Ten Text Characteristics for Guided Reading


1. **Genre/Form**: Genre is the type of text and refers to a system by which fiction and nonfiction texts are classified. Form is the format in which a genre may be presented. Forms and genres have characteristic features.

2. **Text Structure**: Structure is the way the text is organized and presented. The structure of most fiction and biographical texts is narrative, arranged primarily in chronological sequence. Factual texts are organized categorically or topically and may have sections with headings. Writers of factual texts use several underlying structural patterns to provide information to readers. The most important are description; chronological sequence; comparison and contrast; cause and effect; and problem and solution. The presence of these structures, especially in combination, can increase the challenge for readers.

3. **Content**: Content refers to the subject matter of the text-the concepts that are important to understand. In fiction, content may be related to the setting or to the kinds of problems characters have. In factual texts, content refers to the topic of focus. Content is considered in relation to the prior experience of readers.

4. **Themes and Ideas**: These are big ideas that are communicated by the writer. Ideas may be concrete and accessible or complex and abstract. A text may have multiple themes or a main theme and several supporting themes.

5. **Language and Literary Features**: Written language is qualitatively different from spoken language. Fiction writers use dialogue, figurative language, and other kinds of literary structures
such as character, setting, and plot. Factual writers use description and technical language. In hybrid texts you may find a wide range of literary language.

6. **Sentence Complexity**: Meaning is mapped onto the syntax of language. Texts with simpler, more natural sentences are easier to process. Sentences with embedded and conjoined clauses make a text more difficult.

7. **Vocabulary**: Vocabulary refers to words and their meanings. The more known vocabulary words in a text, the easier a text will be. The individual's reading and vocabulary refer to words that she understands.

8. **Words**: This category refers to recognizing and solving the printed words in the text. The challenge in a text partly depends on the number and the difficulty of the words that the reader must solve by recognizing them or decoding them. Having a great many of the same high-frequency words makes a text more accessible to readers.

9. **Illustrations**: Drawings, paintings, or photographs accompany the text and add meaning and enjoyment. In factual texts, illustrations also include graphics that provide a great deal of information that readers must integrate with the text. Illustrations are an integral part of a high quality text. Increasingly, fiction texts include a range of graphics, including labels, heading, subheadings, sidebars, photos and legends, charts and graphs. After grade one, texts may include graphic texts that communicate information or a story in a sequence of pictures and words.

10. **Book and Print Features**: Book and print features are the physical aspects of the text—what readers cope with in terms of length, size, and layout. Book and print features also include tools like the table of contents, glossary, pronunciation guides, indexes, sidebars, and a variety of graphic features in graphic texts that communicate how the text is read.