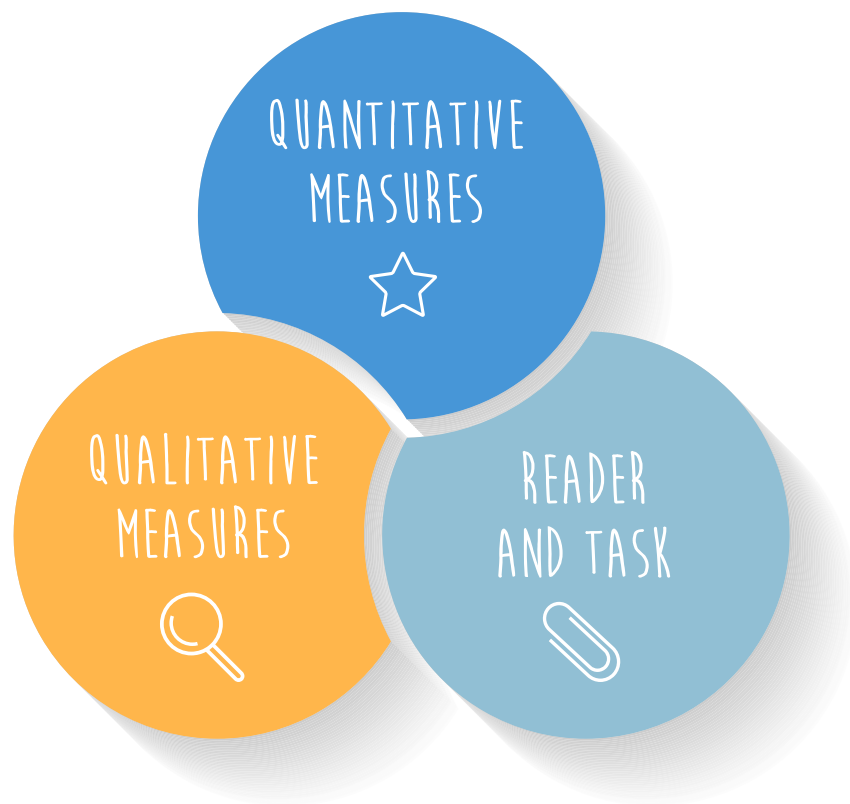


TEXT COMPLEXITY: WHY ALL THREE MEASURES MATTER

With each day and each school year that passes, children improve their reading proficiency by engaging with increasingly difficult texts. For educators, selecting age-and grade-appropriate texts can be challenging due to differences in students' reading abilities, motivation, and prior knowledge (Fountas and Pinnell).

To assist with this task, EBSCO offers quantitative text complexity measures in several of its school products, including *Core Collections*™ and *NovelList*®. However, this measurement is just one of three that must be considered when choosing reading materials for your students.



1 Quantitative Measures

Scientific, computerized methods of matching readers with texts based on level of difficulty (e.g., word frequency and sentence length) include The Lexile® Framework, Accelerated Reader™, The Fountas & Pinnell Text Level Gradient™ and others.

2 Qualitative Measures

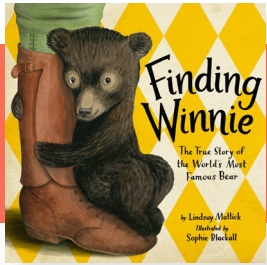
The characteristics of a text (structure, language clarity and conventions, levels of meaning, and prior knowledge demands) help educators to determine text complexity.

3 Reader and Task

Reader variables (background knowledge, experience, motivation and interest) and task variables (purpose and difficulty of the task assigned and questions posed) are best measured by educators.

These variables have the greatest impact in measuring text complexity. For example, a text with a low Lexile level can be challenging for a student whose prior knowledge of the topic is limited. A text becomes even more complex when the teacher asks the student to read the text, draw a conclusion, and write a critical essay to support that conclusion using evidence from the text (Nesi).

Below we have compiled text complexity measures for three popular books, as examples of how all three aspects come together to give a full understanding of a book's complexity.



FINDING WINNIE
BY LINDSAY MATTICK
AND SOPHIE BLACKALL

Target audience: Lower grades (K-3)
Number of pages: 56
Genre: Nonfiction



Quantitative Measures

- Lexile = AD590L
- Accelerated Reader: IL = LG, BL = 3.4, AR Points = 0.5
- Fountas & Pinnell = I-P



Qualitative Measures

- Prior knowledge of Winnie the Pooh character
- Understanding/recognition of "story within a story"
- Sentence structure



Reader and Task

- **Reader:** Young elementary students who have heard *A House at Pooh Corner* (read aloud)
Task: Identify the touchpoints between the bear in *Finding Winnie* and the fictional Winnie the Pooh (compare and contrast)
- **Reader:** Older elementary students (independent readers)
Task: Consider the setting (World War I) and identify examples of how the book reflects life during that time period.
- **Reader:** Middle school students who have read at least one other Caldecott Medal-winning book
Task: Compare art style between two Caldecott Medal winners, create a work of art in one of the styles.



BROWN GIRL DREAMING
BY JACQUELINE
WOODSON

Target audience: Middle grades (4-8)
Number of pages: 240
Genre: Memoir



Quantitative Measures

- Lexile = 990L
- Accelerated Reader: IL = MG, BL = 5.3, AR Points = 5.0
- Fountas & Pinnell = O-V, U-Z



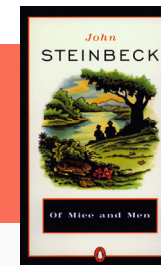
Qualitative Measures

- Book is written in free verse poetry versus traditional prose
- Use of figurative language (e.g. simile, metaphor and alliteration)
- Themes (poverty, racism, family and friendship, coming of age, identity, finding voice through writing, power of dreams)



Reader and Task

- **Reader:** Middle school students who have read *Locomotion* (also by Jacqueline Woodson)
Task: Identify similarities between the poetic writing styles used in the two books.
- **Reader:** Middle or high school students
Task: Read "To You" by Langston Hughes (which opens Woodson's memoir) and identify the ways in which Woodson's childhood stories connect to the themes in Hughes' poem.
- **Reader:** High school students
Task: Citing evidence from the book, write an analytical essay about how major events in U.S. history during this time period influenced the author's life and culture.



OF MICE AND MEN
BY JOHN STEINBECK

Target audience: Upper grades (9-12)
Number of pages: 118
Genre: Fiction



Quantitative Measures

- Lexile = 580L
- Accelerated Reader: IL = UG, BL = 4.5, AR Points = 4.0
- Fountas & Pinnell = I-P



Qualitative Measures

- Prior knowledge of setting (California's Salinas Valley during the Great Depression) and the experience of migrant workers in the 1930s
- Literary devices used (foreshadowing, irony, symbolism)
- Themes (friendship, responsibility to others, loneliness, belonging, respect for old age, right vs. wrong, the effects of oppression and abuse, the American Dream)



Reader and Task

- **Reader:** High school students
Task: Listen to "I Ain't Got No Home" by Woody Guthrie and identify similarities between the life of the song's narrator and the lives of George and Lennie.
- **Reader:** High school students
Task: Create a plot diagram or storyboard of events in the novel, including the exposition (and conflict), rising action, climax, falling action, and resolution.
- **Reader:** High school students
Task: Write an analytical essay that examines a theme in the novel.