Calculating the Reading Level of Your Essays

Microsoft Vista (2007)

The following directions are using Microsoft Word 2007. If you use another word processing program, you may need to adjust the directions.

1. Open Microsoft Word. Click on 'Review' located on the toolbar at the top of the page.
2. Click on "Spelling & Grammar" on the top left. The “Spelling & Grammar” box will pop up.
3. Click “Options” at the bottom of the box. A menu will pop up.
4. Click the option that reads “Show Readability Statistics.” Click OK.
5. Then continue having the “Spelling & Grammar” check your paper.
6. Upon completing the “Spelling & Grammar” check, you’ll see a menu. At the bottom of the menu, you’ll see “Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level.” This is the Reading or Grade Level at which you are writing.

Microsoft XP (2003)

The following directions are using Microsoft Word 2003. If you use a newer version of Microsoft Word, you may need to adjust the directions.

1. Open Microsoft Word. Click on 'Tools" located on the toolbar at the top of the page.
2. Scroll down to 'Options.'
3. Click on the 'Spelling & Grammar' tab.
4. At the bottom of the menu, click on 'Show Readability Statistics.' Click 'Ok.'
5. Exit out of 'Tools.'

6. Open the desired Microsoft Word document.
7. Click on the 'Spelling & Grammar' check (It's the ABC checkmark icon located at the top of the page.
8. Once you've completed the 'Spelling & Grammar' check, the 'Readability Statistics chart' will pop up. At the bottom of the chart, you'll see the "Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level."
9. Write this number down for the Reading or Grade Level that you are writing.
“What if I don’t have a computer with these programs (or no computer at all)?”

You can calculate this number manually (or without the aid of a computer). Select a sample of about 150 words from your essay. Once you’ve selected your sample text, use the following formula:

\[
.39 \left( \frac{\text{total number of words}}{\text{total number of sentences}} \right) + 11.8 \left( \frac{\text{total number of syllables}}{\text{total number of words}} \right) - 15.59 = \text{Reading Level}
\]

Example:
I selected two paragraphs (or 155 words) from my Personal Experience Essay assignment sheet. I calculated the following totals:

1. There were a total of 155 words.
2. There were 6 sentences.
3. And I calculated the following syllable count:
   
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Syllable Words</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 syllable</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 syllable</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 syllable</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 syllable</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 syllable</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

   
   \[105 \times 1 = 105\]
   \[37 \times 2 = 74\]
   \[10 \times 3 = 30\]
   \[0 \times 4 = 0\]
   \[1 \times 5 = 5\]

   
   \[214 \text{ syllables}\]

Using these three pieces of information (the total amount of words, the total number of sentences, and the total number of syllables), I can insert them into the formula and calculate the grade level of this piece of writing.

\[
.39 \left( \frac{155 \text{ words}}{6 \text{ sentences}} \right) + 11.8 \left( \frac{214 \text{ syllables}}{155 \text{ words}} \right) - 15.59 = \text{Reading Level}
\]

\[10.08 + 16.28 - 15.59 = \text{Reading Level}\]

\[26.36 - 15.59 = \text{Reading Level}\]

\[10.8 = \text{Reading Level}\]

When I used the computer to check the reading level for the same selection of text, it came to 11.1. So as you can see, the difference between 11.1 (using the computer) and 10.8 (using the formula) is only .3. The difference between the two is miniscule. So whether you use the computer or check it using this formula, you can calculate the approximate reading level of your writing.