Reading in the Secondary School

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Recommended Citation
Secondary teachers of vocational subjects frequently have to face the burdensome task of choosing the right text for their courses, but they would not and should not delegate the responsibility to other offices or agencies. In having to deal with choice of texts, teachers feel several factors are operating against the chances of finding the right textbook. Sometimes they express a certain frustration, saying, "As if it is not enough responsibility to try to prepare young people for a role in a technical area, we even have some evidence that students whose verbal backgrounds are poor are advised to take our subjects."

In a time of accelerating technology, teachers of vocational subjects must become expert in judging which textbooks will be best suited to (1) present the latest ideas accurately, (2) explain technical processes clearly, and (3) be highly readable for a wide range of student abilities. These considerations require wide background, great insight, and a real preparation in the area of measuring textbooks by readability standards.

The article which follows was researched and written by Mary L. Harris, a graduate student on leave from Jones Commercial School, Chicago, where she is a member of the English Department faculty. Mrs. Harris has made a unique contribution to all teachers of industrial and business subjects by demonstrating the use and outcomes of text comparisons through readability scales. No member of a vocational department at high school levels should be without this valuable annotated bibliography.

TEXTBOOKS IN VOCATIONAL COURSES

The purpose of the list below is to compare by publisher, the readability of textbooks in a number of vocational content areas. Three samples of one hundred words each were taken at random from three different sections of each book in the comparison group. These sections dealt with similar information. For example, in the metalworking group, the samples were taken from filing, heat treating, and the shaper. In this way comparison was made with very specific, similar pieces of information.

Edward Fry’s Graph for Estimating Readability was the measuring instrument.

AUTOMOTIVE

The preface states that this book is written for anyone desiring to understand the basic elements of the automobile and something of the products allied to it. The very technical has been avoided. The author suggests that the book may be used as a class text and job guide, as a manual for simple automobile maintenance or as a supplement and reference in Driver Education classes.

Recommended for grade 7-12

Readability grade 11


This book can be used in a fundamentals course in high school, trade school or college and it can also be used as review for advanced classes. The aim of the book is to provide the student with a thorough understanding of the design, construction and operation of automotive units. Each automotive unit starts with the basic theory involved and as the explanation unfolds, parts are added until the unit is complete. It includes a chapter on job possibilities. There are hundreds of diagrams and illustrations.

Recommended for grade 10-12

Readability grade 8


The author presents basic theory for understanding the automotive power plant. The book is intended for the automotive service business—mechanics and service managers—but can be used as a text for automotive classes in high school. It is an adult study of “diagnosis and tune-up.”

Recommended for grade 9-12

Readability grade 12

Each book has a different stated purpose but at the same time each is recommended for use in a high school automotive course. The three topics compared were the engine, the generator, and the cooling system. The Stockel book carried the highest recommended grade of the three, yet the results of the Fry formula showed it to be the easiest one to read. In all three the material on the generator was the most difficult. Stockel managed to explain it in terms that a 9th grade reader could understand; the other two went up to the college level. Perhaps it is a little unfair to include the Wetzel book because
it was written primarily for mechanics in the trade. Yet the other book published by McKnight and McKnight which was written for the high school student and which stated in the preface that it had “avoided the very technical” is much more difficult than Stockel’s book.

**METALWORKING**


This is an introductory text on machining of metals designed to be used in a beginning machine shop class. Primary emphasis is given to benchwork, measurement, drilling and turning. A great deal of space is devoted to how machines operate and to the essentials of mechanics. Recommended for grade 9-11  
Readability grade 8


This book includes an introduction to metalworking; cutting, shaping, bending, joining, finishing and welding metals; heat treating and testing. In the preface the authors say that the book is “written in a language that is sufficiently demanding to stimulate the student’s potential capacities in terms of current educational requirements.” They feel that for many years writers of industrial education textbooks stressed oversimplification of their reading content. The “how-to-do-it” parts are written in simple language; background material is more difficult. Recommended for grade 7-12  
Readability grade 8


Provides a broad introduction to theory and practice of metalworking. It includes bench metalwork, sheet metalwork, forging, heat treatment, foundry work, welding, machine theory and practice, and numerical control machining. The authors emphasize that this most recent edition does more than just present the “doing” or skill aspects of metalwork; it provides shop theory, technology, and technical information. Many
units have been expanded to reflect current industrial and technological practice.
Recommended for grade 9-12 Readability grade 8

McKnight and McKnight Publishing Co. seems to have done a better job “readabilitywise” in the metalworking text than in the automotives. McGraw-Hill and The Bruce Publishing Company have done well also.

GENERAL BUSINESS


The stated purpose of the book is to help students develop a comprehensive understanding of our American business system and its vital role in our total economic society. Business principles and basic economic concepts are explained by relating them to the experiences we have in living and working in America today. It stresses economics and the consumer.
Recommended for grade 10-11 Readability grade 8


The text explains why and how the worker and consumer are affected by our economy. Its stated purpose is to help young people comprehend and appreciate the basic economic principles of our democratic system of free enterprise. The book is concerned with business and the consumer.
Recommended grade 9-11 Readability grade 9


The stated purpose of this book is to raise the level of economic understanding among the nation’s youth by giving them an overall view of the place and purpose of business in our society. It is concerned with business and the consumer.
Recommended grade 10 Readability grade 8

All three books are suitable for the recommended grade.

RETAIL MERCHANDISING AND SELLING


This is a book on retailing particularly for distributive education students. It can also be used for a high school retailing course, basic instruction for adult education, and for training classes conducted in retail stores. Projects are structured to meet the requirements of cooperative part-time students. Recommended grade 10-12  Readability grade 10


The aim of the book is to discuss the activities in the retail distribution of merchandise from the viewpoint of a young person in search of a career field. The 7th edition includes retailing and distribution and economic growth and the contribution made to it by retailing. Emphasis throughout is put on the importance of proper store image. Recommended grade 10-12  Readability grade 10


This book was intended as an introductory course in selling for a high school class. It was also recommended by the authors for use in a cooperative program. The 9th edition was upgraded to include chapters on characteristics of the American economy and economic trends. It includes material on printed advertising, broadcast advertising and merchandise display. There are also chapters on sales management and the legal aspects of selling. Recommended for grade 10-12  Readability grade College

The two Wingate books have different purposes, nevertheless Fundamentals of Selling which is now in its 9th edition is too difficult for the average high school student, especially one in a cooperative program. The Richert book published by the Gregg Division of McGraw-Hill is written at a satisfactory readability level.

MARKETING


The objective of the book is to provide a foundation of economic and marketing concepts for everyone. Also the book
can serve as the core of a distributive education program since
it emphasizes specific job opportunities that occur as a product
moves from its point of origin to its point of use. The student
in a cooperative part-time distributive education program will
find many specific applications to make his work and his career
objective more meaningful.
Recommended grade 10-12

Nolan, Carroll A., and Roman Warmke, Marketing, Sales Promotion
and Advertising. Cincinnati: Southwestern Publishing Company,

This book was designed to acquaint the reader with a basic
understanding of marketing, sales promotion and advertising,
to relate marketing to the total economy, to provide an under­
standing of accepted tools, plans and procedures, to familiarize
the reader with marketing principles and give him practice
in applying them to real life situations. The 7th edition has been
rewritten to serve as the basic instructional tool for marketing
and distributive education courses and can be used for standard
courses or cooperative programs.
Recommended grade 10-12

Carroll Nolan who co-authored Marketing, Sales Promotion and
Advertising, the Southwestern Publishing Company book, also co­
authored Fundamentals of Selling which was reviewed above. The
readability in both books is too difficult for the student for whom it
was written. Marketing and Distribution published by Gregg Division
of McGraw-Hill has a readability level midway between the recom­
mended 10-12. This is probably too difficult, too. Readability scores
tend to under-estimate reading difficulty and student reading level
scores tend to over-estimate the student's reading comprehension abil­
ity.1 Therefore, for practical purposes a textbook should be at least
one and possibly two years below the grade level for which it is
intended.

1 Sinclair Wall, "Readability-A Neglected Criterion in Secondary Textbook
### Metalworking Books

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## RETAIL MERCHANDISING BOOKS

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