

Alberta Provincial  
Achievement Testing

Assessment  
Highlights  
2013–2014

GRADE  
9

# English Language Arts

Alberta  Government

This document contains assessment highlights from the 2014 Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement Test.

Assessment highlights provide information about the overall test, the test blueprints, and student performance on the 2014 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 2014 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 3, 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 2014 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 2014 Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement Test. It complements the detailed school and jurisdiction reports.

## How Many Students Wrote the Test?

A total of 38 718 students wrote both parts of the 2014 Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement Test.

## What Was the Test Like?

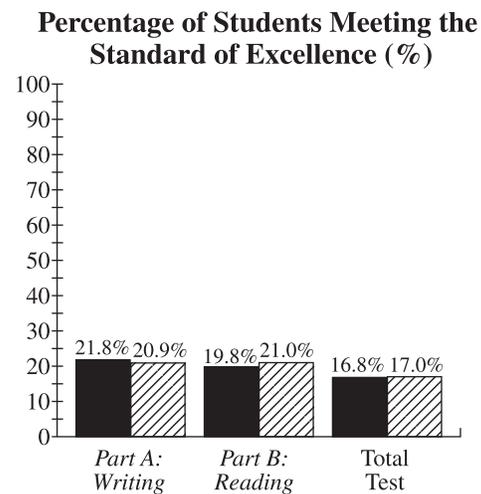
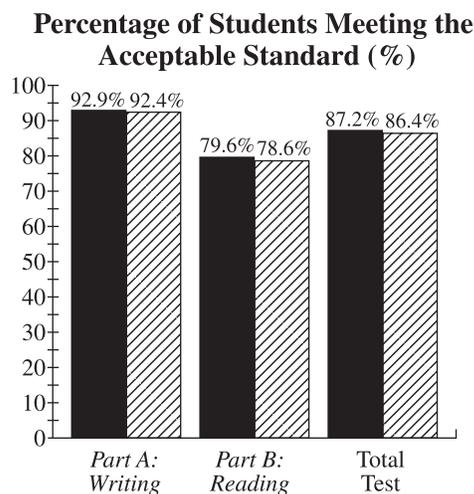
The 2014 Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement Test had two parts that were weighted equally.

*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 2014 are consistent with 2013, 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 73.2 (66.5%). 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 the school and jurisdiction reports that are available on the extranet.



■ 2013 Achievement Standards: The percentage of students in the province who met the acceptable standard and the standard of excellence on the 2013 Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement Test (based on those who wrote).

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

## Part A: Writing—2014 Test Blueprint

The blueprint for *Part A: Writing* identifies the scoring/reporting categories by which student writing is assessed and by which 2014 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>	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*</b> (2.1, 2.2, 2.4, 3.1, 3.3, 4.1, 4.3)** (thought and detail) Students develop, organize, and evaluate ideas for a specified purpose and audience.		
<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—2014 Student Achievement

In 2014, 92.4% of all students who wrote the test achieved the acceptable standard on *Part A: Writing* of the Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement Test, and 20.9% 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.

		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	4.7%	4.6%	5.6%	5.9%	5.5%	4.2%	5.9%
	4.5	6.7%	6.7%	7.1%	7.1%	7.5%	6.3%	8.1%
Proficient	4.0	20.9%	20.6%	21.9%	21.4%	21.8%	21.0%	22.8%
Satisfactory	3.5	18.3%	18.8%	18.0%	18.6%	17.2%	17.0%	16.1%
	3.0	34.2%	34.6%	33.9%	39.2%	29.3%	37.3%	28.4%
	2.5	7.8%	7.9%	7.5%	4.9%	9.2%	6.7%	8.3%
Limited	2.0	5.6%	5.3%	4.9%	2.3%	7.7%	5.8%	8.3%
	1.5	0.9%	0.7%	0.6%	0.2%	0.9%	0.5%	0.8%
Poor	1.0	0.6%	0.4%	0.3%	0.1%	0.5%	0.4%	0.6%
Insufficient / No Response	0	0.4%	0.4%	0.4%	0.4%	0.4%	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. In 2014, 29 844 (77.1% of the total of 38 718) 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 5.5%.

## Part A: Writing—*Commentary on 2014 Student Achievement*

During the 2014 scoring session, 150 teachers from throughout the province scored 38 718 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 2014 Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement Test achieved an average of 37.3 out of a total raw score of 55 (67.8%). The provincial average on the Narrative / Essay Writing Assignment was 23.7 out of 35 (67.7%), and the provincial average on the Functional Writing Assignment was 13.5 out of 20 (67.5%).

Throughout the 2014 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 the student had demonstrated competence in the criteria listed. There are several scoring descriptors in each scoring scale to be assessed in order to arrive at judgments regarding the qualities of a response. Markers were asked 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 topic were informed by details within the prompts. Occasionally, markers needed to re-read a response to appreciate what a student had attempted and accomplished. All markers acknowledged that student responses were first drafts written under timed test writing conditions.

### **Narrative / Essay Writing Assignment—Observations from Standards Confirmation and Central Marking 2014: General Impressions**

In the Narrative / Essay Writing Assignment, students were required to “**Write either a narrative or an essay about the importance of learning in determining the course of a person’s life.**” This assignment was accessible for students at all levels of achievement. The **literary prompts**—which included quotations from works by Edgar Guest (“Achievement is a pleasant thing, / But there’s no end to conquering, / And wise men see / That what is done, however fair, / Cannot in any way compare / With what’s to be. / And wise men’s thoughts are ever turned / On secrets that are still unlearned”), John Henry Cardinal Newman (“It is ... education which gives a man a clear conscious view of his own opinions and judgments, a truth in developing them, an eloquence in expressing them, and a force in urging them”), Epictetus (“We see that a carpenter becomes a carpenter by learning certain things: that a pilot, by learning certain things, becomes a pilot. Possibly also in the present case the mere desire to be wise and good is not enough. It is necessary to learn certain things. This is then the object of our search”), and John Locke (“That the difference to be found in the manners and abilities of men is owing more to their education than to anything else, we have reason to conclude, that great care is to be had of the forming children’s minds, and giving them that seasoning early, which shall influence their lives always after”)—provided many students with opportunities to explore ideas related to the impact of learning on a person’s life. The **visual prompts**—which included a youth on a bicycle being told by an adult to “Remember, be confident. You will be able to do this if you keep trying,” a student asking another student “What are you going to do during the summer holidays?” who replies “I am going to volunteer at the local animal health clinic. I want to gain experience working with animals because I hope to become a veterinarian,” a speaker at a podium addressing an audience saying “We can learn from the past how to better our lives today,” and two individuals near a car with one of them saying “I’m so glad that we’re taking this Driver Education course. Learning to drive will help me become more independent”—also offered students a variety of ideas to choose to explore in their responses.

Many students approached the topic from a personal standpoint by examining the importance of times spent learning from siblings, parents, grandparents, and/or friends and the impact of what was learned on people’s lives. In both essay and narrative responses, students often examined situations related to schooling by looking back on a time in youth when a pivotal lesson was learned, by addressing current events in their lives, or by advocating the value of post-secondary education in acquiring a desired career.

Other students focused on the value of being able to learn from mistakes made, and the benefits of gaining wisdom through experience. Still others emphasized the crucial role of learning in acquiring a job that is suited to one's interests and in earning an income that will provide for both life's necessities and luxury items. Some students cited the notable influence of learning on the lives of celebrities in sports, the music industry, and popular movies or commented on how celebrities have reciprocated by using what they have learned to influence the lives of others in positive ways. In some instances, students discussed characters from literature or film (such as *The Wild Children*, *Ender's Game*, *The Golden Compass*, *An Unbroken Chain: My Journey through the Nazi Holocaust*, *Blood Red Ochre*, and *Touching Spirit Bear*) who learned valuable lessons or bestowed wisdom upon others.

Some students examined the prerequisites to being able to learn or explained how people learn by broadening their understanding of their world and themselves. Others spoke of the need to conquer personal fears, overcome obstacles, explore the unknown, or travel beyond everyday boundaries. In some responses, students analyzed the detriments of not learning or of not taking advantage of opportunities to learn and the resultant lack of success and unhappiness faced by those with regrets. Still others responded to the assignment by recounting or explaining how learning provides individuals with confidence and the ability to react skillfully to unexpected situations. Students often commented on the sense of independence individuals may gain from learning, the ability to be true to themselves, and their recognition of the lasting influence of what has been learned on their lives. Other students reflected on the insight into the present that can be gained through studying the past, the instrumental role of teachers or mentors in enabling a person to uncover hidden talents, or the complexity of what is yet to be learned as the modern world advances technologically. In some cases, students referenced religious beliefs and elaborated on the value of moral standards in guiding individuals through their lives.

### **Narrative / Essay Writing Assignment—Observations from Standards Confirmation and Central Marking 2014: Qualities of Student Writing That Met the Acceptable Standard**

Students whose responses received a score of “**Satisfactory**” in “**Content**” often approached the topic from the stance that learning enables a person to “achieve more, prepare for the future, and learn about the world.” Some students spoke of the basic need to be able to speak, read, and write in order to communicate with and learn from others. In some responses, students examined how “knowledge is easily gained,” how “it is beneficial for your identity,” and how it “improves your social life.” A number of students explored the role of learning in enabling a person to live from day to day, in determining the kind of job a person will have, and in enabling a person to be safe from harm. Other students contended that “Through learning you get better job opportunities, gain respect, and explore more,” “Learning helps you to better yourself, make decisions based on past mistakes, and allow you to do what you want in life,” and “We learn from past experiences, lessons learned in school, and training on a job.” Many students connected the topic to personal experiences involving learning to play a sport, acquiring a second language, giving a speech, playing an instrument, performing on stage, or leading others. Still others warned of the negative consequences of giving in to peer pressure or dropping out of school that could include “being left behind by friends,” “not being able to get a job,” or possibly even “living a life of crime.”

The following excerpts illustrate some of the ideas presented by students whose responses were awarded “**Satisfactory**” scores:

- “The only class in school Kevin liked was Phys-Ed 30. He ran to the changing room to get into his gym cloths. [...] An hour in, Mr. Green had to go deal with something in the office. A few minutes after he left, a horrible sound was coming out of the student next to Kevin, a guy named Chris. [...] When he hit the ground, Kevin froze. Then he remembered what he learned about CPR last week. After checking to see if he was okay, Kevin began chest compressions. [...] Soon Chris was showing signs of life.”
- “Why is learning so important to people? In order to get a good job you need a good education. By learning new things you will get farther in life. Learning will also help you understand who you are today. People learn new things every day. Learning is a part of life.”
- “Learning shows us how to do new things. It even prevents making mistakes. Every day you learn new things about the world by going to school. [...] Learning is an essential part of life. It opens doors and there is always some thing to learn. Life is all about learning.”

- “‘Alright, I will give you a push and once you feel my arms let go start pedaling.’ Jack nodded his head and took a deep breathe as he heard his dad count down. 1 ... 2 ... 3 and then he felt himself move forward, feet sterdy on the pedals hands ready on the handle bars and his dads arm slowly moved away from him. Before he knew it his feet were pedaling away and he was half way down the block. He felt so free and independent.”
- “‘What am I going to do with my life now? This is what I thought when I got out of jail I was nineteen then when I was first put in there. I was in prison for fifteen years for robbing a bank. I just want to have a normal life and put the past in the past. [...] Anyone can start over with just a little bit of help. I got a new start with the help of my mom and my councillor at the corrections centre. Thanks to them I found out what I want to do with my life to help youths in jail better their lives.’”

In narrative and essay responses scored “**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, relevant and/or generic details were provided to support appropriate and/or predictable ideas, 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 between sentences and paragraphs, and a mechanical and/or artificial closure that was related to the focus. Student responses scored “**Satisfactory**” in “**Sentence Structure**,” “**Vocabulary**,” and “**Conventions**” demonstrated generally controlled and sometimes effective and/or varied sentence structure, general words and expressions that were generally used appropriately, a discernible voice or tone, and generally correct use of conventions.

#### **Narrative / Essay Writing Assignment—Observations from Standards Confirmation and Central Marking 2014: Qualities of Student Writing That Met the Standard of Excellence**

Many students whose responses received scores of “**Proficient**” or “**Excellent**” in “**Content**” demonstrated an understanding of the need to “learn certain things” not only in terms of daily survival but also in becoming socialized as a contributing member of society. Inherent in many responses was an awareness of how learning occurs “both in formal schooling and from experiences had outside of school.” Some students adopted a reflective viewpoint, reminiscing on the impact of fundamental learnings from early childhood on the path of their lives at present. Other students observed that they themselves have taught others lessons of significance and had “a positive influence on the lives of others.” In some responses, students spoke of the need to “continually learn, as it is a process that takes a lifetime to undergo.” Additionally, some students explored how “The best opportunities for learning may occur as a result of experiencing failure firsthand,” how “Through learning we build the skills we need to overcome challenges and reach our goals,” and how “Learning provides us with a conscious understanding of our own opinions, our relationships with others, and our own selves.”

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

- “‘Knowledge is a valuable tool in life. People today are always in a hurry and assume that they do not have the time to learn. Metaphorically, learning is like planting a fruit. You water the plant and supply it with fertilizers and one day, the plant will mature and provide you with a sweet fruit. Learning is very similar as you learn each and every day and gain wisdom in a perpetual process.’”
- “‘Landon dejectedly shoved his hands in his jean pockets, reminiscing on his life, while his friends and fellow classmates received their highschool diplomas. They were prepared to embark on their journey to university and into a future of endless possibilities while Landon would be stagnating where he was. He had dropped out of highschool and was struggling to find a job that did not require a highschool education. Amid the celebratory cheers, Landon departed from the auditorium and into the mediocre life that awaited him.’”
- “‘From the very moment we are born, we learn valuable lessons. Whether consciously or subconsciously, we are constantly discovering what is right and what is wrong. When we are young, we are praised or scolded by our parents for our behaviour. From those experiences we learned what was acceptable to

do, and we could make informed decisions regarding what we wanted to do. [...] When we mature and are on our own, we have to make choices for ourselves by considering the consequences of our actions. Will they benefit me or others? Will they cause harm? Will the results be worth the effort? We need to ask ourselves such questions to make the best decisions.”

- “All eyes are upon me. My hands shake as my palms break out in a cold sweat. I press them against my thighs to conceal my fear, but it does little to disguise how nervous I am. My mouth opens but no sound comes out. I am mute. Horrified, I stare into sea of eyes staring impassively in my direction. [...] Then, like a sentinel in the darkness, I see my mother’s face and in it I see the hours she has spent with me practicing my craft, the sacrifices she has made, and the unending support she has provided to me. I inhale deeply and much to my surprise, my voice soars over the crowd.”
- “Aristotle, Einstein, Davinci – all people known for their great minds and their ability to face the unknown. They brought insight into areas where man had no knowledge. [...] Exploring the reality that surrounds us provides us with the ability to manipulate the world to our own ends. In this way our quality of life improves with each and every day. Vaccinations protect us from contagious diseases. Physical illnesses can be treated by doctors. Abundant foods of many varieties and luxury items have given us unprecedented material comforts.”

In responses receiving 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. 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 between sentences and paragraphs. An appropriate or effective closure was provided that 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 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 2014: 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 addressed the topic in rather absolute terms, as in “if you learn you will live and if you don’t you will die,” “learning makes somebody a winner or a loser,” and “you need to learn now because otherwise it will be too late.” 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 with sweeping generalizations such as “learning is what we do all the time,” “learning is hard,” and “some things just can’t be learned.” Students at this level of achievement often struggled with clarifying their ideas in relation to the topic and were not always successful in conveying their thoughts clearly and completely.

The following excerpts were taken from student responses that were awarded “**Poor**” or “**Limited**” scores:

- “The impotence of learning is only learned when you learn some thing. [...] Its why our lifes are just to survive you need to learn some thing. Even that is not enouf. You probly didnt learn how to. So you need to learn more.”
- “Learing in a persons life can be very cool. [...] Future everyone talks about what they want to do when they grow up. So learn a head of time. Learn what they want to do with their future. If they plan to get married in Austrailia if they want to have 2 kids a boy and a girl, if they want to buy there own house

or build their own house. When they want to retire. Where they want to live. That Explains what the importance of learning in someone's life is what they want to do with their life."

- "Sam got a job in the United States to be an animal doctor. He finished college years ago because he liked saving animals' lives which he loved doing. It all started when he was in grade five had a bird he named him Peter. But one day he was sick with some kind of disease it started in his wings and he wasn't able to fly like he did. The next morning it was dead."
- "The first time Evan went dirt biking and quading he loved it. He decided he wanted to become a dirt bike racer and quad racer. He mailed an application to the Motocross Racing Cooperation. He practiced lots and one day he got a letter it said he was accepted so he entered a race. [...] The gate drops and Evan is the first guy to the first corner. He lets go the clutch into the final curb then crosses the finish line."
- "Learning new things helps us learn about stuff. More ways you learn is through teaching, possibly one of the most easiest ways. Teaching folks not to do things does usually impact people and our planet. Some times a good way and some times not. So now we know the importance of learning. So bye."

In student responses scored "**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. 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, was obscure, ineffective, and/or not functional. The development of events and/or details was not clearly discernible, haphazard, and/or incoherent. Transitions were lacking, indiscriminately used, absent, and/or inappropriately used 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 variety in sentence construction. Imprecise and/or ineffective words and expressions were used. The voice or tone was indistinct, indiscreet, not clearly established, 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 assigned topic 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 given 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 assessed accordingly. 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 2014: General Impressions**

Most students were able to connect the context provided in the "**Situation**" to their own experiences. From the viewpoint of "Taylor Smith, a Grade 9 student," students presented "arguments regarding how a Student Rewards Program could be beneficial for both students and staff of the school." In most responses, students referenced or listed the suggested guidelines provided in the test regarding how the Student Rewards Program "could promote school spirit and motivate students to be conscientious and monitor their behaviour" by recognizing "student success on a monthly basis in areas such as academics, athletics, the arts, and extracurricular activities as well as for leadership, cooperation with others, and community involvement" in order to "encourage students to adopt behaviours that will serve them well throughout their lives," how "Each time a student receives recognition, he or she could be entered in a monthly draw for prizes such as CDs, DVDs, and gift cards," and how "The costs of the program could be offset through student fundraising and partnerships with local businesses."

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 Mr. Frank McKenzie, principal of Glenway School" in order to "**convince Mr. McKenzie of the advantages of establishing such a program**" by presenting "**ideas regarding features of a Student Rewards Program that could benefit**" their

“school”—was significant in determining the quality of student responses. When assessing student responses, including those in which students demonstrated a pronounced reliance on the information provided, markers recognized that the Functional Writing Assignment primarily assesses outcomes identified in **General Outcome 3: Managing Ideas and Information** and needed to be judicious in determining the extent to which students successfully incorporated the information given in the test booklet into their responses.

The majority of students succeeded in identifying how a Student Rewards Program could “help students stay on track, work hard, and get homework done,” “provide students with higher confidence when it comes to exams and doing their school work,” and “recognize the students that work the hardest, get the best grades, or are helpful and treat everyone with respect.” Many students acknowledged that “students need reassurance, and rewards will do this” and that “if students are rewarded for the positive things they have done the school may be a lot nicer.” Some students contended that, in the absence of a rewards program, students tend to be “apathetic, disruptive, and inconsiderate of others” and stated that without a rewards program “bullying and poor sportsmanship” would likely continue unabated.

In some responses, students elaborated on how students would “be conscious about how they act” and “show more school spirit and improved behavior.” Other students ruminated on the added benefits of such a program for “teachers [who] wouldn’t have to stress over how to help students succeed” and “members of the surrounding community [who] would feel more at ease around students in the area.” In some cases, students adopted what may have seemed to be a presumptive tone regarding what a Student Rewards Program “would” entail and how it “would” bring about desired outcomes. These students appeared to have used such declarative expressions interchangeably with a hypothetical and/or conditional tone regarding what this program “could” or “might” require or result in and were not to be penalized for using what could be construed as a tone inappropriate for the addressee. In many responses, students provided information regarding how the addressee could contact the sender should he wish to do so, but this was not a requirement of the assignment.

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 in which there were 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. These issues were not to be viewed as detrimental to the quality of student work and were not to be penalized in the assessment of “**Content Management**.”

### **Functional Writing Assignment—Observations from Standards Confirmation and Central Marking 2014: Qualities of Student Writing That Met the Acceptable Standard**

Students whose responses received a score of “**Satisfactory**” in “**Content**” typically recognized that “students always work harder when there is a reward involved in what they’re doing,” that “improvement in the behaviors and learning habits of students could result from this program,” and that “the program will help students deal with stress and help them feel that they belong.” As well, most students acknowledged that “students will be recognized for having a positive attitude, determination, and trying to get their marks up” and that “a Student Rewards Program could improve the life skills of students as they grow up and start their lives.” Among the advantages of a Student Rewards Program cited by many students were the prospect that there could be “more leadership and less bullying, more cooperation and less fighting, more learning and less misbehaving” and the possibility that “teachers won’t have to work so hard to get everyone to cooperate and get along.” Some students speculated that “some students seem to have lost interest in ‘boring’ school subjects and the rewards may help them to want better grades” and argued that,

with a Student Rewards Program in place, “Parents of students in other schools might want to enroll their students in our school.” Still others provided suggestions for additional sources of revenue to support the program that could include “walkathons,” “silent auctions,” “periodic bake sales,” and “school dances.”

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

- “My name is Taylor Smith. I am a student at your school. I have a suggestion that will boost our school spirit and motivate everyone to be nicer. My suggestion is that we should have a ‘Student Award Program.’ Why I think these is a good idea is because we have a lot of students that are really good students but they don’t get any awards or any recognitions. Giving students prizes is a good way to give back to them.”
- “We want our school to be part of a Student rewards Program. Having their names entered in a monthly draw will encourage more students to do a better job in school. This program will help students to become a better person.”
- “This program would motivate all the students of Glenway school to be conscientious. [...] This wonderful program would have many benefits for students and teachers such as teachers would not have to push students to get their work done and students would not have assignments missing.”
- “If someone won an award other people will respect them more because they know that they worked hard and earned the award. This would build there self-esteem. [...] Everyone would try so much harder and they would get rewarded for it.”
- “Students would have a new reason to try their best and develop new skills. They would try and win the awards by showing their strengths. This would make students more eager to do good things and make the school a better place.”

In responses scored “**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 2014: Qualities of Student Writing That Met the Standard of Excellence**

In responses awarded scores of “**Proficient**” or “**Excellent**” in “**Content**,” students often personalized the topic by discussing how a Student Rewards Program could provide them with the opportunity to “feel important” and “experience a feeling of being a valued member of the school community” because “this program recognizes student success in all areas” and “gives everyone a chance to get involved.” In some responses, students effectively conceded that “although student satisfaction with their success should be intrinsic, rewards add a tangible meaning.” Some students contended that a rewards program could “enable students with remarkable talent to shine,” “ensure fairness to all students because all are eligible for a reward,” “inspire students to put more effort into their endeavours,” or “build character by encouraging them to adopt behaviours beneficial for them in life as well as enabling them to be conscientious of how they should act toward others.” Students at this level of achievement often demonstrated empathy for the viewpoints of those parties with a vested interest in a Student Rewards Program, including the students themselves (as in “This program will not only encourage students to feel proud of their accomplishments but strengthen relationships among students as well”), teachers in the school (as in “rewards will entice students to be their best and to support their teachers”), the custodial staff (as in “students will care for the school by refraining from acts of vandalism and contribute to keeping the school clean and safe”), the principal himself (as in “As leader of the school, your job will be to motivate and encourage rather than reprimand and punish”), or members of the community in which Glenway School is located (as in “recognize students not only for what they do in school but in the larger community helping neighbours and volunteering with social welfare organizations”).

The excerpts below were taken from student responses that received “**Proficient**” or “**Excellent**” scores:

- “If we started a Student Rewards Program, students would have more pride in their work and would become more involved in the school. Adolescence need something to make them stand out from the crowd. That is why this program is perfect, for it recognizes students of all abilities in all areas of student life in the school from grades to sports to artistic activities. Students would build memories to look back on and remember what they accomplished in their formative years.”
- “A monthly lottery would take place for all those students who have shown exceptional effort in academics, athletics, the arts, and extracurricular activities along with social involvement, tolerance, cooperation, and leadership. [...] Promotion of the program will be enhanced by prizes that could include material goods or individual notoriety. After all, who doesn’t like an opportunity to win a prize for simply trying your best?”
- “Students will develop a greatly improved work ethic when it comes to mentally and physically challenging activities. They will have an added incentive to give their best effort. [...] The program will, without a doubt, benefit the students and they enter the future. With prizes as motivation, students will be inclined to strive for success.”
- “I think a Student Rewards Program will help students reach their fullest potential. It will focus on students’ areas of strength and foster individual accountability. Students of differing abilities in academics, artistic endeavours, athletic feats, and active citizenship will be acknowledged for their unique achievements. Such a program is a great way to help Glenway School to thrive.”
- “The students who are being recognized will demonstrate to their peers the positive aspects of working hard and being a respectful person. It also encourages students to rise to challenges that confront them, and work toward the fulfillment of their future goals. In this way, they will become the well-rounded citizens we want to have in our society.”

Student writing scored “**Proficient**” or “**Excellent**” in “**Content**,” as illustrated in these excerpts, was characterized by ideas that were thoughtful or perceptive and development of the topic that 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, and any errors present rarely impeded or did not impede meaning. The envelope and letter contained few, if any, format errors or omissions.

### **Functional Writing Assignment—Observations from Standards Confirmation and Central Marking 2014: 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 information presented in the assignment with little of their own thinking or development. Other students misconstrued the role of the writer of the letter to be that of a concerned parent (such as in “it has come to my attention that my daughter Linda Smith is not be rewarded enough for her academic excellence in school. She is a great student and I am sure that she is not the only other student like this”), an indignant teacher (such as in “with this program, us teachers will have too little stuff to do”), a local business owner (such as in “I’m a busy buisnessman so I’ll keep it short. Yes I will support your program”), or a school board member (such as in “students should just do what they are told and learn what there supposed to learn”). In some instances, students mistakenly argued against having a Student Rewards Program because it would be unfair to those who do not receive rewards or contended that such a program will “restrict bad behaviour by punishing kids for doing wrong things.” In other responses, students asserted that a rewards program could “get the students gears moving” and “make sure that students came to school the hole year.” To be persuasive, some students inappropriately asserted that “teachers will be less grumpy” or offered somewhat impractical means by which to raise funds to support the program, such as “handing out candies at pep rallies,” “asking all

students to donait 1 dollar,” “pay for dying the teachers hair purple,” or “haveing students pay for zeros on asignments.”

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

- “I want to give award’s to student for stuff in school. It will make them want to win more stuff, So they will be reconized Also student and people out side the High School will reconize them.”
- “Im writing you a letter for the fact that I attende greenway school. I want a award program at our school it would a great way to cheer up our school and I’d really appreciate it. This is all I have to say thanks.”
- “My friends and me were trying to see if we could get a students rewards program at school. Were thingking that we could give away prizes and stuff like that there. [...] The hole idea is to make kids want school.”
- “I belive that their school will have a more much importants then before and that will also help students and that will benefit both teachers and students.”
- “As a conserved parent, I want to make sure that all kids have a chance to win. [...] This program should be fair to everone so that noone feels bad. That way everone will feel good and be happy.”

In student writing scored “**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 either evident but not maintained or not 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.

Overall, student responses to both the Narrative / Essay Writing Assignment and the Functional Writing Assignment in *Part A: Writing* of the 2014 Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement Test were strong. The vast majority of students (92.4%) achieved the acceptable standard, and 20.9% of all students achieved the standard of excellence. Of all students who wrote the *Part A: Writing* test, only 7.6% did not achieve the acceptable standard.

## Part B: Reading—2014 Test Blueprint and Student Achievement

In 2014, 78.6% of all students who wrote the test achieved the acceptable standard on *Part B: Reading* of the Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement Test, and 21.0% of all students who wrote achieved the standard of excellence. Student achievement on *Part B: Reading* of the 2014 Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement Test averaged 35.8 out of 55 (65.1%).

The blueprint below shows the reporting categories and language functions by which 2014 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, 2.1, 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>11.8/17</b> <b>(69.4%)</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>6.7/11</b> <b>(60.9%)</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>6.8/11</b> <b>(61.8%)</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>10.5/16</b> <b>(65.6%)</b>
<b>Provincial Student Achievement</b> <b>(Average Raw Score and Percentage)</b>	<b>14.6/22</b> <b>(66.4%)</b>	<b>21.2/33</b> <b>(64.2%)</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 2014 Student Achievement

The following is a discussion of student achievement on *Part B: Reading* of the 2014 Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement Test. Sample questions are provided to highlight 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. For each question, the keyed answer is marked with an asterisk.

In the blueprint 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—an excerpt from a memoir, an excerpt from a nonfiction book, and a magazine article—students who achieved the acceptable standard were able to recognize interrelationships among facts presented, identify ideas reinforced by explicit details, and make inferences about the emotional impact of incidents in writers’ recollections of personal experiences. Students who achieved the standard of excellence additionally illustrated strengths in synthesizing aspects of lived experience to gain insight into a person’s character, uncover the basis for an individual’s viewpoint, and judge the validity of a writer’s contentions. Students who did not meet the acceptable standard were generally able to interpret literal meaning in straightforward texts, but many encountered difficulty with questions that required the use of contextual clues to make inferences from a writer’s reflections on the intrinsic value of a personal experience or draw conclusions regarding the perceptions of others regarding an individual’s behaviour. The seven narrative/poetic texts—including two poems, two cartoons, an excerpt from a short story, and two excerpts from novels—enabled many students who met the acceptable standard to demonstrate their ability to distinguish traits of a character’s personality, interpret details related to how the setting in which individuals find themselves influences their decisions, and identify the conflict on which particular events are centred. In addition, students who achieved the standard of excellence were capable of exploring the dilemma inherent in striving to achieve conflicting goals, appreciating the value of retrospective analysis of past events, and acknowledging the lasting impact of pivotal elements on characters’ lives. Those students who did not meet the acceptable standard, while generally able to decode segments of text, sometimes struggled with questions involving recognition of the significance of elements of a character’s experiences to the establishment of the ideas developed by a writer. Some of these differences in student performance are evident in the following questions taken from the 2014 Grade 9 English Language Arts *Part B: Reading* Achievement Test.

In question 46, students were required to derive from context what a phrase in a poem suggests about the lives of the people described (SO 2.1).

- 46.** In context, the phrase “asking how the game is scored” (lines 7, 14, and 27) suggests that people in the city lack a clear understanding of how to
- \*A.** define personal success
  - B.** learn from past mistakes
  - C.** deal with unexpected events
  - D.** be compassionate toward others

Of all students who wrote the test, 62.6% chose the correct answer (option **A**). These students were able to determine—through the development of the analogy drawn between the movement of tokens on a game board in pursuit of acquiring wealth to the actions of “little plastic folk / driving though the city smoke” described in a poem—that the repetition of the phrase “asking how the game is scored” suggests that the efforts of people who equate personal success with financial prosperity are misguided. A total of 11.3% of all students chose option **B**. This alternative presents an inference (regarding how the people described are unable to learn from mistakes made in their past) that is unsubstantiated because there are no details that pertain to mistakes made in the past by the people described in the poem. Option **C** was chosen by 21.4% of all students, a choice—based on the speculation that the people’s actions are indicative of confusion

arising from their inability to deal with unanticipated situations—that is not borne out by the content of the poem. Option **D**, which was chosen by 4.6% of all students, suggests that the people’s preoccupation with their pursuit of material wealth entails a lack of consideration for the feelings of others; however, there is no evidence in the poem that the people described lack compassion. Of those students who achieved the acceptable standard, 62.3% selected the correct answer. A total of 89.2% 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, 30.6% chose the correct answer.

Question 50 required that students recognize from details provided what is suggested about the narrator’s thoughts regarding a scene described in an excerpt from a novel (SO 2.1).

- 50.** The narrator’s thoughts regarding how to remove “a boulder the size of a school bus” (line 28) centre on the differences between the United States and Tibet in terms of
- A.** population size
  - B.** political stability
  - C.** geographical features
  - \*D.** technological advancement

Of all students who wrote the test, 67.8% chose the correct answer (option **D**) by recognizing—from the narrator’s observation of Tibetan prisoners’ laborious efforts to manually remove a large boulder from a roadway and his reflection that, in the United States, people “would use dynamite or heavy equipment to move it”—that the narrator’s thoughts centre on his perception of the extent to which Tibet differs from the United States in its level of technological advancement. In total, 8.4% of all students selected option **A**, 12.8% selected option **B**, and 10.8% selected option **C**. While all three of these alternatives reference areas in which differences may exist in the real world between the United States and Tibet, none of these are examined, either explicitly or implicitly, by the narrator in the excerpt. Of those students who achieved the acceptable standard, 69.2% selected the correct answer, as did 92.1% of students who achieved the standard of excellence. Of those students who did not meet the acceptable standard on the test, 30.0% chose the correct answer.

In the section of the 2014 achievement test blueprinted for curricular content pertaining to **Interpreting Text Organization**, students who achieved the acceptable standard were often able to identify textual features such as onomatopoeia as well as the use of italics 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 parallelism and parenthetical commentary. Students who did not meet the acceptable standard demonstrated weaknesses in distinguishing among qualities characteristic of various rhetorical devices in informational texts. In narrative/poetic texts, students who achieved the acceptable standard could typically identify the origin of conflicts faced by characters and the effects achieved by writers through the repetition of sounds (through alliteration) and the reinforcement of ideas (through repetition of key phrases) as well as the inclusion of a surprise ending. Students achieving the standard of excellence could additionally detect subtle aspects of tone, appreciate the aesthetic value of sensory images, and the emphatic effect of a writer’s use of sentence fragments. Many students who did not achieve the acceptable standard encountered difficulty with questions on narrative/poetic texts that tasked students with examining how an understanding of ideas developed by writers is deepened through recognition and appreciation of the use of textual devices. The following question illustrates some of these differences in the levels of student achievement on the 2014 Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement Test.

Question 2 required that students recognize how the writer uses alliteration to add emphasis in a quotation from an excerpt from a memoir (SO 2.3).

2. In which of the following quotations does the writer use alliteration to add emphasis?
- A. “With both owls riding on my shoulders I used to go down the street to where our gang played games in an empty lot” (lines 22–23)
  - B. “The next time the ball came near him he made a jump” (lines 27–28)
  - \*C. “Wol was pleased as punch” (line 29)
  - D. “Even the tough kids down by the flour mill kept their distance” (line 33)

The correct answer (option C) was selected by 77.0% of all students who wrote the test. These students could recognize that the repetition of the initial consonant in the expression “pleased as punch” adds emphasis to how the owl’s pleasure with having punctured “an inflated rubber beach ball” contrasts with the disappointment felt by the writer and his companions who had been playing with the ball. Option A (selected by 9.0% of all students) presents a quotation in which there is a succession of sound in the phrase “gang played games,” but context reveals that there is no emphasis in the statement cited. Option B (selected by 8.1% of all students) presents a quotation in which the initial consonant is repeated in “him he,” but context again reveals that there is no emphasis in the statement cited. A total of 6.6% of all students selected option D, which presents a quotation that could be interpreted as being somewhat emphatic, but there is no alliteration evident in the citation provided). In all, 78.7% of those students who achieved the acceptable standard chose the correct answer. Most of those students who met the standard of excellence (94.3%) chose the correct answer, whereas only 46.6% 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 meaning of words and phrases and could recognize the use of figures of speech—such as irony, simile, and personification—in informational texts. In addition to these abilities, students who achieved the standard of excellence were able to appreciate how connotations of words and phrases reinforce meaning and how figurative comparisons enrich the reader’s understanding of information presented through the association of the known with the unknown. Students who did not achieve the acceptable standard typically struggled with identifying referents for ideas presented and showed limited awareness of the presence of figurative language in informational texts. Students who achieved the acceptable standard could generally comprehend ideas expressed through metaphor or hyperbole in straightforward narrative/poetic texts. In addition to these abilities, students who achieved the standard of excellence demonstrated strengths in delving through the layers of meaning added by the use of figurative comparisons in the depiction of setting, the establishment of conflict, and the development of characters. 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 interpreting figurative comparisons in narrative/poetic texts. Such differences in student achievement on the 2014 Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement Test are shown in the following question.

Question 34 required that students identify the figure of speech used by the writer to enhance the description of the sky in an excerpt from a short story (SO 2.3).

34. In line 25, the description of the sky is enhanced by the writer’s use of
- A. irony
  - \*B. metaphor
  - C. parallelism
  - D. onomatopoeia

Of all students who wrote the test, 60.3% were able to choose the keyed response (option B) by correctly determining that, in the statement “The sky was already covered by boiling black clouds,” the writer has used a metaphor to enhance the description of threatening aspects of sky that precede the arrival of a destructive hailstorm at a prairie farmstead. Option A (selected by 11.9% of all students) incorrectly

suggests that the omnipresence of storm clouds that were once a “thin black line of cloud along the horizon” is ironic. Option **C** (selected by 15.8% of all students) and option **D** (selected by 12.0% of all students) each identify textual devices that may be used by writers, but neither parallelism nor onomatopoeia are evident in the statement cited. A total of 60.3% of students who achieved the acceptable standard answered this question correctly. Of those students who achieved the standard of excellence, 77.9% chose the correct answer. Of those students who did not meet the acceptable standard, 37.8% selected the keyed response.

In the blueprint category of **Synthesizing Ideas**, students achieving the acceptable standard were typically able to identify factual evidence for main ideas in informational texts and determine the intended effect on the reader of a writer’s presentation of reflections on personal experiences. Students who achieved the standard of excellence were additionally capable of empathizing with the experiences of others as well as perceiving themes related to facets of the human condition described in informational texts. Many of those students who did not achieve the acceptable standard were able to comprehend segments of the information presented, but frequently were challenged by questions that required the formulation of an overarching generalization regarding information presented or extrapolation from a writer’s reflections on the significance of specific events in his or her life. In narrative/poetic texts, students who achieved the acceptable standard generally demonstrated the ability to integrate events stemming from conflicts faced by various characters in order to determine central themes or main ideas. Students achieving the standard of excellence could additionally perceive complexities inherent in relationships among characters and appreciate, from the interplay among elements of fiction, the creation of a unifying effect in narrative/poetic texts. Those students who did not meet the acceptable standard often struggled with questions that required synthesis of events in order to form conclusions about the relevance of situations faced by fictional characters in narrative/poetic texts to real-life experiences. The following questions illustrate some of these differences among the varying levels of student achievement.

In question 10, students needed to form a generalization regarding the writer’s main purpose in an excerpt from a memoir (SO 2.2).

- 10.** In this excerpt, the writer’s **main** purpose is to provide the reader with
- A.** information
  - \*B.** entertainment
  - C.** a conventional moral
  - D.** an insight into human behaviour

The correct answer (option **B**) was selected by 56.9% of all students who wrote the *Part B: Reading* test. These students were able to synthesize elements of the writer’s experiences—such as those related to how “As soon as the door was open they would come waddling out as fast as they could, ready for play,” how “neither of the owls seemed to know what his wings were for,” how “both owls tried to do what we kids did,” and how, on the “day Wol actually learned how to fly,” he “stalled and slid back, downward, tail-first, and hit the ground with an awful thump” and was seen “stomping into his cage [...] furious with all of us”—in order to conclude that his main purpose is to entertain readers with the antics of two owls he had cared for during his childhood. Option **A** was selected by 5.6% of all students, a choice that accurately reflects the fact that the excerpt is based on the actual experiences of the writer, but context reveals that this is not established in the excerpt as the primary purpose of the writer’s recollections. Option **C** (selected by 24.5% of all students) suggests that the writer’s main purpose in the excerpt is to illustrate a commonly held notion regarding the appropriateness of an individual’s conduct—a choice that could be based on the incident wherein “a man and a woman stopped on the sidewalk” and were watching Wol “climbing trees [...] with their mouths open”—but such a conclusion is indicative of a limited understanding of the writer’s main purpose in highlighting the humorous aspects of his experiences with the owls. Option **D** (selected by 12.7% of all students) suggests that the writer intends to provide readers with insight into people’s actions—a conclusion to which there is an element of truth in the depiction of the behaviour of the writer and his father—but this understanding fails to account for the primary focus of the writer on how the owls provided him with a source of amusement during his youth. In total, 56.7% of

students who achieved the acceptable standard chose the correct answer. A total of 81.1% of students who achieved the standard of excellence chose the correct answer, whereas only 28.1% of those students who did not meet the acceptable standard answered this question correctly.

In question 32, students needed to be able to draw a conclusion regarding the premise upon which the humour in a cartoon is based (SO 2.2).

- 32.** The humour in this cartoon arises from Garfield’s assumption that the
- A.** tone of Jon’s statements is meant to offend Garfield
  - B.** relationship he has with Jon is based on mutual respect
  - C.** conflict he is having with Jon will be resolved through compromise
  - \*D.** intensity of Jon’s emotions is an indication of his fondness for Garfield

The correct answer (option **D**) was selected by 59.7% of all students who wrote the test. These students were able to conclude that the humour of the cartoon arises from how, after Garfield is reprimanded for his misbehaviour, his thoughts in the final frame (“I didn’t know you cared!”) indicate that he assumes the vehemence of Jon’s disapproval stems from his affection for Garfield. Option **A** (selected by 25.1% of all students) correctly acknowledges the offensive tone of Jon’s statements but incompletely accounts for the humour central to the cartoon. Option **B** (selected by 6.1% of all students) suggests that humour is derived from a mutual level of respect that Jon and Garfield have for each other, but this idea is not evidenced by events in the cartoon. Option **C** (selected by 9.0% of all students) inaccurately suggests that Garfield’s humorous embracing of Jon in the final frame of the cartoon could indicate an attempt at conciliation through compromise. Of those students achieving the acceptable standard, 58.3% chose the correct answer. A total of 86.8% of students who achieved the standard of excellence chose the correct answer. Of those students who did not meet the acceptable standard, 32.9% answered this question correctly.

Overall, student achievement on *Part B: Reading* of the 2014 Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement Test was strong. Most students (78.6%) were able to achieve the acceptable standard, and 21.0% of all students achieved the standard of excellence. Of all students who wrote the *Part B: Reading* test, 21.4% did not achieve 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 at [education.alberta.ca](http://education.alberta.ca). From the home page, follow the path *Teachers > Provincial Testing > Provincial Achievement Tests (PAT)*, and then 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 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.