

National Assessment of Adult Literacy – 2003

Overview of Literacy Levels

<http://nces.ed.gov/naal>

Below Basic indicates no more than the most simple and concrete literacy skills.

Adults at the Below Basic level range from being nonliterate in English to having the abilities listed below:

- locating easily identifiable information in short, commonplace **prose** texts
- locating easily identifiable information and following written instructions in simple **documents** (e.g., charts or forms)
- locating numbers and using them to perform simple **quantitative** operations (primarily addition) when the mathematical information is very concrete and familiar

Simple tasks typical of level:

- searching a short, simple text to find out what a patient is allowed to drink before a medical test
- signing a form
- adding the amounts of a bank deposit slip

Basic indicates skills necessary to perform simple and everyday literacy activities.

- reading and understanding information in short, commonplace **prose** texts
- reading and understanding in simple **documents**
- locating easily identifiable **quantitative** information and using it to solve simple, one-step problems when the arithmetic operation is specified or easily inferred

Simple tasks typical of level:

- finding in a pamphlet for prospective jurors an explanation of how people were selected for the jury pool
- using a television guide to find out what programs are on at a specific time
- comparing the ticket prices for two events

Intermediate indicates skills necessary to perform moderately challenging literacy activities.

- reading and understanding moderately dense, less commonplace **prose** texts as well as summarizing, making simple inferences, determining cause and effect, and recognizing the author's purpose
- locating information in dense, complex **documents** and making simple inferences about the information
- locating less familiar **quantitative** information and using it to solve problems when the arithmetic operation is not specified or easily inferred

Simple tasks typical of level:

- consulting reference materials to determine which foods contain a particular vitamin
- identifying a specific location on a map
- calculating the total cost of ordering specific office supplies from a catalog

Prose literacy – the knowledge and skills needed to perform prose tasks (i.e., to search, comprehend, and use information from continuous texts).

Document literacy – the knowledge and skills needed to perform document tasks (i.e., to search, comprehend, and use information from noncontinuous texts in various formats).

Quantitative literacy – the knowledge and skills required to perform quantitative tasks (i.e., to identify and perform computations, either alone or sequentially, using numbers embedded in printed materials).

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Proficient indicates skills necessary to perform more complex and challenging literacy activities.

- reading lengthy, complex, abstract **prose** texts as well as synthesizing information and making complex inferences
- integrating, synthesizing, and analyzing multiple pieces of information located in complex **documents**
- locating more abstract **quantitative** information and using it to solve multistep problems when the arithmetic operations are not easily inferred and the problems are more complex

Simple tasks typical of level:

- comparing viewpoints in two editorials
- interpreting a table about blood pressure, age, and physical activity
- computing and comparing the cost per ounce of food items

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Document literacy – the knowledge and skills needed to perform document tasks (i.e., to search, comprehend, and use information from noncontinuous texts in various formats).

Quantitative literacy – the knowledge and skills required to perform quantitative tasks (i.e., to identify and perform computations, either alone or sequentially, using numbers embedded in printed materials).