

The No. 1 Skill Teens Need for College

When it comes to academic collegiate success there is one skill more than any other that separates the A students from the C students: the ability to handle complex reading.

And they can't wait until they are college freshmen to learn how to do this. The time to learn it is in high school, and alarmingly, most states do not require complex reading comprehension instruction at the high school level nor do they have any standards for high school reading achievement. The Associated Press reports of a new study from ACT, the nonprofit company that publishes one of the two tests required for college entrance. Instead, reading is considered a subject for elementary school and is rarely taught in later grades.



What makes an article or book complex to read? Complex reading is characterized by an elaborate organization where the messages are often implicit rather than overt. The interaction between ideas or characters may be subtle instead of obvious. Most of all, the vocabulary is demanding and intricate, notes AP.

How many college-bound high school students can read complex works? Of the 1.2 million high school seniors who took the ACT in 2005, only 51 percent scored high enough to show they were ready to handle first year college-level reading requirements. And this a concern not only to colleges, but also to employers.

What can be done? These aren't easy solutions, but the ACT insists that high school reading standards must be revised in core subjects, and struggling readers need to get help earlier in their education. Also, more teachers need to be trained in how to teach reading within their subject matter. That is, a chemistry teacher must also learn to teach reading as it relates to science.