

# Assessing Readability

Consumers are often asked to read information related to their health issue and to read and fill in forms. Health professionals need to be conscientious about using written information that is easy to read for consumers of different literacy levels. There are different ways to assess readability. Two common ways that can be used together are (1) consumer feedback and (2) a readability formula. It is important not to just rely on using a readability formula to assess readability. Asking consumers is the most reliable way to know that consumers can understand the information. This is an important step in quality control and improving health literacy.

## Consumer Feedback

Ask consumers of diverse backgrounds to evaluate forms or other written information (including written information that you did not develop). Consider the following questions:

- > Are there any words or sections that are hard to read or understand?
- > Is there anything you find offensive?
- > What information do you find helpful?
- > What information isn't helpful?
- > Is there anything missing, that you would like included?

## Readability Formula

Readability formula assesses written information for complexity, grade level, and multi-syllable words. There are many different readability formulas. Reading age is dependent on many different factors, and needs to be relevant to the consumer group for whom the information is being written. The standard is usually grade 8 reading level.

The most accessible formula is available on Microsoft Word. This is the Flesch Kinkaid Reading Formula.

The SMOG Grading tool is a readability formula that does not require a computer to calculate the reading age. There are four steps in the process.

- > Step 1: count 10 consecutive sentences near the beginning, middle and end of the material (total of 30 sentences). A sentence is any list of words ending in a full stop, question mark or exclamation mark.
- > Step 2: count every word of three or more syllables in the 30 sentences. Count repetitions of words.
- > Step 3: Obtain the nearest square root of the number of three or more syllable words.
- > Step 4: Add three to the square root. This gives you the SMOG Grade

For example:

- > Step 1: 10 sentences beginning, middle and end (= 30 sentences)
  - > Step 2: 21 words with three or more syllables.  
28 words with three or more syllables.  
23 words with three or more syllables
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- Total 72
- > Step 3: Square root of 64 (nearest square root to 72) = 8
  - > Step 4: 8 + 3 = 11th grade

## For more information

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