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Appropriate Selection Processes Are Available For Choosing Hospitality texts

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Abstract

First Student: "I know what you mean; I fall asleep every time I try to read this stuff."

(Meanwhile, in the faculty lounge) First Professor: "I do not understand what's wrong with my students; they expect me to teach textbook information from the podium."

Second Professor: "I've noticed the same thing. They do not want to be responsible for their readings. "

Appropriate Selection Processes Are Available For Choosing Hospitality Texts

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First Student: "I know what you mean; I fall asleep every time I try to read this stuff."

(Meanwhile, in the faculty lounge) First Professor: "I do not understand what's wrong with my students; they expect me to teach textbook information from the podium."

Second Professor: "I've noticed the same thing. They do not want to be responsible for their readings."

The preceding hypothetical conversations illustrate a situation commonly occurring on campuses all over the country: Students are failing to complete assigned readings in the required textbooks. This problem generated research in the hospitality services field at one university. Tests were conducted utilizing some of the books currently in use to determine the level of their readability and the number of students who could read and understand the textbooks. As a direct result of this research, some additional questions on textbook selection were raised.

The readability of textbooks is of primary importance in all disciplines, but is imperative in the hospitality area, especially since new technologies and methods are continually bringing about vast changes and rapid growth in the field. A Cloze procedure was administered on four textbooks currently used in Hospitality Services Administration courses at Cen-

tral Michigan University. This procedure, developed in 1953 by W. L. Taylor[1], and applied to readability studies by J. R. Bormuth in 1966[2], is not a readability formula. Instead, it applies Gestalt theory, measuring comprehension through meaning-pattern relationships. Sample passages are taken from the text being tested. Every fifth word is deleted, leaving the students 80 percent of the text upon which to base their responses as they attempt to fill in the missing words. Their responses, of course, depend upon their ability to understand the text.

A rule of thumb that has long been accepted among reading specialists is that when students can comprehend 90 percent or more of a textbook, they are able to read and work independently. Students who can grasp 75 to 90 percent of the text material are working at the instructional level; that is, they can use the text with the assistance and guidance of the teacher. Below 75 percent comprehension, the students are at the frustration level, and the text is virtually useless to them, as they cannot understand it sufficiently to grasp it either literally or inferentially, even with teacher assistance.[3] Ninety percent comprehension is comparable to 57 percent accuracy in a Cloze procedure, and 75 percent comprehension is comparable to 44 percent accuracy in Cloze testing.

It is important to note that the Cloze procedure does not produce a grade level of readability, as most standardized reading tests do. Instead, the procedure clarifies the usefulness of a specific text to a specific group of individuals, making evident, first, which students can use a given text independently or instructionally, and which ones are unable to use it at all, and, second, whether a given text is appropriate for instruction with a specific group of students.

Passages from the four textbooks, with every fifth word deleted, were given to the students, who attempted to fill in the blanks from the context of the remaining words. There was no time limit. Misspellings were disregarded, but words had to be an exact match of the original word used in the text. The tests were administered to students during normal classroom periods. The passages selected were taken from chapters assigned to the students for reading at least three weeks in the future, so that the research would not be invalidated by the students' familiarity with the material. The test results are illustrated in Table 1.

In the sample, although the number of students scoring at the frustration level in textbooks B, C, and D far exceeded the researchers' and faculty's expectations, textbook A, which had been perceived by neither the students nor the faculty as a particularly easy-to-read textbook, scored as a surprisingly readable book. It seemed, therefore, imperative that the readability level of textbook A should be tested in order to demonstrate that this book was not written below college readability level.

The Dale-Chall Readability Formula was applied to textbook A. This formula, devised by Jeanne Chall and Edgar Dale in 1948, determines grade level of written pages of 200 words, by sentence length and word difficulty. Passages are selected every 10 pages throughout the text, and the readability levels of the passages are averaged.[4] It should be noted that increments of difficulty at the college level are very slender, whereas the levels of difficulty in the earlier school years are quite broad from one grade level to the next.

Table 1
Evaluation of Textbooks

Textbooks	Independent Level	Instruction Level	Frustration Level
A	52	9	1
B	9	31	39
C	10	14	45
D	4	10	21

Textbook A averaged at college level, the lowest sample scoring at grade level 9.6, the highest at upper college level. One could, therefore, conclude that the results of the Cloze procedure were not the result of one text being substantially simpler to read than the others.

Texts Are Given Subjective Observation

A subjective examination by the researchers of each of the four textbooks followed, producing the following observations:

Textbook A

- Although oversized, fewer pages than the other texts (260 pages)
- Frequent subheadings
- Wide margins and spacing, giving the appearance of an outline form
- Many charts, graphs, and diagrams to illustrate technical material
- Formulas demonstrated clearly with many examples for clarity and practice
- Although highly technical, clearly defined, explained, and presented
- Brief summary and introduction with each chapter
- Very thorough index

Textbook B

- Verbose writing style, stuffy, and colorless
- Vague, confusing writing style; requires rereading to make sense, despite the fact that it has short paragraphs and frequent subheadings
- Lavishly illustrated
- Dual glossary; confusing and annoying to use

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- Irregular English; syntax needs editing

Textbook C

- A very high-interest subject, but poorly written

- Colorless style

- Great deal of technical information, but no bridging sentences or paragraphs

- Wordy style

- Content which requires memorization (how-to sections) and swamps the reader

- Extensive index and glossary, frequent subheadings, concise introduction, study questions

Textbook D

- Over 700 pages in length, small print

- Very brief index

- Multiple authors

- Awkward style with abundance of parenthetical phrases, asides to the reader, sprinkling of quotation marks abundantly and inappropriately placed

- Specialized vocabulary, but no glossary

- Many extremely long chapters (over 100 pages)

It seems evident that textbooks B, C, and D share some common shortcomings in style, organization, and content. One of these problems is identified by Santa and Burstyn in a study of changes in selected college textbooks. They point out that knowledge has rapidly expanded in recent years, and feel that as subject complexity increases, so does textbook complexity.

> As the conceptual load increases, there is a tendency to make sentence structure and vocabulary more complicated; thus, new knowledge is often expressed in a more complex manner than that used for expressing more established ideas. Since professors tend to choose textbooks that contain the most thorough coverage of their expanding disciplines, they often select books commensurate with their own intellectual sophistication and reading abilities, rather than those of their students.[5]

Reading specialists point to the unfair demands a poorly-organized text makes upon the reader. It can be inferred that even an excellent reader may be discouraged by a badly-organized or conceptually-confusing text.

In reviewing student evaluations of courses in which the texts in this study are currently being used, student criticism was found to range from complaints of simplicity to protests of complexity and boredom.

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Although the intent of textbook authors is not to entertain, but to inform, it certainly will be agreed by most educators that a textbook which is easily read and comprehended by students will accelerate the learning process.

Although what is next reported is the result of an informal interview with faculty, the results are relevant for this article. However, further formal research in this subject area may be warranted.

Informal interviews with 11 faculty members in the School of Business Administration at CMU indicated that there was no single criterion utilized in textbook selection; 10 responses were most commonly given by those interviewed. It should be noted that some instructors admitted that they only skim the text, and do not actually read it thoroughly. As these responses are reviewed, Santa's and Burstyn's earlier cited comments become more relevant.

The 10 most common criteria for text selection are as follows; given in order of frequency of response, "a" and "b" indicate a tie score in these responses:

1. Text selection was based upon compatibility with the instructor's approach to the course, especially how closely the text followed the course outline.

2a. Text selection was based upon what was covered in the table of contents.

2b. Text selection was based upon what was covered in the table of contents, with consideration given to whether the text was readable and/or "interesting."

3. Text selection was based upon supplementary materials provided by the publisher (instructor's manual, student manual, etc.).

4. New instructors had continued to utilize the text that was previously in use.

5. Instructors had personal knowledge of the textbook author and the author's philosophy on the subject.

6. Instructors were concerned with whether students could handle the text being considered. (This response was given by professors who teach advanced, case-type courses.)

7. Text selection was based upon other schools which were utilizing the text.

7b. Text selection was based upon aids for teachers which were provided by the publisher along with the text, i.e., test bank.

8. Text selection was based upon the presence of cases throughout the text.

Criteria Must Exist For Text Selection

Two important points should be considered before selecting a text. First, one must be fully familiar with the text before attempting to evaluate it. A brief skimming or sporadic perusal is not adequate for a

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critical judgment, nor is it fair to either the author of the book or the students to whom it will be assigned.

Second, one must define the intended use of the text and select it to meet that purpose. For example, is it intended that the text contain the total program of the class? Will it be a primary or a secondary instructional vehicle? Will it be supplemental to the program, or is it intended simply for reading enrichment?

Instructors should find the following guidelines useful in textbook evaluation. If answers to most of the questions are positive, then one can make a text adoption decision with a higher degree of confidence of student readability. If most responses are negative, the instructor should question the readability of the text being considered.

• Content

Is the text accurate and explicit?

Does it depend upon the reader's prior knowledge of the subject, or does it clarify each concept?

Is new material introduced clearly and simply?

Is technical vocabulary defined as it is introduced?

Is the content both valid and complete?

Is the publication or revision date current and the information up-to-date?

• Organization?

Are relationships between concepts made clear and developed logically?

Is there a unity of meaning, structure, and organization?

Is the order or presentation logical and easy to follow?

Are the readability and organization enhanced by frequent headings and subheadings?

Does each paragraph contain a topic sentence?

• Style

Does the author avoid the tendency to be unnecessarily verbose?

Does the sentence structure and length enhance the readability of the text?

Does the style stimulate the reader's attention and maintain his interest?

Is the complexity and readability level appropriate to the reading skills and abilities of the students to whom it is assigned?

• Physical features

Are there wide margins?

Is the print legible and of adequate size to prevent eye strain?

Is the book printed on non-glare paper?

Are chapters, or other units of information, of manageable reading length?

Does the text contain an index, glossary, and other useful instructional features?

- **Instructional Aids**

Is the text supported and clarified by visual aids such as maps, graphs, charts, and diagrams?

Are the diagrams, maps, charts, etc. placed adjacent to the portion of the text they illustrate?

Are illustrations, diagrams, charts, etc. of good quality?

Are student manuals or teachers' guides available as supplements to the text?

Does the publisher provide test banks or other teacher aids?

Of course, hospitality professors do not purposely select textbooks for their courses which will subsequently not be read by their students. And yet, some of the evidence presented in this article would indicate that the textbook selection process followed by some professors could be creating precisely that situation. A more careful selection process, one which considers the readability of the texts and the above guidelines, should help combat a common problem in the classroom.

References

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