

# How to Assess Readability

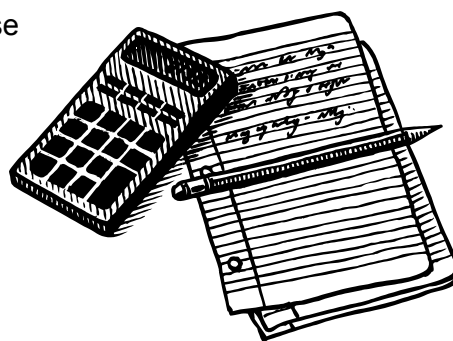
## Using Microsoft Word or Online Tools

### What is Readability?

Readability describes the relative ease with which a document can be read. Readability tests (e.g.: Flesh-Kincaid, Dale-Chall, Fry, FOG, SMOG) are based on mathematical formulas designed to objectively assess the suitability of reading materials for students at particular ages or grade levels. These formulas typically include factors such as sentence length, syllable count and difficult vocabulary.

### Which formula does Word use?

Microsoft Word is set up to use both the Flesch Reading Ease formula and the Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level formula. These formulas are considered the standard by some federal government agencies and some private companies.



### How do I set this up in Word 97-2003?

- Click on the “Tools” menu and select “Options”.
- Choose the tab marked “Spelling & Grammar.”
- Make sure “Check grammar with spelling is selected”.
- Under the “Grammar” section, select the “Show Readability Statistics” check box.

### How do I set this up in Word 2007?

- Click on the round “Microsoft Office Button” (upper left corner of the screen), and then click on the “Word Options” button at the bottom of the window.
- Click the “Proofing” tab on the left side.
- Make sure “Check grammar with spelling is selected”.
- Under “When correcting grammar in Word” section, select the “Show readability statistics” check box.

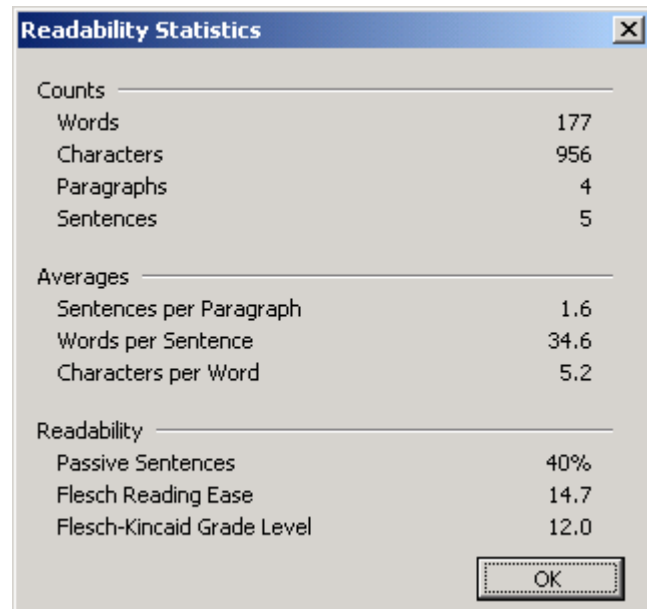
### Notes:

- To make sure you did the steps correctly, go back to the “Tools” menu (97-2003) or “Review” tab (2007) and select “Spelling & Grammar...” or press F7. The readability statistics are at the bottom of the window when the spelling and grammar check ends.
- The Flesch-Kincaid formula in Microsoft Word only displays results up to Grade 12.
- Flesch-Kincaid formula was designed for English language materials. For some languages, Word displays only information about counts and averages, not readability.

## How do I assess the results?

The results of the readability analysis in Microsoft Word will look similar to this illustration, including the basic statistics from the sample text. However, the results may not be entirely accurate.

According to William Dubay's paper, "What is Plain Language?" (July 2004), the "Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level" is generally the minimum reading grade level required to read the text. Unfortunately, this feature of Microsoft Word is limited to 12th grade level at the upper end. Therefore, using the "Flesch Reading Ease Formula" may offer a more reliable result for more difficult material (see table below).



Readability Statistics	
<b>Counts</b>	
Words	177
Characters	956
Paragraphs	4
Sentences	5
<b>Averages</b>	
Sentences per Paragraph	1.6
Words per Sentence	34.6
Characters per Word	5.2
<b>Readability</b>	
Passive Sentences	40%
Flesch Reading Ease	14.7
Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level	12.0
OK	

Image from "What is Plain Language?" by William Dubay

Flesch Reading Ease Score		
90 to 100	Very Easy	4 <sup>th</sup> grade
80 to 90	Easy	5 <sup>th</sup> grade
70 to 80	Fairly Easy	6 <sup>th</sup> grade
60 to 70	Standard	8 <sup>th</sup> & 9 <sup>th</sup> grade
50 to 50	Fairly Difficult	Some high school
30 to 40	Difficult	High school or some college
0 to 30	Very Difficult	College

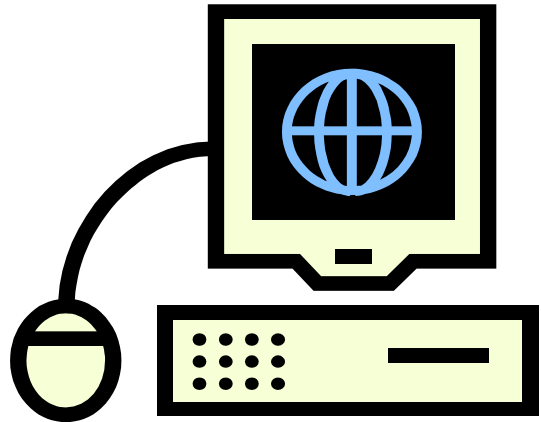
Using this table, it is apparent that the sample (the results of which are shown in the image above) is actually at a more advanced reading level (Flesch Reading Ease score = 14.7: college level) than indicated by the Flesch-Kincaid Grade level. In such cases, you may want to note that this discrepancy may be due to limitations within the Microsoft Word analysis process when reporting your results.

### **I use another word processing program. How do I set this up?**

Check your software instructions or “help” resources for “readability” if you want to use this feature in other word processing programs. Many programs can calculate the readability of text.

### **What if I don’t have access to a word processing program that includes a readability feature?**

Online readability calculators are an excellent alternative to Word’s readability analysis. Several are available. **Joe’s Web Tools** offers a variety of metrics including the Flesch-Kincaid grade level. Simply copy and paste the text of samples. Another is G. Harry McLaughlin’s **SMOG** formula calculator. A Dale-Chall formula calculator is available at **OKAPI!** However, it will require some additional text editing and proofing to use correctly. **Standards-Schmandards** includes tests for foreign languages, such as Spanish, French, Swedish, and Danish.



### **Sample Guidelines**

- For most evaluation methods, three samples of about 300 - 450 words from various parts of the reading material should generate a reasonable measure of overall readability scores.
- Samples should consist of complete sentences, each ending with either a period, question mark or exclamation point. Remove all “hard returns” from the sample. (A program such as “StripMail” can do this quickly and easily).
- Avoid or edit samples with headings, titles, lists, tables, columns, schematics, graphics, arithmetic expressions, symbolic notations, footnotes and non-keyboard characters.

### **Joe’s Web Tools**

<http://www.joeswebtools.com/text/>

### **Standards-Schmandards**

<http://www.standards-schmandards.com/2005/measuring-text-readability/>

### **SMOG**

<http://www.harrymclaughlin.com/SMOG.htm>

Posted by the formula’s creator, G. Harry McLaughlin, a clinical neuropsychologist.

### **OKAPI!**

<http://www.interventioncentral.org/htmdocs/tools/okapi/okapi.php>

Intervention Central site was created by Jim Wright, a Special Education administrator in a suburban school district in Central New York.

“**Write Better: Online Readability Testing Tools Compared**” by Christian Watson.

<http://www.smileycat.com/miaow/archives/000875.php>

### **Questions?**

Please contact Mark Williams at [mawilliams@contracosta.edu](mailto:mawilliams@contracosta.edu).