

Questions and Answers - OSSLT

1. **What is the OSSLT?**

The purpose of the OSSLT is to determine whether or not students have acquired the reading and writing skills that they are expected to have learned by the end of Grade 9, as outlined in *The Ontario Curriculum*.

2. **Who is required to write the OSSLT?**

Students who began Grade 9 during the 2001-2002 school year and those who began it thereafter are required to write the OSSLT. These students are required to complete the test successfully in order to earn their OSSD. The Ministry of Education Grade 12 Ontario Secondary School Literacy Course (OSSLC) was implemented in 2003-2004 as a credit course to provide an alternate to the mandatory test for students who have failed the OSSLT. To take the OSSLC, students must have had at least one opportunity to take the test.

3. **Can students who do not successfully complete the OSSLT take it again?**

Yes, students who were unsuccessful will be able to take it again during future administrations.

4. **How do students prepare for the OSSLT?**

There are a variety of support materials available to help students prepare for the OSSLT. Some resources and tips for taking the test can be found on the EQAO web site (www.eqao.com). When using the support materials for instruction or review, the emphasis is on helping students become familiar with the tasks and skills needed to do well on these tasks. Schools may provide simulated reading and writing activities that resemble those appearing on the OSSLT. Preparation includes helping students plan the use of their time as some may have weak time-management skills. Information sessions are provided at each school immediately prior to the administration of the OSSLT for students to review some important messages related to the test.

5. **Are there remediation programs available for students who do not successfully complete the OSSLT?**

Yes. Schools provide remedial assistance for students who do not successfully complete the OSSLT. TDSB and schools use individual and overall results to determine relative strengths and weaknesses in their students' achievement and to address board-level, school-level, and student-level remedial efforts.

6. **How do schools and boards use the OSSLT results?**

It is useful for boards to analyze their achievement in terms of the provincial results and for schools to analyze their scores in terms of both provincial data and the board results.

7. **Why did TDSB have a lower pass rate than the province?**

We do know that the reading and writing results at the grade 3 and 6 levels are comparable to or better than those evident across the province. It may be that it will take a few years for the gains made at the elementary level to be reflected in the achievement results on the OSSLT.

8. **Why do some TDSB schools have much lower pass rates than others?**

The secondary schools across TDSB offer programs of different types and serve students with different needs. This makes direct comparisons of schools difficult if not impossible. Some schools offer programs and courses that are primarily aimed at students in the academic stream while other schools offer courses that are primarily applied or have programs aimed at special education students. Passing rates tend to be higher for schools that serve students who are enrolled in the academic stream. Although the students being served and the programs being offered may differ from school to school, the goal is always to encourage and promote the highest possible levels of student aspiration and achievement.

9. **Do the results of the OSSLT count toward students' regular grades?**
No. The OSSLT is not tied to a particular subject and does not count toward any particular course grade.
10. **Do universities and colleges have access to individual OSSLT results?**
They will have access to the Ontario Student Transcript, which indicates whether or not a student has successfully completed this diploma requirement. The transcript will not indicate the number of times the student has attempted the OSSLT.
11. **Will students who move to Ontario from another province or country be required to write the OSSLT?**
In general, the answer is yes. In some cases, the student may want to seek a deferral and take the test at a later time.
12. **What were students asked to do on the OSSLT?**
There are five reading selections of three different types: informational (paragraph, news report); graphic; and narrative (e.g. dialogue, real-life narrative). Students are asked to complete two long writing tasks (news report and series of paragraphs expressing an opinion) and six short writing tasks (e.g. summary, explanation, personal experience).
13. **Can the public see what types of questions are on the OSSLT?**
Yes. Two sample test booklets are provided on the EQAO web site to show the types and amount of work that students are required to complete in the March 2006 administration.
14. **What about students with special needs?**
Accommodations are available to students with special needs. To qualify for accommodations on the OSSLT, a student must have an Individual Education Plan (IEP) that describes the required accommodations. The student may be, but does not have to be, formally identified as exceptional by an Identification, Placement and Review Committee (IPRC). Some examples of accommodation: additional time; periodic breaks; braille version; large print.
15. **What about students coming from another country who have difficulty speaking English?**
One of the criteria for a deferral is enrolment in ESL/ELD course. Deferrals are intended for students who have not yet acquired a level of proficiency in English advanced enough to complete the OSSLT successfully. The principal, in consultation with the parent and student, will determine whether or not a deferral should be granted.
16. **What is required to receive an exemption?**
To be considered for an exemption, a student must have an IEP that clearly indicates he or she is not working toward an OSSD. A total of 189 TDSB students were exempted from the March 2006 administration of the OSSLT.
17. **Are the standards low or high?**
The intention underlying the OSSLT is that the standard of performance reflect the essential reading and writing skills that students are expected to have acquired by the end of Grade 9.

18. **Who participated in the standard-setting process?**

The reading and writing standards for the OSSLT were established in 1999 by an 18-member committee of educators, educational experts, statisticians and nominated members of the public. Based on samples of student work, the committee developed descriptions of student performances for both reading and writing. In 2004, EQAO held a standard-alignment activity to align the two standards (reading and writing) with a standard for a single literacy score.

19. **Will the standards change from one year to the next?**

The intention is that the standards will not change from one year to the next. This may be difficult to do given that the test material and the scorers are changing each year.

20. **Who marks the OSSLT?**

Practising or recently retired teachers and qualified individuals from outside the education profession mark the OSSLT. The more complex writing component is marked by scorers with education qualifications. People with other degrees will be permitted to mark the reading component of the OSSLT. All scorers are trained and supervised by EQAO assessment staff.

21. **How will EQAO report on the students who are retaking the OSSLT in the school, board, and provincial results?**

EQAO reports the results of the two categories of students – first-time eligible students and previously-eligible students (those who are retaking the OSSLT) using two methods of reporting.

- Results for All Students (Method 1) are based on all students in the cohort who are working to obtain an Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD) including students who were absent, as well as, students who were deferred from writing the test.
- Results for Fully Participating Students (Method 2) are based on all students in the cohort who are working to obtain an Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD) and excludes those students who were absent or deferred from writing the test.

22. **What are the Reading and Writing outcomes of the OSSLT?**

As in previous years, students must be successful on both the reading and writing tasks in order to pass the OSSLT. Fully participating students are “successful” if they meet or exceed the minimum acceptable standard. Students who are not successful on the test receive a score if they do not meet a minimum level of achievement. They also receive information on their Individual Student Report about the areas of reading and writing that need improvement.