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MEASURING THE READING LEVEL OF LDS MATERIALS:  
A SUPPLEMENT TO THE DALE WORD LIST

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INTRODUCTION

During the past year, the Editing Section of the Church Curriculum Department has been conducting a study of the reading levels of Church publications. Using a computerized program, editors measure the reading level of Church manuscripts and, when necessary, lower the reading level during the editing process.

One of the formulas used in this analysis is the Dale-Chall formula, generally considered the most accurate formula for measuring the reading level of adult materials. It is based on the Dale word list of 3,000 words, which are known by 80 percent of fourth graders. Because of the heavy reliance on "LDS vocabulary" in materials published by the Church, the Dale-Chall formula sometimes exaggerates the reading difficulty of materials intended for an LDS audience.

PROCEDURES

In an attempt to account for the specialized vocabulary known by most Church members, we proposed to supplement the Dale list with a list of LDS words when the Dale-Chall formula is used to measure materials prepared for an LDS audience. This supplement was obtained by--

1. Identifying non-Dale words that occur frequently in LDS publications.
2. Testing 850 of these words on LDS fourth graders to determine which ones are known by 80 percent of the children.
3. Adding these words to the Dale list when the Dale-Chall formula is applied to LDS materials.

Eight hundred and fifty words were selected from a frequency count prepared by the BYU Translation Services Department and the Church Information Systems Department. The frequency count was obtained from Church magazines, general and area conference addresses, the 1979-80 Gospel Doctrine manual, the 1980-81 Family Home Evening manual, Gospel Principles, and Gospel Essentials.

These words were divided into twenty-five test forms of thirty-four words each and tested in a three-option, multiple-choice format. After pretesting in twenty-five Utah wards, the test was administered by the Correlation Department to fourth graders in the United States, Canada, the British Isles, Australia, New Zealand, and the Philippines. Thirty-eight stakes were selected for the study according to a stratified random sampling from Utah, other western states, the Midwest, the East, and foreign countries.

#### FINDINGS

Of the 850 words tested, 249 were identified correctly by at least 80 percent of the LDS fourth graders. These words (listed in the Appendix) should constitute a valid addition to the Dale word list when the Dale-Chall formula is applied to LDS materials.

An analysis of variance showed that children in the United States scored significantly higher on the test than children in foreign countries ( $P < .01$ ).

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

1. In addition to supplementing the Dale list with a list of LDS terms, the test results may have other uses for Church writers and editors. By indicating what terms and concepts are not clearly understood by LDS fourth graders, the test results might be used to identify topics that need to be emphasized or better clarified in the youth curriculum of the Church. The results indicate, for example, that most students are familiar with the concept of resurrection (86 percent), but few with atonement (32 percent). Other terms that do not seem to be clearly understood by this age group are standard works (24 percent), exaltation (31 percent), degrees of glory (39 percent), charity (46 percent), chastity (50 percent), moral (32 percent), morality (24 percent), revelation (50 percent), and patriarchal (18 percent).
2. The words could be tested on LDS populations at higher levels (grades 6, 8, 10, 12, 13, and 16) to determine when the words can be considered "familiar."
3. At present very little is known about the reading abilities of LDS adults. Numerous materials are published each year for different adult audiences in the Church--priesthood leaders, the Relief Society, clerks and secretaries, teachers, members in developing areas, all adult members, etc. Some measure of the reading ability of these groups would make it possible to target different Church publications to an appropriate reading level.
4. Readability measurement needs to be expanded to non-English Church materials, particularly in the areas where literacy rates are low. Formulas have been developed for several foreign languages.

Computerized versions of these formulas would make them much more accessible to Church writers and translators.

5. The Church publications that rate highest in difficulty are administrative materials--handbooks, bulletins, and instructions. These are also the materials that rely most heavily on a technical vocabulary. Most of these words are not commonly used by fourth graders and thus do not appear in our 249-word supplement. More research is needed to determine how well these terms are understood by adult members, particularly Church leaders who are fairly new in the Church and must read a large amount of instructional material.

6. Much more research is needed in the broad area of writing style. The following questions have scarcely been addressed: What style is most appropriate for Church materials? How formal should it be? What style do members prefer? How does the writing style of Church publications affect the interest level and the effectiveness of the message?

## APPENDIX: LDS SUPPLEMENT TO THE DALE WORD LIST

<u>Score</u>	<u>Word--Word Meaning</u>
84%	ABSENCE -- Not being there
91%	ACCOMPLISH -- Get done
90%	ACCOMPLISHMENT -- Something done after hard work
84%	ACHIEVE -- Gain by hard work
94%	ACTION -- Doing something
87%	ACTIVITY -- Doing something with others
85%	ADVANCE -- Move forward
80%	ADVISER(OR) -- Teacher or helper
82%	ALMIGHTY -- All powerful
100%	AMEN -- End of prayer
84%	ANCESTORS -- People who lived before us
87%	APOSTLES -- Twelve men who lead the Church
80%	APPROVE -- Accept
81%	ASSIGN -- Give a job
86%	ASSIGNMENT -- Job'
87%	ASSIST -- To help
94%	ASSISTANCE -- Help
81%	ASSOCIATION -- A group
97%	ASSURE -- Make someone feel sure
88%	ATTENDANCE -- Being there
96%	ATTITUDE -- Way of feeling
89%	BAPTISM -- Being covered with water when you join the Church
82%	BEYOND -- Farther than
93%	BISHOP -- Church leader
91%	BLESSINGS -- Gifts from God
86%	BRETHREN -- Men who are members of the Church
88%	CALLING -- Job in the Church
94%	CAST OUT -- Get rid of
90%	CELESTIAL kingdom -- The highest place in heaven
89%	CELESTIAL marriage -- Lasting forever
84%	CEREMONY -- Special meeting
80%	CHALLENGE -- Something hard to do
91%	CHAPEL -- Holy room in a church
97%	CHAPTER -- Part of a book
88%	COMMANDMENT -- God's law
89%	COMPANION -- One who goes with another
84%	CONFERENCE -- Large meeting
83%	CONFIRM -- Put hands on a person's head
83%	CONTACT -- Get in touch with
89%	CONTROL -- Have power over
81%	CONVERT -- Someone who joins the Church
86%	CONVERT -- Help someone join the Church
86%	COOPERATE -- Work together
97%	COUNCIL -- Group of leaders who meet together
83%	COUNCILOR, high -- Church leader
85%	COURAGE -- Bravery
87%	CREATE -- Make
85%	CREATION -- Make something

87%	CREATION -- All the world
83%	CREATION -- When God made the world
81%	CUSTOM -- Usual way of doing something
80%	DEACON -- Can pass the sacrament
100%	DECISION -- Making up your mind
83%	DECLARE -- Make known
86%	DEPRESSED -- Sad
83%	DEVELOPMENT -- Growth
82%	DIRECTOR -- Someone in charge
80%	DISCIPLE -- Follower
87%	DISCOURAGED -- Losing hope
82%	DISCOURAGEMENT -- Loss of hope
84%	DISCUSS -- Talk about
88%	DISCUSSION -- Talk between people
87%	DISTRICT -- A certain area of the Church
90%	DOUBT -- Not being sure
87%	EDUCATIONAL -- Has to do with learning
97%	ELECT -- Chosen
80%	ETERNAL -- Endless
86%	EVERLASTING -- Never-ending
85%	EXPERIENCE -- Learn by doing
86%	FAITH -- Believing in something you cannot see
87%	FAITHFUL -- Can be trusted
100%	FASTING -- Going without food
80%	FERVENT -- With great feeling
97%	FINAL -- Last one
84%	FIRSTBORN -- Oldest child
80%	FOLLOWER -- Does what someone else says
88%	FORCE -- Power
87%	FORCE -- Making someone do something
93%	FOREVER -- Always
81%	FORGAVE -- Forgot the bad someone did
89%	FORGIVE -- Forget the bad someone has done
100%	FORGIVENESS -- Forgetting the bad someone has done
83%	FULFILL a dream -- Make happen
80%	FULL-TIME -- Do all the time
91%	FUND -- Supply of money
92%	FUNERAL -- Meeting for someone who died
86%	FUTURE -- Yet to come
93%	GENEALOGY -- Family history
96%	GLORIOUS -- Wonderful
82%	GOSPEL -- Teachings of Jesus
85%	GRIEF -- Great sadness
80%	GUARDIAN -- Takes care of another
80%	GUILTY -- Having done wrong
92%	HANDICAPPED -- Blind or crippled
86%	HANDOUT -- Something given
83%	HEAVENLY FATHER -- God
94%	HEAVENS -- The sky above
89%	HENCEFORTH -- From this time on
92%	HOLDER, priesthood -- One who has the priesthood
91%	HOLDS the priesthood -- Has the priesthood
94%	HOLY GHOST -- Spirit that tells us what is right
94%	HONEST -- Tells the truth

91%	HONESTY -- Truthfulness
82%	HONORABLE -- Can be trusted
93%	HUMAN -- Person
86%	ILLNESS -- Sickness
87%	ILLUSTRATION -- Picture or example
85%	IMPORTANCE -- Seriousness
85%	IMPROVEMENT -- Makes better
86%	INDEPENDENCE -- Freedom
83%	INDIVIDUAL -- One person
81%	INFLUENCE -- Cause a change
84%	INSTRUCTION -- Lessons
86%	INSTRUCTOR -- Teacher
82%	INTEREST -- A liking for
84%	INTRODUCE -- Make known
82%	INVOLVE -- Get someone into
93%	JOURNAL -- Daily record
94%	JUDGE -- Decide
85%	KNELT -- Got on knees
96%	KNOWLEDGE -- What you have learned
90%	LOCAL -- By where you live
86%	LOYAL -- Can be trusted
87%	MANUAL -- Book of lessons
87%	MATERIALS -- Things needed to make something
88%	MEETINGHOUSE -- Church building
80%	MEETINGS -- People getting together for a reason
83%	MESSENGER -- Someone who brings news
85%	MIRACLE -- Wonderful thing that is hard to believe
91%	MISSION -- Time of teaching the gospel
81%	MISSION -- Important work
100%	MISSIONARY -- One who teaches the gospel
100%	MOB -- Angry crowd
80%	NATURAL -- Part of the outdoor world
83%	NEEDY -- Very poor
100%	NONMEMBER -- Doesn't belong to the Church
81%	NUMEROUS -- Many
90%	NURSERY -- Room for small children
82%	OBEDIENCE -- Doing what you are told to do
100%	OBEDIENT -- Doing as you are told
91%	OFFERING -- Something given
93%	OFFICIAL -- Someone who holds an important job
85%	ORGANIZE -- Put in order
89%	PARTAKE -- Take a share
82%	PARTICIPATE -- Take part in something
83%	PARTICIPATION -- Taking part in something
88%	PARTNERSHIP -- People working together
90%	PATIENCE -- Ability to wait
88%	PATIENT -- Able to wait
81%	PATTERN -- Model to follow
80%	PERFORM -- Do
85%	PERSONAL -- For yourself
89%	PERSONALITY -- What a person is like
86%	PERSONS -- Human beings
82%	PIONEER -- Explorer
93%	PIONEERS, Mormon -- Traveled to Utah

85% POSTER -- Sign  
 92% PRACTICE -- Do many times  
 83% PREPAREDNESS -- Being ready  
 83% PRESENCE -- Being there  
 84% PRESIDENT -- Main leader of a group  
 89% PRIDE -- Being pleased with yourself  
 94% PRIESTHOOD -- Power God gives to good men  
 97% PRIMARY -- Church meeting for children  
 88% PRIORITIES -- Things that are most important  
 95% PRIVATE -- Alone or secret  
 95% PROBLEM -- A hard question  
 94% PROBLEM -- Difficulty or trouble  
 87% PROJECT -- A job to do  
 93% PROPHET -- Head of the Church  
 80% PUBLISH -- Print  
 88% PUNISHMENT -- Pain received for doing wrong  
 86% PURPOSE -- Reason for doing something  
 87% REALLY -- Truly  
 83% REBAPTISM -- Join the Church again  
 81% RECIPE -- Cooking directions  
 80% REJECT -- Turn away from  
 84% RELATION -- Belongs to the same family  
 80% RELATIVE -- Belongs to the same family  
 87% RELIEF SOCIETY -- Church group for women  
 93% RELIGION -- Belief in God  
 88% RELIGIOUS -- Believes in God  
 84% REMEMBRANCE -- Memory  
 83% REQUEST -- Ask for  
 84% RESPOND -- Answer  
 80% RESPONSIBILITY -- An important job  
 90% RESTORE -- Bring back again  
 87% RESURRECTION -- Rising from the dead  
 88% REVERENCE -- Love and honor for God  
 92% REVERENT -- Quiet  
 84% RIGHTEOUS -- Does good ..  
 97% SABBATH -- Sunday  
 85% SACRED -- Holy  
 86% SACRIFICE -- Giving up something  
 86% SATISFY -- To please  
 84% SAVIOR -- Jesus  
 90% SCATTERED -- Spread around  
 81% SCRIPTURAL -- From holy writings  
 88% SEALINGS -- Joining families together forever  
 82% SECRETARY -- Writes things down  
 81% SECTION -- Part  
 83% SELFISHNESS -- Not sharing with others  
 91% SERIOUS -- Important  
 83% SESSION -- One meeting  
 91% SEXUAL -- Of men and women  
 80% SITUATION -- How things are  
 85% SKILL -- Something you can do well  
 91% SOMEDAY -- At some future time  
 83% SPARE -- Save  
 88% SPIRIT -- Part of man that doesn't die



81%	SPIRIT -- Helps us know what's right
87%	STAKE -- An area made up of several wards
84%	STANDARD -- Rule to live by
91%	STATEMENT -- Something said or written
87%	STORAGE -- Things kept for later use
94%	STOREHOUSE -- Where things are kept
87%	STRENGTH -- Power
81%	STRENGTHEN -- Make stronger
88%	STRIVE -- Try hard
86%	STUDENT -- Learner
91%	SUCCEED -- Do well
94%	SUCCESS -- Something done well
91%	SUGGEST -- Give an idea
83%	SUGGESTION -- Idea that might work
86%	SUPPLY -- Something kept for future use
94%	SUPPORT -- Help
93%	TALENT -- Something you can do well
94%	TEMPLE -- House of God
83%	TESTAMENT -- Part of the Bible
91%	TESTIFY -- Tell what you know is true
83%	THEREFORE -- Because one thing is true, another thing is true
84%	THINE -- Yours
93%	TITHE -- Give one-tenth to the Church
93%	TITHING -- One-tenth given to the Lord
87%	TOTAL -- All
86%	TRANSLATION -- Written in another language
88%	TRIBE -- Large family
93%	UNDERSTOOD -- Knew the meaning
83%	UNIT -- A part
83%	UNSELFISH -- Thinking of others
82%	WARD -- Mormons who live in the same area and attend Church together
80%	WELFARE -- Helping poor people
97%	WICKED -- Bad
97%	WICKEDNESS -- Doing evil
85%	WIDOW -- Woman whose husband is dead
86%	WITNESS -- Tell what you know is true
87%	WORD OF WISDOM -- Lord's law of health
81%	WORLDWIDE -- The whole world
88%	WORSHIP -- Honor God