BASICS OF READABILITY
What it is and how to improve it

April 26, 2018
Samantha Enslen
Dragonfly Editorial

Readability

WHAT is it?
WHY is it important?
HOW is it measured?
HOW can we improve it?
With WHAT tools?
Readability

= 

How **EASY** it is to read a piece of writing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measured using grade levels</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bad</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The fathers of readability

Fleish

Kincaid

Can people read our manuals?
Fleish-Kincaid Grade Level Readability

\[ \text{Fleish Reading Ease} = 206.835 - 1.015 \left( \frac{\text{total words}}{\text{total sentences}} \right) - 84.6 \left( \frac{\text{total syllables}}{\text{total words}} \right) \] 

They assess

\% short vs. long words
\% short vs. long sentences

\[ \downarrow \]

Text with shorter words and sentences

\[ \downarrow \]

More readable
Readability goals

- Flesch-Kincaid grade level = 5th – 9th
- Flesch reading ease ≥ 60
My takeaways

• Readability is largely based on word and sentence length
• Measured by grade level
• Goal is 5th to 9th

HOW DO YOU MEASURE IT?
Microsoft Word

Turn on readability: File

Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) 1.28-Open-RxA-ES-190 – Proposal A1 Sensing Techniques for Data Exfiltration at Scale

Connectiva developed the SP tech funding; this work demonstrated that only a single transmission and process components forms the basis of our app. Connectiva proposes to combine and them against the challenge of overwriting.

3.2 TECHNICAL APPROACH
Connectiva will develop the SP and C optimizing the interaction between the
Options

Proofing, Show readability stats
Run spellcheck

The scope of work performed under this DO I comprehensive tool, or collection of tools, for the PaaS environment that provides on-demand applications, to enable use via a web interface while maintaining analytic momentum.

Clairvoyant provides highly technical sar sustainment, and maintenance of end-to-end p dissemination (PCP) systems, software tod of data from multiple Tracking and Signature

BROCK demonstrates our capabilities in and utilize a wide variety of sensor phenom phenomenologies in direct support of intelligence

Get readability stats

Convergent developed the SP technique using initial research and development (R&D) funding; this work determined that a more than 10% net monetary incentive is achievable with only a single transmission and processing run. The successful demonstration of these technology components forms the basis of our approach. Convergent proposes to continue and jointly develop the SP and CMC technologies and apply them against the challenges of overwhelming sensory imagery from targets.

3.2 TECHNICAL APPROACH

Convergent will develop both SP and CMC algorithms in an iterative process, investigating and optimizing the interaction between these techniques through a series of sensor and applied to various operational scenarios. These scenarios include sensor-level feedback situations and situations in which minimal processing resources are available at the sensor.

The failure step demands the most advanced processing resources on the sensor side. To address this, Convergent will focus our efforts on developing this step to further reduce the processing requirements at the sensor node. We will identify and develop the optimal training techniques for increasing processing speed while maintaining classification accuracy. From previous work and analysis efforts, we recognize that there are many potential training techniques to be investigated, including, but not limited to linear, non-linear, and non-parametric. A promising path forward is to generate the random sampling basis prior to training the video frame and then to model only these pixels that will be part of the SRE.

Once the SP optimization requiring the minimum sensor processing resources is identified, Convergent will identify components and a top-level design and component a hardware
Get readability stats

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
• Ferret out funky phrases
• Pare down paragraphs
• Measure
CHOOSE WORDS WISELY

Long vs. short

Instead of …
• Accordingly
• Facilitate
• Immediately
• Subsequently

Try …
• So
• Help
• Now
• Then
Complex vs. simple

Instead of …  
• Remuneration  
• Liaise  
• Terminate  
• Utilize  

Try …  
• Pay  
• Meet  
• End  
• Use

Redundant vs. plain

Instead of …  
• Tired cliché  
• Pre-planning  
• Serious crisis  
• Time period  
• New innovations  

Try …  
• Cliché  
• Planning  
• Crisis  
• Period  
• Innovations
Two words vs. one

**Instead of …**
- Reason for
- Similar to
- Incumbent upon

**Try …**
- Why
- Like
- Must

Three words vs. one

**Instead of …**
- Take action to
- In conjunction with
- In order to

**Try …**
- Do
- With
- To
Four words vs. one

Instead of …
• Until such time as
• In the event that
• Have a need for
• Despite the fact that
• In a timely manner

Try …
• Until
• If
• Need
• Although
• Promptly

Vague vs. Specific

Instead of …
• We provide end-to-end publishing services.
• We provide a holistic survey of your landscaping needs.

Try this …
• We write, edit, and design books for independent authors.
• We help you choose plants that will flourish in your soil and your climate.
Acronyms vs. Real Words

- TRA will support USCR in running DPS 24x7.
- We will support you in running the DPS system 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Word choice affects readability

**F-K grade level = 12.8**
- Despite the fact that remuneration has not being handled in a timely manner, everyone will be compensated no later than Friday.

**F-K grade level = 4.8**
- Although pay has not been prompt, everyone will be paid by Friday.
Word choice affects readability

F-K grade level = 11.8
- The objective of this initiative is to increase competencies for all staff members in a substantial manner.

F-K grade level = 4.8
- This plan focuses on increasing the skills of our staff.

F-K grade level = 1.2
- This plan will help increase the skills of our staff.

Big caveat

![Cat meme](wut)
Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent, a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.

This country was formed 87 years ago. Its founding principles were liberty and equality.

Gatsby believed in the green light, the orgiastic future that year by year recedes before us. It eluded us then, but that's no matter; tomorrow we will run faster, reach out our arms farther …

Gatsby believed in the green light and the unattainable future it represents. We can’t get it, but we will keep trying.
“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

To do: Replace …

• Many words with one
• Vague words with specific ones
• Acronyms with real words
SHRINK SENTENCES
Readability goals

Ideal avg. sentence length = 14 words

Not 14 words for EACH sentence
But a 14-word AVERAGE

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.

- Readability = 29.4
- # of words = 61
A big mouthful

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
• # words = 58

Step 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
Step 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.

• Readability = 13.8
Step 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
A provider-based clinic model dictates that outpatient facilities can operate under the auspices of the larger medical entity, which reduces overhead for the outpatient clinic while allowing for a separate facility fee to be billed – this holds strong revenue potential for the medical center; in turn, the outpatient clinic providers would also have hospital privileges and integrated medical records with the main health system.

• Readability = 19.3

Step 1: Pull text into headers

A provider-based clinic model dictates that outpatient facilities can operate under the auspices of the larger medical entity, which reduces overhead for the outpatient clinic while allowing for a separate facility fee to be billed – this holds strong revenue potential for the medical center; in turn, the outpatient clinic providers would also have hospital privileges and integrated medical records with the main health system.
Step 1: Pull text into headers

Benefits of a Provider-Based Clinic Model
In this model, outpatient facilities can operate under the auspices of the larger medical entity, which reduces overhead for the outpatient clinic while allowing for a separate facility fee to be billed – this holds strong revenue potential for the medical center; in turn, the outpatient clinic providers would also have hospital privileges and integrated medical records with the main health system.

\[\text{Readability} = 18.3\]

Step 2: Break it up

Benefits of a Provider-Based Clinic Model
In this model, outpatient facilities can operate under the auspices of the larger medical entity, which reduces overhead for the outpatient clinic while allowing for a separate facility fee to be billed – this holds strong revenue potential for the medical center; in turn, the outpatient clinic providers would also have hospital privileges and integrated medical records with the main health system.
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Benefits of a Provider-Based Clinic Model
In this model, outpatient facilities can operate under the auspices of the larger medical entity. This reduces overhead for the outpatient clinic while allowing for a separate facility fee to be billed – this holds strong revenue potential for the medical center; in turn, the outpatient clinic providers would also have hospital privileges and integrated medical records with the main health system.

• Readability = 14.3

Step 3: Bullet it out

Benefits of a Provider-Based Clinic Model
In this model, outpatient facilities can operate under the auspices of the larger medical entity. This reduces overhead for the outpatient clinic while allowing for a separate facility fee to be billed – this holds strong revenue potential for the medical center; in turn, the outpatient clinic providers would also have hospital privileges and integrated medical records with the main health system.
Step 3: Bullet it out

Benefits of a Provider-Based Clinic Model
In this model, outpatient facilities can operate under the auspices of the larger medical entity.
• This reduces overhead for the outpatient clinic
• It allows for a separate facility fee to be billed – this holds strong revenue potential for the medical center
• In turn, the outpatient clinic providers would also have hospital privileges
• It would also have integrated medical records with the main health system.

Step 4: Streamline & make parallel

Benefits of a Provider-Based Clinic Model
In this model, outpatient facilities can operate under the auspices of the larger medical entity.
• This reduces overhead for the outpatient clinic
• It allows for a separate facility fee to be billed – this holds strong revenue potential for the medical center
• In turn, the outpatient clinic providers would also have hospital privileges
• It would also have integrated medical records with the main health system.
Benefits of a Provider-Based Clinical Model

In this model, an outpatient facility operates as part of a larger hospital. This has several benefits:

- **Reduces overhead** for the outpatient clinic
- **Increases revenue** for the hospital, which can bill the outpatient clinic a “facility fee”
- **Provides hospital privileges** to outpatient doctors
- **Integrates medical records** at the clinic and the hospital.

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A provider-based clinic model dictates that outpatient facilities can operate under the auspices of the larger medical entity, which reduces overhead for the outpatient clinic while allowing for a separate facility fee — this holds strong revenue potential for the medical center; in turn, the outpatient clinic providers would also have hospital privileges and integrated medical records with the main health system.

**Provider-Based Clinical Model**

In this model, an outpatient facility operates as part of a larger hospital. This has several benefits:

- Reduces overhead for the outpatient clinic
- Increases revenue for the hospital, which can bill the outpatient clinic a “facility fee”
- Provides hospital privileges to outpatient doctors
- Integrates medical records at the clinic and the hospital.
To dos:

- Break sentences in half (or thirds!)
- Cut extraneous words
- Use bullets
- Pull text into headers, sidebars, pull quotes, cutlines
FERRET OUT FUNKY PHRASES

Watch for “nounification”

verb

noun

before

after
Take a verb

• Decide
• Manage
• Conclude
• Discuss
• Examine
• Consider

Turn it into a noun

• Decide
• Manage
• Conclude
• Discuss
• Examine
• Consider

• Decision
• Management
• Conclusion
• Discussion
• Examination
• Consideration
Add a bunch of other words

- Decide
- Manage
- Conclude
- Discuss
- Examine
- Consider

- Make a decision
- Provide the management of
- Come to a conclusion
- Have a discussion about
- Conduct an examination of
- Take into consideration

Nounification bloats readability

We have made a decision that we are going to conduct an examination of the mummy.

We decided to examine the mummy.
Nounification bloats readability

Tuesday, we will have a discussion about who will provide the management of future ACES webinars.

Tuesday, we will discuss who will manage future ACES webinars.

Rework noun phrases
• Underground mine worker

• Underground mine worker safety protection
• Underground mine worker safety protection procedures development

Secret tip:
Start at the end.
Add prepositions.

• Underground mine worker safety protection procedures development
• Underground mine worker safety protection procedures development

• Developing procedures to protect the safety
• Underground mine worker safety protection procedures development

• Developing procedures to protect the safety of workers in underground mines
In Appendix A, we share our latest tax reform proposals white paper from an accountant’s practical viewpoint.

Secret tip: Break the noun phrase in two.
In Appendix A, we share our latest tax reform proposals white paper from an accountant’s practical viewpoint.

In Appendix A, we share our latest white paper.

It discusses tax reform proposals from an accountant’s practical viewpoint.
• He said gesundheit
• He said gesundheit is a German expression for “god bless you.”

• He said that gesundheit
• He said that gesundheit is a German expression for “god bless you.”

Don’t keep the reader in suspense
Plaintiff's testimony

Plaintiff's testimony that he had never had a back injury
Plaintiff's testimony that he had never had a back injury and had never been treated by a doctor for a back ailment

Plaintiff's testimony that he had never had a back injury and had never been treated by a doctor for a back ailment before this workplace accident
Plaintiff's testimony that he had never had a back injury and had never been treated by a doctor for a back ailment before this workplace accident is suspect.
Plaintiff's testimony is suspect.

He states that he had never had a back injury and had never been treated by a doctor for a back ailment before this workplace accident.
Watch for sluggish constructions

“It is” constructions

It is preferable that the companies commit to a long-term partnership.

We suggest the companies commit to a long-term partnership.
“Provides” constructions

Dragonfly provides corporate writing and editing services to firms worldwide.

Dragonfly writes and edits for companies worldwide.

“Is intended to …” constructions

This publication is designed to introduce investors to our capabilities.

This publication introduces investors to our capabilities.
Throat-clearing

• It is important to remember that …
• A key aspect of this effort which should not be overlooked is …
• As such …
• It is our intention to …
• Just start your sentence!

Formal / “proper” language

• Thomas can be reached at 937-413-2619.
• Please be advised that the deadline has been changed to May 3.
• We regret to inform you that …
• We are in receipt of …
• You can reach Thomas at 937-413-2619.
• The deadline is now May 3.
• We are sorry that …
• We have received …
Padding

• In essence, the agency has two mutually supportive functions.

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

• The agency has two mutually supportive functions.

• Our artists have appeared in *Fast Company* and *Wired* magazines.

Jargon & bizspeak

• Forward initiative
• Harvesting efficiencies
• Mission-critical
• Seamless integration
• Rightsize, smartsize
• Core competencies
These constructions degrade readability

A critical factor which should not be overlooked is our experience and expertise developing holistic solutions for the Roswell base.

We have experience working at the Roswell base.

And turn readers off

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

We use industry-standard methods, while always pushing ourselves to try new tools.
“Bizspeak may seem like a convenient shorthand, but it suggests to readers that you’re on autopilot, thoughtlessly using boilerplate phrases that they’ve heard over and over.”


**To do:**

- Fix nounification & noun phrases
- Keep subject & verb close
- Eliminate sluggish constructions
- Cut jarbon & bizspeak
One big paragraph

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 1: Break it Up

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

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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.
Can you get the gist of the story from the heds?

**The Big Data Challenge**

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---

**To do:**

- Break up long paragraphs
- Add subheads to help with navigation and for “skimmers”
MEASURE

Microsoft Word
Run spellcheck

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Get readability stats

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Readability Statistics</th>
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<tr>
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Storytoolz

FREE AUTHOR RESOURCES

- Word Count Meters
- Readability
- Cliché Buster
- Example Meters
- Story Idea Generator
- Random Conflict Generator
- Half Title Generator
- Your Settings
### Readability Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What</th>
<th>Result</th>
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<tr>
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### Sentence Information

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Value</th>
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<td>6 (21%, 7 words or less)</td>
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<td>1 (4%, 22 words or more)</td>
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<td>15</td>
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<td>27 words long</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shortest sentence</td>
<td>1 word long</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Hemingway
correctness and consistency on every project

- Employing a large team of editors with years of experience handling medical and health care content and a fine understanding of different levels of edit
- Training our editors to work independently, with little to no “hand-holding” by the customer
- Ensuring that our editors master the Chicago Manual of Style and the AM4 Manual of Style—and can quickly learn a house style guide, such as PCORT’s
- Maintaining all project details—such as project specifications, milestones, and due dates—in our web-based project management system, Teamwork
- Communicating regularly with our customer points of contact to answer questions and revise project timelines and budgets as needed
- Ensuring that all deadlines and budgets are met, without exception—and that all work is done to the highest standards of quality

We’ve used this system for more than 10 years for health care clients worldwide. Their satisfaction is the measure of our success. Here are a few small but important details about us:
correctness and consistency on every project

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Secret method

Repeat
Measure (for baseline)
Measure (to see progress)
Edit

To do:

• Turn on MS Word Readability (free)
• Go to Storytoolz (free)
• Get Hemingway Editor ($19.99)
Readability is not a magic bullet

5th grade
Turtle have very frog in close hamburger love is.

12th grade
The last time I was home to see my mother we kissed exchanged pleasantries and unpleasantries pulled a warm comforting silence around us and read separate books

Mothers, by Nikki Giovanni
IN SUM

• Choose words wisely
• Shrink sentences
• Ferret out funky phrases
• Pare down paragraphs
• Measure, edit, measure again
• Use your judgement
THANK YOU!
Samantha Enslen
sam@dragonflyeditorial.com