

Re-leveling with AI: Making Texts Work for English Learners

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The Graham Family of Schools

2025 November 21

Today's *Nagare*

- Introductions and brief tech familiarity conversation
- A little about reading levels and readability
- Re-Leveling
- Enhancing / Elaborating / Amplifying
- Examples . . .
- NotebookLM
- Practice (network allowing)
- Q & A and wrap up

About Chris Spackman

Professional History

- Taught K-12 EFL (English as a Foreign Language) in Japan, 1995 – 2008
- Earned MA TESOL and Ohio ESL K-12 teaching license in 2010
- Work in K-12 ESOL for The Graham Family of Schools since 2010
- Teach adult ESOL for the Basic English program at Columbus State Community College since 2016
- Know English and Japanese; learning Spanish

Links for Today

Please go to <https://www.ChrisSpackman.com/2025-11-21.html> for links we will use today.

Or, use this QR code:



Readability

There are several ways of figuring grade level or readability.

These are just a few of them:

- Coleman-Liau Readability Index
- Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level
- Flesch Reading Ease
- Fry Readability Formula
- Gunning Fog Index
- Lexile (proprietary)
- Linsear Write Grade Level Formula
- The Smog Index

ReadabilityFormulas.com is an excellent free site for checking the readability of a passage. Paste text in, and the results will appear automatically.

Problems with Readability

Most readability formulas focus on a few aspects of the text:

- sentence length
- word length
- syllables per word
- vocabulary lists (some, not all)

These miss language elements that can be difficult for ELs, like phrasal verbs or passive voice, and those that can be easy, like cognates.

They also miss all the other factors, such as . . .

Considerations beyond “readability”

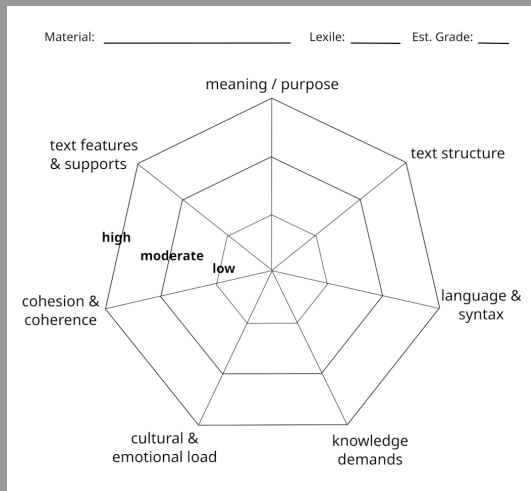
Here are a few other important considerations:

- meaning or purpose of the text
- text structure
- language & syntax (partially addressed)
- knowledge demands
- cultural & emotional load
- cohesion & coherence
- text supports & features

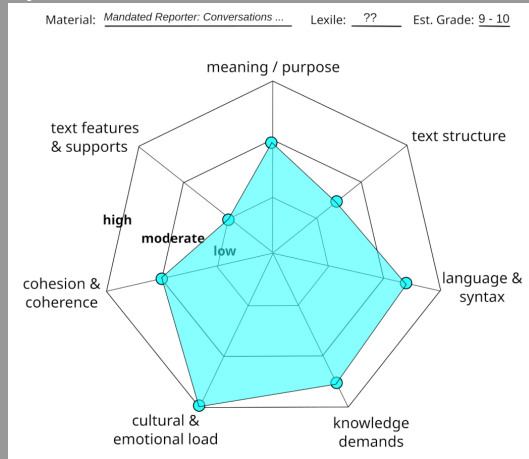
All impact English Learners' acquisition of a text. Re-leveling addresses language & syntax factors. Enhancing addresses most of the factors.

I prefer “enhance”, but you will often also see “amplify” and “elaborate”. They all refer to adding scaffolding to the text to support learners.

Radar Chart



Radar Chart Example



When / How to use the text?

Consider those other factors, then also consider when and how to use the text:

- Difficultly “high” texts: close or guided reading.
- “Medium” texts: whole-class / group reading, individual with supports
- “Easy” texts: individual

This will impact how much you need to re-level or enhance the text.

Close reading a page together in class? Probably does not need to be modified.

Assigning individual reading? Non-easy texts may need re-leveling / enhancing.

Re-Leveling

Re-Leveling okay, but:

- limit to the worst / longest / most complex sentences
- remove only the least important / most irrelevant vocabulary
- tweak prompts, be very specific (give grade level, which formula, etc.)
- do **not** trust LLMs' claims of reading level
- double check LLM output with other, unrelated LLMs
- read and modify final output for *your* students

Sometimes, a very easy-to-read short reading to build background knowledge may be better than re-leveling the main text. LLMs can also help with this.

Re-Leveling (continued)

Example prompt: *Re-level the following text to a 6th grade level on the Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level scale. The students are 9th grade long-term English Learners in World History class in Ohio. Be sure to keep all appropriate academic vocabulary and do not simplify the content. Focus on shortening sentences by breaking up complex or compound sentences and relocating adjective and adverb clauses (when possible). Difficult or uncommon words that are not important for the meaning and are not cognates in Spanish or French can be replaced.*

[text to re-level]

Enhance, When You Can

Instead of re-leveling the text, enhance it (if you have the time):

- add explanations, summaries, etc.
- add vocabulary glosses (explain, don't replace)
- build background knowledge (and super easy reading totally okay for that)
- chunk the text
- highlight speakers, important terms, etc.
- include images, links to videos when appropriate, etc

Easier said than done, and it can depend on the software you use.

Tech Issues With Enhancing

Some enhancements are easy, but not that flexible. Others are easy only with the right software.

- Chunking: easy if multiple versions, but can't be toggled
- Highlighting text: easy, but can't be toggled easily (need different versions)
- Images: generally easy to add
- Text boxes: for annotations, definitions, etc, but not available on GDocs
 - Text in GDoc drawings does not translate (it is an image of text)

This enhanced text was fairly easy and quick to create but is “all or nothing”.

Another Enhanced Text

With ChatGPT and Google Gemini, I **vibe coded** an HTML (web) page that includes several recommended enhancements:

- chunking
- images
- speaker highlighting
- summaries, explanations, etc.
- vocabulary definitions in English and Spanish

All can be toggled on and off, so students can use the ones they want, don't have to use the ones they don't need.

Enhanced YA Short Story

Mandated Reporter: Conversations with Nnedi is a young adult short story / novella I wrote a few years ago. The enhanced version is highly super-duper enhanced.



NotebookLM

First, try the [Readability](#), [Re-Leveling](#), and [Elaborating for Second Language Learners](#) NotebookLM.

NotebookLM is like having an expert friend who you can call up with questions any time.

Practice Time

Let's play ...

Q & A; Wrap Up

- Questions? Answers? Comments?
- The slides and other resources from today are at ChrisSpackman.com
- My “professional” email address is chris@ChrisSpackman.com.
- My work email is spackman.1@TheCharlesSchool.org.
- My Gmail (for the shared documents) is osugisakae@gmail.com.
- I’m on Mastodon at @chris_spackman@twit.social.
 - I believe you can also find me at that address on BlueSky

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Please see ChrisSpackman.com for editable versions of resources from today.

Last edited: 2025-11-20

Session Feedback

Language Culture Connection



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