



DIVE INTO

STRATEGIES
FOR YOUR
3-5
CLASSROOM

Close Reading

Complexity
Text-dependent
Guided
Scaffold
Assessment
Underline
Details
Question
Partner
Connections
Chunk
Tone
Reread
Vocabulary
Craft
Annotate
Discuss
Structure
Point of View

Diane Lapp, Barbara Moss, Maria Grant, Kelly Johnson

Foreword by Lori Oczkus

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Diane, Barbara, Maria, and Kelly



Foreword

At last, close reading is demystified and made practical in this fabulous resource, put together by the respected team of Diane Lapp, Barbara Moss, Maria Grant, and Kelly Johnson! The authors bring their rich classroom experiences and knowledge of the reading process to this useful tool, designed especially for grades 3–5. The movie title of *Dive into Close Reading: Strategies for Your 3–5 Classroom* could be *Everything You Wanted to Know About Close Reading But Were Afraid to Ask!* Whether you already teach students to read closely or are new to the term, *Dive into Close Reading* is for you! This useful and classroom-tested resource is jam-packed with grade-level specific ideas and detailed lesson samples to use all year long. Whether you read *Dive into Close Reading* on your own or if you study close reading in a professional learning community in your school or district, this is a wonderful book!

In my work around the country as a literacy consultant, I find that the definition of close reading varies as well as the practices related to it. The authors of this text aptly define close reading as an approach for all students to develop deep comprehension of complex texts, including English language learners and below-level readers. They add that, “In close reading, students act as investigators, gradually uncovering the meaning of short pieces of literature or informational texts. Through the process of reading, questioning, focusing, and rereading the texts, students uncover the ‘bones,’ or main ideas, of the passage.” The authors claim that rereading to delve deeper into texts is at the heart of close reading.

Today, teachers still ask lots of questions regarding the implementation of close reading and what models work best. The authors of *Dive into Close Reading* address the issues and problems teachers share when incorporating quality close reading lessons in their classrooms. Here are some of the current concerns teachers may express with close reading:

- What is the definition of close reading?
- How can I make close reading relevant to my students so that they will do it on their own?
- What types of texts, including complex texts, should I use in my lessons?
- What are some ways to motivate students to reread during close reading lessons?
- How can I teach close reading using the materials I already have in my classroom?
- What are some lesson formats that fit different types of texts and genres?
- What is the most effective use of text-dependent questions during lessons?
- How can I make time for close reading?
- How does close reading differ from other familiar reading approaches?
- What is the best way to teach students to annotate text?
- How can I use close reading to promote better comprehension and critical thinking?

Foreword *(cont.)*

Dive into Close Reading is chock-full of not only research-based how-to questions and answers but also includes sample texts and lessons that engage students in the close reading process. Teachers will welcome the easy-to-read format and concrete examples. *Dive into Close Reading* has a unique format that is really a two-in-one professional book, plus a rich sample lesson treasure trove. The authors have taken the guesswork out of creating close reading lesson plans that really work!

***Dive into Close Reading* features:**

- Rubrics for evaluating texts based on:
 - what the text says
 - how the text works
 - what the text means
- Grade-specific text-dependent questions charts for grades 3–5 that teachers will want to use every day!
- Suggestions for scaffolding tools, such as partner texts, realia, or illustrations.
- Concrete ideas for performance tasks that are grade-level specific. For example, at 3rd grade, role playing with two characters; or 4th grade, creating posters; or 5th grade, making audio podcasts that critically examine a topic.
- Concrete strategies for helping struggling readers and English language learners grasp concepts.
- Very specific sample lesson plans and strategies for literary texts for each grade level 3–5.
- Very specific sample lesson plans and strategies for informational texts for each grade level 3–5.

Join me in congratulating the authors Diane Lapp, Barbara Moss, Maria Grant, and Kelly Johnson for their brilliant exploration of close reading and their generous gift of a practical guide to illustrate the approach. Teachers everywhere will want copies on their desks to use all year long as they help students *Dive into Close Reading*!

—Lori Oczkus

Literacy Consultant and Coauthor of the
Close Reading with Paired Texts K–5 series

Section 1:

Close Reading Introduced

A Short Scenario

In Mrs. Marquand's fourth grade classroom, students are tackling a standard that involves looking at energy and fuels derived from nature and natural resources. Mrs. Marquand selects a section from the text, *The Next Wave: The Quest to Harness the Power of the Oceans* (Rusch 2014), to use for a close reading. In most circumstances, this text might have students rolling their eyes and putting their heads down. For example, a sentence such as "Despite these overwhelming challenges, the work of these ocean energy pioneers is finally reaching a crest, with an array of amazing machines proving their worth in the water" could easily lose students' attention. After all, this sentence includes technical language (ocean energy), academic language (despite these overwhelming challenges), and even a pun (use of the term *crest*, which is both a high point in the research discussed and a part of wave anatomy).

How can a teacher guide students to notice and comprehend such subtle yet important intricacies of text? That's the question asked by thousands of teachers as they sit down to craft meaningful lessons that involve reading complex texts.

Fortunately, there is an answer to this question—an effective, thoughtful, research-based means of implementing close reading that can be personalized to meet the needs of any teacher's students. The key is to guide students to unlock meaning through strategically crafted text-dependent questions.

Let us return to Mrs. Marquand's fourth grade class to see how she does this.

Mrs. Marquand begins by asking students to read the two paragraphs she has designated for this close reading and to think about the question *What is this text about?* Students are also instructed to use the annotation markings of their choosing to note key words and ideas, confusing concepts or questions, and connections between elements.

Fourth graders David and Max feel confident in their skills. They have practiced with Mrs. Marquand for weeks now. Following the first close reading, the students chat and share their thoughts, first as partners, then as a whole group.

Annotations: symbols, notes, comments, and other markings that help readers remember their thinking. For more information about annotations, see Table 3.2 (page 61).



Max: I think this is about how hard it has been to get energy from the ocean.

David: Yeah, because the ocean is strong and has big waves and stuff.

Max: Right. Also, I was confused about some of the words, like *harness*. Do you know what that means?

David: Uh-uh. I don't know what *harness* means either.

Mrs. Marquand (to the class): Focus on the sentence that has this phrase, "It must *harness* the power of the waves and convert it into electricity." What clues does the author provide to help you understand that sentence?

As she teaches the close reading lesson, Mrs. Marquand uses student annotations and partner talk to guide her next steps. She offers appropriate text-dependent questions to help students unlock meaning for themselves. She guides students by strategically directing their attention to specific areas in the text. In doing so, she empowers them to use their insights and those gained from conversing with their peers. Her instruction includes close assessment of student performance, fostering independence, and building self-esteem. This is evident as Max and David continue to talk after Mrs. Marquand's questioning.

Max: So, there are two parts to that sentence. It has to harness power and then convert it.

David: It says harness the power of *the waves*. So, maybe it means *get*, like *get the power*.

Max: Right, it has to get the power from the waves and then change it into electricity.

David: That makes sense. We figured it out!

As this scenario illustrates, students begin to feel capable when they learn to read complex texts on their own, which is a teacher's dream. This book serves as a guide to teachers as they follow Mrs. Marquand's lead—teachers like you, who are teaching students to closely read complex texts by challenging them with appropriate text-dependent questions that build reading skills, deepen comprehension, and foster independence.

The Close Reading Approach

Compare today's modern, dynamic classrooms to the educational system in place 50 years ago, and it is obvious that huge improvements have been made in the teaching profession. As a frontline educator, you have never before been so well positioned to serve the ever-evolving needs of an increasingly diverse student body, but there are still areas that need attention. Every year, new techniques and buzzwords swirl around, each one promising to open the world of knowledge and critical thought to your students. Some live up to their promises, and some fizzle, only to be replaced by the *next big thing* the following year. You must carefully evaluate new techniques to ensure that they will be of actual benefit to students. No one denies that students need strong preparation for college and future careers. The question is, and always has been, *how* can we best provide students with the skills they need to lead productive, successful lives? The close reading approach described in this book is a terrific place to start.

Close reading is a powerful, useful, and successful approach for teaching reading comprehension and critical-thinking skills. The lessons and strategies described in this book have been piloted and refined by classroom teachers, are backed by current pedagogical research, and are aligned with college and career readiness standards from around the country. Using the close reading approach simply means building upon current practices. Table 1.1 lists useful definitions for terms used in the close reading approach.

Table 1.1 Useful Definitions for the Close Reading Approach

Term	Working Definition
annotation	the process of marking a text with information and questions for further study; may include highlights, symbols, notes, and comments
chunking	breaking a text into smaller pieces, or chunks, numbered for ease of reference and study
close thinking	a sister approach to close reading, where students think deeply about texts that are read aloud to them, as opposed to texts they read independently; is especially useful technique for when students do not yet have the decoding skills necessary to tackle a particular text
guided reading	a small-group reading approach in which a teacher supports developing readers through pre-loading and individualized scaffolding; is frequently used as an intermediate step between shared and independent reading
qualitative	unable to be defined numerically; factors include things such as student experiences with a topic, author purpose, and language features
quantitative	can be defined and assessed numerically, such as by grade level, number of words per page, and word length
scaffold	support for a student's learning; a tailored teaching practice used with the intent of helping the student achieve his or her learning goals
shared reading	an interactive reading experience in which the teacher models the skills of a fluent reader
text-dependent question (TDQ)	a question that is based on the text itself, rather than personal experiences, and can only be answered by someone who has read a particular text selection
text complexity	a measure of the level of challenge presented by a particular text selection for a student at a given level
thinking aloud	technique of speaking the thoughts that occur in the mind while approaching a particular reading challenge; a process that can be used to model or assess a particular skill

Frequently Asked Questions

What does the close reading of complex texts really mean?

When a fluent reader approaches a text, he or she does more than simply decode the words. The fluent reader thinks about a dozen different things before beginning to read: *What do I know about this? Who wrote this? What do I know about that person? When was it written? Is this a book, a pamphlet, an excerpt, a magazine article, a newspaper article, an advertisement, or some other kind of writing? What sort of font is being used, and what does that imply about the writing?* Once the reading begins, this mental questioning process continues, and the reader looks for answers within the text. The fluent reader may reread sections or, if the selection is very short, an entire passage, as understanding of the piece evolves. A truly rich and complex text may be revisited many times over a lifetime, with the reader making new and interesting discoveries with each rereading.

Close reading is a structured approach that enables all students, including English language learners and below-grade-level students, to develop this deep comprehension of complex grade-level texts. In close reading, students act as investigators, gradually uncovering the meaning of short pieces of literature or informational texts. Through the process of reading, questioning, focusing, and rereading the texts, students uncover the “bones,” or main ideas, of the passage. Students return again and again to the text, becoming ever more adept at identifying and interacting with the language, context, structure, and layers of embedded meaning. This emphasis on returning to the same text repeatedly to gradually acquire a comfortable and deep relationship with it is at the heart of the close reading approach.

Why do today's standards require the close reading of complex texts?

Comprehension of complex texts is linked to success on high-stakes assessments of college and career readiness and to actual success in college and career. Today's standards require instruction and supported practice with close reading of complex texts.

A study by the college readiness testing company ACT (2006) evaluated the results of

568,000 ACT reading tests taken by eighth, tenth, and twelfth grade students. These test results were compared with a benchmark level of “college readiness,” a standard meant to predict college acceptance, retention, and the achievement of a 3.0 GPA. Next, the researchers analyzed the student responses with the goal of identifying which factors were indicative of success. Students who were able to read and comprehend the most complex texts were the ones most likely to have high

The Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers determined that “A significant body of research links the close reading of complex texts—whether the student is a struggling reader or advanced—to significant gains in reading proficiency and finds close reading to be a key component of college and career readiness” (2011, 7).

scores on the college-readiness standard. The ACT researchers found that “Students who can read complex texts are more likely to be ready for college. Those who cannot read complex texts are less likely to be ready for college” (2006, 5).

Additionally, there is a significant gap between the complexity of texts being used at the twelfth grade level and those being utilized in career and college settings. In his 2006 study, Gary L. Williamson reported that there is a gap greater than 1.5 standard deviations between the level of these texts, a larger difference than that between typical fourth and eighth grade texts!

At what grade level should we begin using the close reading approach?

Today’s reading standards require students of all ages to take a much more critical look at the texts they read. The earlier students begin to closely read, the better. The close reading approach should be introduced to even the newest readers. In this way, close reading will become a habit of mind when tackling challenging texts (Boyles 2012). Emphasizing the need to repeatedly return to a text in order to uncover evidence for perceived meaning is an essential skill, which can and should be applied in all areas of academic study. Introducing this concept as early as possible can improve students’ academic performance throughout their careers.

Why should close reading replace tried and true reading approaches?

It shouldn’t! There is nothing about close reading that precludes the use of other approaches that work well for you and your students. You can and should continue to use successful approaches, such as guided reading, shared reading, book study, and collaborative groups. Close reading is an approach that will support your students in deeply and critically analyzing all types of complex texts. It is not meant to be the sole approach or strategy for literacy development in your classroom. Think of it as an additional powerful tool in your teaching toolbox. As every craftsperson knows, it is important to use the right tool for each job. The close reading tool is exceptionally useful when teaching students how to approach, analyze, and deeply connect with complex literature and informational texts.

How does close reading differ from other familiar reading approaches?

Close reading focuses on short, complex texts or self-contained sections of texts that are visited and revisited multiple times. Before the reading, teachers *do not* *frontload information* for students. Unlike guided, shared, or read-aloud sessions, it is not recommended that teachers model skills and strategies or preteach background information before students read or listen to a text during the close reading. There is, however, nothing to preclude a teacher from inviting students to closely read a subsection of a text or a stanza of a poem that is already under study or, in the early years, that has been previously shared as a read aloud. However, during the actual close reading, students are encouraged to independently *have a go* at a text selected for its complexity and placement in their appropriate Lexile band. During the first reading, students should read or listen to uncover the big ideas and key details of the text. Students engage in repeated readings of the text to access deeper meaning, including how the text works, by scrutinizing the author’s craft and the meaning of the text. Student annotations should illuminate their

thinking as well as their points of confusion, any unknown vocabulary, and other questions or points of interest they wish to pursue more deeply.

At every juncture, the main role of the teacher is to assess student performance and provide scaffolds to support text analysis. This happens, for example, while listening to conversations to determine the direction to take in the next read, asking students what they are looking for in the read, and reassessing student needs. The major scaffold teachers provide is through the continuous questions they ask: *What does the text say? What evidence can you find for that? How is the information conveyed? Can you find that in the text?* Purposeful questions help students resolve the complexity and uniqueness of each text.

Close reading lessons are also unique in planning. Preplanning of text-dependent questions is essential to the success of a close reading lesson. Unlike other reading instruction approaches, however, close reading cannot be completely preplanned. Although you may craft an initial set of questions before students begin reading the text, tailoring questions and dialog to the issues and questions that arise during students' reading is powerful and authentic. Close reading experiences occur organically and can never be recreated. Each encounter with the text should, however, push students to a deeper level of understanding.

What do I do after a close read?

Close reading experiences should conclude with performance tasks that encourage students to demonstrate their learning. These tasks may include writing, slide shows, reader's theater, art projects, or any other assessment activity designed to further extend students' learning and provide them with opportunities to share their mastery of the learning goals for the lesson. If students are still struggling or are unable to competently demonstrate their knowledge, reteaching may be in order. See pages 67–78 for assessment and reteaching ideas.

Close Reading Management

The easiest way to manage the scheduling of close reading is to encompass other literacy practices within the close reading session. For example, if you use shared reading regularly, try using a close reading approach, which involves a shared reading component. Similarly, close reading can be easily rotated into your guided reading lessons. As students' proficiency with close reading increases, it becomes easier to incorporate it throughout your curriculum.

Generally, we believe that students should have opportunities to engage in close reading on a daily basis. However, these experiences should ideally be spread out across all areas of study, not just with specified language arts lessons. A student might engage in close reading for a math lesson on Monday, a social studies lesson on Tuesday, and a language arts lesson on Wednesday. It is essential that students have ample opportunities to make close reading a deeply ingrained habit so that they can depend on these skills to propel them beyond surface reading for the rest of their lives.

The close reading approach is structured for whole-group instruction and partner work. However, when students struggle, small-group scaffolding becomes necessary. In those cases, a small group can be pulled together while the rest of the students are engaged in independent or small-group work that does not require teacher attention.

Table 1.2 illustrates how one teacher incorporated close reading in her classroom over the course of a week.

Table 1.2 Incorporating Close Reading

Content Area	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Language Arts	close reading: <i>Tom Sawyer</i> pp. 40–41	read aloud: <i>Tom Sawyer</i> chapter 5	close reading: <i>Tom Sawyer</i> p. 101	read aloud: <i>Tom Sawyer</i> chapter 6	read aloud: <i>Tom Sawyer</i> chapter 7
Science	lecture and shared reading: <i>Galileo and the Starry Messenger</i> pp. 4–6	close reading: <i>Galileo and the Starry Messenger</i> pp. 7–9	constellation activity	close reading: <i>Galileo and the Starry Messenger</i> pp. 10–15	build your own telescope activity
Social Studies	finish final project on the Dark Ages	groups present final projects on the Dark Ages	close reading: <i>The Italian Renaissance</i> (textbook chapter intro)	lecture and class discussion of Renaissance changes	Renaissance art
Mathematics	review: graphing	assessment: graphing	small-group work: graphing and measurement review	lecture: finding volume	close reading: <i>Count Like an Egyptian: A Hands-On Introduction to Ancient Mathematics</i> pp. 1–2
Other	practice for spring assembly performance	close reading: visual literacy lesson on Van Gogh's <i>The Starry Night</i>	practice for spring assembly performance	little buddy time with kindergarten partners	begin Renaissance stained glass art project

Organization of this Book

We have created this resource with some very specific goals in mind. First, we want to support other teachers in implementing close reading in ways that demonstrate intentional, explicit instruction. In other words, we want to take the guesswork out of the process and provide a research-supported approach that can easily fit into classroom lessons. Secondly, we want to provide instructional examples of close reading that demonstrate how it can be used to address other important classroom goals, such as general reading and writing goals, the development of academic language, inquiry learning, use of technology, deep thinking, and reading across disciplines.

Finally, it is important to us that we provide a close reading toolkit that includes sample texts, sample student activities, sample performance tasks, and other supports teachers can use to create close reading lessons. A close reading resource is only truly useful if it includes the tools needed to incorporate the approach into every area of the curriculum. For this reason, we have decided to present the majority of this book in a format that supports your efforts to create close reading lessons for classroom use.

Digital Download

The planning templates, appendix resources, and sample lesson passages included in this book are available as Adobe® PDFs online. A complete list of the documents is on pages 273–274. Additionally, the file names are referenced throughout the book. To access the digital resources, go to <http://www.tcmpub.com/download-files> and enter the following code: 54740083. Follow the on-screen directions.

Guide to Book Sections

Section One has presented an overview of the close reading approach. In previous sections, the structure of close reading, useful terms, and frequently asked questions were reviewed.

Section Two presents the process for planning a close reading lesson. This is the section you should turn to as you are thinking about how to make initial planning decisions for a close reading session. Close reading requires careful preparation on the part of the teacher. There are several crucial decisions to be made. First, it is necessary to select an appropriate text. You will also decide which standard or standards to address and identify the areas of complexity for your students. Lastly, you will plan text-dependent questions and additional scaffold questions.

It is important to note that the text-dependent questions can and should evolve during the course of the lesson. You may anticipate that students will struggle with the main idea (and, therefore need additional scaffold questions), but upon viewing their first read annotations, realize that they instead struggled with a challenging vocabulary term. In that case, you might modify your initial text-dependent questions to include text-dependent questions that lead students to clarify the challenging term. Section Two will walk you through each of these steps explicitly.

Digital Download

A digital download with planning templates, appendix resources, and sample lesson passages accompanies this book.

Section Three presents the process for teaching a close reading lesson. This section includes detailed descriptions of how to scaffold the lesson for students of all reading levels. Throughout a close reading lesson, there are several more decisions that need to be made to determine how to scaffold the instruction for students. *Who will be doing the reading? How many times should students revisit the text? How will the lesson be chunked? What annotations should be used? What types of student resources are needed?* At every stage, remember that you may choose to “take back” the reading. If you find that students are struggling too much and becoming unfocused or frustrated, your choice for independent reading may be replaced by a new choice to read aloud and model the thinking and reading skills of a fluent reader. Each of these is addressed more fully in Section Three.

Section Four presents simple step-by-step techniques for assessing and extending close reading lessons. This section includes specific guidelines, activities, templates for anecdotal records and performance tasks, and suggestions on how to reteach information to students who have not fully grasped a lesson. The final set of decisions for a close reading lesson surround the specific ways to assess students’ understanding. You should create and use both formative and summative assessments to determine what, if anything, must be retaught.

Section Five and **Section Six** present a collection of close reading lessons. For each grade level, there are three literary and three informational texts with corresponding lessons. These lessons address a range of college and career readiness anchor standards, specifically key ideas and details, craft and structure, and integration of knowledge and ideas.

Finally, the **Appendices** are designed to help you scaffold lessons for a diverse group of students. Appendix B is a glossary of reteaching ideas, and Appendix C lists the graphic organizers and templates that are provided in the **Digital Download**. For example, there is a character web graphic organizer and a plot chart to be used for teaching text structure. There is also a T-chart and a guide for identifying figurative language to assist with vocabulary development.

The sections of this book are organized around the decisions to be made at each stage of planning and teaching a close reading lesson. Table 1.3 provides an overview of the decisions made at each stage.

Table 1.3 Close Reading Stages and Decisions

Close Reading Stage	What Decision Must Be Made?
Preplanning	• Identify a standard and lesson purpose. • Select a text. • Determine the areas of complexity. • Create text-dependent questions.
Teaching	• Determine how to scaffold the close read. • Who is doing the close reading? • How many times do students revisit the text? • Does any minor frontloading need to occur after the first reading? • How should the text be chunked? • What types of annotations should be used? • What types of student resources are needed?
Assessing and Extending	• How do I assess student understanding? • How do I assess student understanding during the lesson? • How do I assess student understanding after the lesson? • What do I do for students who, at the end of close reading, have not totally comprehended the text? • What do I do to reteach the students who did not understand?

Try It!



Directions: Using Table 1.2 (page 13) as a model, identify potential places in which you can incorporate close reading into your instructional schedule. Write on the table below, or use a digital copy of the table in the Digital Download ([incorporatingclosereading.pdf](#)).

Incorporating Close Reading

Content Area	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Language Arts					
Science					
Social Studies					
Mathematics					
Other					



Section 2: Planning Close Reading

Close reading is a unique instructional approach in that it cannot be strictly preplanned. The teacher designs the overall outline of the lesson, and the carefully selected text influences much of the learning. However, with each dive into the text, the discussion and learning follows student needs. During a successful close reading lesson, you will be both prepared and flexible. Table 2.1 lists the areas of planning and decision making. The shaded areas will be addressed in Section Four of this book.

Table 2.1 Planning for Close Reading

Planning	Date: _____ Grade: _____ Discipline: _____ Purpose(s): _____ Standard(s): _____ Text Selection (literary or informational): _____ Performance Assessment: _____ Materials: _____	
Text Selection	Title: _____ Author: _____ Page(s) or section(s): _____ How should this text be chunked? _____ _____	
Areas of Complexity	Lexile Level: _____ Meaning or Purpose: _____ Structure: _____ Language Features: _____ Knowledge Demands: _____	
Text-Dependent Questions	1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____ 4. _____ 5. _____	
Performance Task	_____ _____ _____ _____	Differentiation Additional Support: _____ _____ Extension: _____ _____

Identifying a Standard and Lesson Purpose

The first step in any lesson is to decide what to teach and why. Begin by considering the standards that will be addressed, the skills on which to focus, and the knowledge of language students already possess. For our sample lessons, we have selected and built them around the applicable standards from the Common Core State Standards for English/Language Arts (2012) to meet the expectations of college and career readiness and built the lessons around those learning goals. Many state standards parallel these expectations. If the standard chosen is particularly challenging, you may opt to focus the lesson entirely around that one. However, often it is useful to bundle several standards into one lesson. The five steps to take in preparing your lesson purpose(s) based on the standards chosen are listed below.

Steps for Identifying a Standard and Creating a Lesson Purpose

1. Choose a standard from the college and career readiness standards or state standards.
2. Create a lesson purpose in kid-friendly language.
3. Share the lesson purpose with your students.
4. Post the lesson purpose where all students can easily view it.
5. Translate the lesson purpose into an “I Can” statement that helps student self-assess.

Once you have selected your standards, they should be translated into a lesson purpose to be shared with your students. The purpose statements, also known as learning goals or intentions, should be thought of in two ways: *what* students are learning and *how* they are learning it. The goal of writing purpose statements is to make explicit, for students and teachers, what learning is occurring and how they can demonstrate that learning. Avoid writing purpose statements that are solely task or activity oriented. This might lead students to mistakenly think that learning is achieved through writing lists, completing graphic organizers, or presenting orally. Instead, purpose statements that describe the actual learning teach students that by writing lists, completing graphic organizers, or presenting orally, we can demonstrate our understanding of the content.

All lesson tasks will be tied to the lesson purpose, so it is important that it clearly articulates what the teacher is trying to teach and is general enough to encompass all the learning goals. For example, imagine your class is reading a text about Mars. You have identified several pertinent standards including summarizing by determining the main idea of a text and how it is supported by key details. For the students, you can articulate *what* they will learn by writing the purpose statement: “You will understand the features of the planet Mars.” Additionally, you can share with students *how* they will demonstrate their learning with the purpose statement: “List five key details in a summary paragraph.”

Lastly, the purpose statements can be translated into “I Can” statements. These are student-generated sentences that students use to state what they are able to do. If the purpose of the lesson was for students to understand the features of the planet Mars and students will demonstrate their learning by listing five key details in a summary paragraph, the “I Can” statement might be, “I can list key details about the features of the planet Mars.” At the end of the lessons, students assess themselves and decide if they can truthfully make this statement.

By sharing the learning targets with your students, you provide them with contexts and goals around which to structure their own reading. It encourages them to stay focused. Post the purposes in front of the classroom so that both you and the students can reference them often and have visual reminders of the current learning goals and how to achieve them.

Examples of Student-Friendly Purpose Statements and “I Can” Statements

- **WHAT:** Understand how the respiratory system works.
HOW: List the parts of the respiratory system.
I CAN: I can list the parts of the respiratory system.
- **WHAT:** Analyze a character.
HOW: Describe the personality of Huck Finn in two paragraphs.
I CAN: I can describe the personality of Huck Finn.
- **WHAT:** Recognize insect classification.
HOW: Compare and contrast bees and wasps.
I CAN: I can compare and contrast bees and wasps.
- **WHAT:** Examine how figurative language shapes a reader’s understanding.
HOW: Explain three idioms from the text in your own words.
I CAN: I can explain idioms in my own words.
- **WHAT:** Understand how setting helps us deepen our understanding.
HOW: Draw a map of Mr. Looper’s farm.
I CAN: I can draw a map of the setting of a story.
- **WHAT:** Recognize the author’s purpose for writing about a particular character and setting.
HOW: Write an argumentative essay about whether Harry Potter would have been a good fit for Slytherin.
I CAN: I can write an argumentative essay about a particular character and setting.



Selecting a Text

The next step is to select the text. In many cases, you may wish to plan a close reading lesson focusing on a short, complex sub-section of a larger text already being studied. In others, you may wish to seek out and select a text specifically to engage in a close reading experience. In either case, it is important to evaluate the selected text for appropriate complexity and length. The close reading approach can be used for any lesson that involves a short passage that is of sufficient complexity to offer a challenge for your students. Additionally, it can also be used to closely examine charts, graphs, graphics, cartoons, or other visual elements. However, we will focus on texts for our examples. Feel free to extrapolate the method to work with other kinds of reading material. If a text does not feel easily accessible to your students, then it is a perfect opportunity to engage in the close reading approach.



Research has shown that in order to be effective, texts selected for close reading should be “compact, short, self-contained ones that can be read and reread deliberately and slowly” (Coleman and Pimentel 2012, 4).

You might notice that it is repeatedly mentioned that the close reading approach is best for short texts. This is because it is an intensive and deep reading approach. The goal is that students will use the skills gained during the close reading experiences in your classroom whenever they are faced with a challenging text of any length, either in school or on their own. However, to tackle a larger text in a classroom setting can become unwieldy and daunting. That is definitely not the goal! The classroom use of close reading should provide students with an opportunity to develop and practice skills that will be useful to

them for a lifetime. Thus, upon choosing texts, keep in mind the time requirements and make sure to not overwhelm yourself or your students.

There are several questions to keep in mind when selecting a text.

- Is it a text that is worthy of deep study and critical analysis?
- Is it relevant, interesting, and engaging? Does it support the topic or theme being studied?
- Does it fall within the range of students’ abilities, plus a little more? Will it make students stretch to gain full understanding?
- What are the demands of the text? (e.g., language, structure, knowledge)
- What scaffolds may be needed when tackling this text with the class? (e.g., Will there be students who will benefit from small-group instruction? Is it necessary to partner this text with another less complex text to build background knowledge and language as scaffolding for struggling students?)
- Does the text address the identified standard?

Determining Areas of Complexity

When evaluating text complexity for students, there are three aspects to consider: the quantitative text attributes, the qualitative text attributes, and the reader/task attributes.

Quantitative Text Attributes

Quantitative text attributes are those that can be measured using numeric evaluations. These include sentence length, number of syllables, word length, and word frequency. The quantitative attributes of a text can be calculated using computer programs and reported with numeric designations. In the past, they were generally reported with grade level designations, such as 4.6 (fourth grade, sixth month). However, there are several analysis systems that have come to favor and provide more information than simple grade level designations, such as the Lexile® Framework for Reading.

The Lexile text measurement evaluates text complexity and represents the quantitative attributes of text with a numeric designation. There is no absolute mapping of the Lexile scores with specific grade levels; instead, students are expected to read within a Lexile range or “Lexile band.” For example, students in second grade should be comfortably reading within the 450L–730L band. Those same students should be challenging themselves to read within the 420L–820L “Stretch” Lexile band. See Table 2.2 for a complete Lexile band chart.

Table 2.2 Lexile Band Chart

Grade Band	Current Lexile Band	“Stretch” Lexile Band*
K–1	N/A	N/A
2–3	450L–730L	420L–820L
4–5	640L–850L	740L–1010L
6–8	860L–1010L	925L–1185L
9–10	960L–1120L	1050L–1335L
11–CCR	1070L–1220L	1185L–1385L

*Common Core State Standards for English, Language Arts, Appendix A (Additional Information), NGA and CCSSO 2012

Other common leveling systems include DRA Levels, and Fountas & Pinnell’s F&P Text Level Gradient™. Each of these systems attempts to provide graduated, quantitative assessment of text difficulty. Table 2.3 shows the levels common to each grade.

Table 2.3 Other Leveling Systems

Grade Level	DRA 2 Level	Fountas & Pinnell
Kindergarten	A–4	A–D
1	6–18	E–J
2	20–28	K–M
3	30–38	N–P
4	40	Q–S
5	50	T–V
6	60	W–Y

Leveling systems are good tools for evaluating the quantitative attributes of texts, but they cannot reflect the content of the text. For example, what if a text requires understanding of historic context to illuminate its subject? What if there is symbolism, a weighty central theme, or a challenging social dynamic at play? These attributes cannot be reflected in a quantitative metric. Therefore, it is essential to go beyond the quantitative elements when evaluating text complexity for students and delve into qualitative text attributes.

Qualitative Text Attributes

Qualitative text attributes are those text attributes that cannot be easily measured using a numeric value. These include text structures, author's purpose, language attributes, and the meaning of the text. The level of challenge included in these features of the text must be carefully analyzed and evaluated before the text is chosen for a group of students. Just because a text uses simple words does not necessarily mean that the text is not complex. Certain authors are known for choosing accessible language to convey nuanced topics. For example, pick any book by Ernest Hemmingway or John Steinbeck, and you may discover that simply by looking at its quantitative attributes, it is simple enough to be read by most elementary students. In fact, Hemmingway's *The Sun Also Rises* has a Lexile level of 610, which means that it should be easily decoded by an average third grader. But when qualitative attributes such as author's purpose and meaning are considered, the text is revealed to be much more complex.

Another important consideration included in qualitative text attributes is the *knowledge demand* or amount of background knowledge a reader must have in order to discern the full meaning. For example, in reading a text on the Underground Railroad, a student must have a relatively deep knowledge of cultural concepts before beginning: *What is slavery? What is a railroad? Who were the abolitionists? What were the dangers for escaped slaves and those who helped them? What prevented escaped slaves from traveling through normal modes of conveyance?* Even if the text gives a lot of support and context, a reader lacking at least some familiarity with the time period and issues involved may find an otherwise simple-seeming text deceptively challenging.

Authors write with audiences in mind. As we write this text, we envision it being read by professional educators who are engaging students in close reading practices. As we write, we target the information and tone to our audience—you. If you are not a member of our expected audience group, this book may be extremely challenging, indeed! We have not included a detailed summary of modern educational practices to place the close reading approach in context. If we did, our actual target audience would become impatient and bored. Authors of every genre must balance the knowledge demands of their writing.

If the author provides less support, the reader must put in more effort to attain a proper understanding. This struggle can be very healthy and rewarding and should not be universally avoided. But if the struggle becomes unproductive or frustrating, it can become difficult for a reader to stay motivated to stick with the reading. Unfortunately, there is no numerical value one can assign to the knowledge demands of a text. To adequately analyze text complexity, it is imperative to consider the specific students who will be reading it.

The next qualitative aspect to consider when evaluating a text is its structure and organization. For narrative texts, consider whether the piece is written using a linear plotline or if it utilizes flashbacks, flash-forwards, or other non-linear storytelling techniques. For elementary students, a straightforward, linear approach is usually easier to navigate. When evaluating informational texts, look closely at how the information is presented. Informational texts can utilize a number of structures, such as cause/effect, sequence, compare/contrast, and problem/solution. A text that sticks to one approach is typically less complex than one that includes a few. For example, consider a book that sequentially describes the process of a seed growing into a tree. All other things being equal, that book will be less complex than a text that starts out sequentially describing the seed growth process, jumps to cause and effect of the rainy season on seed growth, compares and contrasts the growth rates of a variety of seeds, and then tackles the problems and solutions of human encroachment on rainforest biomes.

Visual layout and visual support features play another part in determining the complexity of a text in terms of structure. There is sometimes a tendency to discount these features as outside the realm of “reading,” but every aspect of a document factors into its complexity. Clarifying charts, maps, illustrations, and diagrams serve to simplify or extend the information already presented in the narrative. Likewise, font and layout choices made by the author or publisher affect the reader’s comprehension. Clear, simple, uncluttered visual features tend to make even a complex text accessible. Busy fonts, multiple-column layouts, and ambiguously placed visual support features actually obscure the meaning of the text and make reading more challenging. Even a particularly sophisticated or hyper-informative map or chart can complicate an otherwise simple text.

The way the text handles relationships among ideas is an important component of the text organization that affects text complexity. Consider relationships between characters, plots, and subplots in narrative texts. For informational texts, relationships exist between main ideas, facts and details, or abstract and concrete concepts. When these relationships are simpler, the text is likely to be simpler. When the relationships increase in complexity, so does the text.

Another major area to consider when evaluating qualitative text attributes is how various language features affect the complexity of the text. As a general rule, a more conversational writing style will make a text more accessible and less complex. More formally written textbooks, while essential parts of students' educations, often increase complexity with their less familiar language styles. Likewise, when narrative texts utilize metaphors, similes, descriptive language, onomatopoeia, personification, and other literary devices, this can make a text's meaning more obscure and less comprehensible.

Vocabulary plays multiple roles in the complexity of a text. Words can be easily evaluated quantitatively based on length, number of syllables, and frequency of use in the English language. However, there are cultural aspects of vocabulary that clearly require qualitative evaluation. *Are these words commonly and currently used in this geographical area and in this way?* should be a question that goes through one's mind. Archaic, author-created, or culturally unfamiliar vocabulary can significantly increase the complexity of a text, providing layers of meaning and interest, while forcing the reader to return repeatedly in search of context clues. Dr. Seuss books are well known for their creative use of language, and, in fact, their creation of language. For example, consider this excerpt from *The Lorax*.

The Lorax

by Dr. Suess

"Sir! You are crazy with greed.
There is no one on earth
Who would buy that fool Thneed!"
But the very next minute, I proved he was wrong.
For just at that minute, a chap came along,
and he thought that the Thneed I had knitted was great.
He happily bought it for three ninety-eight.

As is evident, the use of author-created words, such as *Thneed*, as well as the archaic/British term *chap* can increase the text complexity in ways that quantitative analysis might miss. However, these linguistic oddities also create layers of interest and depth in the passage. The various ways that authors choose to present and play with language creates a more meaningful and enjoyable experience for readers, but they also serve to add complexity to the text.

The meaning of the text and the author's purpose in writing it are two other important qualitative attributes to consider. The meaning of the text refers to the sophistication of the ideas and how overtly they are laid out in the writing. For example, *Watership Down* by Richard Adams is, on its surface, the adventures of a group of rabbits. However, when one takes into account its allegorical themes, one realizes that the story is much more nuanced,

deeper, and more meaningful than a superficial assessment might expose. Despite the rabbit on the cover, this text is appropriate for a secondary classroom. Before using a book in a classroom, you need to fully evaluate the layers of meaning for your given text choice.

Like meaning, an author's purpose may be clearly stated, implied, or even intentionally hidden. When evaluating how the author's purpose affects the complexity of a text, one of the most important factors to consider is how, or if, this purpose is expressed. This can be particularly critical in informational texts where the author may be overtly or slyly trying to influence readers' opinions on a topic. It is important to remember that every author has a perspective and an agenda, and sometimes these can be particularly important when building an understanding of a text. When the author's purpose is subtle, uncovering it may be challenging, and thus, the text may prove to be more complex than one in which the author divulges up front his or her reason for writing the text. See Table 2.4 for an example of one teacher's evaluation of the first page from C. S. Lewis's *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* for a close reading lesson.

Table 2.4 Sample Qualitative Evaluation: First page of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*

Qualitative Measures	Degree of Difficulty	Explanation
Meaning or Purpose	Medium	The passage explicitly states the main ideas, but certain details require inference to fully understand
Structure	Medium	The structure of the passage is conventional and chronological but utilizes dialog, which increases difficulty.
Language Features	High	The language is descriptive, sometimes idiomatic, and a bit archaic. The text assumes familiarity with some terminology associated with England during WWII (e.g. air-raid).
Knowledge Demands	Med-High	The text assumes cultural knowledge about WWII in England and the practice of sending children away from cities to keep them safer. This concept is stated matter-of-factly up front but may be questioned and misunderstood by students unfamiliar with the practice.

Tables 2.5 and 2.6 (pages 26–32) provide scoring rubrics, which help in evaluating the qualitative attributes of literary and informational texts.

Table 2.5 Qualitative Attributes Scoring Rubric for Literary Texts

Qualitative Rubric for Literary Texts				
What Does the Text Say?				
Dimension	Consideration	Scoring = 1 Easy or Comfortable Text	Scoring = 2 Moderate or Grade- Level Text	Scoring = 3 Challenging or Stretch Text
Meaning or Purpose	Meaning	The text contains simple ideas with one level of meaning conveyed through obvious literary devices.	The text contains some complex ideas with more than one level of meaning conveyed through subtle literary devices.	The text includes substantial ideas with several levels of inferred meaning conveyed through highly sophisticated literary devices.
	Main Ideas and Key Details	Main ideas and key details support the story theme and character development.	Main ideas and key details weakly support the story theme and character development.	Main ideas and key details that should support the story theme or character development are not apparent; much is left to the interpretation of the reader.