

Clarify

User's manual

20 Rules that will fix 80%
of your grammar mistakes!

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Table of Contents

Introduction	4
General rules for Grace and Clarity.....	5
1) Consistent spelling	5
2) Curiosity	5
3) Sentence stress part.....	5
4) Tenses.....	6
Manual Correcting.....	8
Clarify Comments.....	8
Rule explanations.....	10
Rule1 Double negatives and the word “not”.....	10
Rule2 Sexists writing	11
Rule3 Long sentences 40 word limit.....	11
Rule4 Rule “It” at the start of a sentence	11
Rule5 Rule about “those”, “these” and “they”	12
Rule6 Use of the apostrophe	12
Rule7 Writing out numbers.	12
Rule8 Verbs in the first five words.	13
Rule9 Tautology.....	15
Rule10 Check awkward phrases	17
Rule11 Meaningless word	20
Rule12 Replace long phrases with shorter ones for clearer reading.	22
Rule13 Extended words -ate and -ion.....	24
Rule14 Nominalisation verbs ending with ing, ion or ive.....	24

Rule15 Prepositional phrases vs compound nouns	26
Rule16 Prepositions.....	27
Rule17 Passive voice, reword in active voice.	28
Rule18 Frequent mistakes	29
Rule19 Parallelism.....	32
Rule20 Under construction	32
References.....	33
Appendix A.....	34
Flesch Reading Ease Score	34

Introduction

The aim is to write highly cited publications.

These rules aim to make the document as clear as possible for the reader. Several books have explained dealt with the subject of writing with style, clarity, and grace. The classic “The Elements of Style” by William Strunk (1920) has been reprinted many times and is still a best seller. The more recent title “Style: The Basics of Clarity and Grace” by Williams and Colomb (2012) is in its 4th edition.

This manual describes the 20 Rules for writing academic and business documents with clarity and grace, to make them easier to read and understand. Editors of high impact scientific journals prefer such language because it requires less space in the journal to convey the message. It also shows respect for your readers, who usually are busy people. Note that masters and thesis examiners are often peer reviewers for academic journals. Hence, they expect the same high level of writing in your thesis, as in their academic journals.

General rules for Grace and Clarity

Read about the Flesch Reading Ease score, on the last page and make a note the ease score of your writing before you start revising. Make the corrections indicated in the comments of your document and recheck the ease score. It should increase, making your writing easier to understand.

Keep these four points in mind as you start editing your work.

1) Consistent spelling

You need to set your MSWord to either British or American grammar. Both are correct, but you need to be consistent. The choice of British or American depends on your intended readers. Journal authors specify their preference.

2) Curiosity

To liven up your writing, use as many curiosity-generating words as possible. Curiosity-generating words include the following:

after, although, as long as, as opposed to, as soon as, assuming that, because, before, but, caveats, condition, despite the fact, doubt, during which, even if, even though, gamble, given that, granting, however, if, in contrast, in place of, in preference to, in the meantime, in view of the fact, instead of, interval, later, meanwhile, once, only if, period, provided that, providing, proviso, question mark, rather than, rider, seeing as, since, subsequently, then, though, uncertainty, unknown quantity, unknown, when, whereas, while
--

These words will keep the reader's interest, and the reader will remember your work. Without curiosity-generating words, your writing will be boring to the reader.

3) Sentence stress part

The stress part of a sentence is the end part. When rewording your sentences, especially when moving the verb to the beginning of the sentence, think about the message that this sentence must convey. Then reword in such a way, that the message is at the end of the sentence.

4) Tenses

“Proper use of tenses in scientific documents derives from scientific ethics, i.e.; we owe it to the scientific community to declare, by choice of tense, whether we report established facts or new, previously unpublished data.” Rogers p41.

When a scientific paper has been published in a primary journal (i.e., a journal that publishes only original data), the information communicated becomes “established knowledge”. Hence, use present tense to describe published work.

Example

Established knowledge: Malaria is highly prevalent in tropical countries.

New finding: Inhibition of the enzyme resulted in higher levels of the prodrug.

When attributing a fact to a reference, you may use the past tense to the established knowledge.

Example. Smith (5) showed that the cure rate in infected patients is 15%.

It is also correct to use the present tense to refer to a Figure or table of new findings in your report.

Example. Figure 1 indicates that red mites are bigger than green mites.

Table Introduction 1.1. Rules for applying the appropriate tense.

Context or section	Appropriate tense
Established knowledge, previous results etc.	Present tense
Methods, materials used, and results	Past tense
Description of tables and figures	Present tense, e.g. Table 5 shows..., Figure 2 illustrates...
Attribution	Past tense, e.g. Jones et al. reported that... Davies found...

Table Introduction 1.2. Tenses typically occurring in a paper or report.

Section	Predominant tense
Abstract/Summary	Past
Introduction	Mostly present tense (established facts, previously published data)
Materials/Methods	Past
Results	Past
Discussion/Conclusions	Mixture of past and present, sometimes future tense

Manual Correcting

Read your writing for one rule at a time. Some mistakes are easy to find with the Home/Editing/Find command (Cntrl+F), e.g. the word “not”. Rephrase your sentence as explained for each rule below. To check the number of words in a sentence, select the sentence with the mouse and then select Review/Proofing/Word count or see:

<https://support.office.com/en-us/article/show-word-count-3c9e6a11-a04d-43b4-977c-563a0e0d5da3>

Clarify Comments

How to correct the comments inserted by Clarify

Open The MSWord.docx file with the Clarify comments. You will probably be surprised to see the huge number of comments. One way of dealing with these comments is the following.

- 1) On the top menu of MSWord, click Review/Show Markup/Specific people. Now unselect “All reviewers.” Now no comments will show.
- 2) Follow the same clicks and select one of the 20 rules, e.g “Rule02-his/her” to show all the violations of this rule.
- 3) On the top menu, click Review and in the Comments tab, click “Next” to go to the next comment in your file.

Do not change any wording in text that you quote from another source, or from the titles of references.

- 4) Refresh your memory about “Rule02-his/her” and then edit your sentences to minimize the violations of this rule, as far as possible. It is highly unlikely that you will be able to correct all the violations, of all the rules, but correct as many as you can. Your text will be easier for the reader to appreciate

5) Once you have corrected as many of the “Rule02-his/her” violations, click on Review and in the Comments tab, click the down arrow under “Delete.” Then click on “Delete All Comments Shown” to delete all the comments for this rule.

6) Repeat steps 2 – 5 for each Rule01 – Rule20, until you have corrected as many violations as possible. Then follow the steps in 5) and click on “Delete All Comments in Document” to clear all the comments.

I would appreciate your comments/suggestions on info@ThesisEditor.co.za

Kind regards,

Dr A Apostolides

Rule explanations

Rule1 Double negatives and the word “not”

Double negatives and the word “not” make the reading foggy. Rephrase the sentence with a positive word.

See Rogers p80, Peat p255 and Holm p21.

Table Rule 1. Replace the double negative and “not” with a clearer positive.

Number	Foggy double negative	Clearer positive
1	Not false	True
2	Not infrequently	Frequently
3	Not harmful	Safe
4	Did not succeed	Failed
5	Did not remember	Forgot
6	Not important	Unimportant
7	Did not pay attention	Ignored
8	Does not have	Lacks

Examples:

"It is not unusual for scientists to hypothesise too readily." Revised as "Scientists hypothesise too readily."

"Although DNA sequencing was not unsuccessful, we decided to repeat it. Revised as "Although DNA sequencing was successful, we decided to repeat it."

"We did not find a statistical relationship between weight and diet." This sentence is fuzzy because it may be interpreted in two ways.

Firstly, you did not look for such a relationship.

Secondly, you did look but the relationship was statistically insignificant."

Revise the sentence as follows.

"There was no significant relationship between weight and diet (p=0.8)."

Including the p-value can only be interpreted as the second possible meaning of the ambiguous sentence.

Rule2 Sexists writing

The words “he” or “she” are regarded as sexists and must be rephrased as “scientist” or “authors.”

See Rogers p90, Pear p235

The words his and hers must be replaced with a plural or he/she or she/he, but never with the clumsy s/he.

Examples:

"The doctor must refer his patient." Rephrase as "Doctors must refer their patients."

"A study nurse will determine your blood pressure." Rephrase as "He/she will inform the doctor of your results."

Rule3 Long sentences 40 word limit

Break long sentences into shorter ones. As a rule, 40 words are a limit for scientific writing. Exclude the citations from the word count.

Rule4 Rule “It” at the start of a sentence

Sentences starting with the word “It” cause the reader to re-read the previous sentence, making the writing foggy. Rephrase the sentence. Peat et al. p234 and Young p112.

The “It” word must never be used to start a sentence because it causes the reader to rescan the previous sentence to discover the meaning of “It”.

Example:

“Lack of exercise is a specific indicator of high blood pressure. It is associated with breathlessness on exertion and long term heart disease.”

The “It” that starts the second sentence appears to refer to the “high blood pressure”, but it is referring to the lack of exercise.

Rephrase as “Breathlessness on exertion and long term heart disease are also associated with lack of exercise.”

Rule5 Rule about “those”, “these” and “they”

Rephrase sentences to avoid “those,” “these,” and “they” because these words may confuse the reader.

Example:

“Wild mites and those from culture can differ in colour.” Revised as “Wild type, and cultured mites can differ in colour.”

The first sentence is really confusing because mites cannot come from cultures. It probably means mites bred in the laboratory.

Rule6 Use of the apostrophe

Checks for an apostrophe in each word see Young p30

Example

Possessive singular is This boy's bag. Or at Peter's school. When the word ends in an s, e.g. Dickens, the possessive is Dickens's.

Possessive plural is Pretoria Boys' High School. Or The scientists' reunion.

Possessive pronouns never take an apostrophe. Its or theirs, NOT it's or their's."

Contractions also use the apostrophe. “It is a rainy day.” Can be written as “It’s a rainy day.”

Rule7 Writing out numbers.

Numbers in sentences see Young p 134.

Write out all numbers less than or equal to ten that refer to quantities. Some books also recommend that decades, e.g. twenty, thirty, two hundred etc. be written out. This rule applies only to quantities, e.g. two 5-gauge needles. Or three 9-volt batteries. Or 21 1-day old chicks. Or 21 1-day-old chicks. The words “two” and “three” refer to the number of needles and batteries respectively. The “5-“ and “9-“ refer to the type or model.

Sentences may not start with numbers, write the number out or rephrase the sentence. Example. 1 ml buffer was added. Rephrased as One ml buffer was added. Or buffer was added (1 ml).

Do not write Chapter one, or Figure two, or Table three etc. Write these as Chapter 1, or Figure 2, or Table 3.

Rule8 Verbs in the first five words.

Check for verbs after the 5th word in a sentence

Sentence structure should be “Subject-verb-object” e.g., “Peter kicks the ball”. When the verb appears near the end of the sentence, the writing becomes foggy. The reader often has to re-read the sentence to figure out who or what the verb is referring too.

Example

A study of 100 adolescents with diabetes receiving treatment in one of two managed care settings found that only 67% had sought professional care for their symptoms.

Rephrase as

A study found that of 100 adolescents with diabetes who received treatment in one of two managed care settings, only 67% had sought professional care for their symptoms.

Table Rule 8. Frequently used verbs.

abide, accelerate, accommodate, accompany, account, achieve, acquire, adapt, add, address, adjust, adopt, affect, alight, allow, alter, analyse, apply, argue, arise, arrange, assemble, assess, assist, associate, assume, attach, attempt, avoid, awake, be, bear, beat, become, begin, behold, bend, bet, bid, bind, bite, bleed, blow, break, breed, bring, broadcast, broaden, build, burn, burst, bust, buy, calculate, carry, cast, catch, categorise, cause, challenge, change, choose, claim, clap, classify, cling, clothe, collect, combine, come, compare, compensate, compute, concentrate, conclude, concur, conduct, confirm, connect, consider, consolidate, construct, contradict, contribute, control, convert, correlate, correspond, corroborate, cost, create, creep, cut, dare, deal, debate, decline, decrease, define, delay, demonstrate, derive, describe, design, detect, determine, develop, devise, dig, discard, discover, discuss, display, disprove, distribute, dive, divide, draw, dream, drink, drive, drop, dwell, eat, effect, elicit, eliminate, employ, enable, enhance, ensure, establish, estimate, evaluate, examine, exist, expand, expect, explain, explore, expose, extend, extract, facilitate, fall, feed, feel, fight, filter, find, fit, flee, fling, fly, focus, forbid, forecast, foresee, foretell, forget, forgive, formulate, forsake, forward, freeze, frostbite, generate, give, go, grind, grow, guarantee, handwrite, hang, hear, help, hide, hit, hold, hurt, identify, illustrate, immerse, implement, imply, improve, include, incorporate, increase, indicate, influence, inhibit, initiate, inlay, insert, install, interlay, interpret, introduce, invert, investigate, isolate, keep, kneel, knit, know, lay, lead, lean, leap, learn, leave, lend, lie, light, limit, link, locate, lose, maintain, manage, match, maximise, mean, measure, meet, melt, minimise, mirror, miscalculate, misjudge, mislead, mistake, misunderstand, miswed, model, modify, monitor, mow, neglect, note, observe, obtain, occur, offer, operate, optimise, originate, out, outline, outperform, overcome, overdraw, overhear, overlook, overtake, pay, peak, perform, permit, plot, point, position, precede, predict, prefer, prepare, present, preset, prevent, produce, propose, prove, provide, publish, purchase, put, quantify, quit, read, realise, recognise, recommend, record, reduce, refine, refute, regulate, reinforce, relate, remain, remove, repeat, report, represent, resolve, restrict, retain, reveal, review, revise, rid, ride, ring, rise, rive, run, sample, saw, say, score, see, seek, select, sell, send, separate, sew, shake, shave, shear, shed, shine, shoe, shoot, show, shrink, shut, simulate, sing, sink, sit, slay, sleep, slide, sling, slink, slit, smell, sneak, solve, soothsay, sow, speak, speed, spell, spend, spill, spin, spit, split, spoil, spread, spring, stabilise, stand, state, steal, stick, sting, stink, stride, strike, strip, strive, study, sublet, substitute, succeed, suggest, summarise, sunburn, support, swear, sweat, sweep, swell, swim, swing, take, teach, tear, tell, test, think, thrive, throw, thrust, track, transfer, tread, treat, trigger, undergo, understand, undertake, upset, use, utilise, validate, vary, verify, vex, wake, wear, weave, wed, weep, wet, win, wind, with, withdraw, withhold, withstand, wring, yield.

Rule9 Tautology

Tautology repeated or redundant words Rogers p81.

Tautology means using different words to say the same thing, or a series of self-reinforcing words, where one such word is enough.

Table Rule 9. Tautology. Replace the confusing phrase with the clear word.

Number	Confusing	Clear
1	adequate enough	adequate or enough
2	advance planning	planning
3	appear to be	appear
4	appears to be	appears
5	basic essentials	basics or essentials
6	basic fundamentals	basics or fundamentals
7	close proximity	proximity
8	consensus of opinion	consensus
9	cooperated together	cooperated
10	definite decision	decision
11	elongate in length	elongate
12	extremely minimal	minimal
13	first priority	priority
14	future prediction	prediction
15	increase in increments	increase
16	initial prototype	prototype
17	intra-dermal skin injection	intra-dermal injection
18	joint cooperation	cooperation
19	major breakthrough	breakthrough
20	most optimum	optimum

21	necessary requirement	requirement
22	optimum requirement	optimum
23	outside periphery	periphery
24	past history	past or history
25	rate of speed	speed
26	true facts	facts
27	usual rule	rule
28	true facts	facts
29	very unique	unique

Rule10 Check awkward phrases

Table 10. Awkward phrases. Replace the awkward phrase with a clear word.

Number	Awkward phrase	Clear word
1	a majority of	most
2	a number of	many
3	a sufficient amount of	enough
4	according to our data	we find
5	accordingly	therefore or so
6	after the conclusion of	after
7	all of the	all the
8	along the lines of	like or such as
9	are of the same opinion	agree
10	are of the same opinion	agree
11	as	because
12	as at	on
13	as is the case	as is true
14	as such	(space)
15	as well as	and
16	at such as	when
17	at the present time	now
18	at this point in time	now
19	based on the fact that	because
20	be deficient in	lack
21	be in a position to	can or be able
22	by a factor of two	double or twice
23	by means of	by
24	come to a conclusion	conclude
25	despite the fact that	although

26	due to the fact that	because
27	equally as well	as well or equally well
28	fewer in number	fewer
29	first of all	first
30	for the purpose of	to or for
31	for the reason that	because
32	for this reason	thus or therefore
33	give consideration to	consider or examine
34	happens to be	am or is or are
35	has been proved to be	is
36	have an effect on	affect
37	in a number of	several or many
38	in all cases	always
39	in case	if
40	in excess of	more than
41	in large measure	largely
42	in many cases	often
43	in most cases	usually
44	in my opinion	I think
45	in order to	to
46	in terms of	in
47	in the field of	in
48	in the near future	soon
49	in the order of	about or approximately
50	in view of the fact that	because or since
51	less frequent	rare
52	level	concentration
53	such that	: or - (use colon or dash)

54	the majority of	most
55	the purpose of this study	this study
56	to be	write active verb

Rule11 Meaningless word

These words are meaningless and should be deleted.

Table Rule 11. Delete these words and rephrase the sentence.

Number	Word
1	actually
2	actually
3	at all
4	basically
5	basically
6	carefully
7	certain
8	completely
9	easily
10	essential
11	extremely
12	fortunately
13	generally
14	generally
15	given
16	important
17	individual
18	kind of
19	particular
20	practically
21	quickly
22	quite
23	quite
24	really

25	really
26	remarkably
27	various
28	very
29	very
30	virtually

Rule12 Replace long phrases with shorter ones for clearer reading.

The shorter words improve the clarity of the message.

Table Rule 12. Replace the long phrases with shorter ones.

Number	Longer phrase	Shorter phrase or word
1	determine	assess or measure or investigate
2	detect	assess or measure or investigate
3	correlated	associated
4	due to the fact that	because
5	for the reason that	because
6	on account of	because
7	owing to the fact that	because
8	on the basis that	because
9	documentation	documents
10	taken into consideration	considered
11	dosage	dose
12	elucidate	explain
13	clarify	explain
14	functionality	function
15	in the event of	if or when
16	in the eventuality of	if or when
17	alleviate	lessen or ease
18	moderate	lessen or ease
19	methodology	methods
20	in close proximity to	near
21	at the present moment	now
22	at this point in time	now
23	the majority of	most

24	dyads	pairs
25	prioritise	rank
26	revealed	show or found
27	abuse	misuse
28	terminology	term
29	in order to	to
30	usage	use
31	utilise	use

Rule13 Extended words -ate and -ion

Words ending with -ate may be extended Latin and -ion French words. Rephrase with shorter Anglo-Saxon word.

Examples

Number	French	English
1	Abbreviation	Abbreviate
2	Extraction	Extract
3	Repetition	Repeat
4	Transcription	Transcribe
5		
6		
7		

Rule14 Nominalisation verbs ending with ing, ion or ive.

This is where verbs are turned into nouns. This makes the writing foggy. Schimel p152

Check a dictionary for word origin. My program finds each word that ends with either “ing”, “ion” or “ive” and searches the list of verbs to see if the part of the word before these syllables is in the list. If so, it is highlighted, for you to check if you can rephrase the sentence to use the direct verb, rather than the nominalisation.

Examples

Table Rule 14.1. Nominalisation of verbs

Number	Nominalisation	Verb
1	Abiding	Abide
2	Accelerating	Accelerate
3	Accommodation	Accommodate
4	Collective	Collect
5	Effective	Effect
6	Respective	Respect

Table Rule 14.2. Examples of French and Latin words with shorter Anglo-Saxon synonyms.

Number	Origin	Long foreign	Short English
1	French	attempt	try
2	French	consume	eat
3	French	duration	length or time
4	French	mortality	death
5	French	necessary	need
6	French	permit	let
7	French	utilise	use
8	Latin	demonstrate	show
9	Latin	donate	give
10	Latin	initiate	start
11	Latin	methodology	method

Example

This sentence is full of nominalisations.

Systematic infusion of fetal stem cells appears to be the most practical mode of administration; however, limited migration of cells to the target tissue may act as a constraint on its effectiveness.

Rephrased as

The most practical way to administer fetal stem cells is to infuse them systematically; however, if cells do not migrate to the target tissue, this will fail.

Rule15 Prepositional phrases vs compound nouns

Prepositional phrases vs compound nouns e.g. replace "source of water" with "water source"

Examples

"source of water" with "water source"

"cancer of the lung" with "lung cancer"

Table Rule 15. Prepositional phrases that may be replaced with compound nouns (two- or three-word phrases)

Number	Prepositional phrase	Compound noun
1	burning of fossil fuels	fossil fuels burning
2	cancer of the lung	lung cancer
3	distribution of resources	resource distribution
4	kinetics of enzymes	enzyme kinetics
5	source of water	water source
6	supply of nitrogen	nitrogen supply

The word "of" frequently indicates prepositional phrases and is highlighted.

Rule16 Prepositions

Ensure correct use of prepositions in, into, on, among, amongst, with, as, of"

Check the common meanings of prepositions (words that point us in a direction) according to the following table. Peat p237

Preposition	Meaning
In, into	Inclusion or position within defined limits, as in "We enrolled participants in our study."
On	Supported by or covering, as in "The equipment was on the bench."
Among, amongst	In the middle of or between, as in "There is honour among thieves." Remember to use "between" for two things and "among" for more than two things, unless referring to exact position or precise individual relationships for example, consensus guidelines between France, Germany and Italy.
With	Together with, as in, "This goes with that."
As	Used to express degree or manner, as in, "It is not as easy as you think."
Of	Indicates a relation, as in, "Many of the participants withdrew from the study."

Rule17 Passive voice, reword in active voice.

The following phrases usually indicate passive voice. Active voice is much easier to read. Rephrase the sentence.

Example

Passive voice = Object-verb-subject.

The pH was measured by him. Mistakes were made by them. The department was managed by Peter.

Active voice = Subject-verb-object.

He measured the pH. They made a mistake. Peter managed the department.

Table Rule 17. Phrases used in passive voice. Sentences must be rephrased.

Number	Phrase
1	could be
2	has been
3	may be
4	might be
5	must be
6	shall be
7	should be
8	will be
9	would be

Rule18 Frequent mistakes

This rule covers at least 18 grammar mistakes that are found in scientific writing.

Table Rule 18. Frequent mistakes.

Number	Single	Plural
1	Alga	Algae
2	Bacterium	Bacteria
3	Fungus	Fungi
4	Datum	Dara
5	Medium	Media
6	Nucleus	Nuclei
7	Analysis	Analyses
8	Focus	Foci
9	Formula	Formulae
10	Genus	Genera
11	Hypothesis	Hypotheses
12	Larva	Larvae
13	Parenthesis	Parentheses
14	Stimulus	Stimuli
15	Synthesis	syntheses

Alternate vs alternative

Alternate means things occurring in series.

Alternative means different choices.

Affect vs effect

Affect means feeling. E.g. the argument affected her.

Effect means something measurable. E.g. The argument affected her heart rate.

Compared to vs compared with

Compared to means comparing between different items. E.g. Trees are tall compared to dogs.

Compared with means comparing similar things. E.g. Male rats are heavier when compared with female rats.

Concentration vs level

Concentration refers to a known amount of something in a unit of another substance.

E.g. The concentration of the standard was 11 mg/L.

Level refers to position in a rank. E.g. Your cholesterol level is high.

Different from vs different than

Different from is the correct use. Something cannot be different than; this must be rephrased.

Disk vs disc

Disc refers to CD or DVD.

Disk refers to material between vertebrae.

Further vs farther

Further is an extension of time or degree.

Farther refers to distance.

Less vs fewer

Less is used to compare a quantity or size that cannot be counted individually.

Fewer is used to compare numbers or units that can be counted.

Of vs for

Use of with a verb. Titration of an acid.

Use for with a noun. The pH for the buffer.

Since vs because

Since implies time has passed.

Because implies cause and effect.

That vs which

That restricts the noun. E.g. The well that turned blue had the inhibitor. This restricts it to one of many wells.

Which is nonrestrictive. E.g. The tube, which contained the plant extract, was black.

There is only one tube and it is black.

Whether vs if

Whether is used for distinct choices.

If is used in an conditional context.

While vs whereas

While something that happened at the same time as something else.

Whereas implies a comparison.

Whether vs weather

Whether as above.

Weather refers to rain, lightning, and wind.

The following homonyms (words that sound the same) are frequently misused.

Discreet vs discrete

Discreet means modest, understated.

Discrete means separate or distinct parts.

Lead vs led

Lead means a hint or a tip.

Led means managed, directed, steered.

Lessen vs lesson

Lessen means to make less.

Lesson means to teach.

Patience vs patient

Patience means tolerance or endurance.

Patient means a person in hospital.

Principal vs Principle

Principal of a school.

Principle of code or belief or opinion.

Rule19 Parallelism

Ideas joined by and, or, but must be parallel, all ending in -ing or all ending in -ion

Parallelism refers to smooth flow of a sentence that lists ideas joined by “and”, “or” or “but”.

The enzymes were evaluated for several properties, including association with self, interacting with the substrate and cooperating with the cofactor.

Must be rephrased as:

The enzymes were evaluated for several properties, including association with self, interaction with the substrate and cooperation with the cofactor.

Or:

The enzymes were evaluated for several properties, including associating with self, interacting with the substrate and cooperating with the cofactor.

Rule20 Under construction

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Appendix A

Flesch Reading Ease Score

In the Flesch Reading Ease test, higher scores indicate material that is easier to read; lower numbers mark passages that are more difficult to read. The formula for the Flesch Reading Ease Score (FRES) test is

$$206.835 - 1.015 \left(\frac{\text{total words}}{\text{total sentences}} \right) - 84.6 \left(\frac{\text{total syllables}}{\text{total words}} \right).$$

Scores can be interpreted, as shown in the table below.

Score	Notes
90.0–100.0	easily understood by an average 11-year-old student
60.0–70.0	easily understood by 13- to 15-year-old students
0.0–30.0	best understood by university graduates

Reader's Digest magazine has a readability index of about 65, Time magazine scores about 52, an average 6th grade student's (a 12-year-old) written assignment has a readability index of 60–70 (and a reading grade level of 6–7), and the Harvard Law Review has a general readability score in the low 30's. The highest (easiest) readability score possible is around 120 (e.g. every sentence consisting of only two one-syllable words; "The cat sat on the mat." scores 116). The score does not have a theoretical lower bound. It is possible to make the score as low as wanted by arbitrarily including words with many syllables. The sentence "This sentence, taken as a reading passage unto itself, is being used to prove a point." has a readability of 74.1. The sentence "The Australian platypus is seemingly a hybrid of a mammal and reptilian creature." scores 24.4 as it has 26 syllables and 13 words. While Amazon calculates the text of Moby-Dick as 57.9, one particularly long sentence about sharks in chapter 64 has a readability

score of -146.77. One sentence in the beginning of "Swann's Way", by Marcel Proust, has a score of -515.1.

The U.S. Department of Defense uses the Reading Ease test as the standard test of readability for its documents and forms. Florida requires that life insurance policies have a FRES of 45 or higher.

Use of this scale is so ubiquitous that it is bundled with popular word processing programs and services such as KWord, IBM Lotus Symphony, Microsoft Office Word, WordPerfect, and WordPro.

Polysyllabic words affect this score significantly more than they do the grade level score.

Flesch–Kincaid Grade Level[edit]

These readability tests are used extensively in the field of education. The "Flesch–Kincaid Grade Level Formula" instead presents a score as a U.S. grade level, making it easier for teachers, parents, librarians, and others to judge the readability level of various books and texts. It can also mean the number of years of education generally required to understand this text, relevant when the formula results in a number greater than 10. The grade level is calculated with the following formula:

$$0.39 \left(\frac{\text{total words}}{\text{total sentences}} \right) + 11.8 \left(\frac{\text{total syllables}}{\text{total words}} \right) - 15.59$$

The result is a number that corresponds with a U.S. grade level. The sentence, "The Australian platypus, is seemingly a hybrid of a mammal and reptilian creature" is a 13.1 as it has 26 syllables and 13 words. The different weighting factors for words per sentence and syllables per word in each scoring system mean that the two schemes are not directly comparable and cannot be converted. The grade level formula emphasises sentence length over word length.

The lowest grade level score, in theory, is -3.40 , but there are few real passages in which every sentence consists of a single one-syllable word. Green Eggs and Ham by Dr Seuss comes close, averaging 5.7 words per sentence and 1.02 syllables per word, with a grade level of -1.3 . (Most of the 50 used words are monosyllabic; "anywhere", which occurs 8 times, is the only exception.)

Change options in MSWord to give you the Flesh-Kincaid score of your document.

Word

Click the File tab, and then click Options.

Click Proofing.

Under When correcting spelling and grammar in Word, make sure the Check grammar with spelling check box is selected.

Select Show readability statistics.

After you enable this feature, open a file that you want to check, and check the spelling. When Word finishes checking the spelling and grammar, it displays information about the reading level of the document.