

5.3 Readability

Can your students read the textbook you have chosen for them?

Readability is concerned with the

- interest and motivation of the reader;
- legibility of print and images;
- reading level of the text.

Differentiation attempts to match learning and instruction with the interest and motivation of the students. A first step in this process is to ensure that students can access written elements of learning activities. Modern worksheets, textbooks and exam papers tend to have a high level of legibility. However, it is the reading level of written text that commonly prevents students from accessing learning activities.

There are a number of tests which you can apply to estimate the reading level of textbooks, such as Gunning 'FOG' Readability Test, Flesch-Kincaid Formula or the McLaughlin 'SMOG' Formula.

It is easy to check the readability of worksheets, handouts or tests that you prepare yourself using Microsoft Word because it can apply the Flesch-Kincaid Formula for you. When you are finished typing your document, click on the **Tools** menu, select **Options**, and then click the **Spelling & Grammar** tab. Select the **Check grammar with spelling** check box. Select the **Show readability statistics** check box, and then click **OK**.

To check the readability of a document, click on the **Tools** menu and select **Spelling and Grammar**. When Microsoft Word finishes checking spelling and grammar, it displays information about the reading level of the document.

To convert the grade levels provided by this test to the reading age add five. Therefore, a text with a Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level of 8.1 has a reading level of 13.1 years of age.

In most mixed-ability classes, the reading age varies considerably. A general rule of thumb is that the reading age of a class of 13 year olds can vary from 9 years to 17 years. It may be difficult to choose a textbook with a suitable reading age for your class, so it is very important that all other written materials (worksheets etc.) have a suitable reading age particularly if you want your students to use the text independently.

Science is a technical subject with many words and terms that raise the reading level. Therefore, it is important that sentences are kept short using plain English to counteract the difficulty of the scientific terms.

The worksheets used in this resource pack have reading ages (calculated using the Flesch-Kincaid Formula in Microsoft Word) of 8.8 years to 12.6 years.