

Using Flesch-Kincaid Scoring to Strengthen Your Writing

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What is the Flesch-Kincaid Scale?

The FK scale is a statistical program designed to measure the simplicity of writing. It is a quick way to determine how easy it is to understand the writer!)

It works by calculating the average number of words per sentence, the average number of syllables per sentence, and the frequency of passive and complex constructions.

Using these data, the program comes up with a series of scores. But the most useful one for you as a copywriter is the Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level. Let's say you get an F-K Grade Level of 10.3. This score says that an average student in the 10th grade (3rd month) could understand the writing.

When you're writing DM or any persuasive copy, you should shoot for a target F-K Grade Level below an 8.5.

For example, the F-K Grade Level for this report is 6.3.

Why You Want a Flesch-Kincaid Score Below 8.5

Many beginning copywriters (and many old timers who still struggle with copywriting) resent having to write for a low F-K Score. Here are a few of their objections. And Michael Masterson's responses:

"Why should I get my writing below 8.5? That's not even high school level."

MM: The grade level has nothing to do with academic reading levels. That's a popular myth. It's about understandability and ability to communicate clearly.

"I don't want to dumb-down my writing. I don't want to write for people who are too dumb to understand me."

MM: It's not a question of dumb. It's a question of efficiency. If you write simply, then *all* your readers, smart and dumb, can grasp your ideas more easily.

"Let them work to understand me. My thoughts are worth it."

MM: Maybe. Or maybe your thoughts are not so good. And you want to disguise them with complicated and confusing writing.

Let's see how to lower your F-K score on the next page...

How to Lower Your Flesch-Kincaid Score

Stick to the power of one. Write about one – and only one – big idea at a time.

Whenever appropriate, introduce that idea with a story. Stories have two advantages. First, they are concrete, not abstract. That means they are usually told with simple, active sentences. Such sentences get low scores on the FK scale. They are quickly read and easily comprehended.

By sticking to one idea, it is much easier to avoid complex sentences. Complex sentences are those that are linked by coordinating conjunctions, such as *since*, *whereas*, *inasmuch as*, *notwithstanding*, *therefore*, etc.

Complex sentences are not always bad, but they are often unnecessary. When your thinking is unclear, they are more likely to appear.

Use active sentences...

Active sentences (“John kicked the ball.”) score lower than passive sentences (“The ball was kicked by John.”)

Active sentences are easier to understand. *And* they carry more emotional power.

Michael Masterson’s secret Kincaid crusher ...

Dialog, I’ve found, generally has a very low FK grade. If it is natural – i.e., the kind of speech that ordinary people engage in – it will grade at 4.0 to 6.0.

Let’s see this in action on the next page...

F-K Example #1

This teleconference is unprecedented for Dan – he doesn't typically do these, unless he's speaking to the owners of the companies that pay him thousands of dollars a year for his marketing advice.

But the truth is Dan's got something of a soft spot for copywriters ... and in particular up-and-coming copywriters. He loves this business and he's at the stage in his career where he's done it all ... he has all the money and clients he needs – and, much like Michael Masterson, he gets a huge kick out of helping folks who really want it get a good taste of success.

If you've never heard Dan speak, I strongly encourage you to join us on Wednesday. He's inspiring ... entertaining ... and will challenge the way you think about yourself, your role as a copywriter, the way you think about clients, and how you present yourself to them.

FK Grade Level: 12.8

F-K Example #2

This is a first for Dan. He typically only does these for clients.

But the truth is, Dan's got something of a soft spot for copywriters. Especially, up-and-coming copywriters.

He loves this business. He's at the stage in his career where he's done it all. Has all the money and clients he needs. And, much like Michael Masterson, he gets a huge kick out of helping folks who want to succeed.

If you've never heard Dan speak, I strongly encourage you to join us on Wednesday. He's inspiring ... entertaining ... and will challenge the way you think about yourself, your role as a copywriter, the way you think about clients, and how you present yourself to them.

FK Grade Level: 5.5

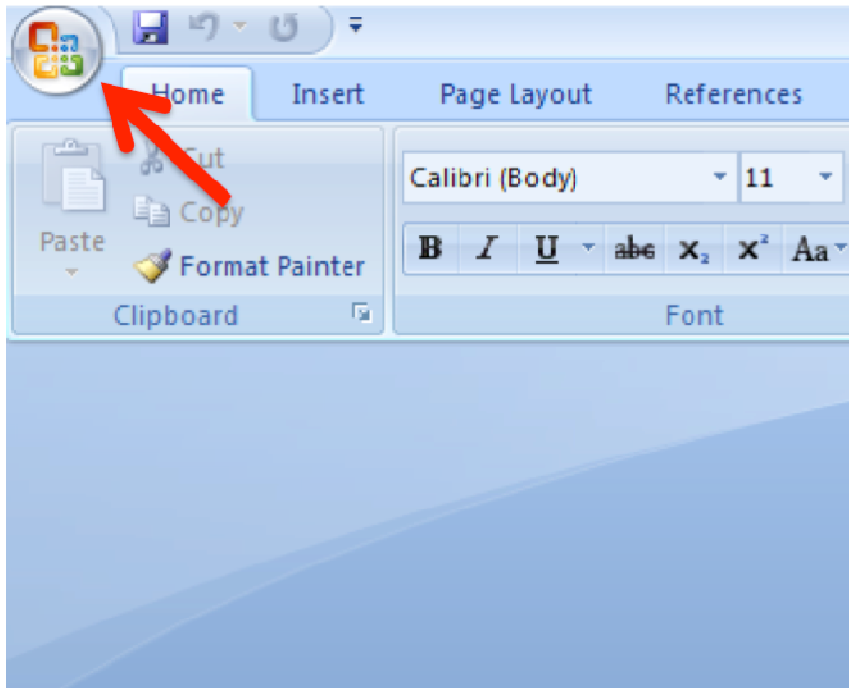
How did this huge reduction in F-K Grade Level happen? By adding a few periods and shortening sentences.

So, how do you get MS Word to show you the F-K Grade Level? Turn the page to find out.

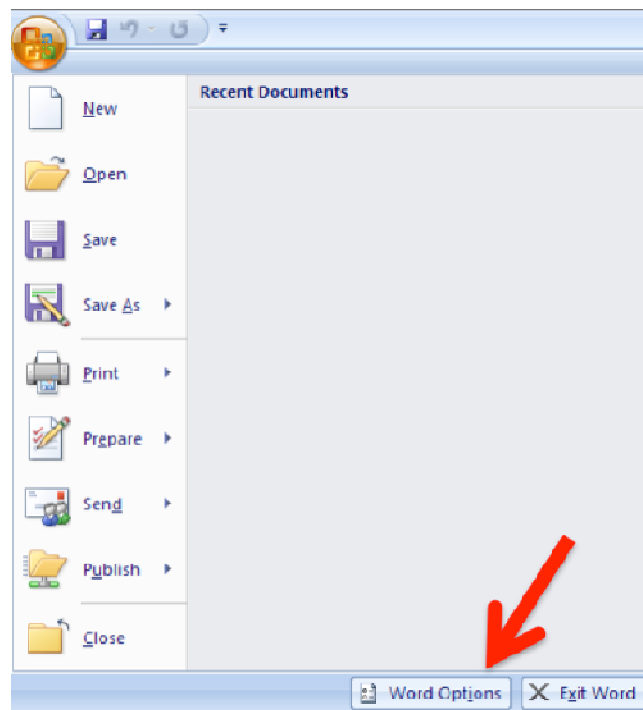
How to Turn On Flesch-Kincaid Scoring in Microsoft Word

Microsoft Word 2007 for Windows

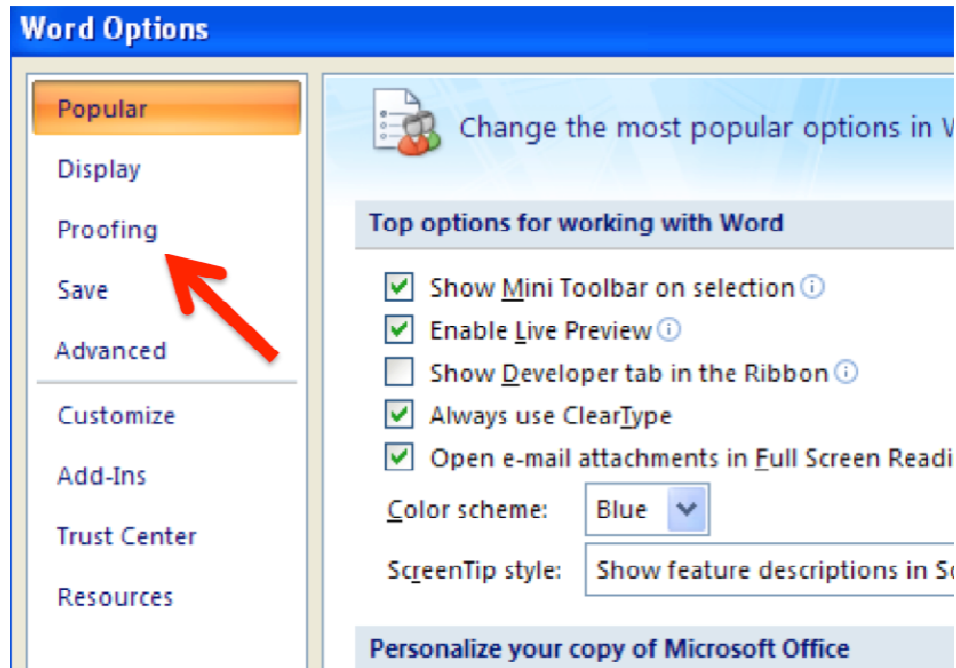
1. Click on the “**Office Button**” -- the little round button in the upper left corner of the screen.



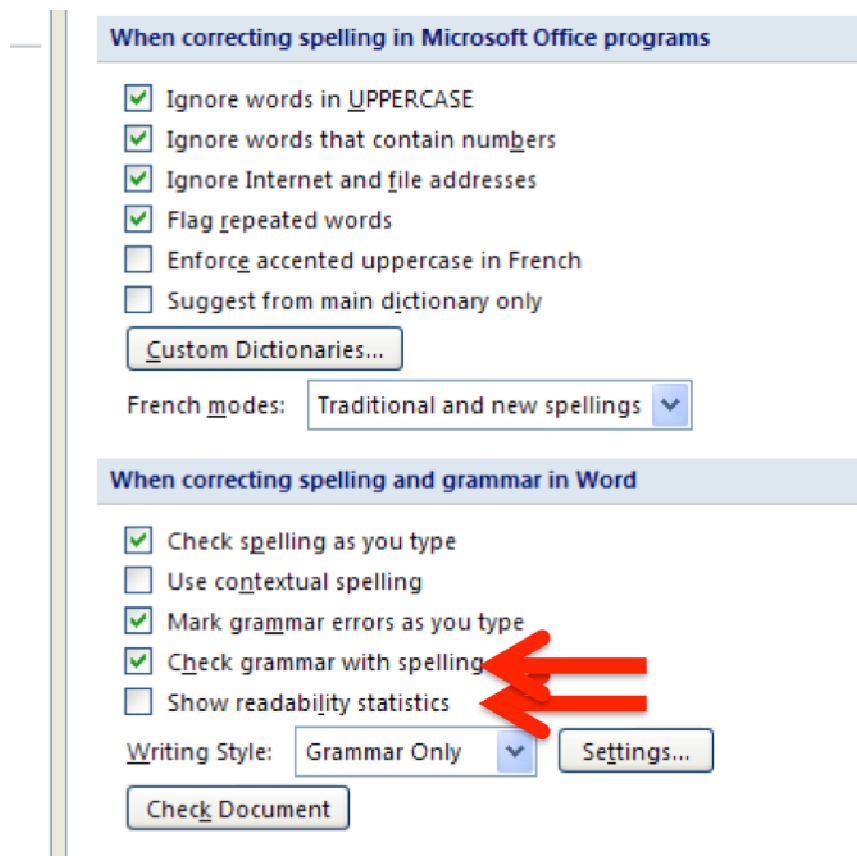
2. A window opens up; click on the **Word Options** button.



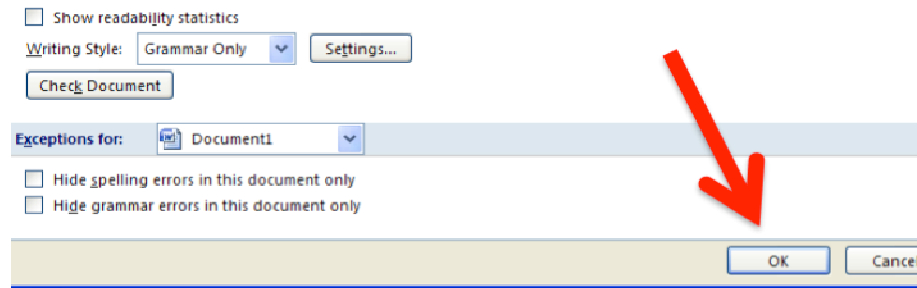
3. Click on **Proofing** item in the list on the left of the box that opens



4. Check both the “**Check grammar with spelling**” and the “**Show readability statistics**” boxes.



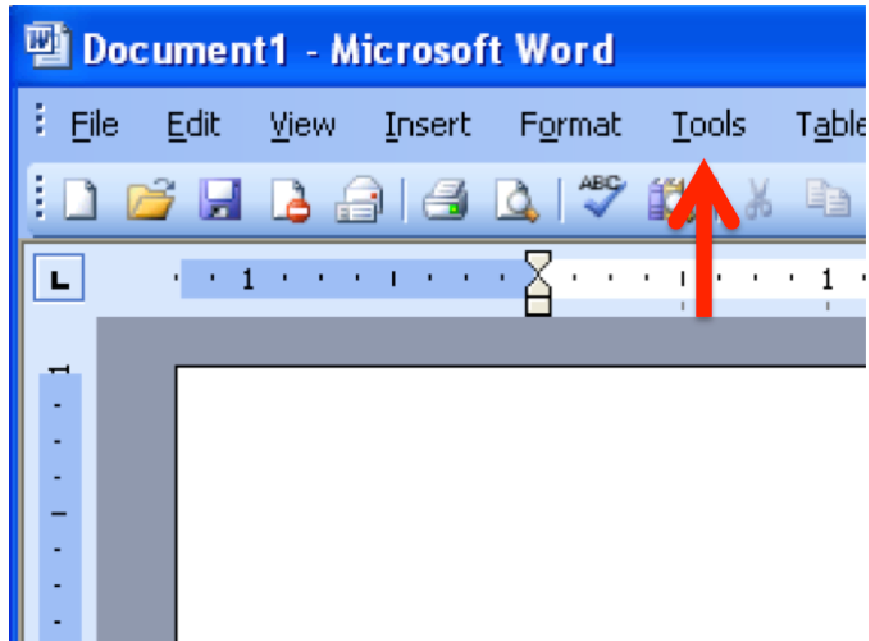
5. When both boxes are checked, click the “**OK**” button at the bottom of the window



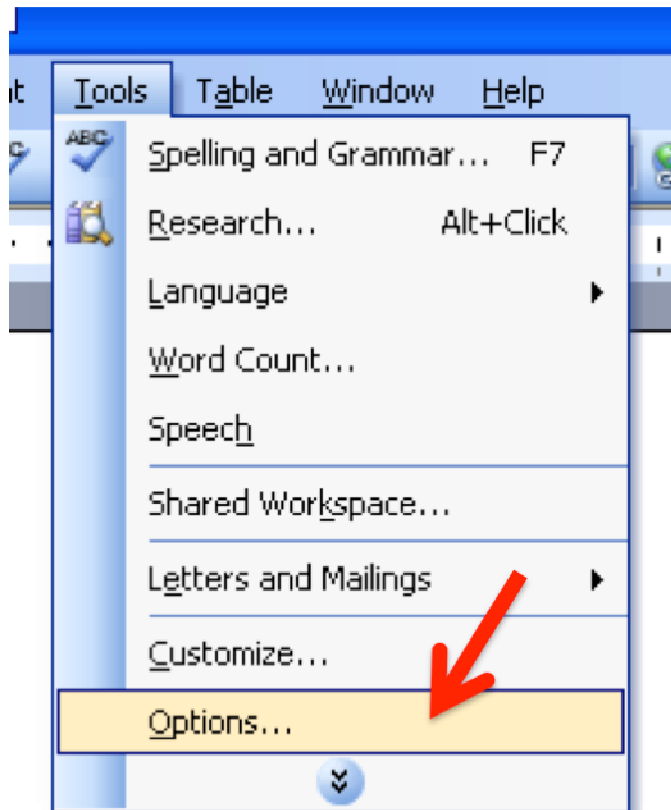
6. Once you've completed these steps, the Flesch-Kincaid score will be displayed every time you spell check your document.

Microsoft Word 2003 for Windows

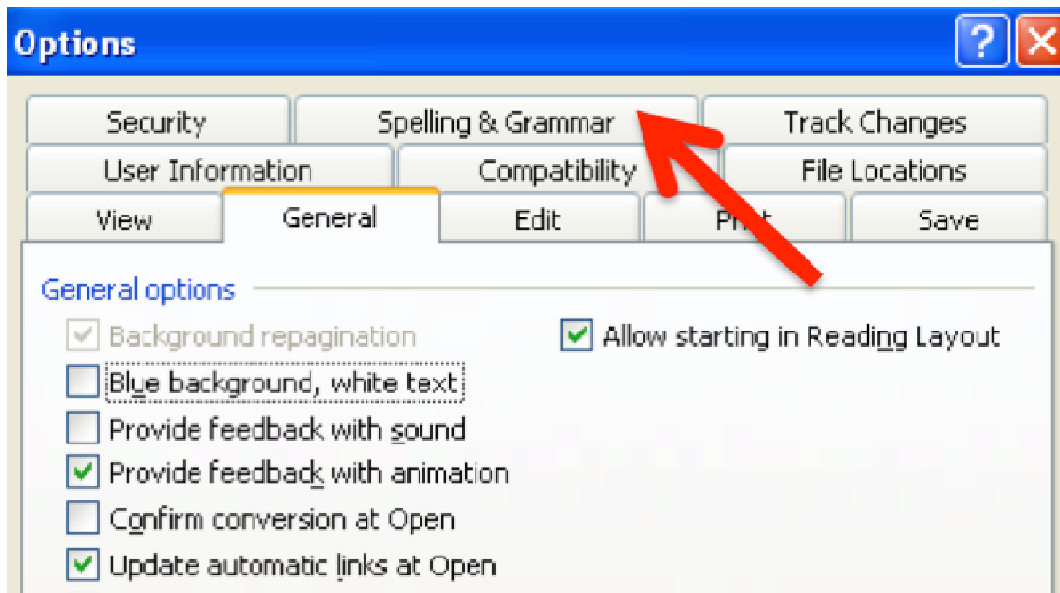
1. Click on the “**T**ools” item on the top menu bar.



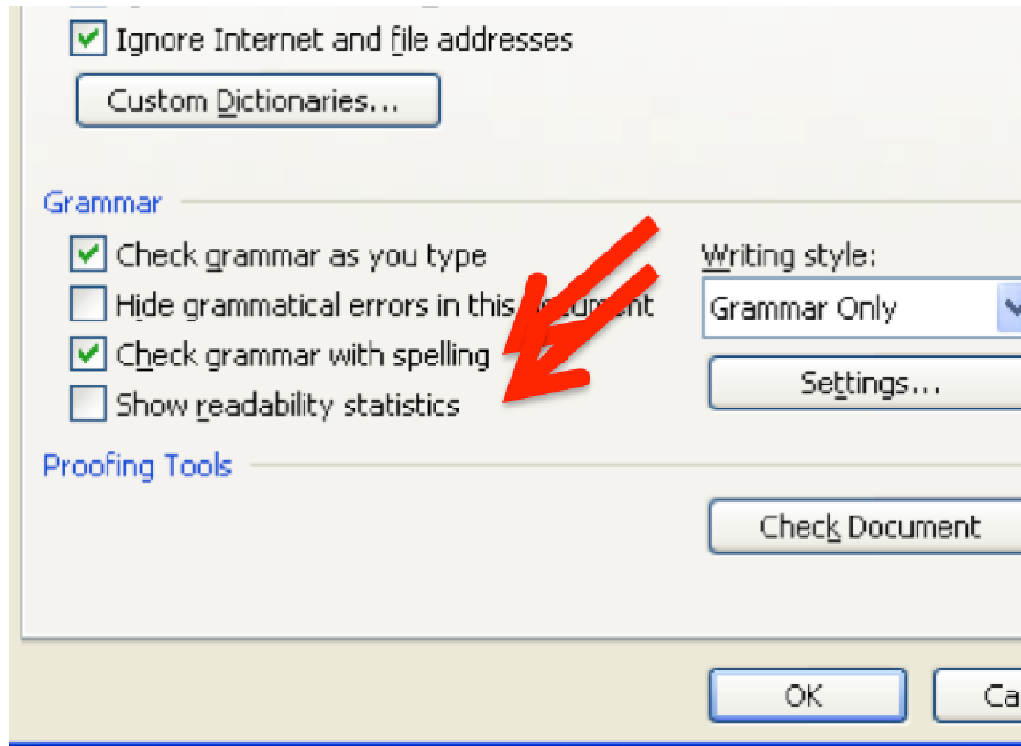
2. A window will drop down from that menu item. Click on the “**O**ptions” item in that menu.



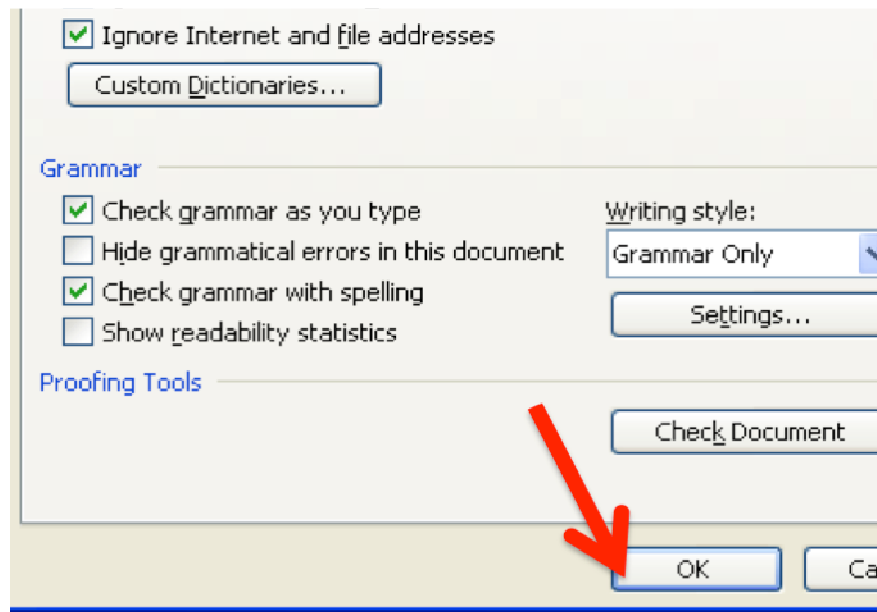
3. In the Options window that opens, click on the “**Spelling & Grammar**” tab.



4. Then click both the “**Check grammar with spelling**” and “**Show readability statistics**” boxes



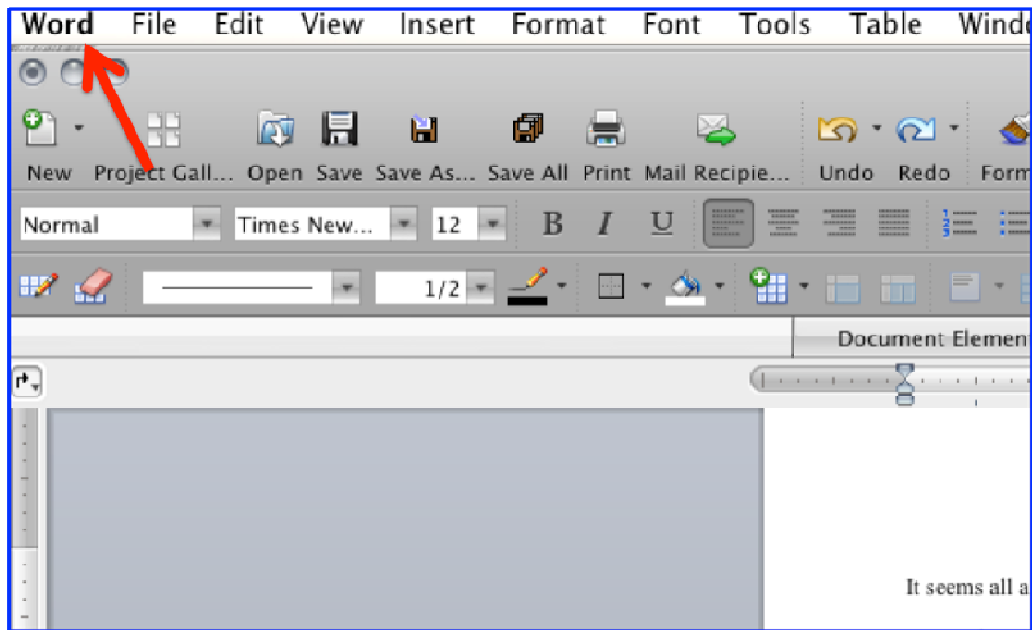
5. After both boxes are checked, click the “**OK**” button.



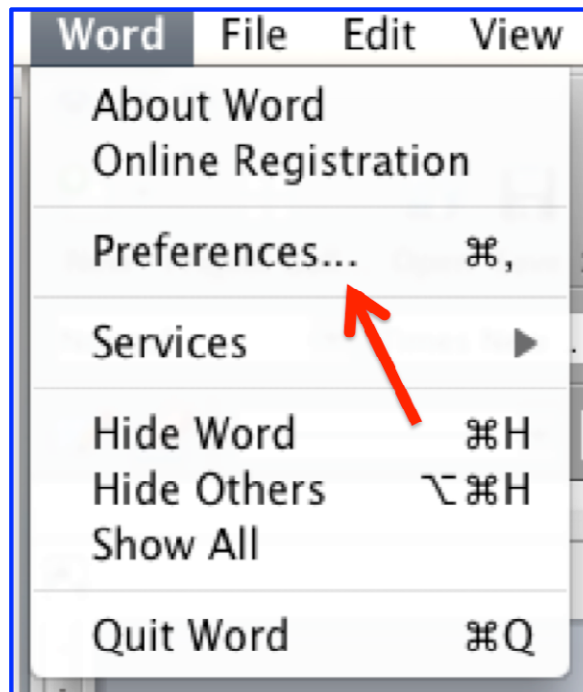
6. Once you've completed these steps, the Flesch-Kincaid score will be displayed every time you spell check your document.

Microsoft Word 2008 for Macintosh

1. Click on the “**Word**” Application Menu item on the top menu bar



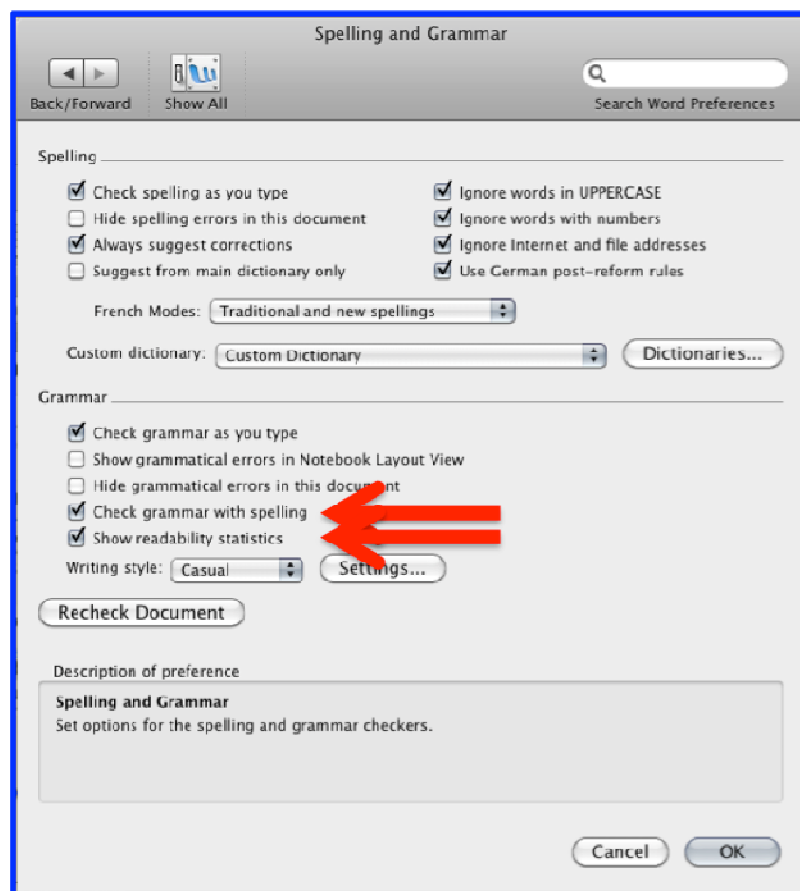
2. A window will drop down from Word Application menu item. Click on the “**Preferences**” item in that menu.



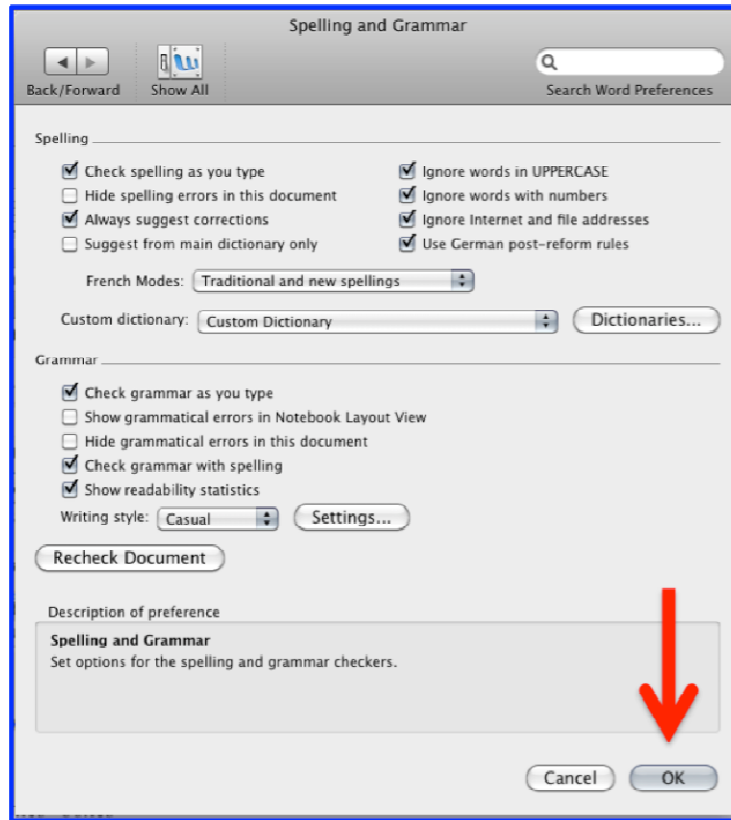
3. In the Word Preferences window that opens, click on the “**Spelling & Grammar**” icon.



4. Then click both the “**Check grammar with spelling**” and “**Show readability statistics**” boxes



5. After both boxes are checked, click the “OK” button.



6. Once you've completed these steps, the Flesch-Kincaid score will be displayed every time you spell check your document.