

Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test, 2007–2008

English-Language Students

Highlights of Achievement Results

FIRST-TIME ELIGIBLE STUDENTS

The following are observations about this year's results in light of those of the past five years:

- 84% of students taking the test for the first time were successful, compared to 77% in 2003.
- The success rate for students enrolled in an academic English course increased by five percentage points, from 90% in 2003 to 95% in 2008. This is the fifth straight year results from this group are 90% or higher.
- The success rate for students enrolled in an applied English course increased by 13 percentage points, from 49% in 2003 to 62% in 2008. Over the past four years, the results from this group have been over 60%.
- The success rate for boys increased by seven percentage points, from 73% in 2003 to 80% in 2008. The success rate for girls also increased by eight percentage points, from 80% in 2003 to 88% in 2008.
- The success rate for English language learners increased by 17 percentage points, from 42% in 2003 to 59% in 2008. For the past four years, the results of this group have been 50% or higher.
- The success rate for students with special needs increased by six percentage points, from 46% in 2003 to 52% in 2008. For the past four years, the results of this group have been 50% or higher.

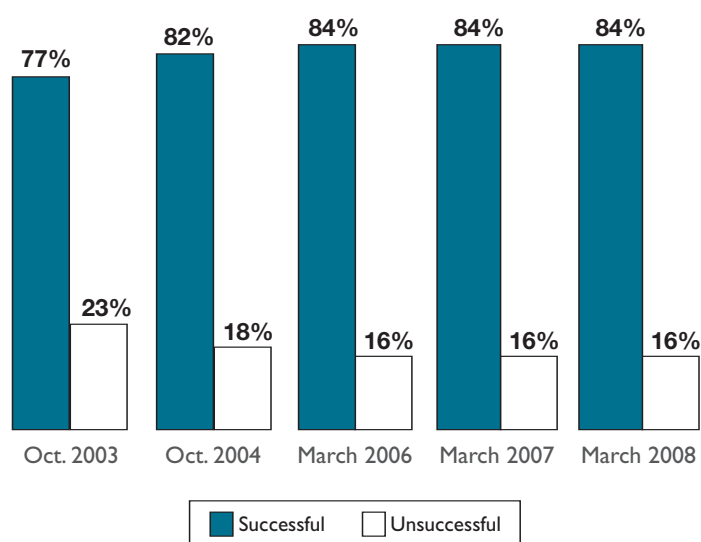
Strategies for Success

INFORMING PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE

The following 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' performance on the March 2008 OSSLT and on feedback from OSSLT scorers.

The first set of observations and strategies focus on the reading and writing skills measured by the test and are followed by observations about English language learners, students with special needs, gender and levels of study in English. Some of the observations refer to reading selections that can be found on the EQAO Web site. Some of the strategies refer to resources published by the Ministry of Education and the Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat. A list of these resources is included at the end of the chart.

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



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	The data indicate that the responses to multiple-choice questions on the three reading skills were effective in distinguishing between successful and unsuccessful readers. The pattern of performance on multiple-choice reading questions among each subpopulation (i.e., students taking academic or applied English courses, males, females, English language learners, students with special needs) was consistent with that of all students. The data from the multiple-choice responses suggest that effective readers • read the whole selection to find all information relevant to the question before selecting the correct option. • understand structural patterns in the text and use them to make meaning. • use prior knowledge when demonstrating their understanding of the text. This year, students were most successful in responding to multiple-choice questions on the dialogue (Section IX) and least successful on the graphic text (Section XI). Students responded more successfully to open-response reading questions that asked them to use information from the selection to support a personal interpretation (Skill 3). Students were less successful in answering open-response reading questions that asked about structural elements, such as the main idea (Skill 2).	Continue to teach strategies for locating information, such as skimming and scanning to preview a text. See the list of resources at the end of this chart for more information on this strategy. Continue to provide direct instruction on using contextual cues to construct meaning from texts. See the list of resources at the end of this chart for more information on this strategy. 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 and graphic texts. See the list of resources at the end of this chart for more information on these strategies. Using reading materials in subject-specific courses, model with a think aloud how to identify the most and least important ideas. See the list of resources at the end of this chart for more information on this strategy. Continue to provide direct instruction on the reading of graphic texts, on the purposes and effects of graphic features and on the layout of text. Provide opportunities for students to read and explain data and access information presented in graphic formats. See the list of resources at the end of this chart for more information on this topic.

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 for questions asking about organization (Skill 2), then came those about the main idea and supporting detail (Skill 1), then those about conventions (Skill 3). The scores for subpopulations of applied students, English language learners and students with special needs showed a similar pattern. As in 2007, students performed better on short-writing tasks than on long-writing tasks. As in previous years, students performed better using conventions than developing and supporting main ideas in open-response writing tasks. Approximately one-third of student responses to the two long-writing tasks showed a clear and consistent focus, specific supporting details and coherent organization. Slightly under one-half of student responses showed sufficient supporting details and mechanical organization. These patterns were consistent among all subpopulations. More than 80% of students used conventions in the long-writing tasks in a manner that did not distract from communication. While percentages vary, this is true of all subpopulations.	Continue to help students organize their writing around a well-developed main idea supported by specific and relevant details. See the list of resources at the end of this chart for more information on this topic. Continue to provide students with proofreading strategies for eliminating errors in grammar and punctuation in their writing in every subject. See the list of resources at the end of this chart for more information on this strategy. Have all subject-specific teachers participate in moderated marking sessions, so that they use the same criteria and terminology when providing feedback for improvement. See the list of resources at the end of this chart for more information on this strategy. 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. Impress on students the need to attend to • the clarity of their handwriting, • following the rules for proper grammar, spelling and punctuation and • avoiding conventions of text messaging and informal e-mail (e.g., no capital letters, "LOL").

General Observations and Suggested Strategies for Improvement

	Observations:	Strategies for Improvement:
Lack of Success	As in 2007, unsuccessful students accounted for a large percentage of blanks on multiple-choice questions about reading selections. As was the case with all students, but more dramatically, unsuccessful students were less successful on open-response reading questions that focused on text structure, such as those requiring an explanation of the effectiveness of a final paragraph (Skill 2). As in 2007, unsuccessful students showed greater success on short-writing than on long-writing tasks. They left more blank responses to the long-writing news report than to any other writing task. Students who were not successful on writing tasks produced responses that lacked focus and supporting details.	Encourage students to attempt all questions. Continue to provide direct instruction on organization patterns and opportunities for students to use their knowledge of them to understand the ideas and information in narrative, informational and graphic texts. See the list of resources at the end of this chart for more information. Give opportunities to practise sustained on-demand writing (one to two pages) that requires a clear and consistent focus developed with specific supporting details organized in a logical way. Use small-group discussion strategies (e.g., placemat) to encourage students to generate and share ideas and activate background knowledge on a topic. See the list of resources at the end of this chart for more information on this strategy.
English Language Learners and Students with Special Needs	As in 2007, the pattern of performance among English language learners and students with special needs on all questions and writing tasks was similar to that of all students. For example, they were most successful responding to multiple-choice questions on the dialogue (Section IX) and least successful responding to those on the graphic text (Section XI). As in 2007, English language learners and students with special needs performed best on short-writing tasks.	When working with students with different needs, use a variety of teaching approaches through differentiated instruction. See the list of resources at the end of this chart for more information on this strategy. To assist English language learners and students with special needs, continue to incorporate visual tools (e.g., concept maps), vocabulary tools (e.g., word charts) and scaffolds (e.g., paragraph frames) for all subject areas. See the list of resources at the end of this chart for more information on these strategies.

	Observations:	Strategies for Improvement:
Gender	Males and females performed equally well on Reading Skill 1 questions. Females outperformed males on Reading Skills 2 and 3 questions. In 2008, males outperformed females on most of the multiple-choice reading questions on the news report (Section I). Females outperformed males on multiple-choice reading questions on all other selections. As in 2007, females performed better than males when developing and supporting main ideas and using conventions in all writing tasks.	Help males develop their literacy skills by continuing to explicitly teach the processes that effective readers and writers use. See the list of resources at the end of this chart for more information.
Level of Study in English	As in previous years, students in applied English courses did not perform as well as students in academic English courses. For example, on long-writing tasks, over 85% of academic-level students wrote clearly focused and organized responses that provided sufficient specific supporting details. However, only about 55% of applied-level students provided such responses.	Integrate literacy skills into subject-specific instruction. EQAO's School Success Stories indicate that cross-curricular school teams have been effective in supporting literacy skill development among students in applied programs. See the list of resources at the end of this chart for more information.

Resources

List of Resources

For more information about

skimming and scanning, go to pages 32–33 of *Think Literacy: Cross-Curricular Approaches, Grades 7–12*: http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/student_success/thinkliteracy/files/Reading.pdf.

cueing systems, go to pages 34–39 of *Think Literacy: Cross-Curricular Approaches, Grades 7–12*: http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/student_success/thinkliteracy/files/Reading.pdf.

making connections and monitoring understanding when reading different text forms, go to, for example, *Think Literacy: Subject-Specific Examples*:

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

http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/teachers/student_success/specific.html.

the **think aloud** strategy and a sample lesson, go to pages 44–47 of *Think Literacy: Cross-Curricular Approaches, Grades 7–12*: http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/student_success/thinkliteracy/files/Reading.pdf.

graphic texts and suggestions about ways to improve students' understanding of them, go to pages 84–86 of *Think Literacy: Cross-Curricular Approaches, Grades 7–12*: http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/student_success/thinkliteracy/files/Reading.pdf.

organizing writing around a main idea and supporting details, go to pages 112–123 of *Think Literacy: Cross-Curricular Approaches, Grades 7–12*: http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/student_success/thinkliteracy/files/Writing.pdf.

proofreading for errors in writing, go to pages 136–139 of *Think Literacy: Cross-Curricular Approaches, Grades 7–12*: http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/student_success/thinkliteracy/files/Writing.pdf.

moderated marking, go to

- http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/literacynumeracy/inspire/research/Teacher_Moderation.pdf and
- the Webcast on **moderated marking** at <http://www.curriculum.org/secretariat/september10.shtml>.

organizational patterns, go to pages 16–19 of *Think Literacy: Cross-Curricular Approaches, Grades 7–12*: http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/student_success/thinkliteracy/files/Reading.pdf.

the **placemat strategy**, go to pages 162–164 of *Think Literacy: Cross-Curricular Approaches, Grades 7–12*: http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/student_success/thinkliteracy/files/Oral.pdf.

List of Resources (continued)

For more information about

differentiated instruction, go to

- the Webcasts describing this strategy at <http://www.curriculum.org/secretariat/march29.shtml>;
- the concept map and explanation on 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
- the Webcast on strategies designed to meet the diverse needs of all students, including at-risk learners: <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/>;
- *TIPS for English Language Learners in Mathematics: Grades 7, 8, 9 Applied, and 10 Applied*: <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/studentsuccess/lms/files/ELLMath4All.pdf>;
- the Webcast at <http://www.curriculum.org/secretariat/december7.shtml> and
- “A View from the Front of the Class,” *EQAO Connects*, Winter 2008: <http://www.eqao.com/eMagazine/index.aspx?Lang=E>.

students with special 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>.

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/merread/merread.pdf> and
- the resources at <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/curriculum/boysliteracy.html>.

integrating literacy strategies into subject-specific instruction, go to

- the Think Literacy: Grades 7–12: Subject-Specific Documents at <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/teachers/studentsuccess/specific.html> and
- the resources at <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/curriculum/boysliteracy.html>.

To learn about how a classroom teacher prepared struggling readers and writers for the OSSLT, go to “A View from the Front of the Class,” *EQAO Connects*, Spring 2007: <http://www.eqao.com/eMagazine/index.aspx?Lang=E>.

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