

K.I.S.S. WITH A TOOL AT YOUR FINGERTIPS

“Keep It Simple Stupid.” It is no surprise that this acronym applies to benefit communication. The question is, how does it apply to the communication you send to your clients and their employees? Over the years, we have had the opportunity to audit hundreds of benefit communication pieces. The most common problem is that the documents are filled with jargon, long sentences and a lot of unnecessary information. This results in most benefit communication pieces written at the 12th grade level – or higher. The goal for employee benefit communication is to keep the readability at a 7th or 8th grade level.



Here are some things you can do to keep your communication simple and engaging:

- Eliminate jargon as much as possible. If you need to use jargon be sure to define it first.
- Do not use contractions.
- Use words having no more than two syllables.
- Delete words adding no value such as “that,” “which,” “however,” “therefore,” etc.
- Use verbs in the active tense.
- Keep it relevant and delete information that is not necessary to the reader.
- Keep sentences as short as possible.

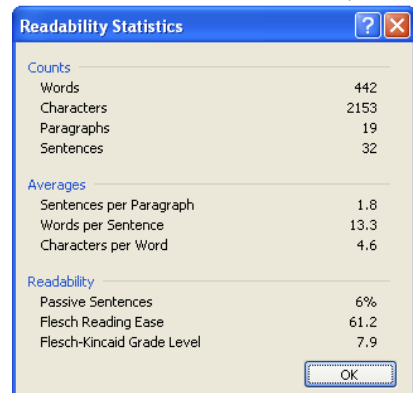
Above all, remember you need to engage the reader. Your communication should tell a story and make sure the reader does not have to read through the entire document before they get the answer to “so what does this mean to me?”

A Simple Readability Test: At Your Fingertips

To test the readability of your communication a tool is available in MicroSoft Word. To check the readability:

1. Click on “Spelling & Grammar” under the review tab.
2. Click “Options.”
3. Check “Show Readability Statistics.”
4. Finish the spell check and your readability statistics will be displayed.

See Screen Shot.



Readability Statistics	
Counts	
Words	442
Characters	2153
Paragraphs	19
Sentences	32
Averages	
Sentences per Paragraph	1.8
Words per Sentence	13.3
Characters per Word	4.6
Readability	
Passive Sentences	6%
Flesch Reading Ease	61.2
Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level	7.9

Your target should be a 7th-8th grade Flesch-Kincaid Reading level, and a higher 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. Here are a few real world examples. Reader's Digest magazine has a readability index of about 65, Time magazine scores about 52, an average 7th grade student's (eleven years old) written assignment has a readability test of 60-70 (and a reading grade level of 6-7) and the Harvard Law Review has a general readability score in the low 30s.

Just remember - K.I.S.S! Take the first step to make sure your clients and their employees value the benefits and tools you provide!

FOR MORE HELPFUL HINTS:

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