

Which Text Is the Most Complex?

Student/Class Goal

Students want to be aware of what level of reading is required to enter college or postsecondary training. They will build metacognition skills in this area as they navigate complex directions and work with reading samples from college entrance tests.

Outcome (lesson objective)

Students navigate through complex directions, assess complexity of college entrance test reading samples, record observations on a given evaluative rubric, and use critical thinking skills to synthesize their experience with complex text.

Time Frame

Three 1 hour sessions

Standard *Read with Understanding*

NRS EFL 6

Purpose	Benchmarks	Word Knowledge	Benchmarks	Comprehension	Benchmarks
Purpose for reading	6.1	Decoding skills	6.3	Strategy use	6.11
Select text	6.2	Word parts	6.4	Text structural elements	
		Context clues	6.5	Genres	
		Reference materials		Literary analysis	
		Word relationships	6.7	Drawing conclusions	6.15
		Content vocabulary		Making connections	6.16
		Figurative language	5.9		
		Fluency	6.10		

Materials

SESSION 1

Whiteboard or chart paper

Readability Umbrella Handout

Word How-To Handout

Computer with projection system (or room to group students around a computer for modeling)

Computers with student access to 1 file: *Microsoft Word 2003 Help on Readability*

Index cards (preferably 4 x 6)

SESSION 2

Readability Rubric Handout

Computers with student access to 3 files: *Reading Passage 1*, *Reading Passage 2*, and *Reading Passage 3*

Handouts of 3 Reading Passages named above for student review

SESSION 3

Critical Thinking and Reading D-E-S Handout

Getting Ready for College Level Reading Handout

Learner Prior Knowledge

Students need to have basic computer skills. This should include the ability to open and work with Word and PDF documents as well as minimizing and maximizing files as needed. Perhaps pair students for peer assistance as needed. Students could benefit from some prior formal instruction in reading strategies specific to navigating text/graphic format directions in order to complete a task. Determine if students have any experience with using rubrics in the past and in what context they were used. Students may have used various kinds of rubrics but not be familiar with the term itself.

Instructional Activities

SESSION 1 ACTIVITY – What is Readability?

Step 1 - Write the word “readability” on the board or chart paper. Define the word as *the ability required to read a piece of text*. For the next three sessions, we are going to consider just how readable some materials really are. Our focus will be two-fold: (1) Do I have the ability to navigate complex directions? (2) How complex are the types of reading passages and questions presented on college level entrance tests?

Teacher Note The focus here is integrating a number of complex reading-based tasks – from navigating the readability directions to using the evaluative rubric to answering comprehension questions on the COMPASS reading passages.

Step 2 - Pass out the *Readability Umbrella* handout. Note the questions under the umbrella. Have students brainstorm what other questions to ask/are needed to read a piece of complex text. Record these under the umbrella on the board/chart paper/handout.

Step 3 - Explain that the first 4 questions under the umbrella relate to a specific tool used to rate readability of Word documents. These ratings are called the Flesch Reading Ease and the Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level. (See teacher resource links for more information on Flesch and Kincaid and the history of this very popular though sometimes questioned rating system).

Step 4 - Provide students with the *Word How-To* Handout as they may want to take notes throughout your model. Explain that these how-to directions are examples of complex text (sometimes called dense because of the vocabulary and graphic integration). Any college student may have to navigate this kind of text to accomplish an unfamiliar task. Demonstrate a Think Aloud Reading Strategy to model what reading strategies you would use to navigate through the complex directions (think of strategies you have introduced in prior sessions to the students; if you have a projection system that attaches to a computer, this is the time to use it ☺). Focus on the purpose: Students may have more information than they need in the *Word How-To*, so they need to use critical thinking skills to successfully reach their goal. The goal is turning on and using the readability statistics on your computer. Complete the model by successfully generating a statistics report on-screen, following the handout steps (you could generate this model report on any Word document you want – the purpose is for students to see how you approach a task that requires technical reading skills).

Step 5 - Briefly discuss the elements of each section of the report (counts, averages, and readability). Review the meaning of the Flesch Reading Ease and Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level. Discuss how this report information might be helpful to a college student (i.e. I have to write an essay that is 200 words or less or I want to know if I am writing at an appropriate level for my readers. Note that the *Word How-To* handout suggests that when writing for a general audience, the writer should aim for about a 7th to 8th grade level.)

Step 6 - Provide students with access to computers (preferably in pairs) and note cards. Have them access a Word file that you have set up with only the *Word How-To* directions in it. Provide assistance and suggest strategies as students work to complete the task of running a readability report on the document. Once they run the report, each student should accurately record all the information from the report on a note card. The note cards can then be checked for accuracy. Each student should bring his/her note card to the next session for reference and review.

Step 7 - For extension/additional practice, provide students with other Word files to practice with readability statistic report generation. Students should feel confident with this task in order to complete Session 2 rubric activities.

SESSION 2 ACTIVITY – Refine your Conduct A Readability Review (Rubric Style)

Step 1 - Review the note card information from yesterday's readability reports on the *Word How-To* handout. The purpose is to verify accuracy of students' recorded information. For example, I found that Ease = 66.9 and Grade Level = 8.4 for the *Word How-To* document the way I had it formatted. If students have any discrepancies, go back to the computer model and generate the report on screen from your master file for verification. Note how discrepancies might have occurred. Discuss the students' experience with navigating through complex directions to complete this task. What challenges did they face? What could have made the task easier? What reading strategies proved helpful in completing this task?

Step 2 - Pass out a *Readability Rubric* to each student. Preview the rubric (title, subheadings, information to be completed, etc.). Explain that this rubric will help to organize readability statistics from the index cards and from three new passages. This rubric will also allow students to record personal evaluations about each of the passages.

Step 3 - Guide students in accurately transferring necessary information from the index card to the *Readability Rubric*. Note that not all information from the card will be utilized in the rubric. Guide them in discussing the personal evaluation portion of the rubric for the Example Passage (3 statements with 1-10 evaluative scale). Note that the last column cannot be completed until all passages have been assessed.

Step 4 - Students will now generate readability reports for three new Word documents. The purpose of this activity is for students to use technology and gain confidence with a skill acquired from reading dense text. Each of these documents contains

a text selection typical of what you might find on the COMPASS college entrance test. These passages are directly from the COMPASS site <http://www.act.org/compass/tests/reading.html>. They are of similar length but varying difficulty and topical interest. Demonstrate how they can access these 3 documents on your computers (perhaps through shortcuts on the desktop of each computer).

Teacher Note Unless you want students to navigate through how to do readability statistics on a portion of a document, keep the Reading Passages being used for readability reports in separate document files. Consider setting up these files and putting shortcuts on the computer desktops for students to easily access 4 different Word files: 1 on the *Word How-To* directions as well as one file for each of the 3 reading passages. If students are more advanced with computer skills and want more challenge in this activity, they could perhaps copy/paste each of the selections from the original PDF file into separate Word documents on their own. If students are overwhelmed with generating all parts of the rubric for all 4 reading passages, reduce and adjust as fits your students.

Explain that they should generate an on-screen report on each document and record the necessary information on the rubric for that document; they will need to carefully select the pieces of information they need as they go. If they miss something, they might have to generate the report again.

Step 5 - Have students work in pairs at computers. Guide students in accessing the three Word documents and accurately recording the necessary rubric information. Encourage them to utilize the *Word How-To* handout from Session 1 to refresh their memory on generating the reports. As students complete the readability reports, review their work.

Step 6 - Provide students with handouts of the three passages. Assign the students to carefully read each of the passages to the best of their ability. They should note what they find easy or difficult about the reading for each passage. Then, they should complete the 4 personal evaluation columns on the rubric for each passage using the scale from 1 to 10; with 1 being strongly disagree and 10 being strongly agree. In the next session, we will be critically thinking about the reading passages and the reported information on each one. Students should bring the passages and the completed rubric to the next session.

DAY 3 ACTIVITY – Critique of Readability

Step 1 - Review last session's rubric for completeness and accuracy as needed. On board or chart paper, list the names of the four reading passages. Give students a moment to discuss their rubrics with a partner and consider which text they think is the most complex. Then have students record their personal ranking of each passage on the board. Take a moment to summarize the results as shown on the board. In this session, students will critically connect with how we might extend beyond our rubric to consider other elements that are required for college reading success.

Step 2 - In order to conduct a high-quality critique, have students mentally "step-aside" from the details of the last two activities and focus on the big picture process of critically thinking that we have done about the reading process. Students have been accessing some thought processes that need to be defined and discussed in order to develop and strengthen their ability to think about their thinking (otherwise known as metacognition).

Give each student a *D-E-S* handout. Write the words "discriminate", "evaluate", and "synthesize" on the board or chart paper. Students need to get familiar with these action terms and how they relate to critical reading and thinking. Students need to be aware of the subtle differences each term can carry (i.e. To discriminate against an individual is viewed negatively; to discriminate in reading is a positive attribute.)

Teacher Definitions and Examples for D-E-S handout might be as follows:

Discriminate: to note or observe a difference

Evaluate: to determine what is significant or noteworthy

Synthesize: to bring all the ideas together, consider them, and make a unified response to what you have experienced

Step 3 - Do a think-aloud model for the students of how you might use the D-E-S chart to guide the reading process in a variety of situations. Ex. When I was reading the different passages, I needed to look very closely to observe what made one text seem more complex to me (discrimination). I had to consider what was significant from the text in relation to the assignment I have been given (evaluation). Now I'm thinking about what I've learned from the reading experience and relating it to my prior experiences. I mix these around in my mind and make a response that brings it all together (synthesis).

Step 4 - Have students share how they might identify these reading strategies in their own words. Students can record their ideas on the appropriate column on the *D-E-S* handout. Discuss how the picture shown might relate to the appropriate key word on the handout. Have students think of other pictures that might help them remember the key word.

Step 5 - Guide students into small group work with the *Getting Ready for College Level Reading* handout. Set up the small group work in a Jigsaw fashion for a short time period (the Jigsaw style gives each group one question to focus on from the handout – then come back together as a class and share reporting). Use these guiding questions as needed to keep students focused on critically thinking about the reading passages: Do you agree with the grade level and ease rankings for each passage? The Reading Passage 2 came back at about a 2nd grade level – why do you think that is? Do you think a person who can read and answer comprehension questions from passages like this would be successful in college level reading? Why or why not?

Step 6 - Bring students back to their evaluative rankings from the beginning of the class session. Are they satisfied with their critiques? Get them thinking about elements other than those on the rubric that can affect how complex we perceive a text to be. Challenge them to consider and respond to all of the questions from the *Getting Ready for College Level Reading*. Get them thinking about their thinking!

Assessment/Evidence *(based on outcome)*

Students will navigate complex text directions and produce an index card with accurate readability statistics for a sample passage. They will also rank the sample passage as well as 3 other passages based on a given evaluative rubric, and use critical thinking skills to synthesize this information with personal observations about the process of assessing text complexity.

Teacher Reflection/Lesson Evaluation

This lesson has not yet been field tested.

Next Steps

Provide students with options for extension. Students may think they know which text is most complex for the college-ready reader, but the real test comes when they have to answer questions in a college entrance testing format. Give students access to the link for the COMPASS reading passages and work with the comprehension questions online (or set up a desktop shortcut to the downloaded PDF document). Have them record their answers to the comprehension questions for Passages 1-3 and then check with the answer key. This can lead nicely into a further lesson on refining reading strategies for different types of text and how to deal with multiple choice testing situations. It might also lead to students adjusting their evaluative rank of which text was truly the most complex.☺

Technology Integration

Think Aloud Teaching Strategy http://literacy.kent.edu/eureka/strategies/think_aloud09.PDF

Jigsaw Groups Teaching Strategy http://literacy.kent.edu/eureka/strategies/jigsaw_groups09.PDF

Access point to COMPASS Sample Reading Test Questions in PDF format

(Recommend downloading the 11 pg PDF document and saving it for use as needed)

<http://www.act.org/compass/tests/reading.html>

Teacher Resources for Information on Flesch Reading Ease and Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level

<http://www.readabilityformulas.com/flesch-reading-ease-readability-formula.php>

<http://www.readabilityformulas.com/flesch-grade-level-readability-formula.php>

Using Microsoft Word's Readability Program <http://www.michbar.org/journal/pdf/pdf4article1467.pdf>

Purposeful/Transparent

Reading levels become increasing more complex as students work through the educational process. Students wanting to continue to postsecondary education will need to be able to navigate through complex directions and text and further develop their critical reading skills.

Contextual

By using reading samples from college entrance tests, students become familiar with the types of reading they will be continually be asked to read with understanding in their courses.

Building Expertise

Students will gain mastery in using critical reading strategies of discriminate, evaluate and synthesize and discern readability statistics for various reading passages.

READABILITY

What falls under the readability umbrella?



According to the Readability Formula:

How many words do I have to know?

How big are the words?

How many sentences are there to read?

How long are the sentences?

According to Real Life Experience:

Am I familiar with the topic I am reading about?

Do I have the ability to read a selection and complete a task?

What Else?????

How to Turn On Grammar Checking and Readability Statistics in Word

Did you know you can get Word to score the understandability and grade level, as well as give a word count when you do spelling and grammar checks? Word will give you readability scores based on the average number of syllables in your words and the average number of words in your sentences. You will get a Flesch Reading Ease score of up to 100 points, where the higher the points indicate the easier the document is to read and understand. Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level scores rate your document on the U.S. school grade level.

Difficulty: Moderate

Instructions

Things You'll Need:

- Computer
- MS Office Suite or Word Software Application

Step 1

From the menu bar, you need to select Tools. Then select Options from the [drop-down menu](#).

Step 2



Option Window

When the Options window appears, select the Spelling & Grammar tab.

Step 3

On the Spelling & Grammar tab, insure both the Check Grammar with Spelling and Show Readability Statistics are checked. Then click OK to save your settings. Also, if you want to check spelling or grammar as you type rather than waiting until you run this function, you will need to check the Check Grammar as You Type and Check Spelling as You Type options as well.

Word How-To Handout

Step 4



Readability Statistics	
Sounds	
Words	334
Characters	2648
Paragraphs	26
Sentences	37
Averages	
Sentences per Paragraph	1.7
Words per Sentence	13.4
Characters per Word	4.7
Readability	
Passive Sentences	2%
Flesch Reading Ease	64.8
Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level	7.6

Readability Statistics

Once readability statistics is set, you simply run Spelling and Grammar to get your results.

For most standard documents, you will want to aim for a Flesch Reading Ease score of approximately 60 to 70 and a Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level of 7th to 8th. Knowing who the audience is for your document is really key to what grade level score you need to aim for.

Read more: [How to Turn On Grammar Checking and Readability Statistics in Word | eHow.com](http://www.ehow.com/how_4833212_grammar-checking-readability-statistics-word.html#ixzz0tsvn8T9U)
http://www.ehow.com/how_4833212_grammar-checking-readability-statistics-word.html#ixzz0tsvn8T9U

How to Use Spelling and Grammar Checking in Word

Once you complete typing your Word document, you should always spell check it as your first step in proofing before [printing](#). Below are the steps for spell-checking. If spell checking does not show your grammar errors too, then you may need to turn on that feature.

With the "Check Grammar as You Type" and "Check Spelling as You Type" options set on, Word will notify you of misspelling and potentials grammar errors as you type rather than waiting until you complete the document and start the check process. If this is set on, then you can Right-Click on the misspelled word to get a quick recommendation for those words underscored with red or Right-Click somewhere in those words underscored in green for grammar suggestions.

If you do not see any red or green lines, you may not have the check as you type features turned on. If you want those features see the article titled "How to Turn on Grammar Checking and Readability Statistics in Word." Or if you have the red and green underlines in your document and find them too distracting, you can use the instructions in the article to uncheck those options.

Difficulty: Easy

Instructions

Things You'll Need:

- Computer
- MS Office Suite or Word Software Application

Word How-To Handout

Step 1



Spelling and Grammar Icon

From the toolbar, select the Spelling and Grammar (ABC) button.

If you can not find this button on the toolbar, you may use the menu option Tools, then select Spelling and Grammar from the [drop-down menu](#) to start this process.

Step 2



Spelling and Grammar Window

If you have potential spelling or grammar errors, the appropriate Spelling and Grammar window will appear until all errors have been resolved by the user.

Option A: You may correct the error with the Change button.

Option B: Continue without correcting the potential error using the Ignore button. Use Ignore All button if you know the word is correct and it appears multiple time in the document.

Step 3



Readability Statistics

After all potential errors have been resolved; then you should return to the point in your file where spelling stopped. If you did not start at the beginning of the document, you may get a pop-up window asking if you want to continue checking from the beginning, select Yes to start over at top of file or No to stop checking.

Word How-To Handout

If you have readability statistics set on, the Readability Statistics window will appear showing that [data](#) along with word and character counts. Click OK to clear the window and return to the document. If Readability Statistics are not set to on, then Word will return to your document at the point where spelling stopped.

Read more: [How to Use Spelling and Grammar Checking in Word | eHow.com](http://www.ehow.com/how_4833227_use-spelling-grammar-checking-word.html#ixzz0tsvUU8pw)
http://www.ehow.com/how_4833227_use-spelling-grammar-checking-word.html#ixzz0tsvUU8pw

How to Display readability statistics for only a portion of a document:

Make sure you have selected the Show readability statistics check box.

Highlight the portion for which you want statistics.

(To highlight a portion of the text, put the cursor where you want to begin the statistics from. Left click on the mouse, and then drag so that you begin to “highlight” a portion of the text. Keep highlighting until you reach the end of the portion of text you want to have statistics on.)

On the Standard toolbar, select Tools, then Spelling and Grammar.

Then you will get a message that Word finished checking the selection.

Do you want to continue checking the remainder of the document? Click **NO**.

If you click NO, you will receive readability statistics for only the highlighted portion.

If you click YES, you will receive readability statistics for the entire file.

Readability Rubric Results

FROM READABILITY STATISTICS						PERSONAL EVALUATION			
STATS KEY	Words	Sentences	Words Per Sentence	Flesch Reading Ease 1-100	Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level 0-12.9	The vocabulary is familiar or makes sense in context. 1-10	I can read this material out loud with little difficulty. 1-10	I can summarize this passage in my own words. 1-10	FOR ME, WHICH TEXT IS THE MOST COMPLEX? <small>(1-most complex to 4-least complex)</small>
EXAMPLE PASSAGE Word How-To Directions	929	43	18.6	66.9	8.4				
PASSAGE 1 Andean Farming (Natural Science)	338	13	6.3	37.4	9.6				
PASSAGE 2 Fortune Tellers (Fiction)	341	39	6.6	91.9	2.0				
PASSAGE 3 Zora Hurston (Humanities)	345	22	14.6	77.6	6.0				

What Methods Do Andean Farmers Use?

Public debate around climate change and its effects on agriculture tends to focus on the large-scale industrial farms of the North. Farmers who work on a small scale and use traditional methods have largely been ignored. However, as the world slowly comes to terms with the threat of climate change, Native farming traditions will warrant greater attention.

In the industrial model of agriculture, one or two crop varieties are grown over vast areas. Instead of trying to use local resources of soil and water optimally and sustainably, the natural environment is all but ignored and uniform growing conditions are fabricated through large-scale irrigation and the intensive use of artificial fertilizers and pesticides. For example, a handful of basically similar potato varieties, all of which require nearly identical soil conditions, temperature, rainfall, and growing seasons, account for almost all global production. When these global crops are no longer suited to the environment in which they are grown, when their resistance to disease and pests begins to fail, or the climate itself changes, the best way to rejuvenate the breeding stock will be to introduce new genetic material from the vast diversity of crop varieties still maintained by indigenous peoples.

In contrast to the industrial model, Andean potatoes and other Andean crops such as squash and beans grown by Quechuan farmers exhibit extraordinary genetic diversity, driven by the need to adapt crops to the extraordinary climatic diversity of the region. Along the two axes of latitude and altitude, the Andes encompasses fully two-thirds of all possible combinations of climate and geography found on Earth. The Andean potato has been adapted to every environment except the depth of the rainforest or the frozen peaks of the mountains. Today, facing the likelihood of major disruptions to the climatic conditions for agriculture worldwide, indigenous farmers provide a dramatic example of crop adaptation in an increasingly extreme environment. More importantly, Native farmers have also safeguarded the crop diversity essential for the future adaptations.

Source: PDF File accessed through <http://www.act.org/compass/tests/reading.html>

READING PASSAGE 2

Fortune Tellers

A young couple entered the restaurant in Andy's view. They were holding hands. Andy sat back down in his chair. He felt sick. He turned and faced his father, who was eating *xôi*.

"What's the matter, son?" asked his father. "I thought you were going to the birthday party."

"It's too late."

"Are you sure?"

Andy nodded. He looked at the plate of *xôi*. He wanted to bury his face in it.

"Hi, Andy." A voice came from behind.

Andy looked up. He recognized the beautiful face, and he refused to meet her eyes. "Hi, Jennifer," muttered Andy, looking at the floor.

"You didn't miss much, Andy. The party was dead. I was looking for you, hoping you could give me a ride home. Then I met Tim, and he was bored like me. And he said he'd take me home.... Andy, do you want to eat with us? I'll introduce you to Tim."

Andy said, "No, I'm eating *xôi* with my father."

"Well, I'll see you in school then, okay?"

"Yeah." And Andy watched her socks move away from his view.

Andy grabbed a chunk of *xôi*. The rice and beans stuck to his fingernails. He placed the chunk in his mouth and pulled it away from his fingers with his teeth. There was a dry bitter taste. But nothing could be as bitter as he was, so he chewed some more. The bitterness faded as the *xôi* became softer in his mouth, but it was still tasteless. He could hear the young couple talk and giggle. Their words and laughter and the sounds of his own chewing mixed into a sticky mess. The words were bitter and the laughter was tasteless, and once he began to understand this, he tasted the sweetness of *xôi*. Andy enjoyed swallowing the sticky mess down. Andy swallowed everything down—sweetness and bitterness and nothingness and what he thought was love.

Adapted from Nguyen Duc Minh, "Fortune Tellers." in the collection *American Eyes*. ©1994 by H. Holt

Source: PDF File accessed through <http://www.act.org/compass/tests/reading.html>

In the 1930s, why did author Zora Neale Hurston choose Eatonville, Florida, to be the first source for her collection of folklore?

I was glad when somebody told me, “You may go and collect Negro folklore.” In a way, it would not be a new experience for me. When I pitched headforemost into the world I landed in the crib of Negroism. It was fitting me like a tight chemise. I couldn't see it for wearing it. It was only when I was off in college, away from my native surroundings, that I could stand off and look at my garment. Then I had to have the spy-glass of anthropology to look through.

I was asked where I wanted to work and I said, “Florida. It’s a place that draws people—Negroes from every Southern state and some from the North and West.” So I knew that it was possible for me to get a cross section of the Negro South in one state. And then I realized that I felt new myself, so it looked sensible for me to choose familiar ground.

I started in Eatonville, Florida, because I knew that the town was full of material and that I could get it without causing any hurt or harm. As early as I could remember, it was the habit of the men particularly to gather on the store porch in the evenings and swap stories. Even the women would stop and break a breath with them at times. As a child when I was sent down to the store, I'd drag out my leaving to hear more.

Folklore is not as easy to collect as it sounds. The ideal source is where there are the fewest outside influences, but these people are reluctant at times to reveal that which the soul lives by. I knew that even *I* would have some hindrance among strangers. But here in Eatonville I knew everybody was going to help me.

Adapted from Zora Neale Hurston, *Mules and Men*. ©1935 by J.B. Lippincott Company.

Source: PDF File accessed through <http://www.act.org/compass/tests/reading.html>

CRITICAL READING AND THINKING

To think deeply about how complex a passage of text might be,
we can use the 3 thinking processes listed below.

THINKING PROCESS TEACHER DEFINITION IN MY WORDS

1. Discriminate:



2. Evaluate:



3. Synthesize:



GETTING READY FOR COLLEGE LEVEL READING

I am learning to **DISCRIMINATE**.

- ◆ Some key differences that I see in the passages are:

- ◆ Something that made one passage easier for me to read than the others:

I am learning to **EVALUATE**.

- ◆ Something that I question about the readability rubric results for these passages:

- ◆ Something that I want to take note of and remember about critiquing the difficulty of reading materials:

I am learning to **SYNTHESIZE**.

- ◆ If I was asked by my classmates to summarize my thoughts about the reading activities in this lesson, what would I tell them and why? (Remember a summary should be short and to the point!)

- ◆ What skills have I learned in this critical thinking and reading experience that might be useful for my future? Why will these skills be important to me?