

End of Grade 7

Understanding Provincial Achievement Standards in Reading and Writing

Helping your child to be successful



Now that your child has fully made the transition to middle school, he or she is maturing as a reader and writer. As a parent, you can continue to be a source of support and encouragement while respecting his or her independence.

Recognize the signs of a successful writer.

Teachers use six features to identify strengths in a piece of writing, and the Provincial Achievement Standards describe appropriate and strong writing in each of these for the end of Grade 7. The excerpt from *Boat Trip* on the opposite page is an example of an appropriate piece of writing by a student at the end of Grade 7.

Content includes the topic, focus, ideas and details of the piece of writing. In *Boat Trip*, for example, the writer has chosen to write about the MacDonalds' boating trip, and enhanced the ideas by including details such as the raincoats and what they ate.

Organization involves the form of the writing (letter, story, report, etc.) and the order and grouping of ideas. The story *Boat Trip* unfolds in a way that is easy to follow, with the setting and characters introduced at the beginning and the events presented in a logical sequence. Each paragraph contains related ideas.

Word Choice concerns the vocabulary and language that is used. The writer of *Boat Trip* used descriptive words (sticky and weary), technical phrases (changed its course) and figurative language (clear as glass).

Voice shows that the writer cares about the topic and is able to engage the reader. The reader gets a sense of the writer's feelings and personality. In *Boat Trip*, several phrases show voice (decided to go for it, looking a little weary, and turned the boat and put the throttle at full speed).

Sentence Structure relates to the kinds, structures, lengths and beginnings of sentences that are used. In *Boat Trip*, a variety of complex sentence structures is used (After they had been going ..., they stopped just off an island for a swim. They swam for a while before they had some hotdogs and hamburgers).

Conventions include spelling, punctuation and grammar. The writer of *Boat Trip* spelled almost all words correctly and used internal punctuation, such as commas and quotation marks.

You can be involved in building your preteen's writing skills.

Before Writing

Invite your child to talk with you about the writing assignment and how the topic connects to your child's own experiences. If your child is having trouble getting started, suggest that she or he try listing ideas, making an idea web or brainstorming before beginning the first draft.

During Writing

This is a time to encourage independence. You can help by keeping the environment as free from distractions as possible.

After Writing

Be available to offer feedback and suggestions. Always begin by pointing out the strengths in the writing, referring to specific details. Help your preteen focus first on checking the ideas and organization of the piece prior to revising for voice, word choice and sentence structure. Lastly, encourage your child to read the piece aloud and to make her or his own corrections to punctuation, spelling and grammar.

Boat Trip

It was one of the finest days of the year. There was a small breeze, the sun was shining and the water was clear as glass.

The MacDonalds were preparing for their big boating trip they were going to go on. Although they never owned a boat they hired a man named Fred to take them out for the day.

Everyone was just loading up the boat with food and supplies. They were just packed and ready when Fred put some raincoats on the boat because he said that they might get some sticky weather even though forecast was good.

It was know about 10:30 and they were just leaving from the place where they lived called Machias, Maine. This was very exciting to Brian and his sister, who had never been on a boat before except for a ferry. After they had been going for about three hours, they stopped just off an island to swim. They swam for a while before they had some hotdogs and hamburgers.

The weather was starting to get rougher by now and there were some clouds starting to move in. Their boat was still going out to sea, when Fred was sent a message saying that hurricane Barbara had changed its course and it was heading straight for them. Fred, who was a very calm person, came out and told them that their best bet was to go straight for a small town called Sandy Point or they could go straight for home, but it would be hard to say if they would make it in time. None of the MacDonalds wanted to stay in a different town with no money for the whole night. So they decided to go for it. "Very well then," said Fred looking a little weary. He turned the boat, and put the throttle at full speed.

One hour later

It had started to rain and the wind was rattling the windows.

Thirty minutes later

The waves were so big that they had almost capsized when the anchor fell off the side of the boat. Brian's dad went out to cut the rope because the current was to strong to hale it back in when a huge wave came and knocked him overboard. Brian's uncle had seen what happened and jumped in to save Brian's dad.

That was the last anyone ever seen of the two. As for the rest they all made it back home. After capsizing the boat and staying together and floating around until they were picked up by a helicopter. This was their first and most likely their last boat trip.

Writing Revision Checklist

Content

- I selected a topic with a main idea.
- I included straight forward and predictable ideas and events.
- I supported my ideas with effective details.

Organization

- I used my introduction to let my readers know what I will be writing about.
- I put my ideas in a logical order and organized them into paragraphs.
- I included an obvious conclusion.

Word Choice

- I included precise words and/or technical language.
- I included descriptive words (adjectives, adverbs, strong verbs, strong nouns).

Voice

- I made my reader interested in my topic.
- I showed that I care about my topic.
- I included personal feeling, energy and individuality.

Sentence Structure

- I included different kinds of sentences, both simple and complex.
- I included a variety of sentence lengths and beginnings to make my writing interesting.

Conventions

- I used correct end punctuation and capitalization.
- I included internal punctuation(commas, quotation marks, apostrophes).
- I used correct spelling.
- I used correct verb tenses, subject-verb agreement and pronouns.

Tear off this handy checklist for your child. He or she will recognize the traits of good writing and the reading strategies from school. They will support your child's reading and writing skill development.

Be a successful reader.

Using these **reading strategies** will help you improve your understanding of what you read. Ask yourself these kinds of questions when reading:

Before reading:

- What do I know about this kind of text (poem, glossary, news article) that will help me?
- Should I adjust my reading rate to match the purpose of my reading?
- What do I think this will be about?
- What do I already know about this topic?

During reading:

- What can I learn from the text features (table of contents, captions, diagrams, etc.)?
- Were my predictions correct?
- Are there challenging parts where I need to use other strategies, such as rereading?
- How can I use context clues or other strategies to figure out difficult words?

After reading:

- Can I summarize this using a graphic organizer (chart, timeline, web)?
- How are the events (ideas) related to the theme?
- How does this text compare to others I have read or seen?
- Whose viewpoint is presented? Whose viewpoint is missing?

Recognize the signs of a successful reader.

In Grade 7, your adolescent will read a variety of fiction and non-fiction that may cover topics beyond his or her personal experiences. Some will have mature themes that deal with human problems, such as abuse, war or racism. You can tell whether your child is reading successfully by watching for growth in the following **reading behaviours**, described in the Provincial Achievement Standards for the **end of Grade 7**

Checking for understanding and adjusting reading strategies when meaning is lost

Encourage your preteen to understand difficult passages by rereading, skimming, scanning and making connections.

Using strategies to solve unknown words independently

Encourage your child to use context cues, word order and word parts (e.g., prefixes, suffixes and root words) to solve longer words in all subjects.

Automatically recognizing a wide variety of words including those in different school subjects

Encourage your preteen to notice and remember words that occur often in school subjects (variable, integer, ecosystem, geological, economic, cultural).

Reading with expression and confidence

Invite your preteen to read aloud to you sometimes. Praise his or her efforts.

Verifying and adjusting predictions while reading

Encourage your child to use clues in the text and text features (e.g., titles, headings, photographs and captions) to make predictions and then check how close they were.

Reflecting on strategies used to understand what is read

Encourage your preteen to tell you how she or he uses strategies to improve understanding (e.g., forming mental pictures while reading, making connections, asking questions).

You can be involved in building your child's reading skills.

Although your preteen is more independent, you still play an active part in his or her learning. One way is to help your child set aside enough time for reading. When possible, give her or him a choice of reading material that is appealing (newspapers, magazines, suitable internet sites). Invite your child to talk about what he or she is reading. You might enjoy reading some of the same books and discussing them. If you do, here are some examples of questions you could ask each other to get the conversation started:

- Why is this event or character's action important to the story?
- What do you think the author wants you to think about and remember?
- Does the author keep you interested in this selection? How?
- Do you think that the author is presenting all viewpoints?

Andrew Holleman: On a Mission

Article by
Mandy Hager

In the small town of Chelmsford, Massachusetts, 250 people were crowded into a school gymnasium. A boy rose from his seat and walked to the front of the room. He looked nervously at the crowd. "My name is Andrew Holleman," he began, "and I'm twelve years old."

This meeting was the result of weeks of hard work by Andrew Holleman, who had set himself a **daunting** goal – to save one of his favorite places. Anybody faced with a task like this might feel overwhelmed, but Andrew knew his goal was within reach.

It started when Andrew opened a letter. What he read made him burn with anger.

A developer was planning to build a subdivision next to Andrew's backyard. This meant that 16 acres of land, where Andrew had fished and explored, would disappear.

The wetland would be replaced by drainage systems, roads, and nearly two hundred houses.

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Andrew loved the white pines that towered above the fishing hole. Some of the rocks had been carried there on glaciers ten thousand years ago. The land was also home to red foxes, wood turtles, and endangered blue herons.

The developers had money and authority behind them. Why would they listen to a twelve-year-old's protests? Andrew knew that the odds were against him, but he had to try. After Andrew read the letter, he took the first step – he decided to act.

"I had nothing to lose by fighting the developer," he later said, "so I did."

Breaking It Down

The only way to tackle such a huge task was to break it into pieces and work through one piece at a time. Andrew needed a plan, but before he could make one, he needed knowledge. The best way to begin? Research!

At the library, Andrew uncovered information about a law known as the Hatch Act. This law was put in place to protect wetland areas. When Andrew studied the town's master plan, he discovered that half the land the developers were planning to build on was classified as wetland. If the development went ahead, it was likely to break the law.

Getting the Word Out

This was just the opportunity Andrew needed. He had the information, now he had to use it in his fight against the developers.

He planned to persuade as many people as possible to join him. He wouldn't stop at talking to his friends and family – he planned to get the message across to everyone from the Town Board to state senators.

Andrew took a petition around Chelmsford to collect signatures. He spent a lot of time talking to neighbors and local people, making sure that they knew it was better for everyone if the development was stopped. All this talking was great for Andrew's confidence – he'd always been

shy, but with something this big to fight for, he had to get over his nerves.

Andrew's Argument

Andrew drafted a petition, listing reasons to prevent the development. He included the following facts:

- A residential development would destroy the habitat of some endangered species.
- The wetland is a major hunting ground for birds such as hawks. These birds needed the wetland to survive.
- If two hundred homes were built in the area, chemicals would run off driveways and into the stream, polluting wells and harming aquatic life.
- Pollution would filter into the soil, poisoning plants and trees.
- A development would upset the wetland's ecosystem. This would affect other ecosystems in the town, such as parks and rivers.

By the **end of Grade 7**, your preteen should be able to read and understand reading material similar to that above. Some topics, such as pop culture, fictitious societies and other worlds, tend to have special appeal for this age group. In keeping with his or her growing independence, your adolescent may enjoy books that challenge your idea of what is suitable.

The language in reading material for this age is more challenging, so your child may occasionally have to use a dictionary or glossary, or look for clues in the surrounding text, to understand a word or phrase.

In fiction, plots are more complicated (subplots, multiple story lines, unexpected twists). Main characters may be complex and unpredictable, with shades of good and bad.

Information texts, such as the extract from *Andrew Holleman: On a Mission*, convey additional information through text features, such as subheadings, captions, bold type and sidebars (*Andrew's Argument*). At this age level, the amount of information presented may require the reader to synthesize ideas rather than remember every detail.

Contact Us

The Department of Education is committed to your child's reading and writing success. If you have any questions about your child's progress or about how you can be an active part of his or her learning, contact your child's teacher or the provincial literacy team at 506-453-2812.