

# Readability analysis

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## Learning objectives

After this lesson, you'll be able to:

- explain the different factors of the readability analysis in Yoast SEO;
  - understand how the readability analysis assessments can help you optimize your content for search engines.
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One aspect of the content analysis in Yoast SEO is the readability analysis. In this lesson, we'll explain the different factors of the readability analysis, and we'll dive into how the readability analysis assessments can help you optimize your content for visitors and search engines.

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# The readability analysis

In the readability analysis, you receive separate scores for each aspect of readability, as well as an overall readability score, indicated by traffic lights. This works the same as in the SEO analysis.

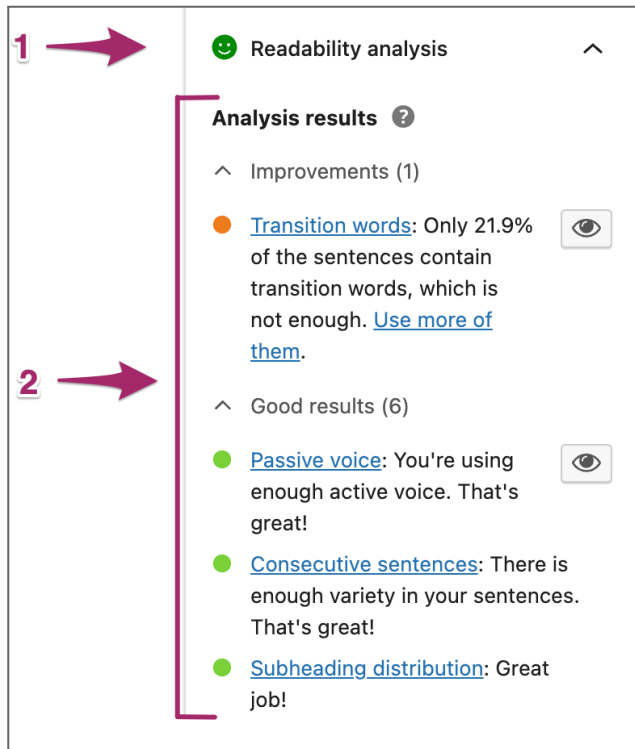


Image 1: The traffic light feedback system in Yoast SEO, where 1 marks the overall readability score and 2 the scores of the individual assessments

## Readability vs. SEO

Let's clarify something first: in the Yoast SEO plugin, there is a distinction between the SEO analysis and the readability analysis. However, that doesn't mean that readability is not important with SEO. In fact, ensuring that your text is easily readable is incredibly important for your overall SEO. The goal is to attract and maintain the interest of your readers. You should avoid risking losing the interest of your readers with poorly structured and confusing texts.

## The readability analysis factors

The readability analysis uses an algorithm to determine how readable your post is. We've carefully crafted this algorithm to make it as valuable as possible without being too strict. It features several checks that'll give you

advice when you write your post. In other words, by following the advice, you can make your text easier to read and understand. Next to most of the textual feedback, you'll find a small button with an eye on it (Image 1). If you click this button, the result matching the feedback will be highlighted in the text. Now, let's take a closer look at the different checks.

## Sentence length

Sentence length is one of the core issues that makes a text hard to read. If your sentences are too long – over 20 words – people might lose track of your point. Often, readers have to jump back a few words to find out what you mean. This is very tiring and inefficient. Try to keep the number of words in a sentence in check. Shorten your sentences. Aim for easy understanding, not a complex literary masterpiece. That's why Yoast SEO has a check that makes sure there are not too many long sentences in your text.

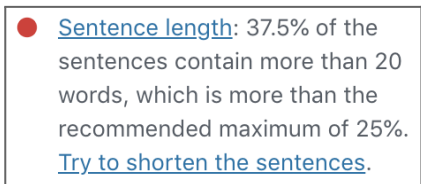


Image 2: Feedback on sentence length

## Consecutive sentences

Consecutive sentences that start with the same word lead to repetition, which your readers may find annoying. It's important to mix up your sentences to keep your article readable and free of obstacles. This is why the plugin also gives you feedback on your sentence beginnings.

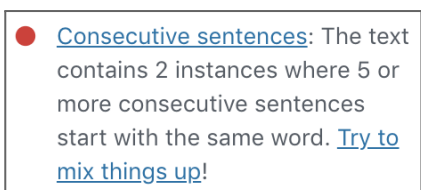


Image 3: Feedback on consecutive sentences

## Passive voice

Another thing to watch out for when you're writing your texts is not to overuse the passive voice. The passive voice is a grammatical construction. The easiest way to explain the passive voice is by contrasting it with the active voice. The active voice is the standard English sentence structure. The

simplest possible sentences feature an actor (the subject), who does (the verb) something to either a person, animal or thing (the receiver).

<b>Word</b>	Mom	hugged	me.
<b>Semantic function</b>	actor	direct verb	receiver

Table 1: Active voice

In the passive voice, the actor and the receiver are switched around. The receiver becomes the grammatical subject. Note that the meaning of the sentence stays exactly the same. The only difference is the word order.

<b>Word</b>	I	was hugged	by mom.
<b>Semantic function</b>	receiver	direct verb	actor

Table 2: Passive voice

In some passive sentences, you can omit the actor. 'I was hugged.', for example, is a perfectly sensible passive sentence, although it provides less information.

Using a lot of passive voice in your text makes it appear distant, and your message will be less clear. There are two main reasons for this. The first one is that sentences in the passive voice are wordy; the passive alternative to an active sentence is simply longer. The second reason is that the passive voice uses a sentence structure that requires more cognitive effort. Your reader will spend valuable working memory on making sense of the sentence, which decreases the likelihood of getting your message across.

So whenever you use the passive voice, always consider whether a better, active alternative is available. In the readability analysis in our plugin, we recommend using the passive voice in a maximum of 10% of your sentences. Yoast SEO detects passive sentences in your text and lets you know if you're using too many of them.

● [Passive voice](#): 40% of the sentences contain passive voice, which is more than the recommended maximum of 10%. [Try to use their active counterparts.](#)

Image 4: Feedback on passive voice

## Transition words

Using transition words like 'most importantly', 'because', 'therefore' or 'besides that' improves the flow of your article as they provide hints to the reader about what is coming next. Yoast SEO recognizes these words and phrases in several languages and will give you feedback on whether you use enough transition words in your text.

● [Transition words](#): Only 19.1% of the sentences contain transition words, which is not enough. [Use more of them.](#)

Image 5: Feedback on transition words

## Paragraph length

Using long paragraphs makes your text look like one big blob of text. This makes it difficult to read your text. The plugin analyzes the length of your paragraphs and your use of subheadings. Subheadings are important to guide the reader through the text and to show them what the important points are. If your paragraphs turn out to be too long, you should break them up, use shorter paragraphs, and insert subheadings.

● [Paragraph length](#): 1 of the paragraphs contains more than the recommended maximum of 150 words. [Shorten your paragraphs!](#)

Image 6: Feedback on paragraph length

## Subheading distribution

Moreover, Yoast SEO checks if the text has an appropriate number of subheadings. Subheadings help guide readers through the text and highlight important information.

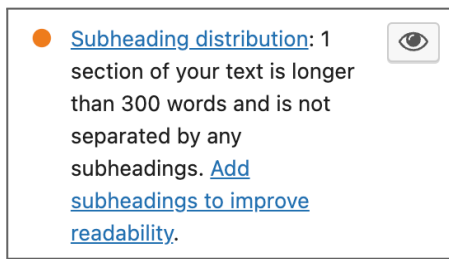


Image 7: Feedback on subheading distribution

## Text alignment (Premium)

The alignment of your text can also have a big impact on the readability of your content. More specifically, using center-aligned text makes your content harder to read and less accessible. That's why Yoast SEO Premium's readability analysis comes with a text alignment check. This check analyzes your content for center-aligned text blocks with more than 50 characters. If it finds any, you'll see a red light warning, and you can click on the eye button to see which part of your text needs to be fixed (Image 8).

If you're writing in a left-to-right language, it's recommended that you switch to left-aligned text, and if you're using a right-to-left language, then right-aligned text is the way to go.

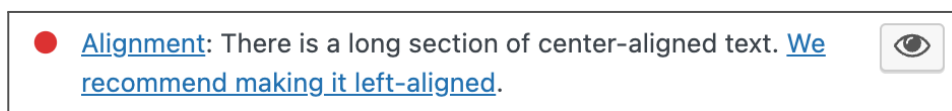


Image 8: Feedback from the text alignment check in Yoast SEO Premium for a left-to-right language

## Word complexity (Premium)

Finally, we have the word complexity check, which is only available if you're using Yoast SEO Premium. This assessment checks your text and highlights words that are considered complex. If more than 10% of the words in your text are complex, we'll recommend you use shorter and more common words. If you click the eye icon, the plugin will highlight all the words that can be considered complex.

To determine whether a word is complex, we used datasets from various research studies that included both native and non-native participants. In our final model, a word is considered complex if:

- it is longer than 7 characters;
- does not appear in the top 5,000 most frequently used words;

- and does not begin with a capital letter.

For example, the word “sensible” is 8 characters long, does not appear in the top 5,000 of common words, and does not start with a capital letter, so our plugin will highlight it as complex. However, you can decide for yourself whether to follow our feedback or not. It is possible that the plugin may highlight words that are not complex for you or your audience, and there may be cases where it is difficult or impossible to replace specialized or niche-specific words with more common ones. In these cases, you can simply ignore the feedback. Ultimately, you know your audience better than anyone.

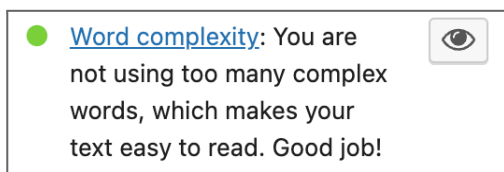


Image 9: Feedback on word complexity

## Cornerstone content

Cornerstone content pieces are those articles on your website you’re most proud of. Articles that reflect your business, communicate your mission, and are extremely well-written. In the Yoast SEO plugin, you can mark your article as cornerstone content. For these cornerstone articles, the content checks in the readability analysis and SEO analysis are stricter. This is because we really want you to optimize these articles as well as you can.

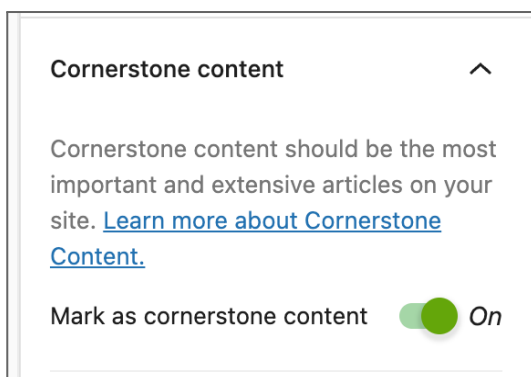


Image 10: Mark your content as cornerstone in the Yoast SEO sidebar

## Key takeaways

- The readability analysis gives you feedback on different aspects of your text, like transitions, your use of passive voice, word complexity, and the length of your paragraphs and sentences.