



A Frontier College summary of the International Adult Literacy and Skills Survey (IALSS) 2003

What is IALSS?

The International Adult Literacy and Skills Survey (IALSS) is the Canadian component of the Adult Literacy and Life Skills (ALL) study, which was a joint project of the Government of Canada and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). The study was conducted by Statistics Canada.

The survey included data from over 20,000 Canadians between the ages of 16-65. The survey was conducted in either English or French. Of the 20,000 people who responded 3,400 were aboriginal Canadians; 2,600 were established immigrants (10 years + in Canada); 1,200 were recent immigrants (less than 10 years in Canada); 3,500 were francophones outside of Quebec; and 3,500 were youth 16-24.

What did IALSS measure?

Prose literacy: the knowledge and skills needed to understand and use information from texts such as editorials, news stories, poems, and fiction;

Document literacy: the knowledge and skills required to locate and use information contained in various formats such as tables, forms, graphs, and diagrams;

Numeracy: the knowledge and skills required to effectively manage the mathematical demands of diverse situations;

Problem solving: the ability to solve problems by clarifying the nature of the problem and developing and applying appropriate solution strategies.¹

What are the literacy levels?

Level 1: People at this level have difficulty reading and have few basic skills or strategies for decoding and working with text.

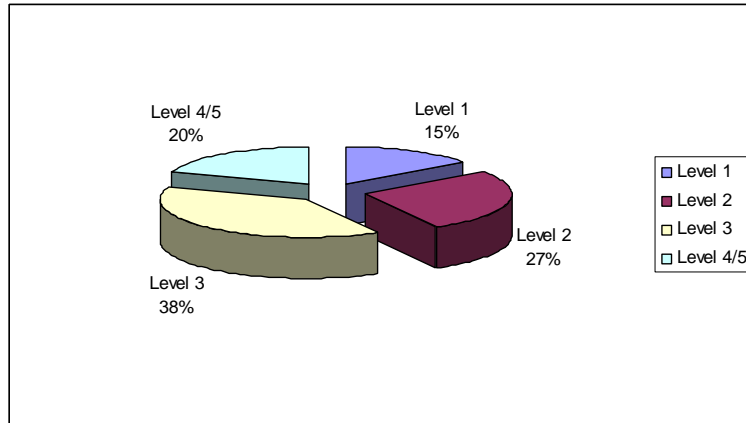
Level 2: People at this level have limited skills. They read, but do not read well. Canadians at this level can deal only with material that is simple and clearly laid out.

Level 3: People at this level can read well but may have problems with more complex tasks. This level is considered by many countries to be the minimum skill level for successful participation in society.

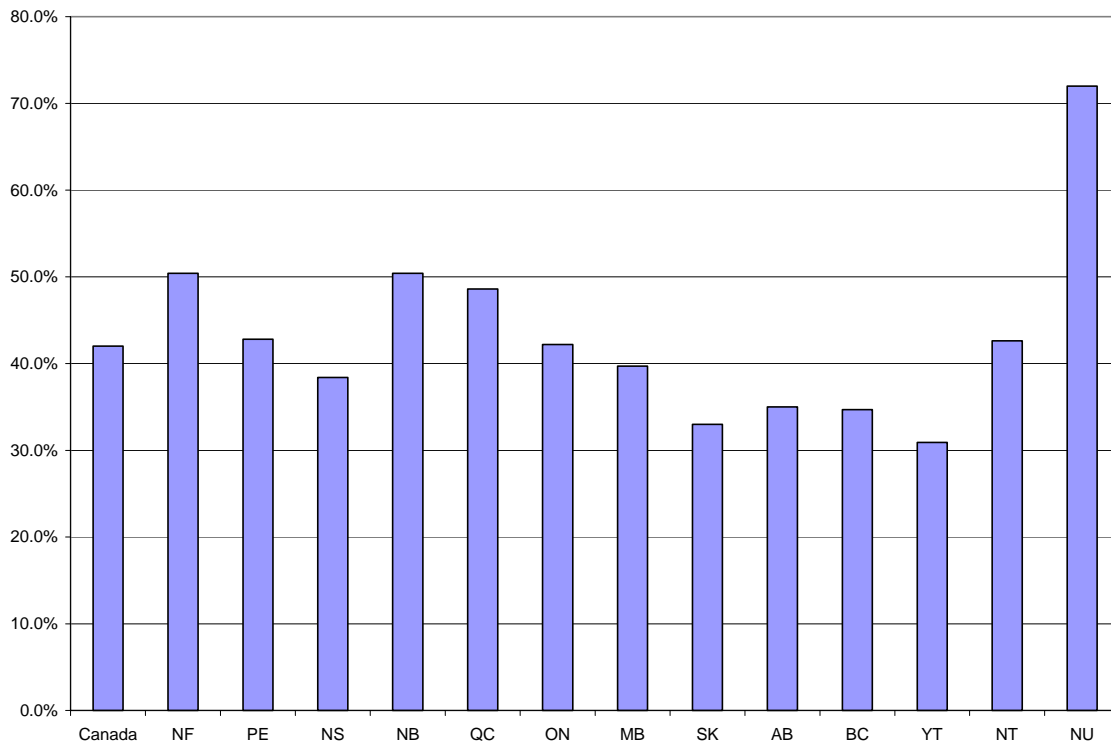
Level 4/5: People at this level have strong literacy skills, including a wide range of reading skills and many strategies for dealing with complex materials. These Canadians can meet most reading demands and can handle new reading challenges.

¹ The 1994 survey did not look at problem solving. Numeracy was revised for the 2003 survey.
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Canadian Results



Provincial / Territorial results: Percentage of adults (16-65) at levels 1 and 2



Provincial / Territorial Results: number of adults (16-65) at levels 1 and 2

Canada	8,849,000
NF	189,000
PE	40,000
NS	243,000
NB	258,000
QC	2,500,000
ON	3,400,000
MB	290,000
SK	203,000
AB	700,000
BC	1,000,000
YT	6,000
NT	11,000
NU ²	9,000

How did Canada fare internationally?

7 countries participated in the survey. Canada ranked behind Norway and Bermuda in terms of having the highest literacy scores. The rankings, including the provinces (based on mean scores) are as follows:

- 1. Norway**
- 2. Bermuda**
- 3. Canada**
- 4. Switzerland**
- 5. United States**
- 6. Italy**
- 7. Nuevo Leon, Mexico**

² Over 60% of respondents in Nunavut indicated a mother tongue of Inuktitut and over half of the population reported using this language on an everyday basis

Who are the Canadians in levels 1 and 2?

LEVEL 1

Demographics:

- 3.1 million
- 1.4 million were immigrants
- 54% were male and 46% female
- 60% were employed
- 12% were unemployed

Education:

- 50% less than high school;
- 30% had completed high school
- 20% had post-secondary education

LEVEL 2

Demographics :

- 5.8 million
- 1.2 million were immigrants
- 52% were male and 48% female
- 70% were employed
- 8% were unemployed

Education:

- 28% less than high school;
- 37% had completed high school
- 35% had post-secondary education

Summary

- Canadian provinces and territories performed well in the international comparison. All provinces with the exception of New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Nunavut had average scores higher than the United States in prose literacy.
- However, in every province and territory, too many adults have low literacy skills. Even in the highest performing jurisdictions, 3 out of 10 adults aged 16 and over performed at the lowest literacy levels
- The prose literacy performance of the Aboriginal populations surveyed is lower than that of the Canadian population.
- Proficiency in prose literacy tends to decrease with age.
- Across all four domains, higher levels of education are associated with higher levels of proficiency
- A higher percentage of men than women have proficiency levels below level 3
- There are 972,000 Canadians at level 1 who are either unemployed or employed but earning low income. There are 1,649,000 at level 2 who are either unemployed or employed but earning low income. Together they total 2,621,000 Canadians who are in the most need of literacy assistance

All statistical information in this document is sourced from Statistics Canada.

For more information:

Statistics Canada

<http://www.statcan.ca/start.html>

National Adult Literacy Database

<http://www.nald.ca>