Gunning Fog Index

Many business texts are hard to read, not because the ideas are difficult, but because the writing is foggy. The Gunning Fog Index is a simple way to measure how easy or hard a piece of English text is to read. It was created by Robert Gunning, an American businessman who worked with newspapers and textbook publishers, and he presented it in 1952 in his book The Technique of Clear Writing. The index gives a number that estimates how many years of formal education a reader needs to understand the text on the first reading. In this guide, Tamer, a sales manager, uses it to make his emails clearer.

1. Why Fog Matters

Fog is the word Gunning used for writing that is longer and more complicated than it needs to be. He saw that much business and newspaper writing was harder to read than necessary. In business, fog costs time and money, because readers misunderstand, ask extra questions or stop reading. The Fog Index does not judge the ideas; it only looks at two things in the text: long sentences and long words. When both are high, the text becomes harder to read.

Example: a user guide full of long sentences makes customers call the help line instead of reading it.

At work: Tamer notices that his team rarely answers his long weekly emails. He decides to measure how foggy they are.

2. Step One: Average Sentence Length

The first step is to take a sample of text, often about 100 words, and count the words and the sentences. Then we divide the number of words by the number of sentences. The result is the average sentence length. For example, 100 words in 5 sentences give an average of 20 words per sentence. Long sentences make readers hold many ideas in mind at once.

Example: a recipe written in short steps is easier to follow than one long paragraph.

At work: Tamer counts 120 words in only 4 sentences in one of his paragraphs. That is an average of 30 words per sentence.

3. Step Two: Complex Words

The second step is to find the complex words, which Gunning defined as words with three or more syllables. Some long words are not counted: proper nouns such as names of people and places, and easy compound words such as salesperson. A verb is also not counted when its third syllable comes only from a common ending such as -es or -ed. We then divide the number of complex words by the total number of words and multiply by 100. The result is the percentage of complex words in the text.

Example: words such as information, responsibility and immediately are complex, while fast, clear and report are not.

At work: in Tamer's paragraph, 15 of the 120 words are complex. That makes twelve point five percent complex words.

This document is a property of Asaseeyat Academy - © Copy Right Protected.

4. Step Three: Calculate the Index

The third step is to add the average sentence length and the percentage of complex words, and then multiply the total by zero point four. Here is a tiny example with simple numbers. A text of 100 words has 5 sentences, so the average sentence length is 20. Ten of those words are complex, so the percentage of complex words is 10. Twenty plus 10 makes 30, and 30 multiplied by zero point four gives a Fog Index of 12.

Example: a short note with sentences of 10 words and no complex words scores only 4.

At work: for Tamer's paragraph, 30 plus twelve point five makes forty-two point five. Multiplied by zero point four, his score is 17.

5. Reading the Score

The score is an estimate of the years of formal education a person needs to understand the text on the first reading. A score of 12, for example, matches roughly the final year of high school. For general business readers, a good aim is a score of about 12 or below, and texts for a very wide audience often aim for about 8. A high score does not mean the reader is not smart; it means the text asks for too much effort. Busy readers, including experts, prefer text that is easy to read.

Example: a notice for all hotel guests should be easy for everyone, so a low score is the goal.

At work: Tamer's score of 17 is far above 12. His emails ask too much of his busy team.

6. Clearing the Fog

To lower the score, we can split long sentences and replace long words with short, familiar ones. For example, use often works better than utilize, and help works better than facilitate. The index also has limits: it counts syllables, not meaning, so a text full of short words can still be unclear. Some long words are simply necessary, such as a product name or a technical term the readers know. The index is a quick check for our writing, not a strict rule.

Example: a bank website changes "commence the application procedure" into "start the application".

At work: Tamer splits his long sentences and chooses simpler words. His next email scores about 10, and his team replies faster.

Conclusion

In summary, the Gunning Fog Index turns readability into one simple number. We find the average sentence length and the percentage of complex words, add them together and multiply by zero point four. The result estimates the years of education a reader needs, and for most business readers a score of about 12 or below is a good aim. The index cannot judge ideas or meaning, so it works best together with common sense. Short sentences and familiar words help every reader get the message the first time.

This document is a property of Asaseeyat Academy - © Copy Right Protected.