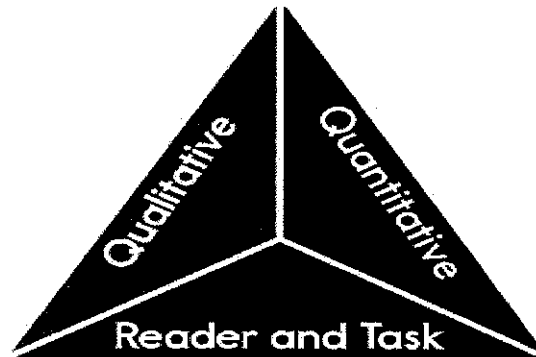


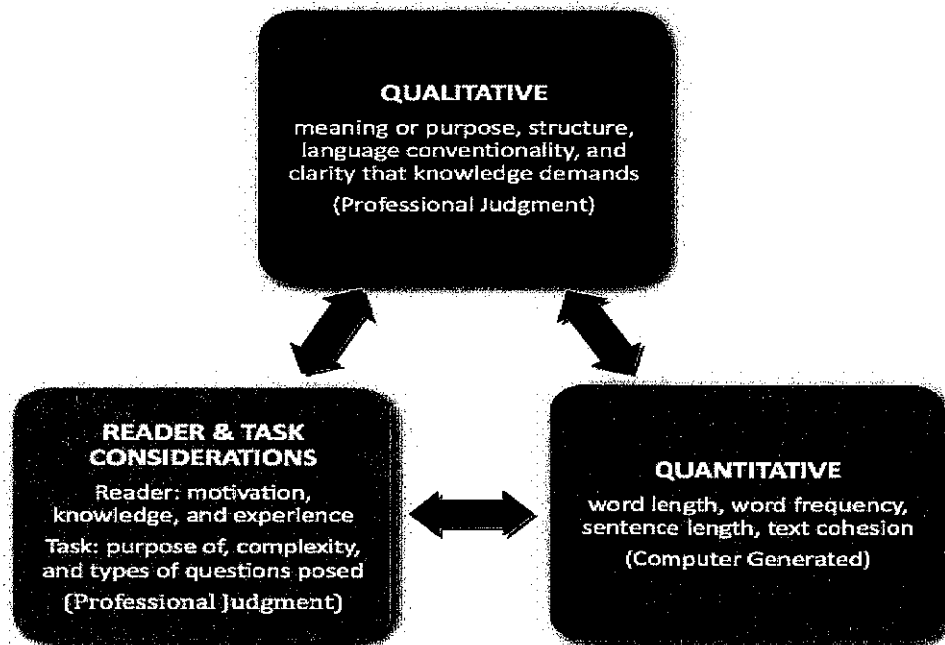
# What is Text Complexity?



**Text complexity** is what the term implies: how challenging is the material for the child at his/her specific grade level. The California State Standards use three factors to determine the complexity of a text:

- Qualitative Measures
- Quantitative Measures
- Considerations relating the reader to the task

## Common Core Model of Text Complexity



Adapted from Appendix A of The CCSS for Literacy and English Language Arts

**Qualitative measures** examine text characteristics that can only be evaluated by the person that is reading the book or passage. The reader is required to consider such factors as:

Levels of meaning:

- Is the purpose explicitly stated or is it vague?
- Does it have a single level of meaning vs. multiple purposes?

Clarity and conventions of language:

- Is the language clear or is it vague and purposefully misleading?
- Is the language contemporary and familiar or is it unfamiliar and archaic?
- Is the text conversational or academic?
- Is there wide use of figurative language, idiomatic expressions, etc.?
- Is the text cohesive or does it lack cohesion?

Knowledge demands:

- Is it a single-themed text and relatively simple as opposed to multiple themed and complex?
- Does the text deal with common everyday experiences or does it present experiences that are likely vastly different from those of the reader?
- Is the text presented from single or multiple perspectives? Are there frequent changes in the setting? How many, if any, references to other texts does the text contain?

Structure:

- How is the text organized—chronologically or in another logical fashion?
- Is the text randomly arranged with complex and loosely connected content?
- Does the structure and organization make sense?
- Are sections and features clearly labeled?
- Is the text free from unnecessary distractions?

Visual device complexity:

- Are graphical devices relatively simple or are they complex?
- Are the graphics more “for show” rather than necessary to help the students understand the material being presented?

**Quantitative measures** are what publishers traditionally relied upon to determine the difficulty of a text. There are dozens of formulas used to figure text difficulty. Many of these formulas consider only two factors: sentence length and number of difficult or unfamiliar words or they look at sentence length and syllable count. Needless to say, these factors are fairly limiting when it comes to determining the complexity of a text. Other factors to consider include:

- Total word count
- Ratio of different words to total words
- Number of high frequency words
- Sentence complexity

LEXILE TEXT RANGES TO GUIDE READING FOR COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS	
GRADES	CCSS LEXILE TEXT RANGE
11-12	1185L-1385L
9-10	1050L-1335L
6-8	925L-1185L
4-5	740L-1010L
2-3	420L-820L
1	190L-530L

**Considerations relating to the reader and tasks** is the vital third component of text complexity. Each reader brings different skills, background and motivation to the act of reading. For example, a student who is interested in the topic being read is likely to bring more background knowledge to the reading task and want to learn more.

The importance of the assignment itself can also influence the reading activity. Skimming a book or article for a key piece of information or reading leisurely places less demand on the reading task than if a student is preparing for an exam, assembling a piece of equipment or reading for long-term retention.