

**Alberta Provincial  
Achievement Testing**

**Assessment  
Highlights  
2015–2016**

**GRADE  
9**

# English Language Arts

*Alberta*  Government

This document contains assessment highlights from the 2016 Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement Test.

Assessment highlights provide information about the overall test, the test blueprints, and student performance on the 2016 Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement Test. Also provided is commentary on student performance at the acceptable standard and the standard of excellence on selected items from the 2016 achievement test. This information is intended for teachers and is best used in conjunction with the multi-year and detailed school reports that are available to schools via the extranet. **Assessment highlights reports** for all achievement test subjects and grades will be **posted on the Alberta Education website every year** in the fall.

Released test items, which contained approximately 25% of the total number of test items from previously secured achievement tests, were mailed to school administrators each fall from 2004 to 2006 and had been made available to teachers in only print form because of copyright limitations. **Every second year**, as of the fall of 2007, **a complete test** for all achievement test subjects and grades (except grades 6 and 9 Français/French Language Arts and Grade 9 Knowledge and Employability courses) will be posted on the Alberta Education website. A test blueprint and an answer key that includes the difficulty, reporting category, and item description for each test item will also be included. These materials, along with the program of studies and subject bulletin, provide information that can be used to inform instructional practice.

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The Alberta Education Internet address is [education.alberta.ca](http://education.alberta.ca).

This document was written primarily for:

Students	
Teachers	✓ of Grade 9 English Language Arts
Administrators	✓
Parents	
General Audience	
Others	

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# The 2016 Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement Test

This report provides teachers, school administrators, and the public with an overview of the performance of all students who wrote the 2016 Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement Test. It complements the detailed school and jurisdiction reports.

## How Many Students Wrote the Test?

A total of 38 859 students wrote both parts of the 2016 Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement Test.

## What Was the Test Like?

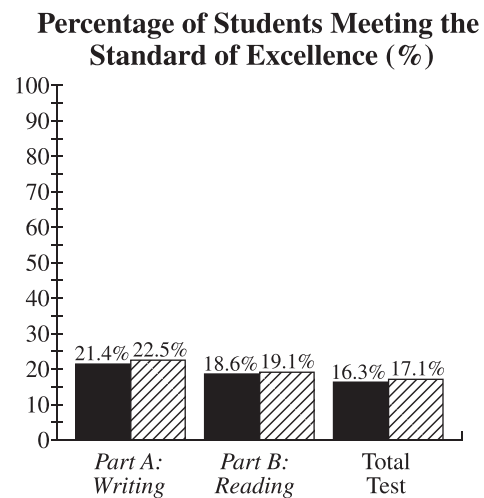
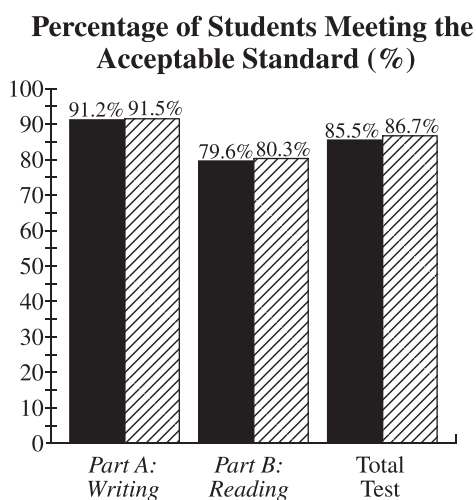
The 2016 Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement Test had two parts that were weighted equally.


*Part A: Writing* consisted of a Narrative/Essay Writing Assignment (worth 35 marks) and a Functional Writing Assignment (worth 20 marks) for a total of 55 marks. The Narrative/Essay Writing Assignment provided students with a topic and some graphic and textual prompts to which they were to respond in either a narrative or an essay format. The Functional Writing Assignment required students to respond to a specific situation by addressing an envelope and writing a business letter to a specific audience.


*Part B: Reading* consisted of 55 multiple-choice questions based on ten reading selections that were either informational or narrative/poetic in nature.

## How Well Did Students Do?

The percentages of students meeting the acceptable standard and the standard of excellence in 2016 are consistent with 2015, as shown in the graphs below. Out of a total possible score of 110 (parts A and B), the provincial average on the test was 72.8 (66.2%). The results presented in this report are based on scores achieved by all students who wrote the test, including those in French-immersion and Francophone programs. Detailed provincial assessment results are contained in school and jurisdiction reports that are available on the extranet.



 2015 Achievement Standards: The percentage of students in the province who met the acceptable standard and the standard of excellence on the 2015 Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement Test (based on those who wrote).

 2016 Achievement Standards: The percentage of students in the province who met the acceptable standard and the standard of excellence on the 2016 Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement Test (based on those who wrote).

## Part A: Writing—2016 Test Blueprint

The blueprint for *Part A: Writing* identifies the scoring/reporting categories by which student writing is assessed and by which 2016 summary data are reported to schools and school authorities; it also provides a description of the writing assignments and the achievement standards.

Writing Assignment and Scoring / Reporting Category	Description of Writing Assignment	Achievement Standards
<b>Assignment I—Narrative/Essay Writing</b>	The Narrative/ Essay Writing Assignment requires students to respond to a prompt that consists of a topic, as well as a collection of materials that students may use if they wish. These materials include graphics, quotes, and short literary excerpts. Students may use ideas from previous experience and/or reading. Students are to respond by writing a narrative or an essay.	Student achievement in each scoring/reporting category is described according to the following achievement descriptors:  Excellent  Proficient  Satisfactory  Limited  Poor  Insufficient
<b>Content*</b> (2.1, 2.2, 2.4, 3.1, 3.3, 4.1, 4.3)** (selecting ideas and details to achieve a purpose) Students respond to a given topic by writing either a narrative or an essay. Students establish their purpose, select ideas and supporting details to achieve their purpose, and communicate in a manner appropriate to their audience.		
<b>Organization*</b> (3.1, 3.3, 4.1, 4.3)** (organizing ideas and details into a coherent whole) Students organize their ideas to produce a unified and coherent narrative or essay that links events, details, sentences, and paragraphs, and that supports their purpose.		
<b>Sentence Structure</b> (4.1, 4.2)** (structuring sentences effectively) Students control sentence structure and use a variety of sentence types, sentence beginnings, and sentence lengths to enhance communication.		
<b>Vocabulary</b> (4.1, 4.2)** (selecting and using words and expressions correctly and effectively) Students choose specific words and expressions that are appropriate for their audience and effective in establishing a voice/ tone that will help to achieve their purpose.		
<b>Conventions</b> (4.2)** (using the conventions of written language correctly and effectively) Students use conventions accurately and effectively to communicate.		
<b>Assignment II—Functional Writing</b>		
<b>Content*</b> (2.1, 2.2, 2.4, 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 4.1, 4.3)** (thought and detail) Students develop, organize, and evaluate ideas for a specified purpose and audience.	The Functional Writing Assignment requires students to write to a specified audience in the context of a business letter. They are also required to address a blank envelope correctly.	
<b>Content Management*</b> (4.1, 4.2)** (using the conventions of written language correctly and effectively) Students communicate accurately and effectively by selecting words and phrases appropriate to their purpose. Students demonstrate control of sentence structure, usage, mechanics, and format.		

\* These scoring categories are weighted to be worth twice as much as the other categories.

\*\*Numbers in parentheses refer to outcomes in the Program of Studies for Grade 9 English Language Arts to which the reporting categories are cross-referenced.

## Part A: Writing—2016 Student Achievement

In 2016, 91.5% of all students who wrote the Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement Test achieved the acceptable standard on *Part A: Writing*, and 22.5% of all students who wrote achieved the standard of excellence.

### Student Achievement by Assignment and Reporting Category

The chart below illustrates the percentage of students achieving writing standards for each writing assignment and reporting category.

		Narrative/Essay Writing Assignment					Functional Writing Assignment	
		Reporting Category					Reporting Category	
		Content	Organization	Sentence Structure	Vocabulary	Conventions	Content	Content Management
Writing Standard	Score*	% of Students	% of Students	% of Students	% of Students	% of Students	% of Students	% of Students
Excellent	5.0	5.2%	4.7%	5.5%	6.2%	5.6%	5.3%	7.0%
	4.5	7.3%	7.3%	7.5%	7.5%	7.9%	6.7%	8.6%
Proficient	4.0	22.6%	21.2%	21.6%	21.9%	22.1%	20.7%	23.8%
Satisfactory	3.5	17.7%	18.8%	17.7%	18.4%	17.0%	15.3%	14.9%
	3.0	32.4%	33.3%	33.5%	38.0%	29.0%	31.7%	27.1%
	2.5	7.5%	7.8%	7.6%	5.0%	8.9%	9.1%	7.9%
Limited	2.0	5.5%	5.6%	5.4%	2.4%	7.8%	8.7%	8.5%
	1.5	0.8%	0.7%	0.6%	0.3%	0.9%	0.9%	0.9%
Poor	1.0	0.7%	0.5%	0.4%	0.2%	0.5%	0.8%	0.6%
Insufficient / No Response	0	0.2%	0.2%	0.2%	0.2%	0.2%	0.8%	0.8%

\*Scores of 4.5, 3.5, 2.5, and 1.5 occur only when local marks and central marks are averaged. In 2016, 29 803 (76.7% of the total of 38 859) papers were marked locally, and these scores were submitted to Alberta Education. Papers with discrepant scores were given a third reading. The third-reading rescore rate was 6.0%.

## ***Part A: Writing*—Commentary on 2016 Student Achievement**

During the 2016 scoring session, 168 teachers from throughout the province scored 38 859 student test booklets. Teachers who marked the tests were generally pleased with the quality of most papers. Students who wrote *Part A: Writing* of the 2016 Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement Test achieved an average of 37.4 out of a total raw score of 55 (68.0%). The provincial average on the Narrative/Essay Writing Assignment was 23.9 out of 35 (68.3%), and the provincial average on the Functional Writing Assignment was 13.4 out of 20 (67.0%).

Throughout the 2016 marking session, every effort was made to reward student strengths where evident rather than to critique what was missing or speculate on what a student should have added or included. When marking student responses, markers were encouraged to conscientiously return to the “**Focus**” section of the scoring categories to consider the extent to which each student had demonstrated competence in the criteria listed. There were several scoring descriptors in each scoring category to be assessed in order to arrive at judgments regarding the qualities of a response. Markers were encouraged to review—at the start of each marking day—each assignment and the prompt materials provided in the test booklet with the expectation that many students’ ideas regarding the assignments were informed by details within the prompts. Occasionally, markers needed to re-read a response to appreciate what a student had attempted and, in fact, accomplished. All markers acknowledged that student responses were first drafts written under time constraints.

### **Narrative/Essay Writing Assignment—Observations from Standards Confirmation and Central Marking 2016: General Impressions**

In the **Narrative/Essay Writing Assignment**, students were required to “Write either a narrative or an essay about **the importance of striving to fulfill a purpose in life.**” This assignment was accessible for students at all levels of achievement. The **literary prompts**—including quotations from works by Mary Shelley (as in “... [N]othing contributes so much to tranquilize the mind as a steady purpose,—a point on which the soul may fix its intellectual eye.”), John Whittier (as in “For of all sad words of tongue or pen, / The saddest are these: ‘It might have been!’ ”), George Bernard Shaw (as in “This is the true joy in life, the being used for a purpose recognized by yourself as a mighty one; the being thoroughly worn out before you are thrown on the scrap heap; the being a force of Nature instead of a feverish selfish little clod of ailments and grievances complaining that the world will not devote itself to making you happy.”), and John Updike (as in “The only way to get somewhere, you know, is to figure out where you’re going before you go there.”)—provided many students with opportunities to explore ideas related to striving to fulfill a purpose in life.

The **visual prompts**—including a newsperson (announcing that “Today the federal government announced a plan to increase the number of refugees who are allowed to immigrate to Canada.”), two students seated at a table (where one student is saying “In order to be able to take our school trip, we need to organize some fundraising activities. If everyone works together, we should be able to raise the money we need.”), a group of youths playing ice hockey (where one player is saying “If I practice every day and improve my skills in high school, I will be more likely to become a professional athlete.”), a youth speaking to another person in a kitchen (who is saying “I really like my part-time job. The experience I am gaining will increase my chances of having a successful career.”), and two individuals hiking through wilderness (where one person is saying “We need to protect wildlife habitats from industrial development. There are many plant and animal species that are in danger of becoming extinct. We all have a role to play in ensuring that the environment is preserved for future generations.”)—also offered students a variety of ideas to choose to explore in their responses.

In responses to the Narrative/Essay Writing Assignment, many students addressed the topic through a discussion of terms synonymous with “striving to fulfill a purpose”—including “seeking to achieve a goal,” “pursuing a passion,” “finding direction,” “making a plan,” “preparing for the future,” and “being



able to achieve success”—and often commented on the importance of “knowing what you really need,” “working hard,” and being “determined” in order to fulfill a chosen purpose. When developing their responses, a number of students responded to the assignment by recounting or explaining situations in which individuals have striven to fulfill a purpose. In such responses, students frequently recounted experiences at school while striving to “overcome peer pressure” or “get good marks,” at home with family members while seeking to “earn the respect of our parents” or being able to honour a “promise made to a loved one,” and at athletic competitions while “concentrating on winning a medal” or “getting the team to work together.” Other students discussed the attributes required to achieve a purpose (such as being “focused,” “dedicated,” “persistent,” “ambitious,” and “idealistic”) and provided suggestions regarding how to fulfill that purpose (such as to “seek guidance from others who are more experienced,” “make a plan so that you know what you will need to do,” and “work hard for the things you really want”).

In some responses, students examined the negative consequences for individuals who lack a purpose in life—such as “not being able to find a satisfying job,” “being unhappy with your circumstances,” or “the inability to make your life better”—and the indelible impact of lacking the motivation to act, such as “having little to take pride in,” “being powerless to change,” and “feeling depressed and hopeless.” Other responses documented how challenges can be overcome when learning a new concept or becoming skilled at a task, including “solving complex math problems,” “getting a job,” and “learning to play a musical instrument.” Still others commented on the meaningfulness of one’s purpose in relation to building personal relationships, and striving to have a positive influence on others through “giving them advice,” “building their self-esteem,” or “believing in them.” Other students presented ideas related to the rewards of being successful in striving to fulfill a purpose. Some identified how “you gain more confidence in your own abilities,” how “people can learn from mistakes how to go about a task in a more productive way,” and how “once a person is able to achieve one goal, they can set new goals to strive for.” Still others discussed the reciprocal benefits of helping others to fulfill a purpose, which include “paying forward the guidance and support you have received” and “seeing others grow and prosper.”

Some students chose to support their ideas with a discussion of the purpose striven for by professional athletes (such as Muhammad Ali, Michael Jordan, Michael Phelps, Wayne Gretzky, and Sidney Crosby) and popular celebrities (such as Ice Cube, Eminem, Prince, Selena Gomez, and Justin Timberlake). Others spoke of the societal impact of the efforts made by notable individuals—such as Malala Yousafzai, Barack Obama, Bill Gates, Steve Jobs, Terry Fox, Neil Armstrong, Helen Keller, Rosa Parks, Martin Luther King, Jr., Nelson Mandela, and Mother Teresa—to fulfill a purpose based on humanitarian values. Other students cited examples from literary works (including *The Wild Children*, *Touching Spirit Bear*, *The Giver*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *Ender’s Game*, *The Princess Bride*, *The Hunger Games*, and *Romeo and Juliet*) and commented on the degree of success achieved by characters in their pursuit of a purpose.

### **Narrative/Essay Writing Assignment—Observations from Standards Confirmation and Central Marking 2016: Qualities of Student Writing That Met the Acceptable Standard**

In many responses that received a score of “Satisfactory” in “Content,” students often presented ideas stemming from the stance that “Everyone has a purpose that they want to fulfill in life.” Some students suggested that “having a purpose is what helps us to move forward with our lives” and that “you should never give up when pursuing a goal.” Others presented examples of individuals whose purpose is to become accustomed to living in a new city, province, or country, work together with members of a club or sports team, or attain advanced educational training. A number of students examined the need to “set a target,” “be patient,” “keep trying,” and “have a positive attitude” when attempting to fulfill a purpose. Still other students purported that striving to fulfill a purpose requires “knowing what matters most to you,” “the willingness to try something new,” and “the inspiration to get through hard times.” In some responses, students spoke of how the pursuit of a purpose enables individuals to “gain experience and wisdom,” “get somewhere when you grow up,” or “make a difference in the world.” In other responses, students commented on how “the purpose you choose says a lot about the kind of person you are” and how “others will gain respect for you and look up to you.” In addition, a number of students acknowledged that “you really need to be honest with yourself” and some emphasized the importance of being able to “believe in yourself even when other people don’t believe in you.”

The following excerpts illustrate some of the ideas in student responses that warranted “**Satisfactory**” scores:

- “Eileen was on her deathbed, she knew it, her family knew it. It did not frighten her though. She felt unfulfilled in her life because she felt like she had not done enough to say that her life had a purpose. Those thoughts were making her feel sad in her last days of life. So she looked back on what she had done.”
- “It is important to strive to fulfill a purpose in life because it helps you focus on your goal to give you a better chance of succeeding, it will make it easier in the long run of being able to actually fulfill that goal, and helps you become a role model for the younger generation.”
- “After I had rose to fame I thought my life couldn’t get better and guess what, it did. I became a volley ball coach to teach other players they can become like me some day and will succeed. [...] I always kept in mind of what my mom had always told me, to never give up because no dream is too big or small and nothing is impossible.”
- “The quality of your life depends on choices you make. What ever your goal is in life, you must push yourself towards that point in order to accomplish it. Striving to achieve a purpose is important because you will gain life skills, you will find happiness, and you can have a successful future. [...] The quality of your life is in your hands, you just have to decide if it will be positive or negative.”
- “Jake enters the pool for warm up and he swims around two and a half kms. Only one thought was in his head the whole entire time. ‘I will make my dad proud today, it’s important that I do. The Olympics are coming up soon and it’s my job to fulfil my promise I made to him when he died.’ [...] The day of the trials, Jake never gave up and pushed himself harder than ever. He came in first and is going to the Olympics. His father would have been proud.”

In narrative and essay responses deemed “**Satisfactory**” in “**Content**,” such as those from which these excerpts were taken, the students’ exploration of the topic was clear and/or logical, the purpose was evident, details were relevant and/or generic, ideas were appropriate and/or predictable, and the writing was straightforward and/or generalized and occasionally appealed to the reader’s interest. The “**Organization**” of such responses was characterized by a functional introduction that established a focus that was generally sustained, events and/or details that were developed in a discernible order, transitions that mechanically connected events and/or details within and/or between sentences and/or paragraphs, and a mechanical and/or artificial closure that was related to the focus. Student responses scored “**Satisfactory**” in “**Sentence Structure**,” “**Vocabulary**,” and “**Conventions**” contained generally controlled and sometimes effective and/or varied sentence structure, general words and expressions that were generally used appropriately, a discernible voice or tone, generally correct use of conventions, and errors that occasionally reduced clarity and/or sometimes interrupted the flow of the response.

### **Narrative/Essay Writing Assignment—Observations from Standards Confirmation and Central Marking 2016: Qualities of Student Writing That Met the Standard of Excellence**

Students whose responses received scores of “**Proficient**” or “**Excellent**” in “**Content**” often purported that when striving to fulfill a purpose, “individuals will discover their true values, gain wisdom from efforts made to find success, and mentor others who may choose to follow your example.” Others examined how “personal sacrifices may be needed but it is through such hardship that we discover our hidden strengths” and how “risk-taking is necessary when aspiring to new heights of achievement.” Some students presented ideas related to being “focused on long-term goals rather than seeking instant gratification,” “leaving a legacy for future generations,” or “putting the needs of others before ourselves.” Other students discussed the “peace of mind attained by those who have no regrets regarding opportunities missed in the past” or the desire “to live in servitude to a higher purpose” by “striving to promote efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to slow global warming.” Some students spoke metaphorically about how “Striving to fulfill a purpose will open doors that have been previously locked,” how “on the journey of life, it may be necessary to find a detour around a roadblock” in order to “reach the finish line,” or how “a purpose can light a spark in your heart” with which “you can illuminate the path to fulfillment.”

Examples from student responses warranting scores of “**Proficient**” or “**Excellent**” are contained in the following excerpts:

- “Swish. The rickety old basketball once again made the pathway through the old dirty netting on the basketball hoop. David had been practicing for hours since the sun had sneaked out from behind the hills. He had to practice because today the tryouts were finally here. He could smell the fresh coffee brewing in the same old pot his Dad had gotten many years ago for Christmas. That Christmas. When the basketball he held in his hands, was given to him. Who would have thought that gift opened up a whole new world for him.”
- “Each person views the world differently. However, one thing that is consistent among all humans is that, without a purpose, people often find themselves feeling hopeless, depressed, or insignificant. To avoid this, individuals must reflect on their personal priorities to identify a purpose they wish to achieve. [...] People who succeed in attaining their goals can then have an impact on the lives of others by giving advice and assistance. By working together, we can make a difference in our own lives, the lives of others, and in the world.”
- “Drew grew up dreaming of playing in the NHL, but no one believed in his dream as much as he did. People scoffed at his optimism, but that didn’t stop him. [...] When Drew entered the WHL, a huge step toward being in the NHL, the dream-crushers who ridiculed him when he was younger started to recognize his talent and praised him for his success. [...] By shutting out all the negativity and reeling in all the positivity, Drew achieved what few people thought was possible. He looked down at the NHL logo on his jersey with a fulfilled smile.”
- “Striding down the cold, stone grey hallway that she had passed through for three years now, Jeanine felt a growing sense of panic. So much stress was weighing upon her shoulders, stress that did not seem to be affecting anyone else. It was her last week of Grade 12 and she still did not know how her life was going to play out. Her purpose in life was unclear and her interests were few. She was scared. Life would be an open book for her to explore. But how would she turn the pages of her future if she had no direction in which to go?”
- “One’s purpose in life is a buried treasure, waiting to be discovered by one brave enough to venture into the depths of the unknown. Our hearts encase our most valued thoughts, dreams, and memories. For some, the lock on their chest of dreams is rusted and unopenable. For others, the key to opening the lock lies in being able to discover their innermost desires. If we remain true to our selves, we will be able to let our strengths shine through and pursue those goals that will enable us to become the best version of ourselves possible.”

In responses assigned scores of “**Proficient**” or “**Excellent**” in “**Content**,” such as those from which these excerpts were taken, students explored the topic in an adept, plausible, insightful, and/or imaginative manner. The purpose was intentional or deliberate. Ideas presented were thoughtful, sound, perceptive, and/or carefully chosen. Supporting details were specific, apt, precise, and/or original. The writing was considered, elaborated, confident, and/or creative and drew or held the reader’s interest. In “**Organization**,” “**Proficient**” or “**Excellent**” student work contained a purposeful or engaging introduction that clearly or skillfully established a focus that was capably or consistently sustained. Events and/or details were developed coherently in a sensible or judicious order. Transitions clearly or fluently connected events and/or details within and/or between sentences and/or paragraphs. An appropriate or effective closure was related to the focus. Student responses scored “**Proficient**” or “**Excellent**” in “**Sentence Structure**,” “**Vocabulary**,” and “**Conventions**” demonstrated consistently controlled and usually or consistently effective and varied sentence structure. Specific or precise words and expressions were used accurately and/or deliberately. The voice or tone created by the student was distinct or convincing. Minor convention errors rarely, seldom, or in no way reduced clarity or interrupted the flow of the response.

## Narrative/Essay Writing Assignment—Observations from Standards Confirmation and Central Marking 2016: Qualities of Student Writing That Did Not Meet the Acceptable Standard

Student writing scored “**Poor**” or “**Limited**” in “**Content**” was often characterized by an exploration of the topic that was tenuous, simplistic, minimal, and/or tangential. For example, some students discussed the topic in absolute terms, through statements such as “With out a perpose life isent worth liveing,” “You either have a purpose or you don’t so you have to chose witch of those people your going to be,” and “Trying to do some thing usual ends in falure that’s why theirs no use to trying.” In some responses, students quoted randomly from the prompts provided without elaborating on them or connecting them to ideas presented. In other responses, students depicted scenarios in which little context was provided regarding a character’s personality, circumstances, or behaviour in the synopsis of events presented. Some students addressed the topic through circular reasoning, in statements such as “If life didnt have a purpose we wouldt be here but were here and that becuz we have a purpose” and “You need to find out what you want then you will have your perpose, else you won’t find your perpose if you don’t now what you want.” Students at this level of achievement often struggled with developing their ideas clearly in relation to the topic and were not always successful in conveying their thoughts completely.

The following excerpts from student responses illustrate qualities indicative of writing assigned “**Poor**” or “**Limited**” scores:

- “Striving to fufil a purpose in peoples lifes is imposable but its better to keep striving for a goal then just not try at all. [...] Thats the diffrence in how we all have to do what we gotta do to do what we want to do in our lifes.”
- “The impotence of a persons life is when you grow up and get a good education so that you can get a good job. You shouldn’t work for a job you don’t like, you should work for a place that you do like. That way you can do what you want to.”
- “Going to school to perpare for the future is wasteing your life. You go to school for about 20 plus years and that’s 20 plus years of your life gone studying for tests, homework. You should live each day to the fulest as much as you can.”
- “Billy always sat at the lunch table with his cool freinds and just do what they were doing. He never really did anything he wanted to do, he just followed them around like a puppy. [...] One day Billy saw his freinds sitting at the popular table but today he went and sat with the geeks and nerds. He liked them and decided he was gonna do better in school.”
- “Once upon a time there was a boy named Anthony, he was 16 years old and lived in las Vegas, Nevada. Anthony was about a month in the school year and he decided to get a job he didn’t know what yet. [...] He droped off his application at a couple different places like McDonalds target and dunkins. A couple days later he got a call from all 3 places all of them wanted to hire him.”

In student responses that warranted scores of “**Poor**” or “**Limited**” in “**Content**,” such as those from which these excerpts were taken, the purpose was vague or insubstantial. Ideas presented were superficial, ambiguous, overgeneralized, and/or underdeveloped. Supporting details were imprecise, abbreviated, irrelevant, and/or scant. The writing was uncertain, incomplete, confusing, and/or lacking in validity with little appeal to the reader’s interest. In “**Organization**,” the introduction lacked purpose and was obscure, ineffective, and/or not functional. The development of events and/or details was haphazard, incoherent, and/or not clearly discernible. Transitions were lacking, indiscriminately used, absent, and/or inappropriately used to connect events and/or details within and/or between sentences and/or paragraphs. Closure was abrupt, contrived, unrelated to the focus, ineffectual, and/or missing. “**Sentence Structure**,” “**Vocabulary**,” and “**Conventions**” in responses receiving scores of “**Poor**” or “**Limited**” typically demonstrated a lack of control and little or no variety in sentence structure. Imprecise and/or ineffective words and expressions were used inexactly or inaccurately. The voice or tone created by the student was indistinct, not clearly established, indiscreet, and/or not evident. Errors in conventions weakened or impaired communication, blurred or reduced clarity, and interrupted or impeded the flow of the response.

As is often the case each year, the connection between the assignment and the ideas contained in some student responses was difficult to determine. Markers were to consult with group leaders when drawing conclusions about whether or not a response sufficiently addressed the task presented in the assignment. Most often, there was evidence that the student had implicitly addressed the topic and/or

prompts, and the response was assessable. If, however, extensive examination of a student's work by both a marker and a group leader led to the conclusion that the response was "**Insufficient**," then the floor supervisors in consultation with the team leader made a final judgment.

### **Functional Writing Assignment—Observations from Standards Confirmation and Central Marking 2016: General Impressions**

In the **Functional Writing Assignment**, most students were able to connect the context provided in the "**Situation**" to their own experiences. From the viewpoint of "Jody Windsor, a grade nine student who lives in the neighbouring town of Sycamore View," students wrote "a business letter to "Ms. [Laura] Miller"—"the general manager" of "Northside Leisure Centre"—to present "concerns regarding the impact of a reduction in the leisure centre's hours of operation" in order to argue that "the current hours of operation should be maintained for many reasons." In many responses, students referenced or listed how "Northside Leisure Centre has served the needs of the city of Pine Ridge and nearby communities for a number of years" (by providing a "recreational complex [that] houses an indoor swimming pool, an ice-skating arena, a curling rink, a performing arts theatre, and two gymnasiums" and being "open daily from 6:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m."). In addition, students often included details pertaining to the time spent by the writer at the centre ("being able to visit the leisure centre frequently and [...] taking part in recreational activities with [...] friends and [...] family"). The majority of students recognized that, although the "costs of running the centre are covered by the fees paid by individuals who make use of the centre's facilities and by profits from special events," "the centre's hours of operation are going to be reduced" because "the costs of operating the facilities are rising." In some responses, students chose to "propose potential solutions that could be implemented in order to avoid cutting back the hours during which the centre operates." However, the extent to which these guidelines were analyzed and particularized to achieve the student's purpose in the "**Assignment**"—to "Write a business letter to **Ms. Laura Miller, general manager of Northside Leisure Centre,**" to "**present your arguments regarding the benefits for local residents of the facilities and programs provided by the centre**" and to "Provide enough information to **convince Ms. Miller of the need to maintain the centre's current hours of operation**"—is what determined the quality of student responses.

Most students identified the value of the programs and facilities offered by the Northside Leisure Centre to patrons interested in personal fitness (including "the running track in the gymnasium" and "a first-class weightroom"), the performing arts (including "the modern, well-equipped stage used by both student and adult performers"), and team sports (including "playing shinny hockey in the arena," "basketball games and other court sports," and "competitive swimming"). As well, students successfully assumed the role of "one who visits the centre often with family and friends" and expressed dismay at the prospect of "having less recreational activities to do" if the centre's hours of operation are "being lessened because it's becoming too expensive to operate at current levels" in order to support arguments related to why "the working hours of the leisure center shouldn't be reduced." To further support their position, some students explored "solutions to the cuts" that included "two for the price of one admission," "theme nights," "raising hourly fees at times when few people are making use of the facilities," and fundraising through "bake sales, car washes, and pancake breakfasts." In many responses, students provided information regarding how the addressee could contact the sender should she wish to do so, but this was not a requirement of the assignment.

In some responses, students reiterated verbatim information regarding the Northside Leisure Centre that was provided in the test booklet. When assessing student responses, markers were to recognize that the assignment was framed primarily within outcomes specified in **General Outcome 3: Managing Ideas and Information**, and were to assess the extent to which students were successful in incorporating elements of the information provided into their writing in order to achieve their purpose.

As in other years, markers were to acknowledge that there was no prescribed length for responses to the Functional Writing Assignment. While some students concisely fulfilled the requirements of the task, others elaborated more fully on ideas that they presented. Such brevity or embellishment was neither beneficial nor detrimental in and of itself, and markers were to take into account the overall effectiveness

of each response when assessing its quality. With regard to envelope and letter format, recommendations were provided in the guidelines of Canada Post. Other formats/styles were to be considered equally acceptable and markers were to assess the extent to which a student had been consistent in applying a chosen format to both the envelope and letter rather than “deduct marks” for deviations from the Canada Post guidelines. There were a number of student responses with varying amounts of white space between the heading, inside address, and salutation in the letter and some students single-spaced the body of the letter while others used double-spacing. Such formatting was not to be viewed as detrimental to the quality of student work and was not to be penalized in the assessment of “**Content Management.**”

### **Functional Writing Assignment—Observations from Standards Confirmation and Central Marking 2016: Qualities of Student Writing That Met the Acceptable Standard**

Students whose responses merited a score of “**Satisfactory**” in “**Content**” typically recognized that “the Northside Leisure Centre has been a part of our community for years” and “provides many activities for people of all ages.” Students argued that “the hours should not be reduced for countless reasons” by expressing appreciation for positive aspects of people’s experiences at the centre, such as in how “my family has lived in Sycamore View for many years, and much of that time has been spent at the Northside Leisure Centre,” how “kids should have somewhere to play and have fun, and Northside Leisure Centre is the best place for them,” and how “people can visit with each other and get healthy at the same time.” In other responses, students advised against a reduction in the centre’s hours of operation by suggesting that “if the centre is open less hours, less people will come,” that “there won’t be enough time for us to make use of as many of the facilities as we want to,” and that “a reduction in the centre’s hours will cause anxiety and congestion with more people wanting to do the activities with less time to do them.”

Qualities of student writing that warranted “**Satisfactory**” scores are evident in the following excerpts from student responses:

- “My name is Jody Windsor and I am a grade 9 student who lives in the neighboring town of Sycamore View and I have enjoyed recreational activities there with my friends and family. I have recently heard that you will be changing the hours at your facility and I think you should keep the hours the same.”
- “I am writing in concern that you are depleting the amount of hours that the Northside Leisure Centre is open. [...] This centre can give people the opportunity to meet new people, children can have family time with their families, and, it gives people the exercise they need to live a healthy life.”
- “People work all day and the only chance they get to go is at night and you will be making less money if you shortened the hours. You will lose profit for your facility. [...] I have a few ideas for you to consider. You can make a lot of money off of family packs and passes. If you add them, people pay a certain amount per month to go to your facility when ever they want.”
- “You could do some fundraising or other sorts of activities to raise money. [...] Some solutions would be to raise the entrance fee slightly. You could also host different events in hopes to raise some money to go towards the center.”
- “We can make fliers and posters to put up around town to advertise the centre. People will see the posters and come to the centre to buy memberships. Personally, I am willing to help out where needed. We could also have bake sales and ask local buisnesses for donations.”

In responses receiving a score of “**Satisfactory**” in “**Content,**” as illustrated in these excerpts, students presented appropriate ideas and adequately developed the topic. Relevant information was presented and supported by enough detail to fulfill the purpose of the assignment. A tone appropriate for the addressee was generally maintained. In responses scored “**Satisfactory**” in “**Content Management,**” words and expressions used were generally accurate and occasionally effective. The writing demonstrated basic control of correct sentence structure, usage, and mechanics and contained errors that occasionally impeded meaning. The envelope and letter contained occasional format errors and/or omissions.

## Functional Writing Assignment—Observations from Standards Confirmation and Central Marking 2016: Qualities of Student Writing That Met the Standard of Excellence

In responses warranting scores of “**Proficient**” or “**Excellent**” in “**Content**,” students often contended—from the viewpoint of “a frequent user who patronizes the centre on a daily basis” who is “deeply concerned about any reduction in the centre’s hours of operation”—that the Northside Leisure Centre provides “a reprieve from the stress of a long workday” and “builds a sense of belonging among local residents” and argued that “the centre is an asset to the community, and with community support, it can maintain its current programs without reducing the hours of operation.” Many students expressed praise for “the centre’s exceptionally welcoming and knowledgeable staff,” the “valuable life skills gained while at the centre” in “the field of athletics, the arts, and interpersonal interactions,” as well as for “the many different programs and services offered at the centre” which “reflect the diversity that exists in our community.” To reinforce their arguments, some students included speculation about how “among the centre’s visitors there could be a future Olympic contender or an upcoming star of stage and screen” and provided recommendations regarding how to “seek out alternate revenue streams such as 50/50 draws, silent auctions, raffles, and selling sports apparel.”

The excerpts below, taken from student responses, illustrate qualities of writing that received “**Proficient**” or “**Excellent**” scores:

- “Northside Leisure Centre provides our community with many opportunities to exercise, stay in shape, and make our community as a whole healthier and stronger. I myself have made many close friends that I would have never talked to before because of meeting them at Northside. [...] I realize that the costs of running your facility have increased by a wide margin, and that is why you are planning to cut the hours. However, I do believe that there are ways to increase your income in order to cover the costs of operating the facility.”
- “The Northside Leisure Centre has served the needs of the community for many years. Your building contains a substantial amount of diverse attractions which provide numerous ways for people to be active, play team sports, and explore the fine arts. Without your building, people in the community would be lacking these essential services that would otherwise be unavailable to them. By reducing the hours of operation for the centre, you are limiting the amount of time that members of the community spend participating in healthy social events.”
- “People value being able to swim, skate, curl, or play sports in the gym all in one location. The performances staged in the community theatre are of the highest quality. The facilities are well maintained and staff employed there are welcoming and helpful. Above all, the hours during which the centre has been open, from 6:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m., have made the leisure centre accessible to everyone, even those with busy schedules.”
- “Local residents receive many benefits from the facility, like being able to swim on a warm, sunny day or enjoy a musical or theatrical performance on a Friday night. Sports-minded individuals relish playing dodgeball in the gymnasium. [...] The citizens of Pine Ridge and nearby communities take pride in the Northside Leisure Centre as it is part of the city’s history. It has brought strangers together, and made them feel that they are part of the community.”
- “Thank you for taking time out of your busy schedule to read my letter. I sincerely hope that you take my ideas into consideration with regard to your decision to reduce the hours of operation at Northside Leisure Centre. [...] If possible, I would very much like to hear from you to see if we can work together to find a solution that will benefit both the leisure centre and the people who value being able to utilize its facilities.”

Student writing judged “**Proficient**” or “**Excellent**” in “**Content**,” as illustrated in these excerpts, was characterized by ideas that were thoughtful or perceptive, and development of the topic was generally effective or clear and effective. Significant or pertinent information was presented, and this information was substantiated or enhanced by specific or precise details that fulfilled the purpose of the assignment. A tone appropriate for the addressee was clearly or skillfully maintained. In responses scored “**Proficient**” or “**Excellent**” in “**Content Management**,” words and expressions used were usually or consistently accurate and effective. The writing demonstrated either competent and generally consistent control or confident and consistent control of correct sentence structure, usage, and mechanics. Any errors present rarely impeded or did not impede meaning. The envelope and letter contained few, if any, format errors and/or omissions.

## Functional Writing Assignment—Observations from Standards Confirmation and Central Marking 2016: Qualities of Student Writing That Did Not Meet the Acceptable Standard

Students whose responses demonstrated qualities characteristic of “**Poor**” or “**Limited**” scores in “**Content**” sometimes relied exclusively on verbatim reiteration of the information presented in the assignment with little of their own thinking or development. Other students demonstrated a flawed or misconstrued understanding of the purpose of the letter, evident in contentions that “as the principle of the school at the center I assume you have the right to decide,” “if you open more hours more people will come so you will make more money,” and “80 percent of your customers are students and the school dismissal bell is really late so students won’t have time to go to the centre.” In some instances, students mistakenly argued or inappropriately contended that “It’s not fair to lay off workers which is what you’re doing by cutting hours,” “I go there to get fit so if I cant go there I wont be fit and I’ll die,” or “you need to open your eyes and make a better decision.” In other responses, students presented dubious assertions pertaining to how “the center should be open 24 hours a day seven days a week,” how “if you close the leisure centre we’ll just build another one down the street,” and how “the centre has been cutting back for years and this has to stop!”

Ideas such as these are shown in the following excerpts from student responses that warranted “**Poor**” or “**Limited**” scores:

- “I personally would like if you keep these hours at the Lesure center even if it dose cost more because we like to use the gym and pool and ice rink and dont care about if the centere makes a profit because we dont whant to pay more.”
- “If you cut hours less peple will go to lots of peple cant go their. [...] I am not the only person who dissagrees with the hours cutting so we will not be their nor niether anymore costmers.”
- “You can make some changes that wont effect the hole community. And that don’t make us fat because if we do not go then we will just wacht tv and eat chips [...] I think its wronge if you do this or well be very sad and bored.”
- “As you know are town is 100 kms away so it takes eight hours to get there and if you close at 8:00 pm we will never get there one time. [...] How are we gonna spent time with are freinds and families?”
- “This centre is good for when we have nothing to do so if you close then we will have nothing to do so what are we going to do so were not bored.”

In student writing deemed “**Poor**” or “**Limited**” in “**Content**,” as illustrated in these excerpts, ideas were superficial, flawed, overgeneralized, and/or misconstrued and development of the topic was inadequate or ineffective. Information presented was imprecise, undiscerning, irrelevant, and/or missing. Supporting details were insignificant, lacking, obscure, and/or absent, and the purpose of the assignment was only partially fulfilled or not fulfilled. A tone appropriate for the addressee was evident but not maintained or there was little awareness of a tone appropriate for the addressee evident. In responses scored “**Poor**” or “**Limited**” in “**Content Management**,” words and expressions used were frequently vague and/or inexact or inaccurate and/or misused. The writing demonstrated either faltering control or a lack of control of correct sentence structure, usage, and mechanics. Errors that were present frequently or severely impeded meaning. The envelope and letter contained frequent or numerous and glaring format errors and/or omissions.

As is often the case each year, the connection between the assignment and the ideas contained in some student responses was difficult to determine. Markers were to consult with group leaders when drawing conclusions about whether or not a response sufficiently addressed the task presented in the assignment. Most often, there was evidence that the student had implicitly addressed the topic and/or prompts, and the response was assessable. If, however, extensive examination of a student’s work by both a marker and a group leader led to the conclusion that the response was “**Insufficient**,” then the floor supervisors in consultation with the team leader made a final judgment.

Overall, student responses to both the Narrative/Essay Writing Assignment and the Functional Writing Assignment in *Part A: Writing* of the 2016 Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement Test were strong. The vast majority of students (91.5%) achieved the acceptable standard, while 22.5% of all students achieved the standard of excellence. Of all students who wrote the *Part A: Writing* test, only 8.5% did not achieve the acceptable standard.



## Part B: Reading—2016 Test Blueprint and Student Achievement

In 2016, 80.3% of all students who wrote the Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement Test achieved the acceptable standard on *Part B: Reading*, and 19.1% of all students who wrote achieved the standard of excellence. On *Part B: Reading* of the 2016 Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement Test, students achieved an average score of 35.4 out of a total score of 55 (64.4%).

The blueprint below shows the reporting categories and language functions by which 2016 summary data are reported to schools and school authorities, and it shows the provincial average of student achievement by both raw score and percentage.

Reporting Category	Language Function		Provincial Student Achievement (Average Raw Score and Percentage)
	Informational	Narrative / Poetic	
<b>Identifying and Interpreting Ideas and Details</b> (2.1, 2.2, 2.3)* Students construct meaning by interpreting ideas and details pertaining to setting/atmosphere/context, character/narrator/speaker (actions, motives, values), conflict, and events.			<b>10.4/17</b> <b>(61.2%)</b>
<b>Interpreting Text Organization</b> (2.2, 2.3)* Students identify and analyze literary genres. Students identify and analyze the text creator's choice of form, tone, point of view, organizational structure, style, diction, rhetorical techniques (e.g., repetition, parallelism), text features (e.g., alliteration, onomatopoeia, imagery, dialogue, foreshadowing, suspense), and conventions.			<b>6.9/10</b> <b>(69.0%)</b>
<b>Associating Meaning</b> (2.1, 2.2, 2.3)* Students use contextual clues to determine the denotative and connotative meaning of words, phrases, and figurative language (e.g., simile, metaphor, hyperbole, personification, irony, symbolism).			<b>7.3/11</b> <b>(66.4%)</b>
<b>Synthesizing Ideas</b> (2.2)* Students draw conclusions and make generalizations by integrating information in order to identify the tone, purpose, theme, main idea, or mood of a passage.			<b>10.7/17</b> <b>(62.9%)</b>
<b>Provincial Student Achievement</b> <b>(Average Raw Score and Percentage)</b>	<b>14.0/22</b> <b>(63.6%)</b>	<b>21.4/33</b> <b>(64.8%)</b>	<b>Part B: Reading</b> <b>Total Test Raw</b> <b>Score = 55</b>

\*Numbers in parentheses refer to outcomes in the Program of Studies for Grade 9 English Language Arts to which the reporting categories are cross-referenced.

## Part B: Reading—Commentary on 2016 Student Achievement

The following is a discussion of student achievement on *Part B: Reading* of the 2016 Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement Test. Sample questions from the test are provided to highlight the achievement of students who met the acceptable standard, students who met the standard of excellence, and students who did not meet the acceptable standard. For each question, the keyed answer is marked with an asterisk.

In the blueprinting category of **Identifying and Interpreting Ideas and Details**, students were expected to construct meaning by interpreting ideas and details pertaining to setting/atmosphere/context, character/narrator/speaker (actions, motives, values), conflict, and events in ten reading selections. In the three informational texts—a newspaper article, an excerpt from a magazine article, and an excerpt from a nonfiction book—students who achieved the acceptable standard were able to recognize interrelationships among ideas and information presented, identify key elements of concepts presented, and recognize the impact of a personal experience on an individual’s life. Students who achieved the standard of excellence additionally illustrated strengths in making inferences regarding the significance of elements of writers’ experiences described and in discriminating among details in order to determine those most relevant to an idea under discussion. Students who did not meet the acceptable standard were generally able to identify explicit ideas and details in informational texts, but many encountered difficulty with questions that required recognition of connections among ideas presented or identifying the central focus of details presented. The seven narrative/poetic texts—including two poems, two cartoons, an excerpt from a short story, and excerpts from two novels—enabled many students who met the acceptable standard to demonstrate their ability to determine the motivation underlying a character’s actions, recognize how characters are perceived by others, and identify what details suggest about characters’ behaviour. In addition, students who achieved the standard of excellence were capable of acknowledging the complexities of interpersonal relationships among characters portrayed and appreciating the indelible impact of pivotal events on characters’ lives. Those students who did not meet the acceptable standard, while generally able to recognize causality between directly related events, sometimes struggled with questions involving interpretation of the implicit meaning of ideas pertaining to interactions among characters. The following question illustrates some of these differences in student achievement on the 2016 Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement Test.

In question 49, students were required to infer from details in specified lines of an excerpt from a novel what is suggested about the narrator’s experiences (SO 2.2).

49. Details in lines 18 to 23 suggest that, for the narrator, the outcome of doing well on an aptitude test was
- A. embarrassing
  - B. uninteresting
  - \*C. unrewarding
  - D. confusing

Of all students who wrote the test, 58.4% chose the correct answer (option C). These students were able to infer from the narrator’s reflections—regarding how the experience was “too much hassle, though” because of “all the counselors and teachers swarming all over” her for “about a week” and how “everybody remembered what they were dealing with, and forgot” the narrator—that she found the outcome of being recognized for her achievement to be short-lived and unrewarding. Of those students who did not select the keyed response, 9.0% chose option A. This alternative presents the idea that the narrator was embarrassed by her success on the aptitude test, an inference that is not supported by details in the text. Option B was chosen by 25.1% of all students, a choice that suggests that the narrator found the outcome of events to be uninteresting, but there is little explicit evidence in the lines cited of the narrator’s being disinterested in her experiences; her general aversion to school, established earlier in the

text, is implicitly related to her observations but this choice does not account for the narrator’s frustration with events that ensue from her writing of the text. Option **D**, which was chosen by 7.4% of all students, suggests that the narrator is confused by the events that take place, an inference that is also not supported by details in the text. Of those students who achieved the acceptable standard, 59.3% selected the correct answer. A total of 74.1% of those students who achieved the standard of excellence chose the correct answer. Of those students who did not meet the acceptable standard on the *Part B: Reading* test, 33.7% chose the correct answer.

In the section of the 2016 achievement test blueprinted for curricular content pertaining to **Interpreting Text Organization**, students who achieved the acceptable standard were often able to identify textual features that include the use of punctuation as well as the employment of organizational strategies to enhance meaning by writers of informational texts. Students who achieved the standard of excellence were, in addition, able to analyze how the presentation of a writer’s ideas is enhanced through rhetorical choices that include the use of parenthetical commentary as well as sentence fragments. Students who did not meet the acceptable standard demonstrated weaknesses in identifying how the organizational choices employed by the writers of informational texts provide a structure for the development of ideas. In narrative/poetic texts, students who achieved the acceptable standard could typically identify the effects achieved by writers through the repetition of sounds (such as through alliteration) and the development of the mood (through overt elements of the setting). Students achieving the standard of excellence could additionally detect elements central to the conflict faced by characters, subtleties of tone in interactions among characters, and elements that foreshadow the outcome of events. Many students who did not achieve the acceptable standard encountered difficulty with questions that tasked students with recognizing the impact of the writer’s sequencing of events on the development of the central conflict in narrative/poetic texts. Some of these differences in student achievement on the 2016 Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement Test are demonstrated in the following question.

Question 50 required that students identify the tone used by the narrator in specified lines of an excerpt from a novel (SO 2.2).

- 50.** The narrator’s tone in lines 26 to 27 is **best** described as
- A. sincere
  - \*B. sarcastic
  - C. confident
  - D. disinterested

The correct answer (option **B**) was selected by 79.7% of all students who wrote the test. These students could infer from the narrator’s observations—regarding how her house (located “four blocks from the school” rather than in “Chateau Estates or Golf Terrace”) is “Small. Poor. Falling down”—that her reflections (in “You think there’s any money stashed away in some college fund for me? Uh-huh. Right. Tell me another joke”) suggest that her tone is sarcastic. Option **A** (which was selected by 6.3% of all students) suggests that the narrator’s reflections are sincere and, although the emotion underlying her sentiments is genuine, this option does not account for the intended irony of her statements. Option **C** (which was selected by 4.4% of all students) documents how the narrator’s reflections are uttered with a degree of confidence, but this option also does not account for the intended irony of her statements. Option **D** (which was selected by 9.4% of all students) suggests that the narrator’s statements express indifference, but this option does not account for either the strength of conviction underlying her thoughts or the intended irony of her statements. Many of those students who achieved the acceptable standard chose the correct answer, with 81.7% selecting the keyed response. Most of those students who met the standard of excellence (92.5%) chose the correct answer whereas 52.8% of those students who did not meet the acceptable standard chose the correct answer.

With regard to questions blueprinted in the **Associating Meaning** category, students who achieved the acceptable standard were able to identify the denotative meanings of words and phrases and could recognize the use of figures of speech—such as simile, metaphor, and irony—in informational texts. Students who achieved the standard of excellence were additionally able to appreciate how connotations of

words and phrases reinforce meaning and how metaphorical comparisons enrich the reader’s understanding of the similarities between familiar and unfamiliar experiences. Students who did not achieve the acceptable standard typically struggled with distinguishing the meaning of specific words and phrases presented and showed limited understanding of figurative language in informational texts. Students who achieved the acceptable standard could generally recognize the use of metaphor, hyperbole, and personification in straightforward narrative/poetic texts. Students who achieved the standard of excellence demonstrated additional strengths in abstracting from figures of speech a deeper understanding of ideas presented by writers of narrative/poetic texts. Students who did not achieve the acceptable standard were often challenged by questions that required the use of contextual clues to determine the meaning of words and phrases and sometimes encountered difficulty identifying figurative comparisons in narrative/poetic texts. Such differences in student achievement on the 2016 Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement Test are shown in the following question.

Question 48 required that students recognize the literary technique used by the writer in a quotation from an excerpt from a novel (SO 2.3).

48. The expression “I knocked the socks off everybody” (lines 13 to 14) demonstrates the narrator’s use of
- A. personification
  - B. onomatopoeia
  - C. alliteration
  - \*D. hyperbole

Of all students who wrote the test, 70.9% were able to choose the keyed response (option **D**) by correctly recognizing how the narrator uses exaggeration to emphasize the unexpectedness of her high score on an aptitude test in comparison to that of her classmates. Option **A** (selected by 8.2% of all students) incorrectly suggests that the narrator has employed personification. Option **B** (selected by 9.6% of all students) incorrectly suggests that onomatopoeia has been employed by the narrator. Option **C** (selected by 11.2% of all students) incorrectly suggests that alliteration has been employed by the narrator. Each of these options identifies a literary device that is not evident in the narrator’s statement. A total of 72.4% of students who achieved the acceptable standard answered this question correctly. Of those students who achieved the standard of excellence, 94.4% chose the correct answer. Of those students who did not meet the acceptable standard, 32.1% selected the keyed response.

In the blueprinting category of **Synthesizing Ideas**, students achieving the acceptable standard were typically able to identify main ideas in informational texts and determine the central focus of writers’ reflections on personal experiences. Students who achieved the standard of excellence were additionally capable of synthesizing ideas in informational texts in order to formulate conclusions pertaining to the basis for a writer’s inclusion of particular content and perceive the overarching ideas of information presented. Many of those students who did not achieve the acceptable standard were able to identify explicit facts presented but frequently found it difficult to answer questions that required synthesis of ideas to arrive at a generalization encapsulating the content of information presented or extrapolation, from a writer’s reflections, on the significance of specific events. In narrative/poetic texts, students who achieved the acceptable standard generally demonstrated the ability to recognize differing viewpoints among characters and determine central themes from events portrayed. Students achieving the standard of excellence could additionally evaluate the effectiveness of characters’ choices through the writer’s omniscience in exploring their actions and appreciate the main purpose underlying the writer’s presentation of events in narrative/poetic texts. Those students who did not meet the acceptable standard often struggled with questions that required formulating conclusions regarding the intended impact on readers of events depicted and were often challenged by questions regarding the resolution of conflict through the events documented in narrative/poetic texts. The following question illustrates some of these differences in student achievement on the 2016 Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement Test.

In question 51, students needed to draw a conclusion regarding what events in an excerpt from a novel suggest about the purpose underlying the narrator’s actions (SO 2.2).

- 51.** Details in this excerpt **most clearly** illustrate that the purpose underlying the assigned task of writing the journal is to enable the narrator to
- A. improve her grades
  - \*B. document her experiences
  - C. recall events from her past
  - D. record what occurs during her classes

The correct answer (option **B**) was selected by 57.9% of all students who wrote the test. These students were able to conclude—from details related to the narrator’s feelings that, because her “life’s not so exciting,” she will struggle to “have something to say twice a week” and details documenting her thoughts regarding her need “to have four entries” completed to be handed in “on Friday”—that the assignment she has been given is to create a weekly record of her daily experiences. Option **A** (selected by 19.6% of all students) suggests that the purpose of the journal is to enable her to achieve better grades, but this inference is not supported by the text. Option **C** (selected by 12.2% of all students) suggests that intent of the journal is for students to draw upon their memories of the past, but this inference is contradicted by the narrator’s aforementioned thoughts about the expectation that she is to write about events in her life as they occur each week. Option **D** (selected by 10.1% of all students) identifies an activity in which the narrator is currently engaged (in “I’m writing this in Mr. Tremont’s class [...] I’ll take down every word he says”), but her doing so is not established as a requirement of the assigned journal entries. Each of these three incorrect alternatives presents a conclusion based on supposition beyond the text that is not supported by details and events in the excerpt. Of those students achieving the acceptable standard, 57.9% chose the correct answer. A total of 82.1% of students who achieved the standard of excellence chose the correct answer. Of those students who did not meet the acceptable standard, 26.7% answered this question correctly.

Overall, student achievement on *Part B: Reading* of the 2016 Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement Test was strong. Most students (80.3%) were able to meet the standards within the *Part B: Reading* test, and 19.1% of all students achieved the standard of excellence. Of all students who wrote the *Part B: Reading* test, 19.7% did not meet the acceptable standard.

# Achievement Testing Program Support Documents

The Alberta Education website contains several documents that provide valuable information about various aspects of the achievement testing program. To access these documents, go to the [Alberta Education website](#). Click on one of the specific links to access the following documents.

## **Achievement Testing Program *General Information Bulletin***

The [General Information Bulletin](#) is a compilation of several documents produced by Alberta Education and is intended to provide superintendents, principals, and teachers with easy access to information about all aspects of the achievement testing program. Sections in the bulletin contain information pertaining to schedules and significant dates; security and test rules; test administration directives, guidelines, and procedures; calculator and computer policies; test accommodations; test marking and results; field testing; resources and web documents; forms and samples; and Provincial Assessment Sector contacts.

## **Subject Bulletins**

At the beginning of each school year, subject bulletins are posted on the Alberta Education website for all achievement test subjects for grades 6 and 9. Each bulletin provides descriptions of assessment standards, test design and blueprinting, and scoring guides (where applicable) as well as suggestions for preparing students to write the tests and information about how teachers can participate in test development activities.

## **Examples of the Standards for Students' Writing**

For achievement tests in grades 6 and 9 English Language Arts and Français/French Language Arts, writing samples are designed for teachers and students to enhance students' writing and to assess this writing relative to the standards inherent in the scoring guides for the achievement tests. The exemplars documents contain sample responses with scoring rationales that relate student work to the scoring categories and scoring criteria.

## **Previous Achievement Tests and Answer Keys**

All January achievement tests (parts A and B) for Grade 9 semestered students are secured and must be returned to Alberta Education. All May/June achievement tests are secured except Part A of grades 6 and 9 English Language Arts and Français/French Language Arts. Unused or extra copies of only these Part A tests may be kept at the school after administration. Teachers may also use the released items and/or tests that are posted on the Alberta Education website.

## **Parent Guides**

Each school year, versions of the [Alberta Provincial Achievement Testing Parent Guide](#) for grades 6 and 9 are posted on the Alberta Education website. Each guide answers frequently asked questions about the achievement testing program and provides descriptions of and sample questions for each achievement test subject.

## **Involvement of Teachers**

Teachers of grades 6 and 9 are encouraged to take part in activities related to the achievement testing program. These activities include item development, test validation, field testing, and marking. In addition, arrangements can be made through the Alberta Regional Professional Development Consortia for teacher in-service workshops on topics such as interpreting achievement test results to improve student learning.