

The Media Center**Everyday Tech Tools and Reading**

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Whether it's as basic as scanning text to use Microsoft Word as an assistive technology tool or searching a database for reading levels, the tech tools to help connect students with the right reading materials are at our fingertips. It doesn't take much to use them ourselves or show teachers how easy they are to use. I see an in-service in the near future!

Helping students select reading material, a core responsibility of every media specialist, has acquired added importance in this era of No Child Left Behind. As your school is striving to improve reading test scores, it's time to reexamine how we can use technology as a tool for ourselves and for teachers to use when we identify age- and ability-appropriate materials. In addition, much of it can be done *with everyday technology right at your fingertips*.

OCR (optical character recognition) software and a scanner make it easy to scan a block of text into computer-editable text. The text is saved as a text file or a Microsoft Word file, or copy/pasted into Word. Depending on the software, you may also be able to scan the text *directly* into the Word application. If the original text has a wide range of fonts or graphics, you may have to do some editing. You might also have to scan columns separately. Features will vary with each scanner and OCR software, but it's a process that is much easier and quicker than it used to be.

Once the original text is converted to a Microsoft Word file, it's easy to determine the readability statistics. Word provides the Flesch Reading Ease, based on the number of syllables per word and average words per sentence. Standard writing is scored 60-70; the Flesch-Kincaid grade level gives the reading level of a grade and month. These first few paragraphs, for example, have a Flesch Reading Ease of 51.3 and a Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level of 10.5 as shown by the readability statistics diagram here. (See Figure 1 above.)

Readability Statistics is a simple feature in Word that elicits "I wish I'd known that" from teachers unfamiliar with it. Many of our elementary teachers have leveled classroom collections by typing in a few paragraphs of text and noting the reading level inside the book cover. I've even shown students how they can easily level a book themselves.

AutoSummarize is another useful feature for teachers who would like their students to read an easier version of a textbook selection. Once text is scanned and saved as a Word file, AutoSummarize can be used to create a new version of the text. (See Figure 2 on page 22.)

Gathering Readability Statistics with Microsoft Word

(Directions based on Office 2001 for Mac)

1. Begin a new word-processing document.
2. Navigate to the **top menu bar**.
3. Under **Edit**, select **Preferences**.
4. In the **Spelling & Grammar** tab, check "Show Readability Statistics."
5. Type your selection or open a selection of scanned text. (The scanned text should be a **Microsoft Word** file or a text that **Word** can open.)
6. Select "Spelling and Grammar."
7. When you are done the reading statistics will be displayed as shown in the sample **Readability Statistics box**.

thousands of fiction and non-fiction titles. Spanish titles are also available. Lexile numbers range from 200-1700. The popular middle school title *Princess in Love* by Meg Cabot has a Lexile measure of 880, placing it in the sixth grade level range [<http://www.lexile.com>].

- The Scholastic Web site has a large listing of leveled books and Lexile titles. Both files are available in PDF format [<http://teacher.scholastic.com/products/paperbacks/>].
- Some districts have developed their own leveled books databases. The Beaverton, Oregon, school district's database was made with FileMaker Pro. Users can search by title, author, publisher, subject, reading strand, reading recovery strand, guided reading level, or a combined search. A guide aligns DRA Guided Reading Texts with district benchmarks and targets [<http://www.beaverton.k12.or.us/>]. Select the resources link.
- Portland, Oregon, schools have a database of picture books searchable by title, author, RR level, or grade level. The Portland database is easy to use and understand. PDF versions of the database are also available for anyone to use. As noted on the Web site, it's a great resource for "families to help them choose appropriate books for their students." It's also a great PR tool for the district—and a great resource for anyone with Web access [http://www.pps.k12.or.us/curriculum/literacy/leveled_books/].
- The Monroe, Indiana, Public Library has an extensive list of children's fiction books in a series. The list is arranged by author and is not searchable, but is a wonderful resource for elementary and middle school media specialists who find it's not always so easy to keep up with all the titles in popular series [<http://www.monroe.lib.in.us/childrens/serieslist.html#contents>].
- Finally, a lengthy collection of literacy resources is linked from the Greenville, Michigan, school district Web site. There are links to leveled books databases, reading assessment tools, online books, lists of books, and more. This collection is a reminder of the abundance of information available to help busy teachers and media specialists [http://www.greenville.k12.mi.us/ecc/literacy_res.html].

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How to use AutoSummarize:

1. Select AutoSummarize from the Microsoft Word Tools menu.
2. Choose the percent of the original document you would like included in the summary.

3. Select the placement of the summary. Choices are:

- highlight key points (the text becomes colored)
- an executive summary or abstract at the beginning of the document
- a new document on a separate page
- hiding everything but the summary

(Refer to the AutoSummarize box for a visual of how each type of summary will look.)

4. After the document is printed, the student will have a resource that is more appropriate for his or her level.

Mary Alice Anderson is a frequent contributor to professional journals and a conference presenter. She is an adjunct instructor in the College of Education at Winona State University and an online instructor for the University of Northern Iowa Professional Development program. The Winona Middle School Media/Technology Program has received both state and national recognition and awards. She is also the lead media specialist for the Winona Area Public Schools and was a Library of Congress American Memory Fellow in 1999. The Winona Middle School Web site can be accessed at <http://www.rschoolday.com/winonamiddle>. Communications to the author may be addressed to Mary Alice Anderson, Media Specialist, Winona Middle School, 1570 Homer Road, Winona, MN 55987; e-mail: maryalice.anderson@winona.k12.mn.us, <http://www.rschoolday.com/winonamiddle/maryaliceanderson>.

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