

## DOK Primer

Dr. Norman Webb originally developed the Depth of Knowledge (DOK) language system for the purpose of evaluating the relationship between the content complexity (also often referred to as “cognitive complexity”) of curriculum standards and of corresponding assessment items. Over the years, the use of DOK has extended far beyond the original context of evaluating the alignment of statewide summative assessments. Now used extensively throughout U.S. school districts, by state departments of education, assessment developers, educational publishers, and others, DOK is applied toward informing alignment between and among all areas of the education system, not just the relationship between standards and assessments. DOK is a tool that allows educators to communicate effectively, consistently, and efficiently about the content complexity of standards, learning objectives, tasks, prompts, questions, etc.

What DOK is:	What DOK is NOT:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• DOK is an evaluative tool used for content analysis. Specifically, DOK is a language system that can be used to differentiate between and among different levels of complexity of student engagement required by components of educational materials.</li> <li>• DOK can be used to interpret standards, learning objectives, tasks, prompts, questions, etc.</li> <li>• DOK is a reflective lens used to foster intentionality in teachers’ practices, to help ensure that the complexity of learning expectations are clearly understood, that formative/summative/etc. assessments provide opportunities to make reasonable inferences about attainment of learning expectations, and that educational opportunities allow students to engage at the level(s) of complexity intended.</li> <li>• DOK differentiates complexity from difficulty.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• DOK is <b>not</b> used to evaluate the complexity of a text, phenomenon, or topic complexity (e.g. how complex is photosynthesis).</li> <li>• DOK is <b>not</b> a rubric.</li> <li>• DOK is <b>not</b> a protocol.</li> <li>• DOK is <b>not</b> a measurement of “how deeply” an individual is engaging with a particular expectation.</li> <li>• DOK is <b>not</b> hierarchical or progressive (i.e. it does not reflect any sort of learning progression from low → high complexity).</li> <li>• DOK is <b>not</b> a value judgment and does <b>not</b> reflect importance. (In other words, there is no idea inherent to DOK that any level of DOK is “better” than any other. (Academic standards or other learning objectives, by definition, specify what is important.)</li> </ul>

## **Selected examples of how DOK Is commonly used:**

- By individual K-12 teachers and within school Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) to ensure shared understanding of the meaning of academic standards – e.g. the complexity of student engagement required by each learning expectation.
- By K-12 teachers and associated staff to inform development of lesson plans, unit designs, formative/summative classroom and district assessments, and other materials.
- By K-12 teachers and associated staff to inform selection of assessment items from item bank products for which a district has purchased access.
- To communicate expectations to item writers / content developers – e.g. expected distribution of DOK levels of items on an assessment.
- In specifications for assessments via state RFPs.
- By large-scale state department of education efforts to provide educators with tools for goals of school improvement, assessment development, and other endeavors.
- As one component of alignment analyses of statewide summative assessments with standards (as specified by “depth and breadth” requirement of ESSA).

## **What does it mean to conduct a content analysis?**

DOK is used to conduct *content analyses* of the “content” of standards, learning objectives, tasks, instructional prompts, questions, etc. The “content” of a standard, for example, is “what the standard contains” or “the entirety of the standard.” The term “content complexity” refers to the content within a standard or a learning objective, task, prompt, question, etc. DOK is used to analyze the complexity of engagement required by the content of these expectations/tasks/etc. The term “content complexity” does NOT refer to the complexity of a topic (e.g. photosynthesis), text, or context, etc.

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