

**Alberta Provincial  
Achievement Testing**

**Assessment  
Highlights  
2016–2017**

**GRADE  
9**

# English Language Arts

*Alberta*  Government

This document contains assessment highlights from the 2017 Grade 9 English Language Arts Provincial Achievement Test.

Assessment highlights provide information about the overall test, the test blueprints, and student performance on the 2017 Grade 9 English Language Arts Provincial Achievement Test. Also provided is commentary on student performance at the acceptable standard and the standard of excellence on selected items from the 2017 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.

**Every second year, a complete test** for all provincial achievement test subjects and grades (except grades 6 and 9 Français/French Language Arts and Grade 9 Knowledge and Employability courses) is 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 are 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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# Contents

The 2017 Grade 9 English Language Arts Provincial Achievement Test.....	1
<i>Part A: Writing</i> —2017 Test Blueprint .....	2
<i>Part A: Writing</i> —2017 Student Achievement.....	3
<i>Part A: Writing</i> —Commentary on 2017 Student Achievement .....	4
<i>Part B: Reading</i> —2017 Test Blueprint and Student Achievement .....	13
<i>Part B: Reading</i> —Commentary on 2017 Student Achievement .....	14
Provincial Achievement Testing Program Support Documents.....	18



# The 2017 Grade 9 English Language Arts Provincial Achievement Test

This report provides teachers, school administrators, and the public with an overview of the performance of all students who wrote the 2017 Grade 9 English Language Arts Provincial Achievement Test. It complements the detailed school and jurisdiction reports.

## How Many Students Wrote the Test?

A total of 40 396 students wrote both parts of the 2017 Grade 9 English Language Arts Provincial Achievement Test.

## What Was the Test Like?

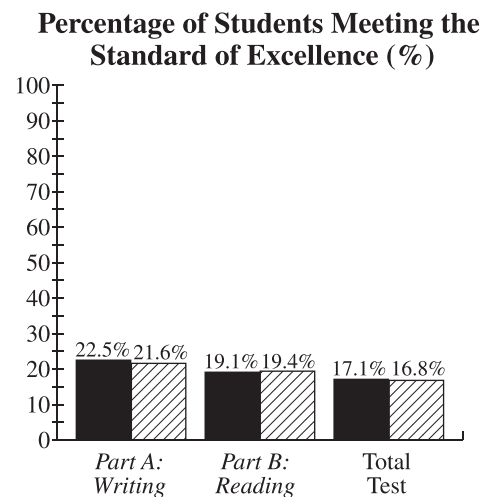
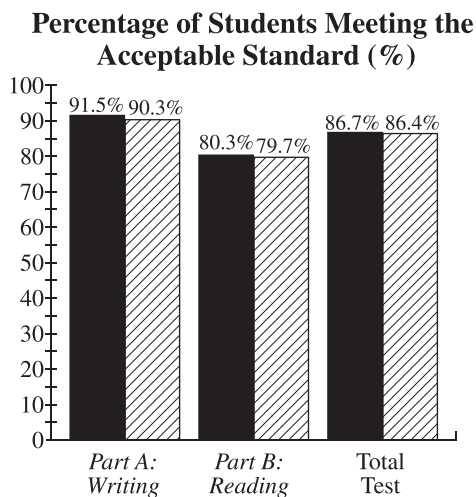
The 2017 Grade 9 English Language Arts Provincial Achievement Test had two parts that were weighted equally.

*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 54 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 2017 are consistent with 2016, as shown in the graphs below. Out of a total possible score of 110 (parts A and B), the provincial average on the test was 72.5 (65.9%). The results presented in this report are based on scores achieved by all students who wrote the test, including those in French-immersion and Francophone programs. Detailed provincial assessment results are contained in school and jurisdiction reports that are available on the extranet.



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

 2017 Achievement Standards: The percentage of students in the province who met the acceptable standard and the standard of excellence on the 2017 Grade 9 English Language Arts Provincial Achievement Test (based on those who wrote).

# Part A: Writing—2017 Test Blueprint

The blueprint for *Part A: Writing* identifies the scoring/reporting categories by which student writing is assessed and by which 2017 summary data are reported to schools and school authorities. It also provides a description of the writing assignments and the achievement standards on the Grade 9 English Language Arts Provincial Achievement Test.

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
<p><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)</p> <p>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.</p>		
<p><b>Organization*</b> (3.1, 3.3, 4.1, 4.3)** (organizing ideas and details into a coherent whole)</p> <p>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.</p>		
<p><b>Sentence Structure</b> (4.1, 4.2)** (structuring sentences effectively)</p> <p>Students control sentence structure and use a variety of sentence types, sentence beginnings, and sentence lengths to enhance communication.</p>		
<p><b>Vocabulary</b> (4.1, 4.2)** (selecting and using words and expressions correctly and effectively)</p> <p>Students choose specific words and expressions that are appropriate for their audience and effective in establishing a voice/tone that will help to achieve their purpose.</p>		
<p><b>Conventions</b> (4.2)** (using the conventions of written language correctly and effectively)</p> <p>Students use conventions accurately and effectively to communicate.</p>		
<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.	
<p><b>Content*</b> (2.1, 2.2, 2.4, 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 4.1, 4.3)** (thought and detail)</p> <p>Students develop, organize, and evaluate ideas for a specified purpose and audience.</p> <p><b>Content Management*</b> (4.1, 4.2)** (using the conventions of written language correctly and effectively)</p> <p>Students communicate accurately and effectively by selecting words and phrases appropriate to their purpose. Students demonstrate control of sentence structure, usage, mechanics, and format.</p>		

\* 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—2017 Student Achievement

In 2017, 90.3% of all students who wrote the Grade 9 English Language Arts Provincial Achievement Test achieved the acceptable standard on *Part A: Writing*, and 21.6% of all students who wrote achieved the standard of excellence.

### Student Achievement by Assignment and Reporting Category

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

		Narrative/Essay Writing Assignment					Functional Writing Assignment	
		Reporting Category					Reporting Category	
		Content	Organization	Sentence Structure	Vocabulary	Conventions	Content	Content Management
Writing Standard	Score*	% of Students	% of Students	% of Students	% of Students	% of Students	% of Students	% of Students
Excellent	5.0	4.4%	4.2%	5.3%	5.6%	5.6%	5.2%	7.1%
	4.5	7.2%	7.7%	7.7%	7.4%	8.2%	7.1%	8.8%
Proficient	4.0	20.9%	19.9%	20.9%	21.2%	21.4%	19.5%	21.5%
Satisfactory	3.5	18.5%	19.3%	18.3%	18.9%	17.7%	15.3%	15.4%
	3.0	32.2%	32.2%	32.7%	38.4%	27.7%	29.3%	25.7%
	2.5	8.7%	9.0%	8.6%	5.4%	9.8%	10.7%	9.3%
Limited	2.0	6.0%	6.0%	5.1%	2.2%	7.7%	9.2%	9.2%
	1.5	1.1%	0.9%	0.7%	0.3%	1.1%	1.7%	1.4%
Poor	1.0	0.7%	0.5%	0.4%	0.2%	0.5%	1.1%	0.8%
Insufficient / No Response	0	0.3%	0.3%	0.3%	0.3%	0.3%	0.8%	0.8%

\*Scores of 4.5, 3.5, 2.5, and 1.5 occur only when local marks and central marks are averaged. In 2017, 32 895 (81.4% of the total of 40 396) papers were marked locally, and these scores were submitted to Alberta Education. Papers with discrepant scores were given a third reading. The third-reading rescore rate was 6.6%.

# Part A: Writing—Commentary on 2017 Student Achievement

During the 2017 scoring session, 166 teachers from throughout the province scored 40 396 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 2017 Grade 9 English Language Arts Provincial Achievement Test achieved an average of 37.1 out of a total raw score of 55 (67.5%). 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 13.3 out of 20 (66.5%).

Throughout the 2017 marking session, every effort was made to reward student strengths where evident rather than to critique what was missing or speculate on what a student should have added or included. When marking student responses, markers were encouraged to conscientiously return to the “**Focus**” section of the scoring categories to consider the extent to which each student had demonstrated competence in the criteria listed. There were several scoring descriptors in each scoring category to be assessed in order to arrive at judgments regarding the qualities of a response. Markers were encouraged to review—at the start of each marking day—each assignment and the prompt materials provided in the test booklet with the expectation that many students’ ideas regarding the assignments were informed by details within the prompts. Occasionally, markers needed to re-read a response to appreciate what a student had attempted and, in fact, accomplished. All markers acknowledged that student responses were first drafts written under time constraints.

## Narrative / Essay Writing Assignment—Observations from Standards Confirmation and Central Marking 2017: General Impressions

In the **Narrative / Essay Writing Assignment**, students were required to “Write either a narrative or an essay about **the importance of planning for the future.**” This assignment was accessible for students at all levels of achievement. The **literary prompts**—which included quotations from Donald Rumsfeld (“Think ahead. Don’t let day-to-day operations drive out planning.”), Malcolm X (“Education is our passport to the future, for tomorrow belongs only to the people who prepare for it today.”), Oprah Winfrey (“The big secret in life is that there is no big secret. Whatever your goal for this year, you can get there—as long as you’re willing to be honest with yourself about the preparation and work involved.”), Byron D. Howell (“There came a time to put my toys away, / to choose a path and try to be a man; / to do as much as I could with my day, / to live my life and do the best I can.”), and Lil Wayne (“The more time you spend contemplating what you should have done ... you lose valuable time planning what you can and will do. Trying to tear down the past prohibits you from building up your future.”)—provided students with a variety of ideas to explore. In both narrative and essay responses, students often discussed the impact of planning for the future on an individual’s education (in terms of the need to plan in high school in order to succeed in university), an individual’s occupation (in terms of the value of planning in providing opportunities for jobs that people will spend their lives doing), and an individual’s family life (in terms of fulfilling a plan to provide for the needs of loved ones). Other students examined how to succeed in planning for the future by growing up, having a goal, employing personal strengths, being organized, and staying focused. In some responses, students discussed the benefits of planning in giving a person a sense of direction, motivating people to make choices that lead them to success. In other responses, students commented on how a lack of planning can have unexpected or detrimental consequences and how people may have difficulty coming to terms with regrets from the past.

The **visual prompts**—which included two individuals in a hockey arena (wherein one person is saying “I think you have what it takes to be a professional athlete. If we make a plan, we can increase your chances of success”), three girls standing beside lockers in a school hallway (wherein one girl is saying “My mom and I were doing some research, and we found out what courses I need to take in Grade 12 to get into the profession that I want”), four individuals near a car (wherein one person is saying “If I continue to work on weekends, I’ll have enough money saved to buy a car”), two individuals seated at a



table (wherein one person is saying “After many years of planning, my family successfully immigrated to Canada”), and a person at a podium speaking to a crowd (saying “Our community is committed to preserving the environment”)—also offered students a variety of ideas to explore. In both narrative and essay responses, many students examined how planning for the future can lead to success in playing sports, passing tests in school, saving money for material possessions, arriving in a new country, or preserving the environment. Some students presented ideas regarding how planning for the future can enable a person to acquire knowledge, develop new skills, or gain insight. Other students spoke of the value of seeking advice, learning from mistakes, and making wise choices when establishing a plan for the future. Still others addressed the long-term impact on a person’s future of decisions made when moving to a different neighbourhood, going to a new school, or interacting with friends on social media.

As in other years, some students chose to support their ideas with a discussion of the topic in relation to aspects of the lives of renowned athletes (such as Muhammad Ali, Michael Jordan, Michael Phelps, Wayne Gretzky, Connor McDavid, and Sidney Crosby) and popular celebrities (such as Ice Cube, Eminem, Prince, Selena Gomez, and Justin Timberlake). Others spoke of the efforts made by notable individuals—such as Malala Yousafzai, Barack Obama, Bill Gates, Steve Jobs, Terry Fox, Neil Armstrong, Helen Keller, Rosa Parks, Martin Luther King, Jr., Nelson Mandela, and Mother Teresa—to plan ahead, improve the lives of others, or have an influence on future events. Other students cited examples from literary works (including *The Wild Children*, *Touching Spirit Bear*, *The Giver*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *Ender’s Game*, *The Princess Bride*, *The Hunger Games*, and *Romeo and Juliet*) and commented on the degree of success achieved by characters in planning for the future.

### **Narrative / Essay Writing Assignment—Observations from Standards Confirmation and Central Marking 2017: Qualities of Student Writing That Met the Acceptable Standard**

In both narrative and essay responses that received a score of “Satisfactory” in “Content,” many students approached the topic by presenting ideas regarding how planning for the future involves standing up for personal beliefs, helping others, or accepting responsibility for one’s actions in order to become who a person wants to be. Some students examined how planning for the future affects the decisions a person makes, the friends a person chooses, or the success a person has in life. Others presented examples of how planning for the future helps individuals to focus on a goal, make good choices, or learn from mistakes. A number of students cited instances wherein planning for the future has allowed people to accept weaknesses, overcome challenges, or find contentment. Still other students suggested that people who do not plan for the future may be viewed negatively by others, encounter difficulties dealing with problems, or struggle to succeed in achieving a goal. Additionally, a number of students commented on the merits of changing a planned course of action, having a back-up plan, or choosing a different plan.

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

- “What most people want in the future is to be successful and that is important because if everyone is successful than our world is going to be a great place. [...] Planning your future is about being prepared for anything. Making plans is key because that’s what will put us in the right direction. Planning also helps us to see how to make things better in our lives.”
- “When Sam was thirteen years old she started baby sitting she was doing it for the money to go see a movie or buy a lunch. [...] She made 100 dollars each weekend, 2400 dollars every year a good price to get what she wanted when she wanted and was glad she didn’t only live in the present.”
- “Why is planning for the future important? Well, planning for your future can greatly benefit your success rate in life. [...] Some ways why planning for the future is important are: planning can help you decide on what type of education you want, you can have less regrets in the future, and lastly, it can affect who your going to become.”
- “Tom was a smart boy but his only downfall was he was reckless. He never planed for the future. [...] One day his friend Steven got into MIT. Tom always wanted to go to MIT but he didn’t know what it took to get there. [...] When Tom learned what he had to do he studied and got good grades. He knew that to achieve his dream he needed to work hard.”

- “Why is it important to plan for the future? Planning for the future is important for many people in many ways. [...] Future planning is done so a person can reach their goals and find they’re passion as well as something they love and be happy.”

In narrative and essay responses scored “**Satisfactory**” in “**Content**,” as illustrated in these excerpts, 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/or between sentences and/or paragraphs, and a mechanical and/or artificial closure that was related to the focus. Student responses scored “**Satisfactory**” in “**Sentence Structure**,” “**Vocabulary**,” and “**Conventions**” 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, generally correct use of conventions, and errors that occasionally reduced clarity and/or sometimes interrupted the flow of the response.

### **Narrative / Essay Writing Assignment—Observations from Standards Confirmation and Central Marking 2017: Qualities of Student Writing That Met the Standard of Excellence**

In both narrative and essay responses that received scores of “**Proficient**” or “**Excellent**” in “**Content**,” students demonstrated an understanding of how planning for the future enables individuals to discover unknown strengths, compensate for personal weaknesses, anticipate the consequences of one’s actions, or remain true to one’s values. Some students illustrated how planning for the future requires that a person be open to all possibilities and that with a plan for the future, a person can celebrate his or her uniqueness and individuality. Other students examined the role of planning in facilitating character growth, particularly when confronted with adversity. Still other students documented the necessity of making sacrifices to achieve a worthwhile goal, the isolation experienced when directing one’s efforts in an unpopular pursuit, or the paradox of planning for a future that cannot be fully controlled. Many students analyzed how individual character traits, such as self-awareness, perseverance, and resourcefulness, are integral to the fulfilment of one’s future plans.

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

- “My sixteenth birthday was only a week away, and I had saved \$4000 for the used Mustang I had long dreamt of buying from my uncle Kevin. I had spent the last two years guiding student tours at Hearts on Our Sleeve Petting Zoo after school and took baby-sitting jobs for five of my mom’s friends from work. [...] The sad reality was, however, that I still needed another \$1000 – it might as well have been a million! [...] Surrendering to the fact that I couldn’t afford the Mustang, I receded to my room. With a knock on the door, my father and then my mom came into my room. [...] They were proud of me, not for failing to reach my goal but for working so hard. I could hardly believe it when the birthday gift they gave me was the money I still needed to buy the car.”
- “When one does not have a map in a forest, they will likely feel lost and confused. The same is true of the future. No one knows what lurks in the shrouded forest of the future, but those who plan are prepared to face whatever comes their way. [...] Planning allows one to ensure, with a margin of certainty, that they will travel toward the goals that they have set for themselves. Confusion is replaced by confidence and increases the likelihood that they will reach their destination.”
- “Becky and I slurp loudly from our smoothies. I glance at the bright colours of the daycare we are walking past. ‘Hey, look at this!’ Becky exclaims. She points to a sign that reads *Now hiring- Part time Daycare workers with training and experience*. I reluctantly follow her through the rainbow-colored door and approach a grey-haired woman seated at the reception desk. [...] Bouncing up to my locker, Becky shouted, ‘I got the job!’ Her eyes were sparkling with excitement. ‘I gotta go tell my mom!’ / Standing there with my books in hand, I was glad she didn’t notice how I was kind of jealous. It was my own fault, though. I really should have taken that babysitting course.”

- “Planning is essential to survival. Planning ensures that people are able to meet their needs which gives them a sense of security and contentment. Having a plan also guides people’s actions toward a particular end. Knowing the goal that is to be reached, an individual can choose a course of action to focus on despite difficulty encountered along the way. [...] It is ironic that planning enables a person to succeed in overcoming unplanned obstacles.”
- “It seemed as though David and his wife barely saw their son at all. Andy slept until afternoon each day and was locked in his room by the time his parent’s came home. David was worried. How could his son be so naive with so little concern for the future? [...] That night while driving feverishly to the hospital, David couldn’t comprehend the words *I’m sorry to tell you that your son’s been in a car accident*. [...] Looking down at Andy’s ravaged face in his hospital bed, David resolved that he would give Andy with the support he needed to regain control of his life.”

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

### **Narrative / Essay Writing Assignment—Observations from Standards Confirmation and Central Marking 2017: Qualities of Student Writing That Did Not Meet the Acceptable Standard**

In both narrative and essay responses scored “**Poor**” or “**Limited**” in “**Content**,” students typically struggled to convey their thoughts clearly and completely. For example, some students reduced the topic to a discussion of how a lack of planning invariably leads to failure, whereas planning is guaranteed to result in success. 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. In such responses, students presented largely unsupported generalizations or randomly recounted experiences that were weakly connected to planning for the future.

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

- “Don’t just jump the gap and hope for the best in life cause if you do you will jump the gun and hurt yourself if your not safe. [...] Don’t get stopped in your tracks you need to keep going so that you get what you want in life than youll be happy.”
- “Lissening to others talk about there plans for the futre makes Jim think I can’t under stand what there saying. [...] Jim disided Im gonna yolo my life and go through everthing Im going through with out any problemes.”
- “For a brighter future playing sports for dreams to be a profesinal player or paying of taxes or dept. [...] Profesinal athlets have the position they have right now before they were profesinals they were just normal athlets trying to get rich.”
- “If you don’t have a plan it will be realy hard to accomplish your goal without a plan but if you have a plan you will accomplish your goal with a plan. [...] Thats why you need to plan so you get your goal otherwize youll will not get your goal because you didn’t have a plan.”
- “Elise decided that she wanted to be success full in all thing in her life. [...] She went to universty and got a degree in buisness and set up a buisness for less fortunate kids and she also got a phd.”

In student responses scored “**Poor**” or “**Limited**” in “**Content**,” such as those from which these excerpts were taken, the exploration of the topic was tenuous and/or simplistic or minimal and/or tangential, the purpose was vague or insubstantial, and the ideas presented were superficial and/or ambiguous or overgeneralized and/or underdeveloped. Supporting details were imprecise and/or abbreviated or irrelevant and/or scant, and the writing was unsubstantiated and/or incomplete or confusing and/or lacking in validity with little appeal to the reader’s interest. In “**Organization**,” the introduction lacked purpose and/or was not functional or obscure and/or ineffective, and any focus established provided little or no direction and was undeveloped or not sustained. 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, and/or unrelated to the focus or ineffectual and/or missing. “**Sentence Structure**,” “**Vocabulary**,” and “**Conventions**” in responses receiving scores of “**Poor**” or “**Limited**” typically demonstrated a lack of control and little or no variety in sentence structure. Imprecise or ineffective words and expressions were used inexactly or inaccurately. The voice or tone created by the student was indistinct, not clearly established, indiscreet, and/or not evident. Errors in conventions weakened or impaired communication, blurred or severely reduced clarity, and interrupted or impeded the flow of the response.

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

### **Functional Writing Assignment—Observations from Standards Confirmation and Central Marking 2017: General Impressions**

In the **Functional Writing Assignment**, nearly all students were able to connect the context provided in the “**Situation**” to their own experiences. From the viewpoint of “Devon James, a student who lives in the town of Glenboro in the municipal district of Spring Valley, Alberta” and attends “Mountain View School [...] which is located in a high-traffic area,” students advocated that “existing school-zone regulations need to be improved to ensure that students are safe while on or near school grounds.” Some students also acknowledged “that local governments may create municipal bylaws that can modify regulations found in the Alberta Traffic Safety Act” and understood the role of “Ms. Susan Barnes” as “a councilor elected to represent the town of Glenboro on the Spring Valley Municipal Council.” The majority of students were able to present “ideas regarding the need to create a municipal bylaw to regulate traffic near schools in the municipal district of Spring Valley” and explained “how the safety of all individuals on or near school grounds can be enhanced by such a bylaw.”

Most students directly referenced the proposed “regulations” that were provided with regard to what “A municipal school-zone bylaw could include” (such as “a speed limit of 20 kilometres per hour in the school zone,” “a bylaw in effect in the school zone from 7:00 A.M. to 9:00 P.M. seven days a week,” “the school zone to include streets within one block of school grounds,” and “traffic signs posted 50 metres beyond the school zone”). Other students additionally cited the “regulations regarding traffic in school zones [that] are contained in the Alberta Traffic Safety Act” (that “in school zones a speed limit of 30 kilometres per hour is in effect from 8:00 to 9:30 A.M., from 11:30 A.M. to 1:30 P.M., and from 3:00 to 4:30 P.M. on school days” and that “The school zone encompasses the boundaries of the school grounds with signs to indicate the beginning and end of the school zone”). When assessing student responses, markers recognized that, although many students adhered closely to the information provided in the test booklet, doing so was acceptable given the manner in which the assignment was framed primarily within outcomes specified in **General Outcome 3: Managing Ideas and Information**. The extent to which these guidelines were analyzed and particularized to achieve the student’s purpose in the “**Assignment**”—to “Write a business letter to Ms. Susan Barnes, councilor for the municipal district of Spring Valley,”

to “**present your arguments regarding the need to create a municipal school-zone bylaw**” and to “**Provide enough information to convince Ms. Barnes of the benefits of creating such a bylaw**”—distinguished the quality of student responses.

Most students were able to identify the merits of modifying the regulations in the Alberta Traffic Safety Act through the enactment of a municipal school-zone bylaw and argued that the new regulations could make students feel safe and do better in school, have a sense of confidence when coming to or leaving school, or feel that they are valued by the community. Some students contended that the current regulations have caused students to feel undue stress while crossing roadways near the school grounds and have resulted in collisions in which people crossing the road have been injured by passing motorists. Many students acknowledged that the bylaw provides guidelines that are necessary to provide for the safety of both pedestrians and drivers. In some responses, students argued that because some drivers are careless or even indifferent regarding legal regulations, a means by which to enforce the regulations may be necessary. In addition, some students contended that enacting a municipal school-zone bylaw could show students how local government can act in the best interests of residents of the community.

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 needed to take into account the overall effectiveness of each response when assessing its quality. With regard to envelope and letter format, recommendations were contained in the guidelines provided by 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 specifically 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 2017: Qualities of Student Writing That Met the Acceptable Standard**

Students whose responses received a score of “**Satisfactory**” in “**Content**” typically recognized how a municipal school-zone bylaw could encourage drivers to use more caution when driving near schools and make students feel secure when crossing the road. As well, most students acknowledged that such a bylaw is needed because heavy traffic has made crossing streets near the school unsafe. Many students cited the advantages of implementing regulations intended to lower the speed limit, increase the time during which the regulations apply, extend the school zone beyond the boundaries of the school grounds, and inform drivers with clearly posted signs. Some students speculated that students at the school would welcome the bylaw and feel that their safety is valued by the community. Still others provided suggestions for gaining support for the policy that included posting an ad in the local newspaper or holding public information sessions.

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

- “I am a student at Mountain View school. I am writing you this letter to request school-zone regulations be improved. Mountain View school is located in a high traffic area, that puts the students in harms way. [...] Thank you for taking the time to read this letter. I hope that you grant us these regulations.”
- “Parents shouldn’t have to worry about sending their kids to school by themselves or with friends. That’s why we need to lower the speed limit in the school zone to 20 km per/hr. [...] Making the speed limit two hours before school and five hours after school will help kids get home safe.”
- “If cars were going slower they could stop faster. This would decrease the chance of any accidents and help students feel more safe. [...] There are many good things that come along with the new school zone regulations the most crucial one being students safety.”

- “Me and many other students think students need to be safe on school grounds. We can do this by creating a municipal bylaw. [...] Traffic signs posted outside the school zone will give drivers a heads up they are getting close to a school. Then they can be ready to slow down early and make sure every one is safe around the school.”
- “My reasoning behind these school zone regulations is the safety of me and the other students that attend Mountain View. [...] These changes give drivers more awareness and will help that students get to and from school safely. I would like to thank you for reading this letter and hope my propositions make a difference in my community.”

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 2017: 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 including first-hand experience with circumstances associated with travelling to and from school. In such responses, students examined the implications of the regulations that could be enacted in a municipal school-zone bylaw and presented arguments related to why the existing regulations have proven to be insufficient and/or why the proposed regulations could improve student safety. Some students demonstrated an appreciation for the role played by members of the Spring Valley Municipal Council and acknowledged the difficulty of balancing the interests of both drivers and pedestrians. Other students effectively conceded that, although the new regulations could be difficult to enforce on a daily basis, occasional monitoring by law enforcement could have an impact. Still other students suggested that students themselves should assume greater responsibility for their safety by using designated crosswalks and obeying all rules.

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

- “Currently, vehicles are moving at 30 km/h during certain times of the day on week days. If we extend the hours during which the bylaw is in effect, students will be safe while crossing the streets that are nearby the school. A reduction in the speed limit from 30 to 20 kilometres per hour will further reduce the risk to pedestrians. [...] Adding these regulations to a municipal bylaw would be a great step toward ensuring the safety of everyone.”
- “Although some drivers do not want any changes to the existing school-zone regulations, the greater good will be achieved by efforts to ensure everyone’s safety while on or near school grounds. The few seconds that could be added to the time it takes someone to drive past the school are a small price to pay for the priceless benefit of keeping students safe from harm. [...] We must do what is necessary to minimize the hazard that roadways around the school pose to pedestrians.”
- “Having these regulations in effect from 7:00 AM to 9:00 PM on all seven days of the week will provide drivers with a clearer and simpler understanding of the time during which the bylaw regulations apply. [...] These preventative measures will reduce the likelihood of accidents between vehicles and pedestrians. [...] The introduction of these regulations will ensure that schools are safe for students, teachers, parents, and drivers alike.”
- “The speed of 30 km per hour that drivers are allowed to go does not provide vehicles with sufficient stopping time. Limiting the times during which they apply to morning, noon, and after school is too narrow a window to ensure that students are safe at all times of the day and on weekends when at the school. Drivers receive too little warning with signs posted only at the boundaries of the school grounds which make up the school zone.”

- “A reduction in the speed limit coupled with an extension of the hours during the regulations are in effect and the inclusion of all streets within one block of the school will contribute significantly to ensuring the safety of students. [...] All of these suggestions will help to decrease the potential risk of accidents and injuries as well as contribute to a building a safe community. Modifying the existing regulations will benefit all residents of Glenboro.”

Student responses scored “**Proficient**” or “**Excellent**” in “**Content**,” such as those from which these excerpts were taken, were characterized by ideas that were thoughtful or perceptive, and development of the topic was generally effective or clear and effective. Significant or pertinent information was presented, and this information was substantiated or enhanced by specific or precise details that fulfilled the purpose of the assignment. A tone appropriate for the addressee was clearly or skillfully maintained. In responses scored “**Proficient**” or “**Excellent**” in “**Content Management**,” words and expressions used were usually or consistently accurate and effective. The writing demonstrated either competent and generally consistent control or confident and consistent control of correct sentence structure, usage, and mechanics. Any errors present rarely or in no way impeded meaning. The envelope and letter contained few, if any, format errors and/or omissions.

### **Functional Writing Assignment—Observations from Standards Confirmation and Central Marking 2017: 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, in part or as a whole, 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 councilor on the Spring Valley Municipal Council, the principal of Mountain View School, or a concerned parent advocating a municipal-school zone policy. In some instances, students mistakenly argued against changing the regulations contained in the Alberta Traffic Safety Act or inappropriately contended that a municipal bylaw should increase the speed limit in school zones or be in effect only when schools are closed. In other responses, students asserted that such a bylaw is a waste of time because drivers will continue to speed. In some instances, students used an inappropriately inflammatory tone in a misguided effort to be persuasive.

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

- “Sooner or later and kid could get serouse injured or worse die by a speeding car if you dont do something. [...] It will be all your fault if kids get hurt.”
- “Peple dont care about the law so we need a photo rader thing that tells them there speed. Then they don’t have no escuse for going to fast. [...] Money talkes so we need big fines for law brakers.”
- “I am writting this letter in regaurds to my concern of traffic. The alberta regulation states school zones have laws in place and we need those laws other wize every one will be hurt. [...] If we don’t have a change to the school bylaw soon were gonna have a lot less of students at are school.”
- “I appriciate how your trying to make a law to make kids safe more. [...] No body pays no attention to sings and nobody goes below the speed limit so I dont now how its going to change.”
- “My frends and I don’t think you should change the law atall things are fine the way it is.” [...] A resent survey showed that 61% of canadians don’t want to change the school zone law. [...] People just need to be more care ful and watch where their going.”

In student responses scored “**Poor**” or “**Limited**” in “**Content**,” such as those from which these excerpts were taken, ideas were superficial, flawed, and/or merely a repetition of the situation presented in the assignment or overgeneralized, misconstrued, and/or a verbatim reiteration of the situation presented in the assignment. Development of the topic was inadequate or ineffective. Information presented was imprecise, undiscerning, and/or simply a restatement of the prompt provided or irrelevant, missing, and/or essentially copied from the prompt provided. Supporting details were insignificant and/or lacking or 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 little awareness of a tone appropriate for the addressee was evident. In responses scored “**Poor**” or “**Limited**” in “**Content Management**,” words and expressions used were frequently vague, inexact, and/or frequently taken from the prompt or inaccurate,

misused, and/or essentially quoted from the prompt. The writing demonstrated either limited evidence or a lack of evidence of control of correct sentence structure, usage, and mechanics. Errors that were present frequently or severely impeded meaning. The envelope and letter contained frequent or numerous and glaring format errors and/or omissions.

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

Overall, student responses to both the Narrative / Essay Writing Assignment and the Functional Writing Assignment in *Part A: Writing* of the 2017 Grade 9 English Language Arts Provincial Achievement Test were strong. The vast majority of students (90.3%) achieved the acceptable standard, while 21.6% of all students achieved the standard of excellence. Of all students who wrote the *Part A: Writing* test, only 9.7% did not achieve the acceptable standard.



## Part B: Reading—2017 Test Blueprint and Student Achievement

In 2017, 79.7% of all students who wrote the Grade 9 English Language Arts Provincial Achievement Test achieved the acceptable standard on *Part B: Reading*, and 19.4% of all students who wrote achieved the standard of excellence. On *Part B: Reading* of the 2017 Grade 9 English Language Arts Provincial Achievement Test, students achieved an average score of 34.7 out of a total score of 54 (64.3%).

The blueprint below shows the reporting categories and language functions by which 2017 summary data are reported to schools and school authorities, and it shows the provincial average of student achievement by both raw score and percentage.

Reporting Category	Language Function		Provincial Student Achievement (Average Raw Score and Percentage)
	Informational	Narrative / Poetic	
<b>Identifying and Interpreting Ideas and Details</b> (2.1, 2.2, 2.3)* Students construct meaning by interpreting ideas and details pertaining to setting/atmosphere/context, character/narrator/speaker (actions, motives, values), conflict, and events.			<b>10.6/17</b> <b>(62.4%)</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, flashback, foreshadowing, suspense), and conventions.			<b>6.7/10</b> <b>(67.0%)</b>
<b>Associating Meaning</b> (2.1, 2.2, 2.3)* Students use contextual clues to determine the denotative and connotative meaning of words, phrases, and figurative language (e.g., simile, metaphor, hyperbole, personification, irony, symbolism).			<b>7.3/11</b> <b>(66.4%)</b>
<b>Synthesizing Ideas</b> (2.2)* Students draw conclusions and make generalizations by integrating information in order to identify the tone, purpose, theme, main idea, or mood of a passage.			<b>10.2/16</b> <b>(63.8%)</b>
<b>Provincial Student Achievement</b> <b>(Average Raw Score and Percentage)</b>	<b>14.0/22</b> <b>(63.6%)</b>	<b>20.7/32</b> <b>(64.7%)</b>	<b>Part B: Reading</b> <b>Total Test Raw</b> <b>Score = 54</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 2017 Student Achievement

The following is a discussion of student achievement on *Part B: Reading* of the 2017 Grade 9 English Language Arts Provincial Achievement Test. Sample questions from the test are provided to highlight the achievement of students who met the acceptable standard, students who met the standard of excellence, and students who did not meet the acceptable standard. For each question, the keyed answer is marked with an asterisk.

In the blueprinting category of **Identifying and Interpreting Ideas and Details**, students were expected to construct meaning by interpreting ideas and details pertaining to setting/atmosphere/context, character/narrator/speaker (actions, motives, values), conflict, and events in ten reading selections. In the three informational texts—an excerpt from a magazine article, a newspaper article, and an excerpt from a nonfiction book—students who achieved the acceptable standard were able to recognize interrelationships among ideas and information presented, identify key elements of an argument presented, and recognize the impact of a personal experience on an individual’s life. Students who achieved the standard of excellence additionally illustrated strengths in making inferences regarding the significance of elements of writers’ experiences described and in discriminating among details in order to determine those most relevant to an idea under discussion. Students who did not meet the acceptable standard were generally able to identify explicit ideas and details in informational texts, but many encountered difficulty with questions that required recognition of connections among ideas presented or identifying the central focus of details presented. The seven narrative/poetic texts—including two poems, two cartoons, excerpts from two short stories, and an excerpt from a novel—enabled many students who met the acceptable standard to demonstrate their ability to determine the motivation underlying a character’s actions, recognize how characters interact with others, and identify what details suggest about characters’ behaviour. In addition, students who achieved the standard of excellence were capable of acknowledging the complexities of interpersonal relationships among characters portrayed and appreciating the indelible impact of pivotal events on characters’ lives. Those students who did not meet the acceptable standard, while generally able to recognize causality between directly related events, sometimes struggled with questions involving interpretation of the implicit meaning of ideas pertaining to interactions among characters. The following question illustrates some of these differences in student achievement on the 2017 Grade 9 English Language Arts Provincial Achievement Test.

In question 18, students were required to identify what is suggested in the citation of an authoritative expert’s contention in specified lines of a newspaper article (SO 2.1).

18. According to Linda Cross, “sweaty palms” (line 39) **most directly** result from a person’s
- A. lack of foresight
  - B. lack of self-esteem
  - \*C. sense of apprehension
  - D. feelings of bewilderment

Of all students who wrote the test, 32.8% chose the correct answer (option C). These students were able to derive from details in lines 39 to 40 (regarding how sweaty palms are an indication of “a stress response that is primitive and instinctive”) and details in lines 41 to 42 (related to “feeling threatened”) that Linda Cross most directly suggests that sweaty palms result from an individual’s feelings of apprehension. Of those students who did not select the keyed response, 4.1% chose option A. This alternative presents the idea that sweaty palms result from an individual’s inability to foresee situations, such as when giving a handshake, but a lack of forewarning is not supported by details in the text. Option B was chosen by 32.1% of all students, a choice that presents the idea that an individual suffers from a loss of self-esteem when giving a handshake, but this idea is based on an inference that is not directly supported by details in the text. Option D, which was chosen by 30.9% of all students, presents the idea that sweaty palms may result from feelings of bewilderment when giving a handshake, but this idea is not directly supported by

details in the text. Of those students who achieved the acceptable standard, 28.6% selected the correct answer. A total of 61.2% 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, 19.3% chose the correct answer.

In the section of the 2017 Grade 9 English Language Arts Provincial Achievement Test blueprinted for curricular content pertaining to **Interpreting Text Organization**, students who achieved the acceptable standard were often able to identify textual features that include the use of punctuation as well as the employment of organizational strategies to enhance meaning by writers of informational texts. Students who achieved the standard of excellence were, in addition, able to analyze how the presentation of a writer’s ideas is enhanced through rhetorical choices that include the use of parenthetical commentary as well as sentence fragments and dialogue. Students who did not meet the acceptable standard demonstrated weaknesses in identifying how the organizational choices employed by the writers of informational texts provide a structure for the development of ideas. In narrative/poetic texts, students who achieved the acceptable standard could typically identify the effects achieved by writers through the use of imagery to enhance the presentation of ideas. Students achieving the standard of excellence could additionally detect elements central to the conflict faced by characters as well as subtleties of tone in interactions among characters. Many students who did not achieve the acceptable standard encountered difficulty with questions that tasked students with recognizing the impact of the writer’s sequencing of events on the development of the central conflict in narrative/poetic texts. Some of these differences in student achievement on the 2017 Grade 9 English Language Arts Provincial Achievement Test are demonstrated in the following question.

Question 17 required that students recognize the rhetorical purpose of the writer’s inclusion of a specific statement in a newspaper article (SO 2.2).

17. In context, the writer includes the statement “The web is the skin between our thumb and first finger” (lines 28 to 29) in order to provide a
- A. personal comment
  - B. humorous example
  - \*C. definition of a term
  - D. transition to connect ideas

The correct answer (option C) was selected by 66.1% of all students who wrote the test. These students could identify from the parenthetical comment (that “The web is the skin between our thumb and first finger”) in lines 29 to 30—which follows the contention that “The trick is to go web to web” in line 28—that the writer is defining what is meant by “The web.” Option A (which was selected by 9.0% of all students) identifies a reason for which a writer might use a parenthetical comment to include personal observations, but this is not the basis for the writer’s choice in this instance. Option B (which was selected by 6.5% of all students) identifies how a parenthetical comment could be used to incorporate a humorous illustration of an observation, but this is also not the basis for the writer’s choice in this instance. Option D (which was selected by 18.3% of all students) suggests that a writer might use a parenthetical comment to provide a transition between ideas, but this, too, is not the basis for the writer’s choice in this instance. Many of those students who achieved the acceptable standard chose the correct answer, with 66.4% selecting the keyed response. Most of those students who met the standard of excellence (94.6%) chose the correct answer, whereas 29.4% of those students who did not meet the acceptable standard chose the correct answer.

With regard to questions blueprinted in the **Associating Meaning** category, students who achieved the acceptable standard were able to identify the denotative meanings of words and phrases and could recognize the use of figures of speech—such as simile, metaphor, and irony—in informational texts. Students who achieved the standard of excellence were additionally able to appreciate how connotations of words and phrases reinforce meaning and how metaphorical comparisons enrich the reader’s understanding of the similarities between familiar and unfamiliar experiences. Students who did not

achieve the acceptable standard typically struggled with distinguishing the meaning of specific words and phrases presented and showed limited understanding of figurative language in informational texts. Students who achieved the acceptable standard could generally recognize the use of metaphor, hyperbole, and personification in straightforward narrative/poetic texts. Students who achieved the standard of excellence demonstrated additional strengths in abstracting from figures of speech a deeper understanding of ideas presented by writers of narrative/poetic texts. Students who did not achieve the acceptable standard were often challenged by questions that required the use of contextual clues to determine the meaning of words and phrases and sometimes encountered difficulty identifying figurative comparisons in narrative/poetic texts. Such differences in student achievement on the 2017 Grade 9 English Language Arts Provincial Achievement Test are shown in the following question.

Question 15 required that students recognize what a simile used by the writer of a newspaper article suggests about her feelings in the situation described (SO 2.3).

15. The simile in lines 2 to 3 is used by the writer to convey her feelings of
- A. embarrassment
  - \*B. discomfort
  - C. anxiety
  - D. fear

Of all students who wrote the test, 83.8% were able to choose the keyed response (option **B**) by correctly recognizing that the comparison—of “dry fingers” that “slid over mine” to “a lizard skittering across my skin”—conveys how the writer is feeling uncomfortable, which is reinforced by the writer’s hiding of “an involuntary shudder” in line 3. Option **A** (selected by 2.5% of all students) incorrectly suggests that the writer feels embarrassed during the interaction described, but embarrassment is not conveyed by the simile used by the writer. Option **C** (selected by 9.2% of all students) incorrectly suggests that the writer is experiencing anxiety during the interaction described, but this choice overstates the writer’s momentary squeamishness. Option **D** (selected by 4.5% of all students) incorrectly suggests that the writer is fearful when shaking hands with the man described, but this choice exaggerates the writer’s temporary uneasiness. A total of 85.6% of students who achieved the acceptable standard answered this question correctly. Of those students who achieved the standard of excellence, 96.2% chose the correct answer. Of those students who did not meet the acceptable standard, 59.0% selected the keyed response.

In the blueprinting category of **Synthesizing Ideas**, students achieving the acceptable standard were typically able to identify main ideas in informational texts and determine the central focus of a writer’s reflections on personal experiences. Students who achieved the standard of excellence were additionally capable of synthesizing ideas in informational texts in order to formulate conclusions pertaining to the basis for a writer’s inclusion of particular content and perceive the overarching ideas of information presented. Many of those students who did not achieve the acceptable standard were able to identify explicit facts presented but frequently found it difficult to answer questions that required synthesis of ideas to arrive at a generalization encapsulating the content of information presented or extrapolation, from a writer’s reflections, about the significance of specific events. In narrative/poetic texts, students who achieved the acceptable standard generally demonstrated the ability to recognize differing viewpoints among characters and determine central themes from events portrayed. Students achieving the standard of excellence could additionally evaluate the effectiveness of characters’ choices through the writer’s omniscience in exploring their actions and appreciate the main purpose underlying the writer’s presentation of events in narrative/poetic texts. Those students who did not meet the acceptable standard often struggled with questions that required formulating conclusions regarding the intended impact on readers of events depicted and were often challenged by questions regarding the resolution of conflict through the events documented in narrative/poetic texts. The following question illustrates some of these differences in student achievement on the 2017 Grade 9 English Language Arts Provincial Achievement Test.

In question 19, students needed to identify the quotation that most clearly identifies the main idea of a newspaper article (SO 2.2).

19. Which of the following quotations **most clearly** identifies the writer’s central argument in this article?
- A. “Greeting with a handshake is part of our culture and a common practice in the business world” (lines 8–9)
  - B. “Historically, handshakes were used to show that both people were unarmed” (line 10)
  - C. “Today, a handshake can indicate the degree of interest you have in somebody” (line 12)
  - \*D. “If you want to send a positive message, then a good handshake helps” (line 13)

The correct answer (option **D**) was selected by 51.3% of all students who wrote the test. These students were able to conclude—from ideas regarding how “If you want to send a positive message, then a good handshake helps” (line 13) and how, if “You give a feeble handshake [...] you run the risk of the other person filling in the blanks and they may well be inaccurate” (lines 15 to 16)—that “a good handshake” sends “a positive message” (line 13). Option **A** (selected by 36.0% of all students) identifies an assertion (regarding the prevalence of the practice of meeting with a handshake in business interactions), an assertion that contributes to but does not encapsulate the writer’s central argument in this article. Option **B** (selected by 2.9% of all students) identifies a contention regarding how handshakes once indicated that individuals were unarmed, but this contention does not fully encapsulate the writer’s central argument. Option **C** (selected by 9.8% of all students) suggests that a handshake reveals one’s interest in another person, but this suggestion also does not encapsulate the writer’s central argument. Of those students achieving the acceptable standard, 49.1% chose the correct answer. A total of 78.4% of students who achieved the standard of excellence chose the correct answer. Of those students who did not meet the acceptable standard, 29.0% answered this question correctly.

Overall, student achievement on *Part B: Reading* of the 2017 Grade 9 English Language Arts Provincial Achievement Test was strong. Most students (79.7%) were able to achieve the acceptable standard on the *Part B: Reading* test, and 19.4% of all students achieved the standard of excellence. Of all students who wrote the *Part B: Reading* test, 20.3% did not achieve the acceptable standard.

# Provincial Achievement Testing Program Support Documents

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

## **Provincial 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 provincial achievement testing program. Sections in the bulletin contain information pertaining to schedules and significant dates; security and test rules; test administration directives, guidelines, and procedures; calculator and computer policies; test accommodations; test marking and results; field testing; resources and web documents; forms and samples; and Provincial Assessment Sector contacts.

## **Subject Bulletins**

At the beginning of each school year, subject bulletins are posted on the Alberta Education website for all provincial 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 provincial achievement tests in grades 6 and 9 English Language Arts and Français/French Language Arts, writing samples are designed for teachers and students to enhance students' writing and to assess this writing relative to the standards inherent in the scoring guides for the achievement tests. The exemplars documents contain sample responses with scoring rationales that relate student work to the scoring categories and scoring criteria.

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

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

## **Parent Guides**

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

## **Involvement of Teachers**

Teachers of grades 6 and 9 are encouraged to take part in activities related to the provincial 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 provincial achievement test results to improve student learning.