

Alberta Provincial
Achievement Testing

Assessment
Highlights
2010-2011

GRADE
3

English Language Arts



Government
of Alberta ■

Alberta ■

Freedom To Create. Spirit To Achieve.

This document contains assessment highlights from the 2011 Grade 3 English Language Arts Achievement Test. The examination statistics that are included in this document represent all writers: both French and English. If you would like to obtain English-only or French-only statistics that apply to your school, please refer to your detailed reports, which are available on the Extranet.

Assessment highlights provide information about the overall test, test blueprints, and student performance on the achievement test that was administered in 2011. Also provided is commentary on student performance at the *acceptable standard* and the *standard of excellence* both in *Part A: Writing* and on selected items from the 2011 *Part B: Reading* tests. This information is intended for teachers and is best used in conjunction with multi-year and detailed school reports that are available in 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.

All released achievement tests including test blueprints, answer keys with the item difficulty, reporting category, test section, and item description for each test item are located at: education.alberta.ca/admin/testing/achievement/answerkeys.aspx

These materials, along with the Program of Studies and subject bulletins, provide information that can be used to inform instructional practice.

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The 2011 Grade 3 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 2011 Grade 3 English Language Arts Achievement Test. It complements the detailed school and jurisdiction reports.

How Many Students Wrote the Test?

A total of 39 126 students wrote both parts of the 2011 Grade 3 English Language Arts Achievement Test. This number reflects an increase of 799 students over last year’s administration.

What Was the Test Like?

The 2011 Grade 3 English Language Arts Achievement Test had two parts that were weighted equally.

Part A: Writing consisted of a narrative writing assignment (worth 35 marks). The narrative writing assignment provided students with a picture prompt to which they were to respond in narrative format.

Part B: Reading consisted of 40 multiple-choice questions based on reading selections that were either informational or narrative/poetic in nature.

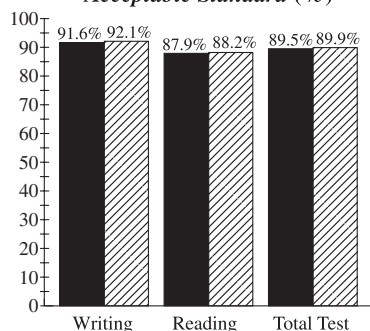
How Well Did Students Do?

Out of a total score of 75 on the test (parts A and B), the provincial average was 69.5%. The percentages of students meeting the *acceptable standard* and the *standard of excellence* in 2011 compared with 2010 are shown in the graphs below. 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.

Acceptable standard

Grade 3—Acceptable %			
	Writing	Reading	Total
2010	91.6	87.9	89.5
2011	92.1	88.2	89.9

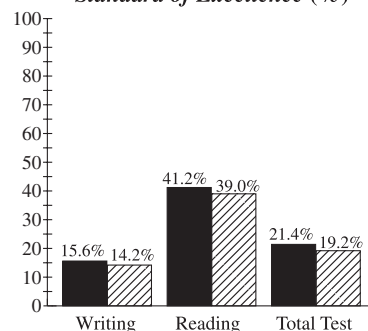
Percentage of Students Meeting the Acceptable Standard (%)



Standard of excellence

Grade 3—Excellence %			
	Writing	Reading	Total
2010	15.6	41.2	21.4
2011	14.2	39.0	19.2

Percentage of Students Meeting the Standard of Excellence (%)



- 2010 Achievement Standards: The percentage of students in the province who met the *acceptable standard* and the *standard of excellence* on the 2010 Grade 3 English Language Arts Achievement Test (based on those who wrote).
- ▨ 2011 Achievement Standards: The percentage of students in the province who met the *acceptable standard* and the *standard of excellence* on the 2011 Grade 3 English Language Arts Achievement Test (based on those who wrote).

Part A: Writing—2011 Test Blueprint

The blueprint for *Part A: Writing* identifies the scoring/reporting categories by which student writing is assessed and by which 2011 summary data are reported to schools and school authorities; a description of the writing assignment; and the achievement standards.

Writing Assignment and Reporting Categories	Description of Writing Assignments	Achievement Standards
Reporting Category	A picture prompt is presented to students. The picture is designed to help stimulate the students' imaginations and direct their writing. Before students discuss the picture prompt and organize their ideas on the planning pages provided, the test description, instructions, and information about the picture prompt are read out loud by the teacher.	Students' achievement in each reporting category will be described according to the following descriptors: Excellent Proficient Satisfactory Limited Poor Insufficient
Content* (selecting ideas and details to achieve a purpose) Students select appropriate details to describe events and characters. Events and/or actions should be plausible within the context established by the writer.		
Organization* (organizing ideas and details into a coherent whole) Students organize ideas, events, and details in a coherent sequence.		
Sentence Structure (structuring sentences effectively) Students use a variety of sentence types and structures appropriately.		
Vocabulary (selecting and using words and expressions correctly and effectively) Students use words and expressions appropriately and effectively.		
Conventions (using the conventions of written language correctly and effectively) Students communicate clearly by adhering to appropriate spelling, punctuation, and capitalization.		

**Content and Organization are weighted to be worth twice as much as each of the other categories*

Part A: Writing—2011 Student Achievement

In 2011, 92.1% of students who wrote the test achieved the *acceptable standard* on *Part A: Writing* of the Grade 3 English Language Arts Achievement Test, and 14.2% of students who wrote achieved the *standard of excellence*. These results are 0.5% higher at the *acceptable standard* and 1.4% lower at the *standard of excellence* than the previous administration of *Part A: Writing* of the achievement test.

Student Achievement by Assignment and Reporting Category

The quality of the writing on the 2011 Grade 3 English Language Arts Achievement Test is consistent with that of previous years at the *acceptable standard*. However, there has been a decline in the quality of writing at the *standard of excellence* level. The chart below illustrates the percentage of students achieving writing standards for each writing assignment and reporting category.

		<i>Narrative Writing Assignment</i>				
		Reporting Category				
		Content	Organization	Sentence Structure	Vocabulary	Conventions
Writing Standard	Score*	% of Students	% of Students	% of Students	% of Students	% of Students
Excellent	5.0	2.9	2.5	3.5	3.3	5.5
	4.5	4.1	3.9	4.0	4.1	5.2
Proficient	4.0	15.4	12.7	15.8	14.4	17.2
	3.5	15.9	16.1	14.4	14.4	12.9
Satisfactory	3.0	47.4	48.3	41.9	52.9	33.2
	2.5	7.6	8.8	10.5	6.4	10.8
Limited	2.0	5.4	6.6	8.6	3.7	13.4
	1.5	0.6	0.6	0.7	0.4	1.1
Poor	1.0	0.4	0.4	0.3	0.2	0.5
Insufficient / No Response	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2

* Scores of 4.5, 3.5, 2.5, and 1.5 occur only when local marks and central marks are averaged. In 2011, approximately 70.6% of papers were marked locally, and these scores were submitted to Alberta Education. Papers with discrepant scores were given a third adjudicating reading. The third reading rescore rate was 7.2%.

Part A: Writing—*Commentary on 2011 Student Achievement*

During the 2011 scoring session, 140 teachers from throughout the province scored 40 297 student test booklets. Teachers who marked the tests were generally pleased with the quality of most papers. On *Part A: Writing* of the 2011 Grade 3 English Language Arts Achievement Test, students who wrote the test achieved an average of 22.6 out of a total raw score of 35 (64.6%).

Narrative Writing Assignment

In the 2011 Narrative Writing Assignment, students were required to use a picture prompt to write a narrative response. The colour picture shows a boy who is outside. The sky is blue and there are some fluffy clouds in the sky. The boy is wearing a bird costume. He is wearing red rubber boots, a blue jumpsuit, red gloves and a red scarf. He is also wearing a blue hat that has a large, red beak for a brim. The hat has a large eye painted on it. The boy is wearing yellow-coloured goggles. He is holding a small speckled egg. The boy is crouching down and looking at the egg. In front of the boy is a birds' nest. It is on the ground. The ground is covered with green grass. There is one unhatched egg in the nest and there is a broken egg with a small, yellow bird sitting inside of it. The small yellow bird is looking at the boy.

Training for the marking session always emphasizes the need to focus on the strengths of the writer and to mark only what is written. Markers conscientiously use their exemplar documents to support the scoring criteria in helping them distinguish between the scoring categories. Each response is reviewed according to each category in the scoring criteria. Every effort is made to score each response in a valid and reliable manner.

Students responded in a variety of ways to the picture prompt, bringing their prior knowledge and experience into their writing. Students who were adept writers made personal connections with some or all of the details in the picture. The child dressed in a colourful costume, the nest with unhatched eggs, and the outdoor setting inspired responses that contained a variety of interesting and often humorous events. Teachers who took part in the marking session noted that students were able to effectively describe the characters and events in their stories. Students achieving the *standard of excellence* had well-developed and detailed events, consistent connections, and descriptive vocabulary, allowing the markers to more clearly discern the writer's voice.

The following excerpts from student responses illustrate a few of the appropriate responses that related to the picture prompt at the *acceptable standard*:

- “The sun was shining. The birds were singing. There was a girl named Lily. She loved to sing.”
- “Carefully Bryce snuck out. He put on his bird suit. When he arrived at the park he heard a big BANG!”
- “Jake said in a soft voice I could help you put your nest back inside your tree.”

These are examples of Grade 3 students' writing. Some spelling and punctuation have been corrected for readability purposes.

Each of these examples illustrates appropriate ideas presented in a straightforward manner. The ideas were supported by general details. The writing was organized in a logical manner that was generally sustained throughout the response. A predictable but suitable ending was provided.

The following excerpts from student responses illustrate a few of the responses that related to the picture prompt at the *standard of excellence*:

- “What would I do with no Mom?” Tom thought. He felt disappointed, his face twitched uncontrollably.”
- “Hello,” a deep voice boomed, “you have been assigned to a mission to help a very special goose. She has lost her egg. this is your first very important mission. So get your gear on and report to me.”
- “Raising a chick is fairly tricky,” Matt thought to himself. “Now, what should I feed this young bird?”
- “Cheep! Cheep! Cheep!” the birds had all started chirping. William looked up and saw the mother bird stuck in between a tree’s branches. “This looks like a job for bird boy!” he cried.

These are examples of Grade 3 students’ writing. Spelling and some punctuation have been corrected for readability purposes.

These examples illustrate how some students were inspired by the picture prompt. In their writing, these students used specific, detailed events that were relevant and original in thought. The writing was purposeful and the connections were developed and maintained throughout the response.

Approximately 70.6% of the papers written were scored locally and submitted to Alberta Education. A high level of reliability was achieved between the local score and the central score. The third reading rescore rate was 7.2%.

Part B: Reading—2011 Test Blueprint and Student Achievement

In 2011, 88.2% of students who wrote the test achieved the *acceptable standard* on *Part B: Reading* of the Grade 3 English Language Arts Achievement Test, and 39.0% of students who wrote the test achieved the *standard of excellence*. These results are slightly higher (0.3%) for the students achieving the *acceptable standard* and 2.2% lower for the students achieving the *standard of excellence* than the previous administration (2010) of *Part B: Reading* of the achievement test.

Student achievement on *Part B: Reading* of the 2011 Grade 3 English Language Arts Achievement Test averaged 29.7 out of a total score of 40 (74.3%).

The blueprint below shows the reporting categories and language functions by which the 2011 summary data are reported to schools and school authorities. The provincial average of student achievement by both raw score and percentage is also provided.

Reporting Category	Language Function		Provincial Student Achievement Average Raw Score and Percentage
	Informational	Narrative / Poetic	
Understanding Main Ideas/Details The student should be able to identify key details and main ideas, differentiate between main and supporting characters, recognize character motivation and explicit relationships between events and characters, and categorize ideas.			12.6/17 (74%)
Organization of Ideas and Relationships Between Form and Content The student should be able to identify genre (stories, poetry, plays, reports, and articles), organize features of story structure, use text and typographical features, recognize authors' techniques, and determine an author's purpose.			4.9/7 (70%)
Associating Meaning The student should be able to associate meanings of words, expressions, and literary devices from prior knowledge and contextual clues.			5.2/7 (74%)
Synthesizing Ideas The student should be able to draw conclusions by relating what is known to new information, and assess the plausibility of ideas and situations in literature.			6.9/9 (76%)
Provincial Student Achievement Average Raw Score and Percentage	9.4/13 (72%)	20.3/27 (75%)	Part B: Reading Total Test Raw Score 29.7/40 (74.3%)

Part B: Reading—*Commentary on 2011 Student Achievement*

The following is a discussion of specific areas of strength and weakness demonstrated by students who wrote the 2011 Grade 3 English Language Arts Achievement Test.

In *Part B: Reading*, students constructed meaning from text using personal experiences, knowledge, and feelings. Students were able to demonstrate effective reading skills by focusing on the central theme and the critical features of a passage to successfully retrieve main ideas from the narratives and informational texts presented. When reading informational texts, students were able to decode and interpret information from texts and visuals to answer the questions. Students were able to use prior knowledge and contextual clues to comprehend the meaning of unknown words. Many students were able to go beyond the literal interpretation of the text, synthesize information, and make predictions about possible future events. When synthesizing, students drew conclusions and were able to assess the plausibility of ideas. Students who performed well took time to read the passages carefully and referred back to the passage before choosing the best alternative.

Types of Reading Passages

There are two types of reading passages on the provincial achievement test: informational texts and narrative/poetic texts. Stories and poems comprise almost 68% of the test. In 2011, students were able to correctly answer an average of 20.3/27 (75%) of the questions based on the stories and poems that they read. This reflects an increase of 1.0% from the 2010 test. About 32% of the test is based on information passages. Students accurately answered an average of 9.4/13 (72%) of questions based on these texts. This is similar to the results from the previous year.

Sample Questions from the 2011 Achievement Test

The following sample questions from the 2011 test show how students responded to questions from the four reporting categories (Understanding Main Ideas/Details, Organization of Ideas and Relationships Between Form and Content, Associating Meaning, and Synthesizing Ideas). For each sample question, the keyed answer is marked with an asterisk. There is a brief analysis of the question and statistics describing how students answered it. These questions are no longer secured and will not be used on future achievement tests.

The questions are from the reading selection, *Sanji and the Baker*, which was used on the 2010 and 2011 Grade 3 English Language Arts Achievement Tests. The reading selection is from the book, *Sanji and the Baker* by Robin Tzannes.

Questions from the reporting category, **Understanding Main Ideas/Details**, require students to identify key details and main ideas, differentiate between main and supporting characters, recognize character motivation, identify explicit relationships between events and/or characters, and categorize ideas.

In multiple choice question 13 from *Sanji and the Baker* students must determine which question could be asked to find more information about the setting in the story. It is based on Specific Outcomes 1.1 and 1.2.

13. Which of the following questions would be asked to find out about the setting?

- Who is the author of the story?
- Where does the story take place?
- What is the problem in the story?
- Why is one character in the story angry?

This item was somewhat challenging for students (about 67% answered it correctly). Students needed to understand the key components of a setting and then identify a question that could be used to discover more details about the setting in the story. Option A was chosen by almost 6% of the students, option C was chosen by 13% of the students, and option D was chosen by 12% of the students. About 69% of students who met the *acceptable standard* were able to answer this question correctly and approximately 91% of the students who achieved the *standard of excellence* chose the correct response.

Multiple-choice Question 8 requires students to locate a key detail in the reading selection. This item is based on Specific Outcome 3.2. It is also categorized as an **Understanding Main Ideas/Details** type of question.

8. How does Sanji get the “five silver coins” (line 27) that he must take to court?

- The baker lends him the money.
- The judge gives him the money.
- He takes the money out of the bank.
- He borrows the money from his friends.

This question was significantly easier than Question 13 (90% of students answered Question 8 correctly). Students could refer back to the selection and locate the specific detail they needed in order to select the correct answer. Option A was chosen by about 3% of the students and option B was selected by 4% of the students. Option C was the response of 3% of the children. About 95% of the students who met the *acceptable standard* were able to answer the question correctly, and 99% of those who achieved the *standard of excellence* chose the correct response.

In the reporting category, **Organization of Ideas and Relationships Between Form and Content**, students are expected to identify various genres (ex. stories, poems, reports, articles, recipes, etc.), understand story and poetic structures, recognize organizational features of non-fiction passages, use text and typographical features to support their comprehension, identify an author’s techniques, and determine an author’s purpose for writing a selection.

Multiple choice Question 10 asks students to identify the purpose of the quotation marks that are used throughout the selection. The question addresses outcomes 2.1 and 4.2 in the Program of Studies.

10. The author uses quotation marks throughout the selection to show

- imaginary words
- compound words
- that a person is speaking
- that a sentence is exciting

About 75% of the students were able to answer this question correctly. They needed to recognize that in this particular context, the author used quotation marks to indicate that a character is speaking. Only 4% of students chose option A. Option B attracted 8% of the students and over 13% of the students chose option D. Approximately 92% of the students who achieved a *standard of excellence* answered the question correctly and 77% of the students who met the *acceptable standard* chose the right answer.

When answering questions from the **Associating Meaning** category, students should be able to determine the meanings of words, expressions, phrases, and literary devices by using their background or prior knowledge and by using contextual clues.

When answering multiple choice Question 11, students had to identify the meaning of a phrase using contextual clues from the narrative passage. Specific Outcome 4.1 was addressed in this question.

11. The author uses the phrase “looking hungrily at the bowl of coins” (lines 48 to 49) to show that the baker

- plans to use the dish
- wants something to eat
- thinks he will get the money
- likes the dish that holds the money

The majority of students (77%) answered this question correctly. Students had to refer back to the selection to locate the specific phrase in the question; then they needed to determine what the phrase meant based on the characters and events in the story. Option A was selected by almost 3% of students, option B was chosen by 13% of students, and option D was the choice of 7% of the children. Over 79% of students meeting the *acceptable standard* responded correctly and 94% of students who met the *standard of excellence* were accurate.

When answering questions from the **Synthesizing Ideas** category, students should be able to make inferences and draw conclusions by relating what they know to new information as well as assess the plausibility of ideas and situations presented in the reading selection.

Multiple choice Question 12 is an item that requires students to draw a conclusion about the action of a main character in the selection. It is based on Specific Outcome 2.1.

12. The judge solves the problem between Sanji and the baker in a way that is

- unkind
- clever
- unfair
- silly

Many students were successful when responding to this question (almost 74% answered it correctly). Students had to refer to details and events in the selection as well as their own experiences and understanding of character motivation in order to draw a conclusion about the judge in the story. Option A was chosen by almost 7% of students. Option C attracted 10% of the children and option D was selected by 9% of the group. Approximately 75% of students who met the *acceptable standard* on the test chose the correct answer. About 90% of students who met the *standard of excellence* drew the correct conclusion.

Achievement Testing Program Support Documents

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

Achievement Testing Program General Information Bulletin

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

Subject Bulletins

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

Examples of the Standards for Student Writing

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

Previous Achievement Tests and Answer Keys

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

Parent Guides

Each school year, versions of the [*Parent Guide to Provincial Achievement Testing*](#) for grades 3, 6, and 9 are posted on the Alberta Education website. Each guide presents answers to frequently asked questions about the achievement testing program as well as descriptions of and sample questions for each achievement test subject.

Involvement of Teachers

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