

PLAIN  
WORDS

Enter  
→

## Is your writing foggy?

One of a series of free  
articles from Plain Words



## Is Your Writing Foggy?

Gunning's Fog Index is easy to remember and simple to apply and has proven over 80% effective in predicting the difficulty of a piece of writing.

This is how you calculate the Fog Index for a given passage:



### 1. Find the average length of sentences.

Divide the total number of words by the number of sentences.

So, if the passage has 221 words and 14 complete sentences, the average sentence length is approximately 16 words.

### 2. Work out the percentage of words with more than two syllables.

Divide the number of words with more than two syllables by the total number of words in the passage.

For example, if the same passage has 19 polysyllabic words (i.e. words of more than two syllables), then the percentage (19 divided by 221, multiplied by 100) is 8%.

Do not include those words that are made up of shorter, easy words and do not count as polysyllabic words, such as 'beekeeper' or 'proofreader'. Also discount verbs that become polysyllabic by adding '-ed' or '-es' (like 'kidnapped' or 'trespasses').



### 3. Add the results of (1) and (2).

Taking the above example,  $16 + 8 = 24$ .

### 4. Multiply the result of step (3) by 0.4.

$24 \times 0.4 = 9.6$ .

The result is the educational grade of reading skill that the passage requires to be easily understood. The American grading system is based on the number of years of schooling after kindergarten. So, our example would correspond to 10th grade reading ability which is high school sophomore level, aged 15-16 years.

Using the Gunning Fog Index, TIME magazine scores 11, the Reader's Digest scores 9 and a comic book scores 6. It's a nice, easy and generally reliable test that you may wish to apply to your own writing.

