Results from the five readability formulas

from early in the junior year of high school (11.28) to mid-way through the second year of graduate school (18.50). Despite this wide range in readability, however, the small standard deviation of 1.84 means that approximately 68% of the articles in the combined samples (approximately 15 articles) fell within the range of early in the senior year of high school to late in the third year of college [(M = 14.04) +/- (SD = 1.84) = 12.20 – 15.88 years of schooling]. That is, the standard deviation reveals that most of the articles fell within the range of late high school to near the end of the third year in college. The remainder fell outside that range, with one lying beyond a master's degree level of readability (18.50).

It appears that most of the articles examined in this study are at appropriate levels of readability for the presumptive readers of the two journals: graduate students, practicing teachers, and professors, all holders of bachelor's degrees and many with graduate degrees. However, because most people read at levels below their highest completed grade in school and also prefer to read easier material, many undergraduates could find some of the articles beyond their comfortable readability levels. On the other hand, this relatively difficult reading level may be necessary, because a small body of research suggests that relatively complex topics result in reports that are by their nature more difficult to read than most other types of works. One interesting study found that journalists who described actual, complex events wrote more complex articles at more difficult (i.e., lower) levels of readability than did journalists who had been discredited for their superficial, sometimes even fabricated reporting and writing (Dalecki, Lasorsa, & Lewis, 2009).

Nevertheless, many reading experts advocate the use of easy reading materials. Some government agencies now mandate easier reading levels for insurance, medical, tax, and other types of information aimed toward general readers. Moreover, it appears that reading experts have not advocated publicly for more difficult reading levels, in general or in specific media or subject areas. Similarly, there is no evidence that reading experts lament the lowering of reading difficulty levels (i.e., increasing of readability) of newspapers over the last several decades. On the contrary, reading experts do not view decreases in reading difficulty levels as a "dumbing down" of material to accommodate allegedly increasing numbers of poor readers. Instead, improving readability is seen as a positive trend

because research has shown that less difficult material can attract larger numbers of readers, and because people can read it with more comprehension. According to DuBay (2004), Robert Flesch and Robert Gunning, who worked with the Associated Press (AP) and United Press (now UPI), respectively, "had an enormous impact on journalism … Together, they helped to bring down the reading grade level of front-page stories from the 16th to the 11th grade, where they remain today" (p. 23).

All five formulas employed in this study are relatively easy to compute, whether via software or manually, although preparing the materials for either type of analysis can be tedious. Because the Flesch Reading Ease and Flesch-Kincaid formulas are available on Microsoft Word programs, they could be the formulas of choice. Their use requires material in Word format, and extraneous characters should be removed. It should be kept in mind that these two formulas tend to score on the easier end of the readability range. Finally, Chall and Dale (1995) point out that "No readability formula is a complete and full measure of text difficulty" (p. 6).

The insights from this study and any future studies could help professors diagnose students' reading difficulties that may manifest themselves in

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Readability Formulas 7.4 and *Dale-*

Appendix A

Articles Analyzed (2000-09) (*N* = 22)

Journal of Research in Music Education (JRME)
(*n* = 11 articles, listed chronologically)

1   Campbell, P. S. (2000). How musical are we: John Blacking on music, education, and cultural understanding. *JRME, 48*