

Use this "Secret Weapon" for More Successful Writing

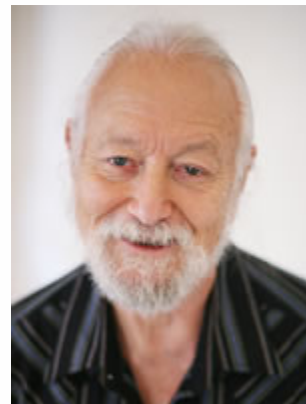
By Will Newman

An essential lesson we teach *Circle of Success* members is if you want to be a successful copywriter, you must "write tight."

What do we mean by "write tight?"

Tight copy uses the least number of words to get an idea across. It's easy to understand. It's conversational, natural sounding.

In short, tight copy is readable. Readability isn't the only quality of tight writing, but it's one of the most crucial. If your writing isn't easy to read, it gets tossed.



Will Newman

Science Proves: Simpler is Better

Scientific research shows our brains are hardwired to trust simpler writing. Simpler writing doesn't work better because it's easier to read. It works better because *it's more believable*.

New writers resist writing simply. They feel they have to dazzle readers with their brilliance. They want to sound impressive. So they use complex sentences and big words.

It's not their fault. We're educated to believe complexity shows intelligence.

This is far from true. Much great fiction embraces simplicity. Take a look at these familiar titles' estimated reading grade level (3.4 means 3rd grade, 4th month):

- *Of Mice and Men* — 3.4
- *Gone with the Wind* — 7.0
- *To Kill a Mockingbird* — 5.9
- *The Road* (2007 Pulitzer Prize winner) — 4.4

A 7th grader can easily read these great works!

Plague of the Black Debt, one of the most successful book-a-logs in direct marketing, mailed 14 million pieces ... generating over \$7 million revenues.

Master Copywriter Lee Euler covered a complex subject without making his writing complex. His writing averaged 6.8.

A Simple Tool to Hone in on Readability

Copywriting succeeds when it's believable. Not believable and it won't get read.

So wouldn't it be nice if you had a tool to measure readability?

There is: The Flesch-Kincaid (FK) Readability Test. FK is a computerized tool that rates reading ease, expressing it as a grade level.

An FK Grade Level of 5.0 or below is very easy to read. A rating of 10.0 or above is very difficult to read. As a copywriter, you should shoot for FK between 5 and 8.

MS Word comes with the FK test built in to its grammar/spell checker. Check in Word's Help menu to find out how to turn it on.

If you're on a Mac and don't use Word, download the free software "Word Counter" from

<http://www.supermagnus.com/mac/index.html>. This small application gives the same information for any Mac word processor.

Understanding the Numbers

After running the spelling/grammar check in Word, a box pops up with three divisions: Counts, Averages, and Readability.

Some copywriters make the mistake of only looking at the Readability section. The numbers there tell you how easy or hard your copy is to read. But they don't tell you what's giving you a high score if you get one. So, you need to look at all the sections.

Counts

This section gives the number of words, characters, paragraphs, and sentences in your document.

Averages

This heart of your readability stats tells the number of sentences per paragraph, words per sentence, and characters per word.

The more characters per word, the longer the word, the harder your copy is to read.

The more words per sentence, the more complicated your sentences are ... and harder to understand.

The more sentences per paragraph, the denser your copy looks ... and the more uninviting to read.

Readability

The bottom section gives Flesch Reading Ease (ignore this), and Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level — the important number.

Warning: FK is important, but it's *only* a tool. The most important part of "readability" is this. Does your writing hit your prospect's core complex and make him want to act?

Copy with FK 5.9 that doesn't do that fails as quickly as one with an FK of 13.2.

In future issues, we'll look at lowering FK and making your copy more compelling.

My FK here? 6.4.

Published: November 2, 2016

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5 Responses to "Use this "Secret Weapon" for More Successful Writing"

What would the readability need to be around if this is B2B copywriting? I feel like this post is mostly focuses on B2C copy.

scrogers – over a year ago

Great question, Scrogers.

Readability of writing applies to ALL writing, B2C, B2B, fiction, and effective persuasive writing. Always shoot for 8th grade or less.

Thank you for asking.

Good luck, best wishes, and much success, Will

Will Newman – over a year ago

I believe that simple is better than complex. It is good to be concise and clear. For example, when I was taking Basic Cell Biology there were some articles and pictures that were complicated. The articles and pictures had to be interpreted and summarized in simpler terms. It is easier to understand sentences that are simple and short.

Victor Nkamany – over a year ago

I see the point in client's trusting the simpler writing of the 5.0 of the FK test. I'm used to technical writing in my old job as an engineer, and have realized I need to change my technique a bit. The article was very useful.

Joe the Third – over a year ago

Hi Will

I have come to love the FK test. I do have a question though. It has been dumped in Word 2016. You see I bought a new computer which has Word 2016. The FK readability is still attached, but it no longer has the rating for passive sentences. I am not too stressed because I still have my old laptop with Word 2010 which has it. The laptop is slow though.

Is there another alternative? Somewhere online that still has the passive rating included?

[FROM WILL: I'm not sure if you're using Word for PC or Mac. But I just updated my Word 2016 for Mac and not only is the FK there, it includes the once-dropped Passive Sentence data. Contact AWAI's member services if you need to get in touch with me for further information.]

Lorie – over a year ago

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