How to Test for Readability

The SMOG Readability Formula
To calculate the SMOG reading grade level, begin with the entire written work that is being assessed, and follow these four steps:

1. Count off 10 consecutive sentences near the beginning, in the middle, and near the end of the text.
2. From this sample of 30 sentences, circle all of the words containing three or more syllables (polysyllabic), including repetitions of the same word, and total the number of words circled.
3. Estimate the square root of the total number of polysyllabic words counted. This is done by finding the nearest perfect square, and taking its square root.
4. Finally, add a constant of three to the square root. This number gives the SMOG grade, or the reading grade level that a person must have reached if he or she is to fully understand the text being assessed.

A few additional guidelines will help to clarify these directions:

- A sentence is defined as a string of words punctuated with a period (.), an exclamation point (!) or a question mark (?).
- Hyphenated words are considered as one word.
- Numbers which are written out should also be considered, and if in numeric form in the text, they should be pronounced to determine if they are polysyllabic.
- Proper nouns, if polysyllabic, should be counted, too.
- Abbreviations should be read as unabbreviated to determine if they are polysyllabic.

Not all pamphlets, fact sheets, or other printed materials contain 30 sentences. To test a text that has fewer than 30 sentences:

1. Count all of the polysyllabic words in the text.
2. Count the number of sentences.
3. Find the average number of polysyllabic words per sentence as follows:
   \[
   \text{average} = \frac{\text{Total # of polysyllabic words}}{\text{Total # of sentences}}
   \]
4. Multiply that average by the number of sentences short of 30.
5. Add that figure on to the total number of polysyllabic words.
6. Find the square root and add the constant of 3.

Perhaps the quickest way to administer the SMOG grading test is by using the SMOG conversion table. Simply count the number of polysyllabic words in your chain of 30 sentences and look up the approximate grade level on the chart.

An example of how to use the SMOG Readability Formula and the SMOG Conversion Table is provided on the following page.
Example Using the SMOG Readability Formula:

How Cancer Works

(If we know something about how cancer works, we can act more effectively to protect ourselves against the disease. Here are the basics.

(1) Cancer spreads; time counts. Cancer is an uncontrolled growth of abnormal cells. It begins small and if unchecked, spreads. If detected in an early, local stage, the chances for cure are best.

(2) Risk increases with age—This is not a reason to worry, but a signal to have more regular, thorough physical check-ups. Your doctor or clinician can advise you on what tests to get and how often they should be performed.

(3) What you can do—Don’t smoke and you will sharply reduce your chances of getting lung cancer. Avoid too much sun, a major cause of skin cancer. Learn cancer’s Seven Warning Signals, listed on the back of this leaflet, and see your doctor promptly if they persist. Pain usually is a late symptom of cancer; don’t wait for it.

Unproven Remedies

Be aware of unproven cancer remedies. They may sound appealing, but they are usually worthless. Relying on them can delay good treatment until it is too late. Check with your doctor or the American Cancer Society for more information.

Colorectal Cancer is second in cancer deaths (25,100) and third in new cases (49,000). When it is found early, chances of cure are good. A regular general physical usually includes a digital examination of the rectum and a guaiac slide test of a stool specimen to check for invisible blood. New there are also do-it-yourself Guaiac Slides for home use. Ask your doctor about them. If you reach the age of 40, your regular check-up may include a “Procto,” in which the rectum and part of the colon are inspected through a hollow, lighted tube.

Prostate Cancer is second in the number of new cases each year (77,000), and third in deaths (60,000). It occurs mainly in men over 60. A digital rectal exam of the prostate by your doctor is the best detector.

A Check-Up Pays Off

(1) Be sure to have a regular general physical including an oral exam. It is your best guarantee of good health.

(2) This pamphlet is from the American Cancer Society.

Cancers You Should Know About

(1) Lung Cancer is the number one cancer among men, both in the number of new cases each year (99,000) and deaths (70,500). Rapidly increasing rates are due mainly to cigarette smoking. By not smoking, you can largely prevent lung cancer. (The risk is reduced by smoking less, and by using lower tar and nicotine bonds.) But quitting altogether is by far the most effective safeguard. The American Cancer Society offers Quit Smoking Clinics and self-help materials.

Unproven Remedies

Be aware of unproven cancer remedies. They may sound appealing, but they are usually worthless. Relying on them can delay good treatment until it is too late. Check with your doctor or the American Cancer Society for more information.

(1) Cancer spreads; time counts. Cancer is an uncontrolled growth of abnormal cells. It begins small and if unchecked, spreads. If detected in an early, local stage, the chances for cure are best.

(2) Risk increases with age—This is not a reason to worry, but a signal to have more regular, thorough physical check-ups. Your doctor or clinician can advise you on what tests to get and how often they should be performed.

(3) What you can do—Don’t smoke and you will sharply reduce your chances of getting lung cancer. Avoid too much sun, a major cause of skin cancer. Learn cancer’s Seven Warning Signals, listed on the back of this leaflet, and see your doctor promptly if they persist. Pain usually is a late symptom of cancer; don’t wait for it.

Unproven Remedies

Be aware of unproven cancer remedies. They may sound appealing, but they are usually worthless. Relying on them can delay good treatment until it is too late. Check with your doctor or the American Cancer Society for more information.

(1) Cancer spreads; time counts. Cancer is an uncontrolled growth of abnormal cells. It begins small and if unchecked, spreads. If detected in an early, local stage, the chances for cure are best.

(2) Risk increases with age—This is not a reason to worry, but a signal to have more regular, thorough physical check-ups. Your doctor or clinician can advise you on what tests to get and how often they should be performed.

(3) What you can do—Don’t smoke and you will sharply reduce your chances of getting lung cancer. Avoid too much sun, a major cause of skin cancer. Learn cancer’s Seven Warning Signals, listed on the back of this leaflet, and see your doctor promptly if they persist. Pain usually is a late symptom of cancer; don’t wait for it.

Unproven Remedies

Be aware of unproven cancer remedies. They may sound appealing, but they are usually worthless. Relying on them can delay good treatment until it is too late. Check with your doctor or the American Cancer Society for more information.

(1) Cancer spreads; time counts. Cancer is an uncontrolled growth of abnormal cells. It begins small and if unchecked, spreads. If detected in an early, local stage, the chances for cure are best.

(2) Risk increases with age—This is not a reason to worry, but a signal to have more regular, thorough physical check-ups. Your doctor or clinician can advise you on what tests to get and how often they should be performed.

(3) What you can do—Don’t smoke and you will sharply reduce your chances of getting lung cancer. Avoid too much sun, a major cause of skin cancer. Learn cancer’s Seven Warning Signals, listed on the back of this leaflet, and see your doctor promptly if they persist. Pain usually is a late symptom of cancer; don’t wait for it.

Unproven Remedies

Be aware of unproven cancer remedies. They may sound appealing, but they are usually worthless. Relying on them can delay good treatment until it is too late. Check with your doctor or the American Cancer Society for more information.

(1) Cancer spreads; time counts. Cancer is an uncontrolled growth of abnormal cells. It begins small and if unchecked, spreads. If detected in an early, local stage, the chances for cure are best.

(2) Risk increases with age—This is not a reason to worry, but a signal to have more regular, thorough physical check-ups. Your doctor or clinician can advise you on what tests to get and how often they should be performed.

(3) What you can do—Don’t smoke and you will sharply reduce your chances of getting lung cancer. Avoid too much sun, a major cause of skin cancer. Learn cancer’s Seven Warning Signals, listed on the back of this leaflet, and see your doctor promptly if they persist. Pain usually is a late symptom of cancer; don’t wait for it.

Unproven Remedies

Be aware of unproven cancer remedies. They may sound appealing, but they are usually worthless. Relying on them can delay good treatment until it is too late. Check with your doctor or the American Cancer Society for more information.

(1) Cancer spreads; time counts. Cancer is an uncontrolled growth of abnormal cells. It begins small and if unchecked, spreads. If detected in an early, local stage, the chances for cure are best.

(2) Risk increases with age—This is not a reason to worry, but a signal to have more regular, thorough physical check-ups. Your doctor or clinician can advise you on what tests to get and how often they should be performed.

(3) What you can do—Don’t smoke and you will sharply reduce your chances of getting lung cancer. Avoid too much sun, a major cause of skin cancer. Learn cancer’s Seven Warning Signals, listed on the back of this leaflet, and see your doctor promptly if they persist. Pain usually is a late symptom of cancer; don’t wait for it.
We have calculated the reading grade level for this example. Compare your results to ours, then check both with the SMOG conversion table:

**Readability Test Calculations**
- Total Number of Polysyllabic Words = 56
- Square Root = 6
- Constant = 3
- SMOG Reading Grade Level = 9

**SMOG Conversion Table**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total Polysyllabic Word Counts</th>
<th>Approximate Grade Level (±1.5 Grades)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-6</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-12</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13-20</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-30</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-42</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43-56</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>57-72</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>73-90</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>91-110</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>111-122</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>133-156</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>157-182</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>185-210</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>211-240</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Developed by Harold C. McGraw, Office of Educational Research, Baltimore County Schools, Towson, Maryland.*