

**Understanding the CCSS:**  
 What They Are and How They Work  
 Choosing, Teaching, and Assessing Complex Texts  
 Dr. David Pook

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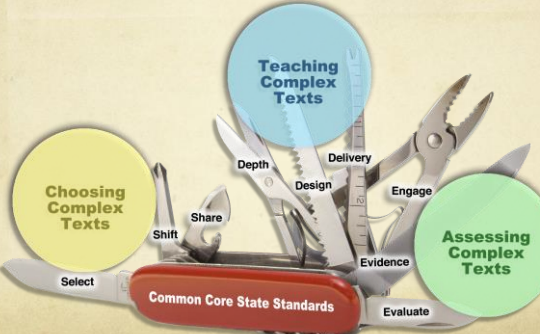
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**Key Shifts in the Standards**



Teaching Complex Texts

Choosing Complex Texts

Assessing Complex Texts

Common Core State Standards

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**Common Core Design:  
 Anchor Standards**



**Anchor Standards** that are common to all grades offer an integrated focus

**Anchor Standards** clearly specify College and Career Readiness

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## Common Core Design: Grade Level Standards

Each **Grade** has specific end-of-year expectations for Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening, & Language

**Across Grades** there is a cumulative progression of understandings & skills

Each **Standard** has a 1-1 correspondence with an Anchor Standard



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## A Sample Comparison: Old NH versus New CCSS

Demonstrate initial understanding of elements of literary texts by **identifying, describing, or making predictions** about character (such as protagonist or antagonist), setting, problem/solution, or plots/subplots, as appropriate to text; or **identifying** any significant changes in character, relationships, or setting over time; or **identifying** rising action, climax, or falling action.

**Analyze** how complex characters (e.g., those with multiple or conflicting motivations) **develop** over the course of a text, **interact** with other characters, and **advance** the plot or **develop** the theme.

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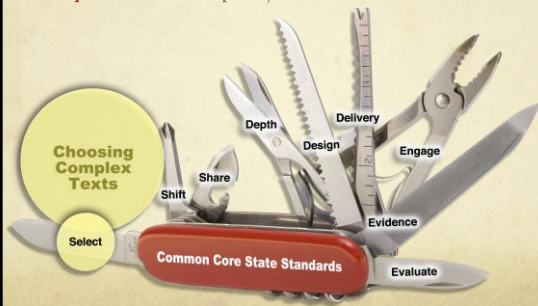
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## Selecting Complex Texts

Texts must be evaluated as to whether they meet the **grade-band requirements** for complexity.



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### Sample Text

#### From Winston Churchill's "Blood, Toil, Tears, and Sweat"



I would say to the House as I said to those ministers who have joined this government, I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears and sweat. We have before us an ordeal of the most grievous kind. We have before us many, many long months of struggle and of suffering. You ask, what is our policy? I can say: It is to wage war, by sea, land and air, with all our might and with all the strength that God can give us; to wage war against a monstrous tyranny, never surpassed in the dark, lamentable catalogue of human crime. That is our policy. You ask, what is our aim? I can answer in one word: It is victory, victory at all costs, victory in spite of all terror, victory, however long and hard the road may be; for without victory, there is no survival. I take up my task with buoyancy and hope. I feel sure that our cause will not be suffered to fail among men. At this time I feel entitled to claim the aid of all and to say, "Come then, let us go forward together with our united strength."

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### Why Selecting Complex Text Matters

- The ability to read complex texts is the **single greatest predictor** of success in college and career
- Text complexity in elementary and secondary texts **has declined steadily**
- Less than **50% of high school graduates** being able to read college and career ready complex text

#### Text Complexity and the CCSS

**Text Complexity Overview**  
 What is meant by text complexity is a measurement of how challenging a particular text is to read. There are a number of different ways of measuring text complexity, each using different measures of text complexity. Research shows that the most reliable predictor of success in college and career is the ability to read complex text in the range of the general population of students in college. This finding has implications for public policy on educational issues. The implications for teaching that research study are outlined in the following section.

**Text Complexity and the CCSS**  
 Reading practices in the US have declined steadily over the past several decades, with the best complexity level generally available only to the extent of students' L2 education. A key requirement of the *Assessing Student and Teacher in the Common Core State Standards* is that students must be prepared to read complex text. The text complexity is measured by the ability to understand text complexity, which is determined by a comparison of text and student's reading level.

Grade Level	Lexile Score	CCSS Lexile Range
3-5	320-540	400-600
6-8	540-780	600-800
9-12	780-1200	800-1200

**Key Elements of Text Complexity: Quantitative, Qualitative, and Reader and Task**  
 Quantitative measures look at factors impacting "readability" as measured by particular computer programs. Qualitative measures examine levels of meaning, knowledge demands, language features, text structure, and use of graphics that computers cannot judge. Reader and Task considers additional "outside" factors that might impact the difficulty of reading the text and guide instruction in the classroom.

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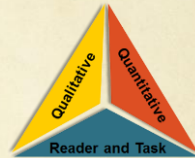
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### Measuring Text Complexity

Appendix A in the CCSS identifies the following factors as determining text complexity:

- **Quantitative measures** look at factors impacting "readability" as measured by particular computer programs.
- **Qualitative measures** examine levels of meaning, knowledge demands, language features, text structure, and use of graphics that computers cannot judge.
- **Reader and Task** considers additional "outside" factors that might impact the difficulty of reading the text and guide instruction in the classroom.



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## Tools for Selecting Complex Text: Text Complexity Analysis Worksheet

**Text Complexity Analysis Tool**

Text Author	Lexile Band	Grade Band	Lexile Band	Grade Band	Lexile Band	Grade Band
1. 1400-1600	140-150	400-500	1600-1800	150-160	500-600	600-700
2. 1600-1800	150-170	500-550	1800-2000	160-170	600-700	700-800

Text Structure	Very Complex (one of grade band)	Moderately Complex (middle of grade band)	Highly Complex (outside of grade band)
1. <b>Text Structure</b>	1. <b>Text Structure</b> 1. <b>Text Structure</b> 2. <b>Text Structure</b>	2. <b>Text Structure</b> 3. <b>Text Structure</b>	3. <b>Text Structure</b> 4. <b>Text Structure</b>
2. <b>Language and Content</b>	1. <b>Language and Content</b> 2. <b>Language and Content</b>	2. <b>Language and Content</b> 3. <b>Language and Content</b>	3. <b>Language and Content</b> 4. <b>Language and Content</b>
3. <b>Knowledge Demands</b>	1. <b>Knowledge Demands</b> 2. <b>Knowledge Demands</b>	2. <b>Knowledge Demands</b> 3. <b>Knowledge Demands</b>	3. <b>Knowledge Demands</b> 4. <b>Knowledge Demands</b>
4. <b>Purpose/ Motives</b>	1. <b>Purpose/ Motives</b> 2. <b>Purpose/ Motives</b>	2. <b>Purpose/ Motives</b> 3. <b>Purpose/ Motives</b>	3. <b>Purpose/ Motives</b> 4. <b>Purpose/ Motives</b>

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## Practice Using the Tool

**Lexile: 1280**

### Sample Text Passage

#### THE BIOGRAPHY OF HARRIET BECHER STOWE BY CHARLES EDWARD STOWE

Catherine was the oldest child of James Beecher and Roxanna Stone, his wife, in a Irish-battered journal found among her papers in a short sketch of her life. It was written when she was scarcely six years of age. In a shaking hand she begins "I was born at East Haverhill, N. H., September 3, 1815, as a P.M.A. in the large quiet opposite father's study. Don't remember much about it myself." The quibble of it is in this brief notice of the circumstances of her birth is very characteristic, all through her life, little episodes of fate were continually playing on the surface of that current of intense thought and feeling in which her deep, earnest nature flowed.

**Text Complexity Analysis Tool**

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## K-1 Informational Text

**Text Complexity Analysis Tool**

Text Author	Lexile Band	Grade Band	Lexile Band	Grade Band	Lexile Band	Grade Band
1. 1400-1600	140-150	400-500	1600-1800	150-160	500-600	600-700
2. 1600-1800	150-170	500-550	1800-2000	160-170	600-700	700-800

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## Teaching Complex Texts

Students build knowledge through **close reading** of materials facilitated by **text dependent questions** that require evidence drawn from what they have read

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## Why Close Reading Matters

Careful attention to **how the text unfolds** through asking **text dependent questions**

Prepares students for the **kinds of reading tasks** they will encounter after graduation

Leveling the playing field for all students by **not privileging background knowledge**

Motivates students by rewarding them for **reading inquisitively**

### Close Reading and the CCSS

**CLOSE READING DEFINED**  
Close reading is the careful, repeated rereading of a complex text through answering text-dependent questions, aimed at understanding the text's meaning. Close reading allows students to explore and analyze the text through a series of activities that focus on understanding the meaning of individual words and sentences as well as the overall development of events and ideas. It calls on students to extract evidence from the text as well as draw on critical thinking skills to explain their own ideas about the text.

The sort of careful attention to how the text unfolds allows students to assemble... through discussion and to compare... through discussion and to compare... through discussion and to compare...

**CLOSE READING AND THE CCSS**  
The new standards for close reading are embedded in the Common Core State Standards for the three categories of reading: literature, informational text, and history/social studies. The standards for close reading are embedded in the standards for reading: literature, informational text, and history/social studies. The standards for close reading are embedded in the standards for reading: literature, informational text, and history/social studies.

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## Close Reading of a Sample Text

### From Chapter 1 of Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*

Alice was beginning to get very tired of sitting by her sister on the bank, and of having nothing to do: once or twice she had peeped into the book her sister was reading, but it had no pictures or conversations in it, "and what is the use of a book," thought Alice "without pictures or conversation?"

So she was considering in her own mind (as well as she could, for the hot day made her feel very sleepy and stupid), whether the pleasure of making a daisy-chain would be worth the trouble of getting up and picking the daisies, when suddenly a white rabbit with pink eyes ran close by her.

There was nothing so VERY remarkable in that; nor did Alice think it so VERY much out of the way to hear the Rabbit say to itself, "Oh dear! Oh dear! I shall be late!" (when she thought it over afterwards, it occurred to her that she ought to have wondered at this, but at the time it all seemed quite natural); but when the Rabbit actually TOOK A WATCH OUT OF ITS WAISTCOAT-POCKET, and looked at it, and then hurried on, Alice started to her feet, for, for it flashed across her mind that she had never before seen a rabbit with either a waistcoat-pocket, or a watch to take out of it, and burning with curiosity, she ran across the field after it, and fortunately was just in time to see it pop down a large rabbit-hole under the hedge.

In another moment down went Alice after it, never once considering how in the world she was to get out again.

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What are **Text Dependent Questions**

Depth

Draw the reader **back to the text** to discover what it **says**

Have **concrete and explicit answers** rooted in the text

Frame inquiries in ways that **do not rely** on a mix of **personal opinion, background information, and imaginative speculation**

**Text Dependent Questions and the CCSS**

**Text Dependent Questions Defined**  
An effective set of text-dependent questions that are focused on understanding the key elements of a text reading available in the 2014 Anchor Reading Standards by asking students to provide evidence from a complex text and their responses based on what the text explicitly says (Anchor Standard 1) is also tied to the intervening Anchor Reading Standard 2 as well as the range of skills that will be addressed as students work to understand the text. Text-dependent questions require students to engage with a text, drawing primarily on background knowledge or experiences to answer the questions, instead of providing the text itself as the primary evidence and source of truth. Consider the following questions about the writing of Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*.

Anchor Reading Standard 1	Anchor Reading Standard 2
Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and where it says it	Use textual evidence to analyze how the text says what it says
What does the text say?	How does the text say it?
How does the text say it?	What does the text mean about that subject?

With questions like those found in the first column, each individual primary interpretation of the classroom, assessed by a student, would be a personal opinion. With questions like those found in the second column, each student's response would be rooted in the text, but assessed only on a scale of personal opinion. Individual answers, not the questions themselves, would be assessed.

In contrast, the questions in the second column draw the reader back to the text to explicitly discover what text says about the subject at hand. Text-dependent questions like those in the second column would require students to provide textual evidence and explain answers rooted in the text, and thus are measurable indicators of both of Anchor Reading Standard 1 and Anchor Reading Standard 2.

**Examples of Text Dependent Questions**

- In the first of the four text-dependent questions (questions from the first table), the *2014 Anchor Reading Standard* requires that questions focus on what is **explicit** in a text or where *Anchor Standard 2* or even a **summary, paraphrase, or paraphrase** of the text. *Anchor Reading Standard 1* and *Anchor Reading Standard 2* are **text-dependent questions** that do not rely on a mix of personal opinion, background information, and imaginative speculation. In contrast, the questions in the second column draw the reader back to the text to explicitly discover what text says about the subject at hand. Text-dependent questions like those in the second column would require students to provide textual evidence and explain answers rooted in the text, and thus are measurable indicators of both of Anchor Reading Standard 1 and Anchor Reading Standard 2.
- Ask why the author chose a particular word.
- Analyze the impact of the context of a passage.
- Consider evidence like a description of the text.
- Discuss the implications of all that is not explicitly stated.
- Analyze how purpose of the text relates to each other and the reader.
- Find the purpose in a paragraph.
- Notice what is **repeating** or **redundant**.
- Analyze how purpose of the text relates to each other and the reader.

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Differences in Depth: **Text versus Non-Text Dependent Questions**

Depth

**Non-Text Dependent Questions** | **Text Dependent Questions**

Are books without pictures or conversations useful?	<b>What kind of books does Alice find useful?</b>
How would you react if you saw a talking rabbit?	<b>How did Alice react when she saw a talking rabbit?</b>
Would Alice have followed the rabbit down the hole had she not seen it look at a watch?	<b>Why did Alice follow the rabbit down the rabbit-hole?</b>
What do you know about Lewis Carroll?	<b>What does the reader know about the rabbit?</b>

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**Close Reading and Anchor Reading Standards**

Depth

The **Anchor Standards for Reading** found in the **CCSS**

- Prioritize the close reading skills of **extracting evidence and making inferences** (Standard 1) when reading **complex text** (Standard 10)
- Frame the performance of the **intervening Anchor Standards 2-9** as relying on the central close reading skill of **citing specific textual evidence from complex text**
- Create a **ladder** that students must climb to demonstrate **college and career readiness**




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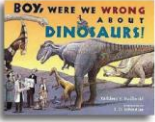
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## Practice Identifying TDQs

From Kudlinski,  
*Boy, Were We Wrong About Dinosaurs*



Long, long ago, before people knew anything about dinosaurs, great bones were found in China. Wise men who saw the bones tried to guess what sort of creatures owned them—they could have been dragons.

After they studied the fossil bones, the ancient Chinese decided that they came from dragons. They thought these dragons must have been taught dragons to be so large. And they believed that dragons could still be alive.

Boy, were they wrong!

We now know exactly what dinosaurs looked like. All that is left of them are fossil bones and a few other clues. Now that we think that many of our own past guesses about dinosaurs were just as wrong as those of ancient China.

Some of our mistakes were little ones. When the first fossil bones of Iguanodon were found, one was shaped like a chin's horn. Scientists guessed that the strange horn is like a spike on Iguanodon's nose.

Boy, were we wrong about Iguanodon!

When a full set of fossil bones was found later, there were two pointed bones, they were part of Iguanodon's hands, not its nose!

Other men then showed us that we may have been wrong about every kind of dinosaur.

Some of our first drawings of dinosaurs showed them with their elbows and knees pointing out to the side, like a human's. With legs like that, big dinosaurs could only waddle clumsily on all fours or foot underwater.

Now we know that their legs were straight under them, like a horse's. Dinosaurs were not clumsy. The sizes and shapes of their leg bones now show that some were as fast and graceful as deer.

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## Creating Text Dependent Questions

Level of Text Specificity	CCS Anchor Standard Close Reading Skill	Text Dependent Question
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Words/Phrases

Analyze how specific word choices shape tone (Standard 4)

Why wasn't Alice "burning with curiosity" when she initially saw the rabbit? What subsequent events led to her feeling this way?

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## Creating Text Dependent Questions

Level of Text Specificity	CCS Anchor Standard Close Reading Skill	Text Dependent Question
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Sentences

Assess how point of view shapes content (Standard 6)

In the opening paragraph Alice states "what is the use of a book ... without pictures or conversation?" What does that sentence reveal about her?

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## Creating Text Dependent Questions Diana

Level of Text Specificity	CCS Anchor Standard Close Reading Skill	Text Dependent Question
	Summarize key supporting details (Standard 2)	<b>What details about the rabbit did Alice perceive in the third paragraph?</b>
Paragraphs	Investigate the structure of specific sentences, paragraphs, and sections of text (Standard 5)	<b>Around what word or phrase does the meaning of the third paragraph pivot (i.e. pinpoint where in the paragraph its meaning and purpose change)?</b>

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## Close Reading and SBAC

**SBAC** assessments are built around the **close reading of complex texts** as determined by answers to **text dependent questions**.

Assessment Questions for Standard 3 (Grades 6-8)

**Sample Question**  
 An illustration depicts the main character in a novel playing a chess game in this illustration. How do these characters play? The illustration shows them from an elevated point of view. The chessboard is a grid of squares. The pieces are arranged in a way that suggests a strategic game. The illustration is a black and white line drawing. The chessboard is a grid of squares. The pieces are arranged in a way that suggests a strategic game. The illustration is a black and white line drawing.

**Sample Question**  
 How do the characters in the novel play chess? (Select the two correct answers.)  
 A. They play chess in a room.  
 B. They play chess in a park.  
 C. They play chess in a school.  
 D. They play chess in a library.

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## Evidence in Assessing Complex Texts

Students should employ **evidence** extracted directly from the text—as well as **draw inferences based on that evidence**—when writing or speaking

**Assessing Complex Texts**

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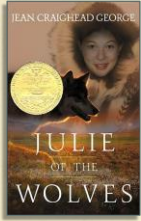
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### Sample Narrative Performance Task



In the passage, the author used **key details and rich vocabulary** to develop a strong character named Miyax. Think about Miyax and the **words and details** the author used to create that character. **Write an original story to continue where the passage ended.** In your story, be sure to use what you have learned about the character Miyax from your **close reading of the passage** as you tell what happens to her next.

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### Sample Explanatory Performance Task

“Besides being beautiful to contemplate, space diamonds teach us important lessons about natural processes going on in the universe, and suggest new ways that diamonds can be created here on Earth.”



**Explain** how information learned from space diamonds can help scientists make diamonds on Earth. **Use evidence from the passage to support your answer.**

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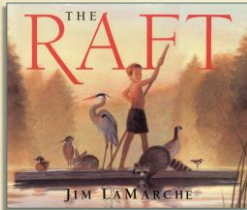
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### Sample Argumentative Performance Task



While reading LaMarche's *The Raft*, students should note key events and details within the story about what Nicky's grandmother did that made her a “river rat” and how Nicky came to appreciate her world.

After introducing their essay, students should share an opinion about Nicky and/or his grandmother and support it using details they have selected from the text. Successful essays will include linking words that connect reasons and evidence to the opinion as well as convey a sense of closure.

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### Sample Research Task



You have read **three texts** describing Amelia Earhart. The three texts are:  
 “Biography of Amelia Earhart”  
 “Amelia Earhart’s Life and Disappearance”  
 “Earhart’s Final Resting Place Believed Found”  
 All three include the **claim** that Earhart was a brave, courageous person.

Consider the **argument** each author uses to demonstrate Earhart’s bravery. **Write an essay that analyzes the strength of the arguments** about Earhart’s bravery in at least two of the texts. Remember to use **textual evidence** to support your ideas.

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### Standards Based Writing Rubrics

SBAC will use writing rubrics that **reflect the priorities of the CCSS** and evaluates students based on their ability to **collect, organize, and analyze evidence** in writing

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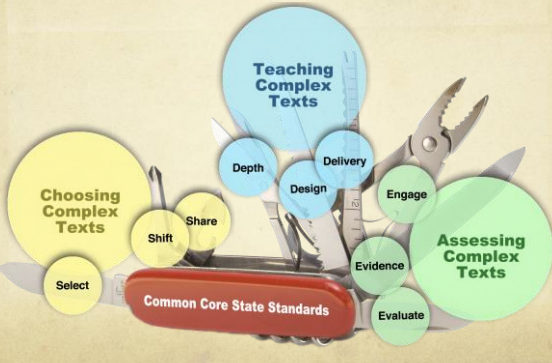
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Let’s Keep Talking: [dopook@gmail.com](mailto:dopook@gmail.com)




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