

Tech Tools: A Digital Head Start on Text-modification and Collaborative “Genius” by Christine Rosalia

Whether you are a public school teacher or teach adults, you are familiar with the need to gloss authentic texts. Perhaps you are preparing a news article for your class and you want to modify or differentiate it so that readers at multiple reading levels can engage with it. Or perhaps you want to teach your students to gloss a complex text (individually or communally) as a step in both improving their reading comprehension and vocabulary learning. Two of my favorite free tools that make preparation of glossed texts more efficient and engaging are: rewordify.com and genius.com.

Rewordify is a web app made by a former IT programmer who is now a Special Educator. To use Rewordify, simply enter text into a given box and the text will reappear with the words or phrases considered difficult “reworded” or simplified. As examples, “sublime” becomes “amazing” and “eschew perusing” is changed to “avoid carefully reading.” Simplification is based on how frequently a word appears in Brigham Young University’s Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) and on definitions given in Merriam-Webster’s *Learner’s Dictionary*. You can set the level of text simplification according to six levels (great for differentiation), add words, adjust given definitions, or change how your output looks (e.g., using different highlighted colors or deciding where glossaries appear on a printed page). But what I like best about Rewordify are the other user tools, which include a cloze generator, various vocabulary quizzes, a timer for reading speed, stats on your text (as well as caveats on what “reading levels” mean), and a “parts of speech” button that will help learners see the syntax within a text (reminiscent of Caleb Gattegno’s Silent Way, different forms are displayed in different colors). When a teacher wants to share a text with students, Rewordify generates a public or private URL for that text. Individual students can customize any of their readings using a “learning session” where they hear words and phrases, make flashcards, type targeted words, read them in context multiple times, and control how they test themselves. The teacher and/or student can keep charts of personalized progress.

To understand how Rewordify is different from Genius, the other site I recommend, you might compare some of the texts they share in their growing libraries. While Rewordify will simplify text for you, Genius is a constructivist tool requiring users to annotate a text “by hand.” A teacher uploads a class reading and then the class (and if you allow it, a larger public) “crowd sources” the text with “mouse-over” annotations. Annotations can mirror Rewordify simplification, or the annotations can be multimedia extensions, which employ text, images, videos, audio, and/or hyperlinks. Genius started as a site exclusively for annotating rap lyrics, but now is for any genre and includes a mammoth collection of songs, news articles, literature, TV and movie scripts, recipes—you name it!

Both tools, rewordify.com and genius.com, are teacher-friendly and contain how-to information in support of your work. Explore what they can do for you!

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