

A Reading Level Reality Check

This is the last issue in a four-part series on writing more clearly. Just to recap:

Part 1 – To Write More Clearly, First Focus on the Words. Whenever possible, substitute multisyllabic words for shorter words.

Part 2 – The Art of Writing One-Breath Sentences. Break up long sentences into shorter ones.

Part 3 – Long Paragraphs: The Scourge of Tired Eyes. Break up long paragraphs into shorter ones to increase white space and reader's attention span.

If you've followed the previous three suggestions as much as possible, then your writing should fall between an 8th grade and 11th grade reading level.

I often see recommendations that the reading level should be below the 8th grade level. That's fine for writing to general audiences, but if you write about technology, it's difficult to stay below the 8th grade level. Remember that this isn't a hard-and-fast rule – you'll need to adjust it according to the subject matter and your audience.

How to Run a Reading Level Check

If you use Microsoft Word® for your word-processing program, a quick way to check the reading level of your writing is to make sure that Word displays the reading level after a spell check. (You are running a spell check, aren't you?)

To do this, make the following selections in Word:

Tools | Options | Spelling & Grammar | Show readability stats checkbox

How Word Calculates Reading Level

Microsoft Word calculates reading levels with formulas that use the "average number of syllables per word" and "average sentence length." The fewer syllables the words have and the shorter the sentences, the lower your reading level score. By being aware of this basic scoring formula, you can make changes in your writing to lower the reading level.

Here's an example:

| BEFORE – Grade level 26.8 | AFTER -- Grade level 6.6 |
|---|---|
| ABX's unparalleled customized design capability, software development experience, and integration technologies, together with Headley Service's project management expertise and achievements, allow a range of powerful development opportunities. | ABX helps clients determine their software needs. Then we use our strong design and development experience to make it a reality. Our partner, Headley Services, manages the software project from start to finish. The result? Your software meets requirements and is completed on time. |

Remember, reading should feel effortless for your prospects and clients. If you communicate your point clearly and simply, you'll set your company apart from your competitors. And the next time a prospect needs your service or products, your company will be the first one they think of.

I hope this information was helpful. If you enjoyed reading it, please consider passing it on to a friend or colleague.

Regards,



Mary

P.S. If you'd like to receive this 4-part series on writing clearly as a single PDF article, email me at maryms@5starwriting.com.

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"Clear and concise writing for the software and manufacturing industries."

If you have a writing project coming up, I'd love to talk to you about it. Please contact me for a complimentary 30-minute consultation.

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