

Assessment and Evaluation Branch

Information Bulletin

Elementary School Assessments

Spring and Summer Marking Sessions

The Assessment and Evaluation Branch and teacher-based marking committees had a busy schedule processing thousands of provincial assessments this spring. This year the marking sessions were moved throughout the province to make it easier for teachers to become involved in the professional development opportunity. By all accounts, teachers appreciated the increased accessibility, as well as the learning experiences provided through marking.

Common Errors/Concerns Grades 2 and 4 Literacy Assessments



Participating in marking sessions is an excellent professional development opportunity for teachers. While marking over 3800 Grade 2 writing pieces and over 4300 Grade 4 writing pieces, the following issues and trends emerged:

Rough Drafts

For Grades 2 and 4, students bubble their answers directly into the assessment booklets. As a result, teachers can help to facilitate the scanning process (and speed with which results are returned) by ensuring that any rough drafts and scrap paper are not stapled into the assessment booklets. All booklets are first cut and then run through a scanner. Additional paper in the booklets must be removed before scanning. With

the number of booklets processed, removing spare paper is very time consuming and slows down the whole process. If it is necessary to include rough drafts, please ensure that the loose paper is stapled together and clearly labelled with the student's name, school, and litho number in the event that the paper is separated from the booklet. Please do not staple the paper to the booklet.

Writing Prompts

A large number of classrooms, particularly in Grade 4, were given writing prompts and in some cases, the outline of the writing pieces. Needless to say, this practice seriously limited the students' writing due to several factors. In particular, the marking committee members felt that the traits of voice and content were limited: students were unable to write about familiar topics where individual writing styles and passions could take the writing to a higher level. To avoid limiting student writing in this way, **writing prompts are not permitted**

in Grades 2 and 4 assessments.

Graphic Organizers

There were a large number of classrooms using graphic organizers for the assessments in both Grades 2 and 4. Graphic organizers are a valuable teaching tool but for this writing piece, they hampered the students' writing ability. Exemplar and marking committee members agreed that traits such as voice and content were particularly underdeveloped. The Administrative Guidelines state, "The writing is intended to reflect the student's ability to **write independently**. Children should apply the strategies they have learned which were modeled throughout the year." Graphic organizers should be a tool used by choice as it is a strategy used throughout the year. The task is meant to be an independent piece of writing; forcing entire classes of students to use the organizer goes against the spirit of the assessment and negatively impacts the piece of writing.

Special points of interest:

PISA: April 20-May 21

PCAP Field Trial May 18-29

2008/2009 Schedule

Grade 2 Literacy May 22-29

Grade 4 Literacy June 3-9

Grade 5 Math June 3-9

Grade 6 Science June 3-9

Grade 7 Literacy Oct 20-24

Middle Level Math June 8-9

Grade 9 ELPA Jan 15-22

Grade 10 FI Literacy Apr 20-24

Grade 12 Potential Graduate Reassessment June 8

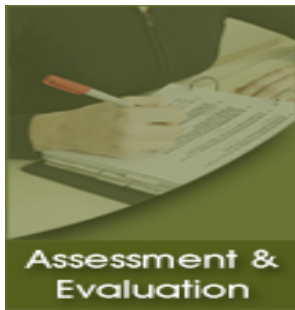
Grade 12 Oral Proficiency Nov 3-Dec 5
Apr 20-May 29

Intensive French Oral & Written Jan/Feb
June

Please remember that it is very important to read the Administrative Guidelines carefully before administering any provincial assessment.

Traits of Writing: Hints for Targeting the Standards

Please see the link for Assessment and Evaluation link in the Portal for more details.



Traits of Writing

Teacher recommendations, with regard to specific traits, are highlighted in the next section as anecdotal evidence gathered by survey after the marking sessions.

Content: Students often included too many irrelevant details and/or lacked focus. Teachers recommended that students have to acquire skills towards developing a focused topic with sufficient supporting details.

Organization: Generally, student writing could be developed by learning how to create flow with linking ideas and the use of a variety of connecting/transition words. 'Firstly..., Secondly..., Thirdly..., and Finally' used as a formula, often limited student writing. Weak introductions and conclusions were also noted as a problem.

Word Choice: This trait showed to be a strength in both Grades 2 and 4 writing, highlighting the success of recent curricular initiatives such as "million dollar words." A lack of interesting verb choices was noted as a weakness (went, go, saw, etc.).

Sentence Structure: In Grade 2, repetitive sentence beginnings were noted as an issue. This was also noted in Grade 4, as well as the lack of more complex sentences and sentence variety. Both grade levels reflected a need for better connecting words for compound sentences ('and then...and then...').

Conventions: In both Grade 2 and Grade 4, homophones (their/there/they're, etc.) were noted as an issue. Many Grade 4 students struggled using quotation marks correctly. Possessives and the proper use of apostrophes were noted as problems in both grades. Many Grade 2 students had difficulty with end punctuation.

"New knowledge is the most valuable commodity on earth. The more truth we have to work with, the richer we become."

Kurt Vonnegut

Grade 5 Mathematics: Common Errors

We would encourage all teachers to apply for marking sessions as opportunity for professional development.

This year, the Grade 5 marking session was held in Quispamsis. The following trends emerged in the grade 5 mathematics assessment this year.

Number Concepts:

In general, it appears many students struggle with the conceptual understandings of number concepts. Students need to develop a solid understanding of the relationship between fractions, division, and decimals (A2, A3). It is also evident that many students have difficulty comparing, ordering, and expressing larger numbers (A6, A8).

Operations:

Division, division, division! Division questions consistently appear in the open-response section and students consistently perform poorly on them (B4, B6). Problems in this area also spill out into the selected-response section;

thus, students are losing 3 to 4 points on this each year. Another area of concern is in the estimation of products and quotients (B11). Please see *Hints for Targeting the Standards* on the Assessment & Evaluation Portal site.

Geometry:

Students need more practice exploring the relationships between the areas and perimeters of squares and rectangles, along with manipulating and predicting their dimensions (E4). The open-response item testing rotation (E10) also seemed to cause difficulty for many students.

Probability:

Although a slight improvement over previous years can be observed, students still need to work on being able to make statements/draw conclusions from simple experiments involving theoretical and experimental probability.

Please see the Assessment and Evaluation Portal for more detail on the Grades 5 and Middle Level Mathematics Assessments (*Middle Level Mathematics: Common Errors and Hints for Targeting Outcomes*).

New Provincial Report Card

This fall, we will see the release of the first annual school achievement reports. Each school will receive a report indicating achievement levels on provincial assessments over a three -year period, as well as the provincial targets for each assessment. Also, each district will receive a district-level report.

