

# How can teachers evaluate the language demands of texts?

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## **Abstract**

This session aims to explore the use of a tool that helps content teachers select and evaluate texts for students new to the academic discourse of higher education. Firstly, it will introduce the Learning Progressions (Tertiary Education Commission, 2008) which provide a comprehensive framework of sequential steps in the development of language and literacy skills. Next, it will demonstrate how the reading progressions can support teachers in evaluating the language demands of texts. Two sample texts from textbooks used on first year programmes will be mapped against the reading progressions. This will be followed by a discussion of how content teachers' attention to the demands of texts can enhance students' success in academic reading.

## **Outline**

### *Introduction*

I will introduce a framework for content teachers to evaluate the language demands of the student texts. This comprehensive framework of Learning Progressions (Tertiary Education Commission, 2008) is a set of sequential steps in the development of literacy skills in reading, writing, listening and speaking. By mapping their texts against the reading progressions, teachers can consider vocabulary, language and text features, comprehensibility and a critical reading component. They can also design a curriculum so that progressively more challenging texts help students develop their understanding of academic discourse along with their content knowledge.

### *Development*

I will then introduce the context for this research - textbooks used in first year programmes at AUT University. Textbooks appear to form the basis of student reading materials in first year programmes. Typically they are selected for their suitability for expanding on syllabus topics, however, this may mean that they are selected without much regard for the assumptions they make about student reading ability.

### *Task*

I will show two sample texts used in the first semester of the first year in two bachelor programmes and raise questions about their use in these programmes. In evaluating the language demands of the texts, I will focus on vocabulary, language and text features, comprehensibility and a critical reading component.

How can teachers evaluate the language demands of texts?, Alison Kirkness, Nuts & Bolts

## *Conclusion*

I will conclude with a discussion focussing on participants' use of similar frameworks and share examples of how content teachers develop student reading skills and organise a coherent syllabus. Some sample questions to prompt interactive discussion. What criteria/ frameworks do participating teachers currently use to evaluate the language of a text? What are the advantages / disadvantages of using a framework to evaluate a text? What are the advantages / disadvantages of explicitly sharing with students the teacher's evaluation of the text? What are the advantages to students of an explicit focus on the language elements in a text? When and how can content teachers integrate this explicit literacy teaching into a syllabus?

## **References**

Tertiary Education Commission, (2008). *Learning Progressions for Adult Literacy and Numeracy*. Wellington :Tertiary Education Commission, New Zealand.