

Readability Tools

The transition process can be complicated for family members. This is especially true if they are not familiar with transition-specific terminology. It is helpful to provide family members with resources in easy-to-understand language that explains the transition process. We have included some helpful resources on how to make resources accessible (readable) to all families.

What is Readability?

Readability is a measure of how easy a piece of text is to read and comprehend. A test of readability is usually based on the complexity and familiarity of a particular text. To determine the readability of a text, many readability tests look at the number of syllables and words in the text to determine a readability score. Most scores come in the form of a grade level or a designated scale. For example, more multi-syllabic words and more words per sentence often result in a higher readability score and therefore, a higher grade level.

When developing resources to share with families, you will want to assess the readability of the text you are going to share using a few different tests. This way, you can get a true sense of a text's readability. To ensure your reading materials are accessible to a range of families, we suggest all resources remain at or below a 5th grade reading level.

Resources

Below you will find some free resources you can use to check the readability of a text:

- **Microsoft Office Outlook and Word:**

Microsoft Office Outlook and Word will check your document's readability for you. To enable this option, click the "Review" option on your toolbar. Next, select "Spelling & Grammar" and then "Options". Under the Grammar options, check the box for "Show readability statistics". Now when you use your spell check, you will be able to see your readability score.

- **WebFX Readability Test Tool:** <https://www.webfx.com/tools/read-able/>

On this website, you can copy and paste a website URL or directly input the text to determine its readability. This tool will test between 150-3000 words.

- **OnlineUtility.org:** https://www.online-utility.org/english/readability_test_and_improve.jsp

On this website, you can copy and paste or directly input the text to access your readability score.



Types of Readability Tests and Descriptions

There are several different readability terms that you may encounter. To understand what each test measures, refer to the terms below.

- **Cloze Test:** This method removes 25-50 selected words from a sample of text, asks readers to fill in the missing words, and measures what percentage of removed words readers picked. Ideally you want the score to be 60% or higher.
- **Flesch Reading Ease:** The Flesch Reading Ease score utilizes a mathematical formula to measure the average number of syllables per word and the average number of words per sentence for a 100-word block of text. The results are measured on a scale of 0-100 where 0 is the hardest and 100 is the easiest.
- **Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level:** Like the Flesch Reading Ease score, this is a mathematical formula that measures syllables and sentence length. However, the results are given as an academic grade level, from 0-12.
- **Gunning Fog Index:** The Gunning Fog Index considers “complex” words with three or more syllables as part of its mathematical formula for readability. It gives a grade-level score from 1-unlimited. The ideal target score is 7 or 8.
- **Coleman Liau Index:** Unlike most other readability tests, the Coleman Liau Index relies on number of characters, instead of syllables per word, for calculation. It returns a grade-level score from 1-12.
- **SMOG Index:** This index utilizes a mathematical formula measuring how many words have three or more syllables within 30 sentences in the passage (10 from the beginning, middle, and end of text). The formula results in a reading grade level.
- **Automated Readability Index:** The Automated Readability Index (ARI) mathematical formula has two variables: number of letters per word and words per sentence. The formula results in a reading grade level.
- **Fry Graph Readability Formula:** This method pulls three random 100-word passages from a text and looks at the average number of syllables and average number of sentences in each section. It plots the scores on a Fry Graph to find the grade level of the text.

For more information on these readability test terms, check out https://readabilityformulas.com/search/pages/Readability_Formulas/

Tips for Changing the Readability of a Text

You may be thinking, “What happens if I test the readability of a text I am going to share with families, and it is above a 5th grade reading level?” Below, we share a few suggestions on how you can adjust your text to make your materials more accessible.



- **Simplify the language.** When sharing materials with families, it's not important to use highly academic language. In fact, we would discourage using vocabulary words that families don't understand. Keep all language simple and clear whenever possible
- **Reduce the number of complex and compound sentences.** Whenever possible, break apart sentences into unique, simple sentences. Avoid lists and conjunctions when possible.

Let's look at an example. Consider this text:

- Transition is the process by which students, their families, and their teachers think about and plan for the student's life after high school. The transition planning process should enable the student to move successfully from high school to postsecondary education and training, employment, independent living, and community participation based on the student's preferences, interests, needs, and strengths. **(Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level: 16.8)**

Given the high grade-level score (16.8), we would need to simplify this text before sharing it with families. Here is one way you could preserve the message while making it more readable:

- Transition is a time when students, families, and teachers plan for a student's life after high school. Planning for the future should include thinking about continued education or a job. Will the student go to college? Or does the student want to work right away? Planning for the future should include thinking about where the student will live. Will the student live alone? With a roommate? Maybe at home with family? Planning for the future should also include thinking about how the student will participate in their community. Will the student join a sports club? Does the student want to join a volunteer group? When planning, students, families, and teachers should consider what the student likes and wants, what they need to be successful, and what they are good at. **(Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level: 5.8)**

There is no one right way to simplify text. Use your best judgement to make sure the information you are trying to share is preserved and rely on the range of readability tests to give you feedback about how difficult your text is to understand.

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