

The Language and Readability of the KJV

Flesch-Kincaid Readability Scores

	KJV Grade Level	NIV Grade Level	NASB Grade Level	TEV Grade Level	NKJV Grade Level
Gen. 1	4.4	5.1	4.7	5.1	5.2
Mal. 1	4.6	4.8	5.1	5.4	4.6
Matt. 1	6.7	16.4	6.8	11.8	10.3
Rev. 1	7.5	7.1	7.7	6.4	7.7
Grade Level Average	5.8	8.4	6.1	7.2	6.9

Is the KJB Really Hard to Read

- The KJB is easier to read because it uses one or two syllable words while new versions substitute complex multi-syllable words and phrases. (Riplinger, *New Age Bible Versions*, 196)
- In *The Language of the King James Bible*, Gail Riplinger cites statistics generated from Grammatik and Word for Windows to demonstrate that the KJB has a 5th grade reading level, while the NKJV and NASB read at a 6th grade level, meanwhile the popular NIV possess an 8th grade reading level. The KJB possesses:
 - less syllables per word
 - less letters per word
 - less words per sentence
 - smaller percentage of long words
 - greater percentage of short words than modern versions.(159)

Brief History of the English Language

- Three distinct periods mark the development of English:
 - Old English—6th century to the Norman Conquest of 1066
 - Middle English—1100 to 1500
 - Modern English—1500 to the present

Notes of John Bois

- John Bois records in his notes from the final review committee that in the final step one man read from the translation and the others sat around and listened. . . It was an auditory review. It was an auditory enterprise. (Teems, 209)
 - Andrew Downes—“Jesus Chris, yesterday, and to day the same, and for ever.”
 - Final Version—“Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever.” (Hebrews 13:8)

Literary Forms and Features

- One of these features that slides right by us as modern readers relates to the genitive or possessive construction. A common biblical formula is the construction noun plus the preposition *of* plus noun (noun + *of* + noun). The Standard English way of achieving the same effect is to turn the second noun into a modifying adjective placed in front of the first noun. (Ryken, 135-136)
 - Genesis 1:24—“best of the earth” (land animal)
 - Psalm 2:9—“rod of iron” (iron rod)
 - Isaiah 5:22—“men of strength” (strong men)
 - John 4:7—“women of Samaria” (Samaritan woman)

Literary Forms and Features

- A subcategory of the noun + *of* + noun construction occurs when the same noun appears in both halves of the formula. The effect is to suggest the quality of being superlative—the most heightened form that can be imagined. (Ryken, 136)
 - I Timothy 6:15-“King of kings, and Lord of lords.”
 - Song of Solomon 1:1—“song of songs”
 - Ecclesiastes 1:2—“Vanity of vanities”

Literary Forms and Features

- Even when the noun-of-noun formula does not meet the special conditions noted in the preceding paragraphs, it is simply a common formulation in the King James Bible. (Ryken, 136)
 - Psalm 34:7—“angel of the LORD”
 - Psalm 65:9—“the river of God”
 - Proverbs 4:17—“the bread of wickedness”
 - James 3:18—“fruit of righteousness”
 - Ecclesiastes 10:18—“idleness of hands”
- “Once alerted to the noun-of-noun construction, we can find it nearly continuously in the King James Bible. In addition to preserving the word order of the original, the King James Bible gains rhythmic smoothness with this construction.” (Ryken, 136)

Literary Forms and Features

- Another formula that is vintage King James are the words lo and behold. The grammatical term for them is interjection. The function of the formula is to signal the spectacular nature of an event or the profound importance of a statement. The effect is awe-inspiring. (Ryken, 136-137)
 - Revelation 3:20—“Behold, I stand at the door and knock”
 - Acts 12:7—“Behold, and angel of the Lord came upon him”
 - Matthew 28:20—“Lo, I am with you always”

Literary Forms and Features

- Did your English teacher ever tell you never to begin a sentence with the word “and.” It so happens that the ancient Hebrews and Greeks absolutely loved the conjunction translated as “and.” In Hebrew the prefix *waw* has this meaning and in the Greek the word is *kai*. The effect of these frequent and in the King James Bible is to create a tremendous sense of continuity. Everything flows in sequence. The construction often shows a sense of cause and effect, as one thing produces the next, which produces the next. (Ryken, 137)

— Judges 3:21-22

List of Hebrew Idioms

- “to lick the dust” (Psalm 72:9, Isaiah 49:23, Micah 7:17)
- “to fall flat on his face” (Numbers 22:31)
- “a man after his own heart” (I Samuel 13:14)
- “to pour out one’s heart” (Psalm 62:8, Lamentations 2:19)
- “the land of the living” (Job 28:13, Psalm 27:13, 52:5, Isaiah 38:11, Jeremiah 11:19, Ezekiel 32:23-27)
- “under the sun” (Ecclesiastes 1:4 and twenty other times in this book)
- “sour grapes” (Ezekiel 18:2)
- “from time to time” (Ezekiel 4:10)
- “pride goes before a fall” (Proverbs 16:18)
- “the skin of my teeth” (Job 19:20)
- “to stand in awe” (Psalm 4:4; 33:8)
- “to put words in his mouth” (Exodus 4:15, Deut. 18:18, II Samuel 14:3; 14:19, Jeremiah 1:9) (McGrath, 263)

Idioms and Words From Tyndale

- “fight the good fight”
- “my brother’s keeper”
- “the apple of his eye”
- “the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak”
- “sign of the times”
- “in the cool of the day”
- “ye of little faith”
- “a law unto themselves”
- “peace-maker”
- “long-suffering”
- Passover, Jehovah, scapegoat, atonement, landlady, seashore, fishermen, stumbling block, taskmaster, two-edged, viper, zealous, and beautiful (Teems, 227-228)

Results of Replacing the KJB

- Leland Ryken, author of *The Legacy of the King James Bible* chronicles the following results of the ascendancy of modern versions.
- A common English Bible in both the church and culture has been lost.
- The authority of the Bible went into eclipse when we lost a common Bible.
- Biblical illiteracy has accompanied the decline of the KJB (Ryken, 230)