

**Alberta Provincial  
Achievement Testing**

**Assessment  
Highlights  
2014–2015**

**GRADE  
9**

**Knowledge and Employability  
English Language Arts**

*Alberta*  Government

This document was written primarily for:

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

For further information, contact

**Ray Shapka, Assessment Standards Team Leader**, at  
[Ray.Shapka@gov.ab.ca](mailto:Ray.Shapka@gov.ab.ca)

Nicole Lamarre, Director, Student Learning Assessments and Provincial Achievement Testing, at  
[Nicole.Lamarre@gov.ab.ca](mailto:Nicole.Lamarre@gov.ab.ca), or

Provincial Assessment Sector: 780-427-0010  
Toll-free within Alberta: 310-0000.

The [Alberta Education website](http://education.alberta.ca) is found at education.alberta.ca.

Copyright 2015, the Crown in Right of Alberta, as represented by the Minister of Education, Alberta Education, Provincial Assessment Sector, 44 Capital Boulevard, 10044 108 Street NW, Edmonton, Alberta T5J 5E6, and its licensors. All rights reserved.

**Special permission** is granted to **Alberta educators only** to reproduce, for educational purposes and on a non-profit basis, parts of this document that do **not** contain excerpted material.

## *Contents*

The 2015 Grade 9 Knowledge and Employability English Language Arts Achievement Test.....	1
<b>Part A: Writing</b> —2015 Test Blueprint.....	2
<b>Part A: Writing</b> —2015 Student Achievement .....	3
<b>Part A: Writing</b> —Commentary on 2015 Student Achievement .....	4
<b>Part B: Reading</b> —2015 Test Blueprint and Student Achievement.....	6
<b>Part B: Reading</b> —Commentary on 2015 Student Achievement.....	7
Achievement Testing Program Support Documents.....	10

## The 2015 Grade 9 Knowledge and Employability English Language Arts Achievement Test

This report provides teachers, school administrators, and the public with an overview of the performance of those students who wrote the 2015 Grade 9 Knowledge and Employability English Language Arts Achievement Test. It complements the detailed school and jurisdiction reports.

### How Many Students Wrote the Test?

A total of 1 275 students wrote both parts of the 2015 Grade 9 Knowledge and Employability English Language Arts Achievement Test.

### What Was the Test Like?

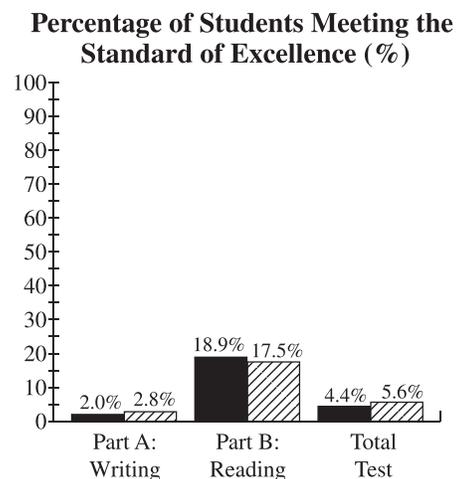
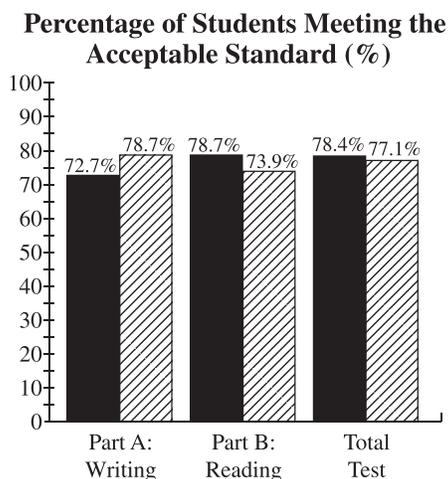
The 2015 Grade 9 Knowledge and Employability English Language Arts Achievement Test had two parts:

*Part A: Writing* consisted of a Persuasive Essay-Writing Assignment worth 35 marks (35% of the total mark). The Persuasive Essay-Writing Assignment provided students with a context (situation) and a collection of materials that students could use if they wanted to.

*Part B: Reading* consisted of 50 multiple-choice questions worth 65 marks (65% of the total mark). The reading selections were from fiction, non-fiction, drama, poetry, and visual media.

### How Well Did Students Do?

The percentages of students meeting the acceptable standard and the standard of excellence in 2015 are shown in the graphs below. Out of a total possible score of 100 (parts A and B), the provincial average was 63.0%. The results represented in this report are based on scores achieved by all students who wrote the test, including those in French Immersion and Francophone programs.



■ 2014 Achievement Standards: The percentage of students in the province who met the acceptable standard and the standard of excellence on the 2014 Grade 9 Knowledge and Employability English Language Arts Achievement Test (based on those who wrote).

▨ 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 Knowledge and Employability English Language Arts Achievement Test (based on those who wrote).

## Part A: Writing—2015 Test Blueprint

The blueprint for *Part A: Writing* identifies the scoring/reporting categories by which student writing is assessed and by which 2015 summary data are reported to schools and school authorities; it also provides a description of the writing assignments and the achievement standards.

<p><b>Description of Writing Assignment</b></p>	<p>The writing assignment requires students to respond to a prompt that provides a given context (situation) and a collection of materials that students may use, if they wish. These materials may include graphics, quotations, and short literary excerpts. Students may use ideas from previous experience and/or reading. Students are to respond by writing a persuasive essay.</p>
<p><b>Reporting Category</b></p>	<p><b>Content*</b> (selecting ideas and details to achieve a purpose) Students respond to a given topic by writing an essay. Students establish their purpose, select ideas and supporting details to achieve the purpose, and communicate in a manner appropriate to their audience.</p> <p><b>Organization*</b> (organizing ideas and details into a coherent whole) Students organize their ideas to produce a unified and coherent essay that links details, sentences, and paragraphs, and that supports the purpose.</p> <p><b>Sentence Structure</b> (structuring sentences effectively) Students control sentence structure and use a variety of sentence types, sentence beginnings, and sentence lengths to enhance communication.</p> <p><b>Vocabulary</b> (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.</p> <p><b>Conventions</b> (using the conventions of written language correctly and effectively) Students use conventions accurately and effectively to communicate.</p>
<p><b>Standards</b></p>	<p>Student achievement in each reporting category will be described according to the following descriptors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Excellent</li> <li>Proficient</li> <li>Satisfactory</li> <li>Limited</li> <li>Poor</li> <li>INS (insufficient)</li> </ul>

*\*Note: Content and Organization are weighted to be worth twice as much as the other categories.*

## Part A: Writing—2015 Student Achievement

In 2015, 78.7% of students who wrote the test achieved the acceptable standard on *Part A: Writing* of the Grade 9 Knowledge and Employability English Language Arts Achievement Test, and 2.8% of 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.

		Essay-Writing Assignment				
		Reporting Category				
		Content	Organization	Sentence Structure	Vocabulary	Conventions
Writing Standard	Score*	Percentage of Students	Percentage of Students	Percentage of Students	Percentage of Students	Percentage of Students
Excellent	5.0	0.9%	0.6%	0.6%	0.9%	0.8%
	4.5	0.8%	1.2%	0.8%	0.5%	0.4%
Proficient	4.0	6.7%	6.4%	5.5%	7.3%	5.3%
Satisfactory	3.5	11.6%	10.1%	8.2%	11.3%	8.9%
	3.0	47.9%	42.2%	45.1%	60.9%	44.4%
	2.5	16.3%	16.1%	18.7%	12.0%	17.6%
Limited	2.0	11.1%	17.5%	15.7%	5.0%	16.8%
	1.5	2.0%	2.7%	2.5%	0.9%	3.8%
Poor	1.0	2.0%	2.6%	2.1%	0.5%	1.3%
Insufficient / No Response	0	0.7%	0.7%	0.7%	0.7%	0.7%

\* Scores of 4.5, 3.5, 2.5, and 1.5 occur only when local marks and central marks are averaged.

## **Part A: Writing—*Commentary on 2015 Student Achievement***

During the 2015 scoring session, teachers from throughout the province scored 1 275 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 2015 Grade 9 Knowledge and Employability English Language Arts Achievement Test achieved an average of 20 out of a raw score of 35. The provincial average on the Essay-Writing Assignment was approximately 57%.

### **Essay-Writing Assignment**

In the 2015 Essay-Writing Assignment, students were required to respond to a prompt that provided a context and a collection of materials that students could use, if they wished. Students were to respond in the form of a persuasive essay. The wording of the assignment in posing the question “Should schools offer students a later school start time?” and inviting students to “Write a persuasive essay to the principal of Carely School that clearly states your point of view regarding a later school day start time” encouraged students to bring their knowledge and experiences into their writing.

Training for the marking session always emphasizes the need to look at the strengths of the writer and to mark only what is written. When marking, markers conscientiously examined the “Focus” section of the scoring categories to orient themselves to distinctions within the scoring criteria as well as the various scoring descriptors in each scoring scale in order to arrive at judgments regarding the qualities of a response. Markers conscientiously used their exemplar documents to support the scoring criteria in distinguishing among scoring categories. Each response is to be reviewed according to each category in the scoring criteria. Every effort is made to score each response in a valid and reliable manner.

Students responded to the prompt bringing their prior knowledge and experience into their writing. Teachers who took part in the marking session noted that many students were adept at listing the pros and cons related to the issue and responded in a realistic manner. They also noted that students who chose one position tended to present a stronger argument in their writing.

The following excerpts contain examples from responses that achieved “Satisfactory” scores:

- “You need time after school to be with friends or family. Friends and family are important.”
- “There also can be more time to get ready in the morning, so you don’t have the feeling of being rushed.”
- “If school starts later the later it ends. If it starts normally you would have extra time after school.”

In responses such as those from which these excerpts were taken, students explored the topic in a clear and plausible manner. The writer's point of view was evident and, for the most part, students approached the topic from one side of the issue. The ideas and details provided were appropriate, and supporting details tended to be relevant, but general in nature. At times, additional supporting details would have enhanced the writing. The introduction was functional and a focus was generally maintained. The conclusion was related to the focus. Ideas were developed in a discernible order. However, coherence tended to falter at times. Transitions tended to be mechanical and generally connected ideas within sentences but less so between paragraphs. Also evident in such student responses was sentence structure that was generally controlled. Sentence type and sentence length were sometimes varied, and there was some variety of sentence beginnings. Words and expressions were generally used appropriately. The tone or voice created by the writer was evident, and it was noted that the topic engaged the students. Generally correct use of conventions was seen, although errors occasionally reduced the clarity and flow of the response.

The following excerpts contain examples from responses that achieved "Proficient" or "Excellent" scores.

- "When us students get that extra hour of sleep our bodies will be ready to learn, our minds ready to listen to our teachers."
- "How would you feel if you had all these things to be doing after school and you weren't getting the right amount of sleep at night, you would probably be tired, stressed, and exhausted?"
- "Eating a healthy breakfast in the morning helps your body and brain get prepared for the day ahead."

In responses such as those from which these excerpts were taken, students demonstrated work in which the exploration of the topic was adept and/or logical or insightful and/or discerning. The introductions were purposeful or engaging, and the conclusions reinforced or enhanced the focus. Sentence structure was consistently controlled and sentence type, length, and beginnings were consistently varied. Words and expressions were well-chosen and supported or enhanced the writer's position. Few errors in conventions were evident, and any errors that were present rarely reduced the clarity and flow of the response.

## Part B: Reading—2015 Test Blueprint and Student Achievement

In 2015, 73.9% of students who wrote the test achieved the acceptable standard on *Part B: Reading* of the Grade 9 Knowledge and Employability English Language Arts Achievement Test, and 17.5% of students achieved the standard of excellence.

Student achievement on *Part B: Reading* of the 2015 Grade 9 Knowledge and Employability English Language Arts Achievement Test averaged 33.0 out of 50 (approximately 66.0%).

The blueprint below shows the reporting categories and language functions by which 2015 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> Students construct meaning by recognizing explicit or implicit ideas and details and make inferences about the relationships between ideas, details, and events.			<b>10.3/16</b> <b>(64.3%)</b>
<b>Interpreting Text Organization</b> Students identify and analyze the author’s use of genre. Students identify and analyze the author’s choice of form, text features, organizational structure, style, literary techniques, and conventions.			<b>5.0/8</b> <b>(62.5%)</b>
<b>Associating Meaning</b> Students use contextual clues to determine the denotative and connotative meaning of words, phrases, and figurative language (e.g., simile, metaphor, hyperbole, idioms, irony, symbolism).			<b>4.2/6</b> <b>(70.0%)</b>
<b>Synthesizing Ideas</b> Students draw conclusions and make generalizations by integrating information in order to identify the tone, purpose, theme, main idea, point of view, or mood of a passage.			<b>13.5/20</b> <b>(67.5%)</b>
<b>Provincial Student Achievement (Average Raw Score and Percentage)</b>	<b>16.4/26</b> <b>(63.0%)</b>	<b>16.6/24</b> <b>(69.2%)</b>	<b>Part B: Reading            Total Test            Raw Score =            33.0/50</b> <b>(66.0%)</b>

## Part B: Reading—*Commentary on 2015 Student Achievement*

The following is a discussion of student achievement on *Part B: Reading* of the 2015 Grade 9 Knowledge and Employability English Language Arts Achievement Test. Sample questions are provided to highlight the levels of achievement of students who met the acceptable standard, students who met the standard of excellence, and students who did not meet the acceptable standard.

Students were presented with a variety of Informational and Narrative/Poetic texts, which included a cover of a magazine, an excerpt from a magazine, a short informational article, a job profile, a graphic novel, a cartoon, a biography, and a poem.

In the content area of **Identifying and Interpreting Ideas and Details**, students were expected to construct meaning by recognizing explicit or implicit ideas and details and making inferences about the relationships between these ideas and details.

Multiple-choice question **28** required students to locate a key detail in a graphic novel.

- 28.** In Frame 14, the coach allows Jermaine back on the team because he
- A.** learned to be unselfish
  - B.** has good basketball skills
  - C.** has caught up on schoolwork
  - D.** solved a problem with another player

6.3% of the students chose A

3.6% of the students chose B

80.8% of the students chose C (correct answer)

9.3% of the students chose D

Approximately 87.1% of students who met the acceptable standard were able to answer this question correctly, whereas about 94.4% of students who met the standard of excellence chose the correct response.

In the content area of **Interpreting Text Organization**, students were expected to identify and analyze the author’s use of genre. Students identified and analyzed the author’s choice of form, organizational structure, style, literary techniques, text features, and conventions.

Multiple-choice question **5** required students to identify the purpose of a diagram in a magazine article.

- 5.** The purpose of Diagram A is to illustrate skateboard
- A.** assembly steps
  - B.** assembly tools
  - C.** techniques
  - D.** parts

14.9% of the students chose A

15.8% of the students chose B

2.4% of the students chose C

66.9% of the students chose D (correct answer)

Approximately 72.0% of students who met the acceptable standard were able to answer this question correctly, whereas about 91.5% of students who met the standard of excellence chose the correct response.

In the content area of **Associating Meaning**, students were expected to use contextual clues to determine the connotative and denotative meanings of words, phrases, and figurative language.

Multiple-choice question **31** required students to determine the contextual meaning of a word as used in a graphic novel.

- 31.** The word **most similar** in meaning to “rumble” as used in the title (Excerpt I) is
- A.** fight
  - B.** sport
  - C.** growl
  - D.** cooperate

56.8% of the students chose A (correct answer)

16.7% of the students chose B

10.7% of the students chose C

15.8% of the students chose D

Approximately 61.8% of students who met the acceptable standard were able to answer this question correctly, whereas about 83.1% of students who met the standard of excellence chose the correct response.

In the content area of **Synthesizing Meaning**, students were expected to make generalizations by integrating information from a selection in order to identify the purpose, theme, main message, point of view, or mood of the selection.

Multiple-choice question **25** required students to integrate information from a graphic novel to draw a conclusion related to the use of foreshadowing.

- 25.** The quote “BASKETBALL CAN HELP YOU MAKE FRIENDS, BUT IT CAN ALSO HELP YOU MAKE ENEMIES ...” (Frame 2) is **mainly** used to
- A.** flash back to previous events
  - B.** foreshadow future events
  - C.** introduce characters
  - D.** establish setting

11.7 % of the students chose A

58.5% of the students chose B (correct answer)

13.0% of the students chose C

16.8% of the students chose D

Approximately 62.2% of students who met the acceptable standard were able to answer this question correctly, whereas about 85.9% of students who met the standard of excellence chose the correct response.

## ***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 at [education.alberta.ca](http://education.alberta.ca). 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 have been designed to be used by 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 presents answers to frequently asked questions about the achievement testing program as well as 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.