**Bauerlein, M. (2011). *Too Dumb for Complex Texts?* ASCD.**

***Excerpted***

In a 2006 report titled *Reading Between the Lines: What the ACT Reveals About College Readiness in Reading*, ACT identifies this inability as the decisive gap between college-ready and college-unready students. "The clearest differentiator in reading between students who are college ready and students who are not is the ability to comprehend *complex* texts“ (p. 2).

**MAIN IDEA POWER SENTENCE:**

When faced with a U.S. Supreme Court decision, an epic poem, or an ethical treatise—works characterized by dense meanings, elaborate structure, sophisticated vocabulary, and subtle authorial intentions—college-ready students plod through them. Unready students falter.

Does the gap widen because unready students don't have the intelligence or background knowledge to understand complex texts? To some extent perhaps, but ACT suggests that the difficulty lies just as much in students' lack of experience and practice with reading complex texts. ACT asserts, "The type of text students are exposed to in high school has a significant impact on their readiness for college-level reading" (p. 23). The more students are exposed to complex texts, the more they realize that they can't complete their studies through "a single superficial reading" (p. 24).

Complex texts require a slower labor. Readers can't proceed to the next paragraph without grasping the previous one, they can't glide over unfamiliar words and phrases, and they can't forget what they read four pages earlier. They must double back, discern ambiguities, follow tricky transitions, and keep a dictionary close at hand. Complex texts force readers to acquire the knack of slow linear reading. If they rarely encounter complex texts, young students won't even realize that such a reading tack is a necessary means of learning. Unready students might be just as intelligent and motivated as the ready ones are, but they don't possess the habits and strategies needed to carry on.

**MAIN IDEA POWER SENTENCE:**

Complex texts can be lengthy and opaque, the product of careful thought and studied composition. To address them, readers may need to sit down with them for several hours of concentration. Readers need to be patient enough to ponder a single sentence for a few minutes, because many complex texts aren't just purveyors of information, but expressions of value and perspective.

…

That willingness to pause and probe is essential, but the dispositions of digital reading run otherwise. Fast skimming is the way of the screen. Blogs, chats, and comments are usually hastily produced and consumed. The more students become habituated to them, they more they will eschew a slow and deliberate pace; or, rather, the more they will read quickly and fail to comprehend. If they have grooved for many years a reading habit that races through texts, as is the case with texting, e-mail, Twitter, and other exchanges, 18-year-olds will have difficulty suddenly downshifting when faced with a long modernist poem.

**MAIN IDEA POWER SENTENCE:**