

## Readability by the Numbers

Readability Statistics	
Counts	
Words	3158
Characters	19074
Paragraphs	159
Sentences	99
Averages	
Sentences per Paragraph	2.4
Words per Sentence	24.8
Characters per Word	5.6
Readability	
Passive Sentences	13%
Flesch Reading Ease	19.4
Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level	16.4

## Readability Scales

***Sentences per Paragraph*** – not as important as ***Lines per Paragraph***, which should be no more than 6 per paragraph, preferably 4-5

***Words per Sentence*** – no more than 17/sentence preferably 13-15

***Passive Sentences*** – no more than 4%, preferably 0%

***Reading Ease*** – should be 50%, the higher the better. Less than 30% is unacceptable.

***Grade Level*** – Even funders deserve no more than 11<sup>th</sup> grade, preferably 9<sup>th</sup> grade – especially direct mail.

It's not that the good people who are reading your proposal can't read above a sophomore in high school level or that the serial comma is so important when it stands alone. However, collectively, all these things together cause three problems.

- The more difficult it is to read a document, the more difficult it is to remember its content. We need grant readers to remember all of the proposals details, so they can refute problems or answer questions from foundation trustees.
- The more difficult it is to read, the less likely the reader will actually read the proposal from cover to cover. If they don't read the whole document, there is a statistically better chance they won't fund the proposal.
- Longer sentences and longer paragraphs complicate content, even for people who are talented and patient. People who have a lot of reading to do, generally reduce automatically their reading ability by 5-7 grade levels. So if your readers are busy, they may only be reading at 9<sup>th</sup> grade reading level.

Just a note, People magazine and most other popular journals are written at 5<sup>th</sup> grade level. GRE tests are written at 8<sup>th</sup> grade level, and while it may not seem like it, IRS instructions are supposed to be written at 9<sup>th</sup> grade reading level.

- To help the reader go easily through the materials, we push for "reader rest stops", including
  - Two spaces at the end of a sentence
  - Use of the serial/oxford comma
  - Extensive use of bullet points (not numbered paragraphs, but bullet points)
  - Text boxes with quotes, data, or pullout quotes
  - Slightly different fonts and colors for headings, headers/footers, page #s
  - Reduced hyphenation
  - General no more than 6 lines per paragraph and no more than 15 words per sentence
  - I like to ***bold and italicize key phrases*** that will help the reader find key sections.



- Proposals and Letters of inquiry should have ragged right margins – more personal