Framework

Ontario
Secondary School
Literacy Test

December 2007 Edition

**Education Quality and
Accountability Office**

EQAO

Framework

Ontario
Secondary School
Literacy Test

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Contents

December 2007 Edition:

What's new in this framework

See page 2 to learn about changes in the December 2007 edition.

This framework provides a detailed description of the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT), which is conducted each year in Ontario. It also describes how the OSSLT aligns with the expectations in *The Ontario Curriculum*.

Introduction

Who is this framework for?

This framework has been prepared for

- educators;
- parents and
- members of the general public.

What is in the framework?

In this framework, you will find

Chapter 1: a brief introduction to EQAO, large-scale assessments in Ontario and the OSSLT, and information on the differences between large-scale and classroom assessment.

Chapter 2: information about the purpose and benefits of the OSSLT, a description of how results are reported as well as information about how the OSSLT aligns with national and international testing.

Chapter 3: an introduction to the OSSLT, a description of how it aligns with *The Ontario Curriculum* and with current research and a delineation of what is assessed.

Chapter 4: discussions of the assessment process, the content of the OSSLT, accommodations and special provisions, how EQAO determines whether a student has passed and the meaning of Ontario's achievement levels.

Chapter 5: information on how EQAO assessments are aligned with curriculum expectations.
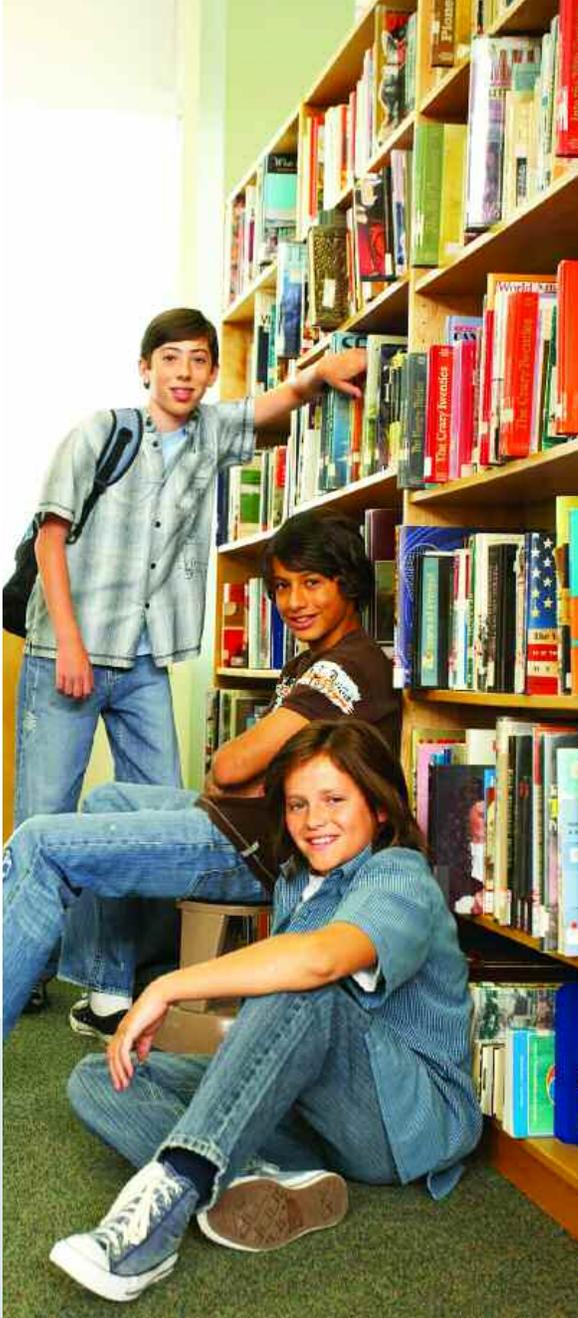
Chapter 6: information on how reading and writing questions are scored.

Chapter 7: a discussion of how EQAO ensures that its assessments are comparable from year to year.

What's New in the December 2007 Edition

The December 2007 edition of the framework has been reorganized and rewritten to improve clarity and readability. It has also been redesigned to enhance the presentation of information in both text and chart form. This edition carries over a number of changes in the December 2006 edition and make some new ones, as described below:

• There were minor adjustments to the reading and writing charts showing the number of items and raw score point distributions.

• The reading and writing curriculum connection charts have been updated as a result of the release of the revised *Ontario Curriculum, Grades 1–8: Language* (revised 2006) and *Grades 9 and 10: English* (revised 2007).

In This Chapter

• What is EQAO?
• What is assessment?
• What assessments does EQAO conduct?
• What is the OSSLT?

Insight: Differences between large-scale and classroom assessment

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CHAPTER 1: About EQAO and Provincial Assessments

What is EQAO?

The Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) is an arm's-length agency of the provincial government that measures the achievement of students across Ontario in reading, writing and mathematics, and reports the results to parents, educators and government. EQAO assessments are based on the expectations in *The Ontario Curriculum*.

EQAO results are reported at the provincial, school board and school levels. They are used by the Ministry of Education, district school boards and schools to improve learning, teaching and student achievement. An Individual Student Report is also provided by EQAO for each student who writes an EQAO assessment.

What is assessment?

Assessment is an important part of teaching and learning. For example, teachers use assessment in the classroom to gauge the skills and knowledge of their students. They use this information to plan their teaching and identify individual students who may need

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For more information and valuable resources for parents and educators, visit the EQAO Web site:

www.eqao.com

additional help. A traditional test is one kind of assessment, but student progress can be measured in many other ways. Reviewing a portfolio of student work is one example.

Large-scale assessments, like those conducted by EQAO, measure student achievement across the province at critical times in students' school careers.

Insight:

Differences between large-scale and classroom assessment

EQAO's Large-Scale Assessments	Classroom Assessment
The purpose of EQAO's large-scale assessments is to provide comparable year-to-year data to give the public information on student achievement.	The purposes of classroom assessment are to improve student learning (using models such as Ministry exemplars to assess the quality of work), to report regularly on student achievement and to provide timely, constructive feedback for improvement.
EQAO's large-scale assessments provide reliable, objective and high-quality data that can inform school boards' improvement planning and target setting.	Classroom assessments encourage students to engage in self-evaluation and personal goal setting. They also provide parents with information on strengths and weaknesses that can be used to encourage improvement.
EQAO's large-scale assessment materials are created and scored "at a distance." The assessment scorers do not know the students personally.	Classroom assessment materials are usually created and marked by a teacher who knows the students personally.
EQAO's large-scale assessments are summative; they present a snapshot of student achievement or learning at the time the assessment is administered.	Classroom assessments are conducted in an instructional context and include diagnostic, formative and summative assessment. They are administered at regular intervals over time.
EQAO's large-scale assessments require students to demonstrate their knowledge and skills independently on standardized tasks and under standardized conditions, although some accommodations are allowed for students with special education needs.	A wide variety of supports (reminders, clarification) are often available to address students' special education needs and abilities.

EQAO's large-scale assessments measure achievement against expectations from the prescribed curriculum and contain tasks and items that sample from and represent the curriculum for the domain assessed.	Classroom assessments measure expectations from the curriculum and contain tasks and items that represent expectations, topics and themes that have been taught. The questions are written in language used regularly in the classroom by the teacher.
EQAO's large-scale assessments provide the same (in a given year) or psychometrically comparable items (from year to year) for all students.	Classroom assessments can provide modified items or tasks tailored to the special education needs of individuals or groups of students.
In order for students' results on EQAO's large-scale assessments to be comparable across the province, the assessments must be administered, scored and reported on in a consistent and standardized manner.	Results of classroom assessments across the province are not always comparable, because of the variation in administration procedures and time allowed, amount of teacher support, modification of items to suit student needs and teacher autonomy in marking.
For EQAO's large-scale assessments, all scorers use the same scoring guides and are trained and monitored to ensure objectivity and consistency.	The marking of classroom assessments is more subjective and is often influenced by contextual information about the students that is available to the teacher. Teachers use the achievement charts in the curriculum policy documents to guide assessment decisions.

What assessments does EQAO conduct?

EQAO conducts four provincial assessments each year. These are
• the Assessment of Reading, Writing and Mathematics, Primary Division (Grades 1–3);
• the Assessment of Reading, Writing and Mathematics, Junior Division (Grades 4–6);
• the Grade 9 Assessment of Mathematics and
• the OSSLT.

What is the OSSLT?

The OSSLT, which is the subject of this framework, assesses whether students have the literacy (reading and writing) skills needed to meet the literacy requirement for the Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD). The remaining sections of this framework describe the OSSLT in greater detail.

- What is the purpose of the OSSLT?
- What is reported?
- What are the benefits of the test?

> **Insight:** Is the OSSLT consistent with national and international assessments?

CHAPTER 2: The OSSLT

What is the purpose of the OSSLT?

The purpose of the OSSLT is to determine whether a student has the literacy (reading and writing) skills required to meet the standard for understanding reading selections and communicating in a variety of writing forms expected by *The Ontario Curriculum* across all subjects up to the end of Grade 9.

What is reported?

The Individual Student Report includes
- the student's overall result.

School reports include
- overall school-level results, with comparisons to board and provincial results;
- results by subgrouping, such as by gender and English-language learner and special needs status;
- contextual data on demographics and participation in the test;
- results over time;
- results of the student questionnaire accompanying the test;
- a Student Roster report, for unsuccessful students only, that shows individual student results for each item on the test, with overall board and provincial results for comparison, and

- profiles of strengths and areas for improvement in reading and writing.

Board reports include
- overall board results, with comparisons to provincial results;
- contextual data, results over time, reports by subgroup and questionnaire data and
- profiles at the board level of strengths and areas for improvement.

Provincial reports include
- overall provincial results, including results by board;
- contextual data, results over time, reports by subgroup and questionnaire data;
- instructional strategies for success and
- case studies (school success stories).

Note: In cases where the number of students being reported on for a school or board is small enough that individual students could be identified, EQAO does not release the reports publicly.

What are the benefits of the test?

Besides determining whether a student has the literacy (reading and writing) skills needed to meet the literacy requirement for an OSSD, the OSSLT provides the Ontario education system with valid, reliable and comparable year-to-year data on student acquisition of literacy skills. Schools need to know that they can confidently use this data along with other sources of contextual and assessment information (e.g., on demographics, attendance and pass rates) to determine how well the strategies they introduce to support improved student achievement in literacy, such as staff development and new

learning resources, are working. Beyond specific reporting, the OSSLT
• provides data to assist schools and boards in improvement planning and target setting and
• provides educators with opportunities to improve their understanding of assessment practices by participating in OSSLT item development and scoring.

It is not possible to produce reliable data for graduation decision making, for improvement planning and for use in the remediation of individual students simultaneously, as this would require a test that is prohibitively long. Therefore, the OSSLT is focused on reporting reliable data for graduation decision making and improvement planning, while also providing individual results.

Insight:

Is the OSSLT consistent with national and international assessments?

The definitions of reading and writing literacy for the OSSLT are generally consistent with the definitions of these terms for the national and international assessments in which Ontario students participate.

The Pan-Canadian Assessment Program's (PCAP's) Assessments of Reading and Mathematics (13-year-old students) and the Student Achievement Indicators Program (SAIP) Assessments of Reading and Writing (13- and 16-year-old students), Administered by the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC)

As of 2007, SAIP has been replaced by PCAP.

A student's reading fluency depends on the
• personal experience the student brings to the task,
• student's language base (vocabulary and language strategies),
• complexity of the textual information and
• difficulty of the task….

Text complexity includes consideration of vocabulary, organization, rhetorical devices, syntax, ideas, and subject matter. In straightforward texts these features are uncomplicated, direct, concrete, and conventional. In more complex texts these features are relatively more complicated, more varied, indirect, and somewhat more abstract, but usually remain conventional. In

sophisticated texts the features are subtle, challenging, frequently abstract, and often innovative and unconventional. Students are asked to read texts at these three levels of complexity….

Three types of questions are presented to students. Interpretive questions require students to demonstrate an understanding of the reading passages at literal and figurative levels. Evaluative questions ask students to make judgments about textual information and the author's purposes. Extension and extrapolative questions require the student to relate concepts in the texts to their personal experiences, explaining the links clearly (CMEC, 1999, p.5).

The blueprint for the OSSLT requires reading selections that are mostly "straightforward," occasionally "complex" and never "sophisticated" as defined by SAIP. The reading questions on the OSSLT are mostly "interpretive," occasionally involve "extension" or are "interpolative" and are rarely "evaluative" as these terms are defined by SAIP. Nevertheless, the OSSLT is congruent with SAIP assessments of reading.

Writing takes place within a specified context or situation….This SAIP assessment will consider the writer's skill in integrating such elements as development of ideas, organization, language conventions and usage, and stylistic features in carrying out a purpose….

Writing is socially situated in that it is meant to be read. This social dimension calls for particular qualities such as clarity of communication and correctness of language (CMEC, 2003, p.10).

The OSSLT assesses writing for clarity of communication, development of ideas, organization, language conventions and usage. The OSSLT does not assess stylistic features. Nonetheless, the OSSLT is congruent with SAIP assessments of writing in many respects.

SAIP assesses the reading and writing knowledge and skills of 13- and 16-year-old students. SAIP assessments of reading, writing, mathematics and science are conducted under the auspices of the CMEC on a rotating schedule every four years in 12 Canadian provinces and territories.

In Ontario, over 4800 13- and 16-year-old students in approximately 360 randomly selected English- and French-language schools participate.

The SAIP/PCAP assessments help to determine how well education systems across Canada are meeting the needs of students and society and whether students across Canada reach similar levels of performance at about the same age.

The Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS), Administered by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement, on Reading (Grade 4 students)

Readers are regarded as actively constructing meaning and as knowing effective reading strategies and how to reflect on reading. . . . Meaning is constructed through the interaction between the reader and text in the context of a particular reading experience (Mullis, Kennedy, Martin and Sainsbury, 2006, pp. 3–4).

The OSSLT shares this view of readers and how they construct meaning. PIRLS does not assess writing.

PIRLS assesses the reading skills of nine-year-old (Grade 4) students. It is conducted under the auspices of the International Association for the Evaluation of

Educational Achievement every five years in over 40 countries around the world. In Ontario, Grade 4 classes in 200 randomly selected schools participate.

The PIRLS assessments help to determine trends in children's reading literacy achievement and policy and practices related to literacy. Countries that participate collect valuable information about students' performance in reading, as well as home, school and classroom influences on that achievement.

The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) Assessment of Reading Literacy Among 15-year-old Students, Administered by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)
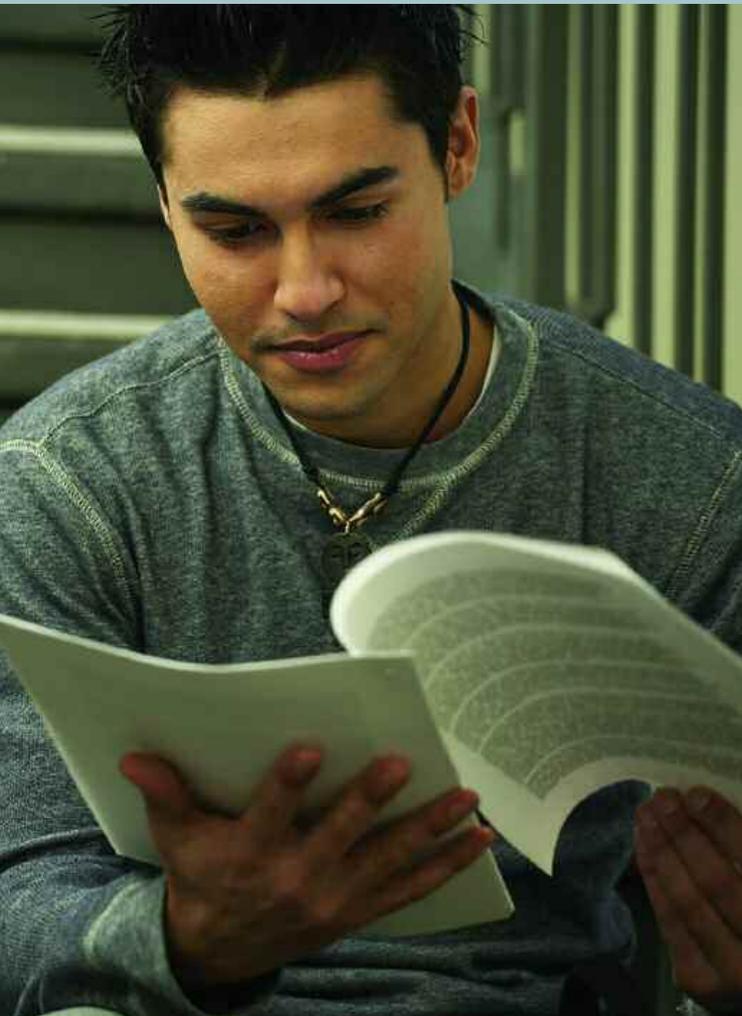
Examinees are expected to demonstrate their proficiency in all of these processes:
• retrieving information,
• forming a broad understanding,
• developing an interpretation,
• reflecting on and evaluating the content of a text and
• reflecting on and evaluating the form of a text. (OECD, 2003)

The OSSLT focuses on the first three points on the PISA list. PISA does not assess writing. Still, the OSSLT is well aligned with PISA assessments of literacy.

PISA assesses the reading knowledge and skills of 15-year-old students. It is conducted under the auspices of the OECD every three years in over 40 countries around the world.

In Ontario, over 3000 students in Grade 10 classes in 138 randomly selected English- and French-language schools participate.

The PISA assessments help to determine the extent to which students near the end of compulsory education have acquired the knowledge and skills that are essential for full participation in society.

• What is the definition of literacy for the OSSLT?
• Does the definition of literacy align with *The Ontario Curriculum*?
    • What is assessed?

Insight: How the definition of literacy aligns with current research

CHAPTER 3: What Is Assessed by the OSSLT

What is the definition of literacy for the OSSLT?

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

In the reading component of the test, students use reading strategies to interact with a variety of narrative, informational and graphic selections to construct an understanding of the meaning of the texts. Students are asked to demonstrate their understanding of explicit (directly stated) and implicit (indirectly stated) meanings as well as to connect their understanding of the text to their personal experience and knowledge. The reading selections that students are asked to read are representative of those expected across subject areas in *The Ontario Curriculum* up to the end of Grade 9.

In the writing component, students are prompted to write two short responses, a series of paragraphs expressing an opinion and a news report. Through their responses, students demonstrate their ability to communicate ideas and information clearly and coherently. Since writing on large-scale assessments does not allow for a complete revision and refinement process, written work on the OSSLT is scored as first-draft (unpolished) writing. The written forms in which students are asked to write are representative of those expected across subject areas in *The Ontario Curriculum* up to the end of Grade 9.

Does the definition of literacy align with *The Ontario Curriculum*?

The reading and writing skills tested on the OSSLT are based on the *Ontario Curriculum* expectations requiring reading and writing across all subjects to the end of Grade 9. Cross-references to particular expectations are found in Chapter 5 of this framework.

To place this definition in a wider context, the following is what *The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 9 and 10: English* (revised 2007) says about literacy:

Literacy development is a communal project, and the teaching of literacy skills is embedded across the Ontario curriculum. However, it is the English curriculum that is dedicated to developing the knowledge and skills on which literacy is based—that is, knowledge and skills in the areas of listening and speaking, reading, writing, and viewing and representing.

Language development is central to students' intellectual, social, cultural and emotional growth and must be seen as a key component of the curriculum. When students learn to use language, they do more than master the basic skills. They learn to value the power of language and to use it responsibly. They learn to express feelings and opinions and to support their opinions with sound arguments and evidence from research. They become aware of the many purposes for which language is used and the diverse forms it can take to serve particular purposes and audiences.

They learn to use the formal language appropriate for debates and essays, the narrative language of stories and novels, the figurative language of poetry, the technical language of instructions and manuals. They develop an awareness of how language is used in different formal and informal situations. They come to understand that language is an important medium for communicating ideas and information, expressing world views, and realizing and communicating artistic vision. Students learn that language can be not only used as a tool but also appreciated and enjoyed.

Language is the basis for thinking, communicating, learning, and viewing the world. Students need language skills in order to comprehend ideas and information, to interact socially, to inquire into areas of interest and study, and to express themselves clearly and demonstrate their learning. Learning to communicate with clarity and precision will help students to thrive in the world beyond school….

Language skills are developed across the curriculum and, cumulatively, through the grades. Students use and develop important language skills as they read and think about topics, themes and issues in various subject areas. Language facility helps students to learn in all subject areas, and using language for a broad range of purposes increases both their ability to communicate with precision and their understanding of how language works. Students develop flexibility and proficiency in their understanding and use of language over time. As they move through the secondary school program, they are required to use language with ever-increasing accuracy and fluency in an expanding range of situations. They are also expected to assume responsibility for their own learning and to apply their language skills in more challenging and complex ways.

Reading and Literature Studies
Although many students entering the Grade 9 English program are fluent, independent readers, some may need additional support to develop their reading skills and to monitor their own progress. In addition, all students need instruction to cope with the more challenging reading demands of the secondary school curriculum, which - requires students to consider increasingly abstract concepts and to use language structures that are more complex and vocabulary that is more specialized than in earlier grades. The English program will help students learn to read efficiently and to absorb information quickly.

The English curriculum focuses on developing the knowledge and skills that will enable students to become effective readers. An effective reader is one who not only grasps the ideas communicated in a text but is able to apply them in new contexts. To do this, the reader must be able to think clearly, creatively, and critically about the ideas and information encountered in texts in order to understand, analyse and absorb them and to recognize their relevance in other contexts. Students can develop the skills necessary to become effective readers by applying a range of comprehension strategies as they read and by reading a wide variety of texts. It is also important that they read a range of materials that illustrate the many uses of writing. By reading widely, students will develop a richer vocabulary and become more attuned to the conventions of written language. Reading various kinds of texts in all areas of the curriculum will also help students to discover what interests them most and to pursue and develop their interests and abilities.

Reading is a complex process that involves the application of various strategies before, during, and after reading. For example,

before reading, students might prepare by identifying the purpose of the reading activity and by activating their prior knowledge about the topic of the text. Teachers help build the necessary background knowledge for students whose life experiences may not have provided them with the information they need to understand the text. During reading, students may use "cueing systems" —that is, clues from context or from their understanding of language structures and/or letter-sound relationships—to help them solve unfamiliar words, and comprehension strategies to help them make meaning of the text. Comprehension strategies include predicting, visualizing, questioning, drawing inferences, identifying main ideas, summarizing, and monitoring and revising comprehension. After reading, students may analyse, synthesize, make connections, evaluate, and use other critical and creative thinking skills to achieve a deeper understanding of the material they have read.

Writing
A central goal of the writing strand is to promote students' growth as confident writers and researchers who can communicate competently using a range of forms and styles to suit specific purposes and audiences and correctly applying the conventions of language—grammar, usage, spelling, and punctuation. These conventions are best learned in the context of meaningful and creative writing activities that allow students to develop the ability to think and write clearly and effectively.

Writing, from initial musings to final publication, is a complex process that involves a range of complementary thinking and composing skills, as well as other language processes, including reading, speaking and listening. As writers compose, they consider their audience; make decisions about form, style and organization; and apply their knowledge of language use. To develop these competencies, students

need a supportive classroom environment, with opportunities to extend and refine their skills in using the writing process and doing research. At the secondary level, teachers continue to teach and model effective strategies and skills, as well as provide appropriate scaffolding for students who are building skills and working towards independence. Students need opportunities to apply these skills and to write daily, in many forms and genres, for a variety of purposes and audiences, and within different time constraints. The forms and genres explored may include essays, reports, short stories, poetry, scripts, journals, letters, biographies, children's stories, articles, reviews, précis, explanations, instructions, notes, procedures, résumés and advertisements. Because postsecondary institutions and employers require clear, well-organized writing, on demand and within strict timelines, students also need to learn and practise strategies for writing effectively and correctly in the context of in-class writing assignments and test situations.

The following are selected examples of statements from other *Ontario Curriculum* documents that emphasize the literacy skills found in the OSSLT:

Communication is, of course, extremely important in science, as it is in all disciplines—both in terms of reading and writing, and in the use of information technology for collecting, organizing and expressing information (page 3, *Grades 9 and 10: Science*, 1999).

Students and teachers need to be aware that success in these courses is not measured simply in terms of how well students memorize a series of facts. Rather, these courses teach students to assess how events, ideas and values affect them individually and their society as a whole. Courses in Canadian and world studies

actively involve students in research, critical thinking, problem solving and decision making. They also help students develop a variety of communication skills, as well as the ability to use information technology to collect, organize, interpret and present information. Students can apply these skills and understandings in other secondary school subjects, in their future studies and in today's rapidly changing workplace (page 3, *Grades 9 and 10: Canadian and World Studies*, 2005).

Students who aspire to be writers, actors, musicians, dancers, painters or animators, for example, are not the only ones who can benefit from study of the arts. In arts courses, students develop their ability to reason and to think critically as well as creatively. They develop their communication and collaborative skills, as well as skills in using different forms of technology (page 4, *Grades 9 and 10: The Arts*, 1999).

Research on Native education confirms that when students develop the ability to communicate in a Native language, learning that language will reinforce, not interfere with, the learning of English, French or other languages (page 3, *Grades 9 and 10: Native Languages*, 1999).

Technological education relies on English and literacy skills for the description of specifications, proposals and evaluations, and has ties to the arts through its use of various media to model and present ideas and products (page 3, *Grades 9 and 10: Technological Education*, 1999).

Engaging in the world of business involves studying individuals, communities, and organizations, assessing their needs and problems, and generating solutions. Business studies draws upon facts, concepts, and processes from many other fields of study. For example, close links exist between marketing and communications,

accounting and mathematics, entrepreneurial studies and technology, international business and world studies, and management and studies of society and human nature. (page 3, *Grades 9 and 10: Business Studies*, 2006).

The discipline of social sciences and the humanities has connections with many other disciplines taught in secondary school, on the level of both knowledge and skills. Studies in social science and humanities courses will allow students to bring a broader perspective to their learning in subjects such as history, geography and English. Students will be able to build on previous learning, integrate related knowledge, and apply learning skills across subject areas (page 3, *Grades 9 and 10: Social Sciences and the Humanities*, 1999).

Literacy skills can play an important role in student success in mathematics courses. Many of the activities and tasks students undertake in math courses involve the use of written, oral and visual communication skills. For example, students use language to record their observations, to explain their reasoning when solving problems, to describe their inquiries in both informal and formal contexts, and to justify their results in small-group conversations, oral presentations and written reports. The language of mathematics includes special terminology. The study of mathematics consequently encourages students to use language with greater care and precision and enhances their ability to communicate effectively (page 27, *Grades 9 and 10: Mathematics*, revised 2005).

Knowledge of a second language is valuable for a number of reasons. Through learning a second language, students can strengthen their first-language skills and enhance their critical and creative thinking abilities; they also tend to become more tolerant and respectful of other cultures. In addition, the

ability to communicate in another language provides students with a distinct advantage in a number of careers, both in Canada and internationally (page 2, *Grades 9 and 10: French As a Second Language—Core, Extended, and Immersion French*, 1999).

The communication skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing are more important than ever in the modern business world, in which the timely exchange of information is often the key to success. Classical and international language programs provide ideal opportunities for students to develop and refine these important skills. Moreover, learning more than one language develops the ability to think creatively and to solve problems effectively. Studying other languages will also give students new insights into their first language. In fact, it could be said that the only way to fully appreciate the particular nature and function of language is by studying and comparing several languages (page 3, *Grades 9 and 10: Classical and International Languages*, 1999).

Insight:

How the definition of literacy aligns with current research

Is the definition of literacy used by EQAO consistent with current research? This question is answered in the following 2004 paper, "Congruence of Language and Literacy as Defined for the OSSLT and Research," by Shelley Peterson, Associate Professor (literacy), Department of Curriculum Teaching and Learning, OISE/UT:

Literacy is defined broadly in current research and for the OSSLT as construction of meaning through reading and writing a range of print and visual texts. Language and literacy are viewed as social practices that take place in and are influenced by the social and cultural contexts (including gender, race, class, age and other identities and power relationships) in which students interact with others (Alvermann & Phelps, 2002). Reading and writing are complementary—they involve making meaning for particular social purposes using the available symbolic tools of letters, words, sentence structures and genre formats, as well as perspectives and understandings (Bainbridge & Malicky, 2004).

There is reciprocity between reading and writing (Clay, 1998). Students who read widely have a broad repertoire of symbolic tools and meanings that they can use to compose their own texts. Students who write frequently for a variety of purposes and audiences, using a variety of genres, have ample opportunities to experiment with and consolidate what they learn through reading. They draw on the words, sentence structures, genre formats, writing styles, ideas and perspectives encountered in their reading to create and communicate their own ideas to others. Additionally, through writing, students come to understand how texts are constructed and learn how ideas are presented within texts. This knowledge helps students to understand ideas and information and make inferences and predictions when they are reading.

The reading component of the OSSLT is based on the widely accepted view in research that reading comprehension is the goal of reading (Pearson & Johnson, 1978; Pressley, 2000). Comprehension is influenced by factors inside and outside the reader. Internal factors include the reader's experience, social and cultural identities, what the reader knows about language, about print and about the world, as well as the reader's interest, motivation, strategies, purpose, perspectives and repertoire of reading skills. External factors include the reading task, the text organization and format, the vocabulary and topic of the text, and the social and physical environment.

Evidence of students' reading comprehension is reflected in the scoring guides for the OSSLT reading component: (1) analyzing textually explicit information and ideas that are directly stated in one part of the text; (2) synthesizing textually explicit information and ideas that are found in more than one place in the text; (3) inferring or predicting textually implicit ideas using knowledge and experience together with information in the text; and

(4) providing scriptally implicit ideas and information by making personal connections with background knowledge and experience (Pearson & Johnson, 1978; Raphael, 1986).

The writing component of the OSSLT is framed by a widely accepted understanding of writing as communicating meaning using the conventions of print and texts for various purposes and audiences within various social contexts (Chapman, 1997). Writers draw on their background knowledge about print, text structures and the communicative possibilities of various genres, as well as their experiences and knowledge about the world in general to compose texts.

A cognitive processing model (Flower & Hayes, 1981) is used to understand how students compose the texts required in the OSSLT writing component. Writers' writing processes are viewed as non-linear and dynamic, varying from writer to writer and according to the purpose, audience and social context for the writing. Generally, writing involves some form of planning (e.g., generating and organizing ideas and determining goals), composing or drafting, and monitoring and revising of the growing text. Editing of conventions occurs at any point in writing processes.

Evidence of students' writing development (Moffett, 1968) is reflected in the scoring guides for the OSSLT writing component:

(1) Students' writing is more highly valued as it develops from the vague, where they address a distant, unknown audience, to the concrete, where they address a known audience. This dimension is demonstrated when writers become aware of the need to provide information for readers who may or may not share their perspectives and experiences. They also recognize that clarity of communication requires the use of conventional punctuation, spelling and grammar.

(2) Students' writing is more highly valued as it develops from a confusing presentation of ideas and information to a more clear and coherent presentation. This dimension is demonstrated when writers move away from written work containing hackneyed information and ideas and from the use of vague, colloquial language and limited syntactic choices to composing more effective texts that organize ideas and information clearly and use language and sentence structures with some effectiveness.

What is assessed?

The OSSLT assesses reading and writing skills.

Reading is defined as the process through which the reader actively makes meaning for a variety of written texts that students are expected to understand according to the expectations in *The Ontario Curriculum* across all subjects up to the end of Grade 9. The OSSLT narrative, informational and graphic reading selections focus on three reading skills:
• Reading Skill 1: understanding explicitly stated information and ideas
• Reading Skill 2: understanding implicitly stated information and ideas (making inferences)
• Reading Skill 3: making connections between information and ideas in a reading selection and personal knowledge and experience (interpreting reading selections by integrating information and ideas in a reading selection and personal knowledge and experience)

Writing is defined as the constructive process of communicating in the written forms in which students are expected to write according to the expectations in *The Ontario Curriculum* across all subjects up to the end of Grade 9. Through a combination of multiple-choice questions and two short and two long open-response writing tasks, the OSSLT focuses on three writing skills:
• Writing Skill 1: developing a main idea with sufficient supporting details
• Writing Skill 2: organizing information and ideas in a coherent manner
• Writing Skill 3: using conventions (spelling, grammar, punctuation) in a manner that does not distract from clear communication

CHAPTER 4:
The Assessment Process

In This Chapter

- What does the OSSLT consist of?
- How does EQAO determine whether a student passes?
- How does EQAO ensure that English-language learners and students with special education needs can participate fairly?

What does the OSSLT consist of?

The OSSLT consists of two booklets. The test contains both operational and field-test reading and writing items. The operational component of the test comprises

- 31 multiple-choice reading items related to five reading selections;
- four open-response items related to three of the five reading selections;
- two short open-response writing tasks;
- two long open-response writing tasks (a series of paragraphs expressing an opinion and a news report) and
- eight multiple-choice writing items.

The writing skills formerly associated with the summary and information paragraph will continue to be tested by open-response items. All open-response questions are scored with rubrics.

Operational items are "live" test questions that count toward a student's score. Field-test questions are embedded in a test for trial purposes for potential use in future tests. Each booklet contains embedded field-test questions that account for less than 20% of the allotted time.

OSSLT: Approximate Number of Items by Type			
	Multiple-Choice Items	**Open-Response Items**	**Total Items**
Operational Reading	31	4	35
Operational Writing	8	4	12
Field Test	6 to 10	0 to 2	7 to 10
Total Items for Each Student	45 to 49	8 to 10	54 to 57

OSSLT: Approximate Number of Raw Score Points and Percentage of Total Raw Score Points by Item Type		
Operational Item Type	**Number of Raw Score Points**	**Percentage of Total Raw Score Points**
Multiple-Choice	39	48%
Open-Response	42	52%
Totals	81	100%

Item Types and Raw Score Points by Task

Reading Tasks by Selection Type	Reading Questions and Raw Score Points
Read and respond to questions related to understanding of an information paragraph	Six multiple-choice and one open-response reading questions = 9 score points or 11% of total literacy score
Read and respond to questions related to understanding of a news report	Five multiple-choice and one open-response reading questions = 8 score points or 10% of total literacy score
Read and respond to questions related to understanding of a dialogue	Five multiple-choice and two open-response reading questions = 11 score points or 14% of total literacy score
Read and respond to questions related to understanding of a real-life narrative	Nine multiple-choice questions = 9 score points or 11% of total literacy score
Read and respond to questions related to understanding of a graphic text	Six multiple-choice questions = 6 score points or 7% of total literacy score
	Total reading raw score points = 43 or approximately 53% of total literacy score
Writing Tasks	**Writing Prompts, Questions and Raw Score Points**
Write short responses to two prompts	Two short-writing prompts = 10 score points or 12% of total literacy score
Write a series of paragraphs expressing an opinion	One long-writing prompt (Opinion) = 10 score points or 12% of total literacy score
Write a news report	One long-writing prompt (News Report) = 10 score points or 12% of total literacy score
Respond to questions related to structuring content, organization of ideas and using conventions when writing	Eight multiple-choice questions = 8 score points or 10% of total literacy score
	Total writing raw score points = 38 or approximately 46% of total literacy score

How does EQAO determine whether a student passes?

After all operational items in a student performance are scored, the data are analyzed to determine a literacy score. In 1999, passing standards for reading and writing were set by a standard-setting committee. In 2004 and 2006, EQAO held standard-alignment activities to align the two standards (reading and writing) with a single standard for a literacy score based on a test administered on a single day. The Individual Student Report tells passing students that they passed and provides a single literacy score for students who did not pass. Schools are provided with additional information to address the needs of unsuccessful students. This information enables students, parents and teachers to plan for improvement.

How does EQAO ensure that English-language learners and students with special education needs can participate fairly?

English-language learners are provided with special provisions and students with special education needs are allowed accommodations to ensure that they can participate in the OSSLT and can demonstrate the full extent of their skills. In cases where special provisions or accommodations will not address a student's needs, a deferral from participation in the assessment is allowed. Each year, EQAO reviews and updates these provisions and accommodations to ensure that they reflect new developments in supports for students. A separate guide for students with special education needs and English-language learners outlines the policies and procedures for granting special provisions, accommodations, deferrals and exemptions, ensuring the integrity of the assessment.

CHAPTER 5: Curriculum Connections

How are curriculum expectations reflected in the OSSLT?

Curriculum Documents

The OSSLT is solidly grounded in the *Ontario Curriculum* expectations for all subjects that address reading and writing skills up to the end of Grade 9. The international standards for large-scale graduation-requirement tests state that students should not be tested on knowledge and skills they have not been taught. When teachers teach *The Ontario Curriculum* in their classes, their instruction includes the knowledge and skills related to reading and writing that the test measures.

The charts on the following pages clearly link the reading and writing knowledge and skills tested by the OSSLT to some of the overall and specific expectations in the Grades 7, 8 and 9 *Ontario Curriculum* documents published between 1997 and 200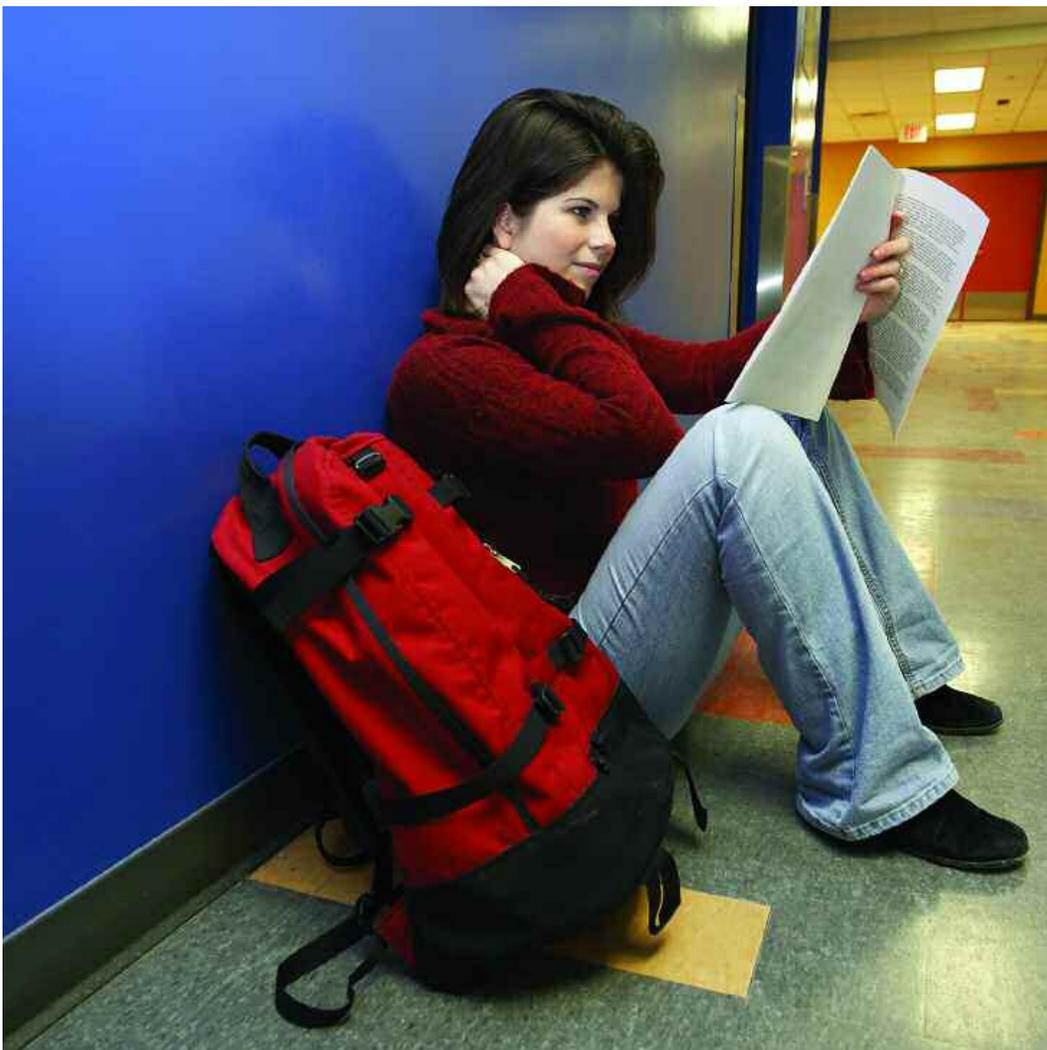7. The expectations listed are only a sample of those related to the OSSLT. Many other expectations in the curriculum relate directly or indirectly. The charts will be updated once the Ministry of Education completes the revisions to *The Ontario Curriculum* that are currently underway.

Curriculum Exemplars

For most subjects and at each grade level, the Ministry of Education provides teachers with exemplars of student performance at the four levels of achievement described in each subject curriculum document. Some of the tasks in the Ministry's Grade 9 exemplars are identical to tasks on the OSSLT. For instance, the supported-opinion task in academic English and the magazine article in social science and humanities (food and nutrition) are direct matches with the series of paragraphs expressing an opinion and the news report. Other writing tasks, such as the newsletters in business studies and guidance, the reports in applied and academic mathematics and science, the proposal in academic geography and the letter in drama, are similar to the writing tasks on the OSSLT.

Sample Grades 7–9 Curriculum Expectations Related to the OSSLT Reading and Writing Tasks*

Grade and Subject	Curriculum Expectations	Reading Skills	Writing Skills
Grade 7			
Drama and Dance	evaluate the quality of a drama and a dance performance by writing a review that refers to what was seen, heard, and experienced		✔
French as a Second Language	read at least twelve simple texts (e.g., letters, descriptions, essays), and identify main ideas and some supporting details	✔	
	write in a variety of simple forms (e.g., letters, poems, descriptions), following a model and making substitutions and minor adaptations to the model		✔
Geography (revised 2004)	apply the perspective of one or more themes of geographic inquiry to produce a report (e.g., newspaper, television, radio, website) on an actual or fictional environmental event (e.g., forest fires, illegal dumping, an oil spill, deforestation, an epidemic, drought, the development of a new mine, the depletion of fish stocks)		✔

* The curriculum expectations listed in this table are only a sample of those related to the OSSLT. Many other expectations in the curriculum relate directly and indirectly.

Grade and Subject	Curriculum Expectations	Reading Skills	Writing Skills
Grade 7			
Health and Physical Education	outline a variety of issues related to substance use and abuse (e.g., the effects of second-hand smoke; the impact of laws governing drug use, including the use of tobacco and alcohol)	✔	✔
History (revised 2004)	use a variety of primary and secondary sources to locate relevant information about how early settlers met the challenges of the new land (e.g., *primary sources: artefacts, journals, letters, statistics, field trips, interviews, period documents and maps; secondary sources: maps, illustrations, print materials, videos, CD-ROMs, Internet sites*)	✔	
	describe the major causes and personalities of the War of 1812		✔
	analyse, synthesize, and evaluate historical information (e.g., debate the question: Who won the War of 1812?)	✔	✔
Language: Overall Expectations (revised 2006)	read and demonstrate an understanding of a variety of literary, graphic, and informational texts, using a range of strategies to construct meaning	✔	
	recognize a variety of text forms, text features, and stylistic elements and demonstrate understanding of how they help communicate meaning	✔	
	generate, gather, and organize ideas and information to write for an intended purpose and audience		✔
	draft and revise their writing, using a variety of informational, literary, and graphic forms and stylistic elements appropriate for the purpose and audience		✔
	use editing, proofreading, and publishing skills and strategies, and knowledge of language conventions, to correct errors, refine expression, and present their work effectively		✔
Language: Specific Expectations (revised 2006)	identify the topic, purpose, and audience for more complex writing forms *(e.g., a rap poem or jingle, to express a personal view to the class; a report for a community newspaper about a public meeting on an environmental issue affecting local neighbourhoods; an autobiography for a youth magazine, web page, blog, or zine)*		✔
	write complex texts of different lengths using a wide range of forms *(e.g., a description of the procedure for growing rice or coffee; an explanation of multiple ways to solve a mathematical problem or investigation; an argument stating the opposing points of view on a community issue, including the response of each side to the points made by the other side, for a class/school debate, or to report on the debate in a newsletter; a fictional narrative about a historical event to dramatize material studied; a mystery story modelled on the structures and conventions of the genre)*		✔

Grade and Subject	Curriculum Expectations	Reading Skills	Writing Skills
Grade 7			
Mathematics (revised 2005)	research and report on real-life applications of area measurements (e.g., building a skateboard; painting a room)	✔	✔
	make and evaluate convincing arguments, based on the analysis of data		✔
	read, interpret, and draw conclusions from primary data (e.g., survey results, measurements, observations) and from secondary data (e.g., temperature data or community data in the newspaper, data from the Internet about populations) presented in charts, tables, and graphs (including relative frequency tables and circle graphs)	✔	✔
Music	communicate their thoughts and feelings about the music they hear, using language and a variety of art forms and media (e.g., a short essay, a dance drama)		✔
Visual Arts	explain their preference for specific art works, with reference to the artist's intentional use of the elements and principles of design (e.g., the smooth texture and balanced forms of Inuit soapstone carvings effectively communicate the artists' harmonious relationship with the natural world)		✔

Grade and Subject	Curriculum Expectations	Reading Skills	Writing Skills
Grade 8			
Drama and Dance	produce pieces of writing in which they reflect on their experiences in drama and dance, and in which they show their ability to analyse and find solutions to problems in real life		✔
French as a Second Language	read at least fifteen simple texts (e.g., excerpts from newspapers, magazines), and identify the main idea and supporting details	✔	
	produce pieces of writing in a variety of simple forms (e.g., lists, dialogues, illustrated stories), following and making adaptations to a model		✔
Geography (revised 2004)	investigate and explain the advantages and disadvantages of Canada's involvement in major trade associations/agreements (e.g., North American Free Trade Agreement [NAFTA], World Trade Organization [WTO])	✔	✔
	explain how the components of culture (e.g., language, social organization, educational systems, beliefs and customs) can be affected by migration		✔
Health and Physical Education	outline the possible negative consequences of substance use and abuse (e.g., fetal alcohol syndrome, effects of steroid use, accidents when drinking and driving)	✔	
History (revised 2004)	use a variety of resources and tools to gather, process, and communicate information about conflicts and changes that occurred during the development of western Canada	✔	✔
	explain the effects of post-Confederation immigration, new wheat strains, and the Klondike gold rush on the expansion of western Canada and British Columbia (e.g., the development of prairie towns, the entry of the Yukon Territory into Confederation, the growth of Dawson City)	✔	✔
Language: Overall Expectations (revised 2006)	read and demonstrate an understanding of a variety of literary, graphic, and informational texts, using a range of strategies to construct meaning	✔	
	recognize a variety of text forms, text features, and stylistic elements and demonstrate understanding of how they help communicate meaning	✔	
	generate, gather, and organize ideas and information to write for an intended purpose and audience		✔
	draft and revise their writing, using a variety of informational, literary, and graphic forms and stylistic elements appropriate for the purpose and audience		✔
	use editing, proofreading, and publishing skills and strategies, and knowledge of language conventions, to correct errors, refine expression, and present their work effectively		✔
Language: Specific Expectations (revised 2006)	analyse increasingly complex texts to identify different types of organizational patterns used in them and explain how the patterns help communicate meaning (e.g., a "before-and-after" comparison in an advertisement; time order and cause and effect in an online magazine or newspaper article)	✔	
	identify the topic, purpose, and audience for more complex writing forms (e.g., a personal memoir about the school experience to share with classmates, family, and friends at graduation; a report on a topic of current interest in the style of a newspaper article, including headlines, for a school or community newspaper; a campaign flyer or brochure to promote a candidate for school government)		✔

Grade and Subject	Curriculum Expectations	Reading Skills	Writing Skills
Grade 8			
Mathematics (revised 2005)	communicate mathematical thinking orally, visually, and in writing, using mathematical vocabulary and a variety of appropriate representations, and observing mathematical conventions		✔
	research, describe, and report on applications of volume and capacity measurement (e.g., cooking, closet space, aquarium size) (*Sample problem:* Describe situations where volume and capacity are used in your home.)	✔	✔
	identify and describe trends, based on the rate of change of data from tables and graphs, using informal language (e.g., "The steep line going upward on this graph represents rapid growth. The steep line going downward on this other graph represents rapid decline.")		✔
Music	recognize and describe the difference between program music (e.g., *The Moldau* by Smetana) and absolute music (e.g., Symphony No. 40 in G Minor by Mozart)		✔
Visual Arts	cexplain their preference for specific art works, with reference to the artist's use of the principles of design and their understanding of the ideas and feelings expressed in the work (e.g., Colville's use of sombre colours and informal balance in *Horse and Train* conveys a strong sense of impending disaster)		✔

Grade and Subject	Curriculum Expectations	Reading Skills	Writing Skills
Grade 9			
Comprehensive Arts	identify, research, and describe historical and stylistic links within the arts (e.g., Baroque style in visual arts and music)	✔	✔
Dance	outline the cultural significance of one or more world dance forms (e.g., modern, jazz, Afro-Caribbean, South Asian)		✔
Dramatic Arts	research a dramatic form prevalent before the twentieth century (e.g., *commedia dell'arte*, Greek comedy, and Shakespearean tragedy)	✔	
English (Applied and Academic): Overall Expectations (revised 2007)	read and demonstrate an understanding of a variety of informational, literary, and graphic texts, using a range of strategies to construct meaning	✔	
	recognize a variety of text forms, text features, and stylistic elements and demonstrate understanding of how they help communicate meaning	✔	
	use knowledge of words and cueing systems to read fluently	✔	
	generate, gather, and organize ideas and information to write for an intended purpose and audience		✔
	draft and revise their writing, using a variety of informational, literary, and graphic forms and stylistic elements appropriate for the purpose and audience		✔
	use editing, proofreading, and publishing skills and strategies, and knowledge of language conventions, to correct errors, refine expression, and present their work effectively		✔
English (Applied): Specific Expectations —with selected examples (revised 2007)	identify the important ideas and supporting details in a few different types of texts	✔	
	make inferences about simple texts and some teacher-selected complex texts, using stated and implied ideas from the texts (e.g., *state what the actions of a character in a story reveal about the character's attitude; draw conclusions about the subject of a biography*)	✔	
	extend understanding of simple texts and some teacher-selected complex texts by making basic connections between the ideas in them and personal knowledge, experience, and insights; other texts; and the world around them	✔	
	analyse texts in terms of the information, ideas, issues, or themes they explore, examining how various aspects of the texts contribute to the presentation or development of these elements (e.g., *explain how the behaviour of the main character at the climax of the story reveals the story's theme; show how flashbacks are used in a graphic novel to explain the present behaviour of the hero; determine how the diagrams in a technical manual support the information conveyed by the text*)	✔	
	identify a few different characteristics of informational, literary, and graphic text forms and explain how they help communicate meaning (e.g., *newspaper articles follow the 5 W's pattern to communicate the most relevant information to the reader efficiently; opinion pieces guide the reader through the argument by means of a topic sentence, supporting details, and transitional words*)	✔	
	identify a few different text features and explain how they help communicate meaning (e.g., *the sections and subheadings in a newspaper layout help readers locate global, national, and local news*)	✔	
	use a few different decoding strategies to read and understand unfamiliar words (e.g., *identify root words, prefixes, and suffixes to predict meaning*)	✔	

Grade and Subject	Curriculum Expectations	Reading Skills	Writing Skills
Grade 9			
English (Applied): Specific Expectations —with selected examples (continued)	identify the topic, purpose, and audience for a few different types of writing tasks (e.g., *a formal paragraph stating and explaining an opinion on a topic for the teacher; a newspaper article and accompanying photograph for the local newspaper*)		✔
	identify, sort, and order main ideas and supporting details for writing tasks, using a few different strategies and organizational patterns suited to the content and the purpose for writing (e.g., *identify key words in questions or prompts provided in the assignment and use them to organize information and ideas; use the 5 W's to classify information from a documentary*)		✔
	write for different purposes and audiences using a few different informational, graphic, and literary forms		✔
	use knowledge of basic spelling rules and patterns, a few different resources, and appropriate strategies to spell familiar and new words correctly		✔
	use punctuation correctly to communicate their intended meaning		✔
	use grammar conventions correctly to communicate their intended meaning clearly		✔
	proofread and correct their writing, using guidelines developed with the teacher and peers		✔
French as a Second Language (Core): Academic	demonstrate an understanding of materials containing a brief text (e.g., brochures, posters, advertisements) through oral and written presentations	✔	✔
	write a descriptive paragraph, including an introductory sentence, development of main ideas, and a concluding sentence		✔
French as a Second Language (Core): Applied	read materials containing a brief text (e.g., brochures, advertisements) and develop the main ideas and some supporting details in a different context (e.g., radio announcements, class posters)	✔	
	write a short descriptive paragraph, including an introductory sentence, development of main ideas, and a concluding sentence		✔

Grade and Subject	Curriculum Expectations	Reading Skills	Writing Skills
Grade 9			
Food and Nutrition	describe the useful information available in cookbooks (e.g., storage and preparation tips, conversion charts, food terms)	✔	✔
Food and Nutrition	organize, interpret, and communicate the results of their inquiries, using a variety of methods (e.g., graphs, diagrams, oral presentations, newspaper articles, hypermedia presentations, and videos)	✔	✔
Geography: Academic and Applied (revised 2005)	gather geographic information from primary sources (e.g., field research, surveys, interviews) and secondary sources (e.g., reference books, mainstream and alternative media, CD-ROMs, the Internet) to research a geographic issue	✔	
Geography: Academic and Applied (revised 2005)	communicate the results of geographic inquiries, using appropriate terms and concepts and a variety of forms and techniques		✔
Guidance and Career Education (revised 2006)	identify and use a variety of reading skills and strategies to improve understanding of texts	✔	
Guidance and Career Education (revised 2006)	use appropriate forms of writing (e.g., report, summary, narrative) to suit audience and purpose		✔
Health and Physical Education	identify the major factors (e.g., environmental influences such as peer pressure, media influences, adolescent attitudes) that contribute to the use of alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs	✔	
Health and Physical Education	explain the benefits and disadvantages of working with others		✔
Individual and Family Living	describe variations in the roles of adolescents and in expectations of females and of males among families within Canada and in other countries		✔
Individual and Family Living	describe the impact of economic, social, technological, environmental, and health factors on lifestyle decisions (e.g., whether to purchase a product, use a service, or participate in an activity)		✔
Introduction to Business (revised 2006)	describe a variety of Canadian inventions (e.g., the snowmobile, basketball, kerosene) and innovations (e.g., IMAX) including Aboriginal inventions and innovations (e.g., goggles, snowshoes, kayaks)		✔

Grade and Subject	Curriculum Expectations	Reading Skills	Writing Skills
Grade 9			
Music	identify and describe, orally and in writing, how the elements of music work together in a particular historical style and cultural context in a variety of musical works that are dealt with chronologically, conceptually, thematically, and/or by genre (e.g., *chronologically:* Baroque, classical, Romantic, contemporary, jazz, popular music, etc.; *conceptually:* rhythmically oriented music, melodically oriented music, loud or quiet music, music of a specific texture, etc.; *thematically:* music for celebration, music for dance, music for film, music for rituals, music that tells stories, patriotic music, etc.; *by genre:* impressionism, ragtime, big band, jazz, rock 'n' roll, Kodo, Ghanaian drumming, aboriginal songs, Canadian Maritime music, etc.)		✔
Mathematics: Academic and Applied (revised 2005)	communicate mathematical thinking orally, visually, and in writing, using mathematical vocabulary and a variety of appropriate representations, and observing mathematical conventions		✔
Mathematics: Applied (revised 2005)	describe a situation that would explain the events illustrated by a given graph of a relationship between two variables (*Sample problem:* The walk of an individual is illustrated in the given graph, produced by a motion detector and a graphing calculator. Describe the walk [e.g., the initial distance from the motion detector, the rate of walk].)		✔
Mathematics: Academic (revised 2005)	explain the significance of optimal area, surface area, or volume in various applications (e.g., the minimum amount of packaging material; the relationship between surface area and heat loss)		✔
Native Studies	describe the contributions of Aboriginal artisans to Canadian society (e.g., Tomson Highway—theatre; Graham Greene—acting; Pauline Johnson—poetry; Robbie Robertson—music; various Inuit sculptors)		✔
	explain how traditional forms of expression influence modern designs in Aboriginal art forms		✔
Science: Academic	describe the major postulates of the cell theory and how the theory explains cell division (e.g., all living things are made up of one or more cells and the products of those cells; cells are the functional units of life; all cells come from pre-existing cells)		✔
Science: Applied	describe the basic process of cell division, including what happens to the cell membrane and the contents of the nucleus (e.g., stages of mitosis—prophase, metaphase, anaphase, and telophase)		✔
Visual Arts	explain how artistic intentions are expressed in specific examples of historical and student artworks (e.g., the Group of Seven's intent to establish a new direction in Canadian art)		✔

In This Chapter

• How is the test scored?

CHAPTER 6:
How the Test Is Scored

How is the test scored?

Each open-response item on the OSSLT is scored using a rubric. The following are the rubrics used for scoring. Multiple-choice items are scored by machine.

OSSLT Generic Rubric for Open-Response Reading Items	
Code	**Descriptor**
Blank	• blank: nothing written or drawn in the lined space provided
Illegible/ Off topic	• response is illegible, off-topic, irrelevant or incorrect
Code 10	• response indicates minimal reading comprehension • response provides minimal or irrelevant ideas and information from the reading selection
Code 20	• response indicates some reading comprehension • response provides vague ideas and information from the reading selection; it may include irrelevant ideas and information from the reading selection
Code 30	• response indicates considerable reading comprehension • response provides accurate, specific and relevant ideas and information from the reading selection

OSSLT Topic Development Rubric for Writing a Series of Paragraphs Expressing an Opinion	
Code	**Descriptor**
Blank	The pages are blank with nothing written or drawn in the space provided.
Illegible	The response is illegible, or irrelevant to the prompt.
Off topic	The response is off topic.
Code 10	The response is related to the prompt but does not express an opinion. **OR** The response expresses an opinion with no supporting details or provides details unrelated to the opinion. There is no evidence of organization.
Code 20	The response is related to the prompt, but only part of the response expresses and supports an opinion. **OR** The response is related to the prompt, and expresses and supports an opinion, but the opinion is unclear or inconsistent. There are insufficient supporting details: too few or repetitive. There is limited evidence of organization.
Code 30	The response is related to the prompt and expresses a clear opinion. There are insufficient and/or vague supporting details or the connection of the details to the opinion is not always clear. There is evidence of organization, but lapses distract from the overall communication.
Code 40	The response is related to the prompt. A clear and consistent opinion is developed with sufficient supporting details, however, only some are specific. The organization is mechanical and any lapses do not distract from the overall communication.
Code 50	The response is related to the prompt. A clear and consistent opinion is developed with sufficient specific supporting details. The organization is logical.
Code 60	The response is related to the assigned prompt. A clear and consistent opinion is developed with sufficient specific supporting details that are thoughtfully chosen. The organization is coherent demonstrating a thoughtful progression of ideas.

OSSLT Topic Development Rubric for Writing a News Report

Code	Descriptor
Blank	The page is blank with nothing written or drawn in the space provided.
Illegible	The response is illegible or irrelevant to the prompt.
Off topic	The response is off topic.
Code 10	The response is related to headline and/or photo but is not a news report. **OR** The response is a news report related to the headline and/or photo. It identifies an event, but provides no supporting details, or provides details that are unrelated to the event. There is no evidence of organization.
Code 20	The response is related to headline and/or photo but only partly in the form of a news report. **OR** The response is a news report related to the headline and/or photo, but the focus on an event is unclear or inconsistent. There are insufficient supporting details: too few or repetitious. There is limited evidence of organization.
Code 30	The response is a news report related to the headline and photo with a clear focus on an event. There are insufficient and/or vague supporting details or the connection of the details to the event is not always clear. There is evidence of organization, but lapses distract from the overall communication.
Code 40	The response is a news report related to the headline and photo with a clear and consistent focus on an event. There are sufficient supporting details, however, only some are specific. The organization is mechanical and any lapses do not distract from the overall communication.
Code 50	The response is a news report related to the headline and photo with a clear and consistent focus on an event. There are sufficient specific supporting details to develop the news report. The organization is logical.
Code 60	The response is a news report related to the headline and photo with a clear and consistent focus on an event. There are sufficient specific supporting details, which are thoughtfully chosen to develop the news report. The organization is coherent demonstrating a thoughtful progression of ideas.

OSSLT Use of Conventions Generic Rubric for News Report and Series of Paragraphs Expressing an Opinion

Code	Descriptor
Code 10	There is insufficient evidence to assess the use of conventions. **OR** Errors in conventions interfere with communication.
Code 20	Errors in conventions distract from communication.
Code 30	Errors in conventions do not distract from communication.
Code 40	Control of conventions is evident in written work.

OSSLT Generic Rubrics for Short Writing Tasks

Code	Topic Development
Blank	• blank: nothing written or drawn in the lined space provided
Illegible / Off topic	• response is illegible, off-topic or irrelevant to the prompt
Code 10	• response is not developed or is developed with irrelevant ideas and information
Code 20	• response is developed with vague ideas and information; it may contain some irrelevant ideas and information
Code 30	• response is developed with clear, specific and relevant ideas and information

Code	Use of Conventions
Code 10	• errors in conventions distract from communication
Code 20	• errors in conventions do not distract from communication

In This Chapter

• How is the comparability of the test maintained from year to year?
• How is the OSSLT blueprint used?
• How is the test equated year to year?
  • Why and how are items field tested?

CHAPTER 7:

Maintaining Comparability

How is the comparability of the test maintained from year to year?

It is critically important that the OSSLT be comparable from year to year. A number of measures are taken to ensure year-to-year consistency, including
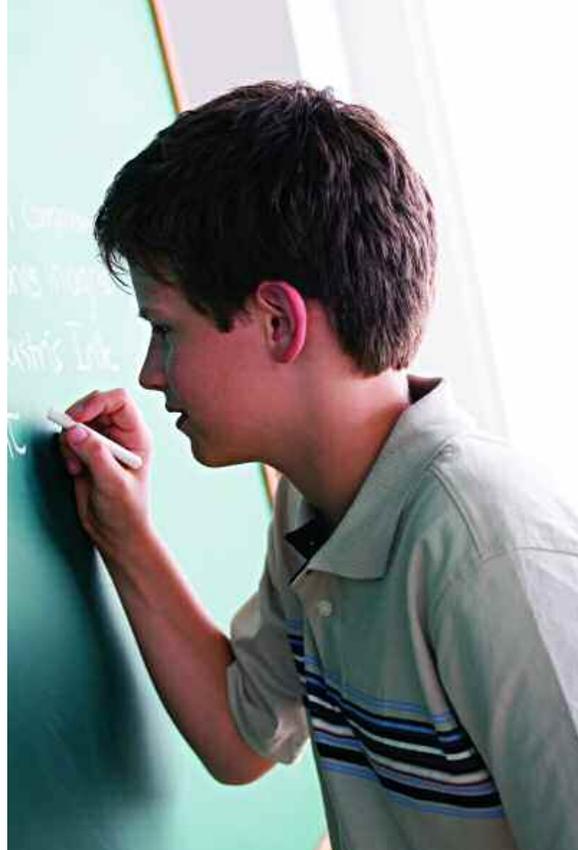
• use of a blueprint;
• equating from year to year and
• use of field-test items.

How is the OSSLT blueprint used?

The OSSLT blueprint is used to develop each year's test so that it always has the same characteristics. The blueprint ensures each reading or writing item on the test measures reading and writing skills emphasized in *The Ontario Curriculum.* Chapter 5 of this framework maps these skills and tasks to cross-curricular expectations in Grades 7, 8 and 9.

How is the test equated year to year?

Data on field tested items are used in the construction of each new version of the test so that each year's test has the same level of difficulty as previous tests. Equating is used to ensure that data at the school, board and provincial levels can validly be compared from year to year.

Why and how are items field tested?

Embedded field-test materials are used to try out new items before they become operational to ensure that they are fair for all students and to equate the test with those of previous years, which allows results to be compared from one year to the next. The quality of year-to-year comparisons of data depends on the use of embedded field-test materials.

Field-test items look like the operational part of the booklet. However, scores on these items are not used in determining student, school, board or provincial results.

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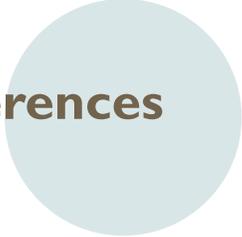
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