

Common Core Standards  
Qualitative Features of Text Complexity Explained  
Companion to the Qualitative Dimensions Scale

(To be consulted in filling out the rubric and in conjunction with anchor texts)

Structure (could be story structure and/or form of piece)

- Simple → Complex
- Explicit → Implicit
- Conventional → Unconventional
- 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)
- Simple graphics → sophisticated graphics
- Graphics unnecessary or merely supplemental to understanding the text → Graphics essential to understanding the text and may provide information not elsewhere provided

Language Demands: Conventionality and Clarity

- Literal → Figurative or ironic
- Clear → Ambiguous or purposefully misleading
- Contemporary, familiar → Archaic or otherwise unfamiliar
- Conversational → General Academic and domain specific
- Light vocabulary load<sup>1</sup>: few unfamiliar or academic words → Many words unfamiliar and high academic vocabulary present
- Sentence structure <sup>2</sup>straightforward → Complex and varied sentence structures

Knowledge Demands: Life Experience (literary texts)

- Simple theme → Complex or sophisticated themes
- Single theme → Multiple themes
- Common everyday experiences or clearly fantastical situations → Experiences distinctly different from one's own
- 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 genre conventions required → Cultural and literary knowledge useful
- Low intertextuality (few if any references/allusions to other texts) → High intertextuality (many references/allusions to other texts)

Knowledge Demands: Content/Discipline Knowledge (chiefly informational texts)

- Everyday knowledge and familiarity with genre conventions required → Extensive, perhaps specialized discipline-specific content knowledge required
- Low intertextuality (few if any references to/citations of other texts) → High intertextuality (many references to/citations of other texts)

Levels of Meaning (chiefly literary texts) or Purpose (chiefly informational texts)

- Single level of meaning → Multiple levels of meaning
- Explicitly stated purpose → Implicit purpose, may be hidden or obscure

---

<sup>1</sup> Though vocabulary can be measured by quantifiable means, it is still a feature for careful consideration when selecting texts

<sup>2</sup> Though sentence length is measured by quantifiable means, sentence complexity is still a feature for careful consideration when selecting texts