

New England Common Assessment Program

High School Expectations

READING



New England Common Assessment Program High School Expectations

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Introduction

The New England Common Assessment Program (NECAP) Reading High School Expectations have been developed as a means to identify the *state-assessed* reading content knowledge and skills expected of all high school students. The Grade Expectations (GEs) in this document describe the expectations for High School. This set of Grade Expectations includes concepts and skills intended to be assessed on demand, in a large-scale assessment (indicated by “State”).

Reading Grade Expectations are meant to capture the “big ideas” of reading that can be assessed, without narrowing the curriculum locally. They are not intended to represent the full local reading curriculum for instruction and assessment.

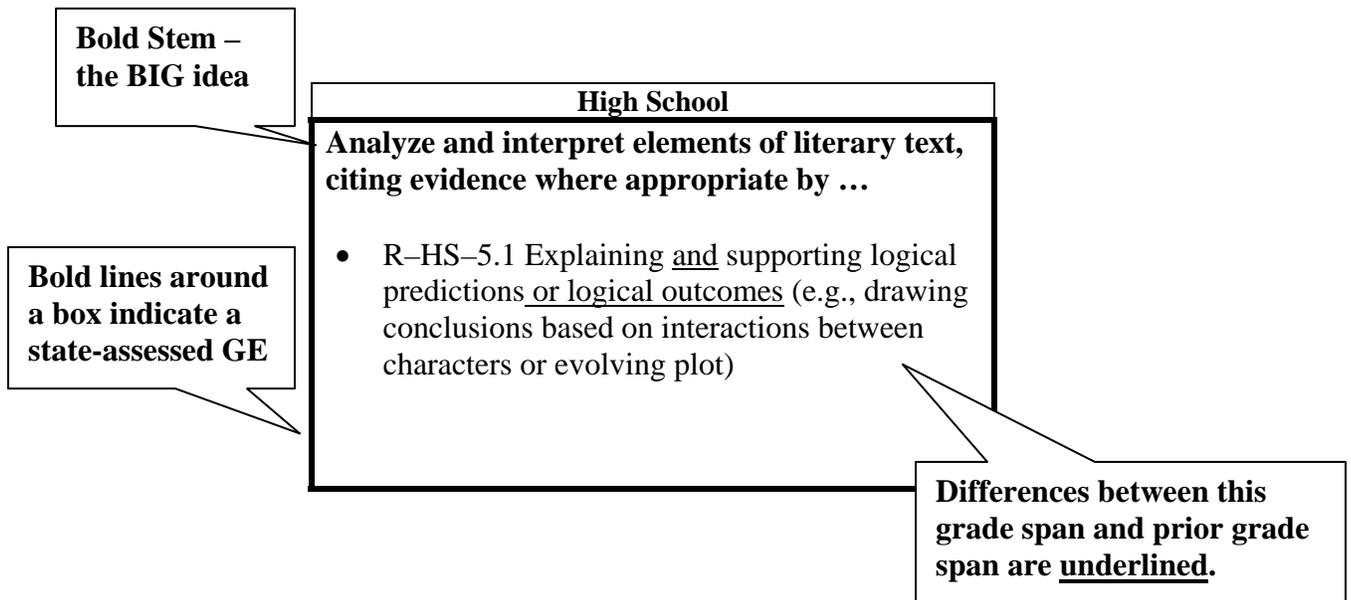
Grade Expectations represent reading content knowledge and skills *introduced instructionally at least one to two years before* students are expected to demonstrate competence in applying them independently in an on-demand assessment.

When using Reading Grade Expectations for high school, the following are important to understand:

- 1) All of the concepts and skills identified in this document are “fair game” for large-scale assessment purposes. Conjunctions used throughout this document have specific meaning. The use of the conjunction “or” means that a student can be assessed on all or just some of the elements of the GE in a given year. The use of “and” between elements of a GE means that the *intent* is to assess each element every year. In some situations, “or” is used when students have choices about how they will provide supporting evidence for their response (e.g., “R–HS–4.2 Paraphrasing or summarizing key ideas/plot, with major events sequenced, as appropriate to text)
- 2) Each Grade Expectation includes three parts:
 - **A statement in bold**, called the “stem,” is at the beginning of each GE. Each “stem” is the same or similar across the grades for a given GE, and is meant to communicate the main curriculum and instructional focus of the GE across the grades.
 - The non-bold text within a GE indicates how the GE is specified at a given grade level or grade span. There often are several indicators for each GE stem. Each indicator is coded and indicated as fair game for “state” or “local” assessment.
 - Differences between adjacent grades are underlined. (Note: Sometimes nothing is underlined within a GE. In these situations, differences in adjacent grades “assume increasing text complexity” and are noted for those GEs. (See Appendix F for descriptions of increasing text complexity.)
- 3) Each GE is coded for the content area, the grade span, the GE “stem” number, and the specific indicator for that GE stem. [e.g., “R—HS--6.2” means R (Reading) – HS (HS) -- 6 (6th GE “stem”) – 2 (the second specific indicator for the 6th GE stem).]

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Sample NECAP High School Expectation



The GE stem identifies “the what” – meaning, “*What* is the big idea for instruction and assessment?”

The bulleted indicators following each stem identify “the how” – meaning, “*How* will students demonstrate what they know and can do?”

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Overview of NECAP High School Expectations (GEs) for Reading

Reading Content Clusters	Focus of GE	GE Number*	Page
Vocabulary	Vocabulary Strategies	R-2	4
	Breadth of Vocabulary	R-3	4
Literary Texts	Initial Understanding of Literary Texts	R-4	5
	Analysis and Interpretation of Literary Text, Citing Evidence	R-5, R-6	6
Informational Texts	Initial Understanding of Informational Text (Expository and Practical Text across Content Areas)	R-7	7
	Analysis and Interpretation of Informational Text (Expository and Practical Text across Content Areas), Citing Evidence	R-8	8
Reading Appendices	A: <i>Suggested</i> Informational and Literary Texts		9
	B: The Six Syllable Types		9
	C: Metacognition Strategies for Understanding Text		10
	D: Glossary of Reading Terms		11 – 15
	E: A Discussion of “Increasing Text Complexity”		16 - 19

*NOTE: NECAP GE numbering is in sequence. Local GE numbering is not in sequence. The numbering code was built upon the existing GLEs for grades 2-8 when local and high school GEs were added.

VOCABULARY STRATEGIES and BREADTH of VOCABULARY (R-2)

High School

R-HS-2

Students identify the meaning of unfamiliar vocabulary by...

- R-HS-2.1 Using strategies to unlock meaning (e.g., knowledge of word structure) including prefixes/suffixes, common roots, or word origins; or context clues; or resources including dictionaries, glossaries, or thesauruses to determine definition, pronunciation, etymology, or usage of words; or prior knowledge)

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VOCABULARY STRATEGIES and BREADTH of VOCABULARY (R-3)

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R–HS–3

Shows breadth of vocabulary knowledge through demonstrating understanding of word meanings and relationships by...

- R–HS–3.1 Identifying synonyms, antonyms, homonyms/ homophones, shades of meaning, idioms, or word origins, including words from dialects, or other languages that have been adopted into our language/standard English
- R–HS–3.2 Selecting appropriate words or explaining the use of words in context, including connotation or denotation, shades of meanings of words/nuances, or idioms; or use of content-specific vocabulary, words with multiple meanings, precise language, or technical vocabulary
EXAMPLE: Students might be asked to explain the meaning of terminology appropriate to the content of the subject area as used in a text passage

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INITIAL UNDERSTANDING of LITERARY TEXTS (R-4.1 to R-4.2)

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R–HS–4

Demonstrate initial understanding of elements of literary texts by...

- R–HS–4.1 Identifying, describing, or making logical predictions about character (such as protagonist or antagonist), setting, problem/solution, or plots/subplots, as appropriate to text; or identifying any significant changes in character, relationships, or setting over time; or identifying rising action, climax, or falling action
- R–HS–4.2 Paraphrasing or summarizing key ideas/plot, with major events sequenced, as appropriate to text

ANALYSIS and INTERPRETATION OF LITERARY TEXTS/CITING EVIDENCE
(R-5.1 to R-5.5)

High School

R–HS–5

Analyze and interpret elements of literary texts, citing evidence where appropriate by...

- R–HS–5.1 Explaining and supporting logical predictions or logical outcomes (e.g., drawing conclusions based on interactions between characters or evolving plot)
- R–HS–5.2 Examining characterization (e.g., stereotype, antagonist, protagonist), motivation, or interactions (including relationships), citing thoughts, words, or actions that reveal character traits, motivations, or changes over time
- R–HS–5.3 Making inferences about cause/effect, internal or external conflicts (e.g., person versus self, person versus person, person versus nature/society/fate), or the relationship among elements within text (e.g., describing the interaction among plot/subplots)
- R–HS–5.4 Explaining how the narrator’s point of view or author’s style is evident and affects the reader’s interpretation
EXAMPLE: If this story were told from another character’s point of view, how would the reader’s interpretation be different?
- R–HS–5.5 Explaining how the author’s purpose (e.g., to entertain, inform or persuade) message or theme (which may include universal themes) is supported within the text

(GE R-5 assumes increasing text complexity across grade levels. See Appendix F for descriptions of increasing text complexity.)

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ANALYSIS and INTERPRETATION OF LITERARY TEXTS – AUTHOR’S CRAFT/CITING EVIDENCE (R-6)

High School

R–HS–6

Analyze and interpret author’s craft, citing evidence where appropriate by...

- R–HS–6.1 Demonstrating knowledge of author’s style or use of literary elements and devices (i.e., imagery, repetition, flashback, foreshadowing, personification, hyperbole, symbolism, analogy, allusion, diction, syntax, or use of punctuation) to analyze literary works

INITIAL UNDERSTANDING of INFORMATIONAL TEXT (R-7.1 to R-7.3)

High School

R–HS–7

Demonstrate initial understanding of informational texts (expository and practical texts) by...

- R–HS–7.1 Obtaining information from text features [e.g., table of contents, glossary, index, transition words/phrases, transitional devices (including use of white space), bold or italicized text, headings, subheadings, graphic organizers, charts, graphs, or illustrations]
- R–HS–7.2 Using information from the text to answer questions; to state the main/central ideas; to provide supporting details; to explain visual components supporting the text; or, to interpret maps, charts, timelines, tables, or diagrams
- R–HS–7.3 Organizing information to show understanding or relationships among facts, ideas, and events (e.g., representing main/central ideas or details within text through charting, mapping, paraphrasing, summarizing, comparing/contrasting, outlining)

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ANALYSIS and INTERPRETATION OF INFORMATIONAL TEXTS/CITING EVIDENCE (R-8.1 to R-8.6)

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R–HS–8

Analyze and interpret informational text, citing evidence as appropriate by...

- R–HS–8.1 Explaining connections about information *within* a text, *across* texts, or to related ideas

EXAMPLE: Students are asked to compare information presented in two textual excerpts.

- R–HS–8.2 Synthesizing and evaluating information within or across text(s) (e.g., constructing appropriate titles; or formulating assertions or controlling ideas)

EXAMPLE: How does the title of the article reflect the author’s perspective?

- R–HS–8.3 Drawing inferences about text, including author’s purpose (e.g., to inform, explain, entertain, persuade) or message; or explaining how purpose may affect the interpretation of the text; or using supporting evidence to form or evaluate opinions/judgments and assertions about central ideas that are relevant

- R–HS–8.4 Distinguishing fact from opinion, and evaluating possible bias/propaganda or conflicting information within or across texts

- R–HS–8.5 Making inferences about causes and/or effects

- R–HS–8.6 Evaluating the clarity and accuracy of information (e.g. consistency, effectiveness of organizational pattern, or logic of arguments)

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Appendix A: Suggested Informational and Literary Texts

Suggested Informational and Literary Texts (Print and Non-Print) for Instruction and Assessment

All students need ongoing opportunities to apply and practice reading strategies with many different types of LITERARY and INFORMATIONAL texts. Recognizing a variety of texts and their characteristics will help students in meeting grade level expectations described in the NECAP GEs. Suggested Texts listed below are not meant to be exhaustive for any given grade level. (Underlining indicates additional text types introduced for the first time at this grade level.)

High School

Suggested

Informational Texts include, but are not limited to

Reference materials:

Reports, magazines, newspapers, textbooks, biographies, autobiographies, Internet websites, legal documents (i.e. Supreme Court case decisions, lease agreements), public documents (drivers' manuals) and discourse, essays (including literary criticisms), articles, technical manuals, editorials/commentaries, primary source documents, periodicals, job-related materials, speeches, on-line reading, documentaries, etc.

Practical/functional texts:

Procedures/instructions, announcements, invitations, advertisements, pamphlets, schedules, memos, applications, catalogues, etc.

Suggested Literary Texts

include, but are not limited to

Poetry, plays, fairytales, fantasy, fables, realistic fiction, folktales, historical fiction, mysteries, science fiction, myths, legends, short stories, epics, novels, dramatic presentations, comedies, tragedies, satires, parodies, memoirs, epistles, etc.

(Assumes increasing text complexity across grade levels. See Appendix F for descriptions of increasing text complexity.)

Appendix B: The Six Syllable Types

1. **closed** – [not] - closed in by a consonant - vowel makes its **short** sound. **open** – [no] - ends in a vowel - vowel makes its **long** sound
3. **silent e** – [note] - ends in vowel consonant e - vowel makes its **long** sound
4. **vowel combination** – [nail] the two vowels together make a sound
5. **r-controlled** – [bird] - contains a vowel plus “r” - vowel sound is changed
6. **consonant - l - e** – [table] - at the end of a word

Appendix C: Metacognition Strategies for Understanding Text

Teachers continually model and reinforce use of strategies, so that students learn to flexibly apply strategies that help them comprehend and interpret literary and informational texts.

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Reading and learning to read are problem solving processes that require strategies for the reader to make sense of written language and remain engaged with texts.

Complexity of text and purpose of reading will determine the extent to which each strategy is applied.

Before reading, students...	During reading, students...	After reading, students...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set a purpose • Activate prior knowledge (schema) • Preview text • Identify text structure clues (e.g., chronological, cause/effect, compare/contrast, etc.) • Locate text features (e.g., transitional words, subheadings, bold print, etc.) • Use Cues: graphics and pictures • Skim/Scan • Predict and make text-based references • Sample a page of text for readability and interest 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-monitor using: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Meaning ➤ Language structure ➤ Print cues • Reread • Self-correct • Clarify • Determine Importance • Generate literal, clarifying, and inferential questions • Visualize • Construct sensory images • Summarize and paraphrase • Check predictions • Interpret <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Literal meaning ➤ Inferential meaning • Make Connections, using <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Graphics ➤ Pictures • Monitor fluency (oral/silent; or text complexity) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Adjust rate ➤ Use punctuation and dialogue cues ➤ Use phrasing, intonation, expression • Read for accuracy • Use note-taking strategies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reread for confirmation • Summarize and paraphrase key ideas • Evaluate <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Accuracy of information ➤ Literary merit and use of author’s craft • Clarify • Analyze information within and across texts • Support conclusions with references from text • Synthesize • Connect ideas/themes in text to... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Text: Compare one text to another text ➤ Self: Relate and explain ideas or events in text to personal experience ➤ World: Recognize commonalities of text to world

Appendix D: Glossary of Reading Terms

Affix – A meaningful part of a word that is attached before (prefix) or after (suffix) a root or base word to modify its meaning.

Alliteration -The repetition of initial consonant sounds in neighboring words. (For example: The slithering, slimy snake)

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Allusion - A reference to a familiar person, place, or thing.

Analogy - A comparison of two or more similar objects, suggesting that if they are alike in certain respects, they will probably be like in other ways, too.

Analysis - A separating of a whole into its parts with an examination of these parts to find out their nature and function.

Antagonist - A person or thing working against the main character.

Antonym - A word that is opposite in meaning to another word. (For example: love – hate, hot-cold)

Author's Craft – The techniques the author chooses to enhance writing. (Examples of author's craft: style, bias, point of view, flashback, foreshadowing, symbolism, figurative language, sensory details, soliloquy, stream of consciousness, etc.)

Autobiography – An account of the life of an individual written by the subject, classified as non-fiction.

Base Word – A free morpheme (can stand alone), to which affixes can be added. (For example: worry)

Bias - A highly personal judgment.

Biography – An account of the life of an individual, classified as non-fiction or informational text.

Cause/Effect – A text or response to reading text which provides explanations or reasons for phenomena.

Character - A person, animal, or object that takes part in the action of a literary work. The main or major character is the most important and central to the action. A minor or supporting character is one who takes part in the action, but is not the focus of the attention.

Characterization - The method an author uses to reveal the characters and their various personalities. Authors use two major methods of characterization: direct and indirect. When using direct characterization, a writer states the characters' traits, actions, motives, or feelings. When describing a character indirectly, a writer depends on the reader to draw conclusions about the character's traits or uses other participants in the story to reveal a character's traits and motives.

Cite - To quote as an example.

Citation - A direct quote from the text, as opposed to a generalized summary or statement; an acknowledgment and documentation of sources of information.

Climax – Turning point in the action of a plot

Comparison/Contrast - A text or response to reading text that identifies how information presented has similar or different characteristics or qualities.

Conflict - The problem or struggle in a story that triggers the action. Conflicts may be internal (struggles from within a character) or external.

Context - The set of facts or circumstances surrounding an event or a situation, explanation of characters, or definition of important terms in text; the background information the reader needs to know in order to fully understand the message of the text.

Context clues - Information in the reading passage that helps the reader determine the meaning of unfamiliar words or phrases, such as illustrations or the meaning of other words in the text.

Controlling Idea – This is the main idea/focus that runs throughout the paper or text.

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Conventions - Features of standard written English that usually include sentence formation, grammar, spelling, usage, punctuation, and capitalization.

Decode – The ability to translate a word from print to speech, usually by employing knowledge of sound-symbol correspondence

Dialects – Regional or social language

Dialogue - A conversation between two characters. In poems, novels, and short stories, dialogue is usually set off by quotation marks to indicate a speaker’s exact words; in a play, dialogue follows the names of the characters, and no quotation marks are used.

Diction - An author’s choice of words based on their accuracy, clarity, and effectiveness.

Drama - A story written for performance by actors. Dramas are often divided into parts called acts, which are often divided into smaller parts called scenes.

Epistle – A literary letter intended for public audience

Evaluate - Examine and judge carefully, based on evidence found in the text.

Figurative Language - Language used in writing or speech that is not meant to be interpreted literally, as the intent of the language is to create a special effect, idea, image, or feeling.

Fluency - The clear, easy, written or spoken expression of ideas, or freedom from word-identification problems that may hinder comprehension during silent reading or the expression of ideas during oral reading; The ability to read text accurately, quickly, and with proper expression, phrasing, and intonation between word recognition and comprehension; Rapidly and automatically recognizing and decoding words, with evidence that the reader is accessing the deeper meaning of the text; Assessment of fluency is associated with rate, accuracy, and scores on comprehension tests.

Focus - The concentration of a specific idea(s) within the topic the writer is addressing; the main/central idea that runs through a text. (For example: If the topic is “horses,” the focus might be: Horses are very expensive to own.)

Genre - A category used to classify literary works, usually by form, technique, or content. For example, literature is commonly divided into three major genres: poetry, prose, and drama. Each genre is, in turn, divided into sub-genres

Graphic Organizer- A diagram or pictorial device used to record and show relationships among ideas or information.

Historical fiction – Fiction drawn from the writer’s imagination, but true to life in some period of the past.

Homonym - One of two words that have the same sound and often the same spelling but differ in meaning. (For example, *bear* “to carry,” *bear* (the animal), and *bare* “naked.”)

Homophone - One of two or more words that are pronounced the same but differ in meaning, origin, and sometimes spelling. [For example, *hair/hare*, *knight/night*, and *(fish) scale / (musical) scale*.]

Hyperbole - A figure of speech in which exaggeration is used for emphasis or effect.

Inference - A deduction or conclusion made from facts that are suggested or implied rather than overly stated. (For example: Mom said that I should study more and watch television less. I inferred that I should get better grades or the television would be taken out of my room.)

Informational text – A text that provides facts, ideas, and principles that are related to the physical, biological, or social world; classified as non-fiction text.

Literary conflict - The tension that grows out of the interplay of the two opposing forces in a plot.

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Literary devices - Tools used by the author to enliven and provide voice to the writing, such as dialogue, alliteration, foreshadowing, personification, metaphors, etc.

Literary elements - The essential techniques used in literature, such as characterization, setting, plot, and theme.

Metaphor - A figure of speech in which one thing is described in terms of another to make an implicit comparison – that is, a comparison that does not use words such as “like” or “as.” (For example: The sky’s lamp was bright.)

Mood – A feeling created by text

Morpheme – The smallest meaningful unit of language; may be a word or part of a word (For example – “less” or “child”)

Narrative - A story, actual or fictional, expressed orally or in writing; a text that tells about a sequence of events.

Narrative passage - Text in any form that recounts or tells a story.

Narrator - The person (or animal or object) telling a story, who may be a character within the story or someone outside of the story.

Onomatopoeia - A figure of speech in which the sound of the word imitates the sounds associated with the objects or actions to which they refer. (For example, *crackle, moo, pop, zoom.*)

Opinion - A belief or conclusion held with confidence, but not sustained with proof.

Paraphrase - Restate text or passage mostly in other (or in own) words.

Personification - The attribution of human qualities to inanimate objects. (For example: *The clouds played and danced in the sky.*)

Phoneme - The smallest unit of sound in a spoken word; a speech sound that combines with other sounds in a language to make words.

Phonemic awareness ability to hear, identify and manipulate individual sounds in spoken words; Involves blending, segmenting, deleting sounds, etc.

Phonics - Relationships between the letters of written language and the individual sounds of spoken language

Plot - The plan, design, storyline, or pattern of events in a play, poem, or works of fiction.

Poem - A composition characterized by use of condensed language, chosen for its sound and suggestive power and the use of literary techniques such as rhyme, blank verse, rhythm, meter, and metaphor.

Point of View - The way in which an author reveals characters, events, and ideas when telling a story; the perspective or vantage point from which a story is told.

Problem - The conflict or struggle (internal or external) that causes the action in a story or play. An internal conflict takes place within the mind of a character, such as a struggle to make a decision, take an action, or overcome a feeling. An external conflict is one in which a character struggles against some outside force, such as another person or something in nature.

Prose - Writing that is not restricted in rhythm, measure, or rhyme; most writing that is not drama, poetry, or song is considered prose.

Protagonist - The main character or hero of a text.

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Reading critically - Reading in which a questioning attitude, logical analysis, and inference are used to judge the worth of the text; evaluating relevancy and adequacy of what is read; the judgment of validity of worth of what is read, based on sound criteria and evidence.

Reading rate - The speed at which a person reads; generally measured as words per minute or words correct per minute.

Realistic Fiction – Fiction drawn from the writer’s imagination, but is true to life; often focuses on universal human problems.

Resolution - The portion of the play or story in which the problem is resolved. It comes after the climax and falling action and is intended to bring the story to a satisfying end.

Rhyme - A metrical device in which sounds at the ends of words or lines or verse correspond. Another common device is the use of internal rhymes, or rhyming words within lines.

Rhyme scheme - A regular pattern of rhyming words in a poem, usually indicated by assigning a different letter to each rhyme in a stanza such as, *a-b-a-b*.

Rhythm - In verse or prose, the movement or sense of movement communicated by the arrangement of long and short or stressed and unstressed syllables.

Root – A bound morpheme, usually of Latin origin, that cannot stand alone, but is used to form a family of words with related meanings. (For example: “spec”)

Self-monitor - Metacognitive awareness and processes whereby the reader realizes that what is being read is or is not making sense, and adjusts reading strategies to improve comprehension.

Semantics - The study of meaning in language, particularly the meaning of words and changes in the meanings.

Setting - The time and place of the action in a literary work. The setting includes all the details of a place and time. In most stories, the setting serves as a backdrop or context in which the characters interact and the plot progresses.

Simile - A figure of speech in which one thing is likened to another using an explicit comparison (that is, using the words “like” or “as”) to clarify or enhance an image. (For example: It was as cold as an ice cube.)

Soliloquy - A speech delivered by a character when he/she is alone on the stage; monologue.

Stereotype - A pattern or form that does not change. A character is “stereotyped” if she or he has no individuality and fits the mold of that particular type of person or character, such as a villain.

Style - The characteristic manner used by an author to express ideas and create intended effects, including the writer’s use of language, choice of words, and use of literary devices.

Summary - Writing that presents the main/central points of a larger work in condensed form.

Synonym - Two or more words that have highly similar meanings. (For example: *happy, glad, and cheerful*.)

Syntax - The pattern or structure of word order in sentences, clauses, and phrases

Text Structure – The way information is organized and presented. (For example: Fiction texts and biographies generally use a narrative structure and are meant to be read from beginning to end; nonfiction or informational texts are organized by topics or into sections, using text features such as headings, bold print, transitional words/phrases, etc.)

Theme - The central idea, message, concern, or purpose in a literary work, which may be stated directly or indirectly. (For example: In the book *The Pancake*, by Anita Lobel, “People should work together” or “Don’t be too cocky” are themes.)

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Thesis - The basic proposition put forward by a speaker or writer, which then is proved through fact, argument, or support from a text; the subject or argument of a composition. It is the controlling idea about a topic that the writer is attempting to prove; a sentence that announced the writer's main, unifying controlling idea about a topic. A thesis statement usually contains two main elements: a limited subject (Internet), a strong verb, and the reason for it - the "why"- (The Internet provides information of varying depth and quality).

Tone - The overall feeling or effect created by a writer's use of words, sentence structure, and attitude towards the audience, characters, or topic. This feeling, which pervades the work, may be serious, mock-serious, humorous, sarcastic, solemn, objective, etc.

Traditional literature – Stories passed down orally throughout history. (Examples include: folk tales, fairy tales, myths, legends, and epics.)

Turning Point - The moment in a story or a play when there is a definite change in direction and one becomes aware that it is now about to move toward the end.

Voice - The style and quality of the writing which includes word choice, a variety of sentence structures, and evidence of investment. Voice portrays the author's personality or the personality of the chosen persona. It is the fluency, rhythm, and liveliness in writing that makes it unique to the writer. A distinctive voice establishes personal expression and enhances the writing.

The following sources were referenced in developing the glossary:

- Fountas and Pinnell (2001) *Guiding Readers and Writers Grades 3-6: Teaching Comprehension, Genre, and Literacy*. Heinemann
- Kemper, Sebranek & Meyer (2001) *The Write Source*. Wilmington: Houghton Mifflin
- Moats (2003) *LETRS: Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling*. Sopris West
- Pennsylvania Department of Education (2003) *Reading Assessment Glossary*
- (2001) *Put Reading First*. National Institute for Literacy, US Department of Education
- (2004) *Tri-State New England Grade Level Expectations for Writing - Appendix A: Writing Glossary*

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Appendix E: A Discussion of “Increasing Text Complexity”

Karin Hess and Sue Biggam, 2004

The instruction and assessment of reading comprehension presents unique challenges to classroom teachers and test developers alike; and the criteria used in selecting a variety and range of appropriate texts are essential to meeting those purposes. In the classroom, students learn to apply and practice a variety of reading strategies, for different purposes and with different text types. Over time, students who are exposed to a variety of text types with increasing complexity also learn how text features differ by genre, and they gain confidence in peeling back the layers of complexity for a deeper understanding of what is read. In test development, the overall number of test items is driven by the length and type of reading passages and the number of items possible accompanying each passage. Passages for reading assessment, drawn from “authentic” text whenever possible, should always include both literary and informational texts. A series of questions accompanying each reading passage may include initial understanding of text, analysis and interpretation of text, or a combination of both types of questions, especially for longer text passages.

We have learned from NAEP research (1985) that difficulty of text passages was one of the three most important factors in reading comprehension performance of 4th, 8th, and 12th grade students. The other two factors were familiarity with subject matter presented in text and the type (literal, inferential, etc.) of question asked (Chall and Conard, 1991). Other research suggests that at grades 2 and 3, word difficulty may influence text complexity more than other factors (Anderson, 1992). Lipson and Wixson (2003) summarize the challenges of understanding text complexity this way:

"In the past, one of the few text features that was given much attention was its difficulty or readability, as measured by factors such as the number of syllables in the words and the number of words in the sentences. Current research has demonstrated that a number of other factors have a significant impact on both how much and what students understand and learn from a text. The presence or absence of these factors determines the extent to which a given text can be considered 'considerate' (to enable readers with minimal effort) or 'inconsiderate' (text requiring much greater effort). (Armbruster, 1984) "

A variety of factors influence text complexity. The complexity of text, or the degree of challenge of a particular text, is the result of specific combinations and interactions of these factors. For example, a text that has short simple sentences may, nevertheless, be challenging to read/comprehend when it contains abstract ideas, concepts that are unfamiliar, or requires a greater level of interpretation to unlock the intended meaning. Pinnell and Fountas' text leveling system (2002), an extension of the system used by Reading Recovery developed for classroom use at grades 3-6, includes these factors for determining complexity: understanding the nature of print, repeated text, natural language versus book text, supportive text, and high frequency vocabulary. Their system also calls attention to differences between fiction and nonfiction texts in book leveling, and includes descriptors that "overlap" to the next level of difficulty.

Chall, Bissex, Conard, and Harris-Sharples (1996) suggest that linguistic characteristics (vocabulary and sentence structure and variety) as well as concepts presented, text organization, and background knowledge required of readers all need to be considered in determining appropriateness of text for a given grade level. "Merely breaking up longer sentences and simplifying vocabulary does not guarantee that reading materials will be completely appropriate for lower reading levels." They also point out differences between popular fiction, literature, and informational texts with regard to text difficulty. For example, popular fiction tends to

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(a) use less figurative language than literature, (b) be more repetition of information, and (c) have more conventional language use; therefore demands on the reader of popular fiction are more about basic understanding of explicit messages than on interpretation of the message.

Criteria for increasing text complexity include factors that interact to affect the relative difficulty of reading particular material. The tables on the following pages describe specific ways in which text materials generally increase in difficulty over the grade span of grades 1 through high school. The descriptors in the tables build from one grade span to the next. It is expected that students would have experience reading text described for their grade levels, as well as those of earlier grade spans.

Factors that Interact to Influence Text Complexity

- **Word Difficulty and Language Structure**, including vocabulary and sentence type and complexity of words or structure (often determined through the use of multiple readability formulas)
- **Text Structure** (e.g., description, chronology, sequence/procedure, cause-effect, proposition-support, problem-solution, critique)
- **Discourse Style** (e.g., satire, humor)
- **Genre and Characteristic Features of the Text**
- **Background Knowledge and/or Degree of Familiarity with Content** needed by the reader (e.g., historical, geographical, or literary references)
- **Level of Reasoning Required** (e.g., sophistication of themes and ideas presented, abstract metaphors, etc.)
- **Format and Layout of Text**, including how text is organized/layout, size and location of print, graphics, and other book/print features
- **Length of Text**

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Descriptors of Text Complexity for Grade Levels or Grade Spans

Karin Hess and Sue Biggam, 2004

Please Note: Sample grade-appropriate text titles are included at the end of the descriptors for each grade span as examples of text that would illustrate many of the characteristics described in the table. In many cases, particular teachers and schools will choose to introduce these specific texts at grade levels below or above the grade level indicated. While every descriptor might not be evident in a sample text passage, it is expected that the sample texts reflect the intent of the descriptors, and many of the indicators.

Text Complexity Descriptors High School

- ❖ Includes a full range of literary genres, including realistic and historical fiction, science fiction, fantasy, and folk literature.
- ❖ Informational/functional texts include primary sources, personal narratives and autobiographies, schedules, and manuals, as well as synthesized information found in textbooks.
- ❖ Increasing number of uncommon words, including words with non-literal meanings and more abstract vocabulary; word choice can reflect diverse historical and cultural context; text often includes technical words with specialized meanings.
- ❖ Language in narrative text is more elaborate and complex, and includes a wide range of dialogue, use of dialects, and varied sentence structure to convey specific meanings.
- ❖ Prose style matches text purpose (informational, recreational, provocative, etc.).
- ❖ Relationships between ideas become less explicit and require more inference or interpretation.
- ❖ Understanding content requires increasing cultural and historical breadth of knowledge.
- ❖ More sophisticated themes.
- ❖ Texts used often call for literary analysis.
- ❖ Informational texts use format, illustrations, and graphics to support understanding of meaning.
- ❖ Text features often include advance organizers, inset text, and technology support.
- ❖ Increasing

SAMPLE TEXTS AT HIGH SCHOOL:

To Kill a Mockingbird; Night; Into Thin Air; Newsweek magazine

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