In this 15 minute Webcast, Resource YouthBuild instructor Rebecca Dezan describes in detail how she has implemented these instructional shifts in her literacy instruction.

1. BALANCING INFORMATIONAL AND LITERARY TEXT

While the 2014 GED test and TASC will ask test takers to respond to some questions about fiction texts, these tests focus more on information science, health, and career-related readings. These texts may contain complex themes and academic language. In light of these shifts, we recommend that YouthBuild educators and staff use complex nonfiction texts in addition to “at-level” texts when working with students. This shift could help teachers connect their lessons to social issues and current events, which makes material more relatable and relevant to students.

While using nonfiction texts, encourage students to read and reread small sections of texts (one to three paragraphs) while summarizing main ideas, paraphrasing, learning academic vocabulary words and responding to text-dependent questions. Read these texts to students out loud so students have the opportunity to hear an experienced reader.

"What is Close Reading?" describes strategies for helping students practice close reading and comprehension.

The following websites offer a wealth of discipline-based nonfiction texts to use in your lessons:

- Teaching Tolerance, from the Southern Poverty Law Center, has resources to engage students in reading informational, nonfiction texts that touch on social justice themes.
- The New York Times’ Learning Network offers useful, relevant articles to engage students in close reading of nonfiction texts.

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• **Upfront Magazine** is an affordable monthly magazine from the New York Times that provides updated information on timely events.

Common Core State Standards offers a free list of recommended texts that you can use in your classroom. Try to select texts that draw on themes that resonate with students.

2. **KNOWLEDGE IN THE DISCIPLINES**

Math, science, and social studies instructors play a key role in advancing students’ literacy. By building knowledge in the disciplines, students develop understanding about the world through texts, in addition to classroom dialogue, media, and activities. This video from the PBS Common Core Series describes ways in which instructors can develop intentional instruction so that students engage in deep learning of science, social studies, and math concepts.

Visit our subject-area pages to access more articles, websites, and YouthBuild teacher-developed lesson plans:

- [English Language Arts](#)
- [Science](#)
- [Math](#)
- [Social Studies](#)
- [Digital Literacy](#)

3. **STAIRCASE OF COMPLEXITY**

Common Core State Standards call for a staircase of increasing text complexity so that all students are ready for the demands of college and career-level reading.

The [Text-Complexity Assessment Rubric](#) provides useful criteria with which to select complex texts. In addition, this table of [Informational Text Types](#) outlines the types of texts that you can incorporate into your classrooms and program.

4. **TEXT-BASED ANSWERS**

Responding to text-dependent questions will be a key component of the new high school equivalency exams. Students will need to practice, practice, practice responding to text-dependent questions in all subjects (e.g. math, social studies, and ELA) and YouthBuild program components (e.g. construction, life skills, career development).

While we still encourage YouthBuild students to engage with readings by relating themes and ideas to their personal experiences, YouthBuild educators should routinely ask students questions that can only be answered through careful reading of nonfiction and fiction texts.

Please note that text-dependent questions are not low-level, literal, or recall questions. However, you can present a few of these questions as a scaffolding tool when introducing texts, as it helps students experience early success.

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This **Text-Dependent Examples** table provides clear examples of specific types of text-dependent questions to assist you as you plan your lessons. The **Text-Dependent Question Guide** provides useful tips and strategies to create strong text-dependent questions while supporting students’ efforts to engage with these questions.

### 5. WRITING FROM SOURCES

The 2014 GED now requires students to write essays that present an opinion or point of view while providing evidence to support this point of view. YouthBuild instructors are strongly encouraged to engage students in research projects where they are using evidence to inform or make an argument and are responding to the ideas, events, facts, and arguments presented in the texts they encounter. Students should also practice writing as an iterative process: writing, revision, and rewriting is crucial to effective essay development.

Rubrics outlining criteria for effective writing are key assessment tools that should not only be used by teachers, but also students. Visit our [Assessments and Rubrics](#) page for useful resources to develop writing assessments and rubrics.

Here are two examples of lesson plans developed by YouthBuild teachers where students practice responding to texts and writing research papers:

- **Connecting with our Natural History**, Carly Moline, Wisconsin Fresh Start

  In this lesson, students will take a trip to a local park or natural area and learn about the area’s natural and human history, which could include how some geological formations came to be, as well as the role humans played in shaping the landscape of today. Students will then use this knowledge to write about what they have learned, using the 11-sentence paragraph or essay format.

- **Approaching Qualitative Research through Interviews**, Celine Massuger, R.U.T.H. YouthBuild – Canoga Park

  This lesson helps students carefully read informational text so that they can develop effective interviewing skills.

### 6. ACADEMIC VOCABULARY

**Academic vocabulary** will be central to the new GED, TASC, and HiSet tests. When reading complex texts, students should learn these new words in context.

When introducing students to complex texts, identify **academic vocabulary words** prior to introducing these texts. Discuss the meanings of these words with students before introducing the texts. There are a number of ways that you can teach vocabulary so that students conceptually understand the meaning of the word and become comfortable with using these words in everyday language.

[Fun Strategies to Learn Academic Vocabulary](#) and [Word Work Activities](#) are simple guides, developed by the Youth Development Institute, that suggest effective and engaging ways that students can expand their academic vocabulary. These activities include drawing pictures to demonstrate the meanings of words, creating cartoons to express the conceptual meanings of these words, and developing lexical arrays.