

Factors Related to Text Difficulty

| FACTOR | DEFINITION |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| Genre | The <i>genre</i> is the type of text and refers to a system by which fiction and nonfiction texts are classified. Each genre has characteristic features. |
| Text Structure | The structure is the way the text is organized and presented. It may be <i>narrative</i> , as in most fiction and biographical texts. Factual texts are organized categorically or topically and may have sections with headings. Writers of factual texts use several underlying structural patterns to provide information to readers: <i>enumeration, chronological sequence, comparison/contrast, cause/effect, and problem/solution</i> . The presence of these structures, especially in combination, can increase the challenge for readers. |
| Content | The content refers to the subject matter of the text—the concepts that are important to understand. In fiction, content may be related to the setting or to the kinds of problems characters encounter. In factual texts, content refers to the topic being focused on. Content is considered in relation to the prior experience of readers. |
| Themes and Ideas | The themes and ideas are the big ideas that are communicated by the text. A text may have multiple themes or a main theme and several supporting themes or ideas. |
| Language and Literary Features | Written language is qualitatively different from spoken language. Fiction writers use dialogue, figurative language, and other kinds of literary structures. Factual writers use description and technical language. In hybrid texts you may find a wide range of literary language. |
| Sentence Complexity | Meaning is mapped onto the syntax of language. Texts with simpler, more natural sentences are easier to process. Sentences with embedded and conjoined clauses make a text more difficult. |
| Vocabulary | Vocabulary refers to the meaning of words and is part of our oral language. The more the words are accessible to readers in terms of meaning, the easier a text will be. An individual's <i>reading and writing vocabularies</i> are words that they understand and can also read or write. |
| Words | A text contains printed words that must be recognized and solved. The challenge in a text partly depends on the number and difficulty of the words that the reader must solve by recognizing them or decoding them. A text that contains a great many of the same common words makes a text more accessible to readers. |
| Illustrations | The illustrations are the drawings, paintings, or photographs that accompany the text and add meaning and enjoyment. In factual texts, illustrations also include graphic representations that provide a great deal of information readers must integrate with the text. Illustrations are an integral part of a high-quality text. Increasingly, fiction texts include a range of graphics. |
| Book and Print Features | The book and print features are the physical aspects of the text—what readers cope with in terms of length, size, and layout. Book and print features also include tools like the table of contents, glossary, pronunciation guide, index, and sidebars. |

Figure 2.