

Appendix B

How to Use the S.M.O.G.

(Simple Measure of Gobbledegook)
Readability Formula

If the text has 30 or more sentences:

1. Count off 30 sentences within the document: 10 consecutive sentences at the beginning, in the middle, and near the end of the text. Do not include titles and headings.
2. Mark all polysyllabic words (words with three or more syllables) in the 30-sentence sample.
3. Count the total number of polysyllabic words.
4. Find the nearest square root of this total.
5. Add a constant of three to the square root. This gives you the reading level a person must have to understand the text.

If the text has less than 30 sentences:

1. Count all polysyllabic words in the text.
2. Count the number of sentences in the text.
3. Find the average number of polysyllabic words per sentence:
average = $\frac{\text{Total \# of polysyllabic words}}{\text{Total \# of sentences}}$
4. Subtract the total number of sentences from 30 and multiply the remainder by the average number of polysyllabic words per sentence.
5. Add this figure to the total number of polysyllabic words.
6. Find the square root and add the constant of 3. This gives you the reading level a person must have to understand the text.

Additional Guidelines for Using the S.M.O.G.

- Hyphenated words are considered one word.
- Numbers that are in numeric form should be pronounced to determine if they are polysyllabic. (Example: 337 has 8 syllables.)
- Proper nouns, if polysyllabic, should be counted too.
- Abbreviation should be read as unabbreviated to determine if they are polysyllabic. (Example: ON, for Ontario, has four syllables.)
- Include the repetitions of the same word, no matter how often it is used.
- The grade level is accurate to +/- 1.5 grades.

Adapted from *Clear Lines: How to Compose and Design Clear Language Documents for the Workplace*,
Frontier College, 1991