

## Introduction to This Classic Reprint and Commentaries

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In his introduction to *The Measurement of Readability*, George R. Klare describes the book as “primarily a review of research literature in the field of readability, together with an analysis of trends and conclusions that can be drawn from the existing data” (Klare, 1963, p. 1). In other words, rather than present just the author’s position on readability, it summarizes the larger state of contemporary research, especially as it relates to readability formulas. Although Klare cautions, “Primarily, a formula is a means of rating a piece of writing *after* it has been written” (p. 18), he also says, “*In this book, ‘readability formula’ refers to a method of measurement intended as a predictive device that will provide quantitative, objective estimates of the style difficulty of writing*” (p.3; italics Klare’s).

Chapter one of Klare’s book begins with a goal statement: the importance of readable writing for the reader’s sake. Then it reviews five principles of writing readably, discusses how to use a readability formula, and explains how to choose which formula to use. The chapter concludes by acknowledging the limitations of formulas.

The four commentators point out additional limitations. They describe a new world in which the computer has changed both the requirements for documentation and the methodology for developing it. Gretchen Hargis demonstrates that readability has been absorbed into a larger concern with task orientation and usability. Kristin Zibell focuses on the unique challenges of designing information for presentation on the Internet. Karen Schriver discusses the limitations of criterion passages and the practice of writing to the formula. Ginny Redish challenges the appropriateness, reliability, and validity of readability formulas.

In his rebuttal to the four commentaries, Klare reasserts his position on readability formulas. As he reviews the use of formulas as means for predicting and producing readable writing, he interweaves responses to the commentators. Then he raises some of his own observations and questions about computer documentation.

Although Klare and the commentators disagree on many issues, they share a fundamental interest in helping the reader by providing the best information. The generation gap has intensified the differences in opinion about what the best information is, but ultimately the argument is between using silverware or chopsticks, two ways of accomplishing the same goal.

### **Reference**

Klare, G. R. (1963). *The measurement of readability*. Ames, IA: Iowa State University Press.

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