

This excerpt applies to Text Complexity

Text Complexity: The Common Core State Standards require students to read increasingly complex texts with increasing independence as they progress toward career and college readiness.

A. Texts for each grade align with the complexity requirements outlined in the standards.

Reading Standard 10 outlines the level of text complexity at which students need to demonstrate comprehension in each grade. (Appendix A in the Common Core State Standards gives further information on how text complexity can be measured.)¹ Research makes clear that the complexity levels of the texts students are presently required to read are significantly below what is required to achieve college and career readiness. Far too often, students who have fallen behind are given only less complex texts rather than the support they need to read texts at the appropriate level of complexity. The Common Core State Standards hinge on students encountering appropriately complex texts at each grade level to develop the mature language skills and the conceptual knowledge they need for success in school and life. Instructional materials should also offer advanced texts to provide students at every grade with the opportunity to read texts beyond their current grade level to prepare them for the challenges of more complex text.

B. All students, including those who are behind, have extensive opportunities to encounter and comprehend grade-level text as required by the standards. Materials aligned with the Common Core State Standards must provide extensive opportunities for all students to engage with sufficiently complex text, although some will need more scaffolding to do so. Curriculum developers and teachers have the flexibility to build progressions of more complex text within grade-level bands that overlap to a limited degree with earlier bands (e.g., grades 4–5 and grades 6–8). In addition to classroom work on texts at their own grade level, some students may need further instruction, which could include approaches such as instruction on grade-level texts, fluency practice, vocabulary building, and additional practice with texts from the previous grade band. However, this additional work should not replace extensive classroom practice with texts at or above grade level, and all intervention programs should be designed to accelerate students rapidly toward independent reading of grade-level text.

Some percentage of students will enter grade 3 or later grades without command of foundational reading skills such as decoding. For these students, it is essential that there are age appropriate materials to ensure that they have extensive training and practice in the foundational reading skills required to achieve fluency and comprehension. The K-2 publisher's criteria more fully articulates the essential foundation skills all students need to decode in order to become fluent readers and comprehend text.

- C. Shorter, challenging texts that elicit close reading and re-reading are provided regularly at each grade.** The study of short texts is particularly useful to enable students at a wide range of reading levels to participate in the close analysis of more demanding text. The Common Core State Standards place a high priority on the close, sustained reading of complex text, beginning with Reading Standard 1. Such reading emphasizes the particular over the general and strives to focus on what lies within the four corners of the text. It often requires compact, short, self-contained texts that students can read and re-read deliberately and slowly to probe and ponder the meanings of individual words, the order in which sentences unfold, and the development of ideas over the course of the text.
- D. Novels, plays, and other extended readings are also provided with opportunities for close reading as well as research.** Students should also be required to read several longer texts each year. Discussion of extended or longer texts should span the entire text while also creating a series of questions that demonstrate how careful attention to specific passages within the text provide opportunities for close reading. Students should also be required to demonstrate that they are able to read larger volumes of material and extract knowledge and insight.
- E. Additional materials markedly increase the opportunity for regular independent reading of texts that appeal to students' interests to develop both their knowledge and joy in reading.** These materials should ensure that all students have daily opportunities to read texts of their choice on their own during and outside of the school day. Students should have access to a wide range of materials on a variety of topics and genres. These texts should enable students to read broadly and widely to build their knowledge and experience. Materials will need to include texts at students' own reading level as well as texts with complexity levels that will challenge and motivate students. In alignment with the standards and to acknowledge the range of students' interests, these materials should include informational texts and literary nonfiction as well as literature. A wide variety of formats can also engage a wider range of students, such as high-quality newspaper and magazine articles as well as information-rich websites.