

# Testing Tablets

**M**ore than 55 million iPads have been sold since the devices were first introduced in January 2010, and nearly 20 percent of Americans own some kind of tablet or e-reader, according to the Pew Internet & American Life Project.

iPads are proving popular in state legislatures as well. Vermont and Virginia conducted iPad pilot projects last year. In at least seven legislatures, iPad pilot projects are underway this year; two states have purchased iPads for all legislators. Even in states without formal pilot projects, tablets and mobile devices are shaking up the way legislative business is done.

Vermont, the Virginia Senate and the Virginia House of Delegates all began pilot projects during sessions last year, and expanded the projects this year. All members of the West Virginia Senate used iPads during a special session last summer, and this year all legislators in West Virginia and Alaska have iPads. Idaho purchased four iPads and four Androids to share among legislators who don't own their own. Indiana has two committees using iPads, and North Carolina has one committee testing Android tablets and iPads.

Why are they so popular? Tablets are user-friendly, relatively cheap, lightweight and more convenient to carry, and have good battery life—all important features for legislators whose schedules involve going from chamber to office to town meetings and home. Tablets are ideal for reading and storing large amounts of information. The Indiana General Assembly found that just a single bill generates about 11,400 sheets of paper. It hopes to go paperless in the future if the iPads work out.

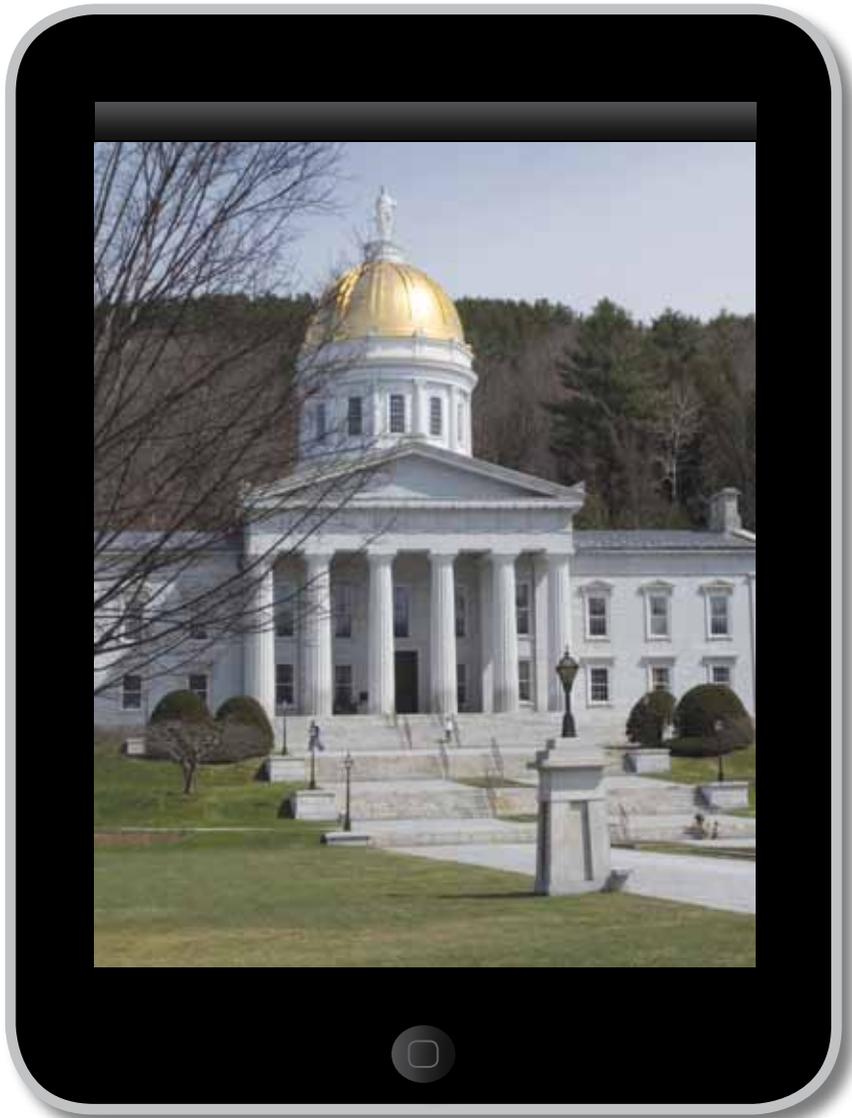
West Virginia Senate Majority Leader John Unger II says the tablets have increased efficiency and saved money. “We were the first state to have the full chamber use iPads, and it really expedited things. It also enhances and allows for contribution from the public as well.” Unger uses his iPad to get real time bill information, read email, record meetings and Skype with elementary students back in his district.

Tablets pose some challenges, however. “It’s definitely a culture shift, and one challenge is training,” says Unger. iPads also are not very practical when it comes to creating, editing or printing documents, and can be more work for IT staff to support. During last year’s pilot project in Vermont, IT staff had to add apps to each device manually and do updates one at a time. Since then, however, mobile device management software has become available that can push apps, security settings and other information to all the devices at once.

Most states are working to provide at least some support for members who have tablets so they can receive legislative email and calendars using whatever type of device they own. Others are trying to accommodate mobile devices by developing special apps. Legislatures or chambers in at least 17 states have optimized their websites for mobile devices.

Concerns about how quickly technology can change, however, have many legislatures looking for the best way to adapt to a new environment. “My goal is to be device-agnostic,” says Rich Beckwith, Information Technology director for the Missouri House of Representatives, so that no matter what device legislators or citizens use now or in the years to come, they can access the information they need.

—Pam Greenberg



# What the H\*%# Does That Mean?

Which of the following sentences is easier to understand?

1. "If the location of the land is in a state other than the state in which the agency's jurisdiction is located, the agency's justification of anticipated benefits from the acquisition will be subject to greater scrutiny."
2. "When an agency wants to buy land in a different state, its reasons for the purchase will be studied very thoroughly."

Most people prefer the second one because it's clearer, more concise, and written in plain language, which the Plain Language Action and Information Network defines as any communication that can be understood the first time it is read or heard.

Some think legal and legislative writing has veered too far from plain language. A recent study, "Ballot Readability and Roll-Off," looked at 1,112 ballot measures from states between 1997 and 2007 to see whether their readability affected voters' behavior. Researchers scored each one using the Flesch-Kincaid scale, which assigns the grade level required to understand it. (For example, the first sentence above scores at 19.7 grade level; the rewrite is at 9.4.)

The authors found that, regardless of the topic, the more difficult a measure was to understand, the less likely citizens were to vote on it.

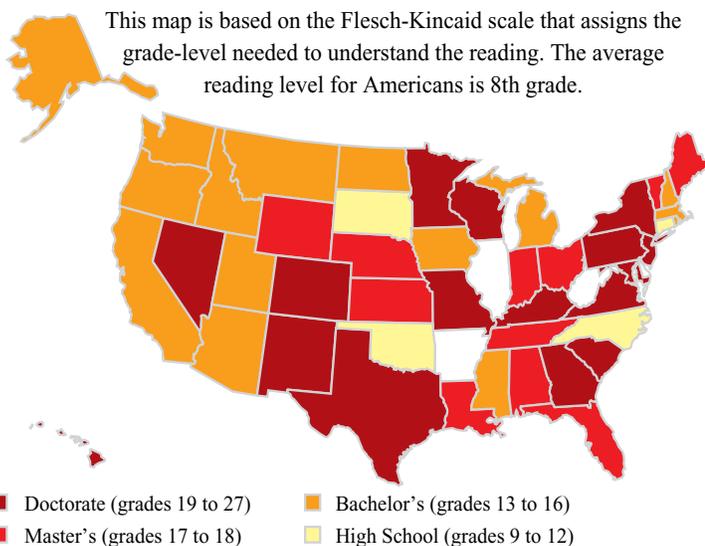
Most popular reading is written at the eighth to 10th grade level, which studies have shown is best for the average American. The authors found, however, that all ballot questions included in their survey contained language that exceeded that level of reading proficiency, and well over half fell into the graduate-school level or higher on the Flesch-Kincaid scale.

Ballot measures, especially, require voters to tackle complex, nuanced issues, yet "complex ballot language can confuse voters," says Shauna Reilly, one of the authors. And confused voters may end up casting a vote for the policy they don't want—or opting not to vote at all—she warns.

Lawmakers in Colorado, Indiana, Missouri, New York and Pennsylvania are considering various requirements for plain language on ballots.

"We want the average voter to be able to plainly understand the issues on the ballot," says House Speaker Pro Tem Shane Schoeller (R), who recently introduced the Missouri Fair Elections Act. The Colorado legislation would require titles of statewide ballot measures to be written in "plain, nontechnical language and in a clear and coherent manner using words with common and everyday meaning that are understandable to the average reader."

## Average Reading Level of Ballot Measures, 1997 - 2007



Note: Arkansas, Delaware, Illinois and West Virginia either did not have statewide ballot initiatives in the last decade or not enough information is known.

Source: Pew Center on the States, 2011.

## Check Your Own Writing

Microsoft Word users can apply the Flesch-Kincaid scale to their own documents.

1. Click the Microsoft Office button, and then click "word options" at the bottom right.
2. Click "proofing."
3. Check "check grammar with spelling."
4. Check "show readability statistics" Then click "OK."
5. To check a document, click on the "review" tab, then "spelling & grammar" check the spelling. When done, it displays the reading level of the document.

The Voting and Usability Project offers guidance on plain language for all elections-related materials, and the U.S. Election Assistance Commission provides polling place and ballot design guidelines and templates for use at the state and local levels.

The plain language movement is wider than the ballot box, of course. According to the Center for Plain Language, 32 states have a plain language program in at least one governmental agency. Texas, for example, has a plain language project for contracts, Oregon has a plain language standard under the Department of Administrative Services, and Washington's plain talk initiative is run from the governor's office.

The Plain Writing Act of 2010 requires the federal government to write all new publications, forms and publicly distributed documents in a "clear, concise, well-organized" manner. Iowa Congressman Bruce Braley (D) sponsored the legislation and now wants to apply the rules to federal regulations.

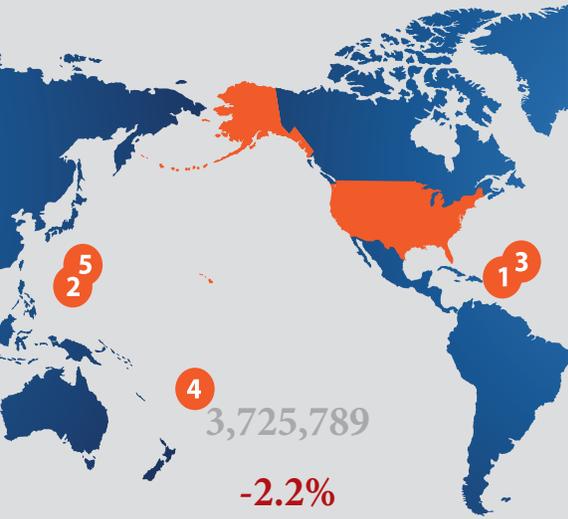
"Whether you like or loathe government regulations, I think everyone can agree that when one exists, it should be written as clearly as possible," Braley said in a press release. "Sadly, gobbledygook dominates the regulations issued by government agencies."

—Shannon McNamara

**Editor's Note:** This article is written at a 13.4 grade level on the Flesch-Kincaid scale.

# America's Islands

The population took a dip downward on all islands except Guam between 2000 and 2010. Following are each territory's current population and how it has changed since 2000.



## 1. PUERTO RICO

159,358

+2.9%

## 2. GUAM

106,405

-2%

## 3. U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS

55,519

-3.1%

## 4. AMERICAN SAMOA

53,883

-22.2%

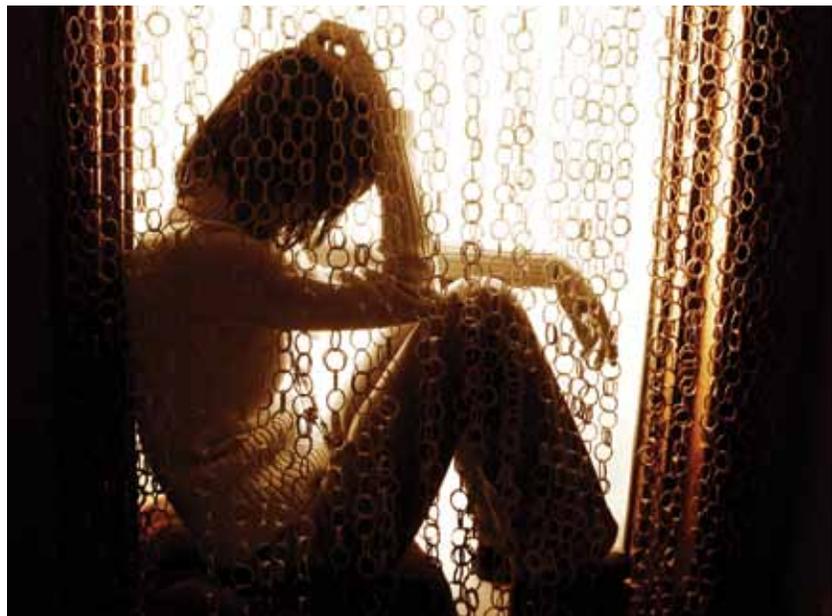
## 5. NORTHERN MARIANA ISLANDS

Source: 2010 U.S. Census.

# Human Trafficking in the Spotlight

The New York Giants defeated the New England Patriots in stunning fashion at this year's Super Bowl in Indianapolis. Hundreds of thousands of people came from across the country and globe to enjoy the game and festivities hosted in the Hoosier state. But along with all the hoopla comes crime, including prostitution of trafficked victims. Just ask Texas, host of last year's game, where more than 130 arrests related to human trafficking were made during Super Bowl week.

In Indiana, this awareness prompted legislators to evaluate their state laws to see if they could be improved to better combat traffickers. The result was a bill sponsored by Senator Randy Head (R), which became law just before the Super Bowl. It expanded the state's definition of human trafficking to include elements of force and fraud and created a new offense for the trafficking of a minor, when the victim is 16 years of age



or younger. Both crimes are Class B felonies.

In addition to the law change, the Indianapolis Metropolitan Police Department participated in the "National Day of Johns Arrests," a 10-day anti-sex trade effort surrounding the Super Bowl, coordinated among 20 law enforcement agencies across eight states. The operation resulted in 556 arrests for offenses including sex solicitation, prostitution and human trafficking.

In Indiana, the first people arrested under the new law were two women tracked down by leads developed from Internet advertisements. After interviewing the arrestees, law enforcement officials determined they were part of a trafficking ring and were victims rather than suspects. Police are currently pursuing their traffickers.

The Indiana legislation was the first human trafficking bill enacted in 2012. Every state except West Virginia and Wyoming has at least one law that addresses some aspect of trafficking crimes or protections for victims.

—Rich Williams