

The
Comparative
Readability
of the
Authorized
Version

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the
**BIBLE
FOR
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FOREWORD

People who complain about the King James Bible, often mention that they think it is not as easy to read as some of the modern versions.

Some have placed the reading level of the King James Bible at grade 12. *Moody Monthly* carried an article in 1987 which claimed its reading level was at grade 14. In other words, you had to be a sophomore in college in order to understand it.

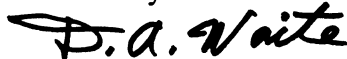
In this present book, my eldest son, D. A. Waite, Jr., has provided documentation which completely reverses this false information.

He has done so in a painstaking pursuit of the truth. He has devoted hundreds and hundreds of hours of research. His research has been objective rather than subjective.

This has been accomplished by means of the computer. He has compared seven versions in all, using several up-to-the-minute methods of readability measurement. He has not attempted to slant his findings, either for or against the King James Bible. He has allowed the statistical results to speak for themselves.

We of the BIBLE FOR TODAY, are very happy to publish this much-needed study. We sincerely hope and pray that it will be used of the Lord to correct the widespread errors about the readability of our King James Bible.

Sincerely for God's Truth,



Rev. D. A. Waite, Th.D., Ph.D.

Director, BIBLE FOR TODAY, INCORPORATED

July 1, 1996

DAW/w

Thy Lamp

(Psalm 119:105)

**Let me hold Thy Lamp
Tho darker grows the night.
Let me hold it high,
To share Its perfect Light**

**Let me shed it forth
By word and deed each day.
Let me tell it out
Along life's busy way.**

**Let me hold Thy Lamp
To bear Its precious flame.
Let me light some pathway
And proclaim Thy holy Name.**

**Let me hold Thy Lamp
And clearly show the way,
To keep the TRUTH aglow and bright
Until I'm called away.**

**By Gertrude Grace Sanborn
[The author's grandmother]**

The
Comparative Readability
of the
Authorized Version

**A Readability Analysis of Seven Bible Versions:
KJV, ASV, RSV, NASV, NIV, NKJV, & NRSV**

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Preface

Yes, it is absolutely true. The translators of the Authorized Version (KJV) really wrote on the college level! The readability statistics are crystal clear. Utilizing the same methods used in my *Reading Ease of the King James Bible*, I have computer-generated these readability statistics: *Flesch Reading Ease*--47.9 (difficult readability); *Flesch Grade Level*--13.3 (college sophomore); *Flesch-Kincaid*--12.7 (almost college freshman); and *Gunning's Fog Index*--15.2 (college junior).

But did the translators of the King James Bible **translate** on the college level? You see, these readability scores were generated (by *Word for Windows 2.0*) from the *dedication* to the Authorized Version of 1611, written by the translators and addressed to King James I of England. These scores are important because they demonstrate how these Elizabethan translators *could* write when they were free to create their own words and syntax and were not limited by the words and syntax they were *translating*. The long sentences and complicated syntax stand in stark contrast to the simple words and compact phrases of the translation that followed. But what then *was* the grade level at which the KJV translators actually *translated*? That is an excellent question. But are the mass-marketed answers accurate?

We have all seen comparative grade level statistics similar to those in the unfinished table below. But do the Flesch-Kincaid (F-K) and Gunning's Fog indexes (GFI) *really* prove that the KJV is written on the high-school senior (12) and college sophomore (14) levels? Do these readability formulas *actually* prove that the KJV is more difficult to read than the ASV, RSV, NASV, NIV, NKJV, and NRSV? Do they actually *prove* that the NIV is the easiest to read of them all?

This little book will help you answer these questions and complete this unfinished table. But Beware! Until you have actually completed this "shopping list" and accurately "compared brands," *don't* even consider "buying" products like the *highly-advertised* Brand X and Brand Z scores!

OUR BRAND				BRAND X	Grade Level	BRAND Z	***OUR BRAND***		
1994	1992	1992	1990	c. 1990	ENTIRE	1987	1992	1992	1990
ww6	ww2	G5	G4	<i>Translations of the Bible</i>	BIBLE	<i>Which Bible Translation?</i>	ww2	G5	G4
F-K	F-K	F-K	F-K	F-K	VERSION	GFI	GFI	GFI	GFI
				12.0	KJV	14.0			
				not given	ASV	11.6			
				11.0	NASV	11.3			
				not given	RSV	10.4			
				8.1	NRSV	not given			
				8.0	NKJV	9.1			
				7.8	NIV	7.8			

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PROLOGUE

And now for the main event! Just how did the KJV's readability compare to that of the other six Bible versions in this scientific, head-to-head competition? We must not let our emotional attachment to any particular version cloud our vision of the truth. We have all heard how difficult to read the KJV is and so we must not have any vain expectations of this tired, old version doing very well amidst such robust, young competition.

I suppose that if the archaic and obtuse KJV manages to "defeat" or tie even one other modern version--just one, mind you--it has done quite well for such an old "codger." There is no sense prolonging the agony. We may as well look at the results now. Even though the truth hurts, we must look it squarely in the face and move on--come what may!

"Let's see now. The first place award for readability excellence in the Old Testament goes to"

The New International Version is already starting towards the podium for its acceptance speech. And now the New Revised Standard Version also makes its way towards the front. The New American Standard Version and the New King James Version blush as their eyes meet while they start to stand.

The RSV takes its hands out of its pockets preparing to applaud the winner. The ASV contemplates words of comfort for those versions whose hopes will soon be dashed. And the dignified old KJV, with white hair and wrinkled brow, sits quietly in the corner thinking of days gone by and of dreams of tomorrow. When suddenly its reverie is broken by the gasps and groans of thousands in the audience. "There must be some mistake!" some shout. "That's not fair!" others shriek. What is all this commotion about?



I wanted to first discover, then document the truth whatever it was. When I began this research project three years ago, I had no idea what the truth was. I had been just as confused by modern Bible version readability propaganda as anyone else. I don't suppose I believed everything that I heard, but I thought there must be some truth to all the claims. Quite frankly I was surprised at the results! Maybe you will be too.

Chapter I

By What Standard?

INTRODUCTION

Purpose: Seven-Translation Comparative Bible Readability

The purpose of this small book is very simple. I have attempted to portray the comparative readability of seven Bible translations as clearly as possible. With the help of my faithful computer, I have analyzed every word in the 1611¹ *King James Version* (KJV), the 1901 *American Standard Version* (ASV), the 1952 *Revised Standard Version* (RSV), the 1971 *New American Standard Version* (NASV), the 1978 *New International Version* (NIV), the 1982 *New King James Version*, and the 1989 *New Revised Standard Version* (NRSV).

Bible Sections Analysis--OT, NT, Entire Bible

For each of these seven Bible translations, I independently analyzed the Old Testament, the New Testament, and the Entire Bible utilizing FOUR different computerized readability programs. I then carefully recorded and tabulated these computer-generated readability statistics. To simplify the data for this book, I averaged the readability statistics for *Grammatik 4.0* (1990), *Grammatik 5.0* (1992), *Word for Windows 2.0* (1992), and *Word for Windows 6.0* (1994). Although the charts in this book still indicate each computer program's individual readability scores, these scores are arranged from best average score to worst average score in each category.

Book-by-Book Analysis--Genesis to Revelation

¹ The Logos Bible Software program that I used to generate all KJV readability texts uses the most accurate modern representation of the 1611 KJV--the Oxford University Press's 1769 edition.

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For each of these seven Bible translations, I used TWO different computerized readability programs (1992 *Grammatik 5.0* and 1992 *Word for Windows 2.0*) to independently analyze each of the Bible's sixty-six books. Once again I carefully recorded, tabulated, and averaged these readability statistics. I arranged these scores in Bible book order, listed each computer program's individual scores, and then combined these individual scores into an average score.

Chapter-by-Chapter Analysis--KJV & NIV only

For the 1611 King James version and the 1978 New International Version, I used ONE computerized readability program (1992 *Word for Windows 2.0*) to analyze each of the 1,189 chapters in the Bible. I carefully recorded and tabulated these readability statistics. I then compiled an item analysis for each of the four different readability scores generated for each translation.

The Challenge of Bible Sections Analysis--Time

Some may wonder why I did not use all four computer programs for the book-by-book and chapter-by-chapter analyses and why I did not do a chapter-by-chapter analysis of all seven Bible translations. The answer is twofold--time and sanity! The readability statistics in this book took me literally hundreds of hours to computer-generate, record, and tabulate.

The easiest readability scores to generate and tabulate were the Old Testament, New Testament, and Entire Bible scores. For each of the seven Bible translations, it took *Word for Windows 2.0* about eight hours² to generate readability statistics for the Entire Bible, about six hours for the Old Testament, and about two hours for the New Testament. Although the computer required little attention during these long blocks of time, it was "tied-up" for over one hundred twelve hours during just the *Word for Windows 2.0* analysis time. It did take a little less time than this for *Word for Windows 6.0* to generate its readability statistics and (Thank the Lord!) much less time for *Grammatik 4.0* and *Grammatik 5.0* to generate their readability statistics.

² I computer-generated all these *Word for Windows 2.0* readability statistics in the summer of 1993, using a 386SX-20 computer.

The Challenge of Book-by-Book Analysis--Time & Patience

Generating readability statistics for the book-by-book analyses took as much time and more. The computer-analysis time was about as long, but the process was more labor-intensive. I had to prepare each of the sixty-six books for computer analysis in all seven Bible translations. Then I had to start the analysis and record and tabulate the data sixty-six times for all seven translations. Since readability statistics generated by *Word for Windows 2.0* and *Grammatik 5.0* offer a fairly balanced picture of the seven-translation book-by-book readability (and since I don't seem to have a spare one hundred thirty hours), I decided not to tabulate my *Grammatik 4.0* statistics or to generate the *Word for Windows 6.0* scores.

The Challenge of Chapter-by-Chapter Analysis--Time & Fatigue

Generating the readability statistics for the chapter-by-chapter analyses was the most exhausting and time-consuming phase of this entire readability study. It is unlikely that I will ever do another complete Bible translation chapter-by-chapter analysis of all 1189 chapters. (It is also unlikely that I will ever attempt a verse-by-verse complete Bible translation analysis either, for that matter.) The work is too mentally draining and demands constant attention for hundreds of hours. I chose the KJV and the NIV as representatives of the old and the new "schools" of translation "thought." I used *Word for Windows 2.0* because it generates four different and widely used sets of readability scores [and because I had not yet discovered the swiftness of *Grammatik 4.0* and *Grammatik 5.0*].

The Challenge of Verse Numbers

Some may wonder if I included the verse numbers when I prepared each Bible text for computer analysis. I elected not to remove the verse numbers from the Bible text for two reasons. First, the minuscule difference in readability scores did not justify the large expenditure of time required to *reliably* remove only the verse numbers from the text. (It was fairly easy to remove the verse numbers and chapter numbers from the KJV since it uses words for its numbers elsewhere. It was much more challenging, however, to remove *only* verse and chapter numbers from the modern versions because they do not use words for numbers elsewhere.)

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Second, one could say that the verse numbers actually have become a part of the text and should be included. Furthermore, since the text of all seven translations included the same numbers, the *comparative* readability should be exactly the same; and the *actual* readability should be virtually the same.

READABILITY FORMULAS

The Validity of Readability Formulas

Some may wonder how valid readability formulas are in predicting the readability of a particular text. Most of the fifty or so formulas for determining reading difficulty pre-suppose that word-length and/or sentence length alone determines readability. As David Crystal reminds us in the 1987 *Cambridge Encyclopedia of Language* (p. 252), however: “There is no neat correlation between sentence length and difficulty; and not all long words are difficult to read.” Mr. Crystal continues by pointing out that most readability formulas fail to stress important criteria such as “complexity of sentence construction and the nature of word meaning.” As a result, Crystal mentions that many have found fault with the various readability formulas.

In spite of all the criticism aimed at readability formulas, however, Mr. Crystal concludes his comments with these significant words: “But in the absence of more sophisticated measures, *they* [readability formulas] *continue to attract widespread use, as a reasonably convenient way of predicting* (though not explaining) *reading difficulty.*” [Emphasis was added.]

Overview of Readability Formulas Used

Of the readability programs that I used for the Entire Bible, all generated Flesch-Kincaid (F-K), and Flesch Reading Ease (FRE) readability scores. All except *Word for Windows 6.0* generated Gunning’s Fog Index (GFI) readability scores. *Word for Windows 2.0* also added the Flesch Grade Level (FGL) to the basic three. *Word for Windows 6.0* replaced the GFI and FGL with the Coleman-Liau Grade Level (C-L) and Bormuth Grade Level (BGL) readability scores.