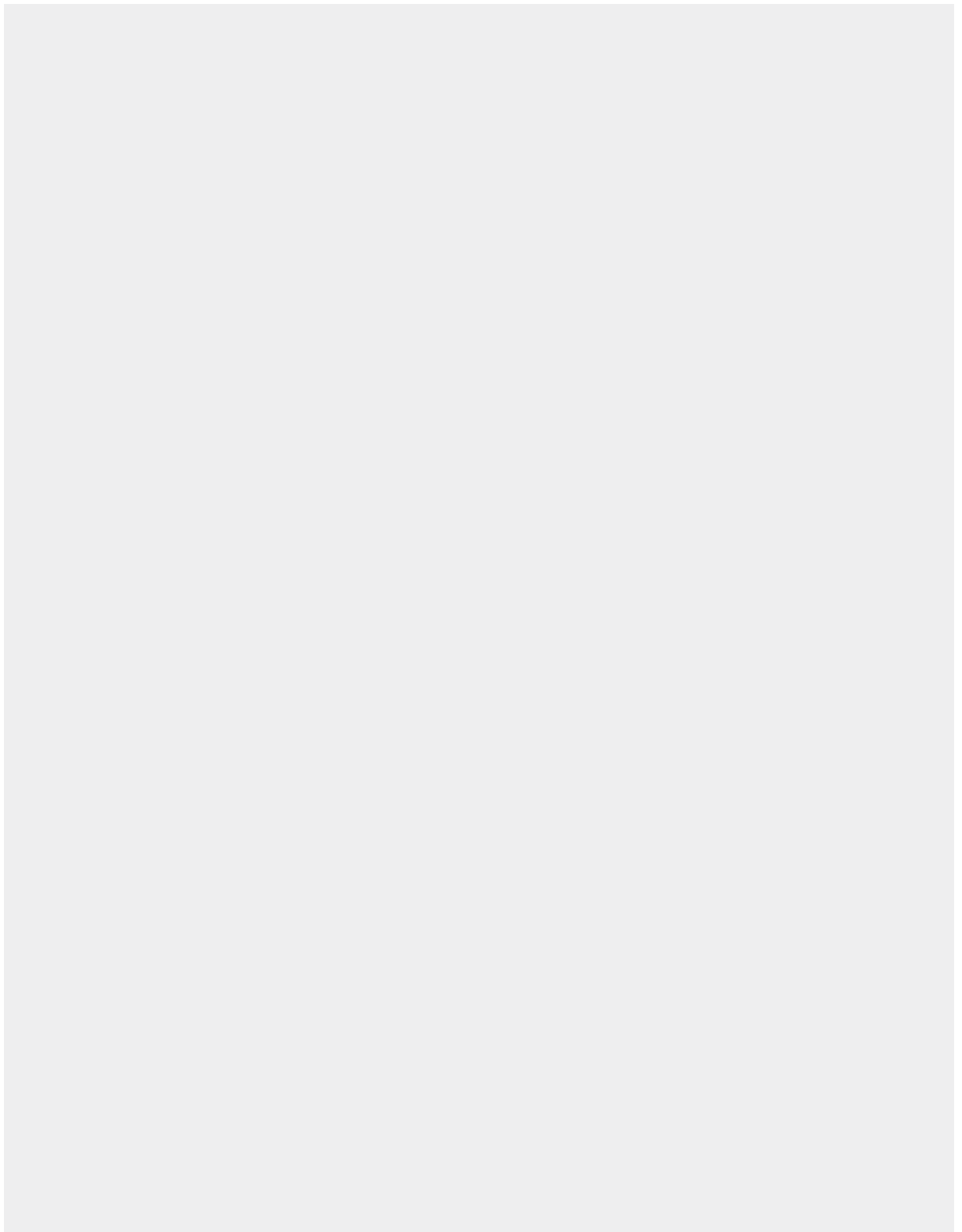
Despite steady or growing reading demands from various sources, K–12 reading texts have actually trended downward in difficulty in the last half century. Jeanne Chall and her colleagues (Chall, Conard, & Harris, 1977) found a thirteen-year decrease from 1963 to 1975 in the difficulty of grade 1, grade 6, and (especially) grade 11 texts. Extending the

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during the same time period. Although the decline occurred in all demographic groups, the steepest decline by far was among 18-to-24- and 25-to-34-year-olds (28 percent and 23 percent, respectively). In other words, the problem of lack of reading is not only getting worse but doing so at an accelerating rate. Although numerous factors likely contribute to the decline in reading, it is reasonable to conclude from the evidence presented above that the deterior-

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## Readers and Tasks

## S T A N D A R D S ' S C O P E A N D S E Q U E N C E

As illustrated in figure 4, text complexity in the Standards is defined in grade bands: grades 2–3, 4–5, 6–8, 9–10, and 11–CCR.<sup>5</sup> Students in the first year(s) of a given band are expected by the end of the year to read and comprehend proficiently within the band, with scaffolding as needed at the high end of the range. Students in the last year of a band are expected by the end of the year to read and comprehend independently and proficiently within the band.

Figure 4: The Progression of Reading Standard 10

Grade(s)	Reading Standard 10 (individual text types omitted)
K	Actively engage in group reading activities with purpose and understanding.
1	With prompting and support, read prose and poetry [informational texts] of appropriate complexity for grade 1.
2	By the end of the year, read and comprehend literature [informational texts] in the grades 2–3 text complexity band proficiently, with scaffolding as needed at the high end of the range.
3	By the end of the year, read and comprehend literature [informational texts] at the high end of the grades 2–3 text complexity band independently and proficiently.
4	By the end of the year, read and comprehend literature [informational texts] in the grades 4–5 text complexity band proficiently, with scaffolding as needed at the high end of the range.
5	By the end of the year, read and comprehend literature [informational texts] at the high end of the grades 4–5 text complexity band independently and proficiently.
6	By the end of the year, read and comprehend literature [informational texts, history/social studies texts, science/technical texts] in the grades 6–8 text complexity band proficiently, with scaffolding as needed at the high end of the range.
7	By the end of the year, read and comprehend literature [informational texts, history/social studies texts, science/technical texts] in the grades 6–8 text complexity band proficiently, with scaffolding as needed at the high end of the range.
8	By the end of the year, read and comprehend literature [informational texts, history/social studies texts, science/technical texts] at the high end of the grades 6–8 text complexity band independently and proficiently.
9–10	By the end of grade 9, read and comprehend literature [informational texts, history/social studies texts, science/technical texts] in the grades 9–10 text complexity band proficiently, with scaffolding as needed at the high end of the range.
	By the end of grade 10, read and comprehend literature [informational texts, history/social studies texts, science/technical texts] at the high end of the grades 9–10 text complexity band independently and proficiently.
11–12	By the end of grade 11, read and comprehend literature [informational texts, history/social studies texts, science/technical texts] in the grades 11–CCR text complexity band proficiently, with scaffolding as needed at the high end of the range.
	By the end of grade 12, read and comprehend literature [informational texts, history/social studies texts, science/technical texts] at the high end of the grades 11–CCR text complexity band independently and proficiently.

<sup>5</sup>As noted above in “Key Considerations in Implementing Text Complexity,” K–1 texts are not amenable to quantitative measure. Furthermore, students in those grades are acquiring the code at varied rates. Hence, the Standards’ text complexity requirements begin formally with grade 2.

## M A : S A R

The following examples demonstrate how qualitative and quantitative measures of text complexity can be used along with reader and task considerations to make informed decisions about whether a particular text is an appropriate challenge for particular students. The cases below illustrate some of the possibilities that can arise when multiple measures are used to assess text complexity and how discrepancies among those measures might be resolved. It is important to note that the conclusions offered below concerning the texts' appropriateness for particular grade bands are informed judgments based on qualitative and quantitative assessments of text complexity. Different conclusions could reasonably be drawn from the same data, and reader and task considerations may also warrant a higher or lower placement.

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Example 1: *Northanger Abbey* (Grades 6–8 Text Complexity Band)

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E

The plan which I adopted, and the one by which I was most successful, was that of making friends of all the little white boys whom I met in the street. As many of these as I could, I converted into teachers. With their kindly aid, obtained at different times and in different places, I finally succeeded in learning to read. When I was sent of errands, I always took my book with me, and by going one part of my errand quickly, I found time to get a lesson before my return. I used also to carry bread with me, enough of which was always in the house, and to which I was always welcome; for I was much better off in this regard than many of the poor white children in our neighborhood. This bread I used to bestow upon the hungry little urchins, who, in return, would give me that more valuable bread of knowledge. I am strongly tempted to give the names of two or three of those little boys, as a testimonial of the gratitude and affection I bear them; but prudence forbids;—not that it would injure me, but it might embarrass them; for it is almost an unpardonable offence to teach slaves to read in this Christian country. It is enough to say of the dear little fellows, that they lived on Philpot Street, very near Durgin and Bailey's ship-yard. I used to talk this matter of slavery over with them. I would sometimes say to them, I wished I could be as free as they would be when they got to be men. "You will be free as soon as you are twenty-one, but I am a slave for life! Have not I as good a right to be free as you have?" These words used to trouble them; they would express for me the liveliest sympathy, and console me with the hope that something would occur by which I might be free.

I was now about twelve years old, and the thought of being a slave for life began to bear heavily upon my heart. Just about this time, I got hold of a book entitled "The Columbian Orator." Every opportunity I got, I used to read this book. Among much of other interesting matter, I found in it a dialogue between a master and his slave. The slave was represented as having run away from his master three times. The dialogue represented the conversation which took place between them, when the slave was retaken the third time. In this dialogue, the whole argument in behalf of slavery was brought forward by the master, all of which was disposed of by the slave. The slave was made to say some very smart as well as impressive things in reply to his master—things which had the desired though unexpected effect; for the conversation resulted in the voluntary emancipation of the slave on the part of the master.

In the same book, I met with one of Sheridan's mighty speeches on and in behalf of Catholic emancipation. These were choice documents to me. I read them over and over again with unabated interest. They gave tongue to interesting thoughts of my own soul, which had frequently flashed through my mind, and died away for want of utterance. The moral which I gained from the dialogue was the power of truth over the conscience of even a slaveholder. What I got from Sheridan was



Example 2: (Grades 9–10 Text Complexity Band)

E

The man took off his dark, stained hat and stood with a curious humility in front of the screen. "Could you see your way to sell us a loaf of bread, ma'am?"

Mae said, "This ain't a grocery store. We got bread to make san'widges."

"I know, ma'am." His humility was insistent. "We need bread and there ain't nothin' for quite a piece, they say."

"F we sell bread we gonna run out." Mae's tone was faltering.

"We're hungry," the man said.

"Whyn't you buy a san'widge? We got nice san'widges, hamburgs."

"We'd sure admire to do that, ma'am. But we can't. We got to make a dime do all of us." And he said embarrassedly, "We ain't got but a little."

Mae said, "You can't get no loaf a bread for a dime. We only got fifteen-cent loafs."

From behind her Al growled, "God Almighty, Mae, give 'em bread."

"We'll run out 'fore the bread truck comes."

"Run out then, goddamn it," said Al. He looked sullenly down at the potato salad he was mixing.

Mae shrugged her plump shoulders and looked to the truck drivers to show them what she was up against.

She held the screen door open and the man came in, bringing a smell of sweat with him. The boys edged behind him and they went immediately to the candy case and stared in—not with craving or with hope or even with desire, but just with a kind of wonder that such things could be. They were alike in size and their faces were alike. One scratched his dusty ankle with the toe nails of his other foot. The other whispered some soft message and then they straightened their arms so that their clenched fists in the overall pockets showed through the thin blue cloth.

Mae opened a drawer and took out a long waxpaper-wrapped loaf. "This here is a fifteen-cent loaf."

The man put his hat back on his head. He answered with inflexible humility, "Won't you—can't you see your way to cut off ten cents' worth?"

Al said snarlingly, "Goddamn it, Mae. Give 'em the loaf."

The man turned toward Al. "No, we want ta buy ten cents' worth of it. We got it figgered awful close, mister, to get to California."

Mae said resignedly, "You can have this for ten cents."

"That'd be robbin' you, ma'am."

"Go ahead—Al says to take it." She pushed the waxpapered loaf across the counter. The man took a deep leather pouch from his rear pocket, untied the strings, and spread it open. It was heavy with silver and with greasy bills.

"May soun' funny to be so tight," he apologized. "We got a thousan' miles to go, an' we don' know if we'll make it." He dug in the pouch with a forefinger, located a dime, and pinched in for it. When he put it down on the counter he had a penny with it. He was about to drop the penny back into the pouch when his eye fell on the boys frozen before the candy counter. He moved slowly down to them. He pointed in the case at big long sticks of striped peppermint. "Is them penny candy, ma'am?"

Mae moved down and looked in. "Which ones?"

"There, them stripy ones."

The little boys raised their eyes to her face and they stopped breathing; their mouths were partly opened, their half-naked bodies were rigid.

"Oh—them. Well, no—them's two for a penny."

"Well, gimme two then, ma'am." He placed the copper cent carefully on the counter. The boys expelled their held breath softly. Mae held the big sticks out.

Steinbeck, John. *Of Mice and Men*.  
New York: Viking, 1967 (1939).

Figure 6: Annotation of *Of Mice and Men*

Qualitative Measures	Quantitative Measures
<p><b>Levels of Meaning</b></p> <p>There are multiple and often implicit levels of meaning within the excerpt and the novel as a whole. The surface level focuses on the literal journey of the Joads, but the novel also works on metaphorical and philosophical levels.</p> <p><b>Structure</b></p> <p>The text is relatively simple, explicit, and conventional in form. Events are largely related in chronological order.</p> <p><b>Language Conventinality and Clarity</b></p> <p>Although the language used is generally familiar, clear, and conversational, the dialect of the characters may pose a challenge for some readers. Steinbeck also puts a great deal of weight on certain less familiar words, such as <i>gimme</i>, <i>ma'am</i>. In various portions of the novel not fully represented in the excerpt, the author combines rich, vivid, and detailed description with an economy of words that requires heavy inferencing.</p> <p><b>Knowledge Demands</b></p> <p>The themes are sophisticated. The experiences and perspective conveyed will be different from those of many students. Knowledge of the Great Depression, the "Okie Migration" to California, and the religion and music of the migrants is helpful, but the author himself provides much of the context needed for comprehension.</p>	<p>The quantitative assessment of <i>Of Mice and Men</i> demonstrates the difficulty many currently existing readability measures have in capturing adequately the richness of sophisticated works of literature, as various ratings suggest a placement within the grades 2–3 text complexity band. A Coh-Metrix analysis also tends to suggest the text is an easy one since the syntax is uncomplicated and the author uses a conventional story structure and only a moderate number of abstract words. (The analysis does indicate, however, that a great deal of inferencing will be required to interpret and connect the text's words, sentences, and central ideas.)</p> <p><b>Reader-Task Considerations</b></p> <p>These are to be determined locally with reference to such variables as a student's motivation, knowledge, and experiences as well as purpose and the complexity of the task assigned and the questions posed.</p>

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Example 3: *L* *P* (Grades 9–10 Text Complexity Band)

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*E*

From Chapter 1: "A Most Terrible Sea"

At six in the morning I was awakened by a great shock, and a confused noise of the men on deck. I ran up, thinking some ship had run foul of us, for by my own reckoning, and that of every other person in the ship, we were at least thirty-five leagues distant from land; but, before I could reach the quarter-deck, the ship gave a great stroke upon the ground, and the sea broke over her. Just after this I could perceive the land, rocky, rugged and uneven, about two cables' length from us . . . the masts soon went overboard, carrying some men with them . . . notwithstanding a most terrible sea, one of <sup>9</sup>y  
seaxrrB)  
RMrRfB) at Bn WnB) sea) s. I r20

Figure 7: Annotation of *L* *P*

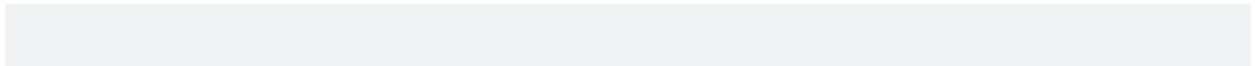
Qualitative Measures	Quantitative Measures
<p><b>Purpose</b></p> <p>The single, relatively clear purpose of the text (not fully apparent in the excerpt but signaled by the title) is to recount the discovery of the concept of longitude.</p> <p><b>Structure</b></p> <p>The text is moderately complex and subtle in structure. Although the text may appear at first glance to be a conventional narrative, Dash mainly uses narrative elements in the service of illustrating historical and technical points.</p> <p><b>Language Conventionalty and Clarity</b></p> <p>Language is used literally and is relatively clear, but numerous archaic, domain-specific, and otherwise unfamiliar terms are introduced in the course of citing primary historical sources and discussing the craft, art, and science of navigation.</p> <p><b>Knowledge Demands</b></p> <p>The text assumes relatively little prior knowledge regarding seafaring and navigation, but some general sense of the concepts of latitude and longitude, the nature of sailing ships, and the historical circumstances that promoted exploration and trade is useful to comprehending the text.</p>	<p>Various readability measures of <i>L</i> <i>P</i> are largely in agreement that the text is appropriate for the grades 9–10 text complexity band. The Coh-Metrix analysis notes that the text is primarily informational in structure despite the narrative opening. (Recall from “Why Text Complexity Matters,” above, that research indicates that informational texts are generally harder to read than narratives.) While the text relies on concrete language and goes to some effort to connect central ideas for the reader, it also contains complex syntax and few explicit connections between words and sentences.</p> <p><b>Reader-Task Considerations</b></p> <p>These are to be determined locally with reference to such variables as a student’s motivation, knowledge, and experiences as well as purpose and the complexity of the task assigned and the questions posed.</p> <p><b>Recommended Placement</b></p> <p>The qualitative and quantitative measures by and large (e.g., <i>L</i> <i>P</i>) are in agreement that the text is appropriate for the grades 9–10 text complexity band. The Coh-Metrix analysis notes that the text is primarily informational in structure despite the narrative opening. (Recall from “Why Text Complexity Matters,” above, that research indicates that informational texts are generally harder to read than narratives.) While the text relies on concrete language and goes to some effort to connect central ideas for the reader, it also contains complex syntax and few explicit connections between words and sentences.</p>





## Vowels

Common graphemes (spellings) are listed in the following table for each of the vowels in [gc5c5](#)



### Syllable Counting or Identification (Spoken Language)

A spoken syllable is a unit of speech organized around a vowel sound.

Repeat the word, say each syllable loudly, and feel the jaw drop on the vowel sound:

chair (1) table (2) gymnasium (4)

### Onset and Rime Manipulation (Spoken Language)

Within a single syllable, \_\_\_\_\_ is the consonant sound or sounds that may precede the vowel; \_\_\_\_\_ is the vowel and all other consonant sounds that may follow the vowel.

Say the two parts slowly and then blend into a whole word:

school	onset - /sch/; rime - /ool/
star	onset - /st/; rime - /ar/
place	onset - /pl/; rime - /ace/
all	onset (none); rime - /all/

Say the words that are broken into onsets and rimes. Write the words.

### Phoneme Addition (Spoken Language)

What word would you have if you added /th/ to the beginning of "ink"? (think)

What word would you have if you added /d/ to the end of the word "fine"? (find)

What word would you have if you added /z/ to the end of the word "frog"? (frogs)

### Phoneme Substitution (Spoken Language)

Say "rope." Change /r/ to /m/. What word would you get? (mope)

Say "chum." Change /u/ to /ar/. What word would you get? (charm)

Say "sing." Change /ng/ to /t/. What word would you get? (sit)

### Phoneme Deletion (Spoken Language)

Say "park." Now say "park" without /p/. (ark)

Say "four." Now say "four" without /f/. (or)

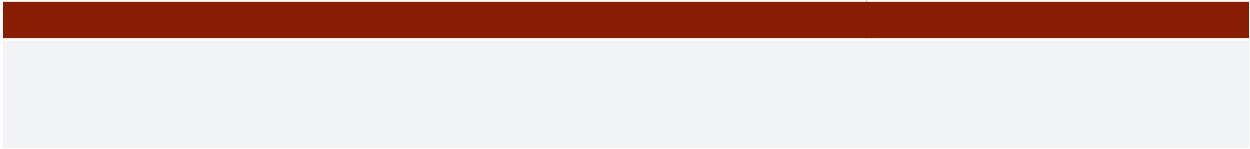


## Categories of Phoneme-Grapheme Correspondences

Figure 10: Consonant Graphemes with Definitions and Examples

Grapheme Type	Definition	Examples
Single letters	A single consonant letter can represent a consonant phoneme.	b, d, f, g, h, j, k, l, m, n, p, r, s, t, v, w, y, z
Doublets	A doublet uses two of the same letter to spell one consonant phoneme.	, ll, ss, zz
Digraphs	A digraph is a two- (di-) letter combination that stands for one phoneme; neither letter acts alone to represent the sound.	th, sh, ch, wh ph, ng (sing) gh (cough) [ck is a guest in this category]
Trigraphs	A trigraph is a three- (tri-) letter combination that stands for one phoneme; none of the letters acts alone to represent the sound.	-tch -dge
Consonants in blends	A blend contains two or three graphemes because the consonant sounds are separate and identifiable. A blend is not "one sound."	s-c-r (scrape)    th-r (thrush) c-l (clean)        f-t (sift) l-k (milk)         s-t (most) and many more
Silent letter combinations	Silent letter combinations use two letters: one represents the phoneme, and the other is silent. Most of these are from Anglo-Saxon or Greek.	kn (knock), wr (wrestle), gn (gnarl), ps (psychology), rh (rhythm), -mb (crumb), -lk (folk), -mn (hymn), -st (listen)
Combination qu	These two letters, always together, usually stand for two sounds, /k/ /w/.	quickly

Figure 11: Vowel Graphemes with Definitions and Examples



b) If the word is not recognized, try dividing the consonant. This makes the first syllable closed and the vowel sound short. This strategy will work 25 percent of the time with VCV syllable division.

ev-er      rab-id      dec-ade      riv-er

3. Consonant blends usually stick together. Do not separate digraphs when using the first two principles for decoding.

e-ther      spec-trum      se-quin

## Morphemes Represented in English Orthography

Figure 13: Examples of Inflectional Suffixes in English

Inflection	Example
-s plural noun	I had two _____ for breakfast.
-s third person singular verb	She _____ what she _____.
-ed past tense verb	We _____ the notice.
-ing progressive tense verb	We will be _____ a long time.
-en past participle	He had _____ his lunch.
's possessive singular	The _____' spots were brown.
-er comparative adjective	He is _____ than she is.
-est superlative adjective	Tom is the _____ of all.

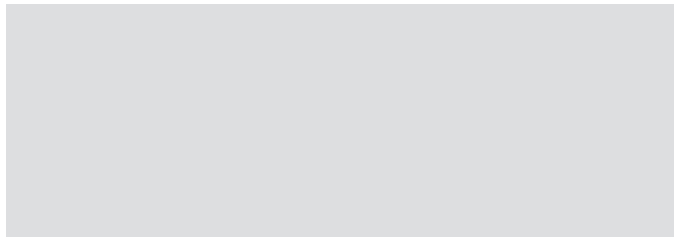
## Examples of Derivational Suffixes in English

Derivational suffixes, such as -ly, and -ness, are more numerous than inflections and work in ways that inflectional suffixes do not. Most derivational suffixes in English come from the Latin layer of language. Derivational suffixes

# D S ,

## **Argument**

Arguments are used for many purposes—to change the reader’s point of view, to bring about some action on the reader’s part, or to ask the reader to accept the writer’s explanation or evaluation of a concept, issue, or problem. An argument is a reasoned, logical way of demonstrating that the writer’s position, belief, or conclusion is valid. In English language arts, students make claims about the worth or meaning of a literary work or works. They defend their interpretations or judgments with evidence from the text(s) they are writing about. In history/social studies,



postures, and expressions); to use dialogue and interior monologue that provide insight into the narrator's and characters' personalities and motives; and to manipulate pace to highlight the significance of events and create tension and suspense. In history/social studies, students write narrative accounts about individuals. They also construct event models of what happened, selecting from their sources only the most relevant information. In science, students write narrative descriptions of the step-by-step procedures they follow in their investigations so that others can replicate their procedures and (perhaps) reach the same results. With practice, students expand their repertoire and control of different narrative strategies.

### Texts that Blend Types

Skilled writers many times use a blend of these three text types to accomplish their purposes. For example, *Life in the Pines*, included above and in Appendix B, embeds narrative elements within a largely expository structure. Effective student writing can also cross the boundaries of type, as does the grade 12 student sample "Fact vs. Fiction and All the Grey Space In Between" found in Appendix C.

## S P A S

While all three text types are important, the Standards put particular emphasis on students' ability to write sound arguments on substantive topics and issues, as this ability is critical to college and career readiness. English and education professor Gerald Graff (2003) writes that "argument literacy" is fundamen-

### ***"Argument" and "Persuasion"***

When writing to persuade, writers employ a variety of persuasive strategies. One common



the states of Virginia and Florida<sup>6</sup>, also found strong support for writing arguments as a key part of instruction. The 2007 writing framework for the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) (National Assessment Governing Board, 2006) assigns persuasive writing the single largest targeted allotment of assessment time at grade 12 (40 percent, versus 25 percent for narrative writing and 35 percent for informative writing). (The 2011 prepublication framework [National Assessment Governing Board, 2007] maintains the 40 percent figure for persuasive writing at grade 12, allotting 40 percent to writing to explain and 20 percent to writing to convey experience.) Writing arguments or writing to persuade is also an important element in standards frameworks for numerous high-performing nations.<sup>7</sup>

Specific skills central to writing arguments are also highly valued by postsecondary educators. A 2002 survey of instructors of freshman composition and other introductory courses across the curriculum at California's community colleges, California State University campuses, and University of California campuses (Intersegmental Committee of the Academic Senates of the California Community Colleges, the California State University, and the University of California, 2002) found that among the most important skills expected of incoming students were articulating a clear thesis; identifying, evaluating, and using evidence to support or challenge the thesis; and considering and incorporating counterarguments into their writing. On the 2009 ACT national curriculum survey (ACT, Inc., 2009), postsecondary faculty gave high ratings to such argument-related skills as "develop ideas by using some specific reasons, details, and examples," "take and maintain a position on an issue," and "support claims with multiple and appropriate sources of evidence."

The value of effective argument extends well beyond the classroom or workplace, however. As Richard Fulkerson (1996) puts it in *Argument: The Proper Context for Thinking about Argument* is one "in which



The research strongly suggests that the English language arts classroom should explicitly address the link between oral and written language, exploiting the influence of oral language on a child's later ability to read by allocating instructional time to building children's listening skills, as called for in the Standards. The early grades should not focus on decoding alone, nor should the later grades pay attention only to building reading comprehension. Time should be devoted to reading fiction and content-rich selections aloud to young children, just as it is to providing those same children with the skills they will need to decode and encode.

This focus on oral language is called *Oral Language* in the Standards. It is a key component of the *Language Acquisition* process.

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The Standards take a hybrid approach to matters of conventions, knowledge of language, and vocabulary. As noted in the table below, certain elements important to reading, writing, and speaking and listening are included in those strands to help provide a coherent set of expectations for those modes of communication.

Figure 16: Elements of the Language Standards in the Reading, Writing, and Speaking and Listening Strands

Strand	Standard
Reading	<b>R.CCR.4.</b> Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.
Writing	<b>.CCR.5.</b> Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach.
Speaking and Listening	<b>SL.CCR.6.</b> Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and communicative tasks, demonstrating command of formal English when indicated or appropriate.

In many respects, however, conventions, knowledge of language, and vocabulary extend across reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Many of the conventions-related standards are as appropriate to formal spoken English as they are to formal written English. Language choice is a matter of craft for both writers and speakers. New words and phrases are acquired not only through reading and being read to but also through direct vocabulary instruction and (particularly in the earliest grades) through purposeful classroom discussions around rich content.

The inclusion of Language standards in their own strand should not be taken as an indication that skills related to conventions, knowledge of language, and vocabulary are unimportant to reading, writing, speaking, and listening; indeed, they are inseparable from such contexts.

C

K

L

### Teaching and Learning the Conventions of Standard English

D, G, K, ,

Grammar and usage development in children and in adults rarely follows a linear path. Native speakers and language learners often begin making new erykf. mang s and in andbe fturf-eyaksinear. Or pacetRmm. 5 tflloydOefOt

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taught and relearned in subsequent grades as students' writing and speaking matures and grows more complex. (See "Progressive Language Skills in the Standards," below.)

*M*, *A*, *G*, *C*

Students must have a strong command of the grammar and usage of spoken and written standard English to succeed academically and professionally. Yet there is great variety in the language and grammar features of spoken and written standard English (Biber, 1991; Krauthamer, 1999), of academic and everyday standard English, and of the language of different disciplines (Schleppegrell, 2001). Furthermore, in the twenty-first century, students must be able to communicate effectively in a wide range of print and digital texts, each of which may require different grammatical and usage choices to be effective. Thus, grammar and usage instruction should acknowledge the many varieties of English that exist and address differences in grammatical structure and usage between these varieties in order to help students make purposeful language choices in their writing and speaking (Fogel & Ehri, 2000; Wheeler & Swords, 2004). Students must also be taught the value of using particular grammatical features in particular disciplines or texts; if they are taught simply to vary their grammar and language to keep their writing "interesting," they may actually become more confused about how to make effective language choices (Lefstein, 2009). The Standards encourage this sort of instruction in a number of ways, most directly through a series of grade-specific standards associated with Language CCR standard 3 that, beginning in grade 1, focuses on making students aware of language variety.

*K*, *G*, *L*, *C*

Grammatical knowledge can also aid reading comprehension and interpretation (Gargani, 2006; Williams, 2000, 2005). Researchers recommend that students be taught to use knowledge of grammar and usage, as well as knowledge of vocabulary, to comprehend complex academic texts (García & Beltrán, 2003; Short & Fitzsimmons, 2007; RAND Reading Study Group, 2002). At the elementary level, for example, students can use knowledge of verbs to help them understand the plot and characters in a text (Williams, 2005). At the secondary level, learning the grammatical structures of nonstandard dialects can help students understand how accomplished writers such as Harper Lee, Langston Hughes, and Mark Twain use various dialects of English to great advantage and effect, and can help students analyze setting, character, and author's craft in great works of literature. Teaching about the grammatical patterns found in specific disciplines has also been shown to help English language learners' reading comprehension in general and reading comprehension in history classrooms in particular (Achugar, Schleppegrell, & Oteiza, 2007; Gargani, 2006).

As students learn more about the patterns of English grammar in different communicative contexts throughout their K-12 academic careers, they can develop more complex understandings of English grammar and usage. Students can use this understanding to make more purposeful and effective choices in their writing and speaking and more accurate and rich interpretations in their reading and listening.

### Progressive Language Skills in the Standards

While all of the Standards are cumulative, certain Language skills and understandings are more likely than others to need to be retaught and relearned as students advance through the grades. Beginning in grade 3, the Standards note such "progressive" skills and understandings with an asterisk (\*) in the main document; they are also summarized in the table on pages 29 and 55 of that document as well as on page 34 of this appendix. These skills and understandings should be mastered at a basic level no later than the end of the grade in which they are introduced in the Standards. In subsequent grades, as their writing and speaking become more sophisticated, students will need to learn to apply these skills and understandings in more advanced ways.

The following example shows how one such task—ensuring subject-verb agreement, formally introduced in the Standards in grade 3—can become more challenging as students' writing matures. The sentences in the table below are taken verbatim from the annotated writing samples found in Appendix C. The example is illustrative only of a general development of sophistication and not meant to be exhaustive, to set firm grade-specific expectations, or to establish a precise hierarchy of increasing difficulty in subject-verb agreement.





## Acquiring Vocabulary

Words are not just words. They are the nexus—the interface—between communication and thought. When we read, it is through words that we build, refine, and modify our knowledge. What makes vocabulary valuable and important is not the words themselves so much as the understandings they afford.

Marilyn Jager Adams (2009, p. 180)

The importance of students acquiring a rich and varied vocabulary cannot be overstated. Vocabulary has been empirically connected to reading comprehension since at least 1925 (Whipple, 1925) and had its importance to comprehension confirmed in recent years (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000). It is widely accepted among researchers that the difference in students' vocabulary levels is a key factor in disparities in academic achievement (Baumann & Kameenui, 1991; Becker, 1977; Stanovich, 1986) but that vocabulary instruction has been neither frequent nor systematic in most schools (Biemiller, 2001; Durkin, 1978; Lesaux, Kieffer, Faller, & Kelley, 2010; Scott & Nagy, 1997).

Research suggests that if students are going to grasp and retain words and comprehend text, they need incremental, repeated exposure in a variety of contexts to the words they are trying to learn. When students make multiple connections between a new word and their own experiences, they develop a nuanced and flexible understanding of the word they are learning. In this way, students learn not only what a word means but also how to use that word in a variety of contexts, and they can apply appropriate senses of the word's meaning in order to understand the word in different contexts (Landauer & Dumais, 1997; Landauer, McNamara, Dennis, & Kintsch, 2007; Nagy, Herman, & Anderson, 1985).

Initially, children readily learn words from oral conversation because such conversations are context rich in ways that aid in vocabulary acquisition: in discussions, a small set of words (accompanied by gesture and intonation) is used with great frequency to talk about a narrow range of situations children are exposed to on a day-to-day basis. Yet as children reach school age, new words are introduced less frequently in conversation, and consequently vocabulary





Our planet made up of many

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Understanding the excerpt's Tier Three words is also necessary to comprehend the text fully. As was the case in example 1, these words are often repeated and defined in context. **S**, for example, is introduced in the second paragraph, and while determining its meaning from the sentence in which it appears might be difficult, several closely related concepts ( ) appears in the next sentence to provide more context.

## B

## R

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## A Note on International Sources for the Standards

In the course of developing the Standards, the writing team consulted numerous international models, including those from Ireland, Finland, New Zealand, Australia (by state), Canada (by province), Singapore, the United Kingdom, and others. Several patterns emerging from international standards efforts influenced the design and content of the Standards:

(1) *Many countries set standards for student reading by providing a reading list. The United Kingdom has standards for the “range and content” of student reading. While lacking the mandate to set particular reading requirements, the Standards nonetheless follow the spirit of international models by setting explicit expectations for the range, quality, and complexity of what students read along with more conventional standards describing how well students must be able to read.*

(2) *In several international assessment programs, students are confronted with a text or texts and asked to gather evidence, analyze readings, and synthesize content. The Standards likewise require students to “draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research” (Writing CCR standard 9).*

(3) *The Standards follow international models by making writing arguments and writing informational/explanatory texts the dominant modes of writing in high school to demonstrate readiness for college and career.*



**S** – Temporary guidance or assistance provided to a student by a teacher, another adult, or a more capable peer, enabling the student to perform a task he or she otherwise would not be able to do alone, with the goal of fostering the student’s capacity to perform the task on his or her own later on<sup>1</sup>

**S** – An investigation intended to address a narrowly tailored query in a brief period of time, as in a few class periods or a week of instructional time

**S** – A text used largely for informational purposes, as in research.

**S E** – In the Standards, the most widely accepted and understood form of expression in English in the United States; used in the Standards to refer to formal English writing and speaking; the particular focus of Language standards 1 and 2 (CCSS, pp. 26, 28, 52, 54)

– A course devoted to a practical study, such as engineering, technology, design, business, or other workforce-related subject; a technical aspect of a wider field of study, such as art or music

– The inherent difficulty of reading and comprehending a text combined with consideration of reader and task variables; in the Standards, a three-part assessment of text difficulty that pairs qualitative and quantitative measures with reader-task considerations (CCSS, pp. 31, 57; Reading, pp. 4–16)

– A range of text difficulty corresponding to grade spans within the Standards; specifically, the spans from grades 2–3, grades 4–5, grades 6–8, grades 9–10, and grades 11–CCR (college and career readiness)

– See [L. S. Vygotsky \(1978\). \*Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Mental Functions\*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.](#)

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<sup>1</sup> Though Vygotsky himself does not use the term [L. S. Vygotsky \(1978\). \*Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Mental Functions\*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.](#), the educational meaning of the term relates closely to his concept of the zone of proximal development. See L. S. Vygotsky (1978). *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Mental Functions*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.