

Summary of Results and Strategies for Teachers

Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test, 2008–2009

English-Language Students

Highlights of Achievement Results

FIRST-TIME ELIGIBLE STUDENTS

The following are observations about this year's results and five-year trends in student achievement:

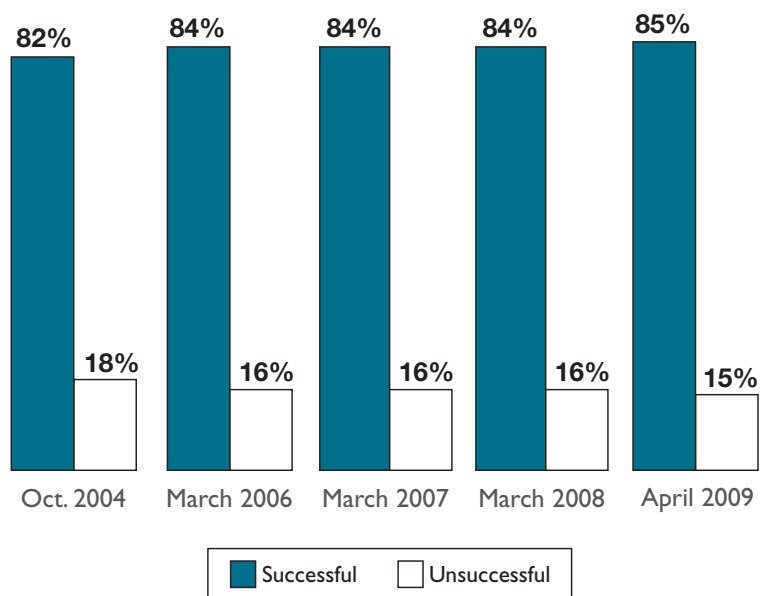
- Of the 142 394 students who wrote the test for the first time, 85% were successful, compared to 82% in 2004.
- The success rate for students enrolled in an academic English course increased by two percentage points, from 94% in 2004 to 96% in 2009. This is the sixth straight year results for this group are 90% or higher.
- The success rate for students enrolled in an applied English course is 62%, as it was in 2004. Over the past five years, the results of this group have been over 60%.
- The success rate for boys increased by three percentage points, from 79% in 2004 to 82% in 2009. The success rate for girls increased by two percentage points, from 86% in 2004 to 88% in 2009.
- The success rate for English language learners increased by 16 percentage points, from 50% in 2004 to 66% in 2009.
- The success rate for students with special needs decreased by two percentage points, from 57% in 2004 to 55% in 2009. For the past five years, the results of this group have been 50% or higher.

Strategies for Success

INFORMING PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE

The following comments, observations and suggested strategies for improvement are meant to assist educators in helping students develop and demonstrate their literacy skills. They are based on an analysis of first-time eligible students' performances on the April 2009 OSSLT and scorer feedback. Some of the comments and observations refer to sections of the 2009 OSSLT found on the EQAO Web site.

Success Rates on the OSSLT over Five Years for First-Time Eligible Students



Comments from Scorers

Reading

Students who restate part of the question at the beginning of their answer, write in full sentences and use correct spelling, tend to score higher than those who do not.—B.C.

Section V, Question 7: Some students think the word “selection” in the open-response question on the information paragraph refers to the whole of Session 1 and try to summarize the whole booklet.—A.A.

Section V, Question 7: More practice linking a relevant detail to the main idea would raise the level of performance.—S.C.

Section IX, Question 6: Some students use slang terms (e.g., “drama queen”) to describe the character of Pamela and then do not give any evidence from the reading selection to support the choice. Have students use more precise language in their responses and use a specific example from the selection to support their interpretation.—S.H.

Writing

In general, students are writing more.—L.F.

There are fewer off-topic answers than in previous years.—M.F.

I’ve noticed that many students are not using capital letters for the names of schools, streets, etc.—S.M.

Although student work in general is more legible than in previous years, students need to be told to write as clearly as they can.—R.W.

Short-writing prompts: Students should be familiar with the format of the OSSLT. Some students think the writing sections of the test are related to the reading selections and questions that precede them. This wrong assumption results in a lower score than the student might otherwise earn.—J.B.

News Report: Most students understand the news report format. Many students incorporate the characteristics of actual newspaper reports into their responses, such as the five W’s in the introduction to their report, and then go on to expand on the “how” and “why” of the event. Many students use quotations to support and advance their newspaper accounts.—V.J.

Opinion: Most students organize their ideas into more than the three-paragraph minimum, which is good. Continue to work on one topic per paragraph. Put your stronger arguments near the beginning and end, and weaker arguments in the middle.—C.G.

Opinion: Many students try to support both sides of the issue. If they do not have the writing skills to carry this off, they give the impression that their opinion is unclear or inconsistent. I would encourage these students to take a stand—yes or no—and support that opinion.—R.W.

Preparing Students to Write the OSSLT

According to the *Principles for Fair Student Assessment Practices for Education in Canada*, students must be informed “about the content of the assessment, types of question formats used, and appropriate strategies, if any, for responding.” EQAO develops and posts **OSSLT preparation materials**, including rubrics and previous tests, each year prior to the administration of the test. EQAO depends on the schools to ensure each student has the opportunity to use these materials and undertake the test with knowledge of the format and all associated rules. Each year, there is evidence that some students were not fully prepared to write the test. For example, some students summarize all of *Booklet 1* when responding to the open-response question that asks them to summarize the information paragraph (question 7, Section V).

For more information on the terms and strategies in **boldface** above and in the following chart, refer to the List of Resources at the end of the chart.

Observations and Suggested Strategies for Improvement by Skill: Reading

Through a combination of multiple-choice and open-response questions about narrative, informational and graphic reading selections, the OSSLT focuses on three reading skills:

Reading Skill 1: understanding explicitly stated information and ideas

Reading Skill 2: understanding implicitly stated information and ideas

Reading Skill 3: making connections between information and ideas in a reading selection and personal knowledge and experience

	Observations:	Strategies for Improvement:
Reading	Response data indicate that the multiple-choice questions assessing the three reading skills were effective in distinguishing between successful and unsuccessful readers.	
	Data from the multiple-choice responses suggest that effective readers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • read the whole selection to find all relevant information related to the question before selecting the correct option. • understand structural patterns in a text and use them to make meaning. • use prior knowledge when demonstrating their understanding of a text. 	<p>Continue to teach strategies for locating information, such as skimming and scanning to preview a text.</p> <p>Continue to provide direct instruction on using contextual cues to construct the meaning of texts.</p> <p>Continue to teach students before-, during- and after-reading strategies to assist them in making connections between their prior knowledge and new content when reading informational texts.</p>
	This year, students were equally successful on multiple-choice questions assessing all three reading skills.	
	This year, students were most successful on multiple-choice questions relating to the dialogue (Section IX) and were least successful on those relating to the real-life narrative (Section VIII).	Continue to encourage students to read closely for an accurate understanding of details and to connect these details to form inferences .
	Among open-response reading questions, students were least successful on those relating to the summary of the information paragraph (Section V). Students performed equally well on all other open-response reading questions.	Model the think aloud strategy to show students how to determine which ideas are most and least important and make connections among ideas in subject-specific reading materials.
	As in previous years, the largest percentage of “blanks” and “off topics” was recorded for the summary of the information paragraph (Section V).	<p>Continue to provide direct instruction on organization patterns, and opportunities for students to use their knowledge of them to understand how main ideas and supporting details are presented and related.</p> <p>Continue to provide direct instruction on summarizing skills.</p>

Observations and Suggested Strategies for Improvement by Skill: Writing

Through a combination of multiple-choice questions, two short-writing tasks and two long-writing tasks (a news report and a series of paragraphs expressing an opinion), the OSSLT focuses on three writing skills:

Writing Skill 1: developing a main idea with sufficient supporting details

Writing Skill 2: organizing information and ideas in a coherent manner

Writing Skill 3: using conventions (spelling, grammar, punctuation) in a manner that does not distract from clear communication

	Observations:	Strategies for Improvement:
Writing	Students generally performed well on all multiple-choice writing questions. Scores were highest on questions assessing organization (Skill 2), then main idea and supporting details (Skill 1), then accuracy of conventions (Skill 3). Scores among subpopulations (e.g., students taking applied English courses, English language learners and students with special education needs) showed a similar pattern.	
	As in 2008, students performed better on the short-writing tasks than on the long-writing tasks.	Continue to provide students with frequent opportunities to write extended responses.
	The performance of first-time eligible students was similar on both long-writing tasks. Over 75% of responses to the two long-writing tasks showed a clear, consistent focus, specific supporting details and deliberate organization. This pattern is consistent among all subpopulations except students taking applied English courses and students with special education needs. Approximately 63% of their responses showed a clear, consistent focus, specific supporting details and deliberate organization.	Continue to help students organize their writing around a well-developed main idea and support their idea through the use of clear, specific and relevant details. Encourage students to use the rough notes space to make quick plans of their ideas (web, T-chart for opinion, 5 Ws for news report) before writing their response.
	A larger percentage of students achieved scores in the higher codes of the rubric for topic development for the news report than for the series of paragraphs expressing an opinion. However, more students showed a lack of understanding of the writing form of the news report than that of the series of paragraphs expressing an opinion.	Have all teachers participate in moderated marking sessions so that they use the same criteria and terminology when providing feedback for improvement.

	Observations:	Strategies for Improvement:
Writing (continued)	Compared to student performance on topic development, performance on use of conventions was about the same or better on all four writing tasks. More than 80% of first-time eligible students used conventions in long-writing tasks in a manner that did not distract from communication.	<p>When working with students to prepare them for the OSSLT, ask them to score responses using the generic scoring rubrics (available on the EQAO Web site) and to compare and explain their scores.</p> <p>Provide direct instruction and models to clarify the characteristics of a news report (e.g., objective point of view, use of dates and quotations) as distinct from other writing forms (e.g., editorial, persuasive opinion piece or personal narrative).</p> <p>Provide frequent opportunities to students to develop skills in non-fiction writing.</p>

General Observations and Suggested Strategies for Improvement

Lack of Success	On multiple-choice reading questions, unsuccessful students accounted for a large percentage of blank responses.	Encourage students to attempt all questions.
	The pattern of success on individual open-response reading questions among unsuccessful students is similar to that among students in general.	
	This year, unsuccessful students had difficulty with multiple-choice questions assessing Reading Skills 1, 2 and 3. They were least successful on questions assessing Skills 2 and 3.	
	Unsuccessful students showed greater success on short-writing than on long-writing tasks. Their performance on the two long-writing tasks was similar.	Give opportunities to practise sustained writing (one to two pages) that requires a clear and consistent focus, with specific supporting details and logical organization.
	Unsuccessful students left more blank responses to the long-writing news report (Section IV) than the long-writing opinion (Section VI), but they left more blank responses to the Section X short-writing task than any other writing task.	Use small-group discussion strategies such as placemat to encourage students to generate and share ideas, and to activate background knowledge on a topic.
	Students who were not successful on writing tasks produced responses that lacked focus and supporting details.	Encourage reading and writing by applying current research about teaching strategies for reluctant readers and writers.

	Observations:	Strategies for Improvement:
<p>English Language Learners and Students with Special Education Needs</p>	<p>In general, students with special education needs leave a larger percentage of blanks for open-response questions in reading and writing than any other subgroup.</p>	<p>When working with students with different needs, use a variety of teaching approaches through differentiated instruction.</p>
	<p>In general, English language learners and students with special education needs write more off-topic responses than other groups do.</p>	<p>To assist English language learners and students with special education needs, continue to incorporate visual tools (e.g., concept maps), academic vocabulary tools (e.g., word charts) and scaffolds (paragraph frames) in all subject areas.</p>
	<p>English language learners and students with special education needs were more successful on Skill 1 multiple-choice reading questions than on those assessing Skills 2 and 3.</p> <p>English language learners were most successful responding to the news report reading selection (Section I) and least successful responding to question 6 (inference about a character) on the dialogue (Section IX).</p>	<p>Encourage English language learners and students with special education needs to develop skills in questioning and making inferences.</p>
	<p>English language learners performed well on multiple-choice writing questions, especially those dealing with punctuation and grammar.</p>	
	<p>English language learners scored higher on their use of conventions for the short-writing tasks than the long-writing tasks.</p>	<p>Continue to provide students with proofreading strategies for eliminating errors in grammar and punctuation in their writing in every subject.</p>
	<p>On long-writing tasks, English language learners performed better on topic development than on use of conventions, while students with special education needs performed about the same on topic development and use of conventions.</p>	<p>Encourage students to review and revise their responses on the OSSLT without concern that cross-outs will affect their score.</p>

	Observations:	Strategies for Improvement:
Gender	This year, males outperformed females on the multiple-choice questions relating to four of the five reading selections.	
	Females outperformed males on all open-response reading items. The gender gap is most evident in dialogue (Section IX) question 6, which asks students to make an inference about a character.	Continue to provide males with opportunities to develop their literacy skills by explicitly teaching the processes that effective readers and writers use.
	Females outperformed males on all but one multiple-choice writing question.	
	As in 2008, females outperformed males in both topic development and use of conventions on all writing tasks.	
Course Type in English	As in previous years, students in applied English courses did not perform as well as students in academic English courses.	Integrate literacy skills into subject-specific instruction. The EQAO School Success Stories indicate that cross-curricular school teams have been effective in supporting literacy skill development in students in applied courses.
	In reading, the largest gap in performance between students in academic and applied English courses occurred in the summary of the information paragraph (Section V) and question 6 (making an inference about a character) on the dialogue (Section IX).	Continue to encourage the development of higher-order thinking skills, particularly the skills of analysis and making inferences. "Characteristics of Successful and Unsuccessful Student Performance on the OSSLT," available on the EQAO Web site, indicates that the responses of unsuccessful students show simplicity, concreteness and a narrow range of skills.
	The performance of students taking applied English courses was weakest in reading Skill 2 and somewhat better in Skills 1 and 3.	

Resources

List of Resources (2009)

EQAO reminds educators to use the **OSSLT preparation materials** posted on the EQAO Web site to prepare students for writing the test: *Planning and Preparation Guide*, *Getting Ready Guide*, Released OSSLT Materials (previous tests and answers), Sample Test Materials, and Characteristics of Successful and Unsuccessful Student Performance on the OSSLT. School success stories, also available on the EQAO Web site, provide information about school-wide strategies to improve student literacy skills.

Resources are listed in the order they appear in the chart above.

For more information about

skimming and scanning, go to page 32 of *Think Literacy: Cross-Curricular Approaches, Grades 7–12*—“Reading Strategies”: <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/teachers/studentsuccess/think.html>.

contextual cues, go to pages 34–39 of *Think Literacy: Cross-Curricular Approaches, Grades 7–12*—“Reading Strategies”: <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/teachers/studentsuccess/think.html>.

making connections and monitoring understanding when reading different text forms, go to *Think Literacy: Cross-Curricular Approaches, Grades 7–12* subject-specific examples:

- *Science and Technology, Grades 7–8* and *Science, Grade 9 Applied (2004–2005)*;
- *Health and Physical Education, Grades 7–10 (2004)* and
- *Geography, Grades 7–9 (2004)*

found at <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/teachers/studentsuccess/specific.html>.

inferences, go to pages 40–43 of “Engaging in Reading: Reading Between the Lines” in *Think Literacy: Cross-Curricular Approaches, Grades 7–12*—“Reading Strategies”: <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/teachers/studentsuccess/think.html>.

think aloud strategy and sample lessons, go to pages 44–47 and pages 56–59 of *Think Literacy: Cross-Curricular Approaches, Grades 7–12*—“Reading Strategies”: <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/teachers/studentsuccess/think.html>.

organizational patterns, go to pages 16–19 of “Getting Ready to Read: Finding Organizational Patterns” in *Think Literacy: Cross-Curricular Approaches, Grades 7–12*—“Reading Strategies”: <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/teachers/studentsuccess/think.html>.

summarizing, go to the Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat webcast *Teaching for Understanding: Summarization*: <http://www.curriculum.org/secretariat/january30TU.shtml>.

organizing writing around the use of a main idea and supporting details, go to pages 112–122 of *Think Literacy: Cross-Curricular Approaches, Grades 7–12*—“Writing Strategies”: <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/teachers/studentsuccess/think.html>.

moderated marking, go to

- http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/literacynumeracy/inspire/research/Teacher_Moderation.pdf and
- the *Teacher Moderation: Collaborative Assessment of Student Work* webcast: <http://www.curriculum.org/secretariat/september10.shtml>.

List of Resources (continued)

For more information about

non-fiction writing, go to the Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat webcasts:

- *High-Yield Strategies to Improve Student Learning, Part 4: Teaching Non-Fiction Writing—Clip One: Reading Conference: Text Structure (persuasive writing)*: <http://www.curriculum.org/secretariat/may2.shtml>;
- *Non-Fiction Writing*, Connie Wright: *Persuasive Writing: Deconstructing a Newspaper Article*: <http://www.curriculum.org/secretariat/april18.shtml>;
- *Non-Fiction Writing*, Bridget Scime: *Report Writing*: <http://www.curriculum.org/secretariat/april18.shtml> and
- *Quality Teaching: It's Intentional*, Dr. Douglas Reeves: *Non-Fiction Writing*: <http://www.curriculum.org/secretariat/april21.shtml>.

placemat, go to pages 162–164 of *Think Literacy: Cross-Curricular Approaches, Grades 7–12—“Oral Communication”*: <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/teachers/studentssuccess/think.html>.

current research, go to *What Current Research Tells Us*: <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/curriculum/boysliteracy.html>.

differentiated instruction, go to

- the Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat webcast *Differentiated Instruction: Continuing the Conversation*: <http://www.curriculum.org/secretariat/march29.shtml>;
- pages 14–15 of *Education for All: The Report of the Expert Panel on Literacy and Numeracy Instruction for Students With Special Education Needs*: <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/reports/speced/panel/speced.pdf> and
- *Building Upon Our Successes*, the Literacy and Numeracy secretariat webcast on differentiated instruction strategies designed to meet the diverse needs of all students, including learners who may be "at risk": <http://www.curriculum.org/secretariat/september28.shtml>.

English language learners, go to

- pages 23–26 of *Many Roots, Many Voices: Supporting English Language Learners in Every Classroom*: <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/manyroots/manyroots.pdf>;
- the webcast *Teaching and Learning in Multilingual Ontario*: <http://www.curriculum.org/secretariat/december7.shtml> and
- *EQAO Connects*, Winter 2008, “View from the Front of the Class: Preparing for the OSSLT”: <http://www.eqao.com/eMagazine/2008/01/eMagazine.aspx?Lang=E>.

students with special education needs, go to *Education for All: The Report of the Expert Panel on Literacy and Numeracy Instruction for Students With Special Education Needs, Kindergarten to Grade 6*: <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/reports/speced/panel/speced.pdf>.

questioning, go to

- the Literacy and Numeracy webcast *Quality Teaching: It's Intentional*, Dr. Annette Woods: *Critical Literacy*: <http://www.curriculum.org/secretariat/april21.shtml> and
- the video *Developing Thinking Skills Through Higher-Level Questioning*: https://admin.na3.acrobat.com/_a59783387/thinkingskills.

List of Resources (continued)

For more information about

proofreading for errors in writing, go to pages 124–126 (revising and editing) and 136–139 (proofreading) of *Think Literacy: Cross-Curricular Approaches, Grades 7–12*—“Writing Strategies”: <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/teachers/studentsuccess/think.html>.

males and literacy skills development, go to

- pages 17–21 of *Me Read? No Way! A Practical Guide to Improving Boys' Literacy Skills*: <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/brochure/meread/meread.pdf>;
- the video *Read Anything Good Lately? Boys, Books and Reading*: <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/curriculum/boysliteracy.html> and
- *Boys' Literacy Teacher Inquiry: Work Plan Support Booklet*—June 2008: <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/curriculum/boysliteracy.html>.

integrating literacy strategies with subject-specific instruction, go to

- *Think Literacy: Cross-Curricular Approaches, Grades 7–12* subject-specific documents: <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/teachers/studentsuccess/specific.html> and
- the video *Think Literacy: Embedding Literacy Strategies into Daily Instruction*: https://admin.na3.acrobat.com/_a59783387/thinkliteracy/.

EQAO Connects Webmag provides educators with information about EQAO assessments and ideas to develop the literacy and math skills they assess. For example, the Spring 2009 edition will include an article on how to develop a good open-response question. Previous issues have included articles on embedding cross-curricular literacy instruction and preparing students for the OSSLT.

- *EQAO Connects*, Spring 2008, “View from the Front of the Class: Improving Literacy Instruction: A Cross-curricular Approach”: <http://www.eqao.com/eMagazine/2008/05/eMagazine.aspx?Lang=E> and
- *EQAO Connects*, Spring 2007, “View from the Front of the Class: A Teacher’s Perspective: Starting Early: Preparing Struggling Readers and Writers for the OSSLT”: <http://www.eqao.com/eMagazine/index.aspx?Lang=E>.

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