

HIAS OPEN RESOURCE

What makes a text more or less challenging?

Supporting all readers in secondary school

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Final version

Overview

This document contains...

Slides that could be used as part of a CPD sequence for teachers in school, supporting understanding of reading in secondary schools

Points to consider when using this resource

The resources in this series are intended as a companion piece to the DfE's series of training videos and guidance [*Supporting all readers in secondary school*](#), providing additional detail. This resource expands on ideas shared in video 3, [*Reading in secondary students*](#) and provides links to research.

Non-fiction texts and accessibility – Year 7 up

Very accessible (too simple?)	Accessible
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Familiar – no surprises in terms of text type • Simple, similar subheadings and organisational features • Shorter sections/ paragraphs • Majority of sentences start in familiar ways (eg <i>There is... The ball rolls... Many people claim that...</i>) • Majority of sentences are simple or compound • Limited range of subordination (if, when, because, who, which) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mixed text type – may include different elements • Mixture of subheading types • Larger chunks of text, longer paragraphs • Greater range of ways of starting a sentence – up to half of sentences do not start with a noun (eg <i>The dinosaurs...</i>) or pronoun (eg <i>It...</i>); more use of fronted adverbials • Some literary or figurative language • Humour or playfulness with words • Wider range of subordinating conjunctions • More (and more extended) noun phrases

What makes a text more challenging?

Longer, unbroken sections of extended text – fewer or no subheadings or obvious organisational features

Greater variety in the ways sentences open

Inclusion of longer sentences with three or more clauses

Higher proportion of complex sentences

More emphasis on literary, academic or archaic language

Average sentence length is more than 15-18 words

Increasingly frequent and ambitious use of tier 2 and tier 3 vocabulary

Greater assumption of background knowledge

Use of nominalisation (eg *food insecurity is a common problem* rather than *food supplies are insecure*)

Thinking about text placement in context

- When pupils are expected to read and use a text independently, choose a text that has features that make it more accessible, such as consistent subheadings and shorter sections. When pupils are expected to access a more challenging text, it should be linked to their knowledge of the topic. Placement of academic reading within the teaching sequence is key to ensuring that pupils improve both their understanding of the text and their understanding of the topic.
- Place academic reading in the sequence once pupils:
 - have been introduced to the key concepts and context of the information they are reading
 - can picture the setting or processes being described
 - have experiences that are relevant to understanding the text
 - know the key vocabulary that is likely to appear within the text



Cold read

- Unfamiliar content
- Independent reading
- Reading before studying
- **Choose a more accessible text**
- **or**
- **Provide more scaffolding**



Warmed-up read

- Familiar with content
- Know the key vocabulary
- Supported in-lesson reading
- Reading after studying
- **Choose a more challenging text**
- **Provide scaffolding as needed**

HIAS English Team

Please contact Joanna Kenyon Joanna.Kenyon@hants.gov.uk for support with secondary reading, whole school literacy and English.

For further details on the full range of services available please contact us using the following email: htlcdev@hants.gov.uk

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