English and Communication Benchmarks, Grades 4 – 12

UNDERSTAND TEXT COMPLEXITY (T)
TEXT COMPLEXITY (T.1)

As students progress through the grade levels, they should engage with increasingly complex texts that represent important cultural, historical and societal themes and ideas. Several considerations should guide educators in selecting texts for instruction. Students must be exposed to the greatest works of literature in English and other literature in translation to understand not only our common literary heritage, but also to gain an appreciation for the rich literary traditions of many cultures. Educators can evaluate the complexity and importance of texts by considering ways in which students' assigned readings meet expectations for complexity, rigor and exposure to important fundamental works in American and world literature.

Because so many text elements and instructional considerations impact the selection of texts, the Text Complexity descriptions presented here **are not attached to grade spans, but rather presented as a continuum that may inform text selections.**[1]

Note that not all elements described in each of the categories will necessarily occur together at each level. For example, a text may be complex because its ideas are subtle and implicit, despite its using relatively simple vocabulary and syntax.

The elements of text complexity described are:

T.1.1 Informational Text

    T.1.1.1 Topics
    T.1.1.2 Purpose for the Text
    T.1.1.3 Organizational Structures
    T.1.1.4 Connections among Ideas
    T.1.1.5 Development of Ideas
    T.1.1.6 Style
    T.1.1.7 Vocabulary

T.1.2 Persuasive Text

    T.1.2.1 Topics
    T.1.2.2 Purpose: Claim

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[1] This scale is based on the progression provided by ACT in *Reading between the Lines: What the ACT Reveals about College Readiness*, January 2006. In addition, the progressions are based on the six-point rating scale used to analyze the complexity of reading passages as reported in Achieve's report entitled, *Aligned Expectations? A Closer Look at College Admissions and Placement Tests*.

T.1.2.3 Organizational Structures

T.1.2.4 Connections among Ideas

T.1.2.5 Development of Ideas and Argument

T.1.2.6 Style

T.1.2.7 Vocabulary

T.1.3 Literary Text

T.1.3.1 Topics

T.1.3.2 Purpose: Theme(s)

T.1.3.3 Organizational Plot Structures

T.1.3.4 Connections among Ideas and Literary Elements

T.1.3.5 Development of Ideas (Plot, Character, Setting)

T.1.3.6 Style

T.1.3.7 Vocabulary

These elements are described in greater detail below.

UNCOMPLICATED TEXTS (U)	MORE CHALLENGING TEXTS (MC)	SOMEWHAT COMPLEX TEXTS (SC)	COMPLEX TEXTS (C)
T.1.1 Informational Text			
T.1.1.1 Topics			
T.1.1.1.U Topics may be familiar, related to students' experiences and address concrete topics. *For example, the informational books by Patricia Lauber address topics in earth science and biology, such as volcanoes, dinosaurs, or dogs, or informational books by David Macauley, author of The Way Things Work, explain how many everyday machines work.*	**T.1.1.1.MC** Topics may be familiar to students, yet include some abstract ideas. *For example, consider James Herriot's autobiographical books on working as a veterinarian or biographies from the reissued Landmark Series.*	**T.1.1.1.SC** Topics may include abstract ideas and address topics that are somewhat unfamiliar to students. *For example, consider works by Henry David Thoreau. NOTE: For additional examples, see the ALA's list of "Outstanding Books for the College Bound and Lifelong Learners."*	**T.1.1.1.C** Topics may be unfamiliar to students and removed from their day-to-day experiences and address abstract scientific or social issues. *For example, consider the autobiographical essay The Night Country by Loren Eiseley, Dava Sobel's Longitude: The True Story of Lone Genius Who Solved the Greatest Scientific Problem of His Time or essays on biography by Lewis Thomas. NOTE: For additional examples, see the ALA's list of "Outstanding Books for the College Bound and Lifelong Learners."*
T.1.1.2 Purpose for the Text			
T.1.1.2.U The text's purpose is obvious,	**T.1.1.2.MC** The text's purpose is clear	**T.1.1.2.SC** The text's purpose may be	**T.1.1.2.C** The text's purpose may be

UNCOMPLICATED TEXTS (U)	MORE CHALLENGING TEXTS (MC)	SOMEWHAT COMPLEX TEXTS (SC)	COMPLEX TEXTS (C)
usually stated explicitly and usually revealed at the beginning of the text and/or within the title.	and tends to be revealed early in the text, but may be conveyed with some subtlety.	implicit and may be revealed over the entirety of the text.	implicit or subtle, is sometimes ambiguous and may be revealed over the entirety of the text.
T.1.1.3 Organizational Structures			
T.1.1.3.U Organizational structures are simple and conventional.	**T.1.1.3.MC** Organizational structures may progress in a step-by-step manner that is easy to follow.	**T.1.1.3.SC** Organizational structures may be more involved, shifting back and forth among issues, for example.	**T.1.1.3.C** Organizational structures may be elaborate and sometimes unconventional, and may vary within a text.
T.1.1.4 Connections among Ideas			
T.1.1.4.U Connections among ideas are made explicit in a straightforward and clear manner.	**T.1.1.4.MC** Connections among ideas are sometimes implicit and made with some subtlety.	**T.1.1.4.SC** Connections among ideas are somewhat complex and subtle and at times implicit, and require inferences from prior knowledge.	**T.1.1.4.C.a** Connections among ideas are often implicit, requiring substantial inferences from prior knowledge.
			T.1.1.4.C.b Connections among ideas are complex, including subtle connections which can be deeply embedded within the text.
T.1.1.5 Development of Ideas			
T.1.1.5.U.a Ideas are developed in a clear and straightforward way.	**T.1.1.5.MC.a** Ideas are developed in a clear and straightforward way.	**T.1.1.5.SC.a** Idea development is accomplished in increasingly subtle ways.	**T.1.1.5.C.a** Idea development is accomplished in complex and sophisticated or subtle ways.
T.1.1.5.U.b The text includes basic details and a limited amount of data, which may be repeated for emphasis.	**T.1.1.5.MC.b** The text includes a significant amount of detail.	**T.1.1.5.SC.b** The text includes numerous concepts, conveyed through a substantial amount of data that may be reported in varied ways (e.g., through detailed graphs, charts and tables).	**T.1.1.5.C.b** The text is dense and ideas are conveyed through a substantial amount of data that may be reported in varied ways (e.g., through complex, multifaceted graphs, charts and tables).
	T.1.1.5.MC.c The text contains more – and more detailed – supporting data to illustrate ideas.	**T.1.1.5.SC.c** The text embeds explana-tions of processes or events.	**T.1.1.5.C.c** The text embeds intricate explanations of processes or events.
T.1.1.6 Style			
T.1.1.6.U.a The style is plain and accessible.	**T.1.1.6.MC.a** The style is accessible and clearly supports the purpose and topic of the text.	**T.1.1.6.SC.a** The style is advanced and sophisticated; may not be immediately accessible to the reader or may be intentionally plain for effect.	**T.1.1.6.C.a** The style is intricate or elegant in its simplicity.

UNCOMPLICATED TEXTS (U)	MORE CHALLENGING TEXTS (MC)	SOMEWHAT COMPLEX TEXTS (SC)	COMPLEX TEXTS (C)
T.1.1.6.U.b The language includes simple syntax.	**T.1.1.6.MC.b** The language includes simple and some complex syntax.	**T.1.1.6.SC.b** The language includes more complex syntactical structures.	**T.1.1.6.C.b** The language includes complex syntactical structures.
T.1.1.6.U.c The author may employ literary devices in relatively simple ways to engage a younger audience. *For example, the use of personification or a story structure to provide factual information.*	**T.1.1.6.MC.c** The author employs uncomplicated rhetorical devices to engage the audience and make the main idea clear. *For example, employing parallelism or repetition.*	**T.1.1.6.SC.c** The author employs rhetorical devices to guide readers through somewhat complex ideas. *For example, using rhetorical questions to draw attention to an idea or to emphasize a conclusion.*	**T.1.1.6.C.c** The author employs rhetorical devices purposefully and skillfully to guide the reader through complex ideas. *For example, using antithesis, showing a clear, contrasting relationship between two ideas or employing extended analogies to make a complex idea accessible.*
T.1.1.7 Vocabulary			
T.1.1.7.U Vocabulary is mostly familiar, and, often, critical terms are defined within the same sentence as the term.	**T.1.1.7.MC** Vocabulary includes some unfamiliar terminology, that is often defined with clear -context clues proximate to the term or in a footnote. *For example, a scientific article whose audience is the general public, such as Popular Science.*	**T.1.1.7.SC** Vocabulary includes unfamiliar terminology that may or may not be defined contextually at the paragraph or passage level, or may be included in a glossary. *For example, a school textbook whose purpose is to teach an un-informed reader about a topic.*	**T.1.1.7.C** Vocabulary includes specialized vocabulary that is crucial to an understanding of the material that may not be specifically defined within the text, but assumes prior knowledge. *For example, a trade book authored by an expert in the topic.*
T.1.2 Persuasive Text			
T.1.2.1 Topics			
T.1.2.1.U Topics may be familiar, related to students' experiences and address concrete topics. *For example, consider print or on-line advertisements for a product.*	**T.1.2.1.MC** Topics may be familiar to students, yet include some abstract ideas. *For example, look at editorials from a local newspaper or essays in a book that provide opposing viewpoints on topics of interest to students.*	**T.1.2.1.SC** Topics may include abstract ideas and arguments and address topics that are somewhat unfamiliar to students. *For example, consider editorials from the Wall Street Journal or the New York Times.*	**T.1.2.1.C** Topics may be unfamiliar to students and removed from their day-to-day experiences and address abstract scientific or social issues. *For example, consider a satirical essay like Swift's "A Modest Proposal" that makes an argument about the role of a government in treating its citizens; persuasive essays such as "The Prevention of Literature" by George Orwell or "Discourse on the Sciences and the Arts" by Jean-Jacques Rousseau; or a book that makes an argument, such as Jared Diamond's Guns, Germs and Steel: The Fates of*

UNCOMPLICATED TEXTS (U)	MORE CHALLENGING TEXTS (MC)	SOMEWHAT COMPLEX TEXTS (SC)	COMPLEX TEXTS (C)
			Human Societies, which explains why some societies become rich and powerful while others remain poor and powerless.
T.1.2.2 Purpose: Claim			
T.1.2.2.U The claim is obvious, usually stated explicitly and usually revealed at the beginning of the text and/or within the title.	**T.1.2.2.MC** The claim is clear and tends to be revealed early in the text, but may be conveyed with some subtlety.	**T.1.2.2.SC** The claim may be implicit and may be revealed over the entirety of the text.	**T.1.2.2.C** The claim may be implicit or subtle, is sometimes ambiguous and may be revealed over the entirety of the text.
T.1.2.3 Organizational Structures			
T.1.2.3.U Organizational structures are simple, conventional and predictable.	**T.1.2.3.MC** Organizational structures progress in a step-by-step manner that is easy to anticipate and follow.	**T.1.2.3.SC** Organizational structures are more involved, less predictable.	**T.1.2.3.C** Organizational structures are elaborate and sometimes unconventional.
T.1.2.4 Connections among Ideas			
T.1.2.4.U.a Connections among ideas are explicit and straightforward.	**T.1.2.4.MC.a** Connections among ideas are occasionally implicit.	**T.1.2.4.SC.a** Connections among ideas are sometimes implicit.	**T.1.2.4.C.a** Connections among ideas are often implicit.
	T.1.2.4.MC.b Connections among ideas are mostly but not entirely straightforward and not necessarily subtle.	**T.1.2.4.SC.b** Connections among ideas have some complexity and may be subtle.	**T.1.2.4.C.b** Connections among ideas are complex, including subtle connections which can be deeply embedded within the text.
T.1.2.4.U.b Connections among ideas are explicit in the relatively uncomplicated links between evidence, inferences and claims.	**T.1.2.4.MC.c** Connections among ideas are made explicitly or implicitly to link evidence, inferences and claims.	**T.1.2.4.SC.c** Connections among ideas are made explicitly or implicitly to link evidence, inferences and claims.	**T.1.2.4.C.c** Connections among ideas are made subtly to connect complex evidence and inferences with sophisticated claims.
T.1.2.5 Development of Ideas and Argument			
T.1.2.5.U.a The text addresses basic concepts.	**T.1.2.5.MC.a** The text includes significant amount of detail.	**T.1.2.5.SC.a** Idea development is accomplished in increasingly subtle ways.	**T.1.2.5.C.a** Idea development is accomplished in complex and sophisticated or subtle ways.
T.1.2.5.U.b Idea development is clear and straightforward.	**T.1.2.5.MC.b** The text contains more—and more detailed—relevant data and specific examples to support the claim.	**T.1.2.5.SC.b** The text includes numerous concepts, conveyed through a substantial amount of data that may be reported in varied ways (e.g., through detailed graphs, charts, tables, testimonials) to support the claim.	**T.1.2.5.C.b** The text includes a sizable amount of information, conveyed through data and a range of relevant and significant evidence to support the claim.
T.1.2.5.U.c The text contains a limited	**T.1.2.5.MC.c** The author anticipates and	**T.1.2.5.SC.c** The author anticipates and	**T.1.2.5.C.c** The author anticipates and

UNCOMPLICATED TEXTS (U)	MORE CHALLENGING TEXTS (MC)	SOMEWHAT COMPLEX TEXTS (SC)	COMPLEX TEXTS (C)
amount of relevant data or specific examples, which may be repeated to support the claim.	addresses counter-claims.	addresses counter-claims.	addresses counter-claims effectively and in depth.
T.1.2.6 Style			
T.1.2.6.U.a The style is plain and accessible.	**T.1.2.6.MC.a** The style is accessible and clearly supports the purpose and topic of the text.	**T.1.2.6.SC.a** Style is advanced and sophisticated; may not be immediately accessible to the reader or may be intentionally plain for effect.	**T.1.2.6.C.a** Style is intricate or elegant in its directness and simplicity.
T.1.2.6.U.b Language includes primarily simple syntax.	**T.1.2.6.MC.b** Language includes simple and some complex syntax.	**T.1.2.6.SC.b** Language includes complex syntactical structures.	**T.1.2.6.C.b** Language includes complex syntactical structures.
T.1.2.7 Vocabulary			
T.1.2.7.U Vocabulary is mostly familiar, but can include some context-dependent words.	**T.1.2.7.MC** Vocabulary includes some unfamiliar, context-dependent words, but these can usually be defined with in-sentence context clues and may not be crucial to comprehension of the passage.	**T.1.2.7.SC** Vocabulary includes unfamiliar context-dependent words and phrases, which may be defined by an understanding of the context of the word or phrase, such as at the paragraph or passage level.	**T.1.2.7.C** Vocabulary includes specialized vocabulary and context-dependent, nuanced words and phrases.
T.1.3 Literary Text			
T.1.3.1 Topics			
T.1.3.1.U Topics may be familiar and related to students' experiences and/or fit into a familiar genre. *For example, consider a fable or a folk tale that explains why something is the way it is – such as how the leopard got its stripes – or a novel, like Beverly Cleary's Ramona series, that describes the familiar situations of family life.*	**T.1.3.1.MC** Topics may describe experiences that are familiar to students, yet be removed in terms of setting. *For example, consider Mark Twain's Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, which describes a young boy who believes that sometimes he must ignore the rules to do the right thing.*	**T.1.3.1.SC** Topics may describe unfamiliar experiences and be removed in time and place from the students' own experiences. *For example, short stories of Flannery O'Connor that describe flawed characters and suggest racial and class tension, or novels by John Steinbeck, such as The Grapes of Wrath, that focus on topics of social injustice.*	**T.1.3.1.C** Topics may be unfamiliar to students and removed from their day-to-day experiences. *For example, consider novels in which the plot is somewhat secondary to the philosophical introspection of the author, such as To the Lighthouse by Virginia Woolf, The Stranger by Albert Camus or comedies by the playwright Molière.*
T.1.3.2 Purpose: Theme(s)			
T.1.3.2.U.a Theme is obvious and usually revealed early in the text and/or the title.	**T.1.3.2.MC.a** Theme is clear but may be conveyed with some subtlety, and tends to be revealed early in the text.	**T.1.3.2.SC.a** Theme may be implicit or subtle, is sometimes ambiguous and may be revealed over the entirety of the text.	**T.1.3.2.C.a** Theme may be implicit or subtle, is sometimes ambiguous and may be revealed over the entirety of the text (e.g., through allusions to history, literature or culture).

UNCOMPLICATED TEXTS (U)	MORE CHALLENGING TEXTS (MC)	SOMEWHAT COMPLEX TEXTS (SC)	COMPLEX TEXTS (C)
T.1.3.2.U.b Theme is uncomplicated by other motifs or topics.	**T.1.3.2.MC.b** The text is complicated by more than one theme.	**T.1.3.2.SC.b** The text often includes multiple themes.	**T.1.3.2.C.b** The text often includes multiple themes.
T.1.3.3 Organizational Plot Structures			
T.1.3.3.U Plot structures are simple, conventional and events may be predictable; may be largely told in order of the events.	**T.1.3.3.MC** Plot structures progress in a step-by-step, often chronological order that is easy to anticipate and follow.	**T.1.3.3.SC** Plot structures are more intricate, events are less predictable; may include flashbacks or events told out of sequence.	**T.1.3.3.C** Plot structures are elaborate and sometimes unconventional. Setting (place and time) may include multiple shifts (e.g., complex shifts in point of view, flashback, anecdotes or stream of consciousness) leading to more complex structures to support those shifts.
T.1.3.4 Connections among Ideas and Literary Elements			
T.1.3.4.U Connections among ideas are explicit and straightforward.	**T.1.3.4.MC.a** Connections among ideas are sometimes implicit.	**T.1.3.4.SC.a** Connections among ideas are often implicit.	**T.1.3.4.C.a** Connections among ideas are implicit.
	T.1.3.4.MC.b Connections among ideas have some complexity and may be subtle.	**T.1.3.4.SC.b** Connections among ideas are subtle.	**T.1.3.4.C.b** Connections among ideas are complex, including subtle connections which can be deeply embedded within the text.
T.1.3.5 Development of Ideas (Plot, Character, Setting)			
T.1.3.5.U.a Development of plot, character and setting is clear and straightforward.			**T.1.3.5.C.a** Development of plot, character and setting is accomplished in complex and sophisticated or subtle ways.
T.1.3.5.U.b The text includes moderate amount of detail and information, some of which may be stated explicitly rather than implied.	**T.1.3.5.MC.a** The text includes details which are told both explicitly and implied.	**T.1.3.5.SC.a** The text includes significant amount of detail and information.	**T.1.3.5.C.b** The text includes substantial amount of detail and information, which may be presented using few words through a sophisticated use of complex, subtle literary devices.
T.1.3.5.U.c The text presents straightforward details about and interactions between relatively one-dimensional characters.	**T.1.3.5.MC.b** The text presents details about characters, both through direct description and through dialogue and interactions among characters.	**T.1.3.5.SC.b** The text may feature somewhat subtle character details and complex interactions between multi-dimensional characters.	**T.1.3.5.C.c** The author develops multi-faceted characters through sophisticated or subtle devices and features complex and subtle interactions between char-acters.
T.1.3.5.U.d The plot is conveyed by a clear point of view.	**T.1.3.5.MC.c** Plot is conveyed by a clear point of view.	**T.1.3.5.SC.c** The text may be told in multiple points of view, but those viewpoints are clearly indicated.	**T.1.3.5.C.d** The plot is conveyed by a point of view which may be an unreliable narrator or may be told in multiple points

UNCOMPLICATED TEXTS (U)	MORE CHALLENGING TEXTS (MC)	SOMEWHAT COMPLEX TEXTS (SC)	COMPLEX TEXTS (C)
			of view, with shifts in viewpoint sometimes not always clearly indicated.
T.1.3.6 Style			
T.1.3.6.U.a The style is familiar and accessible.	**T.1.3.6.MC.a** Style is advanced and sophisticated and somewhat elaborate.	**T.1.3.6.SC.a** Style is elaborate or plain for effect.	**T.1.3.6.C.a** Style is intricate or elegant in its simplicity.
T.1.3.6.U.b Language includes primarily simple syntax.	**T.1.3.6.MC.b** Language includes challenging syntax.	**T.1.3.6.SC.b** Language includes challenging syntax.	**T.1.3.6.C.b** Language includes complex syntactical structures.
T.1.3.6.U.c The author employs stylistic elements (e.g., implicit, layered or subtle uses of diction, dialect, imagery, syntax, selection of details) to establish mood or convey an attitude toward the subject.	**T.1.3.6.MC.c** The author employs stylistic elements (e.g., implicit, layered or subtle uses of diction, dialect, imagery, syntax, selection of details) to establish mood or convey an attitude toward the subject.	**T.1.3.6.SC.c** The author employs stylistic elements (e.g., implicit, layered or subtle uses of diction, dialect, imagery, syntax, selection of details) to establish mood or convey an attitude toward the subject.	**T.1.3.6.C.c** The author employs stylistic elements (e.g., implicit, layered or subtle uses of diction, dialect, imagery, syntax, selection of details) to establish mood or convey an attitude toward the subject.
T.1.3.7 Vocabulary			
T.1.3.7.U.a Vocabulary is mostly familiar, but can include some context-dependent words.	**T.1.3.7.MC.a** Vocabulary includes some unfamiliar, context-dependent words, which can usually be defined using in-sentence context clues.	**T.1.3.7.SC.a** Vocabulary includes unfamiliar, context-dependent words and phrases, which may be defined by an understanding of the context of the word or phrases, such as at the paragraph or passage level.	**T.1.3.7.C.a** Vocabulary includes highly context-dependent and nuanced words and phrases.
T.1.3.7.U.b The author employs a limited number of literary devices (e.g., metaphor, simile or hyperbole; metaphors and symbols have one-to-one correspondence).	**T.1.3.7.MC.b** The author makes moderate use of relatively simple figurative language.	**T.1.3.7.SC.b** The author makes use of figurative language beyond clichés; figurative language may be used to present important information.	**T.1.3.7.C.b** The author makes generous use of ambiguous language and literary devices.
T.1.3.7.U.c Levels of meaning are straightforward.	**T.1.3.7.MC.c** Words and phrases can be understood on more than one level.	**T.1.3.7.SC.c** Words and phrases can be understood on multiple levels.	**T.1.3.7.C.c** Levels of meaning are multi-faceted.