

Test the readability of your document

Use the Flesch reading ease scale

This is considered one of the most accurate readability formulas and is based on word count, syllable count and sentence length. It is widely used in the US – and is a legal requirement in some states for financial documents, such as insurance policies.

Flesch score	Readability level
90-100	Very easy (easily understood by an average 11-year-old)
80-89	Easy
70-79	Fairly easy
60-69	Standard (easily understood by 13- to 15-year-olds)
50-59	Fairly difficult
30-49	Difficult
0-29	Very difficult / confusing (suitable for university graduates?)

The Flesch scale is easy to use as you can access it directly from the spell-check in MS Word (see the instructions below). Alternatively, use the Gunning Fog Index online test at www.online-utility.org/english/readability_test_and_improve.jsp

Like all readability tests, Flesch should be used with caution. Some everyday words have three or more syllables (such as calendar and wheelbarrow) and these will affect your readability score.

Reader's Digest magazine has a readability index of about 65, *Time* magazine scores about 52 and the *Harvard Law Review* has a general readability score in the 30s.

How to turn on the Flesch readability function in Microsoft Word

1. Click the **File** tab, and then click **Options**.
2. Click **Proofing**.
3. Under **When correcting spelling and grammar in Word**, make sure **Check grammar with spelling** is selected.
4. Select **Show readability statistics**.

When Word finishes checking the spelling and grammar, it displays information about the reading level of the document.