

Examining the Readability of Psychoeducational Reports

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Introduction

- Rudolph Flesch developed a formula for assessing plain English, or “readability”, in the early 1940s
 - The formula relied on word length rather than a list of words (Flesch, 1979)
- The Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level formula was developed in 1975 by J. Peter Kincaid. It adapted Flesch’s original formula to assess the difficulty of Navy technical manuals by providing a grade level evaluation of difficulty (Kincaid et al., 1975)

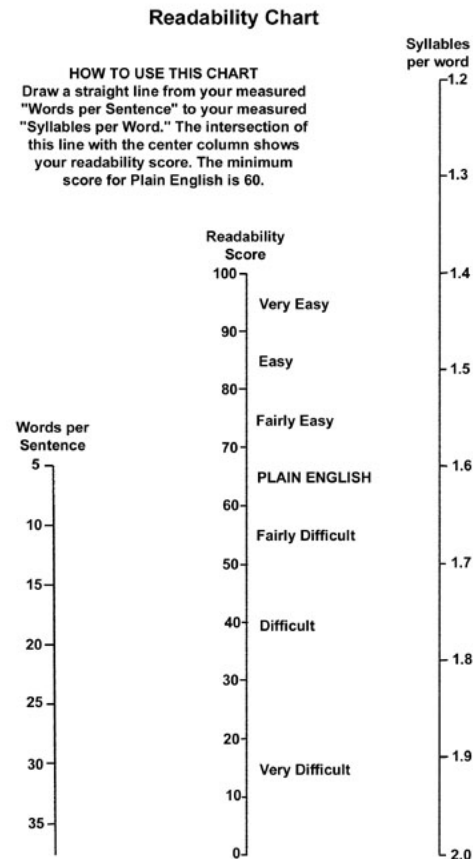
Flesch Reading Ease Score

Flesch Reading Ease

$$206.835 - 1.015 \left(\frac{\text{total words}}{\text{total sentences}} \right) - 84.6 \left(\frac{\text{total syllables}}{\text{total words}} \right)$$

(Flesch, 1979)

Flesch Readability Chart



(Flesch, 1979)

Introduction (Cont.)

- Readability in psychoeducational reports
 - Reports are often written at levels higher than the education level of their audience, particularly parents (Harvey, 1997; Harvey, 2005)
 - In general, documents should aim for a Flesch reading ease score between 60 and 70, which corresponds to an average 8th grade reading level (Digital Accessibility Services, 2026; Harvey, 1997)

Introduction (Cont.)

- Teachers and parents want the same things (Wiener, 1985; Wiener & Kohler, 1986):
 - Organize information by functional domain
 - Describe strengths and problems in clear behavioral terms
 - Describe the child's learning style fully
 - State specific and elaborate program recommendations

Research Question

- What is the Average Reading Level of a Group of Reports from a Connecticut High School's Psychoeducational Reports on High Schoolers Classified with ASD or ID Using the Flesch Reading Ease Assessor?

Method

- Reports were accessed from a high school in Connecticut
- Reports were written and digitally uploaded within the last two years
- Reports were written by school psychologists and/or school psychology interns
- Reports on students not classified with ID or ASD were excluded from analysis

Method, continued

- Included reports were divided into four sections (Background, Observations, Testing Results, and Summary)
- Report sections and the full reports were input into a program to calculate Flesch reading ease scores
- Average Flesch reading ease scores were calculated for each of the report sections and for the total report
- Qualitative descriptors were assigned to average scores based on the readability chart (Flesch, 1979)

Results

	Background (N = 8)	Observations (N = 6)	Testing Results (N = 8)	Summary (N = 8)	Full Report (N = 8)
Average Flesch Reading Ease Score	37.25	44.5	25.125	27.5	27.625
Standard Deviation	9.968	15.592	5.817	11.238	4.779
Minimum Value	27	29	16	8	20
Maximum Value	58	65	32	46	33
Qualitative Descriptor	College	College	College Grad	College Grad	College Grad

Discussion

- Results show Flesch reading ease scores well below recommended levels
- Results suggest different sections of reports are more difficult to write in plain language
 - Testing results had the lowest standard deviation and were firmly consolidated in the “College Grad” range

Implications for Practice

- Implementing specific frameworks to improve reports - e.g., the C.L.E.A.R. approach (Mastoras et al., 2011)
 - Child-centered perspective
 - Link referral questions, assessment results, and recommendations
 - Enable the reader with concrete recommendations
 - Address strengths as well as weaknesses
 - Readability

Implications for Practice (cont.)

- Recommendations for improving readability (Bejno et al., 2024; Fletcher et al., 2015)
 - Use an integrated structure based on functional domains rather than how information was obtained
 - Give verbal descriptions of results rather than numbers
 - Provide examples from the child's life to illustrate test results
 - Reduce psychological jargon and technical terms
 - Simplify sentences by limiting commas to one per sentence and avoiding complicated words

Limitations and Future Directions

- Limitations

- Small sample size
- Restricted range and scope

- Future Directions

- Expanding study to include more schools in Connecticut
- Expanding study to include students from other disability classifications beyond ASD and ID
- Expanding study to include school psychologist, teacher, and parents' perceptions on readability

References

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