



Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT)

What is the definition of literacy for the OSSLT?

Since literacy is the basis for learning, the concept of “success for all” in education means that all students must attain a minimum level of literacy. For the purpose of the OSSLT, literacy comprises the reading and writing skills required to understand reading selections and to communicate through a variety of written forms as expected in *The Ontario Curriculum* across all subjects up to the end of Grade 9.

How does the definition of literacy for the OSSLT align with *The Ontario Curriculum*?

The OSSLT is grounded in the *Ontario Curriculum* expectations for all subjects that address reading and writing skills up to the end of Grade 9.

The following excerpts from the “[Vision and Goals](#)” section of *The Ontario Curriculum, Grade 9: English* (2023) highlight the foundational value of literacy skills:

Literacy is essential for success: it affects all academic achievement and is associated with social, emotional, economic, and physical health. The Grade 9 English course is designed to support students in developing and consolidating the literacy knowledge and skills they need to succeed in education and in life, and to encourage students to experience the joy and possibility that literacy learning can ignite.

Language is the basis for thinking, communicating, and learning. Students need language skills to comprehend ideas and information, to interact socially, to inquire into areas of interest and study, and to express themselves clearly and demonstrate their learning. Learning to communicate by using language with clarity and precision, and in a variety of media and modes, will help students to thrive in the world beyond school and to become lifelong learners.

How is literacy emphasized throughout *The Ontario Curriculum*?

The following quotations are a sample of curriculum expectations that illustrate the central role literacy plays in all subject areas.

Students need well-developed language and literacy skills to succeed in all subject areas, and rich language and literacy experiences deepen the conceptual understanding and strengthen the development of knowledge and skills in other subject

areas. At the same time, the development of skills and knowledge in language is often enhanced by learning in other subject areas ([“Cross-Curricular and Integrated Learning in the English Program” section of](#) The Ontario Curriculum, Grade 9: English, 2023).

The three main goals of the Grade 9 science course are for students:

1. to develop the skills and make the connections needed for scientific investigation
2. to relate science to our changing world, including technology, society, the economy, and the environment
3. to investigate and understand scientific concepts

Achieving these three goals will enable students to develop a high degree of scientific literacy (page 6, The Ontario Curriculum, Grade 9 (De-streamed): Science, 2022).

The goal of the Ontario mathematics curriculum is to provide all students with the key skills required to ...

- recognize and appreciate multiple mathematical perspectives;
- make informed decisions and contribute fully to their own lives and to today’s interconnected local and global communities;
- adapt to changes and synthesize new ideas; ...
- communicate effectively;
- think critically and creatively to connect, apply, and leverage mathematics within other areas of study including science, technology, engineering, the arts, and beyond (page 6, The Ontario Curriculum, Grade 9: Mathematics [MTH1W], 2021).

A vision of literacy for adolescent learners in Ontario schools might be described as follows:

All students are equipped with the literacy skills necessary to be critical and creative thinkers, effective meaning-makers and communicators, collaborative co-learners, and innovative problem-solvers. These are the skills that will enable them to achieve personal, career, and societal goals (page 50, The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 9 to 12: First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Studies, 2019).

Literacy instruction takes different forms of emphasis in different subjects, but in all subjects, literacy needs to be explicitly taught. Literacy, mathematical literacy, and inquiry/research skills are critical to students’ success in all subjects of the curriculum and in all areas of their lives.

Many of the activities and tasks that students undertake in the Canadian and world studies curriculum involve the literacy skills relating to oral, written, and visual communication. For example, they develop literacy skills by reading, interpreting, and analysing various texts, including diaries, letters, government legislation and policy documents, interviews, speeches, treaties, information from non-governmental

organizations, news stories, and fiction and non-fiction books ... In all Canadian and world studies courses, students are required to use appropriate and correct terminology, including that related to the concepts of disciplinary thinking, and are encouraged to use language with care and precision in order to communicate effectively (pages 50–51, The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 9 and 10: Canadian and World Studies, 2018).

Many of the activities and tasks that students undertake in the social sciences and humanities curriculum involve literacy skills relating to oral, written, and visual communication. For example, students use language to understand sources, to analyse and evaluate arguments and evidence, and to present findings in oral, visual, and written forms. In all social sciences and humanities courses, students are required to use appropriate and correct terminology and are encouraged to use language with care and precision in order to communicate effectively (page 45, The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 9–12: Social Sciences and Humanities, 2013).

What is assessed by the OSSLT?

In the **reading component** of the test, students use strategies to interact with a variety of reading selections and demonstrate their understanding by responding to selected-response questions and one open-response question. These reading selections focus on three reading skills:

1. understanding explicitly stated information and ideas
2. understanding implicitly stated information and ideas (making inferences)
3. making connections between information and ideas in a reading selection and personal knowledge and experience (interpreting reading selections by integrating information and ideas in a reading selection and personal knowledge and experience)

In the **writing component**, students respond to selected-response questions and demonstrate their ability to communicate ideas and information clearly and coherently through an opinion essay.

The combination of these written and selected-response questions focuses on three writing skills:

1. developing a main idea with sufficient supporting details
2. organizing information and ideas in a coherent manner
3. using conventions (spelling, grammar, punctuation) in a manner that does not distract from clear communication

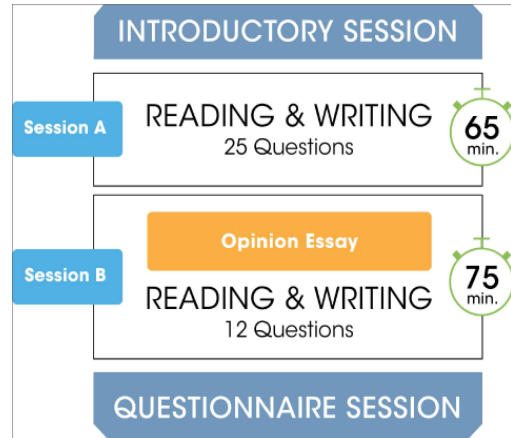
Since a large-scale assessment does not allow for a complete revision and refinement process, written work on the OSSLT is scored as first-draft (unpolished) writing.

THE ASSESSMENT PROCESS

What is in the OSSLT?

The OSSLT is a computer-based assessment that comprises two sessions (Session A and Session B). Each test has a field-test component and an operational component. The operational component contains the scored items to be included in the student results. The items from the field-test component are not used in determining the student results.

The operational component of the test comprises a total of 37 questions: 35 selected-response questions (e.g., single-selection, multiple-selection, drag and drop, drop-down menu, checklist) and two open-response questions. Session A is designed to be completed in approximately 65 minutes, and Session B is designed to be completed in approximately 75 minutes. Students complete each session in one sitting. The sessions can be attempted one after the other, either back to back with a short break or on two different dates and times. At the end of the two assessment sessions, students will be presented with a questionnaire that asks them about their attitudes and perceptions with respect to literacy.

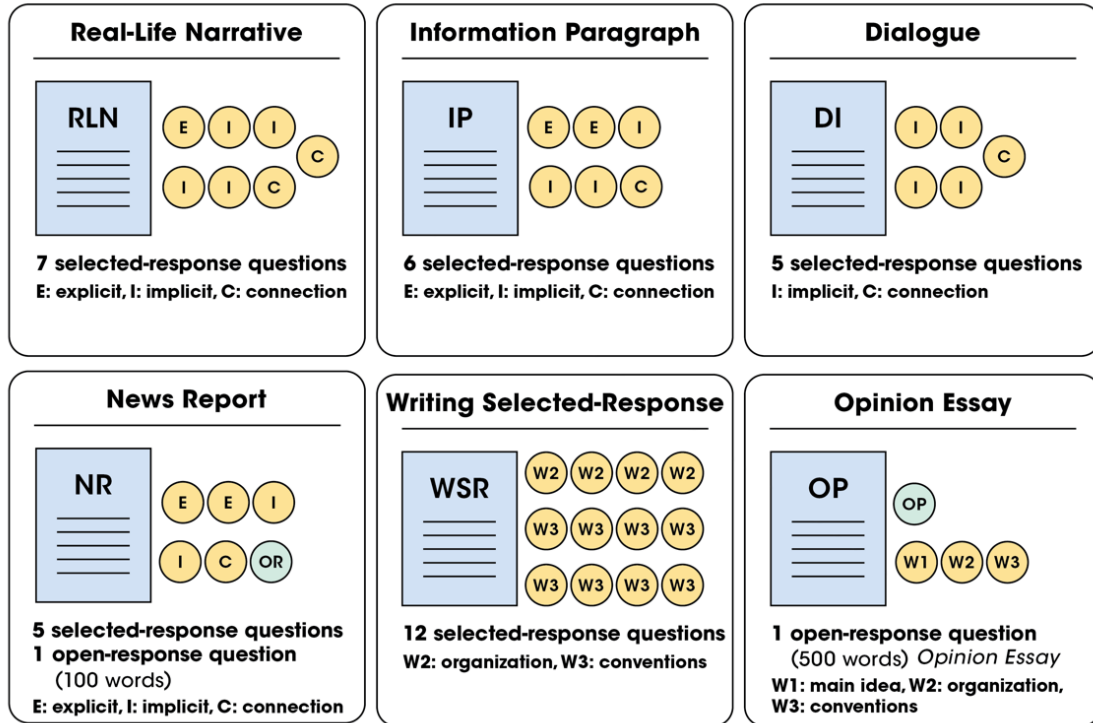


The OSSLT uses a linear test design. Several equivalent test forms are assembled ahead of test administration, according to the same specifications for content and statistics. The forms are fixed in length. Each form generated under this model is mapped to a blueprint specifying criteria for the questions to be selected. The blueprint ensures each reading or writing item on the test measures reading and writing skills emphasized in *The Ontario Curriculum*.

The operational component of the test consists of two sessions that are presented to students in seven sections containing the following:


- **Reading:** four different types of reading selections (real-life narrative, information paragraph, news report, dialogue) and 23 corresponding selected-response reading questions, as well as one open-response question.
- **Writing Selected-Response (WSR):** 12 selected-response writing questions.
- **Opinion Essay (OP):** one open-response question composed of a series of paragraphs supporting an opinion.

Reading and Writing Skills Assessed on the OSSLT



The 37 operational questions on the OSSLT count toward the student’s score. The following table provides information on the number of questions by their type:

Number of Questions by Type

 Operational Reading and Writing	Selected-Response Questions	Open-Response Questions	Total Questions
Operational Reading	23	1	24
Operational Writing	12	1	13
Field Test	7 to 9	0 to 1	7 to 10
Total Questions	42 to 44	2 to 3	44 to 47

The following table provides information on the number of raw score points and the percentage of total raw score points by question type:

Number of Raw Score Points and Percentage of Total Raw Score Points by Question Type		
Question Type	Number of Raw Score Points	Percentage of Total Raw Score Points
Selected-Response Questions	55	71%
Open-Response Questions	23	29%
Total	78	100%

Prior to writing the OSSLT, students can become familiar with the test by taking the practice test on the EQAO website. Teachers can also organize a practice session through the e-assessment system. The practice test contains sample questions similar to those on the OSSLT.

THE BLUEPRINT AND CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

What is the OSSLT blueprint?

Reading Tasks by Selection Type	Reading Questions and Raw Score Points
Read and respond to questions related to an understanding of an information paragraph	Six selected-response reading questions = 10 score points, or approximately 13% of total literacy score
Read and respond to questions related to an understanding of a news report	One open-response and five selected-response reading questions = 10 score points, or approximately 13% of total literacy score
Read and respond to questions related to an understanding of a dialogue	Five selected-response reading questions = 8 score points, or approximately 10% of total literacy score
Read and respond to questions related to an understanding of a real-life narrative	Seven selected-response questions = 10 score points, or approximately 13% of total literacy score
Total reading raw score points = 38, or approximately 49% of total literacy score	

Writing Tasks	Writing Prompts, Questions and Raw Score Points
Write an opinion essay	One long-writing prompt (Opinion) = 20 score points, or approximately 25% of total literacy score
Respond to questions related to the structuring of content, the organization of ideas and the use of language conventions when writing	12 selected-response questions = 20 score points, or approximately 25% of total literacy score
Total writing raw score points = 40, or approximately 51% of total literacy score	

How is the OSSLT linked to *The Ontario Curriculum*?

The following chart links the reading and writing knowledge and skills tested by the OSSLT to some of the overall and specific expectations in *The Ontario Curriculum* for Grade 9. The expectations listed are only a sample of those related to the OSSLT. Many other expectations in the curriculum relate directly or indirectly.



Sample Grade 9 Curriculum Expectations Related to the OSSLT Reading and Writing Tasks

Subject	Curriculum Expectation	Reading	Writing
Dance	• identify and describe the characteristics and function of a social dance within a society		●
	• demonstrate, and describe using correct terminology, the movement repertoire of a variety of dance forms from around the world		●
	• identify and describe ways in which choreographers and performers use or have used dance to address social and environmental issues		●
Drama	• use a variety of print and non-print sources	●	
	• interpret short drama works and identify and explain their personal response to the works	●	●
English	• demonstrate an understanding of a wide variety of words, acquire and use explicitly taught vocabulary flexibly in various contexts, including other subject areas, and use consolidated morphological knowledge to analyze and understand new words in context (B2.2)	●	
	• read a variety of complex texts fluently, with accuracy and appropriate pacing, to support comprehension, and when reading aloud, adjust expression and intonation according to the purpose of reading (B2.3)	●	
	• demonstrate an understanding of the functions of parts of speech in sentences, consolidate and refine their understanding of grammar, and use this knowledge to support comprehension and communicate meaning clearly and precisely (B3.2)	●	
	• use and refine their understanding of the meaning and function of capitalization and punctuation to communicate meaning clearly and coherently, when reading and writing (B3.3)		●
	• read and comprehend various complex texts, using knowledge of words, grammar, cohesive ties, sentence structures, and background knowledge (C1.1)	●	
	• read, listen to, and view a wide variety of text forms by diverse First Nations, Métis, and Inuit creators to make meaning through Indigenous Storywork about First Nations, Métis, and Inuit histories, cultures, relationships, communities, groups, nations, and lived experiences (C1.7)	●	
	• connect, compare, and contrast the ideas expressed in texts and their knowledges and lived experiences, the ideas in other texts, and the world around them (C2.5)	●	
	• summarize and synthesize the important ideas and supporting details in complex texts, and draw effective conclusions (C2.6)	●	
	• generate and develop ideas and details about challenging topics, such as topics related to diversity, equity, and inclusion and to other subject areas, using a variety of strategies, and drawing on various resources, including their own lived experiences (D1.2)		●
	• classify and sequence ideas and collected information, selecting effective strategies and tools, and identify and organize relevant content, evaluating the choices of text form, genre, and medium, and considering alternatives (D1.4)		●

Sample Grade 9 Curriculum Expectations Related to the OSSLT Reading and Writing Tasks (continued)

Subject	Curriculum Expectation	Reading	Writing
English (continuation)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> establish an identifiable voice in their texts, modifying language, style, and tone to suit the text's form, genre, audience, and purpose, and express their thoughts, feelings, and opinions about the topic clearly (D2.3) 		●
Food and Nutrition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> use an appropriate format ... to communicate the results of their research and inquiry effectively for a specific purpose and audience 	●	●
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> use terms relating to food and nutrition correctly 		●
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> demonstrate an understanding of the general research process by reflecting on and evaluating their own research, inquiry, and communication skills 	●	●
Issues in Canadian Geography	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> communicate their ideas, arguments, and conclusions using various formats and styles, as appropriate for the audience and purpose 		●
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> use appropriate terminology when communicating the results of their investigations 		●
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> describe ways in which geographic investigation can help them develop skills, including spatial technology skills and the essential skills in the Ontario Skills Passport 	●	●
Guidance and Career Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> identify and use a variety of reading skills and strategies to improve understanding of texts 	●	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> use appropriate forms of writing (e.g., report, summary, narrative) to suit audience and purpose 		●
Health and Physical Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> describe the short-term and long-term benefits of developing both health-related fitness ... and skill-related fitness 		●
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> explain how active living and healthy eating contribute to a person's physical health and mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being, and describe the benefits of a holistic approach to health 		●
Integrated Arts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> identify and communicate their initial reaction to works from a variety of arts disciplines, using various strategies and modes of communication 	●	●
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> describe, on the basis of research, themes in the work of some past and/or present artists, including Canadian artists, whose body of work incorporates more than one art form 	●	●

Sample Grade 9 Curriculum Expectations Related to the OSSLT Reading and Writing Tasks (continued)

Subject	Curriculum Expectation	Reading	Writing
Introduction to Business	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> describe the concepts of, and conditions that affect, supply and demand 	●	●
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> explain how needs and wants create opportunities for business 	●	
Mathematics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> research a number concept to tell a story about its development and use in a specific culture, and describe its relevance in a current context 	●	●
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> research an algebraic concept to tell a story about its development and use in a specific culture, and describe its relevance in a current context 	●	●
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> describe the value of mathematical modelling and how it is used in real life to inform decisions 	●	●
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> modify budgets displayed in various ways to reflect specific changes in circumstances, and provide a rationale for the modifications 		●
Music	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> conduct research to gather reliable information relating to specific music, musicians, and the musical opinions of others, and describe the impact this information has had on their own opinions or assessments 	●	●
First Nations, Métis and Inuit Studies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> describe some significant issues, trends, and developments in the arts and popular culture in Canada that are relevant to Indigenous peoples during this period, including the cultural contributions of some Indigenous individuals, and explain how these developments/contributions reflect and enhance First Nations, Métis, and Inuit identities 	●	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> describe various ways in which First Nations, Métis, and Inuit artists are incorporating new technologies into traditional art forms 		●
Science	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> choose the information to share, and develop a draft presentation or publication, using appropriate vocabulary 		●
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> explain how naturally occurring phenomena, including the cycling of matter and the flow of energy, contribute to the dynamic equilibrium within and between ecosystems 		●
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> explain the effects of various human activities on the dynamic equilibrium of ecosystems 		●
Visual Arts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> identify and describe their initial reactions to a variety of artworks 	●	●
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> identify, on the basis of research, a variety of secondary and post-secondary pathways and careers related to visual arts 	●	

SCORING

How is the OSSLT scored?

The selected-response questions are scored automatically (computer-scored), while open-response questions are scored by qualified educators who are trained to follow the principles of clear and consistent rubrics.

What are the generic OSSLT scoring rubrics?



Generic Open-Response Reading Rubric

Code	Descriptor
Blank	nothing is typed in the text box
I	The response is one of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• a comment on or a restatement of the prompt• a misunderstanding of the reading selection or prompt• irrelevant or off-topic (unrelated to the reading selection or prompt)• illegible (random characters; not written in English)
10	response indicates minimal reading comprehension response provides minimal or irrelevant ideas and information from the reading selection
20	response indicates some reading comprehension response provides vague ideas and information from the reading selection
30	response indicates considerable reading comprehension response provides accurate, specific and relevant ideas and information from the reading selection

Generic Topic Development Writing Rubric: Opinion Essay

Code	Descriptor
Blank	Nothing is typed in the text box.
I	<p>The response is one of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a comment on the task • irrelevant or off-topic (content unrelated to the prompt) • illegible (random characters; not written in English) • an opinion with no ideas or details (e.g., “yes” or “no” followed by the restatement of the prompt, or just a “yes” or “no” answer) • a restatement of the prompt
10	<p>The essay is related to the prompt but does not express an opinion.</p> <p>OR</p> <p>The essay expresses an opinion with ideas but no supporting details, or it provides details unrelated to the opinion. There is no evidence of content organization.</p>
20	<p>The essay is related to the prompt, but only part of the response expresses and supports an opinion.</p> <p>OR</p> <p>The essay is related to the prompt and expresses and supports an opinion, but the opinion is unclear or inconsistent. The connection between the ideas and details and the opinion is not always evident. There are insufficient supporting details: too few or repetitious. There is limited evidence of content organization.</p>
30	<p>The essay is related to the prompt and expresses a clear opinion. There are insufficient and/or vague supporting details or the connection of the details to the opinion is not always clear. There is evidence of content organization, but lapses distract from the overall communication.</p>
40	<p>The essay is related to the prompt. A clear and consistent opinion is developed with sufficient supporting details; however, only some are specific. The content organization is mechanical, and any lapses do not distract from the overall communication.</p>
50	<p>The essay is related to the prompt. A clear and consistent opinion is developed with sufficient specific supporting details. The content organization is logical.</p>
60	<p>The essay is related to the assigned prompt. A clear and consistent opinion is developed with sufficient specific supporting details that are thoughtfully chosen. The content organization is coherent and demonstrates a thoughtful progression of ideas.</p>

Generic Conventions Writing Rubric: Opinion Essay

Code	Descriptor
Blank	Nothing is typed in the text box.
I	Illegible (random characters; not written in English)
10	The response is fewer than 30 words (without including the words from the prompt). OR Errors in conventions interfere with communication.
20	Errors in conventions distract from communication.
30	Errors in conventions do not distract from communication.
40	Control of conventions is evident.

REPORTING

All students receive an Individual Student Report. The Individual Student Report provides

- a single literacy score for all students whose outcome is successful or not yet successful;
- a statement for students who were not fully participating due to being absent, exempted, or deferred; fulfilling the literacy requirement through the OSSLC; having insufficient evidence to provide an outcome; or for whom the results were withheld due to an administration irregularity or anomaly.

The ISR provides common feedback for improvement for students who have not yet achieved a successful outcome. This information enables students, parents, guardians and teachers to plan for improvement.

The following are sample OSSLT Individual Student Reports.



Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT) Individual Student Report

EXAMPLE STUDENT

Ontario education number: 0****000
School: EXAMPLE SCHOOL (000000)
School board: Example Board

YOUR RESULTS

You are not yet successful on the OSSLT.

Your score	280
Questions attempted	37 of 37

Next steps

The Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT) tests key skills in reading and writing. Success on the test confirms that a student has met the minimum standard for literacy according to *The Ontario Curriculum* across all subjects up to the end of Grade 9. On a scale of 200 to 400, the minimum score that meets the standard is 300.

Reading

Criteria for success in reading:

- make sure you understand what the question is asking and answer that question;
- provide details from the reading selection to support your answer;
- connect your personal knowledge and experience with the details from the reading selection to clarify your response;
- try the practice test to review all types of questions;
- read and reread the question carefully, and eliminate any answers that seem incorrect;
- refer to the reading selection for all associated questions (keep the reading selection open beside the questions when possible);
- make sure to answer all questions.

Writing

Criteria for success in writing:

- relate your response to the assigned prompt;
- develop a clear and consistent opinion;
- include sufficient specific details that are thoughtfully chosen and developed to support your opinion;
- consider how to organize your writing so it flows and there is a thoughtful progression of ideas;
- consistently apply the conventions of language, such as sentence structure, grammar (e.g., verb endings, homophones), spelling (most common words) and punctuation (e.g., end punctuation, apostrophe, quotation marks), that are expected by the end of Grade 9 in the Ontario English curriculum;
- try the practice test to review all types of questions;
- read and reread the question carefully, and eliminate any answers that seem incorrect;
- make sure to answer all questions.

EQAO conducts province-wide assessments at the primary, junior and secondary levels to measure student achievement against curriculum expectations. The data are widely used as an additional tool to guide improvements in education at the individual, school and provincial levels. For additional information and useful resources, visit www.eqao.com.

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Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT) Individual Student Report

EXAMPLE STUDENT

Ontario education number: 0****000
School: EXAMPLE SCHOOL (000000)
School board: Example Board

YOUR RESULTS

You are successful on the OSSLT.

Your score	330
Questions attempted	37 of 37

Understanding the OSSLT results

The Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT) tests key skills in reading and writing. Success on the test confirms that a student has met the minimum standard for literacy according to *The Ontario Curriculum* across all subjects up to the end of Grade 9.

Reading

In reading, students who are successful on the OSSLT

- understood what the question was asking and answered that question;
- provided details from the reading selection to support their answer;
- connected their personal knowledge and experience with the details from the reading selection to clarify their response.

Writing

In writing, students who are successful on the OSSLT

- developed a clear and consistent opinion that was supported by sufficient specific details;
- organized their writing so it flowed and there was a thoughtful progression of ideas;
- applied the conventions of language, such as sentence structure, grammar (e.g., verb endings, homophones), spelling (most common words) and punctuation (e.g., end punctuation, apostrophe, quotation marks), that are expected by the end of Grade 9 in the Ontario English curriculum.

EQAO conducts province-wide assessments at the primary, junior and secondary levels to measure student achievement against curriculum expectations. The data are widely used as an additional tool to guide improvements in education at the individual, school and provincial levels. For additional information and useful resources, visit www.eqao.com.

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