Parent Guide to Provincial Achievement Testing

Achievement tests?
Find out all about them inside!

GRADE 6
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Questions Frequently Asked About the Achievement Testing Program

Each year, children in Grade 6 write provincial achievement tests in language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies. Children in grades 3 and 9 also write achievement tests. In learning about and being advocates for their children as they prepare to write achievement tests, parents often ask the following questions about the Achievement Testing Program.

What is the purpose of the achievement tests? The purpose of the achievement tests is to determine how well students are learning what they are expected to learn, to inform Albertans about students’ achievement relative to provincial standards, and to assist schools, school authorities, and the province in monitoring and improving student learning.

Who is expected to write the tests? All students registered in grades 3, 6, and 9 are expected to write the tests for their grade.

What tests are administered and when?

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Month</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English Language Arts</td>
<td>Part A: Writing 120 min, Part B: Reading 60 min</td>
<td>May</td>
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<td>Mathematics</td>
<td>Part A: Operations and Number Sense 30 min, Part B: Multiple Choice 60 min</td>
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<td>60 min</td>
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What do the achievement tests assess? Alberta’s achievement tests are aligned with the provincial curriculum and with authorized learning and teaching resources. No single test can assess everything. The achievement tests address only those learning outcomes that can be readily assessed by a paper-and-pencil test. The clearest picture of students’ growth and development is gained when a wide variety of assessment information is considered. The achievement tests provide part of the picture. In addition, classroom teachers use many different assessment strategies throughout the school year to gain information about what students are learning.

How are achievement tests developed? Classroom teachers from across the province are involved at every stage of the test development and implementation process, including:

- writing, revising, and reviewing questions,
- administering field tests,
- validating test forms,
- validating French translations,
- validating scoring guides,
- confirming standards,
- administering the tests, and
- marking students’ written responses.
| **What are test accommodations?** | Alberta Education provides alternate test formats and/or administration conditions for students with special test-writing needs in order to allow these students to do their best. Test accommodations may include Braille or large print formats, sign language, use of a reader or scribe, additional writing time, CD format, and taped responses. Students who regularly use aids of this type in the classroom to support their learning may make use of these accommodations when writing one or more of their achievement tests. |
| **How can parents help their children prepare for the tests?** | It is important that children feel relaxed and comfortable when they write any test, including achievement tests. Children’s feelings about a test are very much influenced by what adults close to them say about those tests. Parents can be of most help to their children by encouraging them to relax and do their best, just as they would when writing any test. |
| **How can teachers prepare their students for writing the tests?** | Alberta Education discourages excessive test rehearsals and coaching. Achievement tests are like any other test students would normally write. The best preparation for students to write the provincial achievement tests is effective instruction based on the full range of learning outcomes in the Alberta curriculum. |
| **How are the achievement tests marked?** | All achievement tests, except the language arts writing test, are machine scored. Written-response sections of the language arts tests are marked centrally, in July, by classroom teachers who have been nominated by their superintendents. These teachers are trained by and work under the supervision of Alberta Education staff. Alberta Education also encourages teachers to mark achievement tests locally using the answer keys and marking manuals that are provided to them each year. Locally awarded marks on the language arts written response test that are submitted to Alberta Education will be used as the first reading of a student’s response. The papers will then be marked centrally as the second reading. Both marks contribute to the student’s final mark. In the case of a discrepancy between the two marks, papers will be adjudicated by a third reading, which will determine the final mark that the paper is awarded. In this way, valid and reliable individual and group results can be reported. Papers that are not marked locally by teachers will be marked centrally only once. |
| **How should achievement test results be communicated and used?** | Each school and school authority receives a detailed report of its results. A school also receives two copies of a student’s Individual Student Profile (ISP). One copy of the ISP is to be placed in the student’s permanent file and the other copy is to be forwarded to the student’s parents or guardians. School staff, in consultation with their school council, should look at the school report to see what patterns and trends are evident in the results and to determine how the school’s programs might be improved. The principal, teachers, parents, and community can look at these results in relation to past results, along with school and district assessments and other information about students and programs. They can use this information to provide the best possible learning opportunities for their students. Similarly, it is helpful if the school board and the jurisdiction look at the school authority report to see how district-wide programs can be improved for students. It is also important for Alberta Education to examine the provincial results to see if changes are needed in provincial programs or policies. |
Used in these ways, the test results support continuous improvement in program planning and in teaching. This, in turn, helps to ensure that as many students as possible achieve provincial standards.

**How should school councils use achievement test results?**

In collaboration with the school staff, a school council should review the achievement test results. Questions such as the following may serve as a starting point:

- What are the strengths of our school?
- What are the areas requiring growth?
- What factors could be contributing to our school’s performance?
- What trends in achievement test results can we identify for our school over the past several years?
- What are our local achievement targets for this year?
- What plans can we develop to address the areas requiring growth and to help students to do their best?

**Should schools be ranked according to their results on provincial achievement tests?**

Alberta Education does not support comparisons of schools or authorities based on achievement test scores. Rather, in evaluating a school, people should consider a variety of factors that are relevant to that school. The department emphasizes the importance of provincial standards, local targets, and past performance as the basis for examining the test results and planning instructional programs.

**More questions?**

If you have additional questions or comments about achievement testing, please speak with your child’s teacher or school principal, or contact:

Achievement Testing Program  
Learner Assessment  
Alberta Education  
(780) 427-0010

To be connected toll-free in Alberta, dial 310-0000 and then enter 780-427-0010.
**Test Description and Sample Questions**

All four of the Grade 6 achievement tests are designed to reflect the nature and aim, and to assess the achievement, of learning outcomes that are prescribed in provincial programs of study. More information about these provincial programs of study is available in the *Curriculum Handbook for Parents* (2005–06), which can be accessed at: www.education.gov.ab.ca/parents/handbooks/pub6.pdf. Excerpts from the *Curriculum Handbook for Parents* (2005–06), related to English language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies are presented later in this document.

Descriptions of the Grade 6 achievement tests and sample questions have been included to give you a first-hand look at what provincial achievement tests are all about. We have reduced the print size and changed the layout of the questions to fit the limited space available in this guide.

**English Language Arts**

**Test Description**

*Part A: Writing* consists of two writing assignments—one narrative and one functional—developed to be completed in two hours. For the first 10 minutes of the two hours, students have time to discuss both assignments with classmates, in groups of two to four, or to think alone about the writing prompts. Students will engage in this discussion time without teacher participation. During this discussion time, students may record their ideas on the planning pages provided in the test booklet. The allotted two hours provides students with time for planning, drafting, and revising of both the narrative and functional writing. Students make take an additional 30 minutes to complete the test and may do their writing using a computer. They may use commercially published dictionaries, bilingual dictionaries, and thesauri only when completing Part A.

*Part B: Reading* consists of 50 multiple-choice questions based on reading selections from fiction, non-fiction, drama, poetry, and visual media. Students record their answers on a separate, machine-scorable answer sheet. The test is developed to be completed in 60 minutes; however, students may take an additional 30 minutes to complete the test. Students are not allowed to use a dictionary, a thesaurus, or other reference material when writing *Part B: Reading*.

For more information, view the *Grade 6 English Language Arts Subject Bulletin* at www.education.gov.ab.ca/k_12/testing/achievement/bulletins.
Sample Questions

1. Read the excerpt from an article below and answer questions 1 to 4.

THE INSIDE STORY OF A WASPS’ NEST

One winter, artist and naturalist Anker Odum found a wasps’ nest in a hawthorn bush. As the temperature had been below freezing for months he knew the nest could not contain any living wasps. The only wasps to survive the winter are queens, and they hibernate away from their nest. He knew he could safely look in the nest and describe and draw what he saw. It was like trying to solve a mystery puzzle. . .

When I carefully peeled off the outer covering on one side, I found that all the inhabitants were long dead, mummified—or rather, freeze-dried—from the long cold months. The only adult wasp left in the colony lay dead just inside the entrance hole. The others were all wasp grubs and pupae, and all still in their cells. Although it was small as wasps’ nests go—about the size of my fist—it contained, as far as I could estimate, about 1,000 cells. The building was in four stories, and a stalk of grass went through the whole nest, connecting the floors like a fireman’s sliding pole. Apparently this had grown after the start of the colony, and the wasps had simply built around it.

1. According to the article, when making sure that it is safe to look inside a wasps’ nest, it is most important to consider the
   A. time of day
   B. size of the nest
   C. number of wasps
   D. season of the year

2. When wasps most resemble grubs, they are in the
   A. egg stage
   B. larva stage
   C. pupa stage
   D. adult stage

3. The grass stalk is in the wasps’ nest because
   A. the wasps stored it to use as a food source
   B. the wasps brought it in and used it for support
   C. it grew through the nest and the wasps left it there
   D. it provided the wasps with a quick exit from the nest

4. The author’s activity referred to in this article is best described as a
   A. scientific test
   B. winter adventure
   C. detailed investigation
   D. dangerous experiment

Dingwall, Laima and Annabel Slaight, eds. “The Inside Story of a Wasps’ Nest.” Owl’s Summer Fun. Toronto: Greer de Pencier Books. Adapted and reprinted with permission of MAPLE TREE PRESS INC.
Mathematics

Test Description

The Grade 6 Mathematics Achievement Test is composed of two parts.

Part A: Operations and Number Sense consists of 30 multiple-choice questions designed to assess students’ sense of numbers. The questions are grouped into four categories: Addition/Subtraction, Multiplication/Division, Connecting Experiences, and Number Relationships. The test is developed to be completed in 30 minutes; however, students may take an additional 10 minutes to complete the test. Students are not allowed to use manipulatives or calculators when answering the Part A questions.

Part B: Multiple Choice consists of 50 multiple-choice questions. This test is developed to be completed in 60 minutes; however, students may take an additional 30 minutes to complete the test. Test items are created from the student outcomes contained within each of the following four strands of the Grade 6 Mathematics Program of Studies: Number, Patterns and Relations, Shape and Space, and Statistics and Probability. Students record their answers on a separate, tear-out machine-scorable answer sheet. Students may use manipulative materials and calculators.

For more information on test administration, view the Grade 6 Mathematics Subject Bulletin at www.education.gov.ab.ca/k_12/testing/achievement/bulletins.

Sample Questions

Part A: Operations and Number Sense

1. What is the sum of 11.1 and 99.9?
   A. 9.0  
   B. 88.8  
   C. 111.0  
   D. 1 108.89

2. What is the total cost of 8 items that are $1.25 each?
   A. $12.00  
   B. $11.00  
   C. $10.00  
   D. $9.00

3. A fraction that is equivalent to $\frac{9}{12}$ is
   A. $\frac{1}{3}$  
   B. $\frac{2}{4}$  
   C. $\frac{2}{3}$  
   D. $\frac{3}{4}$

4. What is 364.8 + 4?
   A. 82.2  
   B. 91.2  
   C. 822.0  
   D. 912.0
Part B: Multiple Choice

Use the following information to answer question 5.

At a display, people had to calculate the mass of a rectangular prism. The display consisted of the following poster and apparatus.

Legend
- Rectangular prism
- Cylinder
- Pyramid

\[ \begin{align*}
\text{Mass} & \quad \text{Description} \\
? & \quad \text{Rectangular prism} \\
1.25 \text{ kg} & \quad \text{Cylinder} \\
1.00 \text{ kg} & \quad \text{Pyramid}
\end{align*} \]

5. What is the mass of the rectangular prism?
A. 2 kg  
B. 3 kg  
C. 5 kg  
D. 6 kg

Use the following information to answer question 6.

Claude and Alex made a tally chart of all the students who viewed their display.

Students Viewing the Mars Display

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Girls</th>
<th>Boys</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>III</td>
<td>III</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>III</td>
<td>II</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>III</td>
<td>II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>III</td>
<td>II</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6. According to the information in the tally chart,
A. more boys than girls viewed the display  
B. more Grade 3 boys than Grade 2 girls viewed the display  
C. the greatest number of students from a particular grade who viewed the display were from Grade 1  
D. the greatest number of students from a particular grade who viewed the display were from Grade 4

Use the following perimeter diagram to answer question 7.

7. Sally and her dad drove around the fields of some neighbouring farms. The diagram above shows the path they drove. In total, they drove
A. 55 km  
B. 56 km  
C. 140 km  
D. 180 km

Use the following information to answer question 8.

A pet store sells several brands of dog food.

8. Which of the brands of dog food labelled above is the most expensive per kilogram?
A. Grow Fast  
B. Bark Less  
C. Happy Hound  
D. Perky Pup
Science

Test Description

The Grade 6 Science Achievement Test consists of 50 multiple-choice questions. The test is developed to be completed in 60 minutes; however, students may take an additional 30 minutes to complete the test. Students record their answers on a separate, tear out machine-scorable answer sheet. Test items are created from the student outcomes contained within each of the following five strands of the Alberta Program of Studies for Grade 6 Science: Inquiry and Problem Solving; Air, Aerodynamics, and Flight; Sky Science; Evidence and Investigation; and Trees and Forests.

For more information on test administration, view the Grade 6 Science Bulletin at www.education.gov.ab.ca/k_12/testing/achievement/bulletins.

Sample Questions

Use the following information to answer question 1.

An officer made a diagram of some of the muddy footprints left inside the building.

1. By looking at the officer’s diagram, it can be inferred that the thief
   A. stayed in the building only a few seconds
   B. triggered an alarm in the secretary’s office
   C. ran out of the building carrying something heavy
   D. found a second door leading to the camp director’s office

Use the following diagram to answer question 2.

2. The part of the airplane shown above that causes it to descend is labelled
   A. 1
   B. 2
   C. 3
   D. 4
3. Which of the following statements explains why the sponge did not get wet?

   A. The air in the jar exerts pressure on the water.
   B. The sponge is lighter than the air.
   C. The sponge does not absorb water.
   D. The air is more dense than the sponge.
Social Studies

Test Description

The Grade 6 Social Studies Achievement Test consists of 50 multiple-choice questions. The test is developed to be completed in 60 minutes; however, students may take an additional 30 minutes to complete the test. Students record their answers on a separate tear-out, machine-scorable answer sheet. The test is based on three social studies topics: Local Government; Greece: An Ancient Civilization; and China: A Pacific Rim Nation.

For more information, view the Grade 6 Social Studies Subject Bulletin at www.education.gov.ab.ca/k_12/testing/achievement/bulletins.

Sample Questions

1. According to this information, the Ancient Greeks valued
   A. religion more than acts of war
   B. sports more than religious celebrations
   C. physical fitness more than military actions
   D. physical fitness more than respect for gods

2. The people of Ancient Greece met some of their social needs by
   A. worshipping gods
   B. holding meetings
   C. harvesting olives
   D. building ships

3. The capital city of Canada is located at
   A. Point 1
   B. Point 2
   C. Point 3
   D. Point 4
Use the following sources to answer question 4.

Source I

In Canada, citizens may choose to vote or not to vote. Federal and provincial elections usually draw only about 60% of the eligible voters. In municipal elections, the participation of voters is often lower.

Source II

In Australia, all citizens are required by law to vote in every election. Those who do not vote may be punished.

4. Which of the following issues is the main issue raised by these two sources?
   A. Why should people become involved in government?
   B. How should citizens be involved in government?
   C. Should everyone be allowed to vote in elections?
   D. Should citizens have to vote in elections?

5. In the north of China, the major crop planted is wheat; in the south, the major crop planted is rice. These agricultural practices are mainly influenced by
   A. climate
   B. tradition
   C. physical need
   D. government policy

Use the following information to answer question 6.

- China is making an increasing number of movies.
- The Chinese now receive a lot of information through satellite dishes.
- China is buying a lot of telephone equipment from countries such as Canada.
- The Chinese have made a TV that can be switched from one language to another.

6. Which of the following statements best summarizes the information above?
   A. Canada has more advanced technology than does China.
   B. Technology has changed communication in China.
   C. China is providing technology to its remote areas.
   D. Canada makes money selling goods to China.
Excerpts from the Curriculum Handbook for Parents, Grade 6

The following excerpts from the Curriculum Handbook for Parents (2005–06) provide a brief description and short list of what students should know and be able to do in English language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies by the end of Grade 6.

English Language Arts

The aim of the English language arts program is to enable students to understand and appreciate language, and to use it confidently and competently in a variety of situations for communication, personal satisfaction and learning.

From Kindergarten to Grade 12, students are developing knowledge, skills and attitudes in six language arts strands: Listening and Speaking; Reading and Writing; Viewing and Representing. Students learn to compose, comprehend and respond to oral, print and other media texts. They experience a variety of texts from many cultural traditions.

The following learning outcomes are selected from the Grade 6 English Language Arts Program of Studies.

Explore thoughts, ideas, feelings and experiences

• use prior experiences with oral, print and other media texts to choose new texts that meet learning needs and interests
• assess personal language use, and revise personal goals to enhance language learning and use
• select from the ideas and observations of others to expand personal understanding
• use talk, notes, personal writing and representing, together with texts and the ideas of others, to clarify and shape understanding

Comprehend and respond personally and critically to oral, print and other media texts

• combine personal experiences and the knowledge and skills gained through previous experiences with oral, print and other media texts to understand new ideas and information
• preview the content and structure of subject area texts, and use this information to set a purpose, rate and strategy for reading
• integrate and apply knowledge of phonics, sight vocabulary, language and context clues, and structural analysis to read unfamiliar words in texts of increasing length and complexity
• summarize oral, print or other media texts, indicating the connections among events, characters and settings
• discuss the connections among plot, setting and characters in oral, print and other media texts
• determine purpose and audience needs to choose forms, and organize ideas and details in oral, print and other media texts
Manage ideas and information

- use note-taking or representing to assist with understanding ideas and information, and focusing topics for investigation
- decide on and select the information needed to support a point of view
- skim, scan and read closely to gather information
- use outlines, thought webs and summaries to show the relationships among ideas and information and to clarify meaning
- communicate ideas and information in a variety of oral, print and other media texts, such as multiparagraph reports, question and answer formats and graphs
- establish goals for enhancing research skills

Enhance the clarity and artistry of communication

- revise to provide focus, expand relevant ideas and eliminate unnecessary information
- write legibly and at a pace appropriate to context and purpose
- experiment with a variety of software design elements, such as spacing, graphics, titles and headings, and font sizes and styles, to enhance the presentation of texts
- use complex sentence structures and a variety of sentence types in own writing
- edit for and correct commonly misspelled words in own writing, using spelling generalizations and the meaning and function of words in context
- use various styles and forms of presentations, depending on content, audience and purpose
- emphasize key ideas and information to enhance audience understanding and enjoyment
- identify the tone, mood and emotion conveyed in oral and visual presentations

Respect, support and collaborate with others

- identify ways in which oral, print and other media texts from diverse cultures and communities explore similar ideas
- demonstrate respect by choosing appropriate language and tone in oral, print and other media texts
- assume a variety of roles, and share responsibilities as a group member
- address specific problems in a group by specifying goals, devising alternative solutions and choosing the best alternative
- assess own contributions to group process, and set personal goals for working effectively with others

View a complete copy of the *Curriculum Handbook for Parents* at www.education.gov.ab.ca/parents/handbooks.
Mathematics

The aim of the mathematics program is to prepare students to:
• use mathematics confidently to solve problems
• communicate and reason mathematically
• appreciate and value mathematics
• commit themselves to lifelong learning
• become mathematically literate adults, using mathematics to contribute to society

Students learn to use the following mathematical processes:
• communicate mathematically
• connect mathematical ideas to everyday experiences and to other subject areas
• use estimation and mental mathematics where appropriate
• apply new mathematical knowledge to problem solving
• reason and justify their thinking
• use appropriate technologies
• use visualization to assist in problem solving, processing information and making connections

The following learning outcomes are selected from the Grade 6 Mathematics Program of Studies.

Number
• develop a number sense for decimals and common fractions, explore integers, and show number sense for whole numbers
• apply arithmetic operations on whole numbers and decimals in solving problems

Patterns and Relations
• use relationships to summarize, generalize and extend patterns, including those found in music and art
• use informal and concrete representations of equality and operations on equality to solve problems

Shape and Space
• solve problems involving perimeter, area, surface area, volume and angle measurement
• use visualization and symmetry to solve problems involving classification and sketching
• create patterns and designs that incorporate symmetry, tessellations, translations and reflections

Statistics and Probability
• develop and implement a plan for the collection, display and analysis of data gathered from appropriate samples
• use numbers to communicate the probability of single events from experiments and models

Science

The aim of the science program is to encourage and stimulate children’s learning by nurturing their sense of wonderment, by developing skill and confidence in investigating their surroundings, and by building a foundation of experience and understanding upon which later learning can be based. In elementary science, students develop their skills of inquiry and problem solving. They are also developing positive attitudes toward the study of science and the application of science in responsible ways.

The following learning outcomes are selected from the Grade 6 Science Program of Studies.

Air and Aerodynamics
- describe the properties of air and the interactions of air with objects in flight
- study birds and airplanes and learn a variety of adaptations and designs that make flight possible and provide for propulsion and control

Flight
- develop a basic design, build it, test it, and solve the problems that arise
- learn, through teamwork, that planning, communication, cooperation and flexibility are important to the overall result—even though parts of a task can be worked on individually

Sky Science
- move from a simple view of land and sky to learn the Earth is a sphere in motion within a larger universe
- explore the subjects of seasonal cycles, phases of the Moon, and the apparent motion of stars
- observe, identify and interpret the movement of objects in the sky, and identify pattern and order in these movements

Evidence and Investigation
- learn to pose questions based on observations
- apply observation and inference skills to recognize and interpret patterns and to distinguish a specific pattern from a group of similar patterns
- apply knowledge of the properties and interactions of materials to the investigation and identification of a material sample

Trees and Forests
- learn about a broad range of living things found on, under and around trees
- explore the complex interaction between trees and the larger environment
- examine the human use of forests

Social Studies

The aim of the social studies program is to help students develop the knowledge, skills and positive attitudes they need to be responsible citizens and contributing members of society. Students learn to acquire and evaluate information and ideas. They learn to interact with others and develop understanding and respect for people in their school, their family and their community.

The focus of the Grade 6 social studies program is meeting human needs. Students learn about how needs are met by the local, provincial, and federal governments; how the government of an ancient civilization met the needs of its citizens; and how China—one of Canada’s Pacific Rim neighbours—meets its citizens’ needs.

The following learning outcomes are selected from the Grade 6 Social Studies Program of Studies.

Local Government

- understand that an individual has responsibilities and rights as a citizen that begin at the local level
- develop an understanding of the three levels of government
- understand how governments raise money to meet needs
- understand that democracy allows people to take part in government and how the election process works at all levels of government
- locate on a map of Canada boundaries of local, provincial and federal jurisdictions

Greece: An Ancient Civilization

- understand some of the ways in which physical, social and psychological needs are met, and how they have varied over time and from place to place
- learn how environment, beliefs and class structure affected how an individual’s needs were met in ancient Greece
- understand that Greek values, beliefs and ideas have affected Western civilization—and how they affect us today
- select pertinent information from history books, myths, legends, historical maps and historical fiction

China: A Pacific Rim Nation

- understand that nations in the world are becoming increasingly interdependent and that the Pacific Rim is becoming increasingly important
- understand that lifestyle is influenced by sharing among countries
- use an atlas to locate places in China and Canada
- compare and contrast the way people in China and Canada meet their needs
