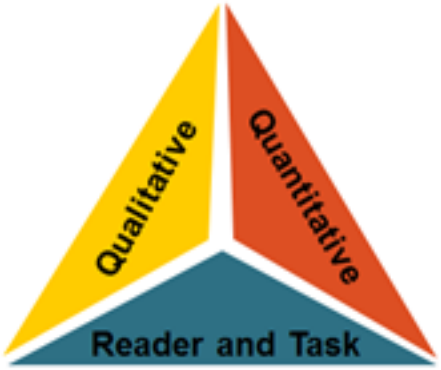
Using the Text Complexity Triangle as Suggested in Appendix A of the Common Core Standards to Evaluate Texts

The *Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects* outlines a three-part model for measuring text complexity.[1] As suggested by Figure 1, the three parts are qualitative dimensions (aspects of text best measured by attentive human readers), quantitative dimensions (aspects of text such as word length/frequency, sentence length, cohesion best measured by computer algorithms) and reader and task considerations (variables such as the reader's cognitive capabilities, motivation, reading purpose, and the knowledge and experiences unique to each reader).

Figure 1. The Common Core Standards' Three-Part Model of Text Complexity[2]



For many years the formal evaluation of text complexity has often been limited to quantitative measures such as Flesch-Kincaid, Dale-Chall, Lexile, ATOS, and Coh-Metrix. Although any tool for measuring text is certainly useful, each is also imperfect as well. Many prose and dramatic texts, for example, can be measured quite suitably and their evalutions can greatly inform instructional use. However, the very same measures may not be as suitable for poetry or for texts with features to aide students just learning to read and such evaluations may not prove as useful in informing instruction. In such instances, it is believed preference should be given to qualitative measures when evaluating such texts.[3]

Likewise, educators must employ their own professional judgment in matching texts to individual students and tasks. Because different readers bring unique abilities and dispositions to the endeavor, educators must consider these elements as well when planning instruction. In some instances, these reader and task considerations sometimes outweigh both the qualitative and quantitative measures available.

Because no single tool and no single measure of text complexity is perfect, educators should consider all three parts of the text complexity triangle before selecting instructional texts.

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[1] Common Core State Standards Initiative (2010).
[2] Common Core State Standards Initiative (2010).
[3] Common Core State Standards Initiative (2010).