

Alberta Provincial
Achievement Testing

Assessment
Highlights
2014–2015

GRADE
9

English Language Arts

Alberta  Government

This document contains assessment highlights from the 2015 Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement Test.

Assessment highlights provide information about the overall test, the test blueprints, and student performance on the 2015 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 2015 achievement test. This information is intended for teachers and is best used in conjunction with the multi-year and detailed school reports that are available to schools via the extranet. **Assessment highlights reports** for all achievement test subjects and grades will be **posted on the Alberta Education website every year** in the fall.

Released test items, which contained approximately 25% of the total number of test items from previously secured achievement tests, were mailed to school administrators each fall from 2004 to 2006 and had been made available to teachers in only print form because of copyright limitations. **Every second year**, as of the fall of 2007, **a complete test** for all achievement test subjects and grades (except grades 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.

This document was written primarily for:

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

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The 2015 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 2015 Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement Test. It complements the detailed school and jurisdiction reports.

How Many Students Wrote the Test?

A total of 38 602 students wrote both parts of the 2015 Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement Test.

What Was the Test Like?

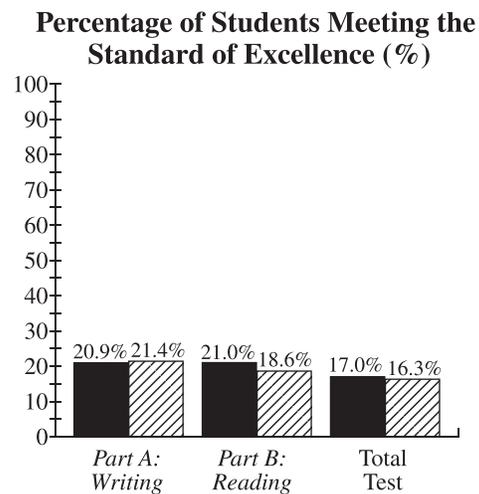
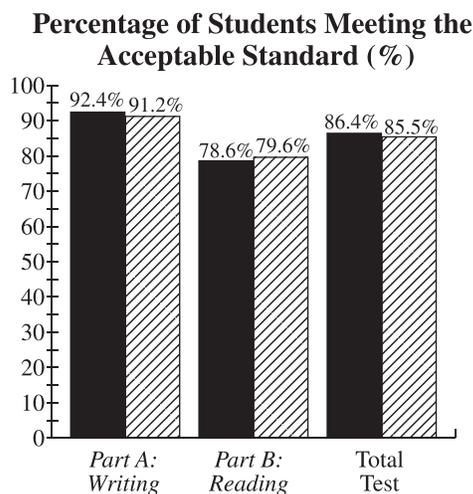
The 2015 Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement Test had two parts that were weighted equally.

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

Part B: Reading consisted of 55 multiple-choice questions based on ten reading selections that were either informational or narrative/poetic in nature.

How Well Did Students Do?

The percentages of students meeting the acceptable standard and the standard of excellence in 2015 are consistent with 2014, as shown in the graphs below. Out of a total possible score of 110 (parts A and B), the provincial average on the test was 73.8 (67.1%). The results presented in this report are based on scores achieved by all students who wrote the test, including those in French Immersion and Francophone programs. Detailed provincial assessment results are contained in the school and jurisdiction reports that are available on the extranet.



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

 2015 Achievement Standards: The percentage of students in the province who met the acceptable standard and the standard of excellence on the 2015 Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement Test (based on those who wrote).

Part A: Writing—2015 Test Blueprint

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

Writing Assignment and Scoring / Reporting Category	Description of Writing Assignment	Achievement Standards
Assignment I—Narrative / Essay Writing	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
Content* (2.1, 2.2, 2.4, 3.1, 3.3, 4.1, 4.3)** (selecting ideas and details to achieve a purpose) Students respond to a given topic by writing either a narrative or an essay. Students establish their purpose, select ideas and supporting details to achieve their purpose, and communicate in a manner appropriate to their audience.		
Organization* (3.1, 3.3, 4.1, 4.3)** (organizing ideas and details into a coherent whole) Students organize their ideas to produce a unified and coherent narrative or essay that links events, details, sentences, and paragraphs, and that supports their purpose.		
Sentence Structure (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.		
Vocabulary (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.		
Conventions (4.2)** (using the conventions of written language correctly and effectively) Students use conventions accurately and effectively to communicate.		
Assignment II—Functional Writing		
Content* (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.	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.	
Content Management* (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—2015 Student Achievement

In 2015, 91.2% 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 21.4% of students who wrote achieved the standard of excellence.

Student Achievement by Assignment and Reporting Category

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

		Narrative / Essay Writing Assignment					Functional Writing Assignment	
		Reporting Category					Reporting Category	
		Content	Organization	Sentence Structure	Vocabulary	Conventions	Content	Content Management
Writing Standard	Score*	% of Students	% of Students	% of Students	% of Students	% of Students	% of Students	% of Students
Excellent	5.0	5.5%	5.1%	5.9%	6.7%	5.9%	4.3%	6.6%
	4.5	7.6%	7.4%	7.3%	7.0%	7.4%	5.6%	7.9%
Proficient	4.0	22.3%	21.1%	21.6%	22.1%	21.8%	18.2%	22.2%
Satisfactory	3.5	17.7%	18.1%	17.0%	17.9%	16.1%	14.8%	15.4%
	3.0	33.4%	34.2%	33.6%	38.7%	29.3%	34.6%	27.6%
	2.5	7.2%	7.4%	7.8%	4.7%	9.3%	9.7%	8.4%
Limited	2.0	5.0%	5.4%	5.7%	2.3%	8.5%	9.7%	9.2%
	1.5	0.5%	0.5%	0.6%	0.3%	0.9%	1.1%	1.0%
Poor	1.0	0.4%	0.4%	0.3%	0.1%	0.4%	0.9%	0.6%
Insufficient / No Response	0	0.4%	0.4%	0.4%	0.4%	0.4%	1.0%	1.0%

*Scores of 4.5, 3.5, 2.5, and 1.5 occur only when local marks and central marks are averaged. In 2015, 29 186 (76.5% of the total of 38 602) 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 6.2%.

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

During the 2015 scoring session, 162 teachers from throughout the province scored 38 602 student test booklets. Teachers who marked the tests were generally pleased with the quality of most papers. Students who wrote *Part A: Writing* of the 2015 Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement Test achieved an average of 37.2 out of a total raw score of 55 (67.6%). 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 13.2 out of 20 (66.0%).

Throughout the 2015 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 are 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 2015: General Impressions

In the **Narrative/Essay Writing Assignment**, students were required to “Write either a narrative or an essay about **the importance of overcoming obstacles in life.**” This assignment was accessible for students at all levels of achievement. The **literary prompts**—which included quotations from works by Edmund Burke (as in “Another source of greatness is difficulty. When any work seems to have required immense force and labour to effect it, the idea is grand.”), Johann Goethe (as in “Nothing upon earth is without its difficulties! It is the secret impulse within, it is the love and the delight we feel, that helps us to conquer obstacles, to clear out new paths, and to overleap the bounds of that narrow circle in which others poorly toil.”), Roland Dixon (as in “First by right comes the true explorer, for whom travel is not a means, but an end in itself. [...] For him the life of the trail, the triumph over obstacles, the thrill of danger, are things in themselves desirable and beyond price; his reward lies not in the attainment, but in the quest.”), and William Channing (as in “I believe that difficulties are more important to the human mind than what we call assistances. Work we all must, if we mean to bring out and perfect our nature. Even if we do not work with the hands, we must undergo equivalent toil in some other direction. No business or study which does not present obstacles, tasking to the full the intellect and the will, is worthy of a man.”)—provided many students with opportunities to explore ideas related to overcoming obstacles in life.

The **visual prompts**—which included two girls having a conversation (wherein one girl states “This project is too difficult. I can’t do it!” and the other girl says “You should try to break it down into smaller steps that could make it easier to complete.”), a student with an arm in a sling speaking to another student in a school hallway (saying “Although I’m left-handed, I have learned to write with my right hand since I broke my wrist a few weeks ago.”), a coach speaking to members of a sports team (saying “We lost our first game but, if we practise and work together as a team, we will win the next one!”), and an elderly woman speaking to a boy (saying “When I moved to Canada, I had to learn English in order to get a job. Hard work and determination helped me gain the skills I needed to be successful.”)—also offered students a variety of ideas to choose to explore in their responses.

In responses to the Narrative/Essay Writing Assignment, many students addressed the topic through a discussion of terms synonymous with “obstacles”—including “challenges,” “difficulties,” “obstructions,” “impediments,” “hindrances,” and “barriers”—and commented on the importance of “dealing with,”

“addressing,” “resolving,” or “coming to terms with” a variety of antagonistic forces. When developing their responses, a number of students responded to the assignment by recounting or explaining situations in which individuals have striven to overcome obstacles. Such responses examined experiences associated with moving to a new city or country, going to a different school, doing homework, studying in order to pass a test in a difficult subject, or playing a sport. Other responses documented obstacles to be overcome when learning how to drive, recovering from a physical injury, or enduring mistreatment when being bullied or discriminated against by others. Still others commented on the obstacles inherent in advancements in technology, including conflicts arising from interactions on social media such as Facebook.

Some students analyzed character traits that enable individuals to overcome obstacles in their lives. Perseverance, determination, adaptability, courageousness, and optimism were among the traits students deemed necessary for success in overcoming obstacles. Other students reflected on personal experiences and elaborated on the value of having the support of siblings, parents, grandparents, and/or friends when overcoming obstacles. In some responses, students presented a process analysis of the sequence of steps involved in being able to overcome obstacles or offered advice regarding the benefits of breaking complex tasks down into smaller parts, staying focused on a goal, and putting in great effort.

A number of students elucidated the benefits of being able to overcome obstacles such as becoming stronger emotionally and physically, gaining a feeling of accomplishment, building confidence, being proud of one’s achievements, and learning life lessons. Still others spoke of the value of overcoming obstacles in empowering individuals to strengthen their character, earn the respect of others, and avoid having personal regrets. Some students chose to support their ideas with a discussion of the obstacles overcome by celebrities in professional sports (such as Michael Jordan, Usain Bolt, and Brett Favre), the music industry (such as Taylor Swift, Nick Jonas, and Lenny Kravitz), or television and movies (such as Oprah Winfrey, Ellen DeGeneres, and Angelina Jolie) as well as historical figures (such as Rosa Parks, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Terry Fox), political leaders (such as Barack Obama, Nelson Mandela, and Sir Winston Churchill), and notable humanitarians (such as Bill Gates, Maya Angelou, and Mother Teresa). Other students referenced characters from literary works (including *The Wild Children*, *Touching Spirit Bear*, *The Giver*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, and *Ender’s Game*) or incorporated elements from video games (such as *Dragon Age*, *Skyrim*, and *Assassin’s Creed*) into their responses.

Narrative/Essay Writing Assignment—Observations from Standards Confirmation and Central Marking 2015: Qualities of Student Writing that Met the Acceptable Standard

In many responses that received a score of “**Satisfactory**” in “**Content**,” students presented ideas stemming from the premise that “In everything you do, there will be obstacles. Because you cannot avoid them, you need to try to find ways to deal with them.” Some students suggested that facing “day to day” obstacles prepares us for the “really big obstacles we may encounter in life.” Others presented examples of individuals whose obstacles include learning a new language, making new friends, and rebounding from the breakup of a personal relationship. A number of students examined the struggles of individuals in attempting to deal with peer pressure, the loss of a loved one, addictions to alcohol or drugs, or eating disorders. Still other students purported that overcoming obstacles requires “a positive attitude,” “hard work,” “the will to survive,” and “the ability to focus on your goals.” In some responses, students spoke of how confronting obstacles enables individuals to “learn from mistakes,” “decrease stress levels,” and keep “moving forward in life to a better future.” In other responses, students commented on the value of “believing in yourself” when attempting to overcome obstacles, “facing obstacles as soon as they happen,” and “improving your skills by creating new ones that you probably never knew you had.” In addition, a number of students acknowledged that “When overcoming an obstacle it’s okay to ask for help from others” and some noted how “by overcoming obstacles, you can help others do the same.”

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

- “Obstacles are in every day of our life. Some are easier and some are harder than others to overcome. [...] By pursuing through obstacles, you get stronger and smarter so you can set yourself up for success

when your older, because you have all these skills and strategies for getting over obstacles. Soon overcoming obstacles will get easier if you practice, break bad habits, and never give up.”

- “Many teenagers and adults go through rough times in their life. But the ones that can deal with those rough times are the ones that have strategies and skills that help them with these situations. The three skills and strategies that are good to have while dealing with a tough situation are having a strong mind, physically strong body, and to have self-motivation.”
- “Marcus sat on the edge of his bed. It had been four years since the bear attack and he didn’t feel any better about it now than he did when it happened. He dreamed about it all the time. Every week he went to a specialist who tried but couldn’t help him. No matter how hard Marcus tried he couldn’t overcome this barrier in his life.”
- “Life is all about overcoming obstacles. From the time we’re born until we take our very last breath we are overcoming obstacles. These obstacles make us better people and give us a better life. We learn a lot from them and without overcoming obstacles we wouldn’t be able to do half the things we want to. The obstacles we face are not there to punish us or tear us down. They are there to reward us and build us into better people.”
- “When I was young I strived to be the best at soccer but I was always the shortest person. I spent every day playing in the field against the taller kids. I would always lose and I wanted to give up. But I would always keep on practicing. [...] After many years and a lot of practice I became very skilled at soccer and I was able to play against the other players that were bigger than me. What I learned from this is that I am capable of solving my own personal issues as long as I am willing to never give up.”

In narrative and essay responses scored “**Satisfactory**” in “**Content**,” such as those from which these excerpts were taken, the students’ exploration of the topic was clear and/or logical, the purpose was evident, relevant and/or generic details were provided to support appropriate and/or predictable ideas, and the writing was straightforward and/or generalized and occasionally appealed to the reader’s interest. The “**Organization**” of such responses was characterized by a functional introduction that established a focus that was generally sustained, events and/or details that were developed in a discernible order, transitions that mechanically connected events and/or details within and/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 2015: Qualities of Student Writing that Met the Standard of Excellence

Students whose responses received scores of “**Proficient**” or “**Excellent**” in “**Content**” often purported that it is necessary to be “open minded to new possibilities,” “resilient in overcoming adversity,” and “true to personal values” in order to be able to “refrain from dwelling on past regrets” and to “embark upon a process of self-discovery.” In many responses, students contended that when overcoming obstacles, individuals may face “a pivotal turning point in defining their character” through which “a new perspective on life may be gained” and “others can be inspired.” Some students presented ideas related to how “we need to try and fail rather than run and regret,” how “we learn best from our failures,” and how “what does not defeat us makes us stronger.” Other students discussed the challenges inherent in decisions made by “political leaders on the well-being of citizens, the state of the economy, or the safety of the country,” the bravery of “inventors like Isaac Newton and Galileo in uncovering newfound truths about the world,” and the global implications of “preserving the environment and endangered species.” Some students spoke figuratively about how “obstacles may open doors to new experiences,” “an obstacle is a mountain to be climbed,” “overcoming obstacles requires forging a path of your own,” “an obstacle is a fork in the road and you must make a decision about what you are going to do,” and “being able to overcome obstacles is like learning to ride a bike because the more times you succeed, the better you become at even more complex challenges.”

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

- “As the Sultan rode back into Cairo after having lost the battle, he saw the downcast looks of the men and women in the streets. They were incredibly disheartened by the injured, limping soldiers who had once stood so proud and tall. Having faith that he could drive out the crusaders, Saladin planned retaliation. [...] He rose a new army to lead the offensive on the sands of the deserts. [...] In 1199, he succeeded in destroying the Hospitallers and the Templars, crushing Richard’s army. Through the lessons earned from losing the first battle, he gained the wisdom and the strength required to defend the caliphate against invaders.”
- “Sometimes the obstacles we face seem insurmountable, but if we look at them with a different perspective, we can understand how to overcome these difficulties. [...] Learning to conquer our obstacles enables us to explore the world that surrounds us, and as we learn about ourselves and our environment we gain maturity. Maturity is necessary in order for us to achieve independence and discover for ourselves how to overcome the challenges that occur each day in our lives.”
- “Cameron ran his fingers through his hair as he read the comments on the last video he posted on the internet. He encountered kind comments, enthusiastic about his unique voice and raw talent, but the majority were cruel. A knot formed in his stomach as he read them. He knew he shouldn’t be reading them at all; it was like constantly creating a new wound after the previous one had healed. [...] Cameron learned that dealing with criticism was like playing the guitar. Sometimes he got blisters on his fingers but this never stopped him from playing and they would always heal over time.”
- “Imagine what life would be like if everyone was too scared or lazy to overcome obstacles. The world would be completely different than it is now. People would never have sailed across the oceans to find new lands, the moon would have remained unexplored, and the technology we have today would not exist. However, overcoming obstacles is something people do every day. Although it may not be as daring as entering a new world, each and every person overcomes obstacles in their daily lives.”
- “Our everyday lives are filled with obstacles that we need to overcome. Yardwork, for example, is an activity some people find onerous. The grass needs to be cut regularly, the garden needs to be weeded, and the hedges need to be trimmed. [...] Going to school can also present individuals with obstacles to be overcome. Book reports, science labs, essays are daily requirements in school. [...] Regardless of the frequency or the magnitude of any obstacle, be tenacious, be dedicated, be realistic, and you will be successful.”

In responses receiving scores of “**Proficient**” or “**Excellent**” in “**Content**,” such as those from which these excerpts were taken, students explored the topic in an adept, plausible, insightful, and/or imaginative manner. The purpose was intentional or deliberate. Ideas presented were thoughtful, sound, perceptive, and/or carefully chosen. 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/or between sentences and/or 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 and/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 2015: Qualities of Student Writing that Did Not Meet the Acceptable Standard

Student writing scored “**Poor**” or “**Limited**” in “**Content**” was often characterized by an exploration of the topic that was tenuous, simplistic, minimal, and/or tangential. For example, some students discussed

the topic in absolute terms, through statements such as “When you give up just like you will always have a harder life,” “It doesn’t matter if you handle the obstacle good or bad it doesn’t matter you will always get over it,” and “Obstacles keep you doing the same thing over and over and you don’t know that to do about it.” In some responses, students quoted randomly from the prompts provided without elaborating on them or connecting them to ideas presented. In other responses, students depicted scenarios in which little context was provided regarding a character’s personality, circumstances, or behaviour in the synopsis of events presented. Some students addressed the topic through ambiguous declarations such as “You will never get very far if you don’t give up in a scenario where it’s hard or confusing” and “Everyone’s obstacles are different because we all have different interests and different views on the world and skills.” Students at this level of achievement often struggled with clarifying their ideas in relation to the topic and were not always successful in conveying their thoughts clearly and completely.

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

- “About 2 years ago I sprained my ankle and I couldn’t play soccer for 2 months so I ran every day to stay in shape so I was able to play again I could still keep up with everyone and not fall behind in anything. [...] If I didn’t I could have been done with soccer or just gave up.”
- “How my cousin broke his arm well first of all he was riding his friend’s bike and flew front wheels and landed on his arm and broke it. So when he played guitar here he can go Jimy Hendrix and he got into a fight and he won because he’s the best. And this time he broke his arm doing the same thing but this time not as bad.”
- “Obstacles are important to have them because without them life would be very boring. For example if we didn’t have to try in school people would not come to school and they would fall asleep if they did so people would not get jobs because they didn’t go to school and didn’t learn for that job.”
- “Overcoming obstacles gives you a sense of accomplishment because when you accomplish your goal you feel good it will make you happier when you accomplish your goal. [...] So that’s why you need to overcome obstacles to feel a feeling of accomplishment.”
- “Coaches are people that help other people with obstacles in sports, they help them practice. They help people do good they cheer them on even if they aren’t doing that good. They help people when they go to the real game. They are very nice people but sometimes they are tough on you. They tell you to do better and some a lot of patience but some have no patience and that is another obstacle you have but you have to keep trying.”

In student responses scored “**Poor**” or “**Limited**” in “**Content**,” such as those from which these excerpts were taken, the purpose was vague or insubstantial. Ideas presented were superficial, ambiguous, overgeneralized, and/or underdeveloped. Supporting details were imprecise, abbreviated, irrelevant, and/or scant. The writing was uncertain, incomplete, confusing, and/or lacking in validity with little appeal to the reader’s interest. In “**Organization**,” the introduction lacked purpose and was obscure, ineffective, and/or not functional. The development of events and/or details was haphazard, incoherent, and/or not clearly discernible. Transitions were lacking, indiscriminately used, absent, and/or inappropriately used to connect events and/or details within and/or between sentences and/or paragraphs. Closure was abrupt, contrived, unrelated to the focus, ineffectual, and/or missing. “**Sentence Structure**,” “**Vocabulary**,” and “**Conventions**” in responses receiving scores of “**Poor**” or “**Limited**” typically demonstrated a lack of control and little or no variety in sentence structure. Imprecise and/or ineffective words and expressions were used inaccurately or inappropriately. 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 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. 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 2015: 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 “Kelly Greer, a student at Tremont School,” students strove to “convince Ms. [Jill] Robertson and the other members of the Markland Chamber of Commerce of the benefits of participating in a work-experience program.” In most responses, students referenced or listed the suggested benefits for students (regarding “part-time employment at local businesses,” “work done after school and/or on weekends,” “having first-hand experience in various occupations,” “gaining expertise in areas of personal interest,” and “life skills”) and for businesses (regarding how “Students selected for the program would demonstrate enthusiasm, initiative, and a willingness to learn” and how “students would not need to be paid wages for their work”). However, 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. Jill Robertson, chairperson of the Markland Chamber of Commerce,” to “**persuade her and the business owners who are members to participate in a work-experience program**” and to “Provide enough information to convince Ms. Robertson and her colleagues of the advantages of this program for both students and businesses”—was significant in determining the quality of student responses.

Most students understood their role in “asking businesses in the Markland Chamber of Commerce to volunteer to take part” in a work-experience program that could be “an amazing opportunity for the students that are interested” as well as being “good for business owners in our community.” Many students documented the benefits for students, including “finding out first-hand more about professions in a chosen field they might one day pursue,” having “the chance to experience the pros and cons of a particular profession,” learning to “accept responsibility,” developing “confidence in their talents and abilities,” and gaining “insight into what is expected of a working citizen.” Other students argued that such a program could “keep teenagers who have too much free time from getting into trouble” and provide them with “life skills such as being independent, earning the trust of others, and being able to interact with others.”

The benefits to businesses that were acknowledged by many students included “wages being optional” as well as the program “having no cost for businesses” and potentially allowing for a “larger profit.” Some students contended that business owners could “teach students valuable life skills like first aid and workplace safety” and could “pass on wisdom to a younger generation.” Still other students asserted that student participants in the program could “bring youthful enthusiasm to the businesses in which they work” and possess “strong interpersonal skills that will help them interact with clients and customers.” Other students contended that, in the absence of a work-experience program, “it will be harder for students to get a job” because “students will be in a lose lose situation because experience is needed to get a job but a job is needed in order to gain the experience required to get hired.” In many responses, students provided information regarding how the addressee could contact the sender should she wish to do so, but this was not a requirement of the assignment.

In some responses, students reiterated verbatim some of the suggested benefits of a work-experience program for students and businesses that were provided in the test booklet. When assessing student responses, markers were to recognize that the assignment is framed primarily within outcomes specified in **General Outcome 3: Managing Ideas and Information**, and were to assess the extent to which students were successful in incorporating elements of the information provided into their writing in order to achieve their purpose.

As in other years, markers were to acknowledge that there was no prescribed length for responses to the Functional Writing Assignment. While some students concisely fulfilled the requirements of the task, others elaborated more fully on ideas that they presented. Such brevity or embellishment was neither beneficial nor detrimental in and of itself, and markers were to take into account the overall effectiveness of each response when assessing its quality. With regard to envelope and letter format, recommendations were provided in the guidelines of Canada Post. Other formats/styles were to be considered equally acceptable and markers were to assess the extent to which a student had been consistent in applying a chosen format to both the envelope and letter rather than “deduct marks” for deviations from the Canada

Post guidelines. There were a number of student responses in which there were varying amounts of white space between the heading, inside address, and salutation in the letter and some students single-spaced the body of the letter while others used double-spacing. These issues 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 2015: Qualities of Student Writing that Met the Acceptable Standard

Students whose responses received a score of “**Satisfactory**” in “**Content**” typically recognized the merits of a work-experience program that could “give students a great first experience with working,” enable them to “discover what they are capable of doing,” and “help students find out what they want to do with the rest of their life.” As well, many students acknowledged that “by participating in the program students can change their minds and decide on a better career,” “they will gain life skills that can’t be taught in the classroom,” and “they will learn to rely on their own judgment.” Some of the advantages of a work-experience program that were identified by many students included arguments that “students would be excited to learn from experienced workers,” “work places get part time employees and students get valuable expertise,” “Businesses will get extra employees making everyone’s workload less,” and “students can get into better colleges by showing that they have training and experience from having a job.” Some students exhorted that “The students of Tremont School have been itching for the opportunity to join the workforce and contribute to society” and that “businesses in the Markland Chamber of Commerce have an important role to play in giving students the expertise they need to be successful in their life.”

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

- “I truly and strongly believe that there are really good benefits to the work-experience program. [...] Students that participate will have a higher sense of what job to choose in the future. [...] Businesses can get students that don’t get paid and show enthusiasm, initiative, and willingness to learn. [...] It will be good for everyone that participates.”
- “A work experience program across Alberta would give students advantages because it would help them figure out what they want to do when they grow up. [...] If a student didn’t like that job they can choose another job that they truly do love. [...] If businesses are looking for jobs to be filled the students can fill them. If the students want a job in a specific business and they like the job they can fill the slot the business is looking for.”
- “A work-experience program could help many of us students receive valuable knowledge about the specific jobs we want to pursue. [...] We believe this will be a useful experience for us students, we would have a first hand experience in various occupations and gain expertise in areas of personal interest. It would help prepare students for their adult life. [...] Businesses will receive enthusiastic workers for free. That’s another reason why we want to establish this program.”
- “This program will give us easier access to first hand experience. Also deploying us to different businesses would be beneficial for the business because there wouldn’t be a need to pay us as the work would be done as part of a school program. [...] It’s a low cost win situation for students and the business. I hope you are inclined towards the idea and I look forward to your reply.”
- “We want to invite you and other businesses to take part in a work experience program so that students can learn and find out what they want to do when they grow up. Letting us use your facilities would be great for us and you will get students that will work for no money. [...] Another advantage to this is that students will be able to be hands on in a job they’re interested in. For you, they will work on weekends and give you workers to get what you need done.”

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 2015: Qualities of Student Writing that Met the Standard of Excellence

In responses awarded scores of “**Proficient**” or “**Excellent**” in “**Content**,” students often contended that “the students of Markland School” who participate in a work-experience program could “develop leadership skills,” “make productive use of out-of-school time,” “make an informed decision regarding the career they choose to pursue,” and “plan what classes to take now to ensure entry into the post-secondary school that offers the best training in their chosen occupation.” In many responses, students presented arguments related to how “Experience is key to success when applying for a job, so this opportunity would enhance students’ chances of finding work of their choosing,” “Students will experience the realities of the hard work required to achieve a level of competence in a chosen field,” and “Greater success can be achieved when compiling a resume and applying for a job.” Some students argued that “Students will try harder to get better grades in their classes so they can graduate high school and get into the colleges or universities that will make their dreams reality,” “Customers might be inclined to purchase goods and services at those businesses that hire students to reward them for their community-mindedness,” and “This program will benefit the community at large by establishing a relationship between the businesses of today and the adults of tomorrow.” In some responses, students adopted a tone of indignation with regard to the detriments of not having a work-experience program in attempting to convince Ms. Robertson of the need for its establishment. As well, a number of students asserted that members of the Markland Chamber of Commerce could “foster a work ethic among today’s youth,” “allow experts at their craft to mentor willing apprentices,” “give students hands on work and first hand experience which are the best teachers,” and “provide a safe, controlled environment to be in while learning the skills of a trade.”

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

- “The jobs that the students of Tremont School are interested in are countless. Doctor, engineer, mechanic, nurse, businessman and scientist are only a few. With a work-experience program, the students will obtain a stepping-stone toward their career and it will be an asset for them when they apply for a job. [...] Businesses and industries will benefit from having workers on evenings and weekends, which is usually when they are busy with many customers. In the long term, these student employees will require less training than completely inexperienced workers.”
- “Students will learn skills to help them for the rest of their life and get them used to having some responsibility. Many students are interested in taking part in a work experience program because it will open doors to a variety of occupations and enable students to contribute to the workforce. [...] Establishing this program would also benefit local businesses and promote the economy of Markland and it’s surrounding communities. Business owners would have extra help and be able to share their knowledge and expertise with the next generation.”
- “Students who are undecided as to what occupation they wish to have after they finish high school would be able to find out what various jobs entail. A work experience program would help the students of Tremont School to more effectively reach their full potential. [...] Businesses that hire these hardworking and enthusiastic students may choose whether or not to pay students a wage. Moreover, employing students who live in the area will enhance the growth of a closely-knit community where people have civic pride.”
- “A work experience program could entail a semester-long term of employment for students at local businesses that are involved in the program in which they gain expertise on the job from coworkers and supervisors. They could grow confident in what they are doing, and possibly consider it as a career path. [...] In this school-run activity students will work without being paid after school hours and possibly on weekends. Only the most motivated and reliable students will be selected for the program and they will be responsible for their own transportation to and from work.”

- “Those students that participate in a work experience program would develop valuable character traits, such as punctuality and dependability. Working along side others would build team work skills and add to a student’s feeling of self-worth. [...] I would be grateful if you would discuss this proposal with other members of the Chamber of Commerce, and consider the valuable role local businesses could play in having a positive impact on the lives of the citizens of tomorrow.”

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 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 impeded or did not impede meaning. The envelope and letter contained few, if any, format errors and/or omissions.

Functional Writing Assignment—Observations from Standards Confirmation and Central Marking 2015: Qualities of Student Writing that Did Not Meet the Acceptable Standard

Students whose responses demonstrated qualities characteristic of “**Poor**” or “**Limited**” scores in “**Content**” sometimes relied exclusively on verbatim reiteration of the information presented in the assignment with little of their own thinking or development. Other students demonstrated a flawed or misconstrued understanding of the purpose of the letter, evident in statements such as “we need a mechanics or multimedia program,” “I heard their was a work experiance program at your school and I would like to go to school there,” and “I would like to apply to work in your company the Markland Chamber of Commerce because I want benfit from the money I make.” In some instances, students mistakenly argued or inappropriately contended that “Me and my class mate believe that there should be extracurricular activites but we need your permission to do so,” “we need to do some thing else than just sports,” “I don’t need any work experience because I don’t need any money right now,” or “I have no idea what to do when I finish school and I dont think this will help me.” In other responses, students presented ambiguous assertions pertaining to how “Students might get over their bad judgment of businesses and change their mind about going to them,” how “if you do this there will be more money being made to pay taxes and it will create more work and their will be less people on the streets,” and how “A work experience program will keep students fit and healthy.”

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

- “As a stuedent of tremont we are asking for you to give us a work experance program so we can have part experance in intresting stuff that we can use to get a job when were older so this is just something to think about. Whatever you wanna do is ok with me.”
- “Our school lacks allot and we are taught things that do not really benifit us for when we go out on our own. We need to learn what it is like to have a real reasonability. This porgram will help us to get what we need out of life. [...] If our school dosent get this program I feel as if I will need to remove my self from the school and find one that will benifit my wantings.”
- “With the work experance program it teaches us that we have to work and still do our schooling and then your parents aren’t paying everything till you are done schooling because when you are done and you can’t get a job because you have had no experance you will have to rely on your parents for money you need for rent and food.”
- “It would great to take whatever time off school so you don’t have classes and you can go make some money. It could be a nice thing cause a lot of teen ages need jobs but cant get any cause they cant get time of school and donot want to give up there free time.”
- “As principle of the school Mrs. Robertson you have the right to deside the right thing to do. You can deside the students that particpate in the program you can punish the ones that are bad. So that way it can make sure the program works.”

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 evident but not maintained or there was little awareness of a tone appropriate for the addressee evident. In responses scored “**Poor**” or “**Limited**” in “**Content Management**,” words and expressions used were frequently vague and/or inexact or inaccurate and/or misused. The writing demonstrated either faltering control or a lack of control of correct sentence structure, usage, and mechanics. Errors that were present frequently or severely impeded meaning. The envelope and letter contained frequent or numerous and glaring format errors and/or omissions.

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. 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.

Overall, student responses to both the Narrative/Essay Writing Assignment and the Functional Writing Assignment in *Part A: Writing* of the 2015 Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement Test were strong. The vast majority of students (91.2%) achieved the acceptable standard, while 21.4% of all students achieved the standard of excellence. Of all students who wrote the *Part A: Writing* test, only 8.8% did not achieve the acceptable standard.

Part B: Reading—2015 Test Blueprint and Student Achievement

In 2015, 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 18.6% of all students who wrote achieved the standard of excellence. Student achievement on *Part B: Reading* of the 2015 Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement Test averaged 36.6 out of 55 (66.5%).

The blueprint below shows the reporting categories and language functions by which 2015 summary data are reported to schools and school authorities, and it shows the provincial average of student achievement by both raw score and percentage.

Reporting Category	Language Function		Provincial Student Achievement (Average Raw Score and Percentage)
	Informational	Narrative / Poetic	
Identifying and Interpreting Ideas and Details (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.			11.3/17 (66.5%)
Interpreting Text Organization (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.			7.3/11 (66.4%)
Associating Meaning (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).			6.9/11 (62.7%)
Synthesizing Ideas (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.			11.1/16 (69.4%)
Provincial Student Achievement (Average Raw Score and Percentage)	14.7/22 (66.8%)	21.9/33 (66.4%)	<i>Part B: Reading</i> Total Test Raw Score = 55

*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 2015 Student Achievement**

The following is a discussion of student achievement on *Part B: Reading* of the 2015 Grade 9 English Language Arts 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 blueprint category of **Identifying and Interpreting Ideas and Details**, students were expected to construct meaning by interpreting ideas and details pertaining to setting/atmosphere/context, character/narrator/speaker (actions, motives, values), conflict, and events in ten reading selections. In the three informational texts—an excerpt from a memoir, an excerpt from a nonfiction book, and a magazine article—students who achieved the acceptable standard were able to recognize interrelationships among ideas and information presented, identify key elements of scientific research presented, and make inferences about the emotional impact of writers’ recollections of personal experiences. 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 interrelationships among ideas presented or identifying the central focus of details presented. The seven narrative/poetic texts—including two poems, two cartoons, and excerpts from three novels—enabled many students who met the acceptable standard to demonstrate their ability to determine the motivation underlying a character’s actions, recognize how characters are perceived by 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 the levels of student achievement on the 2015 Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement Test.

In question 52, students were required to interpret details in specified frames of a cartoon to determine how the cartoonist creates humour (SO 2.1).

- 52.** In frames 1 and 2, the cartoonist creates humour by having April respond to her mother by posing a question regarding the
- A.** appropriateness of her mother’s conduct
 - B.** extent of her mother’s authority over her
 - *C.** literal meaning of her mother’s statement
 - D.** possibility of being able to fulfill her mother’s request

Of all students who wrote the test, 70.7% chose the correct answer (option **C**). These students were able to recognize how—in response to her mother’s statement (“APRIL, HOW MANY TIMES DO I HAVE TO ASK YOU TO TAKE YOUR THINGS UPSTAIRS?!!”)—April’s question (“HOW MANY TIMES DID YOU ASK ME ALREADY?”) is humorous in that her response refers to the literal meaning of her mother’s statement in terms of the number of times April should be asked to take her things upstairs. Of those students who did not select the keyed response, 5.0% chose option **A**. This alternative presents the idea that April disapproves of her mother’s behaviour, an inference that is not supported by details in frames 1 and 2 of the cartoon. Option **B** was chosen by 16.1% of all students, a choice indicating that April is rebelling against her mother’s authority over her, but this is also an inference that is not supported by details in frames 1 and 2 of the cartoon. Option **D**, which was chosen by 8.0% of all students, suggests that April is questioning her ability to fulfill her mother’s request, an inference that is also not supported by details in frames 1 and 2 of the

cartoon. Of those students who achieved the acceptable standard, 72.4% selected the correct answer. A total of 93.2% 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, 37.5% chose the correct answer.

In the section of the 2015 achievement test blueprinted for curricular content pertaining to **Interpreting Text Organization**, students who achieved the acceptable standard were often able to identify textual features such as onomatopoeia as well as the use of transitions 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 also include the use of parallelism and comparison and contrast in the presentation of ideas. 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 repetition of sounds (such as through alliteration) and the development of the mood (through overt elements of the setting). Students achieving the standard of excellence could additionally detect elements central to the conflict faced by characters, subtleties of tone in interactions among characters, and the emphatic effect of a writer's use of sentence fragments. Many students who did not achieve the acceptable standard encountered difficulty with questions on narrative/poetic texts that tasked students with 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 the levels of student achievement on the 2015 Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement Test are demonstrated in the following question.

Question 53 required that students determine the frame of a cartoon in which the central conflict is established (SO 2.2).

53. In this cartoon, the central conflict is established in

- *A. Frame 3
- B. Frame 5
- C. Frame 7
- D. Frame 8

The correct answer (option **A**) was selected by 65.3% of all students who wrote the test. These students could analyze events in the cartoon in order to arrive at the conclusion that the central conflict stems from the statement made by April's mother in Frame 3 ("APRIL, IF THESE TOYS AND BOOKS AND CLOTHES ARE NOT TAKEN UP TO YOUR ROOM BY THE END OF THE DAY, I'M THROWING THEM ALL INTO THE **TRASH!**"). Frame 5 (Option **B**, which was selected by 8.7% of all students) presents a scene in which April's mother stands looking at April's things on the stairs, an event that develops the central conflict established by her declaration in Frame 3. Frame 7 (Option **C**, which was selected by 19.8% of all students) presents a scene in which April's contestation of having her things put in a garbage bag ("YOU CAN'T DO THAT! – IT'S **MINE!!!**") is met with her mother's reply ("SORRY. I MEANT WHAT I SAID."), a situation that heightens the central conflict established in Frame 3. Frame 8 (Option **D**, which was selected by 5.9% of all students) presents a scene in which April's mother asserts that April's things will be "PICKED UP FIRST THING IN THE MORNING" (to which April replies "**AAAAGH!**") that intensifies the central conflict established in Frame 3 and leads to the climactic turning point in Frame 9 (when April's mother concedes and tells April that she may take her things upstairs). Many of those students who achieved the acceptable standard chose the correct answer, with 65.5% selecting the keyed response. Most of those students who met the standard of excellence (83.8%) chose the correct answer whereas only 43.6% of those students who did not meet the acceptable standard chose the correct answer.

With regard to questions blueprinted in the **Associating Meaning** category, students who achieved the acceptable standard were able to identify the denotative meanings of words and phrases and could recognize the use of figures of speech—such as simile, metaphor, and irony—in informational texts. In addition to these abilities, students who achieved the standard of excellence were able to appreciate how connotations of words and phrases reinforce meaning and how figurative comparisons enrich the reader's understanding of the similarities between familiar and unfamiliar experiences. Students who

did not achieve the acceptable standard typically struggled with distinguishing among ideas presented and showed limited awareness of the effect achieved by the use 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. In addition to these abilities, students who achieved the standard of excellence demonstrated 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 2015 Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement Test are shown in the following question.

Question 54 required that students use contextual clues in a frame of a cartoon to determine what a word used by the cartoonist is used to suggest about a character (SO 2.1).

54. In context, the word “THREAT” (Frame 10) is used by the cartoonist to
- A. justify the intensity of April’s emotions
 - *B. provide insight into the mother’s actions
 - C. reinforce the extent of the mother’s exhaustion
 - D. describe how there is a change in April’s character

Of all students who wrote the test, 59.9% were able to choose the keyed response (option **B**) by correctly determining—through the humour of April’s mother’s reflections in Frame 10 (“A REALLY GOOD THREAT... IS ONE YOU DON’T HAVE TO CARRY OUT!”)—that by threatening to throw April’s things in the trash, she has succeeded in having April take her things upstairs to her room. Option **A** (selected by 8.1% of all students) presents a choice that inaccurately suggests that the threat used by April’s mother is intended by the cartoonist to provide justification for April’s intense emotional response to her mother’s actions. Option **C** (selected by 21.3% of all students) presents the inference that April’s mother’s use of a threat is indicative of her exhaustion from cleaning the house, an interpretation that is not substantiated by details in the cartoon. Option **D** (selected by 10.4% of all students) presents the idea that April has undergone a change in her character as a result of her mother’s threat, but there is no evidence of such a circumstance in the cartoon; April is merely shown carrying her things up the stairs at the end of the cartoon. A total of 60.3% of students who achieved the acceptable standard answered this question correctly. Of those students who achieved the standard of excellence, 81.3% chose the correct answer. Of those students who did not meet the acceptable standard, 33.9% 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 an overarching generalization encapsulating the content of information presented or extrapolation, from a writer’s reflections, of the significance of specific events in his or her life. In narrative/poetic texts, students who achieved the acceptable standard generally demonstrated the ability to 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 the conflict developed through the events recounted in narrative/poetic texts. The following question illustrates some of these differences among the varying levels of student achievement on the 2015 Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement Test.

In question 55, students needed to form a generalization from events in a cartoon regarding a character's perception of another character's actions (SO 2.2).

- 55.** Events in this cartoon illustrate how April becomes convinced that her mother is
- A.** acting in the best interests of her family
 - *B.** intent on keeping her word
 - C.** doing what is necessary
 - D.** willing to compromise

The correct answer (option **B**) was selected by 76.7% of all students who wrote the test. These students were able to synthesize events and details in the cartoon to form the generalization that April becomes convinced that her mother is intent on throwing her things in the trash. Option **A** was selected by 2.2% of all students, a choice that suggests that April comes to believe that her mother's actions are motivated by concern for the well-being of all members of the family. Option **C** (selected by 8.9% of all students) suggests that April comes to accept that her mother is simply doing what is necessary. Option **D** (selected by 11.8% of all students) suggests that April arrives at the understanding that her mother is willing to compromise in order to resolve the conflict. Each of these three incorrect alternatives presents a conclusion based on supposition beyond the text that is not supported by details and events in the cartoon. Of those students achieving the acceptable standard, 78.8% chose the correct answer. A total of 90.8% of students who achieved the standard of excellence chose the correct answer. Of those students who did not meet the acceptable standard, 51.0% answered this question correctly.

Overall, student achievement on *Part B: Reading* of the 2015 Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement Test was strong. Most students (79.6%) were able to meet the standards within the *Part B: Reading* test, and 18.6% of all 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. Click on one of the specific links to access the following documents.

Achievement Testing Program *General Information Bulletin*

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

Subject Bulletins

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

Examples of the Standards for Students' Writing

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

Previous Achievement Tests and Answer Keys

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

Parent Guides

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

Involvement of Teachers

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