Are you writing smarter than an 8th Grader?

Imagine yourself surrounded by world-renowned scientists, who are trying to explain you their scientific discoveries and complex mathematical equations. Unless, you are "Sheldon" or into science, you most likely will lose interest in under 10 minutes or worst, fall asleep in middle of the conversation! Another instance can be those two-to-three hour long and inexplicable corporate sessions that left you bewildered! The reason is simple - they were unable to match their content with their audience's reading and understanding level.

The similar principle applies when it comes to content and business writing. According to National Center for Adult Literacy, an average person reads at a seventh- or an eighth-grade level. American Medical Association (AMA) has set the benchmark of writing in the medical industry at an eighth-grade level. So, it all comes down to making your content readable.

Oxford dictionary defines "readability" as the fact of being easy, interesting and enjoyable to read. Aim to write in a way so that your message "reaches out" than "stands out." It was considered that if your audience can easily read and understand your content within the first time of its reading, consider your content as readable. However, this measure is too vague and subjective.

This is when you should grade and score your writing. A few popular readability indices are:

- Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level
- Gunning-Fox Index
- SMOG

The scoring is based on the following parameters:

- Sentence length
- Words complexity
- Syllable count
- Words and Phrases

Developed by Rudolf Flesch and J. Peter Kincaid, the Flesch-Kincaid readability scores and grade are the most widely used measures of readability. The grade suggests the number of years of education required to understand the message. The lower the grade, the better the readability level.
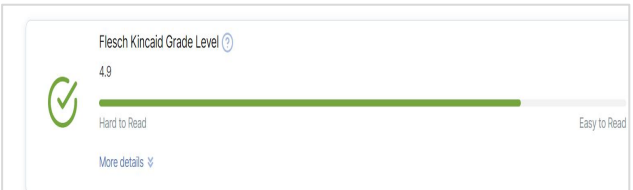For an instance, consider the following corporate email:

	Message	Grade
Original	This is to inform you that due to the unprecedented times that we all are living in and in lieu with the government guidelines, the management believes that a specialized approach is necessary to safeguard the associates and has sanctioned the facility to permit its associates to log on remotely for a period of two-years. Safeguarding our employees has always been our topmost priority.	Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level - 17.8 Flesch Kincaid Grade Level 17.8 Hard to Read More details 0.39 x (words/sentences) + 11.8 x (syllables/words) - 15.
Revised	To ensure safety of our associates, we request you all to work from home.	**Flesch-Kincaid Grade**: 8.1

	Message	Grade
	Starting tomorrow, the work from home arrangement shall continue till March 2022.	Flesch Kincaid Grade Level ⑦ 8.1 Hard to Read More details ⌃

The original message was full of verbiage, phrases and is considered very long sentence. All this hassle just to inform that the associates can work from home for the next two years.
Of course, in corporate communications, to show empathy, it is perfectly fine to add a few more comforting and reassuring words but it shouldn't be at the cost of losing the essence of the original message.

So, is readability score enough to measure the readability? Wait to see the the other side of the coin. Consider this example:

Original Message	Grade
Please pay the full due as currently you are not eligible for any discount. Your total cart value is lower than the required limit. Click Continue.	Flesch-Kincaid Grade: 4.9 Flesch Kincaid Grade Level ⑦ 4.9 Hard to Read Easy to Read More details ⌄

Here, the readability score is great but the voice tone is highly discomforting. To ensure your messages are readable, making the messages concise and easy to read should not be the sole aim. Choosing the rights words with right tone plays a significant role in determining the readability. Let's revise the example using some facts and comforting tone:

Revised Message	Grade
Add a few more items worth $50 to get a flat discount of $15. To skip, click Continue.	Flesch-Kincaid Grade: 2.3 Flesch Kincaid Grade Level ⑦ 2.3 Hard to Read More details ⌄

To ensure readability, you can take help of sophisticated AI-enabled tools. The tools score the writing quality not only based on readability indices, but also evaluate the voice tone, clarity, consistency, usage of phrases, and many more parameters. My top three picks are: **Acrolinx**, **Grammarly Business**, and **Readable**.

To make a greater impact, thrive to keep your content readable. Follow the principles of plain English writing and keep technology by your side to aid you in writing better. Write the right way - keeping it Simple, Civic and Short.