

What is “Authentic Text”?

– and why should I use it in my classroom?

Many terms swirl around the efforts to improve student performance and prepare them for college and career. One such term is “authentic text.”

Authentic text may be thought of as any text that was written and published for the public. Journal articles, blog posts and novels are just a few examples.

Authentic texts are written for “real world” purposes and audiences: to entertain, inform, explain, guide, document or convince. In fact, authentic texts need not even be written words. Audio files, virtual tours, speeches, blueprints, photos, video clips and other non-written items that can be read or interpreted are also considered to be text.

In contrast, most of what students read in school is written for the purpose of student instruction at the student’s grade level, and is intended to provide content in a clear and accessible manner. Thus, most are heavily structured through headings, subheadings and bullets, often starting with an overview and review questions at the end. Use of graphic devices such as photos, diagrams, white space and bold or italic font help to draw the student’s attention to important points. Vocabulary and sentence structure are controlled to support comprehension.

The problem is that students who have been exposed only to instructional text are unprepared for the kinds of materials they must confront beyond school, such as academic journals, contracts, tax forms and instructions, technical manuals, student loan applications, consumer reviews or news reporting and analysis. In order for our students to be prepared when they graduate to face the challenges before them, they must have the skills and strategies to independently grapple with a variety of formats and purposes as well as a range of kinds of prose structure and vocabulary.

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See Also: Authentic Text to Deepen Student Learning