Readability of Text and Writing Instruction

TNCore

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1. Understand readability of text and provide a foundation for understanding text complexity.

2. Explore writing to sources and the relationship between reading and writing.

Students will read and understand grade-level complex text independently and proficiently and express that understanding clearly through writing and speaking about text.

Three instructional shifts

1. Building knowledge through content-rich nonfiction

2. Reading, writing, and speaking grounded in evidence from text, both literary and informational

3. Regular practice with complex text and its academic language

Shift 1: Informational text

Distribution of Literary and Informational Passages by Grade in the 2009 NAEP Reading Framework

Grade	Literary	Information
4	50%	50%
8	45%	55%
12	30%	70%

(2008). Reading framework for the 2009 National Assessment of Educational Progress. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.
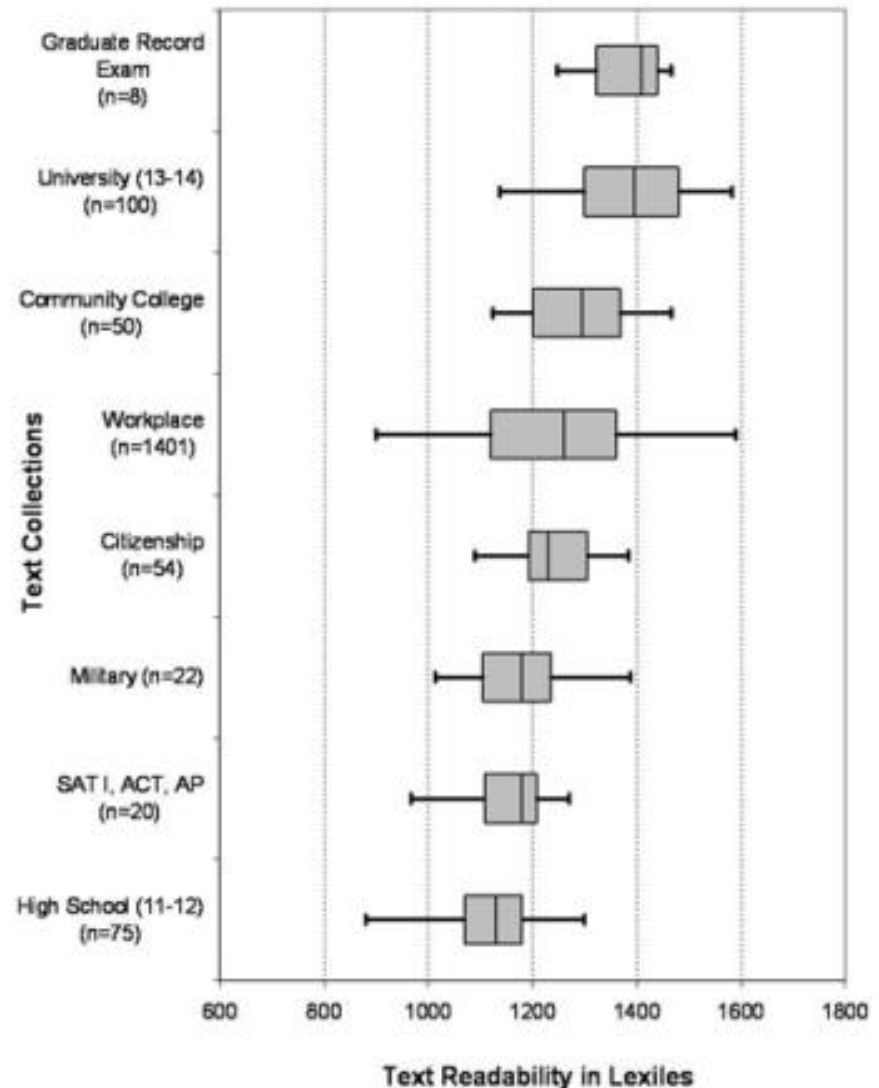
Source: p. 5 of CCSS

- CCSS focuses on gathering evidence:

  - Anchor Standard for Reading #1: Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.

  - Anchor Standard for Writing #9: Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

- Text-dependent questions and writing-to-sources prompts hold students accountable to understanding and responding to what they have read

- Why the shift?

  - Need to spend more time inside the text, less time outside

  - Going outside the text privileges those who have that experience

  - It is easier to talk about our experiences than to analyze the text

Shift 3: Complex text

"Gary L. Williamson (2006) found a 350L (Lexile) gap between the difficulty of end-of-high school and college texts—a gap equivalent to 1.5 standard deviations and more than the Lexile difference between grade 4 and grade 8 texts on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)."

Source of graph:
"A Text Readability Continuum for Postsecondary Readiness," by Gary L. Williamson
http://www.eric.ed.gov/PDFS/EJ822324.pdf.

Box plot showing Text Readability in Lexiles across Text Collections: Graduate Record Exam (n=8), University (13-14) (n=100), Community College (n=50), Workplace (n=1401), Citizenship (n=54), Military (n=22), SAT I, ACT, AP (n=20), High School (11-12) (n=75). X-axis: Text Readability in Lexiles, 500 to 1800.

Quotes from research summary in Appendix A:

- Reading levels among the adult population are also disturbingly low [. . .] 14 percent of adults read prose texts at "below basic" level, meaning they could exhibit "no more than the most simple and concrete literacy skills"; a similarly small number (13 percent) could read prose texts at the "proficient level."

- If students cannot read complex expository text to gain information, they will likely turn to text-free or text-light sources, such as video, podcasts, and tweets. These sources, while not without value, cannot capture the nuance, subtlety, depth, or breadth of ideas developed through complex text.

Conclusion: the ability to read complex texts is a prerequisite for culture, citizenship, and employment opportunities.

Vocabulary

- One of two features of text most predictive of student difficulty

- Which words should be the focus?

  – Academic (tier II): theory, objective, analysis.

  – Essential to text

  – Likely to appear in future texts students will encounter

  – More abstract words with multiple meanings depending on context (principle vs. seconds; inertia vs. dinosaur)

Text complexity chart (Appendix A revision)
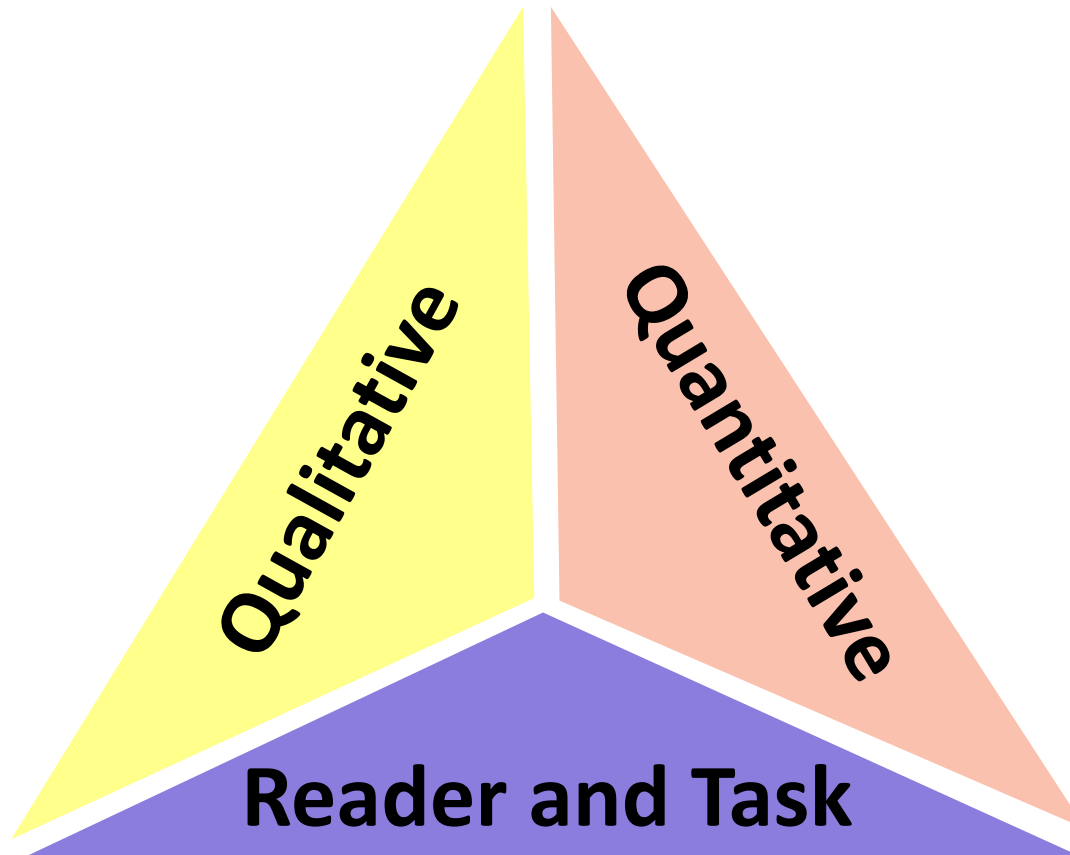
Common Scale for Band Level Text Difficulty Ranges

Common Core Bands	Text-Analyzer Tools					
	ATOS	DRP	FK	Lexile	SR	RM
2nd–3rd	2.75–5.14	42–54	1.98–5.34	420–820	0.05–2.48	3.53–6.13
4th–5th	4.97–7.03	52–60	4.51–7.73	740–1010	0.84–5.75	5.42–7.92
6th–8th	7.00–9.98	57–67	6.51–10.34	925–1185	4.11–10.66	7.04–9.57
9th–10th	9.67–12.01	62–72	8.32–12.12	1050–1335	9.02–13.93	8.41–10.81
11th–CCR	11.20–14.10	67–74	10.34–14.2	1185–1385	12.30–14.50	9.57–12.00

KEY
ATOS: ATOS® (Renaissance Learning)
DRP: Degrees of Reading Power® (Questar Assessment, Inc.)
FK: Flesch Kincaid®(public domain, no mass analyzer tool available)
Lexile: Lexile Framework® (MetaMetrics)
SR: Source Rater© (Educational Testing Service)
RM: Pearson Reading Maturity Metric© (Pearson Education)

Not in concordance table, but integral to research:
Coh-Metrix (University of Memphis/Arizona State University)
(Coh-Metrix provides multiple measures of analysis that today
do not resolve to a single determination. These measures may
still be quite useful in further analyzing quantitative and
qualitative features of text.)

Sample text placements

From page 58 of the CCSS for ELA:

Texts Illustrating the Complexity, Quality, and Range of Student Reading 6–12

	Literature: Stories, Dramas, Poetry	Informational Texts: Literary Nonfiction
6–8	• *Little Women* by Louisa May Alcott (1869) • *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* by Mark Twain (1876) • "The Road Not Taken" by Robert Frost (1915) • *The Dark Is Rising* by Susan Cooper (1973) • *Dragonwings* by Laurence Yep (1975) • *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* by Mildred Taylor (1976)	• "Letter on Thomas Jefferson" by John Adams (1776) • *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* by Frederick Douglass (1845) • "Blood, Toil, Tears and Sweat: Address to Parliament on May 13th, 1940" by Winston Churchill (1940) • *Harriet Tubman: Conductor on the Underground Railroad* by Ann Petry (1955) • *Travels with Charley: In Search of America* by John Steinbeck (1962)

What are Lexiles?

- Lexile is a trademark of Measurement Incorporated. A Lexile is one of many valid ratings systems used to measure a text's complexity.

- All quantitative rating systems focus on two key aspects: syntax (sentence length and structure) and vocabulary (variety and rarity of words)

- A Lexile measure can be assigned to a **student's reading ability** or a **text's readability .** Ex: 900L (5th grade); 1380L (CCR)

- What Lexiles cannot measure:

  – Literary elements (ambiguity, shifts in perspective, figurative language)

  – Poetry and drama

  – Subject matter (abstraction, depth, appropriateness)

  – Knowledge demands

  – Non-text features

Lexile resources

- Lexile Framework for Reading: http://www.lexile.com/

- Lexile Analyzer: http://www.lexile.com/analyzer/

- Find a Book: http://www.lexile.com/fab/

- Helpful resources: http://www.achievethecore.org/ela-literacy-common-core/text-complexity/

- **RLA TCAP/EOC ISR's will include student Lexile scores**

"Students who struggle greatly to read texts within (or even below) their text complexity grade band must be given the support needed to enable them to read at a grade-appropriate level of complexity."

Source: CCSS for ELA Appendix A
http://www.corestandards.org/assets/Appendix_A.pdf

Scaffolding complex text

- Read aloud, especially for younger students

- Multiple reads

- Chunking or interrupted reading

- Vocabulary focus and support

- Speaking and listening opportunities with peers and whole class using Accountable Talk to test and build understandings

- Expect frustration. Even the top students will not understand everything they read on PARCC. Students must embrace productive struggle and demonstrate grit and persistence to succeed on PARCC.

Using questioning to support comprehension

- Text-dependent questioning begins with comprehension and builds towards inference, analysis, and evaluation

- Focus on word, sentence, and paragraph as well as larger ideas, themes, or events

- Focus on difficult portions of text in order to enhance reading proficiency

- Explicit, systematic instruction daily

  - Print concepts, phonological awareness, phonics/word recognition and fluency

- Use a multi-sensory approach to instruction and follow a developmental sequence for instruction

- Strengthen oral language

- Create a cycle of teach, assess, monitor, and adjust

- Teach continuously until automaticity is achieved

Resources on TNCore.org

http://www.tncore.org/english_language_arts/curricular_resources/text_complexity.aspx

1. On line learning series

   - Grades 2-5

   - Grades 6-8

   - Grades 9-12

2. Training Modules

3. Resources

Text Complexity Rubric

1. Orient yourself to the Informational Text Rubric

2. Pair up

3. Read text with your pair

4. Rate it on the rubric

5. Share out

Reading and Writing Connection

Graham and Hebert's meta-analysis from "Writing Next":

- Students' comprehension of science, social studies, and language arts text is improved when they write about what they read.

- Writing summaries increases reading comprehension.

- Reading skills and comprehension are improved by learning the skills and processes that go into the writing process.

Data from previous TCAP WA

Statewide: total percentage of students proficient or advanced (all grade levels)

Nationwide results from NAEP writing 2011
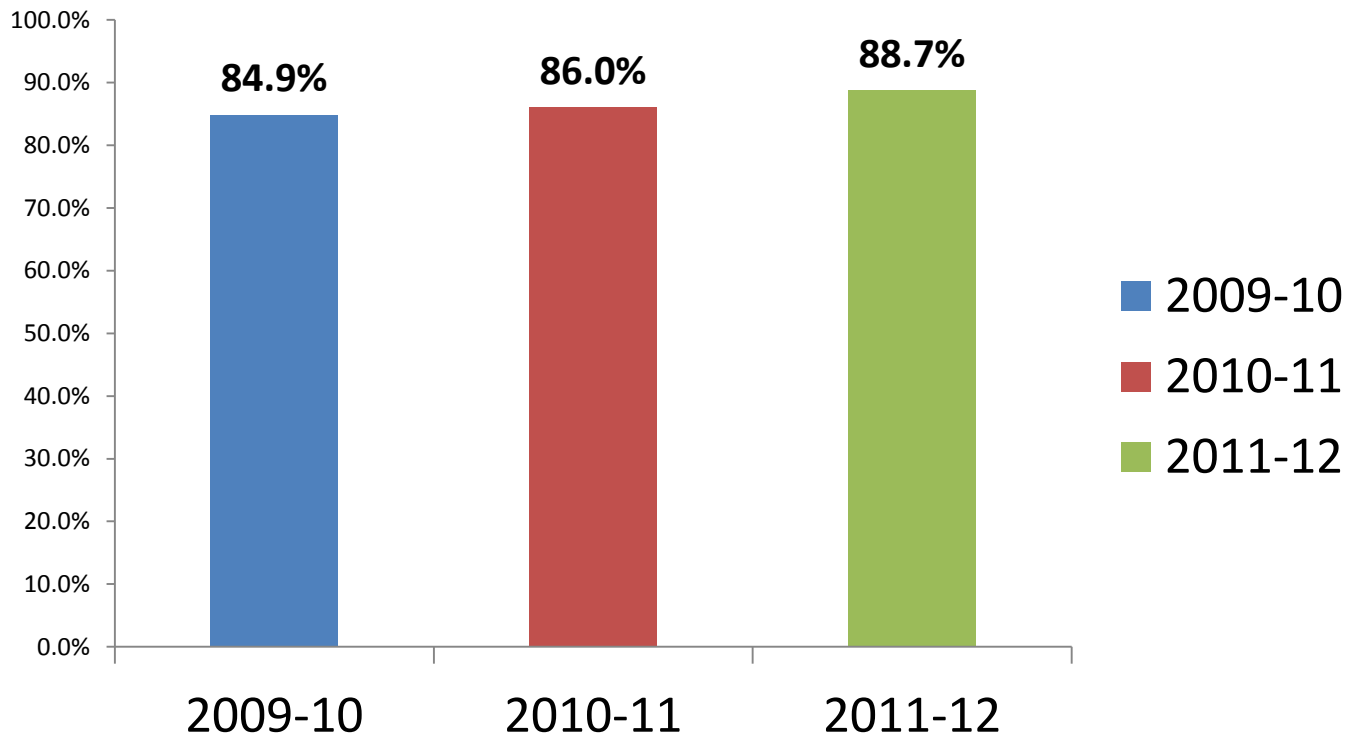
Achievement-level results in eighth- and twelfth-grade NAEP writing: 2011

Grade 8

Grade 12

% at *Advanced*
% at or above *Proficient*
% at or above *Basic*
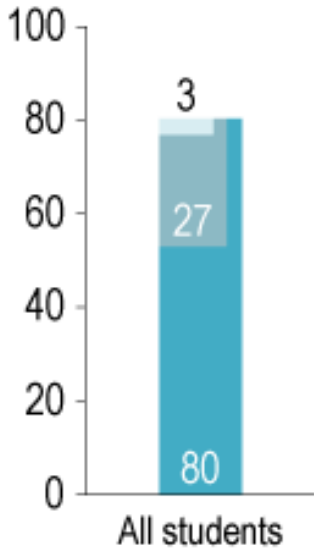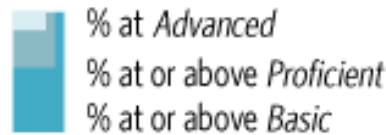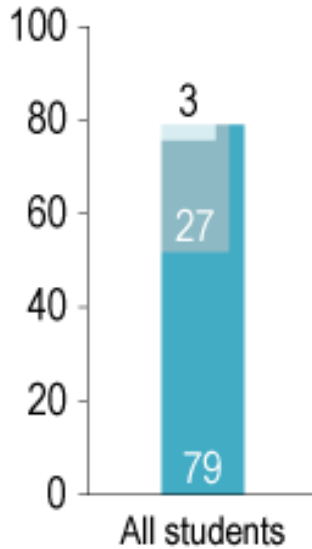
READ THIS TOPIC CAREFULLY BEFORE YOU BEGIN WRITING.

Pretend you were on an island and you saw a locked treasure chest. After searching around, you found a key that would unlock the treasure chest.

Before you begin writing, think about what happened when you opened the locked treasure chest.

Now write a story about your adventures after finding a treasure chest on an island.

Sample Writing Task, Grades 11-12

You have read three speeches about the right of women to vote. These three texts provided you with arguments in support of women's suffrage.

The three texts are:

- "Address to the Senate on the Nineteenth Amendment" by President Woodrow Wilson

- "The Crisis" by Carrie Chapman Catt

- "On a Women's Right to Vote" by Susan B. Anthony

Write an essay that delineates and evaluates the reasoning in all three speeches and argues which speech has the most effective reasoning. Be sure to cite strong and thorough evidence from all three texts to support your analysis. Follow the conventions of standard written English.

TCAP/WA Argument Rubric – Grades 6-8

Tennessee Department of Education

Revised: April 2013

Score	Development	Focus & Organization	Language	Conventions
4	In response to the task and the stimuli, the writing: • utilizes well-chosen, relevant, and sufficient evidence[1] from the stimuli to insightfully support claim(s) and counterclaim(s).[2] • thoroughly and accurately explains and elaborates on the evidence provided, connecting the evidence to claim(s) and counterclaim(s) and demonstrating a clear understanding of the topic and the stimuli.	In response to the task and the stimuli, the writing: • contains an effective and relevant introduction. • states and maintains a clear and sophisticated argument. • utilizes effective organizational strategies to logically order reasons and evidence to create a unified whole. • effectively clarifies relationships among claim(s), reasons, evidence, and counterclaim(s)[2] to create cohesion. • contains an effective and relevant concluding statement or section.	The writing: • illustrates consistent and sophisticated command of precise language and domain-specific vocabulary appropriate to the task. • illustrates sophisticated command of syntactic variety for meaning and reader interest. • utilizes sophisticated and varied transitional words and phrases. • effectively establishes and maintains a formal style.	The writing: • demonstrates consistent and sophisticated command of grade-level conventions of standard written English.[3] • may contain a few minor errors that do not interfere with meaning.
3	In response to the task and the stimuli, the writing: • utilizes relevant and sufficient evidence[1] from the stimuli to adequately support claim(s) and counterclaim(s).[2] • adequately and accurately explains and elaborates on the evidence provided, connecting the evidence to claim(s) and counterclaim(s) and demonstrating a sufficient understanding of the topic and the stimuli.	In response to the task and the stimuli, the writing: • contains a relevant introduction. • states and maintains a clear argument. • utilizes adequate organizational strategies to logically order reasons and evidence to create a mostly unified whole. • clarifies most relationships among claim(s), reasons, evidence, and counterclaim(s),[2] but there may be some gaps in cohesion. • contains a relevant concluding statement or section.	The writing: • illustrates consistent command of precise language and domain-specific vocabulary appropriate to the task. • illustrates consistent command of syntactic variety for meaning and reader interest. • utilizes appropriate and varied transitional words and phrases. • establishes and maintains a formal style.	The writing: • demonstrates consistent command of grade-level conventions of standard written English.[3] • contains some minor and/or major errors, but the errors do not significantly interfere with meaning.
2	In response to the task and the stimuli, the writing: • utilizes mostly relevant but insufficient evidence[1] from the stimuli to partially support claim(s) and counterclaim(s).[2] Some evidence may be inaccurate or repetitive. • explains some of the evidence provided, connecting some of the evidence to claim(s) and counterclaim(s) and demonstrating only a partial understanding of the topic and the stimuli. There may be some level of inaccuracy in the explanation.	In response to the task and the stimuli, the writing: • contains a limited introduction. • states a weak argument. • demonstrates an attempt to use organizational strategies to order some reasons and evidence, but ideas may be hard to follow at times. • clarifies some relationships among claim(s), reasons, evidence, and counterclaim(s),[2] but there are lapses in focus. • contains a limited concluding statement or section.	The writing: • illustrates inconsistent command of precise language and domain-specific vocabulary. • illustrates inconsistent command of syntactic variety. • utilizes basic or repetitive transitional words and phrases. • establishes but inconsistently maintains a formal style.	The writing: • demonstrates inconsistent command of grade-level conventions of standard written English.[3] • contains many errors that may significantly interfere with meaning.
1	In response to the task and the stimuli, the writing: • utilizes mostly irrelevant or no evidence[1] from the stimuli, or mostly/only personal knowledge to inadequately support claim(s) and counterclaim(s).[2] Evidence is inaccurate or repetitive. • inadequately or inaccurately explains the evidence provided; evidence, claim(s), and counterclaim(s) appear disconnected, demonstrating little understanding of the topic and the stimuli.	In response to the task and the stimuli, the writing: • contains no or an irrelevant introduction. • states an unclear argument. • demonstrates an unclear organizational structure; ideas are hard to follow most of the time. • fails to clarify relationships among claim(s), reasons, evidence, and counterclaim(s);[2] concepts are unclear and/or there is a lack of focus. • contains no or an irrelevant concluding statement or section.	The writing: • illustrates little to no use of precise language and domain-specific vocabulary. • illustrates little to no syntactic variety. • utilizes no or few transitional words and phrases. • does not establish or maintain a formal style.	The writing: • demonstrates limited command of grade-level conventions of standard written English.[3] • contains numerous and repeated errors that seriously impede meaning.

- Students at all grade levels scored significantly lower on support/elaboration (or "development" next year)

- We have seen an increase in "D" condition codes (too limited to evaluate). In most of these cases, students copy text directly from stimulus material.

- Conclusion: students need more practice **incorporating textual evidence** into their own arguments or explanations

- Analyze trait scores to determine areas of individual student strength and weakness—share through vertical planning/PLC's

- Work with data experts and look for significant trends in scoring data; adjust instruction accordingly (e.g., less time on grammar drills and more direct instruction on/practice with writing-to-sources)

- In the 2013-14 school year, give and score sample prompts using scoring resources the TDOE will make available. Record and compare data (including by descriptor).

Common Core writing modes

Three Common Core writing modes:

- Opinion/argument

- Informative/explanatory

- Narrative

"Detached broken fossils of pre-adamite whales, fragments of their bones and skeletons, have within thirty years past, at various intervals, been found at the base of the Alps, in Lombardy, in France, in England, in Scotland, and in the States of Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama. Among the more curious of such remains is part of a skull, which in the year 1779 was disinterred in the Rue Dauphine in Paris, a short street opening almost directly upon the palace of the Tuileries; and bones disinterred in excavating the great docks of Antwerp, in Napoleon's time. Cuvier pronounced these fragments to have belonged to some utterly unknown Leviathanic species.

But by far the most wonderful of all cetacean relics was the almost complete vast skeleton of an extinct monster, found in the year 1842, on the plantation of Judge Creagh, in Alabama. The awe-stricken credulous slaves in the vicinity took it for the bones of one of the fallen angels. The Alabama doctors declared it a huge reptile, and bestowed upon it the name of Basilosaurus. But some specimen bones of it being taken across the sea to owen, the English Anatomist, it turned out that this alleged reptile was a whale, though of a departed species."

Appendix A mode definitions

With one or two partners:

1. Read the mode definitions from Appendix A

2. Highlight the words and concepts that overlap between modes

3. Discuss the following questions:

   - How has the Common Core changed and complicated "traditional" definitions of modes, especially narrative?

   - When it comes to teaching students, what matters most in each of the three modes? (In other words, what is the essence without which a piece of writing is no longer an argument, for instance)

   - What do all three modes in Common Core have in common?

Why does the Common Core broaden and complicate the definitions of writing modes to encourage "cross-over"?

- Rarely in the real world (and even in college) will a boss or professor say, "write me only a narrative" or "write me just an argument."

- Professional authors don't observe these generic borders. They trespass in creative and productive ways

- Succesful writing isn't about following a formula or honoring some abstract mode definition. It's about strategic **rhetoric**: "an ability, in each particular case, to see the available means of persuasion" (Aristotle).

The most important consideration for a writer is not mode but achieving the **goal** with **coherence**.

Anchor Standard for Writing #4:

Produce clear and **coherent** writing in which the development, organization, and style are **appropriate** to *task, purpose,* and *audience.*

Ex: Write an essay to convince a group of investors whether or not it is worthwhile to put their money in green energy.

"When you suddenly find your tongue twisted and your speech stammering as you seek to explain to your six year old daughter why she can't go to the public amusement park that has just been advertised on television, and see tears welling up in her eyes when she is told that Funtown is closed to colored children, and see ominous clouds of inferiority beginning to form in her little mental sky, and see her beginning to distort her personality by developing an unconscious bitterness toward white people; when you have to concoct an answer for a five year old son who is asking: 'Daddy, why do white people treat colored people so mean?'"

Some thoughts on teaching writing in a Common Core world

- Spend less time teaching about mode differences and more time on teaching the qualities of good communication through writing (structure, organization, support with facts and details, clarity, strategic rhetoric)

- Give your students frequent practice writing to rich texts paired with thoughtful prompts that require careful reading and comprehension

- Use data from the TCAP WA rubrics to identify gaps and teach mini-lessons on those areas

- The most important discrete skill to teach: citing and using textual evidence

- Focus on writing standard #4 through writing *and* reading. Have students use an analytical device like SOAPSTone to analyze a passage and task and aim for **coherence**

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- Be a model! Share great examples of rich, stylistically diverse writing from professionals, you, and students.

  – Osmosis followed by repetition/mimicry helps students see how to improve their writing.

  – Have students mimic the techniques or structure of a professional piece of writing (e.g. take an op-ed and write your own about a different topic using the same argument structure or rhetorical technique)

- Talk to AP English teachers

- Provide regular, timely teacher feedback on student writing

  - "Academic Feedback" indicator on TEAM, first descriptor: "Oral and written feedback is consistently academically focused, frequent, high-quality and references expectations"

  - Writing Anchor Standards # 5

  - Feedback guidance document

- Other ideas?

- www.tncore.org has:

  - Guides to creating text-dependent questions and conducting a close read

  - Units for close reading and writing to sources (K-12)

  - On-line Learning Series

  - Summer Training and Year-long Course Content

- Questions? tncore.questions@tn.gov

- Sign up for TNCore Updates

Questions?

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Thank you!

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