



In this issue:

[Why CLAD's Reading Effectiveness Tool still rules](#)

[Summer reading: Tannis Atkinson takes on the new grammarians](#)

[Coming to Toronto this fall: Towards Clearer Communications](#)

The CLAD Letter is sent three times a year. Please forward it to colleagues who might find it helpful!

Subscribe or unsubscribe: To receive or stop receiving this newsletter, please email clad@idirect.ca with "Subscribe" or "Unsubscribe" in the subject line.

Why CLAD's Reading Effectiveness Tool still rules

by Sally McBeth, Manager, Clear Language and Design



Whenever I speak in public, people ask, "Which readability tool would you recommend? The Flesch-Kincaid rating in Word's spellchecker? Dale-Chall? Fry? Some kind of software?"

My answer hasn't changed. Seven years after we developed it, the semi-automated Reading Effectiveness Tool on CLAD's website is still the one to beat. I mean that it is the most accurate, convenient, well rounded, and thoughtful way to approach to document assessment. That tool is one of the big reasons our website is so popular and busy.

In fact, hundreds of organizations link to CLAD as a resource for checking reading difficulty. In the past, most of the links were from health organizations. When I checked recently, I discovered a surge of new links from web accessibility sites.

I found links from the resource pages of Accessible Information Technology programs at a number of U.S. universities. Our Reading Effectiveness Tool is recommended in training materials for web accessibility from the National Information Library Service in Australia and the U.S.-based Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers Computer Society. We pop up as a resource on the Minerva Europe knowledge base, which pushes quality standards for websites in the European Union.

There's no doubt anymore that 'plain language' is the most effective way to write for the Web. People want to check their writing for clarity, and there are five big reasons why CLAD's tool is so popular with them:

- It's easy to use because it does a lot of the math for you.
- It does not sacrifice accuracy to convenience. You can trust your results.
- It's not just about the length of the words and sentences. The tool asks you to consider a whole range of factors that affect readability.
- It makes you think. You may not get the score you wanted the first time you try, but you'll know why you didn't.
- Did I mention it's free?



There's one more reason why you may want to try out the CLAD Reading Effectiveness Tool. It's a good way of knowing whether your website or publishing project might qualify for a CLAD Readability Mark. When you think you're ready to apply, get in touch with us for a formal, expert review. If you qualify, you can place the CLAD Readability

Mark on your document and demonstrate your organization's skill and commitment to clarity.

Summer reading: Grammar, anyone?

by Tannis Atkinson, Senior CLAD Associate



Recently I read two books which take very different approaches to clear writing. Billing itself as a stickler's guide to punctuation, *Eats, Shoots and Leaves* doesn't pretend to be balanced. Its subtitle, "The zero tolerance approach to punctuation," warns the reader what to expect—no less than a diatribe on incorrect usage of the comma, apostrophe, dash, colon, and semi-colon. Author Lynne Truss says the "reason to stand up for punctuation is that without it there is no reliable way of communicating meaning. Punctuation herds words together, keeps other apart. Punctuation directs you how to read..."

The book has been a huge hit, presumably with other sticklers who enjoy Truss' sharp wit. For me, the best parts of the book are the brief histories of each punctuation mark, and the passages where Truss acknowledges that usage has changed over time and will continue to change. Sadly, she repeatedly says that people who don't use punctuation correctly are illiterate, barbaric or "thick." Perhaps these barbs are part of what some readers consider to be her wit. Personally, I don't think an editor's role is to make people feel stupid.

By contrast, in *Woe is I: The grammarphobe's guide to better English in plain English*, Patricia O'Conner sets out to prove that grammar can be fun, or at least not humiliating. This compact book is a clear guide to common grammatical questions and mistakes, organized into chapters with witty titles such as "Plurals before Swine: Blunders with numbers," "Comma Sutra: The joy of punctuation," and "Yours Truly: The possessives and the possessed." The new, revised edition also includes a chapter about online writing.

Woe is I is a reference manual and a refresher course full of cheerful enthusiasm. As O'Connor says in the introduction:

"Grammar is mysterious to each of us in a different way. Some very smart people mess up pronouns, and I've known brilliant souls who can't spell....The best of us sometimes get exasperated with the complexities of using English well...But the quirks, the surprises, the ever-changing nature of English—these are the differences between a living language and a dead one."

***Eats, Shoots and Leaves: The zero tolerance approach to punctuation*, by Lynne Truss. New York, NY: Gotham Books, 2004**

***Woe is I: The grammarphobe's guide to better English in plain English* by Patricia T. O'Conner. New York, NY: Riverhead Books, 2003**

Towards Clearer Communications comes to Toronto October 4

On Tuesday, October 4th 2005, the Towards Clearer Communications conference is coming to Toronto. This conference is aimed at communicators from Ontario's public and private sectors. Conference attendees will receive tools on plain language. Come hear how to communicate more effectively with the public, including less-literate adults.

To register, visit www.clearercommunications.ca. For more information, call conference organizer Tobias Keogh at 1-888-906-5666 ext. 225.