

# ESSP WRITING OUTCOME

The Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP) is a multi-year (2014–2020), province-wide plan developed collaboratively by the Provincial Leadership Team (PLT) which consists of the Deputy Minister of Education, the Assistant Deputy Ministers, provincial school division directors of education, and First Nation Education Authority representatives. The ESSP includes the following outcome: “By June 2020, 80% will be at grade level or above in reading, writing, and math.” Provincial writing teams, made up of classroom teachers and literacy coaches from school divisions and First Nations authorities from around the province, as well as the outcome owner, Don Rempel, and ministry representatives, developed materials related to the ESSP outcome.

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### 1. WHAT SUPPORTS FOR WRITING ARE AVAILABLE FOR TEACHERS?

The following supports have been developed by provincial working groups:

- holistic writing rubrics for Grades 1-12 for English and Fransaskois;
- holistic writing rubrics for Grades 2-12 for French Immersion (the focus is on language acquisition in Grade 1; therefore, a rubric was not developed for that grade level);
- writing continua for Grades 1-12 for English, French Immersion and Fransaskois;
- exemplars and optional prompts for French Immersion and Fransaskois; and,
- *Eligible Students for Writing Data Collection* document.

The writing continua are intended to provide an overview of the writing skills, text forms, and strategies for each grade/course, and are not intended to replace the curricula. The continua invite teachers to see how text forms and writing skills shift in focus from grade level to grade level, and how the development of strong writers occurs over the course of twelve years. It is important to note that the writing continua address only the writing component of language arts.

The documents listed above can be found in [English](#) and in [French](#).

The exemplars found on the Saskatchewan Professional Development Unit’s website can serve as a starting point for understanding what the four levels of proficiency may look like in various text forms at each grade level. Those documents can be found here:

[https://www.stf.sk.ca/professional-resources/saskatchewan-professional-development-unit/resources/english-language-arts?field\\_spdu\\_category\\_tid=197](https://www.stf.sk.ca/professional-resources/saskatchewan-professional-development-unit/resources/english-language-arts?field_spdu_category_tid=197)

In the case where school divisions and schools have already developed their own exemplars, or choose to do so in the future, this practice is encouraged as part of professional growth and collaboration.

### 2. WHEN AND FOR WHAT GRADES DOES INFORMATION REGARDING “AT GRADE LEVEL” NEED TO BE REPORTED TO THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION?

The first data collection will occur in June 2018 for students in English Grades 4, 7 and 9 and French Immersion and Fransaskois Grade 4. Data will be submitted in relation to the language of instruction; therefore, French Immersion and Fransaskois students will have only a French writing level reported to the Ministry of Education.

French Immersion and Fransaskois grades 7 and 9 data will be submitted in June 2019. This delay in data submission is because of the implementation of new curricula in 2017–2018.

Writing “at grade level” data will be recorded once each year at the end of the school year.

For an assessment schedule, please see [\*2017-18 ESSP Assessment Plan\*](#).

The guidelines for student inclusion and for reporting are available in the [\*Eligible Students for Writing Data Collection\*](#) document.

### **3. WHICH LEVELS OF THE WRITING RUBRIC DEFINE “AT GRADE LEVEL”?**

Level 3 of the holistic rubrics defines “at grade level” for writing and level 4 defines “at grade level” with enriched understanding. For the purpose of the provincial goal, 80% of students will be at or above grade level (Levels 3 and 4).

### **4. WHY IS THE RUBRIC HOLISTIC AND HOW IS THIS DIFFERENT FROM AN ANALYTIC RUBRIC? MAY HOLISTIC RUBRICS BE CHANGED TO ANALYTIC RUBRICS?**

With the approval of the outcome owners, provincial working groups developed 4-level holistic rubrics.

The holistic rubrics should not be converted to analytic rubrics.

When engaging in holistic scoring, a number of aspects of writing are considered simultaneously across multiple genres. Holistic assessment, underpinned by professional judgement, invites teachers to consider curriculum-specific criteria for proficient writing to determine the degree of proficiency across multiple work samples. Furthermore, with a holistic assessment, teachers can utilize their observations of students while engaged in the process of writing to determine degrees of independence, a key criterion for proficiency. The four levels articulated in the holistic rubrics are discrete and teachers must determine which of the four levels best describes each student’s skills and understanding at year-end.

An analytic rubric clarifies and invites assessment of isolated criteria, in order to facilitate instructional decisions and feedback conversations that will support growth. These types of rubrics are the cornerstone of effective daily practice in a classroom. Many school divisions and the Saskatchewan Professional Development Unit have created analytic rubrics and should be encouraged to use them as they have been doing.

### **5. WHY DO THE RUBRICS LOOK SO SIMILAR FROM GRADE LEVEL TO GRADE LEVEL? DO THEY REALLY TELL US WHAT “AT GRADE LEVEL” LOOKS LIKE?**

The rubrics look similar across grade levels because strong writing shares certain criteria, regardless of the grade or genre. For example, there is never a time when the message of a piece of writing is not critical in determining “at grade level.” What increases the complexity from grade level to grade level are the contexts in which children are applying these skills and understandings. As children progress, they learn to write in new ways, with diverse registers, more complex organization, and increasingly complex language structures. This is how grade levels are differentiated. Using the rubrics alongside the continua helps determine what kinds of writing samples students craft as they move through our school system. In essence, “at grade level” determination requires consideration of criteria, contexts, and tasks.

#### **6. I THINK THERE ARE SOME IMPORTANT CRITERIA MISSING FROM THE RUBRICS, SUCH AS VOICE. SHOULD THESE CRITERIA BE INCLUDED?**

When assessing something as complex and multi-faceted as writing, it is impossible to include every criterion that contributes to strong processes and products in a single rubric.

According to the curricula there are specific criteria that are emphasized more fully in certain years and these criteria are included. However, there are other criteria that are not mentioned and, while still important for developing good writers, are not included in the holistic rubrics. The criteria for proficient writing are very interconnected. For example, it would be difficult to achieve a clear message, a specific point of view, and an appropriate register (all criteria in the rubrics) without addressing voice. Even though voice does not appear explicitly in the rubrics (or curriculum) it is implied through other criteria, and therefore, remains important.

#### **7. WHAT IS MEANT BY “APPROPRIATE REGISTER”?**

The Saskatchewan ELA curriculum defines register as: “a socially defined variety of language such as conversational, informal, formal, frozen, or slang.” Part of being a strong writer is knowing which register is appropriate and most effective in a given context.

#### **8. CAN WE USE THE SASKATCHEWAN PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT UNIT (SPDU) EXEMPLARS FOR THE PURPOSES OF THIS PROJECT?**

The Saskatchewan Professional Development Unit exemplars of student work were not vetted by the provincial writing group and are not intended to be the standard for writing proficiency. They are simply one resource of many that can enhance our understanding of writing. The exemplars were collected and vetted by groups of classroom teachers, Saskatchewan Professional Development Unit personnel, and Ministry personnel prior to the work of the provincial writing team. The levels in the analytic SPDU exemplars may not always correlate to the levels in the holistic provincial rubrics and so the definition of what “at grade level” means needs to be done by considering the holistic rubrics, the writing continuums, and exemplars that have been found to reflect the first two items. This is rich conversation that is best had between classroom teachers who have deep experience in reading the writing of developing learners.

Specific French Immersion and Fransaskois exemplars were not developed with SPDU. Optional prompts for French Immersion and Fransaskois were developed by teachers and consultants in the French provincial working groups. Exemplars, based on the prompts, were selected and scored using the French Immersion and Fransaskois holistic provincial rubrics.

#### **9. WHAT TYPE OF WRITING SAMPLES SHOULD WE BE USING WHEN MAKING OUR PROFESSIONAL JUDGEMENT?**

Writing samples that students create closer to the end of the year are likely the best indicators of “at grade level.” It is important that, when a professional judgement is made, it is based on samples from more than one text form—strong writers are able to navigate multiple writing contexts.

#### **10. ARE WE ALLOWED TO LET THE STUDENTS ENGAGE IN THE WRITING PROCESS FOR THE SAMPLES USED TO DETERMINE “AT GRADE LEVEL”?**

Yes. Writers brainstorm, create drafts, access feedback, revise and edit, and self-assess and share. Engaging in a strong writing process does not interfere with the determination of independence or “at grade level.” The final product of a student’s work as well as their independence when applying the writing process will be considered when determining if a student is “at grade level” in writing.

#### **11. HOW MUCH HELP IS TOO MUCH HELP WHEN DETERMINING “AT GRADE LEVEL?”**

Students should be able to create their own messages, organize their own ideas, and use language that conveys meaning. For example, they may refer to anchor charts, access word lists, or consult with peers about formatting. With this in mind, the student’s product should reflect the student’s work and be an indication of the student’s writing abilities. If a teacher provides prescriptive corrections and the student simply recopies the teacher’s suggestions, the product may not accurately reflect the student’s abilities. Therefore, providing corrections for students to recopy is not the same as providing writing supports for the students to apply when improving their writing product.

#### **12. IS VOICE-TO-TEXT PERMITTED FOR STUDENTS WHO NEED IT? HOW MUCH ARE STUDENTS PERMITTED TO USE TECHNOLOGY?**

The critical question we must ask ourselves is *what does it mean to be a writer?* Is it putting an actual pen to paper? Is it being able to type letters on a keyboard? Rather, it is expressing oneself in the written form, crafting a message, determining organizational structures, and choosing language that has impact and conveys meaning. If the student typically receives assistance from a scribe, or employs technological devices, such as voice-to-text, teachers should continue using what is appropriate for the student. When reporting student results, there is no requirement to report the use of technology or other assistance.

#### **13. WHY DO WE REPORT AT THE END OF THE YEAR? WOULDN’T IT BE BETTER TO DO IT EARLIER, WHEN WE CAN HELP STUDENTS?**

There are two clear purposes for the year-end reporting of writing at the provincial level. The first purpose is to collect student data indicating the degree to which students are writing at grade level in grades 4, 7, and 9 so that patterns and trends can be determined and sector decisions regarding support can be made. The second reason is to provide a catalyst for investigation of the best ways to develop strong writers at every grade level by school divisions, schools, and individual teachers. The year-end reporting achieves both these goals and leaves the instructional decision-making where it belongs, with the teachers. The reporting in June should not prevent teachers from supporting students each and every day in their classrooms.

#### **14. HOW ARE WE MAKING SURE THERE IS CONSISTENCY IN REPORTING “AT GRADE LEVEL” RESULTS IN THE PROVINCE?**

A common provincial rubric supports consistency in assessing student writing. The broad aim of the ESSP Writing outcome is to determine the percentage of students writing at or above grade level. The rubrics articulate key grade level criteria across four distinct levels, the writing continua clarify the development of skills over time, and exemplars enhance the understanding of grade level writing. Further, all supports have been developed in relation to the provincial curriculums, which have always served as the standard for learning. It should be noted that simply averaging writing grades to determine proficiency would not be an appropriate reflection of year end skills and understanding.

#### **15. WHY IS THERE NO COMMON WRITING ASSESSMENT FOR SASKATCHEWAN STUDENTS?**

Rather than a common assessment, it was decided that, given their understanding of their students and the Saskatchewan curricula, teachers can, by using their professional judgement, determine whether or not students are writing at grade level. Engaging students in writing about meaningful subjects, in culturally sensitive and developmentally appropriate ways is the best indicator of writing skill.

**16. WILL THERE BE A “SASK WRITES” DOCUMENT AND WEBSITE SIMILAR TO “SASK READS”?**

A Sask Writes document and website are not planned at this time. That being said, a high percentage of the strategies and environments described within Sask Reads are also best practice when it comes to writing instruction. For example, small group discussion, purposeful conferencing, and explicit strategy instruction are all part of a strong writing program.