

Module 2.1

Why Scaffolding Complex Text Is Crucial

Pages 27–41

Estimated Time: 1 Hour, 25 Minutes



Prior to Meeting

- Have participants read pages 27 to 41, stopping at the section titled “Scaffolding: Building the Bridge.”
- Remind participants of their assignment from Chapter 1, Module 2.
- Ask participants to bring a sample text from their curriculum, either fiction or nonfiction.
- Ask participants to focus on a student similar to Kallie. This student might exhibit one or more of the following characteristics:
 - Proficient oral reading skills
 - Difficulty with comprehension, particularly with inferences, making connections, and synthesizing information
 - Ability to answer low-level comprehension questions, but difficulty with more complex questions
- Lack of motivation for school-related tasks
- Disdainful attitude toward reading

Materials You Need for This Module

- PowerPoint slides for Chapter 2, Module 1
- Chart paper on stand and markers
- Sample texts provided by participants
- Copies of **Handouts 2.1, 2.2, and 2.3**
- Copies of Standards for Motivation and Engagement
- Five index cards, each with one of the following words or terms written on it
 - Levels of meaning (literary) or purpose (informational)
 - Structure
 - Language conventionality

- Clarity
- Knowledge demands

Segment One: Introduction (Approximately 15 Minutes)

1. Project the first two slides to introduce this module.
2. Project **PowerPoint Slide 3** and explain that the module focuses on these characteristics of a college- and career-ready student.
3. Have participants turn to a partner and take turns reading aloud, one sentence at a time, the description on **PowerPoint Slide 3** stopping after every sentence to discuss how their case-study student might respond to each highlighted activity.

Segment Two: What Is Text Complexity? (Approximately 45 Minutes)

1. Ask participants to turn and talk about factors that might make a text complex for them as readers. Ask for volunteers to share with the whole group, noting responses on chart paper.
2. Ask participants to turn and talk about what might make text complex for their case-study student. Ask for volunteers to share with the whole group, noting responses on chart paper.
3. Place charts on the wall for the remainder of the session.
4. Project **PowerPoint Slide 4** and read aloud.
5. Divide participants into five groups. Give each group a different index card containing one element from the list below. Provide **Handout 2.1**, Qualitative Measures of Text Complexity. Ask participants to silently read the description of their term from the handout and discuss briefly. Then, using the texts they brought find an example of their term, if possible. Offer chart paper and a marker if needed.
 - Levels of meaning (literary) or purpose (informational)
 - Structure
 - Language conventionality
 - Clarity
 - Knowledge demands
6. Have each group explain their assigned term and provide the example from their text, if possible.
7. Project **PowerPoint Slide 5** and read aloud.
8. Ask participants to share with their tablemates the quantitative dimensions used at their school as well as how (or if) these evaluations are used by teachers.
9. Project **PowerPoint Slide 6** and read aloud.
10. Divide participants into five groups. Project **PowerPoint Slide 7** and give each group one of the questions on the slide to discuss.

Segment Three: Evaluating Text Complexity (Approximately 15 Minutes)

1. Project **PowerPoint Slide 8**.
2. Ask participants to evaluate the complexity of the text they brought using the handout that corresponds to their text—fiction (**Handout 2.2**) or nonfiction (**Handout 2.3**). Encourage participants to work with a partner if they share similar disciplines, grade levels, or students.

Note: The purpose of this activity is not to place a “text complexity score” on the text, but to encourage discussion about the features of the text that may make it more or less complex.

3. If time permits, have participants share their findings.

Segment Four: Exploring Reading Abilities in the Classroom (Approximately 5 Minutes)

1. Project **PowerPoint Slide 9**.
2. Ask participants to read the shaded box on page 30 titled “How to Informally Evaluate Your Students’ Reading Abilities” and choose one evaluation to complete with their case-study student before the next meeting. Refer participants to the “Student Reading Survey” on page 29 as an example. Suggest that they provide the survey to all of their students.

Segment Five: Reflection (Approximately 5 Minutes)

1. Project **PowerPoint Slide 10** and read aloud.
2. Ask participants to respond to the slide in their learning logs.

Handout 2.1 **Qualitative Measures of Text Complexity**

Appendix A, Common Core State Standards

Levels of Meaning (literary texts) or Purpose (informational texts)

Literary texts with a single level of meaning tend to be easier to read than literary texts with multiple levels of meaning (such as satires, in which the author's literal message is intentionally at odds with his or her underlying message). Similarly, informational texts with an explicitly stated purpose are generally easier to comprehend than informational texts with an implicit, hidden, or obscure purpose.

Structure

Texts of low complexity tend to have simple, well-marked, and conventional structures, whereas texts of high complexity tend to have complex, implicit, and (particularly in literary texts) unconventional structures. Simple literary texts tend to relate events in chronological order, while complex literary texts make more frequent use of flashbacks, flash-forwards, and other manipulations of time and sequence. Simple informational texts are likely not to deviate from the conventions of common genres and subgenres, while complex informational texts are more likely to conform to the norms and conventions of a specific discipline. Graphics tend to be simple and either unnecessary or merely supplementary to the meaning of texts of low complexity, whereas texts of high complexity tend to have similarly complex graphics, graphics whose interpretation is essential to understanding the text, and graphics that provide an independent source of information within a text. (Note that many books for the youngest students rely heavily on graphics to convey meaning and are an exception to the above generalization.)

Language Conventinality and Clarity

Texts that rely on literal, clear, contemporary, and conversational language tend to be easier to read than texts that rely on figurative, ironic, ambiguous, purposefully misleading, archaic or otherwise unfamiliar language or on general academic and domain-specific vocabulary.

Knowledge Demands

Texts that make few assumptions about the extent of readers' life experiences and the depth of their cultural/literary and content/discipline knowledge are generally less complex than are texts that make many assumptions in one or more of those areas.

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Handout 2.2 Text Complexity in Fiction

Levels of Meaning

- Does the text have simple language that is complicated by levels of meaning that may be hidden or inferred?

Language

- Does the text use language that may be difficult to understand, such as ambiguous, figurative, or archaic language?

Point of View

- Is the narrator unclear, unreliable, or untrustworthy, thus confusing the reader or forcing him to make sophisticated inferences beyond the obvious?
- Does the point of view change unexpectedly?

Plot Structure

- Is the plot written through flashbacks or other structures instead of in a chronological approach?

Characters

- Are the characters constantly changing?
- Is there some tension between what is on the surface and what must be inferred about a particular character, or is there too little detail for readers to come to know characters well?

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Handout 2.3 **Text Complexity in Informational Text**

Language

- Does the text contain so much academic vocabulary that students are unable to comprehend what they are reading?
- Is the text inconsiderate—that is, does it fail to support the reader’s comprehension through clear sentence structure, a logical flow of ideas, and a sufficient explanation of key vocabulary?

Conceptual Density

- Are there so many ideas in the text that they are difficult to synthesize?
- Are the ideas seemingly unconnected or stacked on each other without adequate explanation?

Prior Knowledge

- Are the concepts or ideas beyond the knowledge base of the reader?

Unity

- Does the text include so many irrelevant details that it is difficult for the reader to sort out what’s important?

Structure

- Is the arrangement of ideas in the text unclear or random, making it difficult for readers to grasp a content thread?
- Are there few signal words to alert readers to organizational changes?

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