

**Alberta Provincial  
Achievement Testing**

**Assessment  
Highlights  
2012–2013**

**GRADE  
9**

# English Language Arts

*Alberta*  Government

This document contains assessment highlights from the 2013 Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement Test.

Assessment Highlights provide information about the overall test, the test blueprints, and student performance on the 2013 Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement Test. Also provided is commentary on student performance at the acceptable standard and the standard of excellence on selected items from the 2013 achievement test. This information is intended for teachers and is best used in conjunction with the multi-year and detailed school reports that are available to schools via the extranet. **Assessment Highlights reports** for all achievement test subjects and grades will be **posted on the Alberta Education website every year** in the fall.

Released test items, which contained approximately 25% of the total number of test items from previously secured achievement tests, were mailed to school administrators each fall from 2004 to 2006 and have been made available to teachers in only print form because of copyright limitations. **Every second year**, as of the fall of 2007, **a complete test** for all achievement test subjects and grades (except grades 6 and 9 Social Studies; grades 3, 6, and 9 Français/French Language Arts; and Grade 9 Knowledge and Employability courses) will be posted on the Alberta Education website. A test blueprint and an answer key that includes the difficulty, reporting category, and item description for each test item will also be included. These materials, along with the program of studies and subject bulletin, provide information that can be used to inform instructional practice.

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

This document was written primarily for:

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

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# The 2013 Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement Test

This report provides teachers, school administrators, and the public with an overview of the performance of all students who wrote the 2013 Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement Test. It complements the detailed school and jurisdiction reports.

## How Many Students Wrote the Test?

A total of 24 633 students wrote both parts of the 2013 Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement Test.

## What Was the Test Like?

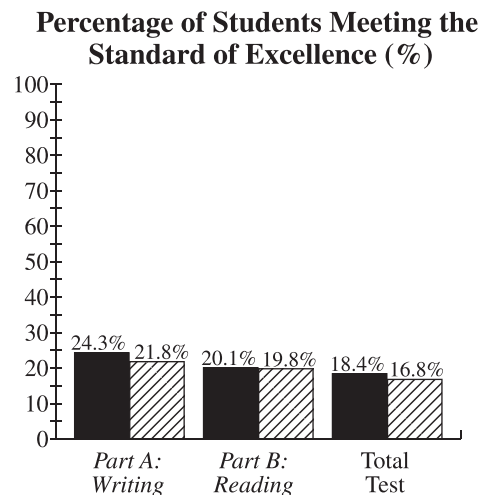
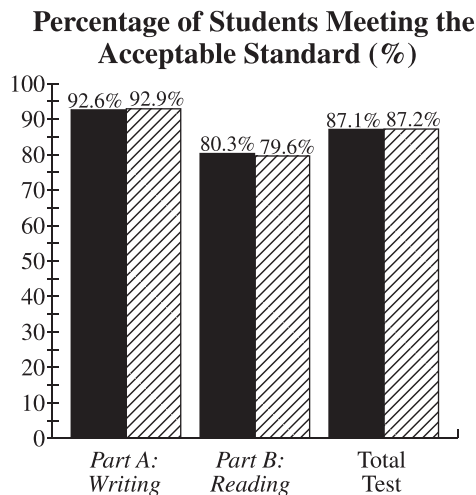
The 2013 Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement Test had two parts that were weighted equally.


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


*Part B: Reading* consisted of 55 multiple-choice questions based on 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 2013 are consistent with 2012, 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 72.4 (65.8%). 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 provided in school and jurisdiction reports.



 2012 Achievement Standards: The percentage of students in the province who met the acceptable standard and the standard of excellence on the 2012 Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement Test (based on those who wrote).

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

## Part A: Writing—2013 Test Blueprint

The blueprint for *Part A: Writing* identifies the scoring/reporting categories by which student writing is assessed and by which 2013 summary data are reported to schools and school authorities; it also provides a description of the writing assignments and the achievement standards.

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

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

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

## Part A: Writing—2013 Student Achievement

In 2013, 92.9% of all students who wrote the test achieved the acceptable standard on *Part A: Writing* of the Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement Test, and 21.8% of students who wrote achieved the standard of excellence. These results are consistent with previous administrations of *Part A: Writing* of the achievement test.

### Student Achievement by Assignment and Reporting Category

The quality of the writing on the 2013 Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement Test is consistent with that of previous years. The chart below illustrates the percentage of students achieving writing standards for each writing assignment and reporting category.

		Narrative / Essay Writing Assignment					Functional Writing Assignment	
		Reporting Category					Reporting Category	
		Content	Organization	Sentence Structure	Vocabulary	Conventions	Content	Content Management
Writing Standard	Score*	% of Students	% of Students	% of Students	% of Students	% of Students	% of Students	% of Students
Excellent	5.0	5.2%	5.1%	5.4%	6.1%	5.8%	4.3%	6.4%
	4.5	7.7%	7.6%	7.6%	7.5%	8.1%	6.8%	9.1%
Proficient	4.0	20.6%	20.7%	21.0%	20.8%	22.1%	19.6%	22.5%
Satisfactory	3.5	18.6%	19.3%	18.6%	19.0%	18.0%	17.3%	16.2%
	3.0	33.0%	33.0%	33.5%	38.6%	28.7%	37.7%	27.9%
	2.5	7.8%	7.7%	8.0%	5.1%	9.0%	7.7%	8.4%
Limited	2.0	5.2%	5.1%	4.6%	2.0%	6.8%	4.8%	7.4%
	1.5	0.8%	0.6%	0.5%	0.2%	0.8%	0.7%	0.9%
Poor	1.0	0.8%	0.5%	0.3%	0.2%	0.4%	0.5%	0.6%
Insufficient / No Response	0	0.4%	0.4%	0.4%	0.4%	0.4%	0.7%	0.7%

\*Scores of 4.5, 3.5, 2.5, and 1.5 occur only when local marks and central marks are averaged. In 2013, 19 726 (80.1% of the total of 24 633) papers were marked locally, and these scores were submitted to Alberta Education. Papers with discrepant scores were given a third reading. The third-reading rescore rate was 5.6%.

## ***Part A: Writing—Commentary on 2013 Student Achievement***

During the 2013 scoring session, 158 teachers from throughout the province scored 24 633 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 2013 Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement Test achieved an average of 37.5 out of a total raw score of 55 (68.2%). The provincial average on the Narrative / Essay Writing Assignment was 23.9 out of 35 (68.3%), and the provincial average on the Functional Writing Assignment was 13.5 out of 20 (67.5%).

Throughout the 2013 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 a response, markers were encouraged to conscientiously return to the “Focus” section of the scoring categories to consider the extent to which the student had demonstrated competence in the criteria listed. There are several scoring descriptors in each scoring scale to be assessed in order to arrive at judgments regarding the qualities of a response. Markers were asked to review—at the start of each marking day—each assignment and the prompt materials provided in the test booklet with the expectation that many students’ ideas regarding the topic were informed by details within the prompts. Occasionally, markers may have needed to re-read a response to appreciate what a student had attempted and accomplished. All markers acknowledged that student responses were first drafts written under timed test writing conditions.

### **Narrative / Essay Writing Assignment—Observations from Standards Confirmation and Central Marking 2013: General Impressions**

In the Narrative / Essay Writing Assignment, students were required to “Write either a narrative or an essay about the importance of self-respect in shaping a person’s character.” This assignment was accessible for students at all levels of achievement. The literary prompts—that included quotations from works by Edgar Guest, Bayard Taylor, and Ralph Emerson—provided many students with opportunities to explore ideas related to being unable to “hide myself from me,” realizing that “Character’s what you give,” understanding that “What you *are*” is more important than “things” you “say,” and learning “lessons” regarding “faith and courage and the way to live.” The visual prompts—that included a youth thanking an employer by saying “Thank you for providing me with an opportunity to prove myself. With the money I make from working, I will be able to buy the new bike I want,” a group of students deciding that “the best way to complete” a “project” is to “ensure that each one ... contributes equally” and “can ... share the success” of the group, a youth apologizing to her parents for not doing “household chores” for which she is “responsible,” and a group of people in which some individuals are carrying a banner with the words “SAVE ENDANGERED SPECIES!” and a person telling another individual how “it’s important to stand up for what we believe in”—also offered students a variety of ideas to choose to explore in their responses.

Many students referred to dictionary definitions of self-respect—that included “having a proper respect for oneself as a human being” and “regard for one’s own standing or position.” Myriad conceptualizations of self-respect were evident in student responses, and most students were able to frame their understandings in a manner that illustrated that they were indeed addressing the assigned topic. In some responses, students approached the topic from a personal standpoint, examining the role played by siblings, parents, grandparents, friends, teachers and/or employers in affecting the development of an individual’s self-respect—such as in “I admire my brother Blair because he spends time with me and teaches me how to be strong and do what is right,” “We are not born with the ability to know right from wrong ... we learn from our parents the virtues we live by,” “True friends will support you in whatever you set out to do and will defend you from criticism from others,” “At school, we learn to treat others the way we wish to be treated,” and “On the job site employees who feel good about themselves are more reliable and productive.”

Students also examined the value of self-respect in reflecting a person’s “honour and integrity,” giving a person “an optimistic attitude toward the future,” and being “a personal shield from being bullied



or criticized by others because those who know who they are and what they stand for will be unaffected by the negative opinions of others.” In some instances, students cited the influence of role models noted for their respect for themselves and others—such as “sports heroes” (including Wayne Gretzky, Michael Jordan, and Tom Brady), “pop stars” (including Miley Cyrus, Justin Bieber, and Beyonce Knowles), and “actors and actresses” (including Channing Tatum, Will Smith, and Julia Roberts)—in inspiring others to realize their own potential. In other responses, students spoke of the value of religious beliefs in guiding individuals through personal crises.

Some students examined the implications of personal postings on “Facebook and other social media sites” that can have lasting consequences. Others responded to the assignment by recounting or explaining how “low self-respect is an obstacle to taking chances and trying new experiences which limits a person’s ability to achieve success and fulfillment,” how “self-respect allows us to take advantage of opportunities as they arise in our lives,” and how “we can accept compliments regarding our achievement graciously when we have self-respect.” To support and develop their ideas, some students also chose to include a discussion of the influence of self-respect on the lives of characters in literary works such as *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *The Wild Children*, *The Chrysalids*, *Ender’s Game*, *The Golden Compass*, and *Touching Spirit Bear*.

### **Narrative / Essay Writing Assignment—Observations from Standards Confirmation and Central Marking 2013: Qualities of Student Writing that Met the Acceptable Standard**

Students who achieved the acceptable standard often approached the topic from the stance that people who have self-respect “stand up for their beliefs,” “help others who are being bullied,” and “respect others so that they will respect you.” Some students examined the relationship between self-respect and “body image,” “the way you dress,” “how you act,” “the friends you make,” and “the decisions you make.” Others presented examples of how having self-respect enables individuals to “strive to succeed,” “make good choices,” and “learn from mistakes.” A number of students examined the importance of self-respect in providing people with the ability to “accept our weaknesses,” “overcome pain and suffering,” “find happiness,” and “show others how to find contentment in their lives.” Still other students purported that “people with out self-respect affect how others see them in a negative fashion,” “discourage others from providing support,” have “trouble dealing with problems,” and are “unable to grow.” As well, some students spoke of the benefits of “having control of your life” and “being able to become the person you want to be.”

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

- “Abbey was a small town girl. She never beleived she could do anything ... Abbey always wanted to play the piano. Her parents let her join clubs and do other sports. Whatever she started she always quit because she didn’t beleive she could do it. It didn’t help that her parents didn’t beleive she could do something. Her parents didn’t beleive because Abbey didn’t beleive in herself.”
- “Do you have self-respect? When you show yourself self-respect it helps you to gain confedence, make a better aperance of yourself and it also makes it easier for you to be liked by others. That’s why self-respect plays an important role in everyday life.”
- “One of my flaws is that I am not very athletic, so my Physical Education mark is usually low. I get frustrated with myself because it is the only class that I don’t do well in ... In two months we have a track meet so I’m going to practice really hard ... After working with Coach McKay everyday after school I was ready ... I won four ribbons and was proud of myself for what I had done. I realized that anything is possible if I just set my mind to it.”
- “Michael [a homeless boy of 18] was getting mad because he had no money, he had grugy clothes and old shoes. He walked toward the shack where he lived, and noticed a nice house with no one home. So Michael decided to grab a rock, smash a window and steal some money ... All of a sudden several police officers showed up and cornered him ... Because he had no self-respect Michael went to jail for his crime.”
- “Self respect is something all people should have. It raises confidence in the person, help them acheive new heights and will benefit the future. Having self respect is ideal for success in school and at work.”

In narrative and essay responses scored “Satisfactory” in “Content,” such as those from which these

excerpts are taken, the students' exploration of the topic was clear and/or logical, the purpose was evident, relevant and/or generic details were provided to support appropriate and/or predictable ideas, and the writing was straightforward and/or generalized and occasionally appealed to the reader's interest. In "Organization," responses scored "Satisfactory" were characterized by a functional introduction that established a focus that was generally sustained, events and/or details that were developed in a discernible order, transitions that mechanically connected events and/or details within and between sentences and paragraphs, and a mechanical and/or artificial closure that was related to the focus. Student responses scored "Satisfactory" in "Sentence Structure," "Vocabulary," and "Conventions" demonstrated generally controlled and sometimes effective and/or varied sentence structure, general words and expressions that were generally used appropriately, a discernible voice or tone, and generally correct use of conventions.

### **Narrative / Essay Writing Assignment—Observations from Standards Confirmation and Central Marking 2013: Qualities of Student Writing that Met the Standard of Excellence**

Many students who achieved the standard of excellence demonstrated an understanding of how having self-respect enables individuals to "capitalize on personal strengths and improve upon personal weaknesses," "make decisions wisely by considering the consequences of your actions," and "give yourself credit for being true to your values." Some students analyzed how "children learn from past experiences" that "being dishonest reflects poorly on our character because others lose their trust in us" and that "when we are accountable for our actions when we are young, we earn the admiration of others and feel satisfied with our selves as adults." Other students examined the reciprocal benefits of self-respect in allowing people to "recognize in others traits we admire and would like to possess ourselves" and "serve as an example to others of what can be achieved through honesty, perseverance, and being accountable for our actions." Still other students illustrated that self-respect requires that a person be "open-minded and willing to accept individual differences" and that "with self-respect, a person can celebrate their uniqueness and individuality."

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

- "From the moment we are born, we are conscious of how we are perceived by others – our parents. They provide us with the foundation of what we come to believe about the world, ourselves, and those who are important to us. If we have self-respect, we can face the challenges that confront us, trust our own judgment when making decisions, and show others that we are loyal and can be depended on, especially in times of need."
- "I work as a marine biologist. I am married with two beautiful children. I have many close friends. To many, I seem to have if not a perfect existence, at least an enviable one. Truthfully I know I do. I know I'm lucky. But if you knew what it cost me to get here, you might question your jealousy. I did not cheat or lie my way to the top. It was more of a singular incident in which I lost all self respect. When I lost my self respect, I had nothing. It happened twenty years ago but haunts me to this day."
- "The intrinsic rewards of self-respect include discovering your fundamental beliefs, and being able to exercise these beliefs in day-to-day interactions. Although this may entail hardship and self-sacrifice, doing so will give people peace of mind in knowing that they have remained true to themselves and what they value most ... This commitment to one's beliefs in the face of adversity is shown by Atticus Finch in *To Kill a Mockingbird* when he defends an innocent black man named Tom Robinson against charges of raping a white girl named Mayella Ewell."
- "Every day teens are bombarded with media messages that define what is popular and perpetuate stereotypes and false images ... Young people who idolise celebrities are conned into believing that they can achieve the unattainable ... When they fail to live up to these unrealistic expectations the impact on their self-esteem is devastating."
- "The sun descended gradually below the horizon. A single tear dropped down the side of Maria's cheek. Her husband, Fernando, clutched her hand and squeezed gently. In the doorway stood Frederico, their son, in his squadron uniform looking every bit the dutiful soldier. Maria broke free from her husband and ran to her son, clutching him close ... Frederico's heart ached as he boarded the train but he knew he was doing what needed to be done ... serving his country."

In responses receiving scores of "Proficient" or "Excellent" in "Content," such as those from which

these excerpts are taken, students explored the topic in an adept, plausible, insightful, and/or imaginative manner, the purpose was intentional or deliberate, ideas presented were thoughtful, sound, perceptive, and/or carefully chosen, details were specific, apt, precise, and/or original, and 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 that were developed coherently in a sensible or judicious order, transitions that clearly or fluently connected events and/or details within and between sentences and paragraphs, and an appropriate or effective closure that was related to the focus. Student responses scored "Proficient" or "Excellent" in "Sentence Structure," "Vocabulary," and "Conventions" demonstrated consistently controlled and usually or consistently effective and varied sentence structure, specific or precise words and expressions that were used accurately and/or deliberately, a voice or tone that was distinct or convincing, and minor convention errors that rarely, seldom, or did not reduce clarity or interrupt the flow of the response.

### **Narrative / Essay Writing Assignment—Observations from Standards Confirmation and Central Marking 2013: Qualities of Student Writing that Did Not Meet the Acceptable Standard**

Student writing that did not meet the acceptable standard was often characterized by an exploration of the topic that was tenuous, simplistic, minimal, and/or tangential. For example, some students reduced the topic to a discussion of the importance of basic needs ("food, shelter, and water") for daily survival. 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 thoughts, personality, circumstances, or behaviour in the synopsis of events presented. Some students addressed the topic with sweeping generalizations such as "With out self respect we may as well all die," "it is better to feel good than bad," and "some times we just need to let our hair down and stop working so hard." Students at this level of achievement often struggled with clarifying their ideas in relation to the topic and were not always successful in conveying their thoughts clearly and completely.

The following excerpts are taken from student responses that were awarded "Poor" or "Limited" scores:

- "What you give is what you get cause if you hate your self you hate others. Theres nothing you can do 'oh who cares' so I'm asking everone else people out there to start self respect."
- "This is a story about ryan, and now he loses his job on day ryan gets a call about he got the job he was nervous about the job the next day at work that next day he was very working hard not giving up ... After a couple pay cheks he had money he needed to buy a house were he lives today."
- "So sunny out i was stuck in side playing guitar i heard a couple of kids walk by and they were talking about the music i was playing. Wow that guy sucks said guy 1. Yea he reeks said guy 2 ... From then on I felt so bad I dint play guitar again ever again."
- "Thank you for takeing the time to read my essay and I hope as you read it you feel like you are informed about the importance of self-respect in shaping a person's character, before it ends I would like to ask if your shapeing someones character are you doing it right or are you doing it wrong."
- "We all kinda feel like crap about ourselves sometimes we cant let that take us over, we need to sometimes accept thats the way we are and we cant always change."

In student responses scored "Poor" or "Limited" in "Content," such as those from which these excerpts are taken, the purpose was vague or insubstantial, ideas presented were superficial, ambiguous, overgeneralized, and/or underdeveloped, details were imprecise, abbreviated, irrelevant, and/or scant, and the writing was uncertain, incomplete, confusing, and/or lacking in validity with little appeal to the reader's interest. In "Organization," the introduction lacked purpose, was not functional, obscure, and/or ineffective, the development of events and/or details was not clearly discernible, haphazard, and/or incoherent, transitions were lacking, indiscriminately used, absent, or inappropriately used within and/or between sentences and/or paragraphs, and the closure was abrupt, contrived, unrelated to the focus, ineffectual, and/or missing. "Sentence Structure," "Vocabulary," and "Conventions" in responses

receiving scores of “Poor” or “Limited” typically demonstrated a lack of control and little variety in sentence construction, the use of imprecise and/or ineffective words and expressions and a voice or tone that was not clearly established, indistinct, not evident, and/or indiscreet, and errors in conventions that weakened or impaired communication, blurred or reduced clarity, and interrupted or impeded the flow of the response.

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

### **Functional Writing Assignment—Observations from Standards Confirmation and Central Marking 2013: General Impressions**

In the Functional Writing Assignment, most students were able to connect the context provided in the “Situation” to their own experiences. From the viewpoint of “Morgan Stevenson, a grade nine student,” students acknowledged that “Contaminants from vehicle emissions are a major cause of air pollution,” expressed concerns “about how idling ... wastes fuel and contaminates the air,” and presented “arguments in favour of establishing an anti-idling bylaw” in order to “encourage people to refrain from needlessly idling their vehicles.” In most responses, students referenced or listed the suggested guidelines provided, such as “signs posted nearby no-idling zones such as schools and hospitals,” a “maximum of three minutes of idling during a one-hour period in a no-idling zone,” “enforcement based on complaint calls received,” a “letter of warning for [a] first offense and [a] fine of \$250.00 for [a] second offense,” “exceptions for below freezing or extremely hot weather,” exemptions for “emergency and public transit vehicles,” and a “public education campaign to raise awareness.”

The extent to which these guidelines were analyzed and particularized to achieve the student’s purpose in the “Assignment”—to “Write a business letter to Mr. David Jones, mayor of the city of Lindberg,” to “Provide enough information to convince Mr. Jones of the beneficial aspects of this bylaw”—was significant in determining the quality of student responses. Standards confirmers noted that many students demonstrated a pronounced reliance on the suggested guidelines of the anti-idling bylaw provided, possibly a result of the seemingly prescriptive specification in the “Assignment” of the importance of establishing “this bylaw.” Thus, markers recognized that, although many students adhered closely to the information provided, doing so was acceptable given the manner in which the assignment is framed primarily within outcomes specified in General Outcome 3: Managing Ideas and Information.

Most students were able to identify the need for “a bylaw that will encourage people to not idle when it is not necessary” in order to “reduce vehicle emissions and the amount of pollution” and to “avoid wasting natural resources.” Many students acknowledged that “the health of residents of the city is at risk because of contaminants released into the air from vehicle exhausts” and elaborated upon how “this bylaw will have a positive impact on air quality and people’s health in the city of Lindberg and surrounding areas.” Other students ruminated on how people have “become accustomed to the convenience of leaving their car running when going to the store or stopping by a friend’s house” and that such “habits” need to be “broken.”

Some students contended that, in the absence of an anti-idling bylaw, “pollution will reach toxic levels,” “valuable resources such as gas and oil will be wasted,” and “health care costs will rise” and argued that an anti-idling bylaw is necessary in order to “preserve the environment for generations to come.” Others spoke of the benefits of the bylaw for “both the city and its air quality as well as the drivers of vehicles who won’t be spending as much money on fuel” and how “a reduction in the amount of idling will decrease the emission of noxious gases and keep the people, animals, and our planet healthy.” Still others argued that “If people are informed of the detriments of idling, they will voluntarily do what they can to refrain from doing so” and “enforcement ... through penalties and fines will not be required.”



In some cases, students provided information regarding how the addressee could contact the sender should he wish to do so, but this was not a requirement of the assignment.

As in other years, markers were to acknowledge that there is no prescribed length for responses to the Functional Writing Assignment. While some students may concisely fulfill the requirements of the task, others may elaborate more fully upon ideas presented. Such brevity or embellishment is neither beneficial nor detrimental in and of itself, and markers were to take into account the overall effectiveness of each response when assessing its quality. With regard to envelope and letter format, recommendations are provided in the guidelines of Canada Post. Other formats/styles are to be considered equally acceptable and markers should assess the extent to which a student has 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 2013: Qualities of Student Writing that Met the Acceptable Standard**

Students whose responses were of sufficient quality to achieve the acceptable standard typically expressed “concerns about idling and how it contaminates the air and wastes fuel,” argued that “contaminants are having a bad impact on the environment and it puts people’s health in danger,” and contended that “There a people getting sick in and around the city and to prevent this from happening any further we should create a bylaw that prevents people from idling.” Many students cited the need to “make it known to our town that idling causes toxic gases and that if they keep a vehicle idling too long they could get a \$250.00 ticket” and speculated that “carbon dioxide has an impact now but the impact will be much greater in the future. That’s why we need to act now and maybe other towns will follow.” Still others provided suggestions for “setting a legal time limit for cars to no more than three minutes in a given one-hour period,” allowing exceptions for public transit vehicles,” “adjusting the time period during winter and hot summer days,” and giving “fines to force citizens to follow the law.”

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

- “To help encourage a decrease in idling I support the creation of a bylaw to limit the use of idling ... I feel that a vehicle should only be left idling no more than three minutes in a given one hour period. The bylaw would still allow for public transit to idle when necessary and idling would be accepted during extreme tempratures to heat up or cool down ... This will help the health of residants and the environment.”
- “I am writing this letter to you concerning the issue of cars idling. This not only wastes gas but also has an impact on the environment. This is a serious issue that needs to be taken care of if we want to preserve our surroundings in good conditions because the gases have a negative impact.”
- “I would like to see this bylaw become active. It will encourage drivers to limit their idling time and help save our air. The exeptions to this bylaw would be for public transportation and during extreme weather conditions ... We should also start a campaign to make people aware of the bylaw and why it is in place.”
- “Idling of vehicles is a very serious matter due to the lose of fuel and unnesicery contaminants being released into the air like carbon dioxide. This is hurting the health of humans and the ecosystems by polluting the air we breath ... The cost of gas and contaminants in the air could be reduced drastically by putting a restriction on idling time to 3 minutes in a one hour period.”
- “By making this bylaw, it would allow public transit to idle. During the extremely hot or cold months there would be a change in idling time allowed. Information sessions would be set up to raise awareness about idling too long. Fines of \$250.00 will make sure that everyone cooperates.”

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 may have occasionally impeded meaning. The envelope and letter contained occasional format errors and/or omissions.

### **Functional Writing Assignment—Observations from Standards Confirmation and Central Marking 2013: Qualities of Student Writing that Met the Standard of Excellence**

In strong responses to the topic that achieved the standard of excellence, students contended that “Many people do not realize the harm they are causing by leaving their cars running when parked,” argued that “By posting signs alongside designated no-idling zones such as schools and hospitals, we can remind citizens of the damage they are causing to our planet by releasing emissions that harm wildlife, natural ecosystems, and human beings” and proposed that “Having a public education campaign will inform drivers of the detrimental effects of idling upon the environment and motivate them to do their part in making the world a better place.” In some cases, students adopted a tone of indignation with regard to the detriments of not having an anti-idling bylaw in attempting to convince Mr. Jones of the need for its establishment. As well, some students recommended how members of the City Council could “consult with their constituents” in order to gain support for the establishment of an anti-idling bylaw.

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

- “Idling wastes many of our natural resources, many of which are non-renewable. Fuel is a non-renewable resource that we take for granted. To leave your car running, when it is not being used, seems like a harmless action. Even though it may seem harmless it is not because all of the contaminants from the exhaust pipe enter either our atmosphere or our lungs. When contaminants enter the atmosphere it destroys our planet and when they are inhaled it creates health problems that can lead to many respiratory diseases and many others. To put this unnecessary habit to a top certain measures must be taken.”
- “Lindberg is a large city and most people own a vehicle which, for the most part, they leave idling while they run and grab their mail from the post office or other such errands. This habit is a major source of pollution, not only for Lindberg, but for the communities surrounding it. I feel that a bylaw would decrease pollution and help residents save money ... Chemicals in vehicle exhaust deteriorate the ozone layer and are harmful when inhaled ... With less idling, less gasoline will be burned which benefits both the pocketbook of drivers and the people who live in the city.”
- “I would like to support the establishment of this bylaw for many reasons ... When we leave our vehicles running while we are not driving, the contaminants in the exhaust of our vehicles are being released to pollute the air in our community, which can threaten and even result in the death of plants, animals, and even humans. These contaminants cause global warming which has increased the dissolution of the Arctic and Antarctic ice caps and disrupted weather patterns, threatening the survival of our planet.”
- “Although Alberta’s economy is driven in large part by oil production and petrochemical processing, particularly in the oil sands, fossil fuels are limited in supply and we need to manage these resources carefully. As supplies dwindle, the price of fuel rises and causes inflation which negatively impacts the quality of life of citizens ... As well, the pollution created by vehicles threatens the health and well being of all people ... Idling vehicles is only one of many factors that contribute to resource depletion and toxins in the air, but it is one thing we have control over that can have an impact.”
- “Other cities have taken the necessary steps to prevent idling in their communities so why shouldn’t we? I fully support the establishment of an anti-idling bylaw to work toward restoring the environment to what it once was before human advancement destroyed plant and animal habitats and weakened the ozone layer that protects us from the sun’s harmful rays ... The demise of the polar bear in glacial regions is a prime example of the disastrous consequences of global warming, a result of pollutants amassing in the air, many of which come from vehicle exhausts.”

Student writing scored “Proficient” or “Excellent” in “Content,” as illustrated in these excerpts, was

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

### **Functional Writing Assignment—Observations from Standards Confirmation and Central Marking 2013: Qualities of Student Writing that Did Not Meet the Acceptable Standard**

Students who did not achieve the acceptable standard sometimes relied exclusively on verbatim reiteration of information presented in the assignment with little of their own thinking or development. Other students misconstrued the role of the writer of the letter to be that of a concerned parent, a member of the city council, or an adult whose career depends on “driving a truck.” In some instances, students mistakenly argued against having an anti-idling bylaw or contended that “we need a law to keep vehicles idle.” In other responses, students asserted that “Man maid vehicles are a problem in todays world be cause people don’t care about the surrondings and just drive wher ever it they want and this makes contaminants the air and makes us sick and need medicle care” in order to support the contention that “If there is less vehicles there will be better air and less people will get sick.”

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

- “I wuld like to talk to you about idling of vehicles. Thar is many vehicles that are idling around town be cause of the high gas prises. Thats destroying the ecosysteme. I wulde like to ask you to pass a law to raise gas prises so people dont have to be idling. I thank you for your time and to conider thes ideas, please reply as soon as possible.”
- “I live in New Vista witch isent that far from Lindberg. It takes only fifteen minutes to get there from my house. We go to Lindberg almost ever day when we go shoping we like the stores there, so that we can buy what we want. Thats why we should have a anti-idling bylaw to get ride of people wasting time and gas in traffic so that we can get to were we want to go.”
- “I am writing to you because of I am concerned of how vehicles are idling to much and cause bad things so there should be a crime for it. If people don’t whant to listen than they should go to jail.”
- “I do thing that the big amout of useless idling is killing the environment right now I would like you to start a law that cars can idle for a max of 3 minutes. Car owners and the human race will stay alive for a few more years.”
- “As the mayor of Lindberg I am enforming you that the anti-idling bylaw is in affect and the will be less pollution and smog for us to beable to breath. It will cost money to make it happen but the citizens want it so we can do it then we will have a good place to live.”

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

Overall, student responses to both the Narrative / Essay Writing Assignment and the Functional Writing Assignment in *Part A: Writing* of the 2013 Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement Test were consistent with the quality of student work in previous years. The vast majority of students (92.9%) successfully demonstrated the skills required to meet provincial assessment standards and achieved the acceptable standard, and 21.8% of all students achieved the standard of excellence. Of all students who wrote the *Part A: Writing* test, only 7.1% did not meet the acceptable standard.



## ***Part B: Reading—2013 Test Blueprint and Student Achievement***

In 2013, 79.6% of all students who wrote the test achieved the acceptable standard on *Part B: Reading* of the Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement Test, and 19.8% of all students who wrote achieved the standard of excellence. These results are consistent with previous administrations of *Part B: Reading* of the achievement test.

Student achievement on *Part B: Reading* of the 2013 Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement Test averaged 34.9 out of 55 (63.5%).

The blueprint below shows the reporting categories and language functions by which 2013 summary data are reported to schools and school authorities, and it shows the provincial average of student achievement by both raw score and percentage.

Reporting Category	Language Function		Provincial Student Achievement (Average Raw Score and Percentage)
	Informational	Narrative / Poetic	
<b>Identifying and Interpreting Ideas and Details</b> (2.1, 2.1, 2.3)* Students construct meaning by interpreting ideas and details pertaining to setting/atmosphere/context, character/narrator/speaker (actions, motives, values), conflict, and events.			<b>10.9/17</b> <b>(64.1%)</b>
<b>Interpreting Text Organization</b> (2.2, 2.3)* Students identify and analyze literary genres. Students identify and analyze the text creator's choice of form, tone, point of view, organizational structure, style, diction, rhetorical techniques (e.g., repetition, parallelism), text features (e.g., alliteration, onomatopoeia, imagery, dialogue, foreshadowing, suspense), and conventions.			<b>7.0/11</b> <b>(63.6%)</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>7.1/11</b> <b>(64.5%)</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>9.9/16</b> <b>(61.9%)</b>
<b>Provincial Student Achievement</b> <b>(Average Raw Score and Percentage)</b>	<b>14.7/22</b> <b>(66.8%)</b>	<b>20.1/33</b> <b>(60.9%)</b>	<b>Part B: Reading</b> <b>Total Test Raw</b> <b>Score = 55</b>

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

## ***Part B: Reading—Commentary on 2013 Student Achievement***

The following is a discussion of student achievement on *Part B: Reading* of the 2013 Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement Test. Sample questions 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, students who achieved the acceptable standard were able to examine one writer’s recollections of a personal experience in an excerpt from a memoir, interpret another writer’s thoughts in an article recounting a personal excursion through the wilderness, and analyze information presented by the writer of a newspaper article. The seven narrative/poetic texts—including two poems, two cartoons, excerpts from two short stories, and one excerpt from a novel—enabled many students who met the acceptable standard to demonstrate their ability to understand how elements of a metaphor enhance the meaning of ideas, identify traits that distinguish characters, determine the conflict underlying events, recognize the atmosphere created by facets of a scene depicted, determine the idea suggested by a poet about people’s lives, determine the significance of a narrator’s recounting of a personal experience, and make inferences from visual details. Students who achieved the standard of excellence additionally illustrated strengths in applying their understanding of each informational text as a whole to elements within to determine subtle interrelationships among events, details, and ideas. These students were also able to appreciate how characterization establishes conflict, how seemingly coincidental events are causally related, and how universal experiences are illustrated in narrative/poetic texts. Students who did not meet the acceptable standard, while able to recognize basic details and straightforward ideas in informational and narrative/poetic texts, had some difficulty with questions requiring close reading of text. These differences in student performance are evident in the following question taken from the 2013 Grade 9 English Language Arts *Part B: Reading* Achievement Test.

In question 17, students were required to interpret details in specified lines of an excerpt from a nonfiction book to identify what the writer reveals regarding another writer’s ideas (SO 2.1).

17. In lines 16 to 24, the writer reveals that Herrero’s suggestions regarding what to do in order to avoid being attacked by a bear are
- A. complex
  - \*B. contradictory
  - C. well researched
  - D. easily understood

Of all students who wrote the test, 73.8% were able to determine—from details related to how “To ward off an aggressive black bear, Herrero suggests making a lot of noise” (line 16) and how “he then adds judiciously, these tactics could ‘merely provoke the bear’” (lines 18–19) and from details related to how “he suggests that hikers should consider making noises from time to time ... to alert bears of their presence” (lines 19–21) and how “he cautions that ‘there may be danger in making noise,’ since that can attract a hungry bear that might otherwise overlook you” (lines 22–24)—that the suggestions provided by Herrero are inherently contradictory and chose the correct answer (B). Of those students who did not select the keyed response, 9.4% chose A (possibly due to inaccurately inferring that the listing of several of Herrero’s suggestions adds to the complexity of his ideas or incorrectly concluding that the contradictions in the advice given make Herrero’s suggestions complex in nature); 5.2% chose C (a choice that could have been based on the misunderstanding that the writer’s references to what “the books tell you” (line 5) and “all the instruction manuals” (line 37) and the inclusion of quotations from a book written by Stephen Herrero suggest that Herrero’s ideas are well researched); and 11.5% chose D (which may have resulted

from the incomplete interpretation that the simplicity of suggestions such as “banging pots and pans together, throwing sticks and rocks, and ‘running at the bear’” (lines 17–18) and “singing a song” (line 20) indicates that Herrero’s ideas are easily understood). Of those students who achieved the acceptable standard, 75.5% selected the correct answer. A total of 98.0% 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 test as a whole, 32.8% chose the correct answer.

Question 42 required that students examine specified lines in a newspaper article to identify the writer’s conclusion regarding the topic under discussion (SO 2.1).

42. In lines 59 to 64, the writer concludes that
- A. workers need to join labour unions to influence government decisions
  - B. all citizens should provide financial donations to literacy groups
  - C. providing job training for workers is beneficial to employers
  - \*D. promoting literacy is a responsibility shared by all citizens

Of all students who wrote the test, 54.5% chose the correct answer (**D**) by identifying—from the assertion that “Literacy is not a special interest group” (line 59) and the argument to “urge our governments to realize the importance of the work of literacy groups across the country and fund them accordingly” (lines 60–62)—that promoting literacy is a responsibility shared by all citizens. Of those students who did not select the keyed response, 15.4% chose **A** (perhaps a result of incorrectly inferring from details pertaining to “labour shortages and faltering productivity” (lines 63–64) that the writer is concluding that labour unions are necessary in order for workers to be able to influence decisions made by government); 12.1% chose **B** (a choice that could have been based on the incorrect interpretation that references to “budget season” (line 60) and the need for “our governments” to “fund” (line 61) literacy groups “accordingly” (line 62) suggest that individual citizens should make charitable contributions to literacy groups); and 18.0% chose **C** (a choice that may have been based on details regarding workers who are “functionally illiterate” (line 21) or “giving workers the best, most up-to-date, and most efficient tools with which to apply their trade” (lines 47–48) from elsewhere in the article which may have led to the incorrect interpretation that the writer is advocating the benefits to employers of providing workers with job training). Of those students who achieved the acceptable standard, 53.1% selected the correct answer. A total of 86.3% 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 test as a whole, 19.9% chose the correct answer.

In the section of the 2013 achievement test blueprinted for curricular content pertaining **Interpreting Text Organization**, students who achieved the acceptable standard were able to identify features characteristic of various literary genres, recognize how awareness of tone enhances comprehension, and understand the significance of the point of view from which informational texts are presented. These students could also appreciate the effects of text features such as punctuation, italics, dialogue, imagery, and sound devices such as alliteration and onomatopoeia in narrative/poetic texts. Students who achieved the standard of excellence were additionally able to recognize how a unifying effect is created by the organizational structure and diction employed by writers of informational texts and how writers’ stylistic and rhetorical choices reinforce meaning in narrative/poetic texts. For students who did not meet the acceptable standard, questions that required an understanding of a writer’s overall development or unique style of writing often proved challenging. The following question illustrates some of these differences in the levels of student achievement on the 2013 Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement Test.

Question 27 required that students analyze events in an excerpt from a short story to determine the element of fiction provided by the writer in specified lines (SO 2.3).

27. Considering the entire excerpt, lines 1 to 11 provide

- A. an underlying moral
- \*B. background exposition
- C. details regarding the main characters
- D. an introduction to the central conflict

The correct answer (**B**) was selected by 62.5% of all students who wrote the test (based on their ability to analyze the elements of the short story presented in order to determine that the description of the hockey rink—in “the Wheelsburg rink had looked as if it might collapse at any moment—and for twenty years it had continued to fool everyone” (lines 1–2)—and the townspeople—in “But Wheelsburg hockey fans didn’t mind a touch of inconvenience or even danger with their sports fare” (lines 7–8)—provides background exposition that establishes the context within which the ensuing events occur). Option **A** was selected by 12.2% of all students (who may have based their answer on the invalid assumption that the reference to how “Wheelsburg fans” (line 9) “gambled on the probability” (line 10) that the roof would cave in “when there was no game in progress” (line 11) in some way provides a moral for the events described in the excerpt). Option **C** was selected by 8.1% of all students (which could have resulted from incorrectly identifying the “Wheelsburg hockey fans” (line 7) as main characters in the story). A total of 17.1% of all students selected **D** (possibly a result of inaccurately identifying the point at which the central conflict is introduced—which occurs in line 15 with the establishment of the Tim and Mike Cardigan’s excitement when they see Skates Kelsey, the renowned hockey scout). Many of those students who achieved the acceptable standard chose the correct answer, with 63.0% selecting the keyed response. Most of those students who met the standard of excellence (84.1%) chose the correct answer whereas 31.3% 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 recognize the denotative and connotative meanings of words and phrases and could recognize the use of figures of speech—such as irony, metaphor, personification, and hyperbole—in informational and narrative/poetic texts. In addition to these abilities, students who achieved the standard of excellence were able to appreciate how meaning is reinforced through figurative language and how humour is achieved through the use of irony in informational and narrative/poetic texts. Students who did not achieve the acceptable standard were often challenged by questions that required defining words from context and encountered some difficulty interpreting literary comparisons in informational and narrative/poetic texts. Such differences in student achievement on the 2013 Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement Test are shown in the following question.

Question 13 required that students identify the word in a poem that is used by the poet to reinforce an image evoked by another word (SO 2.3).

13. The image evoked by the word “paddling” (line 8) is reinforced by the poet through the use of the word

- A. “rough” (line 8)
- B. “childhood” (line 9)
- \*C. “voyageur” (line 10)
- D. “slippery” (line 15)

Of all students who wrote the test, 46.3% were able to choose the keyed response (**C**) by correctly recognizing that image evoked by the metaphor used to describe the son’s behavior as “paddling against the rough / edges of childhood” (lines 8–9) is reinforced by the reference in line 10 to the son’s being “a voyageur”—a term that is footnoted as “a workman, boatman, or guide who used water routes to transport goods and supplies in the fur trade in Canada”—who is “exploring the edge of a flat / world” (lines 13–14).” Option **A** was chosen by 35.9% of all students, who may have selected this answer based on the incorrect literal interpretation that the boy’s “furious / paddling” (lines 7–8) is indicative of “rough” (line 8) waters.

Option **B** was chosen by 14.6% of all students, and could have been selected by students who may have erroneously determined that the image of the son paddling a boat literally refers to an event from his childhood. Option **D** was chosen by 3.2% of all students—who may have inaccurately equated the paddling of a boat with the experience of being on “slippery water / slides” (lines 15–16). A total of 44.4% of students who achieved the acceptable standard answered this question correctly. Of those students who achieved the standard of excellence, 69.2% chose the correct answer. Of those students who did not meet the acceptable standard, 26.6% selected the keyed response.

In the blueprinting category of **Synthesizing Ideas**, students achieving the acceptable standard were able to draw conclusions and make generalizations by integrating information to identify the tone, purpose, theme, or main idea of informational and narrative/poetic texts. Students achieving the standard of excellence could also derive from elements within a passage overarching ideas, detect subtleties of language that suggest a writer’s tone, and appreciate the mood created in informational and narrative/poetic texts. Those students who did not meet the acceptable standard often struggled with questions that required synthesizing aspects of the reading selections to form comprehensive generalizations or judgments and questions requiring recognition of the verisimilitude of fictional events. The following questions exemplify some of these differences among the varying levels of student achievement.

In question 28, students needed to be able to synthesize information in an excerpt from a short story to determine the main motivation behind a character’s actions (SO 2.2).

- 28.** Throughout this excerpt, Skates Kelsey is **mainly** motivated by
- \***A.** self-interest
  - B.** moral integrity
  - C.** passion for hockey
  - D.** love of competition

The correct answer (**A**) was selected by 37.0% of all students who wrote the test; these students were able to synthesize information regarding Skates Kelsey’s preoccupation with his own circumstances—in references to how “Mr. Kelsey’s immediate problem was to pay his hotel bill and get transportation back to the city” (lines 24–25) and how “This, he told himself, was the greatest break of his life” (line 94) because he would get his “job back” (line 95) and ask “for a raise. And get it” (line 96)—in order to draw the conclusion that Kelsey is mainly concerned with his own self-interest. Option **B** was selected by 6.5% of all students, who may have overlooked the aforementioned information and misconstrued Kelsey’s decision to sign Tim Cardigan for a tryout to be based on a desire to behave in accordance with his personal moral values. Option **C** was selected by 44.1% of all students, who may have incorrectly focused on information related to Kelsey’s interest in how “Tim Cardigan could skate” (line 35), how “It all looked so simple and natural and easy that Kelsey was sure the Wheelsburg fans didn’t appreciate it” (lines 54–55), and how “It was Cardigan’s footwork that did it” (line 70) in order to conclude that Kelsey’s main motivation throughout the excerpt is his passion for hockey. Option **D** was selected by 12.3% of all students, who could have erroneously inferred from Kelsey’s reflections—such as those regarding how “He was around and in there like a gust of wind, with the defenceman clattering to the ice” (lines 50–51) and how “It was fun to watch Cardigan handle this watchdog” (line 64)—that his primary motivation is love of competition. Students achieving the acceptable standard found this question difficult, evident in the fact that 31.9% of these students chose the correct answer. A total of 75.8% of students who achieved the standard of excellence chose the correct answer. Of those students who did not meet the acceptable standard, 14.3% answered this question correctly.

In question 55, students needed to be able to form a generalization regarding the intent underlying a character’s actions in a cartoon (SO 2.2).

55. The main idea underlying this cartoon is based on the mother’s desire to teach her daughter to be
- A. ambitious
  - B. resourceful
  - C. considerate
  - \*D. accountable

The correct answer (**D**) was selected by 65.5% of all students who wrote the test; these students were able to derive—from the young girl’s daydreaming of how snow “makes everything look smooth and perfect and clean” (Frame 5), her mother’s demands, and her observation of her messy room while reflecting that it is “too bad” that “it doesn’t snow inside” (Frame 8)—that the mother wishes for her daughter to be accountable for tidying her room. Option **A** was selected by 9.5% of all students, who may have incorrectly inferred that the girl’s actions result from a lack of ambition. Option **B** was selected by 9.2% of all students, who may have misunderstood the mother’s intention to be the desire to teach her daughter to be able to make use of her personal resources. Option **C** was selected by 15.5% of all students, who could have inaccurately assumed that the mother is concerned that the girl’s actions demonstrate a lack of consideration for others. Students achieving the acceptable standard found this question accessible, evident in the fact that 66.2% of these students chose the correct answer. A total of 86.7% of students who achieved the standard of excellence chose the correct answer. Of those students who did not meet the acceptable standard, 33.3% answered this question correctly.

Overall, student achievement on *Part B: Reading* of the 2013 Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement Test was strong and comparable to students’ levels of achievement in previous years. Most students (79.6%) were able to meet the standards within the *Part B: Reading* test, and 19.8% of students achieved the standard of excellence. Of all students who wrote the *Part B: Reading* test, 20.4% did not meet the acceptable standard.



# *Achievement Testing Program Support Documents*

The Alberta Education website contains several documents that provide valuable information about various aspects of the achievement testing program. To access these documents, go to the Alberta Education website at [education.alberta.ca](http://education.alberta.ca). From the home page, follow this path: *Teachers > Provincial Testing > Achievement Tests*, and then click on one of the specific links under the *Achievement Tests* heading to access the following documents.

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

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

## **Subject Bulletins**

At the beginning of each school year, subject bulletins are posted on the Alberta Education website for all achievement test subjects for grades 3, 6, and 9. Each bulletin provides descriptions of assessment standards, test design and blueprinting, and scoring guides (where applicable) as well as suggestions for preparing students to write the tests and information about how teachers can participate in test development activities.

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

For achievement tests in grades 3, 6, and 9 English Language Arts and Français/French Language Arts, writing samples have been designed to be used by teachers and students to enhance students' writing and to assess this writing relative to the standards inherent in the scoring guides for the achievement tests. The exemplars documents contain sample responses with scoring rationales that relate student work to the scoring categories and scoring criteria.

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

All January achievement tests (parts A and B) for Grade 9 semestered students are secured and must be returned to Alberta Education. All May/June achievement tests are secured except Part A of grades 3, 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 *Parent Guide to Provincial Achievement Testing* for grades 3, 6, and 9 are posted on the Alberta Education website. Each guide presents answers to frequently asked questions about the achievement testing program as well as descriptions of and sample questions for each achievement test subject.

## **Involvement of Teachers**

Teachers of grades 3, 6, and 9 are encouraged to take part in activities related to the achievement testing program. These activities include item development, test validation, field testing, and marking. In addition, arrangements can be made through the Alberta Regional Professional Development Consortia for teacher in-service workshops on topics such as Interpreting Achievement Test Results to Improve Student Learning.