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Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT)

What is the definition of literacy for the OSSLT?

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

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

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

The following excerpts from page 4 of *The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 9 and 10: English* (revised 2007) highlight the foundational value of literacy skills:

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.

There is emphasis on literacy throughout *The Ontario Curriculum*

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

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

activities and tasks that students undertake in the Canadian and world studies curriculum involve the literacy skills relating to oral, written, and visual communication. For example, they develop literacy skills by reading, interpreting, and analysing various texts, including diaries, letters, government legislation and policy documents, interviews, speeches, treaties, information from non-governmental organizations, news stories, and fiction and non-fiction books … In all Canadian and world studies courses, students are required to use appropriate and correct terminology, including that related to the concepts of disciplinary thinking, and are encouraged to use language with care and precision in order to communicate effectively (pages 50–51, Grades 9 and 10: Canadian and World Studies, revised 2013).

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

- *recognize and appreciate multiple mathematical perspectives;*
- *make informed decisions and contribute fully to their own lives and to today's interconnected local and global communities;*
- *adapt to changes and synthesize new ideas;*
- *communicate effectively;*
- *think critically and creatively to connect, apply, and leverage mathematics within other areas of study including science, technology, engineering, the arts, and beyond.*
  (Grade 9 Mathematics, 2021, https://www.dcp.edu.gov.on.ca/en/curriculum/secondary-mathematics/courses/mth1w/course-intro)

Many of the activities and tasks that students undertake in the science curriculum involve the literacy skills related to oral, written, and visual communication. Communication skills are fundamental to the development of scientific literacy, and fostering students' communication skills is an important part of the teacher's role in the science curriculum … Students use writing skills to describe and explain their observations, to support the process of critically analysing information in both informal and formal contexts, and to present their findings in written, graphic, and multimedia forms (page 39, Grades 9 and 10: Science, revised 2008).

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

Information and communications technologies (ICT) provide a range of tools that can significantly ... support students' language learning. ICT tools include multimedia resources, databases, Internet websites, digital cameras, and word-processing programs. Tools such as these can help students to collect, organize, and sort the data they gather and to write, edit, and present reports on their findings ... Whenever appropriate, therefore, students should be

encouraged to use ICT to support and communicate their learning (page 35, Grades 9 and 10: English, revised 2007).

A vision of literacy for adolescent learners in Ontario schools might be described as follows:
> *All students are equipped with the literacy skills necessary to be critical and creative thinkers, effective meaning-makers and communicators, collaborative co-learners, and innovative problem-solvers. These are the skills that will enable them to achieve personal, career, and societal goals.* (page 50, Grades 9 to 12: First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Studies, revised 2019).

What is assessed by the OSSLT?

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

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

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

The combination of these written and multiple-select questions focuses on three writing skills:

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

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

THE ASSESSMENT PROCESS
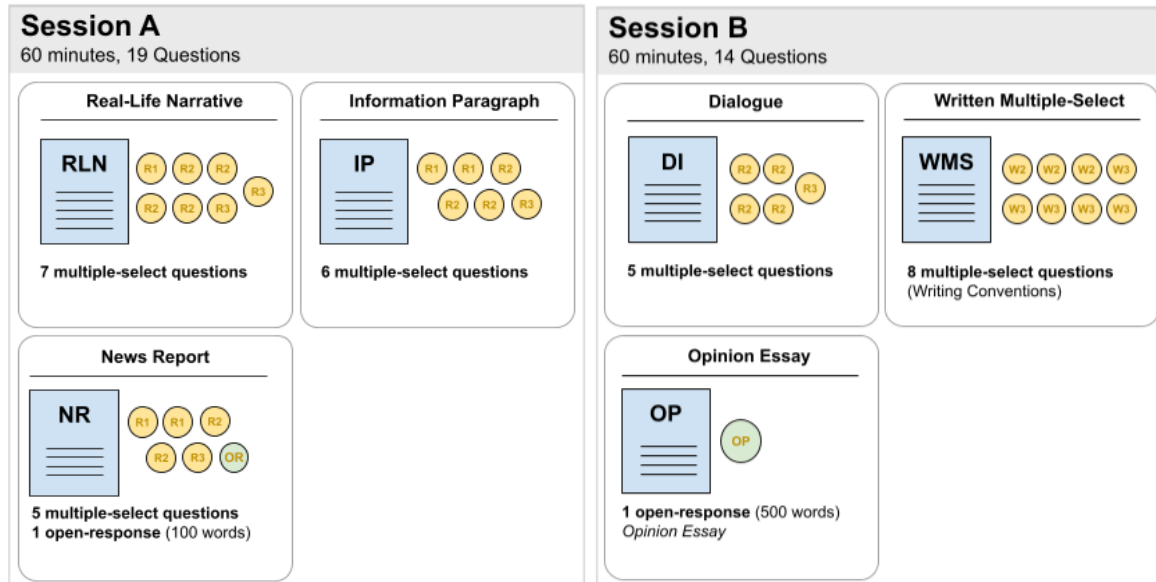
What is in the OSSLT?

The OSSLT is a computer-based assessment that comprises two sessions (Session A and Session B) containing a total of 33 questions: 31 multiple-select questions (e.g., multiple-choice, drag and drop, drop-down menu, checklist, text selection) and two constructed open-response questions. Each session is designed to be completed in 60 minutes, and students complete each session in one sitting. The sessions can be attempted one after the other, either back to back with a short break or on two different dates and times. At the end of the two assessment sessions, students will be presented with a questionnaire that asks them about their attitudes and perceptions with respect to literacy.
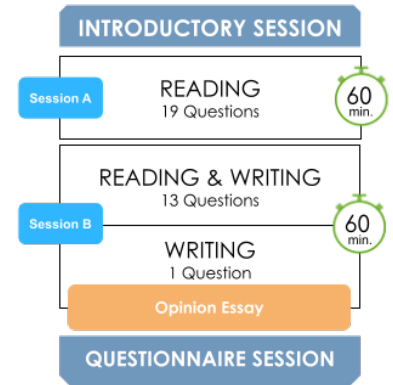
The OSSLT uses a testlet-based linear on-the-fly (tLOFT) design. In this method, test forms are generated in real time through the selection of pre-constructed and pre-equated groups of **questions** and, where applicable, the associated reading selections. Each group generated under this model is mapped to a blueprint specifying criteria for the **questions** to be selected.

The two sessions are presented to students in six groupings of the following types of questions:

- **Real-Life Narrative (RLN):** a reading selection and seven multiple-select reading questions.
- **Information Paragraph (IP):** a reading selection and six multiple-select reading questions.
- **News Report (NR):** a reading selection, one written response and five multiple-select reading questions.
- **Dialogue (DI):** a reading selection and five multiple-select reading questions.
- **Written Multiple-Select (WMS):** eight multiple-select writing questions.
- **Opinion Essay (OP):** one written response composed of a series of paragraphs supporting an opinion.

The 33 questions in the OSSLT are operational: they count toward the student's score. The following table provides information on the number of questions by their type:

	Number of Questions by Type		
	Multiple-Select Questions	Open-Response Questions	Total Questions
Operational Reading Questions	23	1	24
Operational Writing Questions	8	1	9
Total Questions	**31**	**2**	**33**

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

Number of Raw Score Points and Percentage of Total Raw Score Points by Question Type		
Operational Question Type	**Number of Raw Score Points**	**Percentage of Total Raw Score Points**
Multiple-Select Questions	47	67%
Open-Response Questions	23	33%
Total	**70**	**100%**

Prior to writing the OSSLT, students can become familiar with the assessment through an introductory session that they can try on their own (or that is organized by their teacher). During the session, students will have access to a practice test that contains sample questions.

How is a student outcome of "successful" or "not yet successful" determined?

The Individual Student Report provides the outcome and a single literacy score for all students. This information enables students, parents, guardians and teachers to plan for improvement.

A statistical procedure informed by Item Response Theory (IRT) is used to assign outcomes to students according to their responses to the questions on the OSSLT. IRT is based on the relationship between students' overall ability in reading and writing and their performance on individual items. The analysis determines the most likely location of a student on the achievement continuum defined by the content of the test. **Each student's outcome is determined by the pattern of responses to the multiple-select questions and by the scores achieved on the open-response questions.**

THE BLUEPRINT AND CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

Blueprint for the OSSLT

Reading Tasks by Selection Type	Reading Questions and Raw Score Points
Read and respond to questions related to an understanding of an information paragraph	Six multiple-select reading questions = 10 score points, or approximately 14% of total literacy score
Read and respond to questions related to an understanding of a news report	One open-response and five multiple-select reading questions = 10 score points, or approximately 14% of total literacy score
Read and respond to questions related to an understanding of a dialogue	Five multiple-select reading questions = 8 score points, or approximately 11% of total literacy score
Read and respond to questions related to an understanding of a real-life narrative	Seven multiple-select questions = 10 score points, or approximately 14% of total literacy score
	Total reading raw score points = 38, or approximately 54% of total literacy score

Writing Tasks	Writing Prompts, Questions and Raw Score Points
Write an opinion essay	One long-writing prompt (Opinion) = 20 score points, or approximately 29% of total literacy score
Respond to questions related to the structuring of content, the organization of ideas and the use of conventions when writing	Eight multiple-select questions = 12 score points, or approximately 17% of total literacy score
	Total writing raw score points = 32, or approximately 46% of total literacy score

Curriculum Connections

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

	Sample Grade 9 Curriculum Expectations Related to the OSSLT Reading and Writing Tasks		
Subject	**Curriculum Expectation**	**Reading**	**Writing**
Dance	• identify and describe the characteristics and function of a social dance within a society		●
	• demonstrate, and describe using correct terminology, the movement repertoire of a variety of dance forms from around the world		●
	• identify and describe ways in which choreographers and performers use or have used dance to address social and environmental issues		●
Dramatic Arts	• use a variety of print and non-print sources	●	
	• interpret short drama works and identify and explain their personal response to the works	●	●
English (Applied and Academic)	• 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)	• 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	●	
	• 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	●	
	• identify a few different characteristics of informational, literary, and graphic text forms and explain how they help communicate meaning	●	●
	• identify a few different text features and explain how they help communicate meaning	●	●
	• use a few different decoding strategies to read and understand unfamiliar words	●	
	• identify the topic, purpose, and audience for a few different types of writing tasks		●

Sample Grade 9 Curriculum Expectations Related to the OSSLT Reading and Writing Tasks (continued)			
Subject	**Curriculum Expectation**	**Reading**	**Writing**
English (Applied) continued	• 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		●
	• write for different purposes and audiences using a few different information, 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		●
Food and Nutrition	• use an appropriate format … to communicate the results of their research and inquiry effectively for a specific purpose and audience	●	●
	• use terms relating to food and nutrition correctly		●
	• demonstrate an understanding of the general research process by reflecting on and evaluating their own research, inquiry, and communication skills	●	●
Geography (Academic and Applied)	• communicate their ideas, arguments, and conclusions using various formats and styles, as appropriate for the audience and purpose		●
	• use appropriate terminology when communicating the results of their investigations		●
	• describe ways in which geographic investigation can help them develop skills, including spatial technology skills and the essential skills in the Ontario Skills Passport	●	●
Guidance and Career Education	• identify and use a variety of reading skills and strategies to improve understanding of texts	●	
	• use appropriate forms of writing (e.g., report, summary, narrative) to suit audience and purpose		●
Health and Physical Education	• describe the short-term and long-term benefits of developing both health-related fitness … and skill-related fitness		●
	• explain how active living and healthy eating contribute to a person's physical health and mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being, and describe the benefits of a holistic approach to health		●
Integrated Arts	• identify and communicate their initial reaction to works from a variety of arts disciplines, using various strategies and modes of communication	●	●
	• describe, on the basis of research, themes in the work of some past and/or present artists, including Canadian artists, whose body of work incorporates more than one art form	●	●

Subject	Curriculum Expectation	Reading	Writing
Introduction to Business	• describe the concepts of, and conditions that affect, supply and demand	●	●
	• explain how needs and wants create opportunities for business	●	
Mathematics	• research a number concept to tell a story about its development and use in a specific culture, and describe its relevance in a current context	●	●
	• research an algebraic concept to tell a story about its development and use in a specific culture, and describe its relevance in a current context	●	●
	• describe the value of mathematical modelling and how it is used in real life to inform decisions	●	●
	• modify budgets displayed in various ways to reflect specific changes in circumstances, and provide a rationale for the modifications		●
Music	• conduct research to gather reliable information relating to specific music, musicians, and the musical opinions of others, and describe the impact this information has had on their own opinions or assessments	●	●
First Nations, Métis and Inuit Studies	• describe some significant issues, trends, and developments in the arts and popular culture in Canada that are relevant to Indigenous peoples during this period, including the cultural contributions of some Indigenous individuals, and explain how these developments/contributions reflect and enhance First Nations, Métis, and Inuit identities	●	
	• describe various ways in which First Nations, Métis, and Inuit artists are incorporating new technologies into traditional art forms		●
Science (Academic and Applied)	• communicate ideas, plans, procedures, results, and conclusions orally, in writing, and/or in electronic presentations, using appropriate language and a variety of formats (e.g., data tables, laboratory reports, presentations, debates, simulations, models)		●
	• describe the limiting factors of ecosystems …, and explain how these factors affect the carrying capacity of an ecosystem		●
	• describe the complementary processes of cellular respiration and photosynthesis with respect to the flow of energy and the cycling of matter within ecosystems …, and explain how human activities can disrupt the balance achieved by these processes		●
Visual Arts	• identify and describe their initial reactions to a variety of artworks	●	●
	• identify, on the basis of research, a variety of secondary and post-secondary pathways and careers related to visual arts	●	

HOW THE OSSLT IS SCORED

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

The following rubrics form the basis of open-response scoring.

Generic EQAO Scoring Rubrics for the OSSLT

	Generic Rubric for Open-Response Reading Items

Code	Descriptor
Blank	• nothing is typed in the text box
I	The response is one of the following: • a comment on or a restatement of the prompt • a misunderstanding of the reading selection or prompt • irrelevant or off-topic (unrelated to the reading selection or prompt) • illegible; random characters; not written in English
10	• response indicates minimal reading comprehension • response provides minimal or irrelevant ideas and information from the reading selection
20	• response indicates some reading comprehension • response provides vague ideas and information from the reading selection
30	• response indicates considerable reading comprehension • response provides accurate, specific and relevant ideas and information from the reading selection

Topic Development: Generic Rubric for the Opinion Essay

Code	Descriptor
Blank	Nothing is typed in the text box.
I	The response is one of the following: • a comment on the task • irrelevant or off-topic (unrelated to the prompt) • illegible; random characters; not written in English
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.
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 repetitious. There is limited evidence of organization.
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.
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.
50	The response is related to the prompt. A clear and consistent opinion is developed with sufficient specific supporting details. The organization is logical.
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.

	Conventions: Generic Rubric for the Opinion Essay

Code	Descriptor
Blank	Nothing is typed in the text box.
I	Illegible; random characters; not written in English
10	There is insufficient evidence to assess the use of conventions. **OR** Errors in conventions interfere with communication.
20	Errors in conventions distract from communication.
30	Errors in conventions do not distract from communication.
40	Control of conventions is evident in written work.

Reporting

The following is a sample final OSSLT report for a student after the scoring of the assessment.

Education Quality and Accountability Office

EQAO

ONTARIO SECONDARY SCHOOL LITERACY TEST (OSSLT)

2020-2021

INDIVIDUAL STUDENT REPORT

EXAMPLE STUDENT

OEN:	000-000-000	Test written on:	March 22, 2021
School:	Example School (000000)	Report Generated on:	May 28, 2021
School board:	Example Board		

YOUR RESULTS

You are successful on the OSSLT.

This report contains personal information that is protected under the *Freedom of Information and Protection Privacy Act*.

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