



Hello Again

In this issue of our newsletter, we're delighted to introduce a new service, the CLAD Readability Mark. Please let us know if you would like your plain language efforts to be recognized in this way.

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The CLAD Letter is sent three times a year. Please forward it to colleagues who might find it helpful! Unsubscribe? If you don't want to receive this newsletter, please send an e-mail to clad@idirect.ca with "Unsubscribe" in the subject line.

Introducing...The CLAD Readability Mark!



Are you proud of the clear language work going on in your organization? Do you have a document that you feel deserves the recognition of acknowledged clarity experts?

CLAD is celebrating our 10th year in business by launching the CLAD Readability Mark. If you qualify, you'll be able to display this symbol on your winning document or website. Here's how it works:

We'll assess the clarity of your document or online material for an affordable fee. If you qualify, we'll send you the symbol and our permission to use it. If you don't yet qualify, we'll send you a report outlining the steps you should take to improve readability. Once we've done a final review to ensure you've implemented the bulk of our recommendations, we'll award you the CLAD Readability Mark.

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Beyond readability formulas – what experts look for

by Sally McBeth, Manager, Clear Language and Design



Readability formulas measure the number of long words and sentences in your document. This gives you a sense of how difficult the text will be for readers. Readability formulas were first developed by and for educators. They help teachers to pick grade-appropriate reading material. The U.S. armed forces rely on them to help control difficulty in training material for recruits.

These formulas can be great aids to writers. In fact, we have a semi-automated version of one formula on our website. It's based on the 'SMOG' formula (Short Measure of Gobbledygook).

Just keep in mind there's an awful lot that these formulas can't tell you. In fact, a formula on its own can give you a completely false measure of how well you're going to get your message across. Here's why:

They can't tell you how well the information is organized. The research says logical organization – not sentence and word length – is the overriding factor when it comes to reading comprehension. And by 'logical' we mean the reader's logic, which is not necessarily yours. Ever wondered why it's so hard to program you VCR? It's likely because the engineer who designed the interface thinks like an engineer, and you don't.

They don't measure the level of difficulty of the task. You can write the most readable mutual fund prospectus ever, but if your potential investor doesn't understand key investment concepts, they're vulnerable.

They don't evaluate the design of your information. If you're giving instructions and warnings for eye drops in 4-point type (trust me, I've seen this) – they are pretty useless to an 80 year old with glaucoma.

Assessing clarity isn't simple. It's as complicated as the human mind. When a readability expert assesses your writing, you get an analysis of all the factors – language and sentence structure, organization, tone, design and navigation features – everything that affects your success as you try to accomplish your purpose with your chosen audience.

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What's new in our resource collection

Books

Get to the Point: A strategy for writing clearly at work, by Rose Grotzky. Toronto: Praxis, 1998

Based on her research in a range of businesses, Grotzky uses case studies to highlight the many reasons why clear communication is vital at work. The book includes guidelines to help readers create clear business documents.

The Non-Designer's Web Book (2nd edition), by Robin Williams and John Tollett. Berkeley, CA: Peachpit Press, 2000

This engaging and well-illustrated book outlines everything you need to know about the Web. Senior CLAD Associate Tannis Atkinson says, "This is a really useful general introduction to everything you need to know about the web:

browsers, searches, file formats and browser-safe colours. It's also a fun place to learn how basic principles of design apply to the Web."

Websites

www.useit.com

One of the foremost experts on web usability is Dr. Jakob Nielsen. His site includes a regular column, The Alertbox, which highlights findings from his ongoing research. Tannis recommends two excellent introductions to usability, [Usability 101](#) and [Top ten mistakes of Web design](#).