

Figure 2: Qualitative Dimensions of Text Complexity

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

- Single level of meaning → Multiple levels of meaning
- Explicitly stated purpose → Implicit purpose, may be hidden or obscure

**Structure**

- Simple → Complex
- Explicit → Implicit
- Conventional → Unconventional (chiefly literary texts)
- Events related in chronological order → Events related out of chronological order (chiefly literary texts)
- Traits of a common genre or subgenre → Traits specific to a particular discipline (chiefly informational texts)
- Simple graphics → Sophisticated graphics
- Graphics unnecessary or merely supplementary to understanding the text → Graphics essential to understanding the text and may provide information not otherwise conveyed in the text

**Language Conventionality and Clarity**

- Literal → Figurative or ironic
- Clear → Ambiguous or purposefully misleading
- Contemporary, familiar → Archaic or otherwise unfamiliar
- Conversational → General academic and domain-specific

**Knowledge Demands: Life Experiences (literary texts)**

- Simple theme → Complex or sophisticated themes
- Single themes → Multiple themes
- Common, everyday experiences or clearly fantastical situations → Experiences distinctly different from one's own
- Single perspective → Multiple perspectives
- Perspective(s) like one's own → Perspective(s) unlike or in opposition to one's own

**Knowledge Demands: Cultural/Literary Knowledge (chiefly literary texts)**

- Everyday knowledge and familiarity with genre conventions required → Cultural and literary knowledge useful
- Low intertextuality (few if any references/allusions to other texts) → High intertextuality (many references/allusions to other texts)

**Knowledge Demands: Content/Discipline Knowledge (chiefly informational texts)**

- Everyday knowledge and familiarity with genre conventions required → Extensive, perhaps specialized discipline-specific content knowledge required
- Low intertextuality (few if any references to/citations of other texts) → High intertextuality (many references to/citations of other texts)

Adapted from ACT, Inc. (2006). *Reading between the lines: What the ACT reveals about college readiness in reading*. Iowa City, IA: Author; Carnegie Council on Advancing Adolescent Literacy. (2010). *Time to act: An agenda for advancing adolescent literacy for college and career success*. New York: Carnegie Corporation of New York; Chall, J. S., Bisseck, G. L., Conrad, S. S., & Harris-Sharples, S. (1996). *Qualitative assessment of text difficulty: A practical guide for teachers and writers*. Cambridge, UK: Brookline Books; Hess, K., & Biggam, S. (2004). A discussion of "increasing text complexity." Published by the New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont departments of education as part of the New England Common Assessment Program (NECAP). Retrieved from [www.nciea.org/publications/TextComplexity\\_KH05.pdf](http://www.nciea.org/publications/TextComplexity_KH05.pdf)