

# Bringing Reading Instruction to Life Using PIAAC Tools: Supplement to the *Introductory Guide*

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# **Bringing Reading Instruction to Life Using PIAAC Tools:**

**Supplement to the Introductory *Guide***

**Amy R. Trawick**

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## INTRODUCTION

### Purpose of the Supplement

This report is designed to complement an earlier report, *Using the PIAAC Literacy Framework to Guide Instruction: An Introduction for Adult Educators* (Trawick, 2017), which promoted a contextualized approach to teaching reading in adult literacy/education programs. The first report drew upon the conceptual foundations of the PIAAC international assessment of literacy. As the title indicates, the first report was general and introductory in nature. This supplement attempts to drill down into more specifics.

The purpose of this supplement is threefold:

- to flesh out the ideas introduced in the original report (which I will refer to from now on as the “introductory *Guide*” or “*Guide*”),
- to provide resources that will help make those ideas more accessible to teachers, and
- to answer frequently asked questions related to the kind of curriculum design advocated in the *Guide*.

If contextualized reading instruction is new to you, I hope this supplement will increase your comfort in incorporating the approach in your classroom. If you are already using a contextualized approach, I hope the materials and techniques presented here will expand your teaching toolkit. In addition to drawing heavily on tools adapted from the PIAAC literacy framework, the supplement integrates evidence-based practices and standards-based instruction around the College and Career Readiness Standards. The intent is to help real teachers use contextualized reading instruction in real classrooms, acknowledging all the complexity doing so may entail.

### Types of Adult Learners

The approaches shared in this supplement are, broadly speaking, applicable to all types of adult learners, including ESOL learners and students with learning disabilities—if adapted thoughtfully.

### How to Use the Supplement with the Introductory *Guide*

This supplement assumes knowledge of the introductory *Guide* [Using the PIAAC Literacy Framework to Guide Instruction: An Introduction for Adult Educators \(Trawick, 2017\)](#), so it is important to have read the *Guide* prior to diving into this supplement.

As you go forward, keep in mind the two foundational understandings that undergird both PIAAC's assessment work and the approach taken in the original *Guide*:

- A **use-oriented conception of competency in literacy**. The PIAAC Literacy Expert Group maintained that reading skills are best assessed when these skills are actually being put to use to accomplish literacy tasks typical of those adults face at work, in their communities, and as they pursue lifelong learning.
- A **view of proficiency as a continuum**. In this view, reading is affected by many factors and should not be characterized as an all-or-nothing skill.

The *Guide* recommends three broad steps to move these understandings from the realm of international assessment to the adult education classroom:

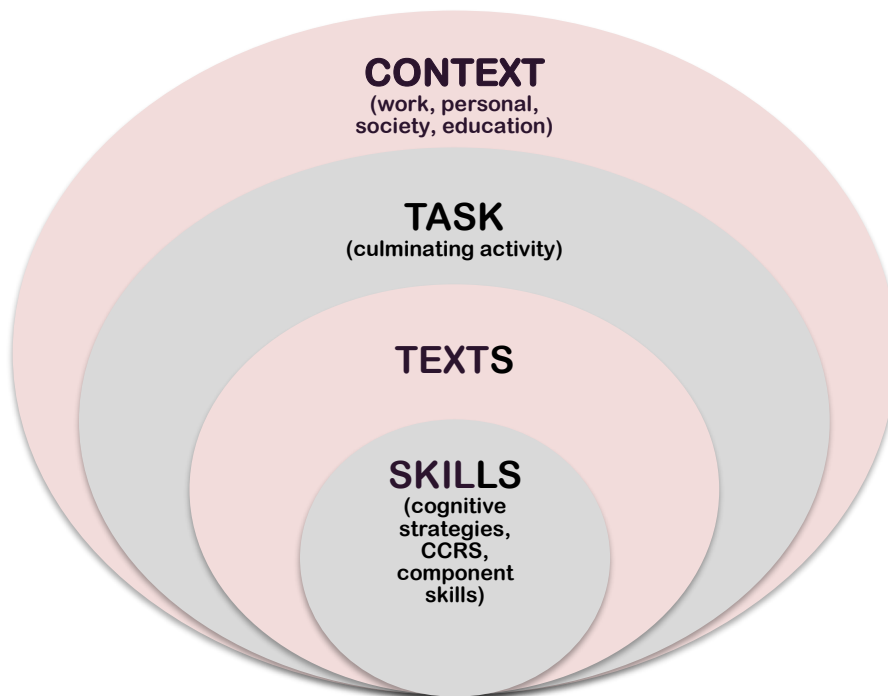
1. **[Contextualize Skill Instruction, Using the Basic PIAAC Framework Elements](#)**  
Contextualized reading instruction works well in a unit approach to curriculum, as opposed to relying on daily lessons that are disconnected from each other. The units comprise linked lessons and may be organized around an integrated reading task that requires the bundling of a manageable set of skills. PIAAC's descriptions of **Contexts**, **Cognitive Strategies**, and **Content/Texts** provide useful checkpoints for focusing instruction in this way. See [Appendix G](#) and [Section II](#) in the *Guide* for a review of specific terms.
2. **[Incorporate the Factors Affecting Task Difficulty](#)**  
These factors, identified by the PIAAC Literacy Expert Group, can serve as a tool for differentiating instruction in a multi-level classroom and targeting the appropriate level of challenge to inspire student progression along the continuum. See Section II in the *Guide* to review basic information about the [factors affecting task difficulty](#).
3. **[Embed and Sequence Instruction in the Most Relevant Skills](#)**  
Key to this step is targeting skills for explicit, scaffolded instruction, through techniques such as the [gradual release of responsibility](#) and the [whole-part-whole](#) approach. See [EXHIBIT 17](#) and [EXHIBIT 18](#) in the original *Guide* to review two examples.

### Revisiting the Model for Contextualized Reading Instruction

In the introductory *Guide*, I offered a model for contextualized reading instruction (EXHIBIT 1) to help readers visualize the nested approach to contextualization supported through the PIAAC tools. I described this approach in the following way:

Let's start using the word "skills" to refer to not only PIAAC's cognitive strategies but also the reading components (e.g., phonics, fluency) and other skills articulated by a state's College and Career Readiness Standards. The PIAAC work helps us envision how these **skills** are used in real-life, as we read **text(s)** in the pursuit of an overarching **task**, situated within an authentic adult **context**. By applying this same organizing principle of nesting and contextualizing to construct learning activities, we can provide students with meaningful learning experiences that develop *literacy-in-use* for long-term retention and transfer. (Trawick, 2017, p. 21)

#### EXHIBIT 1: Model for Contextualized Reading Instruction

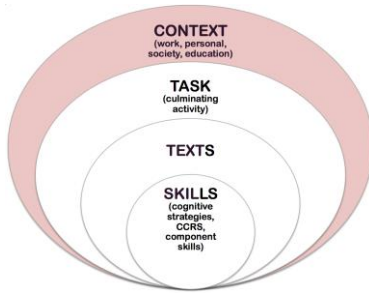


In essence, the concentric circles in this model represent both 1) how reading skills are *used* in authentic adult literacy activities and 2) how they might be *taught* in adult literacy settings to give students the supported practice they need with literacy-in-use to facilitate their developing abilities and inclination to use literacy to accomplish adult goals.



**Working in Tandem with the *Guide***

While many teachers have expressed interest in applying the approaches in the *Guide*, they have also asked in-depth questions about some of the ideas and tools. This supplement is organized around teachers' frequently asked questions. The model of contextualized reading instruction (i.e., the concentric circles graphic) appears at the top of each new section, along with the question posed. At least one of the circles is highlighted to let you know how the conversation relates to the model. Where appropriate, and as you have already seen, links to the introductory *Guide* are provided to help you easily review information or access tools in that document.



## A. HOW DO I FIND RELEVANT, “REAL-LIFE” TOPICS FOR GED/HISET/TASC STUDENTS?

This question is a common one, arising most recently in an online LINCS Literacy Circle discussion. How I often see this question phrased is something like: *How do I find relevant, “real-life” topics for students who have to pass a high school credentialing exam like the GED, HiSET, or TASC—and convince them that this kind of instruction is how they need to spend their time? My students are really focused on test prep and don’t want to mess around.*

Students who are close to taking a high school credentialing assessment (i.e., GED, HiSET, TASC) are often conscious of their time and may have preconceived notions about what instruction will or should look like. Teachers have shared that they are reluctant to approach instruction in terms of “real-life” themes or projects, as the *Guide* advocates, because of how students may respond. They are also worried about slowing down student progress. Having students work in a publisher’s workbook seems more targeted, efficient, and manageable for students who are at different places in their skill and knowledge base.

**The problem is that what makes this traditional approach attractive is also what diminishes its effectiveness for long-term and transferable learning.** In the traditional approach, students do the same, predictable, kind of literacy activity over and over again: read a short text and answer questions. They experience very little, if any, diversity in the types of texts, formats, or purposes for reading, diversity that would ultimately build their expertise as readers and prepare them for the kinds of reading practices they are likely to encounter on their jobs, in their communities, or in their training and lifelong learning pursuits. Furthermore, building deep, connected knowledge in the content areas under study is hampered by moving quickly from topic to topic, sacrificing depth of exploration for breadth of content coverage and short-term learning.

As discussed in the *Guide*, organizing instruction in units (i.e., linked lessons related to a specific topic and/or task) allows for deeper exploration of content as well as engagement with more varied texts. To address the needs of students preparing for their high school equivalency credential, then, units might focus on topics/tasks associated with the content areas tested on the credentialing assessments. For instance, all the tests include social studies, science, and literature. These have been chosen because they are domains of knowledge that impact adult activity. In many workbooks and textbooks, though, they are presented in such academic ways that both teachers and students forget that the very reason we study them is because they have implications for our lives. The trick is to bring

that “real-life” implication to the forefront. Carefully designed units of instruction allow us to do that.

Here’s one way I’ve seen this approach work: Several years ago, a teacher in Oklahoma had her class choose a topic from the Science GED book to study. The students selected the circulatory system. Wanting them to see the relevance of the unit upfront, the teacher asked students why they thought the circulatory system was important for adults to know about. The class discovered that, as a whole, most of them either had heart disease themselves or had a family member with it. With this real-world connection in mind, the teacher helped them reframe the unit from “the circulatory system” to “Having a Healthy Heart.” The teacher then led students in a project of researching how to have a healthy heart, embedding the explicit teaching of related reading skills/strategies. When they had completed the unit, they went back to the GED book and took the post-test. I happened to be in the room the day the students shared their projects and took the end-of-chapter test. They all scored 100%—and were amazed that they hadn’t had to work through all the exercises to get there. Of course, familiarity with passage-answering/test-taking was needed, but they’d had PLENTY of practice with that. At least some students had also used the passages in the GED book as source material for their final projects (posters to put up throughout the Family Literacy Center that would help fellow students “have a healthy heart”).

Note that the teacher made this unit meaningful in two ways: 1) it was transparently relevant to the GED goals of students, and 2) it was transparently relevant to their health goals. Because of the further addition of a rich task (researching information to create posters for an authentic audience and then presenting these posters to each other), students also developed digital literacy, research skills, synthesis skills, writing skills, and oral presentation skills.

A myriad of ways exist to construct similar units in your classroom. EXHIBIT 2 provides some tips to keep in mind as you explore different options.

### ***EXHIBIT 2 Tips for Finding Relevant, “Real-Life” Topics for GED/HiSET/TASC Students***

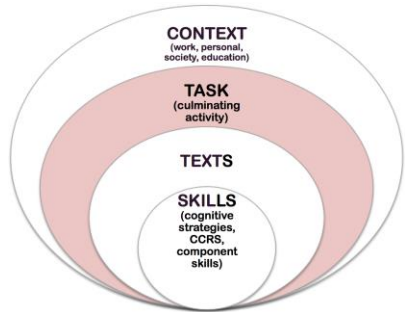
- **Review the specific topics/objectives assessed for each content area tested by the credentialing assessment, referencing the official website or other official materials.** The most specific information is often found under a heading called something like “Test Framework” or “Assessment Targets.” See an example for the HiSET at [https://hiset.ets.org/s/pdf/2018\\_taaq.pdf](https://hiset.ets.org/s/pdf/2018_taaq.pdf).
- **Consider why each topic is important for adults to know.** Think: How do adults tend to use information of this sort? Developing a table (see EXHIBIT 3) to keep track of your thinking can be helpful. Partnering with other colleagues and/or students to complete this activity can also be beneficial.

- **Identify topics that have the most obvious transfer value to life outside of school and/or that help set up a whole section of study in a content area.** For instance, a teacher might identify earth systems (i.e., geosphere, biosphere, hydrosphere, atmosphere) as an important unit topic because it is addressed on the high school equivalency exam and it introduces the idea of “systems,” a key concept to understand as an adult. He might have groups of students learn about and present on a specific system (one system per group), describing how it is a system, what its key features are, and why this is an important system for adults to know. After all the presentations, students could then work through the corresponding sections in the textbook, now having a good deal of background knowledge to bring to this school-based task. Students could be asked to look for new or conflicting information.
- **Remember you can start planning with a skill/strategy in mind.** The *Guide* discussed the option of starting the planning stage for instruction with a [skill in mind](#) and then thinking about a rich context for applying that skill. In the case of a class of students mainly studying for a credentialing exam, a teacher might decide to focus on developing students’ abilities to evaluate the credibility and relevance of information, a key PIAAC cognitive strategy and one addressed by her College and Career Readiness Standards. She could then review the topic lists in social studies and/or science to determine a subject area to use for the skill development. For example, she might consider the GED social studies topics of *political parties, campaigns, and elections* (GED CG.e) or *individual rights and civic responsibilities* (GED CG.d) because they would allow the class to explore a controversial issue (e.g., a current campaign topic) and evaluate information from different sources.
- **Show students how/where the topic and/or the reading skill(s) being targeted appear on the credentialing exam.** Having students open to a table of contents for a workbook, the publisher Assessment Target page, or a go-to section on the test website can help drive home how the unit will propel them towards their credentialing goal.
- **Have students articulate why the topic is important for “real-life”—that is, for life outside your program (and including ongoing education and training).** Sometimes this may happen easily at the beginning of the unit, as we saw earlier with the circulatory system/“Have a Healthy Heart” example. Often, though, learning is more powerful when students themselves discern applications by the end of their work in the unit. To prompt such connections, teachers might say things like, “As we go through this unit, let’s keep thinking about how we can use this information as adults. You’ll be speaking to this in your final projects.”
- **Allow time for students to work in/use their workbooks.** Organizing instruction around units doesn’t preclude setting aside time for students to get familiar with the text formats and reading activities required by the credentialing exam. These may be

periodically incorporated explicitly into instruction (e.g., “How are prompts set up? How are answers constructed? Is it better to read the questions first or the passage first?”). The reality, too, is that there will not be time to have a unit study on all the topics sampled by the exam, and students will likely want to study more on their own. The time spent in in-depth unit study, however, can provide the deeper background knowledge to build from as they work independently. It will also give students practice with more authentic applications of reading that will have longer-term carry-over into other aspects of their lives, beyond taking a test.

**EXHIBIT 3: Process for Identifying Targets for Unit Topics (Example)**

<b>Content Area: GED Social Studies</b>		
Mark with an * if this has unit potential	Assessment Target	Application to life outside school
<b>CG: CIVICS AND GOVERNMENT (50%)</b>		
...	...	...
*	b. Principles that have contributed to development of American constitutional democracy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Concepts like “separation of powers,” “checks and balances”—and how they are made concrete in the actual design of the government-- help analyze current events and offer/evaluate possible solutions.</li> <li>• If adults know which part of the government is responsible for what duties, they know where to direct advocacy activities.</li> </ul>
	c. Structure and design of United States government	
*	d. Individual rights and civic responsibilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Helps frame different understandings about personal vs civic behavior; is a basic tension in US politics so exposure to the rich body of thought around the tension can deepen critical thinking around current events related to such things as economic policy and civil rights.</li> </ul>
...	...	...
<b>GEOGRAPHY AND THE WORLD (15%)</b>		
...	...	...
	a. Development of classical civilizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Helps understand early influences on our democratic system of government—can understand references to these</li> <li>• Provides warning signals for the fall of empires to help in making decisions...</li> </ul>
...	...	...



## B. HOW DO I KNOW IF A TASK IS “AUTHENTIC”?

Identifying a literacy task for a unit, one that is central to the unit and demonstrates in essential ways how literacy is used in “real life,” is key to effective contextualized reading instruction. This kind of task is considered “authentic.” Since we know that many of our students will be moving on to postsecondary and training settings, literacy tasks that replicate or simulate the kinds of reading they’ll experience in these contexts can also be considered “authentic,” if the transfer to those settings is made clear. What we want to do, then, is to design an overarching literacy task for the unit—let’s start calling it a “Unit Task”—that is *as authentic as possible*, considering the limitations of time, materials, and transportation. Think about a **Unit Task** as a **culminating activity that requires the learner to use targeted reading skills, either to do something (e.g., find contact information; shop for groceries) or to access, analyze, and evaluate information in order to produce a product (e.g., a piece of writing or an oral presentation)**. Ideally, the culminating activity will also have an audience other than the teacher, such as the students themselves, classmates, the larger program/adult learning center, the workplace, or the community.

In the *Guide*, you read [examples](#) of Unit Tasks, such as researching a health concern to share information about its causes and impacts with fellow students, finding contact information in a directory (for school or workplace), comparing three careers to identify and share the best fit, and researching information in order to write a letter to an online discussion board to argue for a particular side of a controversial topic. These all approximate the kinds of activities adults do outside of school; in other words, they lean towards authenticity. So, just thinking about meaningful reading tasks that happen outside of school can get you pretty far.

You may also find the work of Halliday (1985) a useful way of approaching the issue of authenticity. Halliday focused on what it means to use language for “true communicative purposes” as opposed to, say, reading only “as part of the function of *learning to read*” (Purcell-Gates, Jacobson, & Degener, 2004, p. 94). He identified seven functions for written language that can be helpful to consider when developing Unit Tasks (EXHIBIT 4).

**EXHIBIT 4 Halliday's Language Functions**

<b>Language Function</b>	<b>Description</b> (from Purcell-Gates, Jacobson, & Degener, 2004, pp. 96-97; emphasis added)
Instrumental	Language used to <b>satisfy a material need, enabling one to obtain goods and services that one wants or needs</b> . Examples: Ordering something via a form; requesting in a memo.
Regulatory	Language used to <b>control behavior</b> . This is related to the instrumental function but is distinct. The difference between this and the instrumental is that in the instrumental the focus is on the goods or services required and it does not matter who provides them, whereas the regulatory function is directed toward a particular individual and it is the behavior of that individual that is to be influenced. Examples: Written rules and regulations (such as, a driver's manual); the "don't walk" sign or a stop sign.
Interactional	Language used to <b>make or maintain interpersonal contact</b> . Examples: Personal letters and greeting cards; Notes like "I love you."
Personal	Language used to <b>express awareness of oneself</b> , in contradistinction to ones' environment. Includes expressions of personal feelings, participation and withdrawal, interest, pleasure, and disgust. Examples: Memo of personal reaction to a new policy; writing in a journal of personal reactions and feelings.
Heuristic	Language used to <b>learn and to explore the environment</b> . Examples: Reading for information; writing down questions to ask of text or of a speaker.
Imaginative	Language used to <b>create, including stories and make-believe/pretend</b> . Examples: Reading/writing poetry, fiction.
Informative	Language used to <b>communicate information to someone who does not already possess that information</b> . Examples: writing information texts; Writing research reports; writing personal letters to inform someone of what has happened to a relative.

Purcell-Gates et al. (2004) suggest that if a task fails to address one of these functions, it's being used purely to teach reading and not for an authentic purpose. When adult learners use reading in class for authentic purposes/functions, they are more likely to draw upon the underlying reading components and cognitive skills in ways that will transfer to college, to training, and to other out-of-school settings over the long-term. As teachers, then, we want to construct tasks that tap into these functions.

Let's see what this might look like. As we do, keep in mind that it's important not to assess the authenticity of the task by only assessing the authenticity of the *text*. "Learning-to-read" activities can be conducted using newspapers, labels, and signs--all "authentic" texts. Let's take a look at EXHIBIT 5 to think in more nuanced ways about what makes tasks themselves authentic.

**EXHIBIT 5 Moving from School-based to “Authentic” Reading**

“Learning-to-Read” Tasks (using a Workbook)	“Learning-to-Read” Tasks (using Authentic Texts)	(More) “Authentic” Reading Tasks
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Circle the word starting with “m” for each word in a row of words presented in a workbook.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Circle all the words starting with “m” on a grocery list.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use the first letter of each word on a short self-generated grocery list to help know what to buy.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Differentiate main idea(s) and supporting details in a <i>Six-Way Paragraphs</i> passage.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Differentiate main idea(s) and supporting details in a newspaper article.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Differentiate main idea(s) and supporting details in an online article to tease out ideas/information as one step in constructing a convincing argument for a class presentation re: alternative energy sources.</li> </ul>

First of all, let’s apply Halliday’s functions to analyze Row 2. Circling words (Column 1) does not fit any function of real-life use of language that we would expect an adult to engage in, even when it is accomplished with realia (e.g., a grocery list, as in Column 2). However, reading a grocery list to help make a purchase (Column 3) would fall under the *Instrumental* function in Halliday’s categorization. Reading a grocery list to acquire food from the grocery store serves a very utilitarian purpose.

Note that Column 3 mentions that the grocery list is self-generated. Why is that important? One assumes that the learner is a beginning reader. A beginning reader is not likely to be able to read whole words of this type from a list created by other people. However, if she has composed a self-generated list, either through invented spelling (with editing) or dictation, it is likely that she could use the first letter, some common letter-sound associations and word patterns she recognizes, and the context of the experience to discern the rest of the word. Perhaps she creates a grocery list comprised only of words beginning with sounds/letters from this unit and from previous units—and then reads them off in the next lesson. The task needs to be manageable, but we want it to be culminating—and authentic.

Now, as teachers, we certainly might have students engage in an activity like we see in Column 1 or 2 as practice *on the way* to the culminating Unit Task of something like what we see in Column 3. However, the idea in contextualized curriculum design is that you use backward design to plan your lessons. That means, in part, that you envision the real-life functional task that you want students to be able to do, make sure it’s level-appropriate, think about what key reading skills/strategies are involved, and then sequence the skill instruction so that students arrive at the point where they are able to complete the task.



Let's look now at Row 3. It's tempting to say that the task in Column 2 is Heuristic in function. The problem is that the goal of the stated activity in that cell is not to learn the *information* but to learn the *difference between main idea and details*. That's a "learning-to-read" goal. Now, compare that goal with what's going on in Column 3. There the student is gleaning information from each article he reads in order to prepare for a student presentation. The reading is Heuristic in function and the writing/presentation will be Informative (see EXHIBIT 4). Because there is so much purpose framing the Unit Task, the reading skill of finding main idea and details (which will indeed be explicitly taught and assessed) has enhanced significance. Again, a teacher may decide to have activities like the ones we see in Column 1 and 2 in lessons *on the way* to the one we see in Column 3, but ultimately the Unit Task is going to require reading for an authentic, culminating purpose.

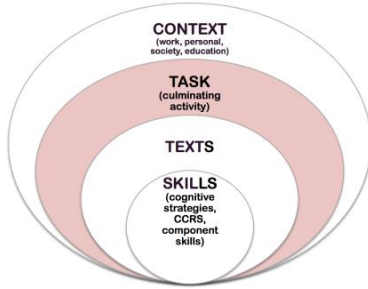
In essence, the Unit Task offers a *use-oriented* approach to at least most of the other reading activities in the unit. Students read with the intent of doing something (else) with what they read, often to share with someone other than the teacher. That sense of purpose, knowing that one is going to have to apply the content of the readings to something concrete outside the text, compels a level of engagement, of focus, and ultimately of skill-learning that "practicing" with text just doesn't seem to generate. Better yet, the requirement to *produce* something that explicitly incorporates readings—an article or a presentation, for instance—fosters an integration of skills and a synthesis of the content that leads to long-term learning. Keeping three simple questions (EXHIBIT 6) in mind as you develop your Unit Tasks can ensure that your units capture the kinds of "authentic" reading that adults tackle in their work, community, and lifelong learning pursuits.

### EXHIBIT 6 Ensuring Authenticity in the Unit Task

#### Basic Questions to Ask about Authenticity in a Unit Task

- Do students engage with "real-life" text(s) (e.g., labels, signs, ads, stories, articles, essays, websites, blogs, chapters, books, self-generated text) as opposed to (just) workbook/textbook texts?
- Do students read text for a purpose other than only to understand/analyze the text (e.g., to know what to get from the store, to know how much medicine to take, to make a decision about a health insurance plan and explain why it is the best fit, to formulate an argument around a community issue and post a letter to a blog about it, to analyze and critique literature to enrich personal identity, determine and defend preferences for authors, and/or deepen cultural understandings)?
  - Tip: See if you can match one of Halliday's functions to the task.
 

- Instrumental	- Regulatory	- Interactional	- Personal
- Heuristic	- Imaginative	- Informative	
- Is there a final audience besides the teacher (e.g., the student, classmates, broader program/center, workplace, community)?



## C. HOW CAN DEVELOPING A UNIT TASK STATEMENT HELP ME PLAN INSTRUCTION MORE EFFECTIVELY?

A Unit Task is a culminating project/product that requires the reading of text(s) and often the integration of skills to accomplish it. You may recall that, in the introductory *Guide*, Sonia wrote a clear [statement](#) to help her frame her Unit Task. She wrote:

*By the end of this unit, students will be able to read simple print and online directories in order to locate phone numbers. They will demonstrate their learning by independently finding five phone numbers on a directory for people at a local business, school, or community agency.*

You'll also find a reference to writing a clear statement in [APPENDIX G](#) in the *Guide*. So let's take a few minutes to ponder the benefits of crafting a Unit Task statement, using the template in EXHIBIT 7.

### EXHIBIT 7 Template for a Unit Task Statement

<p>By the end of this unit, students will be able to read _____ in order to _____.</p> <p>They will demonstrate their learning by _____.</p>
--

A Unit Task statement serves the purpose of helping you as the instructor clarify the goals of instruction for the unit -- both in general and specifically -- as far as adult reading tasks are concerned. The **first sentence** generally speaks to the long-term nature of the learning the unit offers, the transferability. What will students take away with them? In other words, what broad kinds of texts will they be able to read and for what purpose? The **second sentence** begins to answer an assessment question: How will you know they can do this? What kind of assessment task are you going to construct that will give you insights as to their performance? Once these are clear, you are able to focus on the reading skills/strategies students will need to accomplish the Unit Task. (Let me stop here and emphasize, again, that it is perfectly acceptable, and often the case, that we arrive at the task by *starting with the skill/strategy* and thinking about a real-life reading task that requires that skill/strategy. See [page 22](#) of the original *Guide* for this discussion.)

Let's break down the template for the Unit Task statement even further, specifically in terms of *readings, purpose, and unit task components*.

**Readings** - The first blank asks for the **kinds of materials the students will read**. Notice that Sonia wrote “simple print and online directories.” Once you read her unit, you see that she has built in some variety to provide for differentiation, but her class is mainly comprised of beginning level readers, so she will be looking for quite simple directories. It is important in this part of the template to be as specific as you can, especially if someone else will be using your curriculum down the road. What can be problematic at this stage is identifying the kinds of texts (or parts of texts) that are level-appropriate. For instance, reading a utility bill, in general, is a high-level text, if we think of it in terms of reading *all* of a utility bill, including the small print that often occurs on the back of the bill. If the purpose is to identify how much is owed and by what date, an adult reading at the beginning end of the continuum could be taught how to accomplish that task by looking for key words and learning common bill formats.

As an aid, a tool like EXHIBIT 8 can support you and other teachers in your program in identifying level-appropriate texts. It is adapted from a resource developed by Oregon as part of the state’s adult education standards development several years ago. You might find this table helpful in identifying appropriate “real-life” texts for each level, or you might want to work with other colleagues to adapt it in ways that work for your students and program/system.

**Purpose** - The second blank in the Unit Task template follows the words “in order to.” It reminds the teacher to provide an authentic purpose for the reading activities. That means that “in order to learn about main idea” or “in order to build vocabulary” would **not** be appropriate entries! You’ll note that Sonia’s class read directories “in order to locate phone numbers.” Likewise, you want to aim for tasks that are authentic in function, as we covered in Section B of this document.

**Specific task components** - The third blank in the Unit Task template is where you capture how students will demonstrate that they can actually do what you have asserted they should be able to do by the end of the unit. It provides a context for assessment. Sonia’s students, for example, will demonstrate their learning by “independently finding five phone numbers on a directory for people at a local business, school, or community agency.” Again, this is a culminating activity/assessment task, so a good deal of instruction takes place prior to expecting students to independently carry out the task. However, thinking about the end goal early on in the curriculum design process permits Sonia to think carefully about what it will take, instructionally, to prepare students to be able to carry out the task at the end.

**EXHIBIT 8 Level-Appropriate Texts**

<b>Level 1</b> Beginning ESL Literacy	<b>Level 2</b> Low Beginning ESL	<b>Level 3</b> High Beginning ESL/ Beginning ABE Literacy	<b>Level 4</b> Low Intermediate ESL/ Beginning ABE
a. Familiar store signs, product labels, and related ads b. High-frequency practical and survival signs and symbols (e.g., EXIT; DANGER; poison symbol; restroom; hospital; school) c. Very simple charts (e.g., scoreboards)	a. Patterned or self-written sentences b. Short, simplified or self-written stories c. Familiar store signs, product labels, related ads d. High-frequency practical and survival signs and symbols (e.g., EXIT; DANGER; poison symbol; restroom; hospital; school) e. Parts of simple forms (e.g., Name; Address) f. Short, self-written lists (e.g., grocery lists; addresses) g. Simple charts (e.g., scoreboards; calendars) h. Some simple, visually-supported digital texts (e.g., U-Scan at the grocery store)	a. Simplified or self-written stories and poetry b. Familiar store signs, product labels, and related ads c. Common practical and survival signs and symbols (e.g., EXIT; DANGER; poison) d. Parts of simple forms (e.g., Name; Address; Tele-phone Number) e. Self-written lists (e.g., grocery lists; addresses) f. Simple charts (e.g., scoreboards; simple order forms; calendars) g. Simple, visually-supported digital texts (e.g., familiar DVD menu)	a. Simple or self-written stories, poetry, and scripts b. Short, simple personal and functional texts (e.g., personal notes/letters; labels; greeting cards; simple ads) c. Simple instructions (e.g., for a familiar recipe; directions to a residence) d. Read simple forms or parts of more complex forms (e.g., work order forms; library card applications) e. Some simple tables, graphs, and maps (e.g., child's report card; medicine dosage chart; map of a familiar area) f. High-interest, simplified informational sources (e.g., simplified article about a famous person) g. Sections of newspapers and simplified magazines (e.g., bulleted side-bar about how to plant a bulb) h. Some simple digital texts (e.g., personal e-mail)

Adapted from Oregon Department of Community Colleges and Workforce Development (n.d.). *Read With Understanding Learning Framework* (pp. 14-15). Salem, OR: Author.

<b>Level 5</b> High Intermediate ESL/ Low Intermediate ABE	<b>Level 6</b> Advanced ESL/ High Intermediate ABE	<b>Level 7</b> Beginning Transitions/ Low ASE	<b>Level 8</b> Transitions/High ASE
a. Simple novels, biographies, stories, poetry, and scripts b. Simple personal and functional texts (e.g., flyers of upcoming events; ads; recipes) c. Simple forms, tables, graphs, diagrams, and maps (e.g., catalog order forms; menus; nutrition labels; maps of the U.S.; TV schedules) d. High-interest, simple, informational texts e. Selected sections of magazines and newspapers f. Simple digital texts (e.g., personal e-mail; video games; DVD menus; simple web pages)	a. Popular novels, biographies, essays, short stories, poetry, and scripts b. Everyday functional texts (e.g., health brochures; political ads) c. Forms, tables, graphs, diagrams, and maps (e.g., job applications; food pyramid; work flow diagram; nutrition charts; road maps) d. Political cartoons depicting current people or events e. Common informational texts (e.g., self-help books; textbooks; books on special interests) f. Articles and editorials in popular magazines and local newspapers g. Digital texts (e.g., most web pages; electronic encyclopedias)	a. Novels, biographies, essays, short stories, poetry, and scripts b. Some complex functional texts/ documents (e.g., simple wills; voter eligibility materials) c. Complex forms, tables, graphs, diagrams, and maps (e.g., organizational diagram for a workplace; census charts; climate maps) d. Political cartoons e. Specialized informational sources related to math, social studies, science, and work (e.g., high school level textbooks; training manuals) f. Common historical American documents (e.g., The Declaration of Independence; U.S. Constitution; the "I Have a Dream" speech) g. Read articles and editorials in news magazines and major newspapers h. Complex digital texts (e.g., dense web pages/sites; online reports)	a. Literary texts from various historical and cultural perspectives, including foundational American and world literatures b. Complex functional texts/documents (e.g., warranties; contracts) c. Complex forms, tables, graphs, diagrams, and maps (e.g., financial aid table; stock market charts/graphs) d. Political cartoons e. Specialized informational sources related to math, social studies, science, and work (e.g., college-level textbooks; content-area journals; certification materials) f. Historical American documents (e.g., The Federalist; presidential addresses) g. Articles and editorials in major magazines and newspapers h. Complex digital texts (e.g., complex web sites; online reports)

Adapted from Oregon Department of Community Colleges and Workforce Development (n.d.). *Read With Understanding Learning Framework* (pp. 14-15). Salem, OR: Author.

Let's look at another example of a complete Unit Task statement. Marco's unit from [Section II](#) in the *Guide* might look something like this:

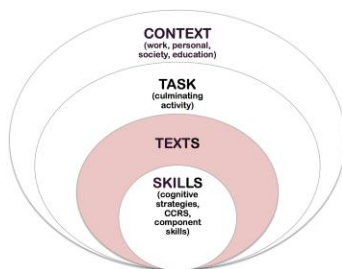
*By the end of this unit, students will be able to navigate through a website and read at least one other source of informational material related to a self-selected health concern in order to understand the causes and impacts of a health concern and make informed decisions. Students will demonstrate their learning by writing an article for the class blog in which they describe the health issue (e.g., what it is, how it manifests, its prevalence) and discuss its causes, its impacts on individual lives, and how they plan to apply what they have learned.*

First, note that Marco adapted the initial sentence a bit to capture the notion that he wanted students not just to read a webpage but to navigate through a website. Similarly, you should feel free to make these template sentences work for you; adapt as necessary. Secondly, unlike Sonia, Marco's students weren't reading just one kind of text. Whereas having students focus on one kind of text within a unit (e.g., directories, labels) often makes sense, especially at the lower levels, thinking more in terms of [rhetorical stances](#) can be beneficial at the higher levels. All of the texts related to Marco's unit would be expository, so that's what Marco targeted. If you'll recall, Marco focuses specifically on [cause and effect](#), so the articles he provides would have that text structure.

A third point to discuss in Marco's Unit Task statement is related to assessment. Since the final project (a blog) is a written product he has to think carefully how to also assess for reading. Marco has several options. Depending on the skills/strategies that he decides to target for instruction, he can have students do such things as:

- cite evidence from texts in their blogs
- submit notes from their research, in addition to their blogs
- submit a completed cause and effect graphic organizer, in addition to their blogs
- include targeted vocabulary words in their blog
- build one or more of these into a rubric that might be used to actually assess the final project (blog), which will also be assessed, one would think, in terms of writing skills.

Since reading is often employed to *do something*—thus, PIAAC's *literacy-in-use* orientation— putting literacy to use will involve integration of skills. This is good. However, as a teacher, you will want to tease out the reading piece(s), when planning both assessment and instruction. The clearer you are in your Unit Task statement about what students should be able to do, and will be assessed on--by the end of the unit--in terms of readings, purpose, and specific task components—the more ready you will be to start planning for instruction.



## D. HOW DO I SELECT THE SPECIFIC TEXTS TO USE IN A UNIT?

Selecting texts is one of the most important decisions a teacher makes in the instructional cycle. Although [EXHIBIT 8](#) in Section C offers guidance on the general types of texts that may be appropriate for each level, care must be taken in choosing the *specific* texts used in lessons. A rule of thumb is that we want texts used for instruction to be “appropriately challenging.” That means we need to follow the Goldilocks Principle: texts should not be too easy, nor too difficult, but just right. If text is too easy, students won’t need to apply the skills they are learning; if it is too difficult, frustration kicks in and blocks learning. Thus, material needs to be challenging to just the right degree.

The resource *College and Career Readiness Standards for Adult Education* (CCRS; Pimentel, 2013) borrows heavily from the work of the Common Core State Standards Initiative (2017) to provide guidance on choosing texts. The 3-dimensional framework it presents (EXHIBIT 9) can be helpful for practitioners who contextualize reading instruction because it acknowledges that the task itself impacts the level of text an individual reader can handle. Practitioners who contextualize also often use authentic texts from the Internet, newspapers, brochures, and information books, few of which may already be leveled for use in a classroom. They need ways to think about text that will enable them to make effective selections.

### EXHIBIT 9 The CCRS Model for Choosing Texts

*The CCSS defines a three-part model—embraced by the [CCRS] panel—for determining how easy or difficult a particular text is to read, as well as specifications for increasing text complexity as students move up the levels:*

- 1. Quantitative dimensions of text complexity.** *The terms quantitative dimensions and quantitative factors refer to those aspects of text complexity, such as word length or frequency, sentence length, and text cohesion, that are difficult if not impossible for a human reader to evaluate efficiently, especially in long texts, and are thus typically measured by computer software.*
- 2. Qualitative dimensions of text complexity.** *The terms qualitative dimensions and qualitative factors refer to those aspects of text complexity best measured or only measurable by an attentive human reader, such as levels of meaning or purpose, structure, language conventionality and clarity, and knowledge demands.*
- 3. Reader and task considerations.** *While the quantitative and qualitative measures focus on the inherent complexity of the text, the CCSS model expects educators to use professional judgment to identify texts that are well-matched to specific tasks or students, such as skilled readers or those with high interest in the content of the text. (Pimentel, 2013, p. 118)*

## Tools for Checking Complexity of Texts

There are a number of tools that have been developed for analyzing text along the quantitative and qualitative dimensions described in the CCRS model above. If you are not familiar with these, I encourage you to explore the resources in EXHIBITS 10 and 11.

### EXHIBIT 10 Tools for Evaluating Text Complexity

Dimension	Tools
<p data-bbox="289 569 456 636"><b>Quantitative Dimensions</b></p> <p data-bbox="264 684 480 1098"><i>[Reading Standard 10 in the College and Career Readiness Standards for Adult Education (Pimentel, 2013) offers guidance on the text assessment scores appropriate for specific student levels.]</i></p>	<p data-bbox="505 510 915 541"><b>Automatic Readability Checker</b></p> <p data-bbox="505 548 1443 579"><a href="http://www.readabilityformulas.com/free-readability-formula-tests.php">http://www.readabilityformulas.com/free-readability-formula-tests.php</a></p> <p data-bbox="505 611 1406 737"><i>Input excerpts from any text and receive not only scores for a number of readability formulas but also a consensus score that takes results from multiple readability formulas into consideration. Using a consensus score is a good practice since no one score is likely to have the rigor you would want.</i></p> <hr/> <p data-bbox="505 768 1187 800"><b>Quick Book Search</b> on the Lexile Framework website</p> <p data-bbox="505 806 1057 837"><a href="https://fab.lexile.com">https://fab.lexile.com</a> (upper right corner).</p> <p data-bbox="505 879 1446 1136"><i>The Lexile approach is a comprehensive system that is used to evaluate both readers and texts. An assessment scores students at a Lexile level, and texts are scored using the same Lexile leveling system. Students can then be matched with texts, theoretically. Rough correlations have also been made between Lexile levels and other leveling systems, including grade equivalents, so those correlations can be used to help match students with books and other texts for which you know the Lexile level. The Quick Book Search function in the upper right corner enables teachers (or students) to enter book titles to see if they match targeted student levels.</i></p>
<p data-bbox="289 1440 456 1507"><b>Qualitative Dimensions</b></p>	<p data-bbox="505 1167 1349 1234"><b>Qualitative Tools</b> at <a href="https://achievethecore.org/page/2725/text-complexity">https://achievethecore.org/page/2725/text-complexity</a></p> <p data-bbox="505 1276 1438 1402"><i>Achieve the Core is an online repository of open resource tools developed to support K-12 teachers in teaching to the Common Core State Standards. The Qualitative Tools section of the website provides resources for analyzing texts qualitatively that adult practitioners may find useful.</i></p> <hr/> <p data-bbox="505 1430 1300 1497"><b>ELA/Foundational Professional Development Units</b> <b>Unit 2: Selecting Texts Worth Reading, Participant Materials</b></p> <p data-bbox="505 1503 1430 1570"><a href="https://lincs.ed.gov/publications/pdf/ccr/ELA_Unit_2_Materials/ELA_Unit_2_Part_Matr.pdf">https://lincs.ed.gov/publications/pdf/ccr/ELA_Unit_2_Materials/ELA_Unit_2_Part_Matr.pdf</a></p> <p data-bbox="505 1612 1446 1766"><i>The Standards-In-Action project, funded by the Office of Career, Technical and Adult Education, has adapted K-12 tools for use in ABE programs. The project has published professional development modules online, and one of these addresses selecting text. The rubrics for analyzing the qualitative dimension of text are especially helpful. Exhibit 11 presents how one state has adapted these materials for their use.</i></p>



**EXHIBIT 11 Qualitative Analysis of Informational Text**

## Qualitative Analysis of Informational Text Complexity

**Text Title:**

**Author:**

**Publisher / Source:**

Check the appropriate levels of complexity, then determine **Overall Qualitative Complexity**:

		<b>LESS COMPLEX</b> Slightly to Moderately Complex	<b>MORE COMPLEX</b> Very to Exceedingly Complex
<b>STRUCTURE</b>	<b>Connections among ideas, processes, or events</b>	<input type="radio"/> explicit and clear; fewer number of connections	<input type="radio"/> implicit, subtle, deep, intricate, and often ambiguous; extensive range of connections
	<b>Text Organization</b>	<input type="radio"/> chronological, sequential, or easy to predict	<input type="radio"/> may contain multiple pathways or exhibit some discipline-specific traits
	<b>Text Features</b> <i>(if used, such as Table of Contents, Glossaries, Headings &amp; Subheadings, Sidebars, ...)</i>	<input type="radio"/> ... help the reader navigate and understand content but are not essential to understanding content	<input type="radio"/> ... directly enhance or essential to the reader's understanding of content
	<b>Graphics</b> <i>(if used, such as Diagrams, Charts, Graphs, Maps, Pictures, Cartoons)</i>	<input type="radio"/> non-essential or supplemental for understanding the text; may support and assist readers in understanding the text	<input type="radio"/> support or are integral to understanding the text; may provide information not otherwise conveyed in the text
<b>LANGUAGE</b>	<b>Language Conventuality</b>	<input type="radio"/> explicit, literal, straightforward, and easy to understand; may have some occasions for more complex meaning	<input type="radio"/> dense and complex; contains abstract, ironic, and/or figurative language
	<b>Vocabulary</b>	<input type="radio"/> mostly contemporary, familiar, and conversational; rarely overly academic	<input type="radio"/> fairly complex and sometimes unfamiliar, archaic, subject-specific, or academic; may be ambiguous or misleading
	<b>Sentence Structure</b>	<input type="radio"/> mainly simple sentences; some compound sentences; some complex constructions	<input type="radio"/> mainly complex sentences, with several subordinate phrases or clauses and transition words; sentences often contain multiple concepts
<b>KNOWLEDGE Demands</b>	<b>Subject Matter Knowledge</b>	<input type="radio"/> common, practical knowledge; includes simple, concrete ideas; may contain a few more complicated, abstract ideas	<input type="radio"/> moderate to extensive levels of discipline-specific or theoretical knowledge; includes a range of recognizable ideas and challenging abstract concepts
	<b>Intertextuality</b>	<input type="radio"/> no or few references or allusions to other texts, or outside ideas, theories, etc.	<input type="radio"/> some to many references or allusions to other texts or outside ideas, theories, etc.
<b>PURPOSE</b>		<input type="radio"/> explicitly stated, clear, concrete, and narrowly focused; or implied but easy to identify based on context or source	<input type="radio"/> subtle, intricate, and difficult to determine; more theoretical or abstract than concrete

*Adapted in Massachusetts from CCRSIA materials.*

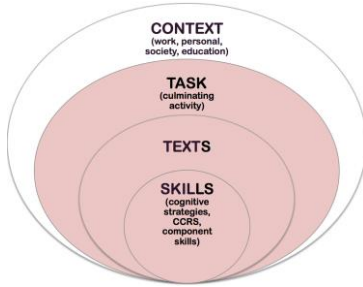
These tools are useful for evaluating the readability level of ‘**continuous**’ text--that is, text that occurs in the form of sentences and paragraphs. In order to evaluate the level of the various types of **non-continuous** texts--such as lists, charts, graphs, and maps described in [Appendix C](#) in the *Guide*--programs and practitioners can use the PMOSE/IKIRSCH Document Readability Formula ([Appendix](#), this document).

No similar tools are readily available for analyzing the task and reader considerations--the third element identified in the CCRS Model for analyzing text complexity. For this dimension, the CCRS model suggests that instructors exercise “professional judgment.” Luckily, the PIAAC Factors Affecting Task Difficulty provide guidelines that can help practitioners navigate this interaction between the text, the task, and the reader.

These factors, described in the original [Guide](#) helped assessment developers determine where assessment tasks should be placed on the [PIAAC proficiency continuum for literacy](#). To review, these factors include:

- Semantic complexity and syntactic complexity
- Degree of complexity in making inferences
- Amount of information needed
- Transparency of the information
- Prominence of the information
- Competing Information
- Text Features

As you can see, most of these focus on the interaction between the text and what the student is being asked to do with the text (e.g., the task). We will look at how practitioners can use the factors in the next section.



## E. WHAT ARE SOME EFFICIENT YET EFFECTIVE WAYS TO DIFFERENTIATE INSTRUCTION?

As we saw in Section D, one way to differentiate instruction is to make sure that each student is reading text that is appropriate for his or her reading comprehension level. That one action step can go a long way. However, teachers often wonder if there are additional ways to make sure students' individual needs are being met.

First, let's distinguish between *differentiating* and *individualizing*, as I am using them in this document. For our purposes, I will define *differentiation* narrowly as adapting some aspect of the task, texts, or skill instruction in order to adjust to the skill abilities of students in the class and provide the appropriate level of challenge to spur movement along the proficiency continuum. *Individualization*, however, has more to do with offering options that enhance student interest, motivation, and/or [engagement](#), a vital consideration for adult literacy instruction reported by the National Research Council (2012) and addressed by the PIAAC Literacy Expert Group (2009). Of course, the two concepts overlap. The distinction between attending *mostly* to motivation (individualization) or *mostly* to skill use (differentiation), however, is an important one to have in mind when making instructional decisions. We will address individualization in Section H. In answering the question here about how to differentiate, we will pick up discussions in previous sections about crafting tasks and selecting texts, using the factors affecting task difficulty.

### Factors Affecting Task Difficulty

The main conceptual tool in PIAAC that aids in differentiation is the [factors affecting task difficulty](#). These can help you structure Unit Tasks and associated reading activities so that they appropriately challenge students. Whereas the approaches we discussed in [Section D](#) offered ways to analyze text itself, these seven factors enable you to look at the dynamic interaction between the text, the reader's skills, and the task the reader needs to accomplish with the text.

Let's revisit Marco's unit in more depth to see how using the factors helped him to select text appropriate for his readers' abilities/needs with specific skills and how these would need to be applied to "do" the Unit Task. We'll also see how the analysis surfaced adjustments Marco wanted to make in his instruction.

Recall that his Unit Task statement might have been something like this:

*By the end of this unit, students will be able to navigate through a [website](#) and read at least one [other source of informational material](#) related to a self-selected health*

*concern in order to understand the causes and impacts of the health concern and make informed decisions. Students will demonstrate their learning by writing an article for the class blog in which they describe the health issue (e.g., what it is, how it manifests, its prevalence) and discuss its causes, its impacts on individual lives, and how they plan to apply what they have learned.*

What kind of information will students be expected to gain from their reading? Reviewing the statement above, you might jot down the following:

- A definition of the health concern
- How it manifests
- How common it is
- Causes
- Impacts of health concern on individual lives
- Personal applications of learning

What else does the Unit Task statement tell us about what students will do?

- Students will be navigating at least one website (but not necessarily conducting a full Internet search).
- Students will be reading some other kind of informational material.

As Marco looked through different websites, he noticed that there was great variety in their formats and overall complexity. He needed to think carefully about how to challenge but not overwhelm the students at different levels within his classroom. If you'll recall, he teaches both low and high intermediate readers in his class, which is quite a spread of ability. His [analysis](#) of the factors of task difficulty helped him to think about how to appropriately challenge students so that they could move along the proficiency continuum in their development.

To see how Marco arrived at some of his conclusions, let's take a look at EXHIBITS 12 and 13. Each of these presents a webpage on diabetes. You'll note that even from what you can see, there are distinct differences in four of the factors:

- **Transparency of the information.** Remember that it is easier to find information in text when it is well labeled, clearly signaled, and well matched to the expectations of the reader. You'll note that the clear, linear headings and subheadings on the webpage in EXHIBIT 12 make it clear where to find specific details. Although the headings themselves are clear in EXHIBIT 13, they are spread out across the lower part of the screen, with some (accompanied by pictures) listed horizontally and other listed in double columns. The most relevant information for the project is also found at the bottom of the page.

- **Prominence of the information.** In general, information found in recognizable parts of the texts (especially the beginning or end of the text) is usually easier to identify than information buried in the middle. On the webpage in EXHIBIT 12, the information needed to complete the task appears right away; however, in EXHIBIT 13, the key details don't show up until at least half-way down the page.
- **Competing information.** As we discussed in the *Guide*, having to sift through potentially relevant information makes a task more complex. Although the information in EXHIBIT 12 is clearly presented, there is still a good amount of information for students to sift through to stay focused on the prompts for the project. EXHIBIT 13, however, also presents a plethora of distracting information, both in terms of what might be relevant and what needs to be ignored completely.
- **Text features.** Tasks tend to be more difficult when the reader has to work to determine how different parts of the text relate to each other. You can see how a reader could more easily make sense of the organizational pattern of the webpage in EXHIBIT 12 than the one in EXHIBIT 13.

Because of these differences in the text, weighed against what the student is trying to accomplish (the Unit Task), Marco would probably decide that the page on EXHIBIT 12 (and other pages on that site) would be more appropriate for his low intermediate students and offer it and others like it as an option for them. EXHIBIT 13, however, may provide fodder for stretching the digital reading skills of the higher-level students, with appropriate scaffolding.

This exercise of thinking about the factors of task difficulty has also offered Marco insights on skills he needs to teach, unique to the different levels and described in his [“Notes”](#) in the *Guide*. For instance, he realizes he needs to add a lesson on inferencing for the low-intermediate students and review with them how to use chunking and verbal retelling as comprehension strategies. Although Marco didn't make changes to the Unit Task itself, the analysis can easily result in changes in this part of the model as well. Especially as teachers become more familiar with the factors affecting task difficulty, they will tend to automatically consider them when developing their Unit Task statements. A more thorough analysis of this type further into the planning cycle, however, can ensure the final Unit Task (and any necessary variations) are well suited for all the students in the class.

**EXHIBIT 12 Sample of Less-Complex Webpage**

The image shows a screenshot of the NIH website page titled "What is Diabetes?". The page layout is clean and organized. At the top, there is a navigation bar with tabs for "Research & Funding", "Health Information", "About NIDDK", and "News". The "Health Information" tab is selected. Below the navigation bar, there is a breadcrumb trail: "Home \ Health Information \ Diabetes \ Diabetes Overview \ What is Diabetes?". A search bar is located in the top right corner.

On the left side, there is a "Diabetes Overview" sidebar menu with a "Clear menu" callout. The menu items include: "What is Diabetes?", "Type 1 Diabetes", "Type 2 Diabetes", "Diabetes & Insulin Resistance", "Gestational Diabetes", "Monogenic Diabetes", "Symptoms & Causes", "Risk Factors for Type 2 Diabetes", "Preventing Type 2 Diabetes", "Diabetes Tests & Diagnosis", "Managing Diabetes", "Insulin, Medicines, & Other Diabetes Treatments", "Diabetes Diet, Eating, & Physical Activity", and "Preventing Diabetes Problems".

The main content area has a heading "What is Diabetes?" with a "Simple tabs" callout. The text explains that diabetes is a disease where blood glucose is too high. It includes text-embedded links for "insulin" and "pancreas" with a "Text-embedded links to more in-depth info" callout. Below this, there are sections for "What are the different types of diabetes?", "Type 1 diabetes", "Type 2 diabetes", "Gestational diabetes", and "Other types of diabetes", each with a "Distinct headings and subheadings" callout. The "Type 1 diabetes" section includes a link to "immune system". The "Gestational diabetes" section includes a link to "gestational diabetes". The "Other types of diabetes" section includes links to "monogenic diabetes" and "cystic fibrosis-related diabetes".

At the bottom of the page, there is a section titled "How common is diabetes?". A "No ads or distracting material" callout is placed at the bottom left of the page.

EXHIBIT 13 Sample of a More-Complex Webpage

The screenshot shows the top navigation bar of the American Diabetes Association website. It includes a logo on the left, followed by menu items: MAGAZINE, TAKE ACTION, WALK, RIDE, NEWLY DIAGNOSED, RECIPES, PROFESSIONALS, and SHOP. Below this is a secondary navigation bar with links for 'En Español', 'Type 1', 'Type 2', 'About Us', 'Online Community', 'Meal Planning', 'Sign In', and 'BECOME A MEMBER'. A 'DONATE NOW!' button is prominently displayed with sub-options for 'One Time', 'Monthly', 'In Memory', and 'In Honor'. A search bar is located to the right of the donation button. Below the search bar is a horizontal menu with categories: 'Are You At Risk?', 'Diabetes Basics', 'Living with Diabetes', 'Food & Fitness', 'In My Community', 'Advocacy', 'Research & Practice', and 'Ways to Give'. A grid of content tiles follows, including 'Diabetes Basics Home', 'Type 1', 'Gestational', 'Diabetes Myths', 'Common Terms', 'Symptoms', 'Type 2', 'What is Gestational Diabetes?', 'A Day in the Life of Diabetes', 'Diabetes Statistics', 'Diagnosis', 'Enroll in the Living With Type 2 Diabetes Program', 'Genetics of Diabetes', and 'Famous People Working to Stop Diabetes'. A 'CLOSE' button is visible at the bottom of the grid.

Multiple tabs

Drop-down menu for "Diabetes Basics"

Invitational overview for "Diabetes Basics"

Various annotated sub-headings for "Diabetes Basics"

This section of the webpage provides an overview of diabetes. It features a large image of a woman in a white lab coat. The text reads: 'This is the place to begin your education about diabetes. This section of our site provides basic overviews of the major issues surrounding diabetes, with plenty of links to more in-depth information if you need it. Take our type 2 diabetes risk test for a quick assessment of your risk. There is no way to predict your chances of getting type 1 diabetes, but you can familiarize yourself with its symptoms.' Below this are three columns of content: 'Symptoms' (Concerned about your health or the health of a loved one? Learn about the symptoms of diabetes.), 'Diagnosis' (A doctor can use three tests to determine if you have prediabetes or diabetes.), and 'Type 2' (Familiarize yourself with the risks, causes, symptoms, and treatments for this increasingly common disease.).

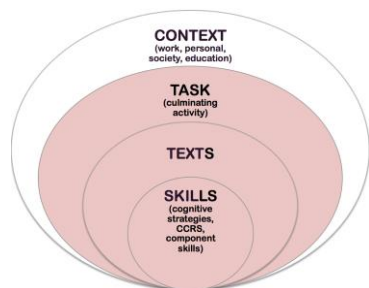
The widget includes social media sharing icons for Facebook, Twitter, and Pinterest. It also has a 'Text Size' selector, a 'Listen' button, and an 'En Español' link. The main part of the widget features a large '4110' graphic in a red-bordered box. Below the graphic is the text 'Match - Donate Now' and 'Make your year-end donation today and help fight diabetes.' A red 'DONATE TODAY' button is at the bottom.

Ads and distracting material

This section provides detailed information on various diabetes topics. It includes sub-headings for 'Type 1' (Type 1 diabetes is usually diagnosed in children and young adults, and was previously known as juvenile diabetes.), 'Gestational Diabetes' (Expecting? Learn why women who have never had diabetes may be at risk during pregnancy.), 'Statistics About Diabetes' (The numbers associated with diabetes make a strong case for devoting more resources to finding a cure.), 'Myths' (Clear up some common misunderstandings about what causes diabetes, the effects of diabetes, and how diabetes can be managed.), 'Common Terms' (Become familiar with terms commonly used when discussing diabetes.), 'A Day in the Life of Diabetes by Jay Dickman' (Pulitzer prize winning photographer Jay Dickman, volunteers his time and talent to photograph three individuals that are living with diabetes to share their up close and personal daily lives.), and 'Famous People Working to Stop Diabetes' (These well-known men and women have joined the Association's "Celebrity Cabinet" to help stop diabetes.).

The sidebar contains several service options: '1-800-DIABETES (800-342-2343) Monday-Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. ET', 'CHAT CLOSED Agents available Mon-Fri 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. ET', and 'GET LOCAL Enter your ZIP to find out what's going on near you.' with a search input and 'GO!' button. At the bottom, there is a 'Free Type 2 Education Series' announcement: 'Ask questions in a live Q&A with our diabetes experts. Register now!'.

Index-like links to more in-depth information



## F. HOW DO I DETERMINE WHAT READING SKILLS TO TEACH?

This is a great question. When contextualizing instruction, it is easy for both the teacher and the students to get caught up in the topic or in completing the Unit Task and to ignore the intentional development of reading skills in ways that last over time and transfer to different settings. To ensure that instruction stays focused on the teaching and learning of reading skills, we need to carefully think through which skills students need to learn in the unit, and then plan instruction accordingly. To help determine which skills to teach, analyzing the reading required for the culminating Unit Task is essential. In the work force, a task analysis is conducted to identify the knowledge and skills required for a job or task, usually to know how to structure related training. In our case, we want to conduct a task analysis of our Unit Task to determine the knowledge and skills required for successful completion—and then compare those with what our students already know and can do. With this information in hand, we can then start to target particular skills/strategies for instruction.

You can make a Unit Task analysis as simple or complex as you want. At its most basic level, a Unit Task analysis involves completing the reading task yourself (or enough of it to know what the task entails), keeping a metacognitive eye on your own thinking. Slow down enough to make notes of the PROCESS/STEPS you go through, what STRATEGIES/SKILLS you are using, and what KNOWLEDGE you are drawing from. Completing a table like the one in EXHIBIT 14 can help you keep track of your thinking.

Completing a Unit Task analysis only tells you the processes, strategies/skills, and knowledge required for accomplishing the task. You cannot teach (with explicit, scaffolded instruction) all of these. Nor should you need to. Once you compare the strategies/skills and knowledge needed to complete the task with what you are required to teach (per your content standards) and what students already know (perhaps from past lessons), you will have a better idea about which ones to target for explicit instruction in the unit. EXHIBIT 15 outlines the key steps.

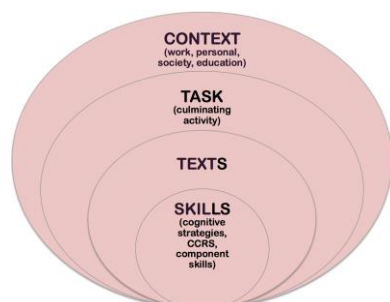


**EXHIBIT 14 Unit Task Analysis**

<p><b>What PROCESS/STEPS do you need to enact to complete this reading task?</b> Think: What am I noticing/doing first, second, third, etc.? (Be aware of other/additional steps someone at your students' level might need to take.)</p>	<p><b>What STRATEGIES/SKILLS are used to complete the task?</b> Think: How am I keeping track of ideas? How am I staying organized? How am I synthesizing information for the final product?</p>	<p><b>What KNOWLEDGE is needed to complete the task?</b> Think: What topical knowledge/vocabulary is required to understand the text? Also, what knowledge about genre, format, and general vocabulary is needed?</p>

**EXHIBIT 15 Steps to Identify Skills for Explicit Instruction**

1. **Conduct a Unit Task analysis.** Adapting the table in EXHIBIT 13 to help you identify the processes, strategies/skills, and knowledge needed for the task.
2. **Consult your content standards.** Although you may have started with a particular standard or set of standards in mind in originally designing the task, it's important to check with them again following a Unit Task analysis to see if additional standards need to be addressed.
3. **Choose a manageable set of reading skills/standards that work together within the overall process of accomplishing the reading for the Unit Task.** Weigh the reading skills/strategies that need to be taught with the other skills (e.g., writing, oral presentation) and knowledge that will require instructional time. You will decide that you will "hold students hand" through some parts of the process not expecting them to accomplish these steps with great independence and using the opportunity to determine needs for future instruction. In other steps students will apply prior learning from your class. For instance, you may already have taught students in the last unit how to take notes from multiple sources. They can now be expected to apply that skill in the unit. That would leave you time to focus instruction on something else in the current unit (e.g., evaluating the credibility of texts).



## G. HOW DO I GET FROM THE STEP OF IDENTIFYING THE CONTEXT, TASK, TEXTS, AND SKILLS TO A SEQUENCE OF INSTRUCTION?

This question seems to come from an understanding that the careful sequencing of instruction is essential for certain types of learners in adult education. Many students with learning disabilities, especially, benefit from high structure and from instruction that builds skills and concepts intentionally across time. Contextualized learning can become frustrating for too many students if it is not also accompanied by organized, contextualized *instruction*.

Sequencing instruction for a contextualized unit requires the teacher to consider how to engage students around the **topic** (context), the **task** (the reading and what will be done with it), and the **skill instruction**. That means the teacher will need to introduce the topic, connect the class with its relevance, and then streamline completion of the Unit Task in such a way that students have enough time to practice and reinforce a set of skills but not become bored with the project and lose time that could be spent exploring other important topics. As discussed in the *Guide*, the [gradual release of responsibility](#) and [whole-part-whole instruction](#) are useful approaches.

The following process can be adapted for many units, especially at the intermediate levels and above. (The synthesis step may not be needed at the lower levels, since students will likely be working from only one text for their culminating task.)

- Introduce topic/Unit Task, fostering enthusiasm for both
- Model/explain target reading skills/strategies needed for the Unit Task and gradually release responsibility to students—may require 1-3 texts
- Give students time to apply independently the reading skills for their project, with several texts. (Students at the lower levels might practice applying their skills--e.g., finding contact information on a different kind of directory each day.)
- Scaffold the required synthesis skills to pull information together
- Allow final project preparation time
- Share final products/assess

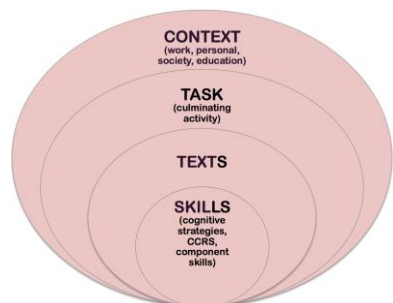
In the midst of this sequence, other skill instruction is likely occurring as well. Vocabulary instruction will need to be embedded at all levels. In the beginning levels, the most time for native English speakers will be given to alphabets and fluency instruction. Even if the Unit Task itself involves non-continuous texts, students at these levels need to spend time with continuous text to build reading fluency. At the intermediate levels, attention may also need to be given to alphabets and fluency instruction.

All of this means you will need to think strategically about projects—how long they are, what other skills are involved, and how they follow each other. Not every project needs to be as involved as the one before it. Asking students to read about 3 careers and create a chart comparing key characteristics from which they'll speak in a small group discussion can be just as powerful a learning activity as a more intricate project—and take less time. If every project involves a Powerpoint or Prezi presentation, a good deal of time will be spent on preparing the final product, unless thoughtful boundaries are put around the activity (5 slides? 7 slides?). As always, the benefits of one potential expenditure of class time have to be weighed against another, and decisions made accordingly.

EXHIBIT 16, or something like it, can be one way of mapping out your instruction for the unit.

**EXHIBIT 16: Scheduling Template**

UNIT Name:	ACTIVITIES TARGETING...			
	Unit Texts/Target Comprehension Strategies/Skills	Vocabulary	Other Skills	Notes
DAY 1				
DAY 2				
DAY 3				
DAY 4				
DAY 5				



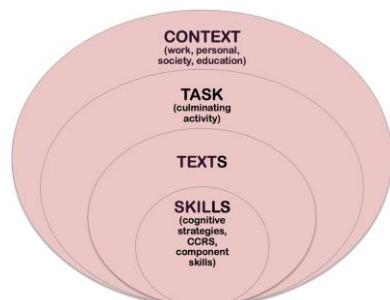
## H. THIS SOUNDS LIKE A LOT OF GROUP INSTRUCTION. HOW DO I INDIVIDUALIZE LEARNING?

This question is most often asked by teachers who are used to students working individually. It is also asked by teachers who know that adults—indeed, learners at all levels—are motivated by choice in their learning. If the whole class is working on one unit, how can we be sure that the unit is interesting/relevant to *all* students?

These are important concerns and can be addressed by building in choice and student input wherever possible. Of course, as described in the *Guide*, the unit topic itself is ideally connected to interests or goals of the adult learners in the classroom. Beyond that, individualization can most easily be accomplished by inviting/allowing student choice at various points in the unit. For instance:

- **Students can choose a specific topic to explore within a larger Context.** If you'll recall, Marco's students self-selected their own health concerns to research. Constructing the unit around broad topics/contexts and then inviting students to choose examples for in-depth study permits individualization.
- **Students can choose the Texts to read for their projects.** In some classes, especially those with easily accessible computers and high-performing students, learners are taught how to find their own texts on the Internet. In other classes, teachers provide "managed choice," bringing in books or copies of articles/chapters/stories for students to select from among or directing students to a specific set of Internet sites, which they may choose among to find the information they need.
- **Students can choose how to demonstrate their learning within the Task, within certain boundaries.** For example, all students may be required to write a persuasive text synthesizing their learning, but they may be able to choose, say, between a blog and a letter to the editor.

You may be able to think of other places within the unit that invite students to exercise agency.



## I. HOW DO I GET BETTER AT THIS?

Contextualizing reading instruction within authentic topics, texts, and tasks is a sophisticated approach to adult education. It takes practice over time. Being patient with yourself and choosing one or two new elements to incorporate at a time will help keep you inspired.

You also need the tangible support of your program director. This support should come in the form of planning time, regular and easy access to the Internet, and mechanisms for sharing lessons and units across the program. As I suggest in the *Guide*, this kind of support is more likely if there is an alignment between your values and mission as an instructor and those of the program as a whole—and if both are compatible with the PIAAC [definition for literacy](#).

Practitioners often find it instructive to work collaboratively with their colleagues to enhance their practice. We all have our own areas of expertise that can benefit others, and similarly we can benefit from the areas of expertise that others have to offer. Additionally, it is often the case that another pair of eyes just happens to notice something we have not. For these and other reasons (many of which we can't always predict), working collaboratively with other practitioners to design curriculum is highly recommended.

EXHIBIT 17 presents one tool that teachers may want to use (or adapt) in teams to evaluate curricula for rigorous skill-based learning, especially if they are concerned about that learning transferring to the PIAAC-identified contexts in which adults tend to apply skills in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This tool was developed as a simple way for practitioners to evaluate their own units or the units of colleagues. It provides a mechanism for thinking critically about the dimensions of contextualized reading instruction covered in the introductory *Guide* and this supplement. You'll note that it is organized around the model for contextualized reading instruction: Context, Unit Task, Texts, and Skills.

**EXHIBIT 17 Basic Checklist for Designing Contextualized Units Using PIAAC Tools**

Category	Features	Comments
<b>Context</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Context is <b>clearly related</b> to students' lives outside the classroom and is likely to be important or relevant to adult students.	
<b>Unit Task</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> The Unit Task is <b>clearly defined</b> and can be easily assessed. <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Purpose, audience, and product are all authentic</b> to how reading is applied in work, community, family, or lifelong learning activity. <input type="checkbox"/> Product requires <b>information acquired from reading</b> to be put to use. <input type="checkbox"/> In general, the Unit Task is appropriate for the instructional <b>level targeted</b> , though differentiation may be required for specific students.	
<b>Texts</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Students practice applying the targeted skills/strategies within <b>authentic text</b> (i.e., students are likely interacting at length with at least 4-6 Internet articles, book chapters, news sites, blogs, forms, infographics, poems, etc.) during the unit. <input type="checkbox"/> The <b>rhetorical stance(s)</b> targeted for instruction relate(s) to the Unit Task. <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Digital sources</b> are used, if appropriate.	
<b>Skills</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> The <b>reading skills/strategies</b> targeted for instruction work together to address the Unit Task. <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Cognitive strategies</b> (access/identify, integration and interpretation, and/or evaluation or reflection) are a major focus of instruction. <input type="checkbox"/> The <b>number of skills/strategies</b> targeted is appropriate for the amount of time in the unit. <input type="checkbox"/> For beginning and intermediate students, <b>component skills</b> (e.g., alphabets, vocabulary, fluency) are appropriately emphasized.	
<p><i>*Developed as part of the LINC'S PIAAC Literacy Circle (Fall 2017). Special appreciation is extended to Leecy Wise and Dianna Baycich, LINC'S facilitators, for their assistance in the development of this checklist and to the participants in the literacy circle for their valuable feedback.</i></p>		

Other, more advanced, feedback you might offer each other would likely involve the areas in EXHIBIT 18. Determining what the terminology means, specifically for your setting, will be a group decision. However, in general:

- “logical sequence” typically means that skills are addressed from simpler to more complex and/or in the order that they are needed to accomplish the Unit Task.
- “appropriate differentiation” typically means that efforts have been made to provide texts whose readability level (in terms of quantitative, qualitative, and task considerations) match those of the readers and to provide the right amount of support to provide challenge for each level of student.

### ***EXHIBIT 18 Advanced Checklist for Curriculum Development***

#### **Advanced Checklist for Curriculum Development**

- Instruction in the reading skills/strategies has a logical sequence.
- Targeted skills/strategies are taught explicitly, with gradual release of responsibility and whole-part-whole or part-whole approaches to instruction, before students are expected to demonstrate independent application approaching mastery.
- Appropriate differentiation is evidenced.

All these activities can help you stay motivated as a professional and enhance your practice. However, the most important way forward, as always, is to stay attuned to your students. Once you bring the real world into your classroom through contextualized instruction, you may discover numerous sources of inspiration and insight: evidence of student progress along the proficiency continuum; students more engaged in their lessons; students reporting how they are using their reading skills at home, at work, and in their communities – and students asking for specific lessons to help them accomplish goals in these areas. Over time, with the help of your students, your colleagues, and your own trial-and-error, you will develop your own customized approach to contextualized reading instruction. The *Guide* and this supplement are but aides on the journey.



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## **APPENDIX**

The following document can also be found at:

<https://cdn1.sph.harvard.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/135/2012/09/pmose.pdf>

## THE PMOSE/IKIRSCH DOCUMENT READABILITY FORMULA

Readability formulas offer a useful first step in assessing print materials. However, all such formulas to date focus on print material written in prose format – materials written in full sentences and paragraph structure. Many print materials are not in sentence and paragraph format. Many health materials such as medicine labels, directions, and dose charts – are in document format. Documents are print materials structured as lists, charts, or graphic displays.

Two well-known scholars and researchers in adult education, Peter Mosenthal and Irwin Kirsch, developed a formula that can be applied to documents.

Mosenthal, Peter and Irwin Kirsch. (1998). "A new measure for assessing document complexity: The PMOSE/IKIRSCH document readability formula." *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, 41, 638–657.

The PMOSE/IKIRSCH document readability formula offers a rating based on three different criteria:

1. **Structure:** the score is based levels of difficulty for either a list or a graphic display depending on the very design of the document. **Question:** What is the design of the document?
2. **Density:** the score is based on number of labels and on number of items. **Question:** How many titles and items are presented to the reader?
3. **Dependency:** the score is based on whether or not any important information is to be found outside the document. **Question:** Does the reader have to look outside the document for important information?

In order to assess a document, follow the three steps as described below. You will offer a score for each of the three criteria, sum the scores, and then use the chart at the end [page 5] to interpret the score.

### Step 1. Examine the structure of the document

The PMOSE/IKIRSCH formula asks you to consider different kinds of structures and offers a score for each type. The score increases with the level of difficulty assigned to that structure. The authors divide documents into two types:

- Lists
- Display [such as pie charts, graphs, or maps]



## A tool for assessing documents

If your document is in the form of a **display** follow the directions for 1b:

**1b. Display:** The authors rank different kinds of graphic representation based on assigned level of difficulty and offer a score at each level. The scoring for a display is based on type:

- 🍏 Pie charts and time lines: Score 2
- 🍏 Bar charts, line graphs, and maps: Score 3
- 🍏 Bar charts and line graphs with nested labels: Score 4

### Step 2: Examine the density of the document

Document density is measured by two factors: the number of labels and the number of items.

#### 2a. Count the number of labels within the document

Assign the following scores depending on the number of labels:

- Score 1 – if 15 or fewer labels
- Score 2 – if 16 to 25 labels
- Score 3 – if 26 to 35 labels
- Score 4 – if 36 to 46 labels
- Score 5 – if more than 46 labels

#### 2b. Count the number of items within the document

Assign the following scores depending on the number of items:

- Score 1 – if 75 or fewer items
- Score 2 – if 76 to 125 items
- Score 3 – if 126 to 175 items
- Score 4 – if 176 to 225 items
- Score 5 – if there are more than 225 items

### Step 3: Determine Dependency

Check to see if the document makes reference to information not included in the document

Sometimes readers need information not included in the document in order to use the document. The authors call this factor 'dependency'. If the document makes reference to information found elsewhere [outside the document], then Add 1 additional point to the score.

#### Record and Sum the scores:

- Document structure score [part a or part b] \_\_\_\_\_
- Number of labels score \_\_\_\_\_
- Number of items score \_\_\_\_\_
- Dependency score \_\_\_\_\_

**TOTAL** \_\_\_\_\_

A tool for assessing documents

### Step 4: Determine the Document Complexity Level

Use the chart below. Circle the total score and read appropriate assessment information

Scores	3 4 5	6 7 8	9 10 11	12 13 14	15 16 17
Complexity Level	Very Low	Low	Moderate	High	Very High
Proficiency Level	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5
Grade/Schooling	Range including Grade 4 or equivalent to less than 8 years of schooling	Range including Grade 8 or equivalent to high school degree	Range including Grade 12 or equivalent to some education after high school	Range including 15 years of schooling or equivalent to college degree	Range including 16 years of schooling or equivalent to post college degree

**Self Test: How would you assess the following label?**

Chili with Beans	
Nutrition Facts	
Serving Size: 1 cup (253 g)	
Servings per container: 2	
Amount per Serving:	
<b>Calories</b> 260	Calories from Fat 72
	<b>% Daily Value</b>
<b>Total Fat</b> 8g	13%
Saturated Fat 3g	17%
<b>Cholesterol</b> 130mg	44%
<b>Sodium</b> 1010mg	42%
<b>Total Carbohydrate</b> 22g	7%
Dietary Fiber 9g	36%
Sugars 4g	
<b>Protein</b> 25g	

## A tool for assessing documents

Record and Sum the scores:

- Document structure score [part a or part b] \_\_\_\_\_
- Number of labels score \_\_\_\_\_
- Number of items score \_\_\_\_\_
- Dependency score \_\_\_\_\_

**TOTAL** \_\_\_\_\_

COMPLEXITY LEVEL: \_\_\_\_\_

**SEE THE NEXT PAGE FOR THE ANALYSIS**

