

Editing for Readability

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DRAGONFLY EDITORIAL
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What is readability?

Hmmm ...

- It is important to recognize the fact that every subject, given that its content is not totally reducible to some other subject area, presents a special set of pedagogic problems arising as a result of the distinctive character of its contents and its essential nature.

Ah!

- Every subject presents its own pedagogic problems.

How do we measure it?

- **Criteria**
 - Word length
 - Sentence length
 - Paragraph length
- **Measurement tools**
 - Flesch–Kincaid
 - Flesch Reading Ease
 - Coleman–Liau Index
 - Etc.

Measuring readability

grade: 20.4

- It is important to recognize the fact that every subject, given that its content is not totally reducible to some other subject area, presents a special set of pedagogic problems arising as a result of the distinctive character of its contents and its essential nature.

grade: 10.6

- Every subject presents its own pedagogic problems.

Goals

- **Flesch–Kincaid Grade Level**
 - 7th–8th (or 5th)
- **Flesch Reading Ease**
 - 60–70 (on a scale of 100)
- **Words**
 - Shorter rather than longer
- **Sentences**
 - Average 14 words (but no more than 21)
- **Paragraphs**
 - Average 42 words
 - Or 1–3 sentences

Why is it important?

- **Busy readers**
- **Distracted readers**
- **They don't *really* care about your content**
- **But ... we still want to reach them**

Why is it important?

**“If a reader can’t understand, the text
is essentially worthless.”**

— John McIntyre, in Copyediting.com seminar *Choosing Your Battles*

How to improve readability

**CHOOSE WORDS WISELY
SHRINK SENTENCES
PICK APART PARAGRAPHS
MEASURE
EXPLAIN**

Choose Words Wisely

Long vs. Short

Instead of ...

- Accordingly
- Facilitate
- Immediately

Try ...

- So
- Help
- Now

Complex vs. Simple

Instead of ...

- Remuneration
- Liaise
- Enumerate

Try ...

- Pay
- Meet
- List

Two words vs. one

Redundant

- Tired cliché
- Pre-planning
- Serious crisis
- Absolutely certain
- New innovations

Clear

- Cliché
- Planning
- Crisis
- Certain
- Innovations

Four words vs. one

Wordy

- Until such time as
- Have a need for
- Despite the fact that
- Make a decision to

Simple

- Until
- Need
- Despite
- Decide

Readability score?

Avg. grade level = 13.8

- Until such time as we make a decision to begin pre-planning to address this serious crisis, we cannot enumerate the remuneration.

Avg. grade level = 5.2

- Until we decide to begin planning to address this crisis, we can't list the pay.

Vague vs. Specific

- We provide end-to-end publishing services.
- We help you assess your landscaping needs.
- We write, edit, and design.
- We help you choose plants that will flourish in your yard.

Acronyms vs. Real Words

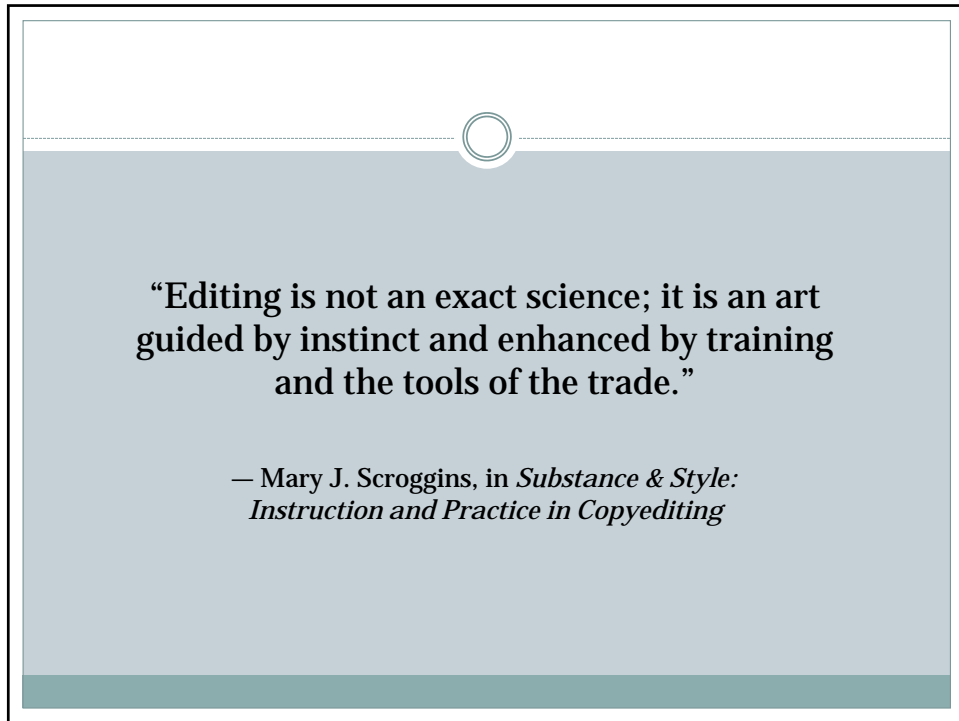
- TRA will support USCR in running DPS 24x7.
- We will support your firm in running the DPS system around the clock.

Two Words vs. Contractions

- They are evolving, though not as quickly as we would like.
- They're evolving, though not as quickly as we'd like.

Big caveat

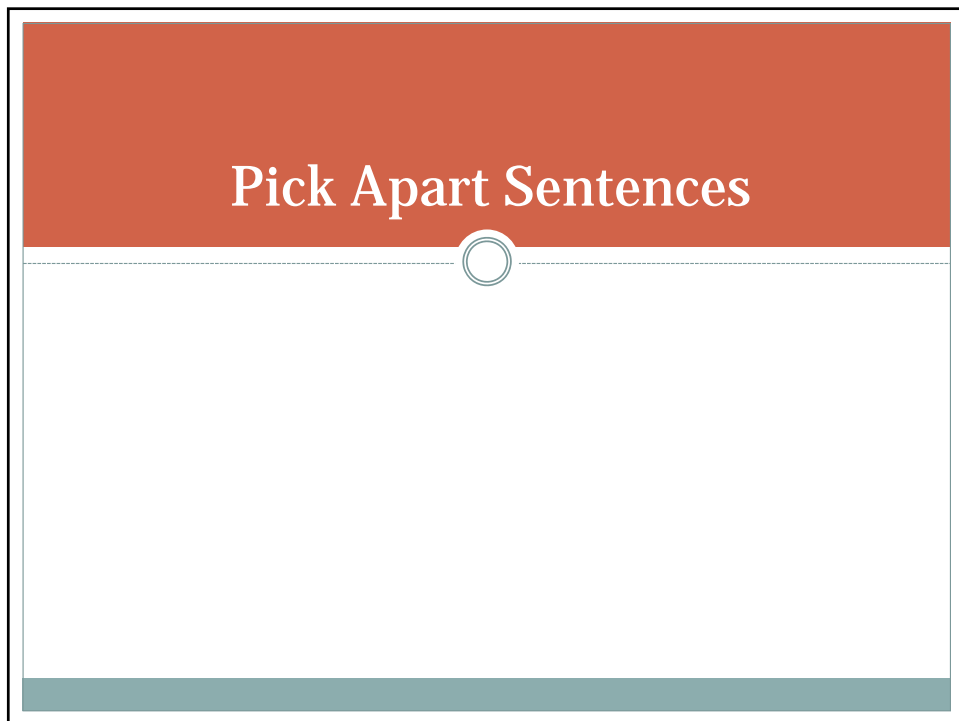




A slide with a light blue background and a white header area. A small circle is centered on a horizontal line separating the header from the main content. The main content area contains a quote in bold black text, followed by the author's name and book title in a smaller, italicized font.

“Editing is not an exact science; it is an art guided by instinct and enhanced by training and the tools of the trade.”

— Mary J. Scroggins, in *Substance & Style: Instruction and Practice in Copyediting*



A slide with a red header area and a white main content area. A small circle is centered on a horizontal line separating the header from the main content. The header area contains the title 'Pick Apart Sentences' in white text. The main content area is empty.

Pick Apart Sentences

Let me just die now

Bigglesworth & Co. maintains the world's largest and industry-leading network of nearly 200 offices in more than 30 countries and territories, generating a dynamic mix of an unmatched global footprint with valuable insight and local expertise to meet the needs of its hundreds of clients per year, across all industry sectors, small- and medium-sized enterprises, local, multinational and global companies.

Let me just keep dying

Klinger sales representatives can instantly check a customer's credit, quickly source the needed products within the company's global inventory, and ensure that the products are shipped to the customer on time, without having to "correct" a customer order when the day-old inventory report reveals a particular batch of printers is no longer in stock or available for shipping.

- *Readability = 27.5*

Strategy 1: Break it up

Klinger sales representatives can instantly check a customer's credit, quickly source the needed products within the company's global inventory, and ensure that the products are shipped to the customer on time.

They no longer must "correct" a customer order when the day-old inventory report reveals a particular batch of printers is no longer in stock or available for shipping.

- *Readability = 15.6*

Strategy 2: Cut it Out

Klinger sales representatives can instantly check a customer's credit, **quickly** source the needed products within the company's global inventory, and ensure that the products are shipped **to the customer** on time.

They no longer must "correct" a **customer** order when **the** day-old inventory report reveals **a particular batch of printers is** no longer in stock or available for shipping.

Strategy 2: Cut it Out

Klinger sales representatives can instantly check a customer's credit, source the needed products within the company's global inventory, and ensure that the products are shipped on time.

They no longer must "correct" an order when day-old inventory reports reveal certain printers are no longer in stock or available for shipping.

- *Readability = 13.8*

Strategy 3: Bullet it Up

Klinger sales representatives can:

- Instantly check a customer's credit
- Source the needed products within the company's global inventory
- Ensure that the products are shipped on time.

They no longer must "correct" an order when day-old inventory reports reveal certain printers are no longer in stock or available for shipping.

- *Readability = 10.0*

Cut it out ...

... IN OTHER WORDS, SIMPLIFY!

Unnecessary words

Wordy

- We have established two special programs aimed at expanding collaboration opportunities with industry partners both in the U.S. and globally.

Clear

- We have two programs that promote collaboration with our industry partners.

Unnecessary words

Wordy

- These programs are meant to develop and implement venues to foster relationships and engagements between industry and the university.

Clear

- These programs foster relationships between industry and the university.

Noun strings

Eh?

- Diabetic patient chest pain reduction effects may be a consequence of taking Ranolazine.

Ah!

- Taking Ranolazine can reduce chest pain in patients with diabetes.

Noun Strings

What?

- We provide cloud-based software deployment management services to the Government.

Oh.

- We help the Government deploy cloud-based software.

... often preceded by “provided”

Boring.

- Dragonfly provides corporate writing and editing services to firms worldwide.

(Not as boring.)

- Dragonfly writes and edits for companies worldwide.

Sluggish verb constructions

Slow	Brisk
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• This publication is designed to introduce investors to our capabilities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• This publication introduces investors to our capabilities.

Sluggish verb constructions

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The finalization of the bill was brought about by the committee chairs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The committee chairs finalized the bill.
---	--

“It is” constructions

Distant	Nice
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is preferable that companies commit to a long-term partnership. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We suggest that companies commit to a long-term partnership.

“It is” constructions

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is essential that transaction activity be monitored in real time. <p style="margin-top: 20px;">• <i>Readability = 9.1</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transactions must be monitored in real time. <li style="margin-left: 20px;">○ <i>or</i> • We must monitor transactions in real time. <p style="margin-top: 20px;">• <i>Readability = 5.7</i></p>
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Third person vs. first

Stiff

- During a child's overnight stay, Dayton Children's compassionate care team will make the safety and comfort of the child a priority.

Personal

- During your child's overnight stay, our compassionate care team will make the safety and comfort of your child our priority.

Formal/"proper" language

Conventional

- Thomas can be reached at 413-2619.
- Please be advised that the deadline has been changed to May 3.
- We regret to inform you that ...

Direct

- Reach Thomas at 413-2619.
- The deadline is now May 3.
- Sorry, sucker!

Formal/“proper” language

Obscure

- This meeting serves as a means to receive suggestions and recommendations about how we can continue to improve the efficacy and effectiveness of our services.

Plainspoken

- At this meeting, you can give us feedback on how we are doing.

Unnecessary adjectives

Meaningless

- Employees can access world-class, hands-on, leader-led professional and executive education.

Simple

- Employees can access relevant, quality education.
- *or*
- Employees can learn about new welding methods.

Jargon

Whatever!

- We are thought leaders who use best-of-breed tools, have industry-standard processes, and utilize bleeding-edge, state-of-the-art technology.

Alright, better.

- We pull the best tools from our industry, while always pushing ourselves to try new techniques.

Jargon

- We will be available on an as-needed basis.

- We will be available whenever needed.

○ *or*

- We'll be available when needed.

○ *or*

- We're free whenever you need us.

“Remember that each profession has its favorite words, its particular vocabulary, and its sacred cows. ... You must consider the intended audience: A specialist writing for other specialists can use expressions that someone writing for a lay audience can't.”

— Mary Stoughton, *Substance & Style: Instruction and Practice in Copyediting*

Padding

- In essence, the agency has two mutually supportive functions.
- The agency has two mutually supportive functions.

Padding

- Our artists have appeared in *Fast Company* and *Wired* magazines, to name a few.
- Our artists have appeared in *Fast Company* and *Wired* magazines.

Fluffy nonsense

- Your custom artwork will be polished to pristine inimitable standards, ensuring that you look your best.
- ????

Pare Down Paragraphs

Please don't make me read that

The Big Data Challenge

Though new tools have helped Klinger effectively manage its financial and transactional reporting needs and analyze data to make informed business decisions, the company faced a challenge that many large, global organizations face: difficulty managing "big data." Big data is any collection of raw data that is becoming so large and complex that traditional disk-based database tools are unable to process it in a timely manner. Because it was taking so long to process and capture transactional data from multiple Klinger systems — much of it processed through overnight batch processing — the data was already dated by the time it could be reviewed and analyzed. Basically, big data was limiting Klinger's visibility into real-time activity. It not only limited the company's ability to plan and forecast with precision, it also limited their ability to quickly and accurately process customer orders to guarantee products were in stock and would arrive on time.

- *Readability = 16.3*

Strategy 1: Break it Up



The Big Data Challenge

Though new tools have helped Klinger effectively manage its financial and transactional reporting needs and analyze data to make informed business decisions, the company faced a challenge that many large, global organizations face: difficulty managing “big data.”

Big data is any collection of raw data that is becoming so large and complex that traditional disk-based database tools are unable to process it in a timely manner.

Because it was taking so long to process and capture transactional data from multiple Klinger systems — much of it processed through overnight batch processing — the data was already dated by the time it could be reviewed and analyzed.

Basically, big data was limiting Klinger’s visibility into real-time activity.

It not only limited the company’s ability to plan and forecast with precision, it also limited their ability to quickly and accurately process customer orders to guarantee products were in stock and would arrive on time.

Strategy 2: Set Guideposts



The Big Data Challenge

Though these tools have helped Klinger effectively manage its financial and transactional reporting needs and analyze data to make informed business decisions, the company faced a challenge that many large, global organizations face: difficulty managing “big data.”

Big data = too much raw data

Big data is any collection of raw data that is becoming so large and complex that traditional disk-based database tools are unable to process it in a timely manner.

Because it was taking so long to process and capture transactional data from multiple Klinger systems — much of it processed through overnight batch processing — the data was already dated by the time it could be reviewed and analyzed.

When we can’t process data, we can’t make decisions

Basically, big data was limiting Klinger’s visibility into real-time activity.

It not only limited the company’s ability to plan and forecast with precision, it also limited their ability to quickly and accurately process customer orders to guarantee products were in stock and would arrive on time.

Strategy 3: One Sentence = One Para

The Big Data Challenge

Though these tools have helped Klinger effectively manage its financial and transactional reporting needs and analyze data to make informed business decisions, the company faced a challenge that many large, global organizations face: difficulty managing “big data.”

What is Big Data?

Big data is any collection of raw data that is becoming so large and complex that traditional disk-based database tools are unable to process it in a timely manner.

Because it was taking so long to process and capture transactional data from multiple Klinger systems — much of it processed through overnight batch processing — the data was already dated by the time it could be reviewed and analyzed.

When can't process it, we can't make decisions

Basically, big data was limiting Klinger's visibility into real-time activity.

~~It not only limited the company's ability to plan and forecast with precision, it also limited their ability to quickly and accurately process customer orders to guarantee products were in stock and would arrive on time.~~

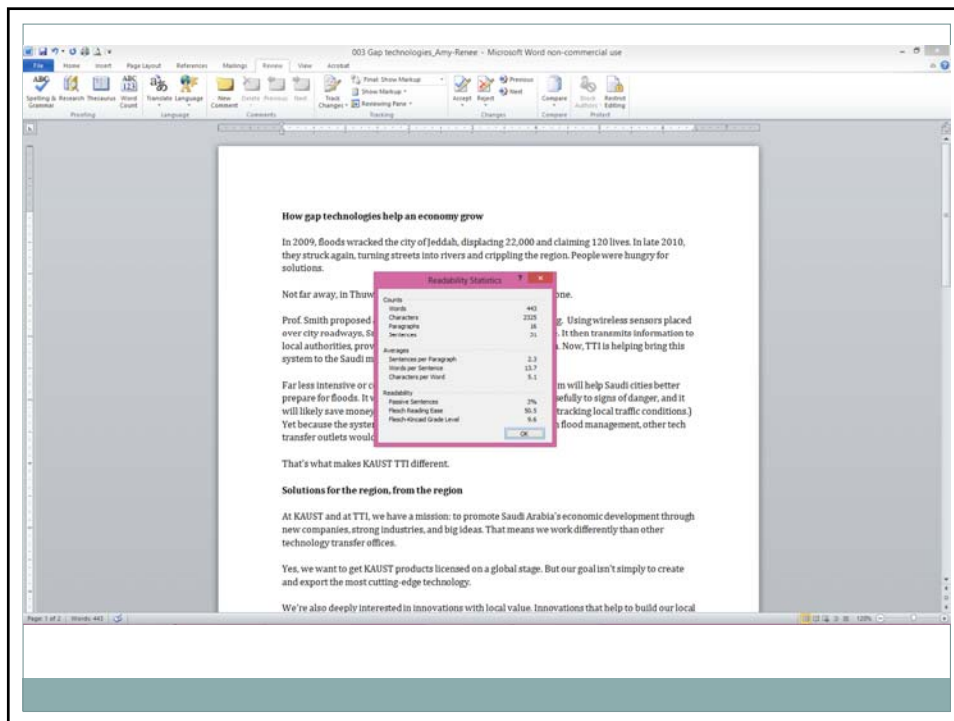
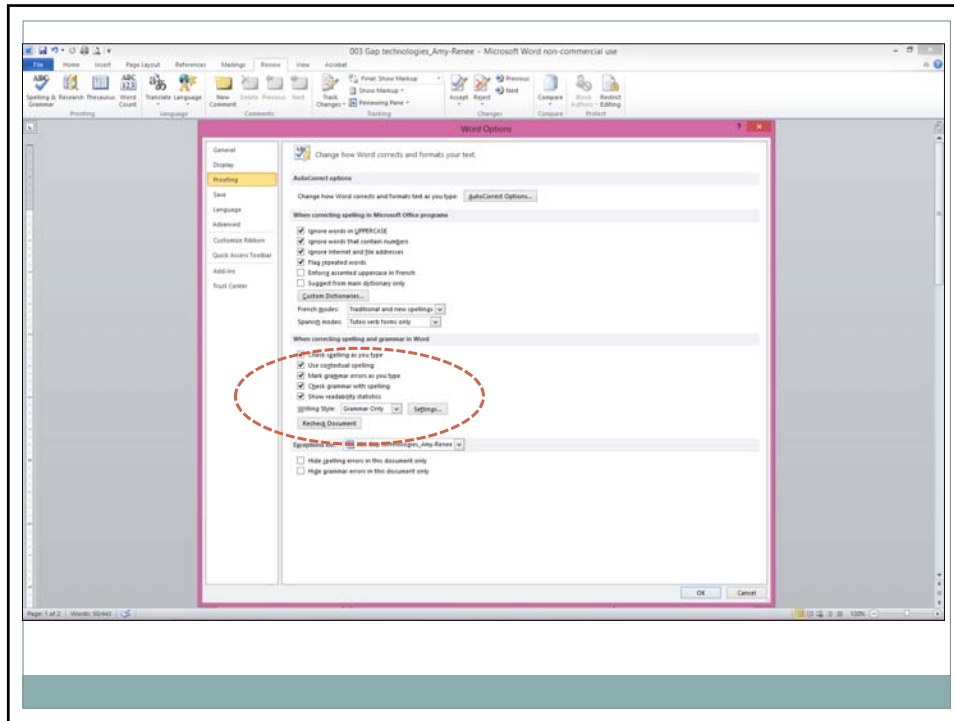
Measure

Goals

- **Sentences**
 - Average 14 words (but no more than 21)
- **Paragraphs**
 - Average 42 words
 - Or 1–3 sentences
- **Flesch Reading Ease**
 - 60–70 (on a scale of 100)
- **Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level**
 - 7th–8th (or 5th)

Microsoft Word

- Click the *File* tab, and then click *Options*.
- Click *Proofing*.
- Make sure the *Check grammar with spelling check box* is selected.
- Select *Show readability statistics*.



How gap technologies help an economy grow

In 2009, floods wracked the city of Jeddah, dis... they struck again, turning streets into rivers an... solutions.

Not far away, in Thuwal, a KAUST professor w...

Prof. Smith proposed an early warning system... over city roadways. Smith's system tracks wat... local authorities, providing a street-level map... system to the Saudi marketplace.

Far less intensive or costly than an infrastruc... prepares for floods. It will help utilities respond... will likely save money and lives. (In drier times, it's also useful for tracking local trame conditions.) Yet because the system does not represent a global/best practice in flood management, other tech... transfer outlets would likely have ignored it.

That's what makes KAUST TTI different.

Solutions for the region, from the region

At KAUST and at TTI, we have a mission: to promote Saudi Arabia's economic development through new companies, strong industries, and big ideas. That means we work differently than other technology transfer offices.

Yes, we want to get KAUST products licensed on a global stage. But our goal isn't simply to create and export the most cutting-edge technology.

We're also deeply interested in innovations with local value. Innovations that help to build our local

Readability Statistics 2010

Words	123
Characters	666
Paragraphs	2
Sentences	8
Averages	
Sentences per Paragraph	4.0
Words per Sentence	15.3
Characters per Word	5.3
Readability	
Flesch-Kincaid Grade	17%
Flesch Reading Ease	40.3
Smith Normal Grade Level	10.1

StoryToolz and Others

- StoryToolz
- Edit Central's readability calculators
- Gunning Fog Index calculator
- OKAPI!
- TXReadability
- WordsCount's SMOG Calculator
- ... just Google "readability calculator"

StoryTool

Readability Statistics

Paste up to 5K of text in the box below

How gap technologies help an economy grow

In 2009, floods wracked the city of Jeddah, displacing 22,000 and claiming 120 lives. In late 2010, they struck again, turning streets into rivers and crippling the region. People were hungry for solutions.

Not far away in [Thessalonika](#), a KAUST professor was busy developing one.

Prof. Smith proposed an early warning system for flood monitoring. Using wireless sensors placed over city roadways, Smith's system tracks water levels in real time. It then transmits information to local authorities, providing a street-level map of flood progression. Now, KAUST is helping bring this system to the Saudi marketplace.

Far less intensive or costly than an infrastructure rebuild, the system will help Saudi cities better prepare for floods. It will help utilities respond quickly and purposefully to signs of danger, and it will likely save money and lives. On other times, it's also useful for tracking local traffic conditions. Yet because the system does not

[Check Readability](#)

If you sign in, you can check 50K instead of 5K!

Check it out! [StoryCheck](#)
Problem with one of the tools? Let me know.

© 2012 Chuck Heckathorn
 Page generated 3/28/13 10:54

StoryTool

Readability Statistics of Entered Text

▼ Reading Levels

Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level	Grade 8.2
Automated Readability Index	Grade 9.5
Coleman-Liau	Grade 8.9
Flesch Reading Ease	61.4/100 (plain English)
Gunning fog index	Grade 10.7
LambertIndex (LIX Formula)	37.5 = school year 5
SMOG Index	Grade 10.3
Average grade level	Grade 10.1 (mean of above)

▼ Sentence Information

Number of characters	932
Number of words	184
Characters per word	5.07
Syllables per word	1.55
Number of sentences	13
Words per sentence	14.2
Number of short sentences	4 (29% 9 words or less)
Number of long sentences	1 (8% 24 words or more)
Number of paragraphs	5
Sentences per paragraph	2.8
Number of questions	0 (0%)
Number of passive sentences	3 (23%)
Longest sentence	35 words long

Explain



Writers think readability means ...

- Flat, boring copy
- Dumbed-down copy
- Pandering to the lowest common denominator
- “See Spot run. See Jane smile. See Tom dig.”

Writers also argue that ...

- **My readers are really smart**
 - ... they are PhDs / doctors / engineers / scientists
 - ... they are CEOs / CIOs / business owners
- **My subject matter is really technical / complex**
- **Therefore readability doesn't apply to me**

“An author’s greatest fear is to appear, as a result of revision, less than brilliant. The good editor convinces authors that *without* revision their genius will be obscured.”

— Arthur Plotnick, in *Substance & Style: Instruction and Practice in Copyediting*

Readability actually means ...

- Lively, vivid copy
- Clear, understandable copy
- Reaching a wider audience
- People actually read what you write!

Example 1: *Wall Street Journal*

... As medical personnel swarmed Ware in front of the Cardinals' bench, his teammates fell to the ground, horrified. What exactly had happened? Replays on CBS confirmed a terrible injury. A cold hush covered Lucas Oil Stadium. Ware's coach, Rick Pitino, huddled his team in tears. Duke players stood silently, shaken. The NCAA tournament is typically such a centrifuge of energy and noise. This was silent and brutal. A three-week circus with 68 teams suddenly meant so much less than the immediate future of one young man lying crumpled on the floor.

Example 1: Stats

- Flesch-Kincaid Readability: 5.0
- Avg. words per sentence: 10.1
- Number of passive sentences: 2 out of 9

Example 2: *Popular Science*

The specifics of how a single-celled organism called *Tetrahymena thermophila* gets it on has been a scientific mystery for more than 50 years. See, *T. thermophila* has seven sexes, and it can reproduce in 21 combinations. For sexy-time, each *T. thermophila* can mate with another *T. thermophila* that has any of the six other sexes. But with so many options, how do cells determine which sex their progeny will be?

Example 2: Stats

- Flesch–Kincaid Readability: 5.0
- Avg. words per sentence: 9
- Number of passive sentences: 2 out of 5

Example 3 : 37 Signals sales copy

We built the company that we'd want to do business with. We hope you do too.

1. Useful is forever

Bells and whistles wear off, but usefulness never does. We build useful software that does just what you need and nothing you don't.

2. Great service is everything

We're famous for fast and friendly customer service. We work hard to make sure we live up to that reputation every day. [See how our customers rate our service.](#)

Example 3: Stats

- Flesch–Kincaid Readability: 5.8
- Avg. words per sentence: 13.0
- Number of passive sentences: 2 out of 6

“Good editors are not obsessed with commas, spacing around headings, or parallelism. We are obsessed with readers and their ability to understand printed words and thoughts as effortlessly as possible.”

— Mary J. Scroggins, in *Substance & Style: Instruction and Practice in Copyediting*

😊 Thanks 😊

WRITE ME, OK?

SAM@DRAGONFLYEDITORIAL.COM

Sources

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