Microsoft’s Word Readability Statistics

You can use readability statistics to track student growth in their writing or reading or use it to level material for readings, such as books and articles using the Microsoft Word word processor.

Microsoft Word will analyze the written material using the Flesch-Kincaid model and give you a grade level between 0-12 and reading ease between 0-100%.

To have MS Word complete a readability analysis of a document:

To get a display of readability statistics it is first necessary to turn on the readability function:

1. On the Tools menu, click Options, and then click the Spelling & Grammar tab.

2. Select the Check grammar with spelling check box.

3. Select the Show readability statistics check box, and then click OK.

4. Click Spelling and Grammar on the Standard toolbar.

When Word finishes checking spelling and grammar, it displays information about the reading level of the document. If you need to retain or copy this information you can to do a screen capture of the readability stats box and then paste it into another document (or just copy the information down by hand).

To copy the contents of an active window hold down the Alt while you press the Print Screen key. This will cause an image of the active window to be placed in the clipboard. Now switch to the document in which you want to place the Readability Statistics and then choose Edit from the menu and then Paste.
What is Flesch-Kincaid?

The Flesch-Kincaid grade formula is the US Department of Defense standard (DOD MIL-M-38784B). The Pentagon requires contractors to use it when they write technical manuals. They call it the Overall Reading Grade Level. The government also goes by the guidelines that good range is 6-10 (for the average public). This is the Flesch-Kincaid formula:

\[
\text{Grade Level} = \left( \frac{.39 \times \text{ASL}}{11.8 \times \text{ASW}} \right) - 15.59.
\]

where:
- \( \text{ASL} \) = average sentence length (\# of words / \# of sentences).
- \( \text{ASW} \) = average syllables per word (\# of syllables / \# of words).

Scientists have researched and found that we comprehend more and faster when the words and sentences are short and simple. While there are dozens of competing formulas, they are generally based on the same concepts.

The Flesch-Kincaid Reading Ease formula has been in use for over 50 years. It gives you a percent of ease from zero to 100 percent. In Microsoft WORD, the program will not show any reading grade level higher than 12. But, it does show the full range of reading ease scores all the way down to zero. A Microsoft Word document with a grade level of 12 and a Flesch-Kincaid Reading Ease of zero is hard for anyone to comprehend. The reading ease formula strongly favors short words. Here is the Reading Ease formula:

\[
\text{Reading Ease} = 206.835 - \left( 1.015 \times \text{ASL} \right) + \left( 0.846 \times \text{ASW} \times 100 \right)
\]

The Reading Ease rates the document's text on a 100-point scale; the higher the score, the easier it is to understand the document. For most standard documents, most people aim for a score of approximately 60% to 70%.
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Applications for using the Readability Statistics

- Track student’s work
  Collect the readability statistics for a student’s (or group of students) writing over time. Use the information to find out how the student is progressing and/or determine if he/she is achieving his/her target grade level.

- Using on-line newspapers
  Copy articles from on-line newspapers for students to read. First go to the newspaper site such as the Florida Times Union (www.jacksonville.com) or the New York Times (www.nytimes.com). There select an article, highlight the article’s content, select copy from the edit menu, switch to MS Word, and select paste from the edit menu. Now run a spell check/readability analysis. You can collect a bank of articles that you have already leveled to present to students for progression. Using this method you can also create a bank of materials similar to the FCAT material for student practice in analysis. *(In an analysis of FCAT 4th reading material, it was found that F-K analyzed the material to be at the 6th grade level.)*

- Using on-line libraries
  Copy books from on-line libraries for students to read, such as from the Internet Public Library (www.ipl.org) or Project Gutenberg (promo.net/pg). Go to the library site, select an online book or article, save the book as text and open it in MS Word, and then run the readability statistics. Or you can highlight the book or article, select copy from the edit menu, switch to MS Word, and select paste from the edit menu. Now run a spell check/readability analysis. You can collect a bank of books and articles that you have already leveled to present to students for progression.

- Leveling books
  Copy selected passages from a book to get an approximate grade level of the material.