Contents

Introduction .................................................. 2

Cross-Curricular Approaches .............................. 6
  Grade 10: Literacy Across the Curriculum .............. 6
  Grade 9: Cross-Curricular Resources .................. 7
  Cross-Curricular Strategies for Teachers ............... 9

Tutoring Programs ........................................... 11
  University Student Tutors in the Schools .............. 11
  Senior Secondary Students: Teaching and Learning .. 12

Test Preparation ............................................. 13
  Mirroring of Test Activities ............................ 13
  A Student Guidebook on Test-Writing Skills .......... 15
  After-School Literacy Classes ......................... 16
  A Three-Tiered Approach ................................ 17
  Literacy Enrichment Classes ......................... 19

Remedial Programs ......................................... 20
  Teacher Resources for Remediation .................... 20
  Multi-Purpose Resource for Grades 10 and 11 ........ 21

Literacy Committees ....................................... 22
  The Board-Based Literacy Committee ................. 22
  The School-Based Literacy Team ...................... 23

This publication is available on the Ministry of Education's website, at http://www.edu.gov.on.ca.
Literacy is a fundamental life skill that is essential for young people if they are to achieve success in life. Students who have well-developed reading and writing skills will be better prepared not only for their future educational careers but also for the world of work. A greater focus on literacy means more opportunities for our students. One way schools and boards focus on the development of literacy is to take steps to prepare students for the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT) and to provide follow-up activities for those students who fail the test.

This booklet is designed to assist schools and boards in developing and delivering programs that will effectively prepare secondary school students for the literacy test. Although the development of literacy skills is an integral component of the curriculum from Kindergarten to Grade 12 and must be continuous over a student’s school career, many students may benefit from specific strategies that are designed to prepare them for the test itself.

The OSSLT is developed by the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) and is based on the expectations for reading and writing that are outlined in the Ontario curriculum policy documents for all subject areas up to the end of Grade 9. Reading and writing skills are the basis for learning in all subject areas in both elementary and secondary school.

There are two components to the OSSLT – reading and writing.

For the reading component, students are asked to read a variety of selections and answer questions about each selection. The reading questions are designed to measure student achievement in these areas:

- understanding of ideas and information that are stated directly in the reading selection
- understanding of ideas and information that are stated indirectly and that require the reader to make inferences
- making of connections between personal knowledge and experience and the ideas and information in the reading selections (e.g., interpretation of meaning)

The reading selections reflect the types of reading materials students should encounter every day, including the following:

- informational materials, such as explanations and instructions
- graphic materials, such as schedules, graphs, and tables
- literary materials, such as stories, descriptions, and dialogues

The questions on the selections include short-answer questions, multiple-choice questions, and questions that require a brief explanation.

For the writing component, students are asked to produce four pieces of writing. The writing tasks are designed to measure student achievement in these areas:

- development of a main idea
- provision of supporting details
- organization and linking of ideas and information
- use of an appropriate tone for the purpose and the intended reader
- use of correct grammar, punctuation, and spelling

The kinds of writing include the following:

- a summary
- a series of paragraphs expressing an opinion
- a news report
- an information paragraph

In this booklet, you will find a wealth of information on the best practices of selected school boards across Ontario and a broad spectrum of successful approaches – from remedial programs and tutoring to the establishment of literacy committees. The programs discussed in this booklet represent only a sample of the many excellent initiatives that have been developed by boards throughout the province. You are invited to share your own tips, techniques, and strategies by filling out the form on the last page of this booklet.

This project was initiated in response to recommendations of the At-Risk Working Group of the Curriculum Implementation Partnership, chaired by Barry O’Connor, Director of Education, Limestone District School Board, and the Education Equality Task Force.
The ministry acknowledges the contributions of the following school boards to this publication:
Brant Haldimand Norfolk Catholic District School Board
Conseil scolaire de district catholique Centre-Sud
District School Board of Niagara
Halton District School Board
Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board
Keewatin-Patricia District School Board
Lakehead District School Board
Limestone District School Board
Rainy River District School Board
Renfrew County Catholic District School Board
Toronto District School Board
Waterloo Catholic District School Board
Wellington Catholic District School Board
York Catholic District School Board

The ministry also wishes to thank the Council of Ontario Directors of Education (CODE) for their initial identification of boards with successful practices for the preparation of students for the OSSLT.

EQAO resources

EQAO provides a variety of valuable materials to help students, parents, and teachers to understand the requirements of the OSSLT and to help students prepare for the test. Important resources can be found under the following headings on the EQAO website, at www.eqao.com.

Getting Ready Guide

“Be Informed, Be Ready”. This guide provides information about the administration of the test, including the exact test instructions and writing prompts. Tips for students are also included.

Annotated Student Responses

Writing: This resource provides a description of what is expected in each writing task, gives details of how marking is done, provides samples of rubrics used, and explains samples of student responses to real writing tasks.

Reading: This resource provides a description of the types of reading tasks and the marking process for each type, as well as samples of student responses with comments.

Preparing for the Test (Tips for Students)

Writing: Samples of each of the types of writing tasks required on the OSSLT are provided with accompanying tips on what to do before beginning to write and what to do during writing.

Reading: General and specific strategies for approaching each of the three types of reading passages are given, as well as tips on how to approach both multiple-choice and written answers. Samples of each type of reading passage are also provided.

Sample Test Booklet

This sample booklet contains reading and writing tasks organized in the way that students will see them on the actual test.

Dos and Don’ts for Writing

This resource provides observations from markers that are intended to draw students’ attention to strategies that did or did not help students be successful on the writing tasks of the test.

OSSLT Curriculum Connections

Charts indicate connections between the types of tasks on the OSSLT and expectations in each curriculum area for Grades 7, 8, and 9.

How to Help Prepare Your Child for the OSSLT

This resource is designed to provide parents with a description of what is required on the OSSLT, what they might do to help their child develop reading and writing skills, and how they might reinforce the importance of these skills in everyday life.

In addition, EQAO publishes annually the Guide for Administering the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test and the Guide for Accommodations, Special Provisions, Deferrals and Exemptions, which include information to assist principals and teachers in preparing for test administration and making decisions regarding accommodations. Teacher scripts and sample letters to parents are also included.
Cross-Curricular Approaches

Grade 9: Cross-Curricular Resources

The Keewatin-Patricia District School Board has taken a proactive approach to the OSSLT, focusing on ensuring that all students are prepared to write the test and aiming to enable students to successfully complete the test on their first attempt.

With these goals in mind, a special program was developed to focus on the instructional practices of all Grade 9 teachers across the curriculum. A working group of teachers determined the type of activity that would most resemble an activity on the OSSLT and that would be appropriate for each subject area. The group also outlined an instructional strategy for the activity. In consultation with subject area teachers, the group then selected, compiled, and developed topics and teaching materials, by subject area, around the two components (reading and writing) and the seven areas tested on the OSSLT. On completion of this considerable task, all materials were distributed to classroom teachers.

The result is a program of continuous development and implementation of resources to ensure that students are thoroughly grounded in the skills they will need to successfully complete the OSSLT.

Grade 10: Literacy Across the Curriculum

Brant Haldimand Norfolk Catholic District School Board

Completing the preparation process

Two days before the OSSLT, students are provided with final preparation by their homeroom teachers on both the process and expectations. During this hour-long teacher-adviser session, teachers review the OSSLT materials and answer student questions. Particular attention is paid to minimizing student anxiety, thereby increasing student attendance.

At the Brant Haldimand Norfolk Catholic District School Board, student success on the OSSLT has been enhanced considerably with an integrated, cross-curricular approach that stresses consistent development of language skills across all curriculum areas and that distributes workload among all teachers, rather than placing exclusive responsibility for literacy on the English department.

All Grade 10 students receive three weeks of literacy preparation in all four of their classes on a rotating basis. Materials are distributed to students in homeroom classes. Students are provided with individual packages, and are responsible for bringing their materials to their classes each day.

On the first day, students complete the literacy exercises in their first-period class. On the second day, they bring their literacy materials to their second-period class, where they complete assigned exercises with the teacher. This process continues on days three and four, rotating through each period, and students spend a minimum of one-half hour working on their literacy assignments during the school day.

The success of this approach is reflected in the comments of students who have taken the OSSLT with far greater comfort and confidence.

Contact: Curriculum Department, (519) 759-8862

Creating and funding literacy resources

Literacy support materials for students, as well as teacher resources, were developed from content on the EQAO website. The board funded the printing of a student package and a teacher resource package for every Grade 10 student and teacher.
The cross-curricular approach in action

Here are just a few examples of how the Keewatin-Patricia District School Board’s innovative approach has incorporated OSSLT preparation across the curriculum:

- **Food and Nutrition**: “Restaurants Launch Heart-Smart Campaign” (Writing a news report)
- **Business Studies**: “Operating System” (Writing a summary)
- **Mathematics**: “Pythagorean Theorem” (Writing an information paragraph)
- **Native Studies**: “Native War Veterans – Tommy Prince” (Writing an opinion piece)
- **Music**: “Shaking Up the Local Music Scene” (Reading an information text)
- **Integrated Technologies**: “Live Safe! Work Smart!” (Reading graphical text)
- **Science**: “Ice Storm ’98” (Reading literary text)

Contact: Dryden office, (807) 223-5311

Cross-Curricular Strategies for Teachers

Providing key cross-curricular strategies for improving students’ reading and writing skills

Who is responsible for teaching literacy? Every one of us – every teacher in every subject area. That’s the philosophy behind an 80-page guide developed by instructional leaders at the Toronto District School Board to help teachers improve students’ reading and writing across all subject areas.

Entitled *Cross-Curricular Literacy: Strategies for Improving Secondary Students’ Reading and Writing Skills*, the guide is designed as a series of stand-alone lessons, each of which contains all the information needed to implement one strategy. Included within each strategy are a definition and description of the practices useful for teaching with the strategy, a brief synopsis of terminology and supporting information, and a specific application of the strategy using a text for a specific content area. The document addresses all of the forms of writing tested by the OSSLT. Graphic organizers are also included on many pages.

Extremely well organized and “user-friendly”, the guide enables teachers to easily locate an appropriate strategy for any subject and student group.

Cross-curricular literacy at a glance

The Toronto District School Board’s literacy resource presents a broad variety of strategies in a highly accessible way. The reading portion of the resource, for example, presents thirty strategies for use before, during, and after reading. Here are some examples:

**Before reading**

- generating questions
- brainstorming
- previewing vocabulary
Tutoring Programs

University Student Tutors in the Schools

Limestone District School Board

Providing one-to-one tutoring

This innovative program provides individual tutoring to students in Grades 9 to 11 who are at risk of not being successful on the OSSLT. This program is provided during the months of May and June to prepare them expressly for the literacy test.

University students, most of whom are in a B.Ed. program, are employed as full-time tutors during the two-month program. The tutors are given two days of tutor training, and then are assigned to individual schools on the basis of school size and need. Tutors work under the supervision of a “literacy liaison tutor teacher” in each school, while the board’s secondary literacy consultant is responsible for managing the program at the district level.

Students needing assistance are withdrawn from class for 20 to 30 minutes per session, approximately three times per week. Tutors maintain a literacy portfolio for each student, which contains samples of student work and tutor feedback. Tutors also complete a summative assessment for each student on completion of the program. Throughout the program, the literacy tutors return to the board office weekly to meet as a group, share best practices, solve problems, and receive additional training.

This highly successful approach has benefited students in a variety of ways. The one-to-one approach enables students to work at their own pace and receive highly personalized instruction. Equally important, students receive the help they need without the self-consciousness that might arise in a classroom setting and hamper the learning process.

Contact: Secondary Curriculum Department, (613) 544-6925, ext. 229

Tutor training: a two-day program

Tutor training is provided at the district level by the secondary literacy consultant. Tutors are given an overview of the OSSLT, including the requirements of each component, the ways in which each skill is assessed, effective methods of teaching these skills, and reading of individual student reports. Tutors are also shown how to help students learn step by step and how to use various types of technological support. Tutors who will work with ESL students receive additional training in how to support ESL learners.

Contact: English Literacy Department, (416) 394-7258

During reading
- making inferences
- questioning text
- highlighting text

After reading
- summarizing main ideas and details
- identifying organizational patterns
- making connections

Contact: Secondary Curriculum Department, (613) 544-6925, ext. 229

Best Practices from Ontario School Boards

Preparing Students for the OSSLT
Senior Secondary Students: Teaching and Learning

Pairing senior English students with Grade 9 students

Grade 9 students who are identified as having weak reading and writing skills can receive one-to-one tutoring from senior students in this successful program developed at the District School Board of Niagara.

Through liaison with elementary teachers, the program begins with a diagnostic literacy test, which is modelled on the OSSLT and given to Grade 8 students in May. The tests are intended to determine areas of weakness in reading and writing, and to identify those students who would benefit from tutoring. These students are invited to participate in a ten-session tutoring program during Grade 9, in which each student is paired with a senior student taking English.

The senior students, under the close supervision of their English teacher, are assigned an independent research project that involves researching strategies for teaching literacy skills. The student tutors then apply these strategies in one-to-one tutoring sessions, with particular emphasis on those areas of weakness identified in the diagnostic test. The tutoring sessions take place on a weekly basis during school time. The Grade 9 students are tested again at the end of the ten-week session.

This program has proven highly effective, and has provided a valuable learning experience for both groups of students.

Contact: Curriculum Services, Don Reilly Resource Centre, (905) 227-5551, ext. 2293

Test Preparation

Mirroring of Test Activities

Using practice activities and mock tests to improve test results

Secondary schools of the Rainy River District School Board have addressed the needs of students who are preparing for the OSSLT by developing preparatory learning materials and a practice test, which mirror the tasks found on the literacy test.

The preparatory material was developed with two key intentions: (1) to adapt some existing classroom activities across a variety of subjects to the OSSLT test format, and (2) to provide practice activities, separate from the course curriculum, that could be administered in any classroom. Preparatory activities stress writing and reading, as well as test-taking strategies.

The practice test, which focuses on a reading task and a writing task, is administered in one class period. During the following period, the classroom teacher discusses the answers to the reading questions with the class, and the writing task is assessed, with the use of an exemplar, by small groups within the classroom. At the end of the period, each test is collected and the results checked by a team of volunteer markers from within the teaching staff.

Students who experience difficulty with the reading or writing tasks are identified, and receive individual remediation from members of the school literacy team.

This process, along with an after-school literacy class and a summer school literacy program, has served not only to provide remediation to students in reading and writing, but also to prepare them effectively for the format and requirements of the OSSLT. The program has generated a consistent increase in student scores, and has enhanced staff awareness of, and commitment to, the critical issue of literacy.
A collaborative effort

One key factor that underlies the success of the Rainy River District School Board’s literacy initiatives is its responsiveness to the needs of every participant in the process and the collaborative nature of that process.

• Students are provided with individualized support. Those with an Individual Education Plan (IEP), for example, experience the accommodations for the practice test; others become familiar with the test surroundings to minimize test anxiety. Meetings have been held with First Nations organizations to discuss Aboriginal students’ literacy achievement and the steps necessary to address this issue.

• Staff and students work together in organizing the administration of the practice test and preparatory materials.

• Teachers of various subject areas have demonstrated their commitment to reading and writing development through their participation in the literacy team and in volunteer marking.

• Parents and community members learn about the OSSLT through televised information sessions, and have an opportunity for input through the school council.

Contact: Program Support Department, (807) 274-5366

A Student Guidebook on Test-Writing Skills

Halton District School Board

Providing students with key tips for writing the test

A 23-page student guide to the OSSLT, developed by the Halton District School Board, provides students with both general guidelines for large-scale test taking and specific advice on handling the types of questions they will encounter on the OSSLT.

Written and illustrated in an approachable and friendly style, the guide — entitled “Hey you in Grade 10: How about a few pointers for that literacy test?” — condenses a wealth of information into an easily digestible and highly accessible format for Grade 10 students.

What’s in the guide?

“Hey you in Grade 10” covers a wide range of topics, including the following:

• some things students should know about taking large-scale tests (what they should watch for and what they should do)

• hints for effective reading (reading strategies) and ways of answering various types of questions (multiple-choice, short-answer, and longer-answer questions)

• tips for writing paragraphs, summaries, reports, and opinion pieces

Contact: School Program Services, (905) 335-3663, ext. 2220
A Three-Tiered Approach
Renfrew County Catholic District School Board

Meeting diverse student needs through individualized training and remediation

The Renfrew County Catholic District School Board offers highly individualized literacy training to Grade 9 students, Grade 10 students, and those students who have been unsuccessful in one or more components/tasks of the OSSLT. Here are the program highlights.

Grade 9 students

• All students receive specific instruction on how to write the literacy test. Various aspects of the OSSLT tasks are dealt with. All Grade 9 teachers administer one or more EQAO sample tasks in the regular classroom and assess their students’ performance.
• All teachers are made aware of the EQAO style of question, and are encouraged to use this format in selected lessons and assignments.
• Special education teachers work with special needs students and assist them in test preparation through practice questions.
• A literacy skills support course is offered through summer school programs.

Grade 10 students

• All students write a mock literacy test, using materials produced by EQAO. The test is administered before the OSSLT, and assessed by Grade 10 teachers.
• Extra help is provided to students during the lunch period.

After-School Literacy Classes
Wellington Catholic District School Board

Building skills through the Literacy for Life program

The Wellington Catholic District School Board’s Literacy for Life program provides highly individualized support to Grade 10 students who are at risk of not being successful on the OSSLT.

Offered over a period of six weeks after school twice a week for one and a half hours, this program is designed for small groups of students – typically fifteen students per class – grouped by learning need. Teachers with qualifications in the area of reading and writing are hired to offer instruction, learning activities, and individual support, using their own teaching resources along with a Literacy for Life manual provided by the board. In turn, students have access to learning materials, including the reading and writing software licensed by the ministry from the NECTAR Foundation.

Students are selected for the program on the basis of the following:
• current marks in English (reading and writing)
• prior assessments (Grade 8)
• a recommendation by the student’s teacher and principal

Offered twice yearly, in September/October and February/March, Literacy for Life has yielded substantial improvements in both student performance and attitudes to learning.

Literacy for Life: the keys to success

The Literacy for Life program works. It offers these features:
• individual teacher-student contact
• teacher expertise
• small instructional groups
• a targeted focus on students’ learning needs

Contact: Program Department, (519) 821-4600
Literacy Enrichment Classes
York Catholic District School Board

Improving students’ test results through after-school classes

The York Catholic District School Board has introduced an after-school program for Grade 9 and 10 students, and for students who are retaking the OSSLT, that provides specialized support in preparation for the literacy test.

The hour-long literacy classes are taught by staff who have English teaching qualifications, and additional peer tutoring is provided by senior secondary students. Individual attention is provided to students in applied programs, who are also grouped in smaller classes.

Resources and materials provided to each student include the following:
• a workbook of reading and writing focused on the literacy test
• English-language works appropriate to literacy learning
• sample tests and EQAO resource materials
• board materials and locally developed literacy packages

The program has been highly successful. Student test results have consistently improved since it was introduced.

Contact: Secondary School Program Department, (416) 221-5051

Students who were unsuccessful on the test

• The individual student report from EQAO is reviewed with each student, and a plan of action is developed.
• Students are recommended for the summer school program.
• These students are also required to take a full-credit course (ESL3O) that develops the reading and writing skills necessary to be successful on the OSSLT.
• Extra help is provided to students, as required.
• A review of the student’s progress is undertaken, before the test date, to determine whether deferral or exemption is advisable.

Contact: School board office, (613) 735-1031
Remedial Programs

Teacher Resources for Remediation
Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board

Providing teachers with resources for summer school

The Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board has developed a resource for remediation that teachers can use as the basis for a ten-day summer school program for Grade 9 and 10 students. Introduced successfully in the 2002 summer school program, the resource has also been distributed to schools, and includes suggestions for school-level remediation activities throughout the year.

The resource provides a detailed framework for the ten-day program, as well as a daily outline designed to provide a balanced pattern of instruction and practice activities. The resource provides instruction and practice in all the types of tasks included in the OSSLT. For regular school programs, activities in the resource can be incorporated in locally developed courses, Learning Strategies courses, and the Grade 11 Literacy Skills course. It can also be integrated across subject areas as part of school literacy initiatives, and offered as practice during individual remediation sessions or as a source for the development of mock tests.

Ten-day program at a glance

Day 1: Introduction and diagnostic assessment activities
Day 2: Reading graphical text
Day 3: Writing a news report
Day 4: Reading informational text
Day 5: Writing a summary
Day 6: Writing an informational paragraph
Day 7: Reading literary text
Day 8: Writing a supported opinion
Day 9: Writing a mock test
Day 10: Celebration!

Contact: Educational Services, (705) 742-9773

Multi-Purpose Resource for Grades 10 and 11

Conseil scolaire de district catholique Centre-Sud

Providing teachers with activities and tips for remediation

The Conseil scolaire de district catholique Centre-Sud has developed a resource for remediation that teachers can use either in regular Grade 10 programs or in lunch or after-school programs for Grade 11 students.

The resource is comprehensive, and it features cross-curricular activities that can easily be incorporated into existing courses at the Grade 10 level. As well, tips and information for teachers on preparing students for the OSSLT enable teachers in all subject areas to become actively engaged.

The activities within the resource provide instruction and practice in all of the tasks included in the OSSLT – that is, reading graphical, informational, and literary texts, as well as writing news reports, summaries, informational paragraphs, and supported opinions.

Each reading task presents two activities – the first is intended for use in direct instruction, and the second is an individual activity for the student. Teaching strategies are outlined in detail for the teacher, and a checklist and question sheet are included with every activity, enabling students to check, evaluate, and reflect on their own work.

Contact: Service de la programmation, (416) 397-6999

Contact: Educational Services, (705) 742-9773
The School-Based Literacy Team
Lakehead District School Board

Taking primary responsibility for student success at the school level

Secondary schools in the Lakehead District School Board, in consultation with board staff, have devised a school-based strategy for improving student performance. This strategy involves the following elements:

• Individual schools take primary responsibility for putting programs in place to improve student success, and are considered accountable for test results.
• Each school creates a literacy team, which includes representatives from most or all subject areas.
• Various strategies are employed by each literacy team, which uses resource materials provided by EQAO, materials developed by board staff, and materials developed by the Assessment Training Consortium and the NECTAR Foundation.
• After test results have been received, school leaders meet to share strategies of their literacy teams and to develop best practices.

Each secondary school in the board currently has a literacy team in place. Each team has created a School Literacy Plan, which provides details of specific activities for Grade 9 students and specific test-preparation strategies for all Grade 10 students in the five to eight weeks leading up to the OSSLT. As well, follow-up is done with each unsuccessful student, which is based on the individual student report.

This model – school-based teams supported by board-wide initiatives – has resulted in a consistent and comprehensive network of support that is designed to effectively prepare all students for the OSSLT.

Grade 10 test preparation strategies
Test preparation for Grade 10 students includes a variety of strategies and resources.

Classroom component. Every Grade 10 class is assigned one specific writing task per week in each subject. As a result, every Grade 10 student will have four opportunities to write each specific task on a weekly basis.
Component from teacher-adviser sessions. Each week, the teacher-adviser conducts a session in which one particular task is examined, using the four examples from each student. Lessons include the outline of the criteria for the task, a review of the classroom teacher’s assessment, and self-assessment using a chart and an exemplar.

Resources. These include a classroom lesson for each task, sample tasks, an assessment checklist, lessons during teacher-adviser sessions, and exemplars for each task.

Remediation. Students who were unsuccessful receive counselling and remediation that is focused on their individual student report. If the student has failed the writing component, he or she is placed in a Grade 10 teacher-adviser program class for the weeks when writing is reviewed.

Contact: Program Department, Instructional Services, (807) 625-5100

Do you have a successful program to share with Ontario educators?

Please fill out this form, and let us know how your school or board is helping prepare students for the OSSLT so we can continue to share best practices across the province.

Name: ______________________________________________
School: _____________________________________________
Address: _____________________________________________
Telephone: (______) ___________________________________
E-mail: ______________________________________________
Board of Education: _____________________________________
Description of program: __________________________________
___________________________________________________
___________________________________________________
___________________________________________________
___________________________________________________
___________________________________________________
___________________________________________________
___________________________________________________

Please fax this form to: Curriculum and Assessment Policy Branch
Ministry of Education
Fax: (416) 325-2575