**Readability of Informed Consent Forms**

**Readability** is the ease with which text can be read. The WOU IRB recommends that the reading level of informed consent documents should be no higher than an 8th grade level. The IRB recognizes that some consent forms are of such a technical nature that it may not be possible to keep to an 8th grade reading level. However, we encourage researchers to consider primary factors involved in readability including: vocabulary, sentence length and structure, amount of information, page design and formatting, and logical order.

**Informed Consent Readability** is about making sure research participants understand what they are agreeing to when consenting to a study. Undoubtedly, informed consent readability strategies and practices should be responsive to the populations of participants they target. In general we suggest researchers consider these four principles of plain language:

1. Use terms your audience can easily understand
2. Write in a conversational style as if you were speaking
3. Organize & filter content with your readers’ needs in mind
4. Format your document so that it looks easy to read, approachable

**WOU IRB now requires that your IRB application include a** Flesch-Kincaid Grade level score for your consent form(s) within Submittable. It is important to acknowledge the difficulty of the reading level of your consent forms so as to ensure participants understand the meaning of participation in the study. We anticipate that many authors will make the suggested small but powerful adjustments put forth in the **readability resource link provided**. However, the IRB reserves the option to request that researchers make additional attempts to lower the Flesch-Kincaid Grade level if it is warranted for the target population.

**WOU IRB Readability Resources**

# **The Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level score**

* Quite popular in readability literature
* Roughly the same algorithm as the Flesch Reading Ease,  
  but translated to a grade level score
* Scores greater than 12th grade are college level

We encourage researchers to consider primary factors involved in readability including: vocabulary, sentence length and structure, amount of information, page design and formatting, logical order, and the degree to which content is meaningful. **There are a number of quality outside resources WOU Researchers can utilize to conceptualize and improve the readability of their consent forms. We suggest:**

* [www.healthcommunications.org/resources/scorecard.pdf](http://www.healthcommunications.org/resources/scorecard.pdf) PDF Icon
* Rates seven design elements that affect readability
* One piece of a comprehensive toolkit, “Improving Readability by Design.” [www.healthcommunications.org/improving-readability-by-design.php](http://www.healthcommunications.org/improving-readability-by-design.php)
* Program for Readability In Science & Medicine Toolkit on Informed Consent <https://prism.kpwashingtonresearch.org/documents/PRISMReadabilityToolkit_ThirdEdv6_062210.pdf>
* Suggested Template Lanugage [https://prism.kpwashingtonresearch.org/documents/PRISM\_template\_language.p](https://prism.kpwashingtonresearch.org/documents/PRISM_template_language.pdf)
* Suggested Alternative Word List: [f](https://prism.kpwashingtonresearch.org/documents/PRISM_template_language.pdf)<https://prism.kpwashingtonresearch.org/documents/PRISM_alternative_word_list.pdf>

**To test the level and clarity of the consent form, we suggest that you:**

**a) read the form out loud to colleagues/staff and test it on a target audience; and**

**b) use the word processing tool (Flesch Reading Ease; Flesch-Kincade Grade Level) available to check grade level.**

**You can find the Flesch-Kincaid Grade level in Microsoft Word by:**

1. Go to File > Options.
2. In the Proofing tab, check the following options:
3. Click OK.
4. Click to Review > Spelling & Grammar to check your document for spelling or grammatical errors and also see the readability level of your document.

**You can copy and paste your google doc text into a word doc and repeat prior steps.**

**You can get the Flesch-Kincaid Grade level in Google Docs** by installing the ProWritingAid Add-on:

1. Within Google Docs > Add-ons
2. Click Get add-ons
3. Search ProWritingAid (beta)
4. Click the ProWritingAid (beta) icon
5. Click the “install” button
6. Click “continue” in the ready to install pop up window
7. Select the google account you’d like to add the readability score feature in the “Choose an account to continue to ProWritingAid” pop up window
8. Click “allow” in the “ProWritingAid wants to access your Google Account” pop up window
9. Click “done” and close the “ProWritingAid (beta) has been installed!” pop up window
10. Back in your google docs > Add-ons
11. Click ProWritingAid (beta) > summary report
12. Scroll down to the fourth row of data and collect the Flesch-Kincaid Grade level from the Readability Measures section, under Grade Level Measures

The Flesch-Kincade grade level scores are popular in readability literature albeit not 100% accurate. It uses a formula derived primarily from word and sentence length