

## Measuring Readability

The Fog Index is one of several methods devised to measure the readability of written texts. Readability is affected by:

- Average length of sentences (in words, not syllables.)
- The percentage of simple words.
- The percentage of verbs expressing forceful action.
- The proportion of familiar words.
- The proportion of abstract words.
- The percentage of personal references.
- The proportion of long and complex words.

The Fog Index is based on a count of the number of words of three or more syllables in a 100-word sample as well as the average sentence length. This checks readability.

To determine the reading difficulty of a passage:

1. Select samples of 100 words each.
2. Calculate average no. of words in sentences. (Count number of words in all and divide by number of complete sentences in sample.)
3. Now count number of words of three or more syllables, excluding proper nouns, compounds such as book-keeper and words ending in -es or ed.
4. Add average number of words per sentence and number of words of three syllables or more.
5. Multiply by 0.4 This formula tells you the Fog Index graded as follows:

### INDEX READING LEVEL

- less than 10 easy reading
- 11-12 top 20% of 12-year olds
- 13 top 20% of 16-year olds
- 14-16 First-year university students
- 17 university graduate

You can apply the Fog Index to check if your text matches the readership it is intended.

For example: A memorandum to workers which contained an ultimatum about productivity was found to have an index of 17. Difficult to read and hardly likely to achieve the co-operation management wanted.

In fact the only management-to-worker communication that fell below an index of 13 was the memo wishing them all a happy Christmas. This company is known for its poor industrial relations. Ineffective communication could be a major cause.

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Some recent American research discovered that:

- only 4% of readers understand a 27-word sentence
- but 75% of readers understand a 17-word sentence
- and 95% cent of readers understand an 8-word sentence

If we are not writing for readers, then for whom?

Make yourself understood: it is the first duty of the good writer.