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Ramping Up for Complex Texts

Helping students read more and better has always been the goal of literacy educators. In our profession, we've tried all kinds of approaches to ensure that students can read and understand the wide range of texts they will be confronted with as they grow and develop. There have been times in our history when students were assigned to read hard texts independently. The thinking at the time was that exposure to great works alone would result in learned citizens. That didn't work because students found summaries that they could use to answer comprehension questions and write essays, although it certainly spawned a whole new publishing category: commercial study guides. Doug remembers being assigned to read *Antigone* and searching everywhere for CliffsNotes so that he could complete the required worksheets and write his essay in response to this prompt:

Just giving students complex text doesn't mean they will read and understand it.

Identify the tragic hero of one of the plays. Analyze the scenes in which the character displays pride and identify the effects that this pride has on the character's life. How could his/her life have been different if he/she had behaved in a less prideful manner?

Thankfully, the answers to this question were clearly articulated in the yellow- and black-striped book. It wasn't that Doug didn't want to read *Antigone*, but rather that although he was assigned to read it, he wasn't taught how to understand an ancient Greek play such that he could answer this prompt. Unfortunately, his teacher did not know that he hadn't read the play because he earned an A on the essay. Lesson learned: Just giving students complex text doesn't mean they will read and understand it.

At other times, we've scaffolded so much that we removed the need for students to read altogether. That didn't work because students were not applying what they had learned to new texts. Nancy remembers a teacher telling her class so much about each assigned chapter of *The Secret Garden* that Nancy didn't feel the need to read the book at all, and Nancy spent her time reading Nancy Drew mysteries instead. She was able to complete all of the tasks (and please her teacher) because the teacher did the majority of the work. The fact that Nancy participated eagerly in classroom discussions wasn't an indication that she was a good reader but rather that she was a good listener. Her teacher's recounting of the previous night's chapter was sufficient for Nancy to engage in rich and collaborative discussions.

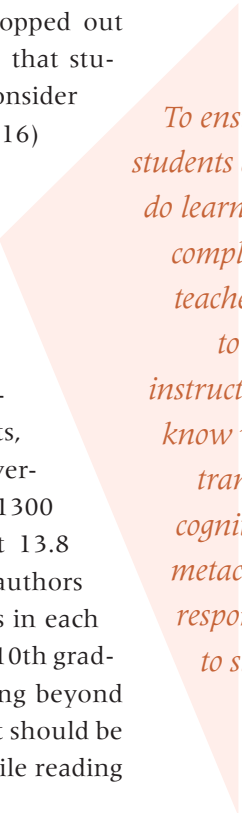
Neither of these approaches met the intended goal of getting students to read complex texts. Instead, they relied on either too little, or too much, teaching. To ensure that students actually do learn to read complex texts, teachers have to scaffold instruction and know when to transfer the cognitive and metacognitive responsibility to students. They need to rethink the texts they use, expanding the range to include more complex texts accompanied by scaffolds and support. And they need to carefully consider the intentional instruction students need to receive if they are going to apply what they have learned to the wide world of texts available to them.

In this chapter, we focus on two major concepts in literacy instruction: text complexity and close reading. Given the new Florida B.E.S.T. Standards, you are likely concerned with making it possible for students to read increasingly complex texts and to gain exposure to thoughtful reading

instruction that provides access to these texts. Therefore, the first section will address text complexity. The second section will examine the need for students to read these texts closely, critically, and deeply. Starting in kindergarten, text complexity and close and critical reading are important. As the standards note, “Educators should encourage students to wrestle with such complex texts—with proper scaffolding—when they deem it appropriate” (Florida Department of Education, 2020, p. 151). The final portion of the chapter is an introduction to a gradual release of responsibility instructional framework that provides the access points students require to access complex texts.

► Reading Complex Texts

Previous standards often included a phrase that required students to read grade-level texts independently. But rarely did standards specify what it meant to have grade-level texts. In 2010, there was widespread acknowledgment that the then current text complexity levels were insufficient to ensure students’ success after PK–12 education. In many cases, expectation for students in the PK–12 system topped out at about 1150 Lexile. But college and career success requires that students be able to read much more complex texts than that. Consider the evidence presented by Wei, Cromwell, and McClarty (2016) in their study of text complexity levels of occupational reading materials. They divided occupations into zones based on the level of education provided. For example, Zone 1 required little higher education and included jobs such as food preparation workers, taxi drivers, and food servers. Zone 5, the highest, included jobs for which a master’s degree was generally required and included positions such as nutritionist, lawyer, and pharmacist. They collected a variety of texts, such as training guides, reference aids, and handbooks. The average reading level for Zone 1 jobs was grade 11.2 (or about 1300 Lexile), with a high of grade 13.9. Zone 5 jobs averaged at 13.8 (or about 1450 Lexile), with a high of grade 14. In fact, the authors conclude that the average text complexity demands for careers in each job zone are higher than most state standards expect of 9th and 10th graders. In their words, “even jobs that require no formal schooling beyond high school still involve comprehension of texts at the level that should be present at the end of high school,” which they identify as a Lexile reading level of between 1150 and 1350.



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While everyone agrees that we shouldn't just hand students hard texts and wish them well, the practice of scaffolded instruction is receiving renewed attention. How much is too much? When is it not enough?

The new Florida standards that require students to read increasingly complex texts serve as a reminder that the ability to make meaning is the ultimate goal and that carefully crafted instruction on decoding and comprehension is fundamental. The standards also note that students should read multiple genres and text types, both digital and print. We can't imagine any literacy educator disagreeing with either of these parts of the goal. While everyone agrees that teachers shouldn't just hand students hard texts and wish them well, the practice of scaffolded instruction is receiving renewed attention. How much is too much? When is it not enough? There is a deep body of research (e.g., Vygotsky, 1978; Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976; Wood & Wood, 1996) on the importance of scaffolding in instruction.

Scaffolded instruction is vital in reading instruction, and its practice is universal. Scaffolding in reading instruction occurs through the use of texts (Fountas & Pinnell, 2012), strategically deployed questions, prompts and cues (Frey & Fisher, 2010), and a gradient of instructional arrangements (Fisher & Frey, 2008; Pearson & Gallagher, 1983). Each of these dimensions of curriculum and instruction is essential for teaching students how to read and for building their capacity to read for meaning. For students to access complex text, their reading experiences must include a thoughtful progression of texts, scaffolds, and instructional arrangements.

A second dimension of the standards concerns exactly what students should be reading. Teachers have operated under tacit agreements about grade level, often relying on local context and traditions. Haven't we all worked in schools where a particular title was considered the province of a specific grade level? For example, where we live, *Charlotte's Web* is third grade, and *Romeo and Juliet* is ninth grade. However, in many cases, these traditions seemed to be justified primarily because units and materials had already been developed and shifting the book to another grade was too much trouble. Given the gap between students' reading levels when they complete high school and the expectations for them when they attend college, the level of text complexity has increased. Teachers must use complex texts that continually stretch students' capacity to read and comprehend literary and informational texts. In other words, the expectation is that students will read and understand more complex texts than they have been expected to in the past. But to what end—and how do we know what makes a text complex?

► A New Definition of Text Complexity

In the past, text complexity and readability were viewed interchangeably by many practitioners, even as researchers cautioned otherwise (Hiebert, 2009). Readability has been estimated based on the average length of sentences, the number of syllables in sentences, and—in some cases—occurrences of rare words. These measures provided teachers with general information about readability and were used to gauge appropriate materials for students. But many have voiced concern that these measures missed the nuances present in many texts, often reporting readings as being easier than they really were. Works by Ernest Hemingway, for example, have been assigned a difficulty level ranging from grades 4 to 8, yet any teacher who has used his works of literature knows that the concepts, dialogue, and background knowledge needed by the reader make these texts far more complex than can be measured by a readability formula alone.

Modern definitions of text complexity extend beyond the numeric scores for texts and have been expanded to include qualitative evaluations as well as careful consideration of the reader and tasks. The Florida Standards describe three aspects of text complexity, including:

- **Quantitative aspects**, which include formal readability measures typically conducted by computers
- **Qualitative aspects**, which include levels of meaning, structure, language conventionality and clarity, and knowledge demands typically assessed by human readers
- **Student-centered considerations**, which include students' background knowledge, stamina, and developmental levels as well as the tasks that are assigned to students. (Florida Department of Education, 2020, pp. 148–150)

Text analysis must always keep all three elements in mind.

Quantitative Evaluation

The temptation is to rely on the quantitative measures alone, which are derived from algorithms that yield numerical data; these measures can be calculated by a computer and do an adequate job of tentatively placing a text within a grade band. But these measures alone are inadequate for understanding why one piece of text is qualitatively more

Video 1.1



Doug discusses text complexity. resources.corwin.com/rigorousreading/fla

To read a QR code, you must have a smartphone or tablet with a camera. We recommend that you download a QR code reader app that is made specifically for your phone or tablet brand.

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difficult than another with the same quantitative score. It is simply insufficient to use readability data (sentence length, use of rare words, and such) and assume that this is the only information needed for gauging text complexity. Furthermore, you can't derive much guidance in terms of your teaching points from quantitative analysis alone. The art of making meaningful qualitative evaluations is best left to the judgment of a knowledgeable educator who is deeply familiar with the texts in question.

Yet teachers should be able to use the quantitative tools that are available to create a list of potential texts that they might want to use. We are not suggesting that teachers only use texts that fit within the quantitative band for their grade level, but we are concerned that there are students who are never taught to read with texts that are of an appropriate grade-level challenge. Figure 1.1 provides current readability information for a range of tools.

Qualitative Evaluation

Qualitative evaluation requires considering a text across several dimensions, including level of meaning, the use of literal versus figurative language, the clarity of the author's purpose or central idea, the overall organization, the use of graphics and visual information, and the demands of the vocabulary (see Figure 1.2 for the rubric included in the Florida B.E.S.T. Standards). Note that these descriptors mirror the teaching points

Figure 1.1 Quantitative Measures of Text Complexity

Grade Level	Flesch-Kincaid	Lexile
K-1st	-1.3-2.18	BR-430L
2nd-3rd	1.98-5.34	420L-820L
4th-5th	4.51-7.73	740L-1010L
6th-8th	6.51-10.34	925L-1185L
9th-10th	8.32-12.12	1050L-1335L
11th-12th	10.34-14.2	1185L-1385L

Figure 1.2 Qualitative Factors of Text Complexity

Low Complexity	Mid Complexity	High Complexity
The text has a single layer of meaning explicitly stated.	Blend of explicit and implicit details; few uses of multiple meanings; isolated instances of metaphor.	The text has multiple levels of meaning and there may be intentional ambiguity.
The language of the text is literal, although there may be some rhetorical devices.	Figurative language is used to build on what has already been stated plainly in the text.	Figurative language is used throughout the text; multiple interpretations may be possible.
The author's purpose or central idea of the text is immediately obvious and clear.	The author's purpose may not be explicitly stated but is readily inferred from a reading of the text.	The author's purpose is obscure and subject to interpretation.
The text is organized in a straightforward manner with explicit transitions to guide the reader.	The text is largely organized in a straightforward manner, but may contain isolated incidences of shifts in time/place, focus, or pacing.	The text is organized in a way that initially obscures meaning and has the reader build to an understanding.
Graphics are simple and restate what is written in the text.	Graphics are not essential to understanding the text but do expand on the information found in the text.	Graphics are essential to the understanding of the text and contain information not expressed in the written text.
Vocabulary consists primarily of commonly used words. These words are used literally, not figuratively.	The text uses some domain-specific words, academic vocabulary, archaic terms, or terms that can read with ambiguity.	The text frequently uses domain-specific words, academic vocabulary, archaic terms, or terms that can read with ambiguity.

Source: Florida Department of Education (2020, p. 149).

we rely on during instruction. A given text is going to be variously more or less difficult within each of these areas, and it is unlikely that any text would be uniformly difficult across all four. *Give Bees a Chance* by Bethany Barton is a fairly straightforward text that explains the contributions of bees in our world. On the other hand, *Night* (Wiesel, 1982) uses a difficult structure—flashback—that can confuse readers.

Student-Centered Considerations

Quantitative and qualitative dimensions are solely about the characteristics of the text itself. The third facet in determining text complexity, however, takes into account the student. This last facet is where teaching lies

When it comes to reading challenging texts, students must be adequately supported to unlock the meanings hidden within.

and in fact is the central theme of this book. We will return to this throughout these chapters, but for now, we want to consider the reader. There are myriad books to select from (see Figure 1.3 for a rubric for this aspect), but only a few will make their way to your classroom or school. This aspect of text complexity ensures that teachers consider their students, the students sitting in front of them, when they select reading materials. That does not mean that students are limited to texts that they can already read, but it does mean that teachers have discretion in selecting texts that they believe will help their students grow as readers. As we will explore throughout this book, there are times when students read less complex texts and times when they read more complex texts. In reality, text complexity is a balancing act between providing sufficient opportunities for students to struggle and enough practice for them to develop habits. Teachers should consider the following when they select texts for students to read:

- provide students with examples of quality writing that mentor them as writers themselves;
- grant students access to excellent illustrations;
- allow students to see themselves—their religion, ethnicity, language, and culture—in the selected texts;
- permit students to interact—through the act of reading—with people who have different experiences and beliefs;
- depict a variety of family structures;
- offer a balanced portrayal of gender identities and roles in terms of the depiction of the characters and what the characters do; and
- interrupt gender, racial, or ability stereotypes.

Another way to find quality books is to review titles that have received national and international recognition. For example, the American Library Association awards the Newbery (for writing) and the Caldecott (for illustration) each year for the best children's books. The same organization presents the Coretta Scott King award to outstanding African American authors and illustrators of books for children and young adults. The University of Texas offers the Tomás Rivera award to children's books that depict the Mexican American experience. The Orbus Pictus award is given by the National Council of Teachers of English for outstanding nonfiction written for children. The Hans Christian Andersen medal is presented biennially by the International Board of Books for

Figure 1.3 Student-Centered Considerations

Student-Centered		
Low Complexity	Mid Complexity	High Complexity
Students can fully understand the text without specific background knowledge.	Students with limited background knowledge may understand the text, but some levels of meaning may be impeded by lack of prior exposure.	For students to fully understand the text, they must have background knowledge of the topic.
The text is understood by the student without the student consciously applying comprehension strategies.	The text is such that the student can read without fatigue and can apply comprehension strategies to understand the text.	The text may demand stamina, comprehension, and inferential skills at the upper boundary of the student's developmental level.
The themes and details in the text are well within the student's developmental level of understanding and appropriate to the student's age level.	The themes and details in the text are within the student's developmental level of understanding, and while some subject matter may be sensitive, it is appropriate to the student's age level.	The themes and details in the text are at the upper boundary of the student's developmental level of understanding. Some subject matter may be sensitive but is appropriate to the student's age level.
The task associated with the text is of a low content complexity level, involving one cognitive step.	The task associated with the text is of mid-level complexity, involving multiple cognitive steps, some of which are at the recall level.	The task associated with the text is of a high content complexity level, involving multiple cognitive steps.

Source: Florida Department of Education (2020, p. 150).

Young People in recognition of the body of work of an author and of an illustrator. Each state awards a series of young reader medals for books that are particularly popular with students in the state. The state reading association or library association will have a list of these awards by year. In addition, the International Reading Association created the Children's Choice, Teen Choice, and Teachers' Choices awards.

Understanding the quantitative and qualitative properties of texts is essential, as are the considerations regarding the reader. While these are helpful categories, they do not provide instructional guidance for teachers hoping to build their students' comprehension of the texts. What do we do with complex texts once we have them? It's important to remember that there is no evidence that students can independently learn from books they can't read (Allington, 2002). When it comes to reading challenging texts, students must be adequately supported to unlock the meanings hidden within.

The intent of close reading is to foster critical thinking skills to deepen comprehension, a key aspect of the Florida B.E.S.T. Standards.

► Reading Closely and Carefully

Selecting a text is more than simply choosing a title from a list or a bookshelf. We have developed a decision pathway to help teachers select texts for their students (see Figure 1.4). Sometimes, the text is great and might be useful. In those cases, consider path 1 and ask yourself if the text meets your instructional purpose, learning intention, or objective. Continue through the questions in path 1 to determine if the text is an appropriate choice. Other times, students need instruction in some aspect of reading. For example, if a group of fifth graders needed additional instruction to “explain the development of stated or implied theme(s) throughout a literary text,” the selected text would need to provide that opportunity and the teacher would follow path 2. Finally, students may need to build their knowledge base, especially if they are going to be able to read more widely about a topic. In that case, the teacher would select path 3 and consider the questions in that column before deciding on a specific text.

Much attention has been given to the process of close reading, which relies on repeated readings of short passages of complex texts. A key purpose of close reading is to encourage students to examine in detail what the text has to say. The first assumption behind the practice of close reading is that the text is worthy; not everything we read requires this kind of inspection. However, understanding the text itself is necessary for comprehension and is key to making the kind of analytic and evaluative judgments that mark a competent reader. One question we often hear is in regard to the use of close reading practices with students who are not yet fully independent readers. It is helpful to keep in mind that the intent of close reading is to foster critical thinking skills to deepen comprehension, a key aspect of the Florida B.E.S.T. Standards. Therefore, the thinking skills needed for close reading should begin in kindergarten. Although the delivery of the lesson is somewhat different when working with emergent readers, the intention is the same. The use of close reading in primary grades will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3.

We apply the same reasoning when working with students with disabilities. It is essential that they receive access to the general curriculum, as stated in both federal law and widely accepted best practices. Our experiences have shown us that close reading is especially useful for these and other students for whom a “one and done” reading of a text is not

Video 1.2



Doug discusses close reading.
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Figure 1.4 Decision Pathways for Selecting Texts

Path 1 It's a Fantastic Text . . .	Path 2 My Students Need Reading Instruction About . . .	Path 3 I Want to Build My Students' Knowledge About . . .
What are my learning intentions?	What are my learning intentions?	What are my learning intentions?
Text Consideration: What are the qualitative and quantitative characteristics of the proposed text?	Reader Consideration: What are the reader's (or readers') cognitive capabilities, motivation, knowledge, and experiences?	Reader Consideration: What are the reader's (or readers') cognitive capabilities, motivation, knowledge, and experiences?
Reader Consideration: What are the reader's (or readers') cognitive capabilities, motivation, knowledge, and experiences?	Text Consideration: What are the qualitative and quantitative characteristics of the proposed text?	Text Consideration: What are the qualitative and quantitative characteristics of the proposed text?
Gap Analysis: What gap exists between the reader and the text I am considering?	Gap Analysis: What gap exists between the reader and the text I am considering?	Gap Analysis: What gap exists between the reader and the text I am considering?
Task Consideration: What instructional arrangement will best address this gap (teacher-led, peer-led, or independent)?	Task Consideration: What instructional arrangement will best address this gap (teacher-led, peer-led, or independent)?	Task Consideration: What instructional arrangement will best address this gap (teacher-led, peer-led, or independent)?
Text–Task Suitability: Does the proposed text align with the proposed task?	Text–Task Suitability: Does the proposed text align with the proposed task?	Text–Task Suitability: Does the proposed text align with the proposed task?
<i>If yes, finalize decision and monitor progress toward identified learning intentions. If no, return to task consideration.</i>	<i>If yes, finalize decision and monitor progress toward learning intentions. If no, return to text consideration.</i>	<i>If yes, finalize decision and monitor progress toward learning intentions. If no, return to text and task considerations.</i>

Source: Fisher, Frey, and Lapp (2016).

sufficient. Close reading affords students with the gift of time to linger with a piece of text. While we have known for decades that multiple readings are essential for deep understanding, in practice, teachers have rarely afforded students with the time to do so. Some of the greatest gains we have witnessed in our own classrooms have been with students who have otherwise struggled as readers.

Reading comprehension is not a skill that exists in a vacuum between the reader and the text immediately in front of her; it also hinges on the accumulation of texts and experiences that she has been exposed to.

There has been debate about the role of activating prior knowledge in a close reading. Reading comprehension is not a skill that exists in a vacuum between the reader and the text immediately in front of her; it also hinges on the accumulation of the many texts and experiences that she has been exposed to throughout her lifetime (e.g., Rosenblatt, 2003). Therefore, a competent reader links her prior knowledge to the new information she is experiencing. We believe that thoughtful reading teachers must encourage students to analyze, make judgments, synthesize across multiple sources of information, formulate opinions, and create new products. To do this, they should be integrating what they have learned from the text with their prior knowledge and experiences. But we share the concern that, in too many cases, the rush to engage students in these critical thinking skills has meant that relatively little time is allocated for eyes on the text. Instead, after extensive pre-teaching of the content of the text by the teacher, the text is all too often given a quick once over. In these cases, true integration doesn't take place; instead, students are mostly drawing on what they already know. It's hard to make forward progress when you're mostly just treading water.

If students are going to access complex texts, they must be given the time to read and reread, to respond to questions that encourage them to return to the text, and to discuss their ideas in the company of others. A strong textual foundation also makes it possible for them to engage in critical thinking skills. It's analogous to a ladder: It doesn't matter how tall the ladder is if the lower rungs are not solid. In our own classrooms, we are witnessing what is happening with our students who struggle to read. We are finding that spending more time on the textual foundations—the lower rungs of the ladder—is making it possible for them to analyze, evaluate, and create.

Developing readers must apprentice to the kinds of problem-solving strategies that expert readers use when their comprehension breaks down. In part, this occurs when their teachers model, as we will discuss in the next chapter. But students also need to practice what they have been taught. When it comes to using complex text, teachers should expect comprehension to break down regularly, and they should seize the opportunities these breakdowns present. These are ideal for showing students how problem-solving comprehension strategies are summoned so that, over time, they become a part of their repertoire as skilled readers (Afflerbach, Pearson, & Paris, 2008). Simply said, this is how students will develop the reading and thinking skills required in the

Florida B.E.S.T. Standards. Consider, as an example, the grade 3 expectation that students “explain a theme and how it develops, using details, in a literary text” (Florida Department of Education, 2020, p. 13). If the texts lack complexity, the key ideas and details will be obvious and students will not make errors; thus, no learning can occur. By using complex texts, in this case a text that has key ideas that are less obvious, students can learn to notice the details that eventually allow them to uncover the information. Will they get it right the first time? Probably not. They need intentional instruction, including the access points that we describe in this book.

► Accessing Complex Texts Through a Gradual Release of Responsibility

For students to access complex texts, they need intentional instruction that provides them with *access* to deep comprehension. In this book, we’ve identified five “access points,” that is, five ways to intentionally guide students’ comprehension of complex text. The framework that allows for the implementation of this type of intentional instruction is known as *gradual release of responsibility* (e.g., Fisher & Frey, 2008; Pearson & Fielding, 1991).

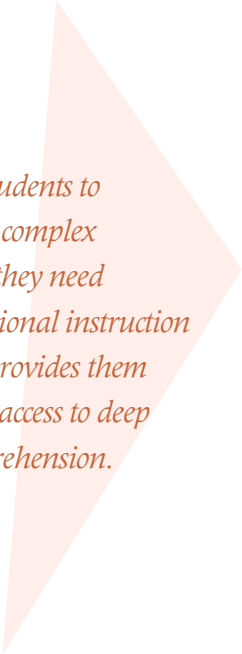
Our interpretation of the gradual release of responsibility model includes the following five phases. Importantly, these are not presented in a prescriptive order. Rather, they can be combined, and teachers can start anywhere. For example, a group of students might enter the classroom and be asked to complete a journal entry about the text the class is reading (independent) and then be invited to share their thinking with a peer (collaborative) while the teacher listens in to identify gaps in understanding so that she can model her thinking and then set the learning intention for the day. She could also identify gaps in understanding for her guided instruction and following her modeling, students may be asked to work independently or collaboratively again. The five components we look for in a lesson designed around the gradual release of responsibility framework include:

- *Learning intentions*: Teachers identify daily learning intentions based on grade-level standards and communicate the expected learning outcomes to students. Also, given the number of English language learners and standard English learners, teachers analyze the content to determine to students as well. Further, teachers identify the social aspects of learning

Video 1.3



Doug talks about the gradual release of responsibility.
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For students to access complex texts, they need intentional instruction that provides them with access to deep comprehension.

and communicate those expectations to students. The evidence for this component was summarized by Marzano, Pickering, and Pollock (2002).

- *Modeling*: Students are provided an example of the thinking required to complete each task. The teacher, not other students, shares his or her thinking while reading such that students get a glimpse inside the mind of an expert. As Duffy (2014) pointed out, “The only way to model thinking is to talk about how to do it. That is, we provide a verbal description of the thinking one does or, more accurately, an *approximation* of the thinking involved” (p. 11).
- *Guided instruction*: Through the strategic use of prompts, cues, and questions, teachers transfer some of the responsibility for learning to students. Typically, this occurs in needs-based groups of three to six students who have been purposefully selected based on formative assessment data (Avalos, Plasencia, Chavez, & Rascón, 2007/2008). Guided instruction can also occur with the whole class or with individual students as teachers address errors without telling students the answers.
- *Collaborative learning*: Students complete collaborative learning activities designed to provide them opportunities to use language and explore the content. The tasks must be structured to build on students’ knowledge and be differentiated so as to not cause stress for students who currently perform below grade level (Matthews & Kesner, 2003). As we will see in the chapter on collaborative learning, some tasks include individual accountability as part of the group interaction (Johnson, Johnson, & Holubec, 2008), which allows teachers to check for understanding.
- *Independent learning*: As part of the gradual release of responsibility, students must apply what they have learned, especially in new situations or contexts (Harvey & Chickie-Wolf, 2007). Although independent learning is the goal of education,

students are often assigned independent tasks for which they do not yet have the skills to complete alone. Some tasks, such as independent reading, writing prompts, and journaling, can occur in the classroom. Others, especially spiral review tasks, can be completed outside of the school day, either in an after-school program or at home.

► The Organization of Learning Expectations in Florida

As you may have noticed, we have quoted several Florida B.E.S.T. Standards in this chapter. Before we conclude this chapter, a brief overview of the organizational structure of these standards is warranted. Florida B.E.S.T. Standards feature four strands (p. 8): Foundations, Reading, Communication, and Vocabulary. But these strands are further divided into standards as follows:

- **Foundations:** This strand is divided into two standards: learning and applying foundational reading skills and applying foundational reading skills for secondary students needing reading interventions.
- **Reading:** This strand is divided into three standards: reading prose and poetry, reading informational text, and reading across genres.
- **Communication:** This strand is divided into five standards: communicating through writing, communicating orally, following conventions, researching, and creating and collaborating.
- **Vocabulary:** This strand has one standard: finding meaning.

Some of the standards contain clarifications. These are designed to help educators understand the language of the standard and to add details that are not included in the standards. For example, in second grade, in the area of reading informational texts, students are expected to “compare and contrast important details presented by two texts on the same topic or theme.”

This standard contains two clarifications:

Clarification 1: For literary texts, students can compare and contrast story elements such as characters, illustrations, and sequence of events.

Clarification 2: The different versions may be of the same or different formats.

Importantly, the standards (other than foundations) are designed for increased vertical alignment. In a given grade level, some of the words in a standard are bold, meaning that those ideas were not included in previous grade levels and thus should be the focus of instruction for students at that level. For example, the standard related to Perspective and Point of View can be analyzed vertically:

R.1.3 Perspective and Point of View	
ELA.12.R.1.3	Evaluate the development of character perspective, including conflicting perspectives.
ELA.11.R.1.3	Analyze the author's choices in using juxtaposition to define character perspective.
ELA.10.R.1.3	Analyze coming of age experiences reflected in a text and how the author represents conflicting perspectives.
ELA.9.R.1.3	Analyze the influence of narrator perspective on a text, explaining how the author creates irony or satire.
ELA.8.R.1.3	Analyze how an author develops and individualizes the perspectives of different characters.
ELA.7.R.1.3	Explain the influence of narrator(s), including unreliable narrator(s) , and/or shifts in point of view in a literary text.
ELA.6.R.1.3	Explain the influence of multiple narrators and/or shifts in point of view in a literary text.
ELA.5.R.1.3	Describe how an author develops a character's perspective in a literary text.
ELA.4.R.1.3	Identify the narrator's point of view and explain the difference between a narrator's point of view and character perspective in a literary text.
ELA.3.R.1.3	Explain different characters' perspectives in a literary text.
ELA.2.R.1.3	Identify different characters' perspectives in a literary text.
ELA.1.R.1.3	Explain who is telling the story using context clues.
ELA.K.R.1.3	Explain the roles of author and illustrator of a story.

Source: Florida Department of Education (2020, p. 14).

There are other standards that repeat the same expectation across several grades. For example, the standard on finding meaning, part of the vocabulary stand, for students in Grades K, 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 reads: “Use grade-level academic vocabulary appropriately in speaking and writing.”

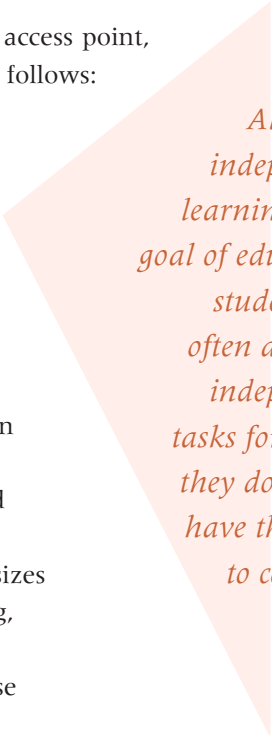
Similarly, Grades 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12 all have the same standard related to paraphrasing and summarizing: “Paraphrase content from grade-level texts.”

Both of these standards, and several others, highlight the fact that access to complex texts is critical if students are to succeed in Florida. The remainder of this book focuses on the access points teachers can use to ensure that students do, in fact, access complex texts.

► **Organization of *Rigorous Reading, Florida Edition***

In the remainder of this book, we describe in detail each access point, always through the lens of complex texts. The chapters are as follows:

- Chapter 2, “Access Point One: Modeling and Learning Intentions,” describes the first access point—establishing the expectations or objectives of the lesson—and explains the ways that teachers can model their critical thinking for students as they read. In this chapter, we discuss the use of think-alouds and interactive shared readings, with special attention on the modeling of annotation skills.
- Chapter 3, “Access Point Two: Close and Scaffolded Reading Instruction,” describes the second access point. The practice of close reading, which emphasizes repeated readings, discussion, and critical thinking, requires scaffolded instruction. Text-dependent questions, prompts, and cues form the basis of these scaffolds and provide students with the teacher-supported experiences they need to read increasingly complex texts.



Although independent learning is the goal of education, students are often assigned independent tasks for which they do not yet have the skills to complete alone.

The intention behind effective instruction is for students to expand their capacity to deeply understand these kinds of complex texts outside the company of their teachers. It is this understanding that lies at the heart of college and career readiness.

- Chapter 4, “Access Point Three: Collaborative Conversations,” describes the third access point. These peer-led learning experiences require tasks that encourage students to interact and to apply what they have learned through close reading to develop deeper understandings of complex texts. In this chapter, we discuss a number of ways that teachers can facilitate student-to-student interactions, including literature circles, discussion roundtables, reciprocal teaching, and collaborative strategic reading.
- Chapter 5, “Access Point Four: An Independent Reading Staircase,” focuses on students’ ability to climb the figurative reading staircase as they apply what they have learned and read increasingly complex texts independently. While they may be reading individually, they are not reading alone, and well-designed instruction is essential in this phase. This chapter explains how to craft this instruction through the use of texts that build background knowledge and through peer-conferencing strategies that foster metacognitive awareness.
- Chapter 6, “Access Point Five: Assessing Students’ Understanding,” concerns itself with demonstrating understanding and assessing performance. These practices are not only for the teacher to use when measuring mastery but also for students to use to propel future learning. This chapter focuses on what occurs after reading, including feedback and assessment.

Doug’s and Nancy’s teachers that you met in the opening of this chapter, however well meaning, didn’t know how to use these access points. Doug’s teacher released cognitive responsibility much too suddenly, and he was left to try to find an outside source of information because he didn’t know how to locate it within the text. Nancy’s teacher never released any of the responsibility and did too much of the cognitive heavy lifting for her students. The teacher’s assessments focused on the wrong measures, and she

never did figure out that Nancy hadn't read the book. In using a range of access points, teachers can avoid these all-too-common pitfalls and balance support with challenge.

► Summary

One method for measuring text complexity is quantitative and relies on the number and types of words in the text; this measure is useful for situating a text within a grade band. However, this method of measurement does not uncover the qualitative values that render a text more or less complex. Analyzing a text qualitatively gives us insight into *what* to teach. The third facet of complexity concerns the reader, which informs *how* we teach complex texts. As students read these texts closely, they need support and instruction on how to identify textual elements and mine texts for understanding, as well as on how to use comprehension strategies to repair meaning when it becomes muddled. The intention behind effective instruction is for students to expand their capacity to deeply understand these kinds of complex texts outside the company of their teachers. It is this understanding that lies at the heart of college and career readiness. By equipping students to take on an ever-widening range of texts, we afford them their independence and extend their understanding of and influence on the biological, social, and physical world around them.