

Alberta Provincial
Achievement Testing

Assessment
Highlights
2009

GRADE
9

English Language Arts



Government
of Alberta ■

Alberta ■

Freedom To Create. Spirit To Achieve.

This document contains assessment highlights from the 2009 Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement Test.

Assessment highlights provide information about the overall test, the test blueprints, and student performance on the 2009 Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement Test. Also provided is commentary on student performance at the *acceptable standard* and the *standard of excellence* on selected items from the 2009 achievement test. This information is intended for teachers and is best used in conjunction with the multi-year and detailed school reports that are available to schools via the extranet. **Assessment Highlights reports** for all achievement test subjects and grades will be **posted on the Alberta Education website every year** in the fall.

Released test items, which contained approximately 25% of the total number of test items from previously secured achievement tests, were mailed to school administrators each fall from 2004 to 2006 and have been made available to teachers in only print form because of copyright limitations. **Every second year**, as of the fall of 2007, **a complete test** for all achievement test subjects and grades (except grades 6 and 9 Social Studies; grades 3, 6, and 9 Français/French Language Arts; and Grade 9 Knowledge and Employability courses) will be **mailed** to school administrators in conjunction with the Assessment Highlights report for that year. In this way, teachers will receive complete forms of achievement tests. The parts of those tests that are released in print form for which electronic copyright permission is received will subsequently be posted on the Alberta Education website. A test blueprint and an answer key that includes the difficulty, reporting category, language function, and item description for each test item will also be included. These materials, along with the Program of Studies and Subject Bulletin, provide information that can be used to inform instructional practice.

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The 2009 Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement Test

This report provides teachers, school administrators, and the public with an overview of the performance of those students who wrote the 2009 Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement Test. It complements the detailed school and jurisdiction reports.

How Many Students Wrote the Test?

A total of 39 172 students wrote the 2009 Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement Test.

What Was the Test Like?

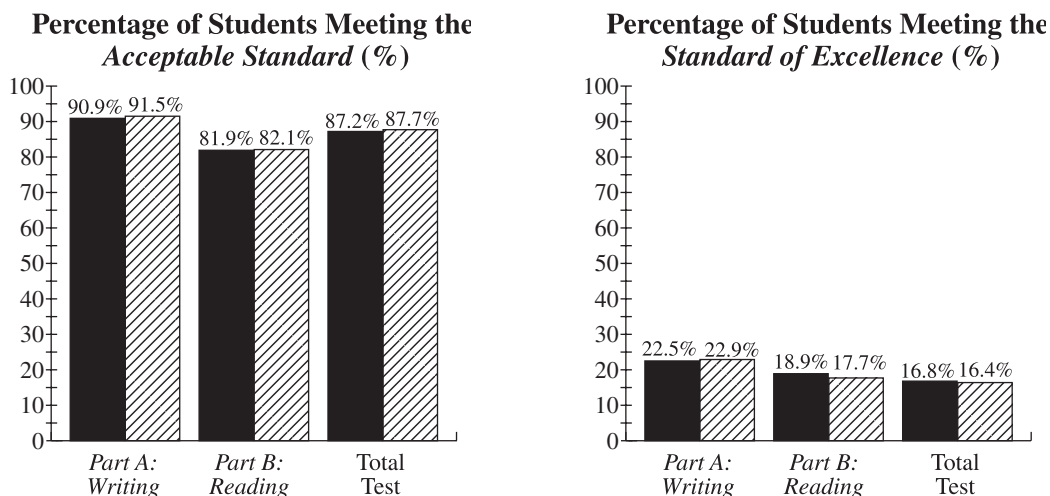
The 2009 Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement Test had two parts that were weighted equally.

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

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

How Well Did Students Do?

The percentages of students meeting the *acceptable standard* and the *standard of excellence* in 2009 are consistent with 2008, as shown in the graphs below. Out of a total possible score of 110 (parts A and B), the provincial average was 73.5 (66.9%). The results presented in this report are based on scores achieved by all students who wrote the test, including those in French Immersion and Francophone programs. Detailed provincial assessment results are provided in school and jurisdiction reports.



■ 2008 Achievement Standards: The percentage of students in the province who met the *acceptable standard* and the *standard of excellence* on the 2008 Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement Test (based on those who wrote).

▨ 2009 Achievement Standards: The percentage of students in the province who met the *acceptable standard* and the *standard of excellence* on the 2009 Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement Test (based on those who wrote).

Part A: Writing—2009 Test Blueprint

The blueprint for *Part A: Writing* identifies the scoring/reporting categories by which student writing is assessed and by which 2009 summary data are reported to schools and school authorities; it also provides a description of the writing assignments and the achievement standards.

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

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

Part A: Writing—2009 Student Achievement

In 2009, 91.5% of students who wrote the test achieved the *acceptable standard* on *Part A: Writing* of the Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement Test, and 22.9% of students who wrote achieved the *standard of excellence*. These results are consistent with previous administrations of *Part A: Writing* of the achievement test.

Student Achievement by Assignment and Reporting Category

The quality of the writing on the 2009 Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement Test is consistent with that of previous years. The chart below illustrates the percentage of students achieving writing standards for each writing assignment and reporting category.

		Narrative / Essay Writing Assignment					Functional Writing Assignment	
		Reporting Category					Reporting Category	
		Content	Organization	Sentence Structure	Vocabulary	Conventions	Content	Content Management
Writing Standard	Score*	% of Students	% of Students	% of Students	% of Students	% of Students	% of Students	% of Students
Excellent	5.0	6.2%	6.0%	6.4%	6.9%	6.3%	6.9%	8.2%
	4.5	7.0%	7.2%	6.8%	6.9%	7.1%	7.3%	8.2%
Proficient	4.0	21.5%	21.5%	21.0%	20.7%	21.5%	21.9%	24.2%
Satisfactory	3.5	15.3%	16.1%	15.8%	16.2%	15.2%	14.3%	14.0%
	3.0	33.4%	33.0%	35.3%	40.8%	30.6%	33.0%	27.4%
	2.5	7.8%	7.7%	7.5%	5.0%	8.4%	6.8%	7.2%
Limited	2.0	7.0%	7.2%	6.0%	2.7%	8.7%	7.7%	8.6%
	1.5	0.7%	0.6%	0.5%	0.2%	1.0%	0.7%	0.9%
Poor	1.0	0.6%	0.5%	0.4%	0.2%	0.6%	0.7%	0.7%
Insufficient / No Response	0	0.4%	0.4%	0.4%	0.4%	0.4%	0.7%	0.7%

* Scores of 4.5, 3.5, 2.5, and 1.5 occur only when local marks and central marks are averaged. In 2009, 27 322 (69.7% of the total of 39 172) papers were marked locally, and these scores were submitted to Alberta Education. Papers with discrepant scores were given a third reading. The third-reading rescore rate was 7.6%.

Part A: Writing—Commentary on 2009 Student Achievement

During the 2009 scoring session, 161 teachers from throughout the province scored 39 172 student test booklets. Teachers who marked the tests were generally pleased with the quality of most papers. Students who wrote *Part A: Writing* of the 2009 Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement Test achieved an average of 37.5 out of a total raw score of 55 (68.2%). The provincial average on the Narrative/Essay Writing Assignment was 23.83 out of 35 (68.1%), and the provincial average on the Functional Writing Assignment was 13.64 out of 20 (68.2%).

Throughout the 2009 marking session, markers strove to reward student strengths where evident rather than to consider what was missing or what should have added or included. When marking, markers conscientiously examined the “**Focus**” section of the scoring categories to orient themselves to distinctions within the scoring criteria as well as the various scoring descriptors in each scoring scale in order to arrive at judgments regarding the qualities of a response. Markers were encouraged to review—at the start of each marking day—each assignment and the prompt materials provided with the expectation that many students’ ideas were informed by details within the prompts. Occasionally, markers needed to re-read a response to appreciate what a student had attempted and, in fact, accomplished. All markers acknowledged that student responses were first drafts written under examination conditions.

Narrative / Essay Writing Assignment

The wording of the assignment in posing the question “What makes a leader effective?” and inviting students to write about “**how a leader can influence others**” encouraged students to consider whether responding in the form of a narrative or an essay would best enable them to explore their ideas. During Standards Confirmation, working group members observed that this ensured that the topic was accessible to most students in that they were able to identify—either explicitly or implicitly—characteristics of successful (or unsuccessful) leaders and/or examine the experiences of those who have benefited from (or been discouraged by) the leadership of another. Some students also presented ideas and experiences wherein they themselves had lead or had an influence on others. As in other years, the number and quality of narrative responses appeared to be comparable to the number and quality of essay responses.

Many students chose to respond to one or more of the prompts provided, evident in ideas presented regarding leaders who foster teamwork, inspire others, overcome adversity, are worthy of respect, and demonstrate “humor, generosity, intelligence, strength, and compassion.” Others based their ideas upon their lived experience, drawing conclusions regarding how a parent, teacher, athlete, coach, or community leader embodies the essence of a leader. Still others drew from the example of contemporary leaders such as Barak Obama or Oprah Winfrey or examined hypothetical or fictitious contexts wherein a leader takes command of a situation, sacrifices personal well being for the benefit of others, or acts decisively during a time of crisis. Standards Confirmers encountered a number of responses wherein students equated a leader with being a role model or a hero, topics used on previous achievement tests. Such responses were acceptable—as were those that referenced literary works or popular media such as movies, television, or music—provided that students related their ideas to topic presented in the assignment.

Students whose writing demonstrated that they had achieved the *acceptable standard* presented ideas regarding how “Without leaders we would be just a bunch of lost followers” and how leaders “have to be persuasive in order convince others to follow.” Many students spoke of leadership in terms of being decisive, taking action, overcoming conflict, and leading by example. Others emphasized a leader’s moral obligation to be reliable and trustworthy and the importance of caring for others. The following excerpts contain examples from responses that achieved “Satisfactory” scores:

- “When not to follow and to lead, it is important to lead your own way sometimes. Not all leaders set good examples. For example if one of your friends starts doing drugs and one of your friends joins him, he is setting a bad example. In a situation like this it is best not to

follow, to be your own leader and go your own way. Maybe you will persuade someone to walk away just like you did making a difference for the better.”

- “I know that for me, just an average teenage girl, that my leader is my sister, now twenty years of age. She is in her third year of collage, studing to become a teacher. I try to follow in her footsteps as well, but I’m not exactly like her so some things turn out different for me than they did for her.”
- “When I was 11 years old I joined a blazer scout group were I learned what makes a leader effective. Shortly after my arrival in the group I was appointed to be the patrol leader ... one of the boy’s called Matt would not do anything at all ... we got in a horrible fight ... When I told my dad he had only one thing to say lead by example. Not by force. The next Wednesday was a service project, so when we arrived at an elderly couples house, I started to work as hard as I could trying to be the example. These actions encouraged the others to work hard. ... I never thought it would be hard to be a leader.”
- “Everyone has leaders in their lives, if they know it or not. You mom, dad, aunt, uncle, friends, grandparents, teachers, are all leaders in you life who help us in a lot of ways. I believe that without them and the influence they have on us we would be very different people.”
- “All leaders strongly lead by example, like when they show that they can do something and want you to learn how too. Perhaps you are at a rock climbing wall, and he can get to the top, but you can’t. Most leaders will assist you until you can do it too.”
- “I was in the hallways by my locker and I had just saw someone litre on the floor. I had the urge to pick it up. So I walked in a graceful manner and picked up the trash and put it into the garbage. It felt a lot better like getting an award for the great work you have done in school. I saw people starring at me when I turned around. But I knew it was the right thing to do to be a good leader ... Throughout the day I saw lots of people picking up trash and putting it into the green garbage cans. I was happy that people actually followed my actions.”
- “As Jared’s small voice started screaming at John, his friend started saying thank you and began to cheer. Jared had done it. He had stood up to John Stanny. The school bully. It only took one person to help the whole student body. And that person was Jared.”

In responses such as those from which these excerpts were taken, students explored the topic in a clear and/or logical way and provided relevant and/or generic details to support appropriate and/or predictable ideas. These students established a focus that was generally sustained, developed their ideas in a discernible order, and provided a mechanical and/or artificial closure. Also evident in such student responses was generally controlled and sometimes effective and/or varied sentence structure, appropriate and general vocabulary, a discernible voice or tone, and generally correct use of conventions.

Those students whose work received scores of “Proficient” or “Excellent” particularized the topic in terms of how effective leaders are charismatic, perseverant, and/or altruistic. Many of these students explored the indelible impact of “great” leaders upon their followers. Some students focused on intrinsic aspects of a leader’s character—such as patience, optimism, or determination—and how these attributes serve to benefit others. The following excerpts illustrate some of the ideas presented by students who achieved the *standard of excellence*:

- “Leaders are creative and original people, who come up with great ideas on their own. People will naturally gravitate to these people because they know that there will always be a well thought out solution to every problem that arises. No challenge is so great that it cannot be overcome by a leader’s indomitable spirit.”
- “Throughout history, we have seen some great leaders, and some not-so-great leaders, but what makes a great leader? Is it their ability to set a positive example for their followers, their keen sense of compromise, or the fact that they make you want to follow them?”
- “Max Hooper is a kid dealing with a lot for his age. Being sixteen with a single mom and three siblings, two younger than him, is a tough thing on its own. To make it harder on him, he is living in a two room apartment in the filthiest projects of Harlem. After going to school all day, he works a full-time night shift stocking shelves at the Kwik-e-Mart so he can help his mom feed the family.”

- “Leadership. Many people claim to possess this highly acclaimed trait, but what truly makes up a leader? There are the obvious traits such as being self confident and speaking your opinions, but to be a true leader, you need more than just these simple characteristics. Someone that has all the qualities of a leader is able to not only influence other people, but also leave a lasting impact on the people they encounter.”
- “Peter led the small gang down to the outskirts of town. When they had reached an aged, rundown building, the group stopped to rest. Peter leaned on the red brick wall for about twenty minutes before he started to talk. ‘Allen, I have been wondering, why do you hate me as leader? For the past month, you have undermined my decisions and refused to cooperate with the other guys.’ / Allen was extremely surprised by this question; he had always thought that Peter disliked him. ‘I’m not sure, but if I had to guess it would be that I am jealous,’ Allen almost choked on his own words. ‘Everyone looks up to you’ he murmured.”
- “Ghandi was an amazingly influential leader. Escaping from the grasp of the British Empire was no easy feat, but Ghandi managed to separate from them peacefully. British imperialism reached far and wide over the world, and at one point in history it was said that the sun never sets in the Empire of Britain and Britain was not going to quickly give this up. Ghandi lead his people in peaceful unity toward parting amicably with the British, still retaining a part in the Commonwealth. Ghandi was able to complete his task because he believed adamantly in what he thought was right for India.”
- “Early one crisp autumn morning, I woke to the deafening sound of sirens. I quickly got out of bed and ran, somewhat clumsily, to my window. I saw what seemed to be a scene pulled out from a Hollywood movie. Pushing open the heavy and dust covered window, I heard a man’s voice magnified through a megaphone. He spoke steadily, with an undertone of compassion. ‘Sir, I know what it’s like to lose a job. I am aware that you have a family and they will be devastated if anything happens to you. Please put down your weapon, Mr. Reese, and release your boss ... Although what I saw that autumn morning took place fifteen years ago, I remember it as though it was yesterday. The leadership of the emergency team inspired me to choose a career with the police force. I take time each day to remember the gentle way the policeman spoke to the troubled Mr. Reese. I also strive each day to emulate the leadership skills that were taught to me through my dusty window, so many years ago.”

Responses that contained ideas such as those in these excerpts demonstrated student work in which the exploration of the topic was adept, plausible, insightful, and/or imaginative. Such students showed the ability to present thoughtful, sound, perceptive, and/or carefully chosen ideas supported by specific, apt, precise, and/or original details. These responses were skillfully focused, coherently developed, and appropriately or effectively concluded. In responses such as those from which these excerpts have been taken, students also employed consistently controlled and varied sentence structure, accurately or deliberately chosen vocabulary, a distinct or convincing tone or voice, and few errors in conventions.

Student writing that was scored “Limited” or “Poor” was often characterized by tenuous, simplistic, minimal, and/or tangential assertions about leadership. These students struggled with focusing and developing their ideas in relation to the topic and were not always able to communicate their ideas clearly. The intent behind such responses was often vague or insubstantial, and the ideas were sometimes of questionable validity, such as in the following excerpts:

- “A leader can influence others by: lessons that can be taught, learning from them, and what they can teach others.”
- “Being a leader has it’s ups and downs ... You get to do what you like but you have to help poeipel in every way posable even those you may not like it nice to give a little and you never know you may get alot back.”
- “Shelly was almost like a mom to Michelle achully she considered to be more than her real mom. Shes three years older but what weve been through age is just a number. Its all her moms fault that Michelle likes Shelly who has a influence on her.”
- “Jake’s frend Garry was the most honest and trust worthy guy he will ever meet in you entire life. Imaterofact he is the only one in the hole world Jake could trust.”

- “Anyone can be a leader in many ways. There are many reasons for people to influence younger and/or older people. Those reasons can be good or bad.”

Student writing that did not meet the *acceptable standard* also often contained ideas that were superficial, ambiguous, overgeneralized and/or underdeveloped and details that were imprecise, irrelevant, and/or abbreviated. The development of events and/or details was not clearly discernible or lacked coherence and these students typically had limited control of sentence structure, used imprecise diction, employed a tone or voice that was indistinct, and made convention errors that blurred or reduced clarity.

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

Functional Writing Assignment

During standards confirmation, working group members found that most students were able to identify with the situation of being appreciative of the work of an animal shelter in caring for lost or abandoned pets. While nearly all students referenced the “services” offered by the shelter, the role of volunteers, and how a newspaper article would inform a wide audience of the importance of donating time and money, the manner in which this information was elaborated upon and employed to achieve the student’s purpose—“to **persuade Lesley Thompson, editor of *The Wentworth News*, to publish an article that will inform the public about the work of the animal shelter**” and to “Provide enough information to **convince Lesley Thompson of the importance of supporting the animal shelter** so that it can continue its charitable work”—was significant in distinguishing strong from weak responses.

Some students generically identified themselves as the owner of a “pet” while others referenced a dog, cat, bird, and other common household pet that was found at an “animal shelter;” still others precisely identified the unique character of their pet and/or the specific shelter at which it was found. Students at all levels of achievement relied heavily upon information provided in the assignment when describing the work of the shelter and, with varying degrees of success, integrated the information into their arguments in order to convince the recipient to act upon the request made. In most cases, students provided information regarding how the addressee could contact the sender (and in some responses the shelter itself) should he or she wish to do so although this was not required in this situation.

As in other years, the recommended formats for the envelope and letter are provided in the guidelines of Canada Post. Markers were reminded, however, that other formats/styles were equally acceptable, given that the student was consistent in applying a chosen format to both the envelope and letter. When assessing this assignment, it was important that markers not “deduct marks” for deviations from the Canada Post guidelines. Instead, markers were instructed to judge the degree to which each student’s response effectively communicated with the intended recipient of the letter. The fact that this assignment was written under examination conditions resulted in many student responses wherein there were varying amounts of white space between the heading, inside address, and salutation of the letter as well as single- or double-spacing of the body of the letter. These issues specifically were not to be viewed as detrimental to the quality of student work and were not to be penalized in the assessment of **Content Management**. In addition, there was no prescribed length for responses to the Functional Writing Assignment. While some students concisely fulfilled the requirements of the task, others elaborated more fully upon the ideas and/or examples presented. Such brevity or embellishment were neither beneficial nor detrimental in and of themselves, and markers took into account the overall effectiveness of each response when assessing its quality.

Students whose responses received scores of “Satisfactory” contained ideas that appropriately and adequately supported arguments to persuade Lesley Thompson to publicize the work of the shelter in order to increase the support it receives. The majority of students cited the services provided by the shelter and suggested that more volunteers and financial support are needed to conduct the daily affairs of the shelter. Qualities of student writing that met the *acceptable standard* are evident in the following excerpts from student responses:

- “The shelter gives many services, one of those being, reuniting pets with their owners. They go and rescue animals, and give those animals emergency care. The volunteers are there helping the pets find a new home. They are there keeping the shelter fixed. They educate the public, for caring for the animals ... This organization does such work for nothing and deserves as much help as it can get.”
- “All the workers there were excited about animals and were helpful in finding Fido. Without their kind love and care for animals my dog could have been gone forever.”
- “They need local support or they will have to close down. I lost my pet when it escaped from my home. Luckily for me we have volunteers that are willing to take care of pets.”
- “The shelter is a great organization that provides loving, tender care for sick, stray and runaway animals. I was wondering if you could put an article in the *Wentworth News*, stating the importance of the volunteers needed to keep the shelter going.”
- “Last week, my dog escaped from my house and was found by the animal shelter. I believe that the shelter is in need to be upgraded and more people are needed ... The public needs to know about this place so more people can help the animal shelter and more people will volunteer and donate money.”
- “The shelter offers a wide variety of services, including adoption, emergency care, animal rescue, and spaying or neutering. They also reunite lost pets with their owners. Volunteers are needed to help keep the kennels clean, help the vets take care of the animals and educate the public about what the shelter does.”

These students presented relevant information that was supported by enough detail to fulfil the purpose of the assignment. A tone appropriate for the addressee was generally maintained, generally accurate and occasionally effective words and expressions were used, basic control of correct sentence construction, usage, and mechanics was evident, and the letter and envelope contained occasional format errors and/or omissions.

Strong responses to the topic which received scores of “Proficient” or “Excellent” included vivid contextualization regarding the circumstances under which the writer gained a first-hand appreciation for the animal shelter’s existence, the broader social implications of the services provided by the shelter, and the vital role of the newspaper in furthering the goal of increasing public support for the shelter. Ideas such as these are shown in the following excerpts:

- “Just one week ago, my dog, Miki, ran away from home. Despite my efforts to search for her, she was not found. But the very next day, I received a call from the local animal shelter saying they had found Miki and on her dog tag, my phone number! I rushed over to the shelter and found Miki there, well fed and groomed.”
- “In order for the shelter to continue providing these services, please inform the public about the effort of these workers to provide for all sorts of animals and the desperate need for more volunteers.”
- “The *Wentworth News* is one of the most read papers in the province and so, if you could publish an article about the benevolent work of Mrs. Purrfect’s Animal Shelter, the prospects of eliciting support for the shelter are significant.”
- “The public needs to be educated about all the shelter does for the community and its need for volunteers and financial aid. Before I lost my pet I didn’t even know that our town had an animal shelter. Informing members of the community will help to ensure that the shelter will receive the support it needs to continue its charitable work.”
- “Penny’s Pet Shelter is more than just a shelter for lost or unwanted pets. In addition to reuniting lost pets with their owners, they also rescue animals and find them new, loving homes. If that wasn’t enough, Penny’s is equipped with all the state-of-the-art emergency

care equipment, and they have an amazing staff of caring, capable people ... I hope you consider giving this well-loved shelter some much-needed publicity.”

- “Without sufficient funds, the shelter may be forced to close down and many pets would lose a chance at finding a new family or being reunited with their previous ones. Therefore, I hope that you will carefully consider my proposal to publish an article about this charitable organization and the work it does to provide a safe haven for pets of all sizes.”

These excerpts demonstrate that students whose work achieved the *standard of excellence* presented thoughtful and/or perceptive ideas, effectively developed the topic, included significant or pertinent information substantiated and/or enhanced by specific and/or precise details in order to fulfill the purpose of the assignment. These students clearly or skillfully maintained a tone appropriate for the addressee, employed words and expressions accurately and effectively, showed competent or confident control of correct sentence structure, usage, and mechanics, and had few, if any, format errors or omissions in the envelope and letter.

Scores of “Limited” and “Poor” characterized responses in which students confused Lesley Thompson with being the owner of the animal shelter, made unproven assumptions about the shelter such as how mismanagement has resulted in its current state of need, or recommended that fundraising by means such as bake sales would remedy the shelter’s financial concerns. Some students became preoccupied with telling a story about the loss of a pet at the expense of satisfactorily fulfilling the task presented in the assignment whereas others questioned the value of the work done by the shelter. The excerpts below are taken from student responses that were unsuccessful in meeting the *acceptable standard*:

- “I Kim Rogers thank you very much for everthing you guys have done for me. And I hope peopl take the consideration to support you guys.”
- “If we loose this organization there will be a lot of on happy people.”
- “I’d like you do a school for the paper so I can spread the word. Animals will die they can’t get there medcine or be adopted. I Subject that we have fundrasiers and donation’s so we can rasle money to buy food water and medcine.”
- “I thank you for your time Mr. Thomson. My Postal Code is T7S 4D6 and my office number is 701 again I thank you for your time I am Kim Roger’s and I hope I head from you.”
- “I am righting to you to ask if you would make an article in the paper to tell the local animal shelter how to run there Buisness ... The center will only keep there pets for so long before they are sent to a pet store that’s not fare.”
- “When I go to the shelter there were cracks in some of the walls and there was dog kennels that had big holes in the side of them. I just wanted to get my pet and get out of there.”

In student writing that did not meet the *acceptable standard*, as illustrated in these excerpts, ideas were superficial, flawed, overgeneralized, and/or misconstrued. Development of the topic was inadequate or ineffective, supporting details were insignificant, lacking, obscure, and/or absent, and the purpose of the assignment was only partially or not fulfilled. In some cases, the tone used by the writer was either evident but not maintained or there was little awareness of a tone appropriate for the addressee. These students typically used vague, inexact, or inaccurate words and expressions, made frequent errors in sentence structure, usage, and mechanics, and had frequent or numerous and glaring format errors and/or omissions in the envelope and letter.

Overall, student responses to both the Narrative / Essay Writing Assignment and the Functional Writing Assignment in *Part A: Writing* of the 2009 Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement Test were consistent with the quality of student work in previous years. The vast majority of students (91.5%) successfully demonstrated the skills required to meet provincial assessment standards and achieved the *acceptable standard*, and 22.9% of students achieved the *standard of excellence*. Of all students who wrote the *Part A: Writing* test, only 8.5% did not meet the *acceptable standard*.

Part B: Reading—2009 Test Blueprint and Student Achievement

In 2009, 82.1% of students who wrote the test achieved the *acceptable standard* on *Part B: Reading* of the Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement Test, and 17.7% of students achieved the *standard of excellence*. These results are consistent with previous administrations of *Part B: Reading* of the achievement test.

Student achievement on *Part B: Reading* of the 2009 Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement Test averaged 36.0 out of 55 (65.5%).

The blueprint below shows the reporting categories and language functions by which 2009 summary data are reported to schools and school authorities, and it shows the provincial average of student achievement by both raw score and percentage.

Reporting Category	Language Function		Provincial Student Achievement (Average Raw Score and Percentage)
	Informational	Narrative / Poetic	
Identifying and Interpreting Ideas and Details Students construct meaning by interpreting ideas and details pertaining to setting/atmosphere/context, character/narrator/speaker (actions, motives, values), conflict, and events.			10.6/17 (62.4%)
Interpreting Text Organization Students identify and analyze literary genres. Students identify and analyze the text creator's choice of form, tone, point of view, organizational structure, style, diction, rhetorical techniques (e.g., repetition, parallelism), text features (e.g., alliteration, onomatopoeia, imagery, foreshadowing, suspense), and conventions.			7.6/11 (69.1%)
Associating Meaning Students use contextual clues to determine the denotative and connotative meaning of words, phrases, and figurative language (e.g., simile, metaphor, hyperbole, personification, irony, symbolism).			7.0/11 (63.6%)
Synthesizing Ideas Students draw conclusions and make generalizations by integrating information in order to identify the tone, purpose, theme, main idea, or mood of a passage.			10.9/16 (68.1%)
Provincial Student Achievement (Average Raw Score and Percentage)	13.7/22 (62.3%)	22.4/33 (67.9%)	Part B: Reading Total Test Raw Score = 55

Part B: Reading—Commentary on 2009 Student Achievement

The following is a discussion of student achievement on *Part B: Reading* of the 2009 Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement Test. Sample questions are provided to highlight levels of achievement of students who met the *acceptable standard*, students who met the *standard of excellence*, and students who did not meet the *acceptable standard*. For each question, the keyed answer is marked with an asterisk.

In the content area of **Identifying and Interpreting Ideas and Details**, students were expected to construct meaning by interpreting ideas and details pertaining to setting/atmosphere/context, character/narrator/speaker (actions, motives, values), conflict, and events in ten reading selections. In the four informational texts, students who achieved the *acceptable standard* were able to recognize key character traits of an individual to whom a tribute is being presented in an editorial, interpret aspects of a writer’s reflections on past experiences in a magazine article, examine a writer’s observations in an essay regarding urban living, and analyze scientific information in a magazine article. The six narrative/poetic texts—including an excerpt from a play, two poems, an excerpt from a novel, and two cartoons—afforded many students who met the *acceptable standard* opportunities to demonstrate their ability to identify traits significant to characters’ personalities, to determine the conflict underlying events, to acknowledge the humour implicit in the narrative viewpoint from which events are recounted, to account for a character’s change in perspective, to recognize the atmosphere created by facets of a scene depicted, and to make inferences from visual details. Students who achieved the *standard of excellence* additionally illustrated strengths in applying their understanding of each informational text as a whole to elements within to determine subtle interrelationships among events, details, and personal reflections. These students were also able to appreciate how characterization is inextricably related to conflict, how vivid details enhance realism, how seemingly coincidental events are causally related, and how universal human experiences are illustrated in narrative/poetic texts. Students who did not meet the *acceptable standard*, while generally able to recognize basic details and straightforward ideas in informational and narrative/poetic texts, appeared to have some difficulty extending their understanding beyond literal comprehension. These differences in student performance are evident in the following questions taken from the 2009 Grade 9 English Language Arts *Part B: Reading* Achievement Test.

Question 11 required students to determine what context suggests details in a stanza of a poem evoke about work in a factory. Note: This question was Question #12 on the 2008 Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement Test.

- 11.** In context, the phrases “first rivets shot home” (line 22) and “the whirl / of the hood line’s drills” (lines 23 to 24) evoke a sense of
- A.** enduring strength
 - B.*** rising momentum
 - C.** restrained movement
 - D.** intense concentration

Of all students who wrote the test, 64.6% were able to recognize how—in contrast to the slow pace established in the first three stanzas as the workers arrive and prepare for the workday—details in the fourth stanza (lines 20 to 25) regarding “First coughs / and the mutter of the forklift engines,” “the first rivets shot home,” “Air hoses everywhere connected, beginning to hiss,” and “the whirl / of the hood line’s drills” build in power and intensity as the workday begins throughout the factory and chose the correct answer (**B**). Of those students who did not select the keyed response, 14.2% chose **A** (a choice in which the element of strength is plausible but the adjective “enduring” implies an ongoing quality that does not accurately describe the factory that starts up and shuts down each day), 7.1% chose **C** (wherein “movement” may appropriately be seen as true, but the qualification invoked by the word restrained provides an interpretation unsupported by words such as “shot” and “whir”), and 14.0% chose **D** (which may result from inferring beyond details in the poem to conclude that the workers’ activities require “intense concentration”). Of those students who achieved the *acceptable standard*, 64.2% selected the

correct answer; a clear indication of their ability to recognize the cumulative effect of details that evoke the busy atmosphere of the factory once it is “underway on the water of time.” Those students who achieved the *standard of excellence* demonstrated ease in deriving a sense of increasing energy in the factory, as 87.7% chose the correct answer. Of those students who did not meet the *acceptable standard* on the test as a whole, only 36.0% chose the correct answer; these students may have selected distractors that other students were able to discount through close reading of the text.

In question 18, students were expected to infer from details in an excerpt from a novel what is suggested about a cat’s reaction to events described. Note: This question was Question #20 on the 2008 Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement Test.

18. The cat’s reaction to “the full treatment” (line 51) is one of
- A. terror
 - B. wariness
 - C. displeasure
 - D.* indifference

Overall, question 18 proved difficult for many students which, in part, could be due to the fact that students needed to read to the end of the paragraph wherein the cat “yawned, closed his eyes, and gave every appearance of going to sleep” and then conclude from these actions that the cat is unaffected by the dog’s show of bravado in snarling, barking, and foaming at the mouth; the correct answer (D) was chosen by 44.0% of all students who wrote the test. The three distractors (A, B, and C) are all based upon interpretations that are not supported by details in the text. A (which was selected by 14.6% of all students) or B (selected by 24.9% of all students) may have been selected based upon the presumptions that cats are typically frightened by or cautious around dogs, neither of which is valid in the situation described. C (selected by 16.4% of all students) could have been chosen if students were to mistake the cat’s obvious disinterest as an indication of its displeasure with the dog—an element that is documented elsewhere in the text but not in this circumstance. The correct answer to this question was selected by 40.9% of those students who achieved the *acceptable standard*, 79.0% of those students who achieved the *standard of excellence*, and only 14.9% of those students who did not meet the *acceptable standard*.

In the section of the 2009 achievement test blueprinted for curricular content pertaining **Interpreting Text Organization**, students who achieved the *acceptable standard* were able to determine the writers’ focus in ideas presented, identify features characteristic of various literary genres, recognize how awareness of tone enhances comprehension, and understand the significance of the point of view from which informational texts are presented. These students could also appreciate the effects of text features such as italics, dialogue, sensory images, and sound devices such as alliteration and onomatopoeia in narrative/poetic texts. Students who achieved the *standard of excellence* were additionally able to recognize a unifying effect is created by the organizational structure and diction employed by writers of informational texts and how writers’ stylistic and rhetorical choices reinforce meaning in narrative/poetic texts. For students who did not meet the *acceptable standard*, questions that required an understanding of a writer’s overall development or unique style of writing proved challenging. The following question illustrates some of these differences in the levels of student achievement on the 2009 Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement Test.

In question 46, students were required to recognize how the diction used by the writer in an essay evokes a sense of the character of an individual described. Note: This question was Question #42 on the 2008 Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement Test.

46. The words “gesticulating” (line 47), “chattering” (line 48), “smiling” (line 52), and “waving” (line 55) **most strongly** evoke a sense of the son’s
- A. determination
 - B.* enthusiasm
 - C. innocence
 - D. sincerity

This question was answered correctly (**B**) by 75.2% of all students who wrote the test (based on the understanding that the writer uses verbs that are present participles to reinforce the active and energetic character of the young man who “talked, gesticulating with his arms and chattering at full speed,” “was smiling and talking so much,” and “scrambled around in front of his father and started all over again, talking and waving his arms and getting in the way.” **A** was selected by 7.0% of all students and **D** was selected by 8.4% of all students (which could be due to the fact that there may appear to be elements of both “determination” and “sincerity” in the son’s behaviour when greeting his father, but earlier in the essay the manner in which the son wildly shouted “Father, Father!,” “ran forward,” and “ran up and took his [father’s] hand” most strongly suggests the enthusiasm underlying his actions). 9.2% of all students selected **C** (likely as a result of being drawn by the description of the son as “a young boy, not more than fifteen years old, maybe sixteen” to the preconceived notion that the young are characterized by their “innocence” stemming from their lack of life experience). Many students who achieved the *acceptable standard* were able to choose the correct answer, with 76.6% choosing the keyed response. The majority of those students who met the *standard of excellence* (94.4%) chose the correct answer whereas only 41.2% of those students who did not meet the *acceptable standard* were able to recognize the character trait evoked by the writer’s diction choices.

With regard to curricular content related to **Associating Meaning**, students who achieved the *acceptable standard* were able to use contextual clues to determine pronoun reference, recognize the denotative and connotative meanings of words and phrases and could recognize the use of figures of speech—such as irony, metaphor, personification, and hyperbole—in informational and narrative/poetic texts. In addition to these abilities, students who achieved the *standard of excellence* were able to appreciate writers’ extension of a central metaphor, demonstrate a deep awareness of how meaning is reinforced through figurative language, and identify the humorous effect achieved through writers’ use of dramatic irony, a play on words, or sarcasm in informational and narrative/poetic texts. Students who did not achieve the *acceptable standard* were often challenged by questions that required defining words from context and encountered some difficulty interpreting literary comparisons in informational and narrative/poetic texts. Such differences in student achievement on the 2009 Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement Test are shown in the following question.

Question 53 required that students recognize the figure of speech used to enhance the humour of a character’s statements in three frames of a cartoon. Note: This question was Question #53 on the 2008 Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement Test.

- 53.** The humour of the father’s statements in frames 3, 4, and 5 stems from his use of
- A.*** hyperbole
 - B.** personification
 - C.** contrasting images
 - D.** literal comparisons

Of all students who wrote the test, 50.3% were able to identify the exaggeration evident in the statements pertaining to doing laundry wherein the father asserts that he does not “TRACK IT BY TAGGING IT WITH ELECTRONIC BRACELETS AND MAP ITS MIGRATION PATTERNS,” “FORM SEARCH-AND-RESCUE EFFORTS TO FIND IT,” or “HIRE FIELD AGENTS TO KEEP IT UNDER 24-HOUR SURVEILLANCE” and chose the keyed response (**A**). **B** was chosen by 9.6% of all students—a choice that suggests some students may have incorrectly understood the depiction of the characters in the cartoon to be personification. **C** was chosen by 12.8% of all students and **D** was chosen by 27.0% of all students—who either may not have recognized that the images used by the father are all related to some form of extensive monitoring or may not have understood that the father’s statements are figurative rather than literal. Only 49.0% of students who achieved the *acceptable standard* answered this question correctly. However, 72.8% of those students who achieved the *standard of excellence* chose the correct answer (indicative of their perceptive understanding of how the hyperbolic quality of the father’s statements adds humour). Of those students who did not meet the *acceptable standard*, only 27.5% selected **A** as the correct response (indicative of the difficulty some students have in identifying figures of speech).

In the blueprinting category that encompasses questions that involve **Synthesizing Ideas**, students achieving the *acceptable standard* were able to draw conclusions and make generalizations by integrating information in order to identify the tone, purpose, theme, or main idea central to writers' or characters' experiences in informational and narrative/poetic texts. Students achieving the *standard of excellence* could also consistently derive from elements within a passage overarching ideas central to the meaning of a reading selection as a whole, detect subtleties of language that evoke a writer's tone, and appreciate the mood and atmosphere created by writers of informational and narrative/poetic texts. Those students who did not meet the *acceptable standard* often found difficult questions that required synthesizing aspects of reading selections in order to form a comprehensive generalization, recognizing the effect created by sensory details, and forming judgments without going beyond what was established in the texts. Questions 22 and 38 from the 2009 Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement Test exemplify some of these differences among the varying levels of student achievement.

In question 22, students needed to be able to integrate information in an excerpt from a novel to draw a conclusion regarding the writer's main purpose. Note: This question was Question #24 on the 2008 Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement Test.

- 22.** Throughout this excerpt, the writer's **main** purpose is to
- A.** present the reader with information about dogs and cats
 - B.** persuade the reader to have empathy for dogs and cats
 - C.** inform the reader of the challenges of owning a dog
 - D.*** entertain the reader with the antics of a dog

The correct answer (**D**) was selected by 83.6% of all students who wrote the test; these students were able to make the most accurate generalization regarding the writer's main purpose in presenting the narrative from the perspective of "a dog named Boy" who "recounts one of his experiences with a cat." While there may be an element of truth in each of **A** (selected by 6.4% of all students), **B** (selected by 6.7% of all students), and **C** (selected by 3.2% of all students), these alternatives do not fully account for the humorous tone that entertains the reader throughout the entirety of the excerpt. Students achieving the *acceptable standard* found this question accessible, evident in the fact that 87.4% of these students chose the correct answer. A perceptive awareness of the writer's purpose was demonstrated by students who achieved the *standard of excellence*, 98.7% of whom chose the correct answer. Of those students who did not meet the *acceptable standard*, 41.1% answered this question correctly.

Question 38 required students to identify what the opening lines of a magazine article suggest about the writer's values. Note: This question was Question #34 on the 2008 Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement Test.

- 38.** Throughout this magazine article, the writer describes his search for
- A.*** personal contentment
 - B.** intellectual challenges
 - C.** human companionship
 - D.** memorable adventures

This question was answered correctly (**A**) by 72.1% of all students who wrote the test. The correctness of the keyed answer is clearly evident in the writer's opening contention ("When I dropped out of the rat race I was after something more than the endless pursuit of money, the constant echo of bucks, bucks, bucks") in which he establishes a focus on his desire for fulfillment in his life by means of "rural self-sufficiency" that is described throughout the article. **B** was selected by 12.1% of all students (who may have considered the ingenuity shown by the writer in some instances to be of greater significance than warranted). **C** was selected by 6.7% of all students (a number of whom may not have recognized that although the writer includes the detail that in time he "was joined by two other people at home — Sarah, and a baby daughter," this is not established as something for which he had been searching). **D** was selected by 9.0% of all students (who may have superficially interpreted the writer's intention to live "closer to nature" to be a reflection of a desire to seek adventure). The keyed answer (**A**) was chosen by 73.6% of students who met the *acceptable standard*, 96.9% of students who met the *standard of*

excellence, and 29.7% of those students who did not meet the *acceptable standard*.

Overall, student achievement on *Part B: Reading* of the 2009 Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement Test was strong and comparable to students' levels of achievement in previous years. Most students (82.1%) were able to meet the standards within the *Part B: Reading* test and 17.7% of students achieved the *standard of excellence*. Of all students who wrote the *Part B: Reading* test, 17.9% did not meet the *acceptable standard*.

Achievement Testing Program Support Documents

The Alberta Education website contains documents that provide valuable information about aspects of the achievement testing program. To access these documents, go to the Alberta Education website at education.alberta.ca. On the home page, click on the tab *Teachers*; then click on the link *Provincial Testing*. Next, click on the link *Achievement Tests*, and then click on one of the specific links under the *Achievement Tests* heading to access the following documents:

Achievement Testing Program General Information Bulletin

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

Subject Bulletins

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

Writing Samples

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

Previous Achievement Tests and Answer Keys

All January achievement tests (parts A and B) for Grade 9 semestered students are secured and must be returned to Alberta Education. All May/June achievement tests are secured except Part A of grades 3, 6, and 9 English Language Arts and Français/French Language Arts. Unused or extra copies of only these Part A tests may be kept at the school after administration. Teachers may also use the print versions of released items that have been mailed to schools and/or the tests that are posted on the Alberta Education website.

Parent Guides

Each school year, print versions of the Parent Guide to Provincial Achievement Testing for grades 3, 6, and 9 are mailed to schools and posted on the Alberta Education website. Each guide presents answers to frequently asked questions about the achievement testing program; descriptions of and sample questions for each achievement test subject; and excerpts from the Curriculum Handbook for Parents identifying what students should know and be able to do in each subject by the end of grades 3, 6, and 9.

Involvement of Teachers

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