

Academic Education

Vocational Education

Skill Certification

Summary

Education and Job Training in Prison

Prisons are intended to rehabilitate criminal offenders, as well as to punish and incapacitate them. The education and training systems operating within most prisons are a key component of the rehabilitation mission of prisons. Previous studies have shown a relationship between participation in educational programs and recidivism rates, with inmates who attend education programs less likely to be reincarcerated after their release (Vacca 2004).

There are many reasons why prison inmates may be motivated to participate in education and training programs. Among these may be a realization that they do not have skills that will lead to employment upon their release from prison. As one inmate said, “I’ve never had a career. I’ve had jobs, but never had anything that would take me anywhere. It’s scary to come out of jail and not realize what you’re going to do” (Clayton 2005).

This chapter describes the relationships among literacy, education, and vocational training in prison. The analyses in the chapter discuss both the prevalence of inmate participation in education and training programs and the relationship between literacy levels and program participation.

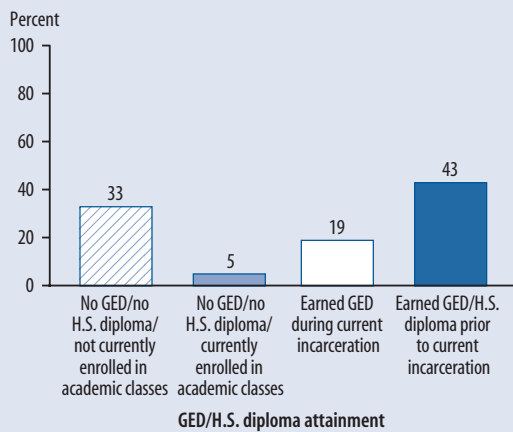
Academic Education

In both 1992 and 2003, GED classes were available in most prisons. However, because of restrictions in Pell Grants that were implemented in 1994, higher educational opportunities were more limited for prison inmates in 2003 than in 1992 (Welsh 2002).

In 2003, some 43 percent of prison inmates had a high school diploma or a GED/high school equivalency certificate when they began their current incarceration, so helping inmates complete their high school education is a major aim of many prison academic programs (figure 4-1).¹¹ Among prison inmates in 2003, some 19 percent had earned their GED/high school equivalency certificate during

¹¹ The 43 percent of prison inmates who had a high school diploma or a GED/high school equivalency certificate when they began their current incarceration includes prison inmates who had higher levels of educational attainment (postsecondary education) prior to their current incarceration.

Figure 4-1. Percentage of the adult prison population, by GED/high school diploma attainment: 2003



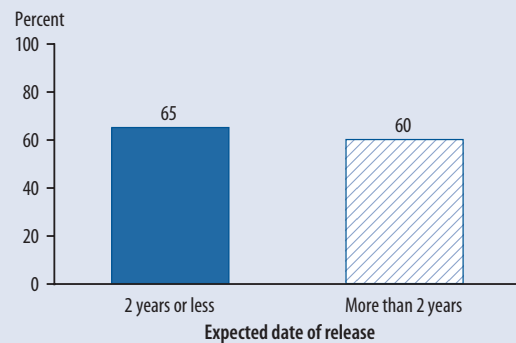
NOTE: Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding. Adults are defined as people 16 years of age and older living in prisons. Adults who could not be interviewed due to language spoken or cognitive or mental disabilities (1 percent in 2003) are excluded from this figure. The category "earned GED/H.S. diploma prior to current incarceration" includes prison inmates who had higher levels of educational attainment (postsecondary education) prior to their current incarceration. SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy.

their current incarceration, and an additional 5 percent were currently enrolled in academic classes.

Having a GED/high school equivalency certificate or a high school diploma may be particularly important for inmates who expect to be released soon and will need to find a job outside of prison. However, the difference in the percentage of inmates who expected to be released in 2 years or less and had a GED/high school equivalency certificate or high school diploma, and the percentage of inmates who expected to be released in more than 2 years and had a GED/high school equivalency certificate or high school diploma, was not statistically significant. (figure 4-2)

As discussed in chapter 2, prison inmates' average prose and quantitative literacy increased with each increasing education level, and their document literacy increased with each increasing education level up to a high school diploma or GED/high school equivalency certificate (figure 2-7).

Figure 4-2. Percentage of the adult prison population with a GED/high school equivalency certificate or high school diploma, by expected date of release: 2003



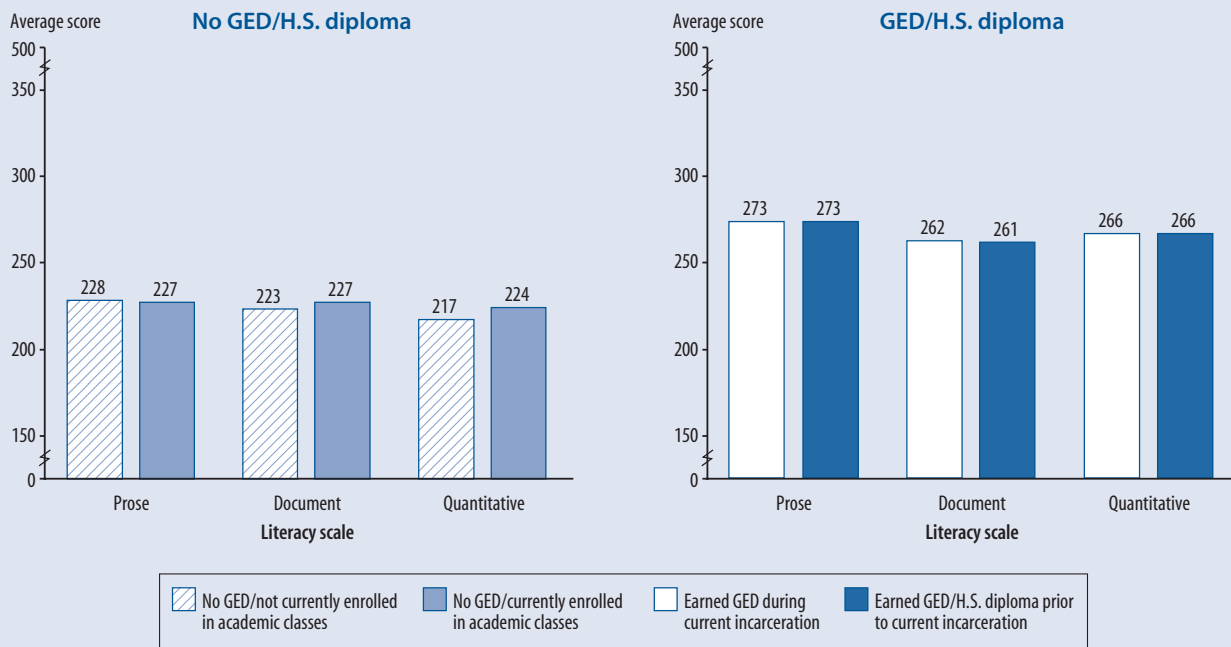
NOTE: Adults are defined as people 16 years of age and older living in prisons. Adults who could not be interviewed due to language spoken or cognitive or mental disabilities (1 percent in 2003) are excluded from this figure. The category "earned GED/H.S. diploma prior to current incarceration" includes prison inmates who had higher levels of educational attainment (postsecondary education) prior to their current incarceration. SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy.

Prison inmates who had a high school diploma or a GED/high school equivalency certificate (either earned during their current incarceration or prior to their current incarceration) had higher average prose, document, and quantitative literacy than inmates who were currently enrolled in academic classes in prison but had not yet earned their GED/high school equivalency certificate (figure 4-3). They also had higher average prose, document, and quantitative literacy than inmates who were not enrolled in any academic classes. The differences in average prose, document, and quantitative literacy between inmates who earned their GED/high school equivalency certificate during their current incarceration and inmates who entered prison with a high school diploma or

GED/high school equivalency certificate were not statistically significant.

A lower percentage of prison inmates who had a high school diploma or a GED/high school equivalency certificate had *Below Basic* prose and quantitative literacy than prison inmates who were currently enrolled in academic classes or did not have a GED/high school equivalency certificate and were not enrolled in classes (figure 4-4). Similar to figure 4-3, there were no statistically significant differences in the percentage of inmates at any of the literacy levels between inmates who earned their high school diploma or GED/high school equivalency certificate prior to their current incarceration and inmates who earned their GED/high school equivalency certificate during their current incarceration.

Figure 4-3. Average prose, document, and quantitative literacy scores of the adult prison population, by GED/high school diploma attainment: 2003



NOTE: Adults are defined as people 16 years of age and older living in prisons. Adults who could not be interviewed due to language spoken or cognitive or mental disabilities (1 percent in 2003) are excluded from this figure. The category "earned GED/H.S. diploma prior to current incarceration" includes prison inmates who had higher levels of educational attainment (postsecondary education) prior to their current incarceration.

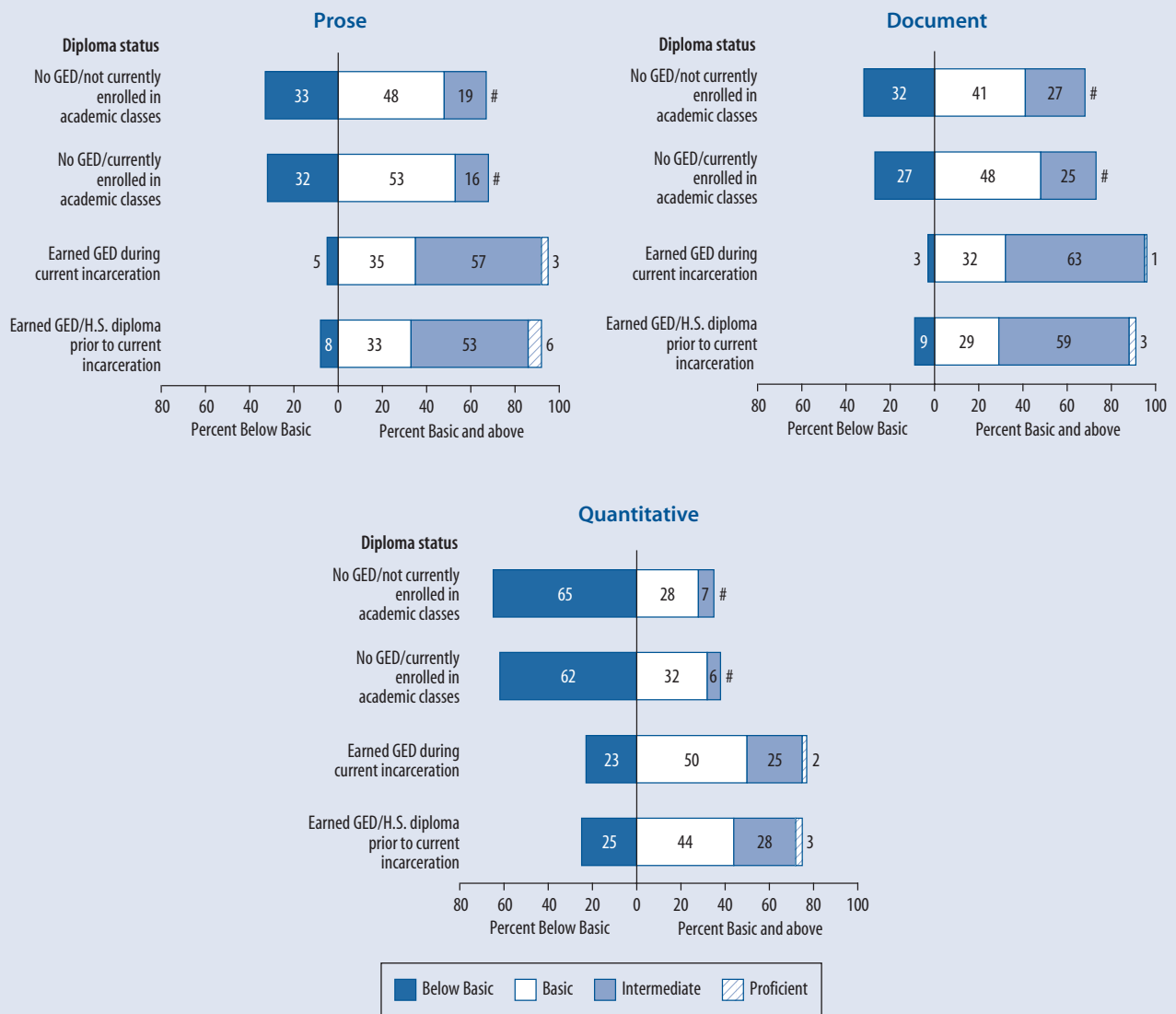
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy.

Vocational Education

Vocational education programs are designed to prepare prison inmates for work after their release from prison. In 2000, some 56% of state prisons and 94% of federal prisons offered vocational training (Harlow

2003). Examples of the types of vocational education programs sometimes offered by prisons are auto mechanics, construction trades, equipment repair, HVAC installation and repair, culinary arts, cosmetology, and desktop publishing. The exact programs

Figure 4-4. Percentage of the adult prison population in each prose, document, and quantitative literacy level, by GED/high school diploma attainment: 2003



Rounds to zero.

NOTE: Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding. Adults are defined as people 16 years of age and older living in prisons. Adults who could not be interviewed due to language spoken or cognitive or mental disabilities (1 percent in 2003) are excluded from this figure. The category “earned GED/H.S. diploma prior to current incarceration” includes prison inmates who had higher levels of educational attainment (postsecondary education) prior to their current incarceration.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy.

offered differ among prisons. As shown in figure 4-5, during their current incarceration, 71 percent of prison inmates had not participated in any vocational training, 11 percent participated in vocational training programs that lasted less than 6 months, 8 percent participated in programs that lasted 6 to 12 months, and 9 percent participated in vocational training programs that lasted more than a year. In 2003, 14 percent of inmates were on a waiting list to participate in a vocational education program, and 10 percent were enrolled in vocational education classes (figure 4-6).

Participation in vocational training may be particularly important for inmates who are getting close to their release date and will need to find a job outside of prison. However, the percentage of incarcerated adults who expected to be released within the next 2 years and participated in vocational training was not statistically significantly different from the percentage

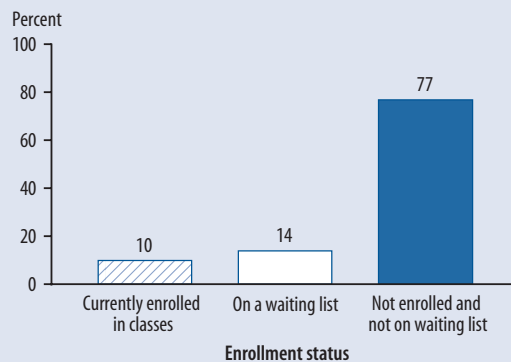
who expected to be released in over 2 years and participated in vocational training (figure 4-7).

Figure 4-5. Percentage of the adult prison population, by length of participation in vocational training programs: 2003



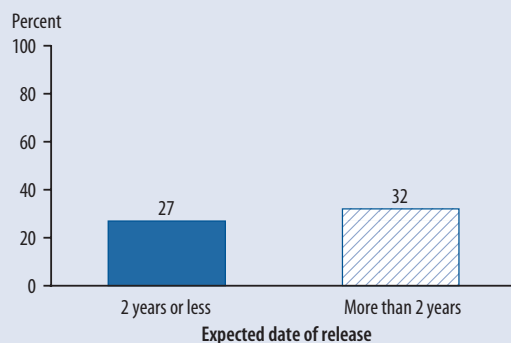
NOTE: Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding. Adults are defined as people 16 years of age and older living in prisons. Adults who could not be interviewed due to language spoken or cognitive or mental disabilities (1 percent in 2003) are excluded from this figure.
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy.

Figure 4-6. Percentage of the adult prison population, by enrollment in vocational training: 2003



NOTE: Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding. Adults are defined as people 16 years of age and older living in prisons. Adults who could not be interviewed due to language spoken or cognitive or mental disabilities (1 percent in 2003) are excluded from this figure.
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy.

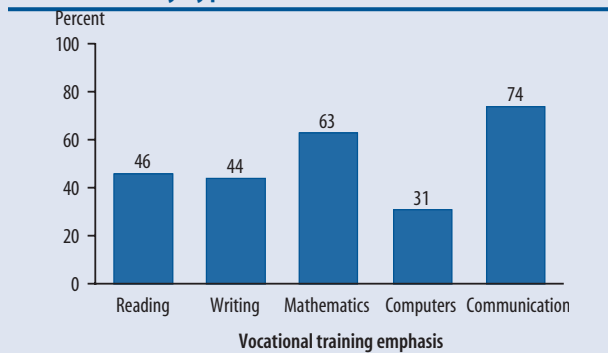
Figure 4-7. Percentage of the adult prison population who participated in vocational training during their current incarceration, by expected date of release: 2003



NOTE: Adults are defined as people 16 years of age and older living in prisons. Adults who could not be interviewed due to language spoken or cognitive or mental disabilities (1 percent in 2003) are excluded from this figure.
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy.

Vocational training programs often include academic instruction in the reading, writing, and mathematics skills required for a particular profession, as well as instruction in general work skills such as how to communicate or work with other people. Among those inmates who participated in vocational training programs, 46 percent received some instruction in reading as part of the program, 44 percent received instruction in writing, 63 percent received instruction in mathematics, 31 percent received instruction in computer skills, and 74 percent received instruction in how to communicate or work better with other people (figure 4-8).

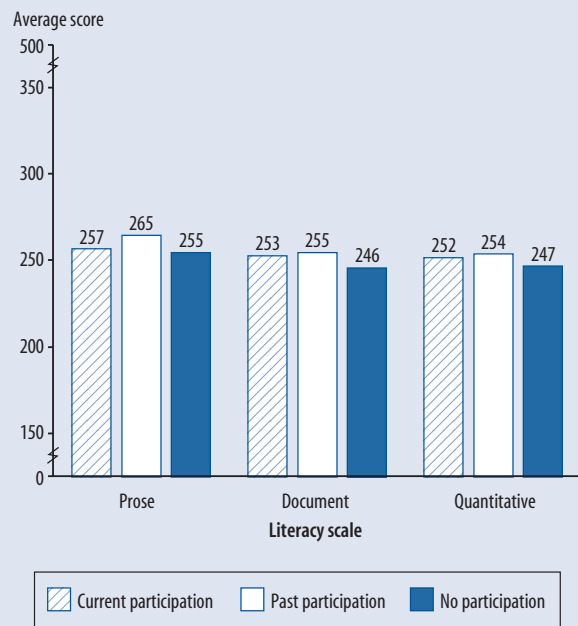
Figure 4-8. Percentage of the adult prison population participating in vocational training who received selected types of instruction as part of the vocational training, by type of instruction: 2003



NOTE: Adults are defined as people 16 years of age and older living in prisons. Adults who could not be interviewed due to language spoken or cognitive or mental disabilities (1 percent in 2003) are excluded from this figure.
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy.

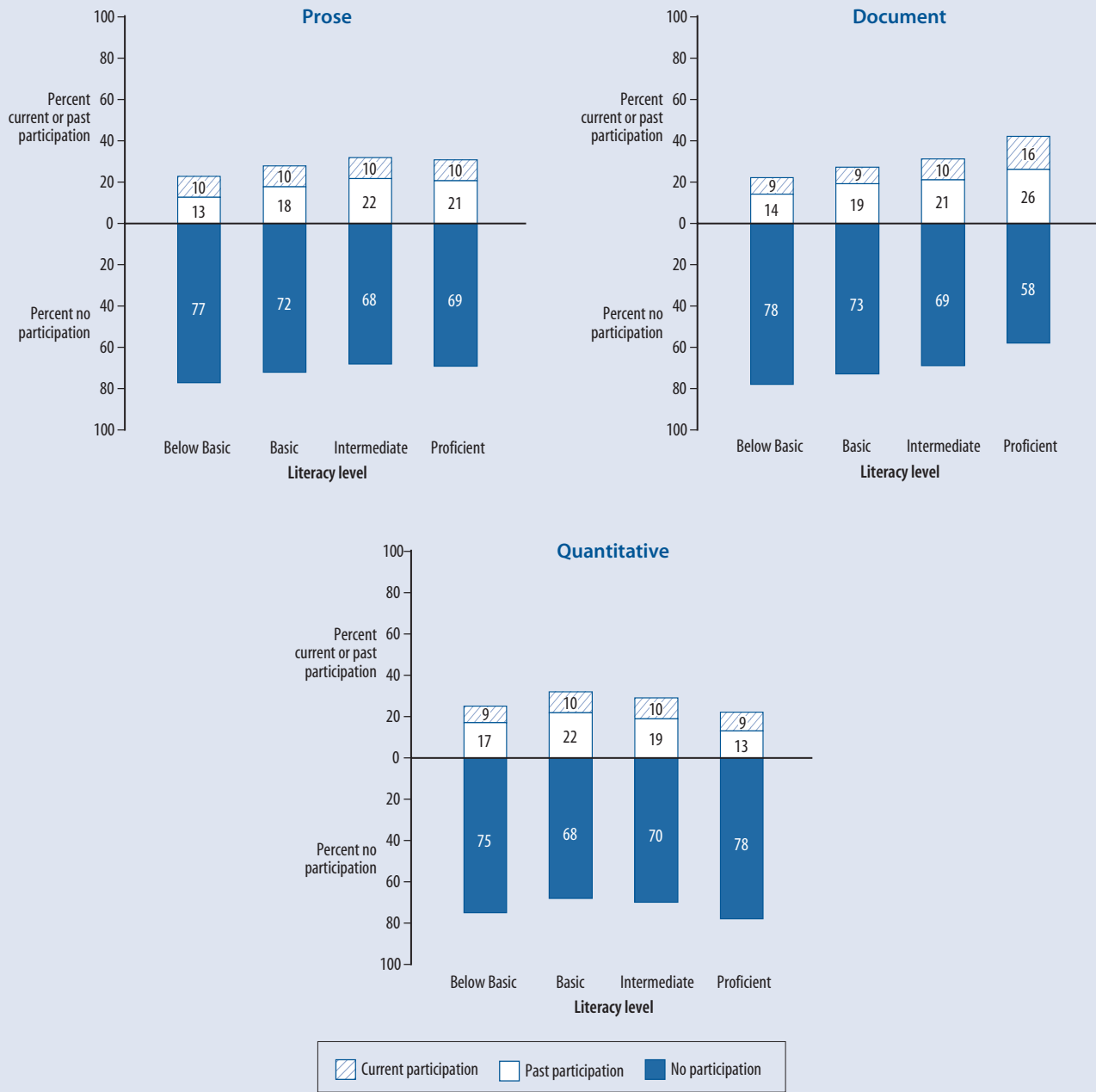
Prison inmates who had participated in vocational training in the past had higher average prose and document literacy than inmates who had not participated in any vocational training (figure 4-9). A higher percentage of prison inmates with *Below Basic* prose literacy than with *Intermediate* prose literacy had not participated in any vocational training programs (figure 4-10).

Figure 4-9. Average prose, document, and quantitative literacy scores of the adult prison population, by participation in vocational training: 2003



NOTE: Adults are defined as people 16 years of age and older living in prisons. Adults who could not be interviewed due to language spoken or cognitive or mental disabilities (1 percent in 2003) are excluded from this figure.
SOURCE: U. S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy.

Figure 4-10. Percentage of the adult prison population who participated in vocational training, by prose, document, and quantitative literacy level: 2003



NOTE: Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding. Adults are defined as people 16 years of age and older living in prisons. Adults who could not be interviewed due to language spoken or cognitive or mental disabilities (1 percent in 2003) are excluded from this figure.
 SOURCE: U. S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy.

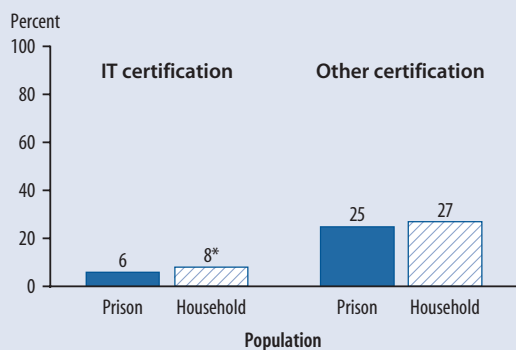
Skill Certification

Information technology (IT) is a growing area of employment. Certification programs, both within prisons and for the general population, are becoming more commonly available. IT certification is available in a variety of areas, including both basic skills such as word processing and more advanced skills such as computer networking. Other types of job-related skill certification that are recognized by a licensing board or an industry or professional association also provide credentials that are recognized in the job market. Certification programs are sometimes offered by prisons as part of their vocational education program. As shown in figure 4-11, some 6 percent of adults in prisons had some type of IT certification in 2003 (earned either in prison or prior to their current incarceration), compared with 8 percent of adults living in households. The difference in the percentage of adults in prisons and

households who had other types of certification was not statistically significant.

Within both the prison and household populations, adults who had received IT or other certification had higher prose, document, and quantitative literacy than adults who had not received any certification (figures 4-12 and 4-13). However, adults in the prison population who had received IT or other certification had lower average literacy on all three scales than adults in the household population who had received the same type of certification.

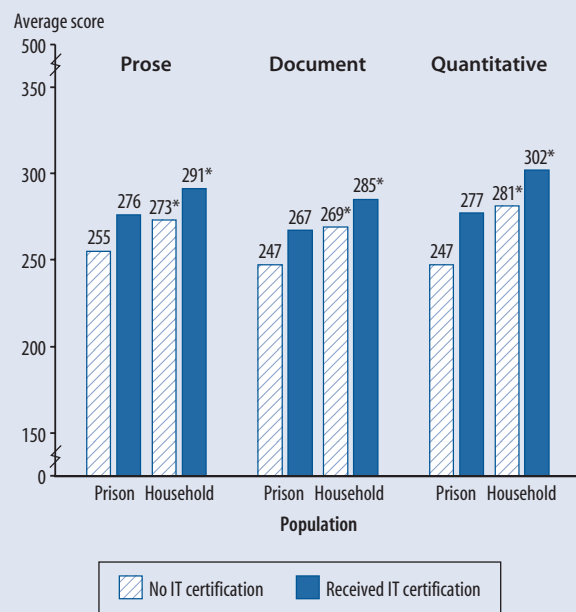
Figure 4-11. Percentage of the adult prison and household populations who have received skill certification: 2003



*Significantly different from prison population.

NOTE: Adults are defined as people 16 years of age and older living in prisons or households. Adults who could not be interviewed due to language spoken or cognitive or mental disabilities (1 percent of the prison sample and 3 percent of the household sample in 2003) are excluded from this figure. SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy.

Figure 4-12. Average prose, document, and quantitative literacy scores of the adult prison and household populations, by receipt of information technology skill certification: 2003



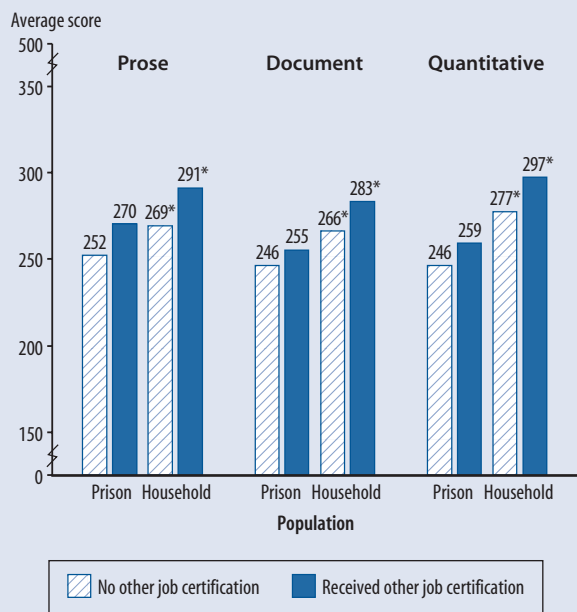
*Significantly different from prison population.

NOTE: Adults are defined as people 16 years of age and older living in prisons or households. Adults who could not be interviewed due to language spoken or cognitive or mental disabilities (1 percent of the prison sample and 3 percent of the household sample in 2003) are excluded from this figure. SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy.

In both the prison and household populations, the differences in the percentage of adults in each quantitative literacy level who had received IT certification were not significant (figure 4-14). Within each quantitative literacy level, the differences in the percentage of the prison and household populations with IT certification were not statistically significant.

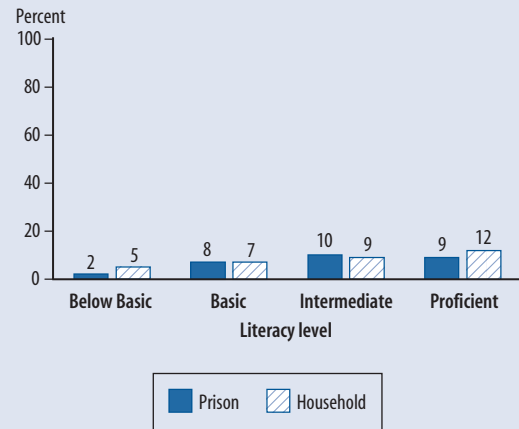
Within both the prison and household populations, adults with *Below Basic* quantitative literacy were less likely to have received certification other than IT than adults with *Basic* or *Intermediate* quantitative literacy (figure 4-15).

Figure 4-13. Average prose, document, and quantitative literacy scores of the adult prison and household populations, by receipt of other job-related skill certification: 2003



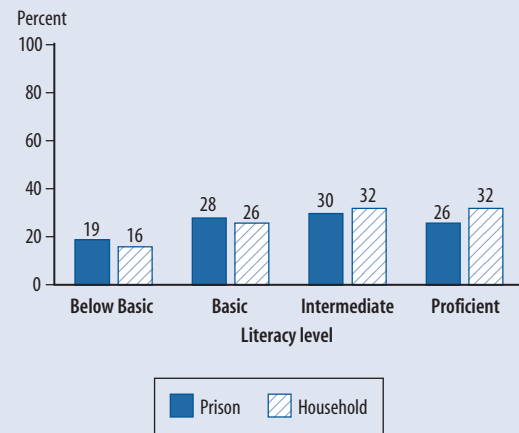
*Significantly different from prison population.
 NOTE: Adults are defined as people 16 years of age and older living in prisons or households. Adults who could not be interviewed due to language spoken or cognitive or mental disabilities (1 percent of the prison sample and 3 percent of the household sample in 2003) are excluded from this figure.
 SOURCE: U. S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy.

Figure 4-14. Percentage of the adult prison and household populations in each quantitative literacy level, by receipt of information technology skill certification: 2003



NOTE: Adults are defined as people 16 years of age and older living in prisons or households. Adults who could not be interviewed due to language spoken or cognitive or mental disabilities (1 percent of the prison sample and 3 percent of the household sample in 2003) are excluded from this figure.
 SOURCE: U. S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy.

Figure 4-15. Percentage of the adult prison and household populations in each quantitative literacy level, by receipt of other job-related skill certification: 2003



NOTE: Adults are defined as people 16 years of age and older living in prisons or households. Adults who could not be interviewed due to language spoken or cognitive or mental disabilities (1 percent of the prison sample and 3 percent of the household sample in 2003) are excluded from this figure.
 SOURCE: U. S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy.

Summary

Forty-three percent of prison inmates entered prison with a high school diploma or a GED/high school equivalency certificate. An additional 4 percent of prison inmates had earned their GED/high school equivalency certificate since entering prison, and 5 percent were enrolled in academic classes that might eventually lead to a GED/high school equivalency certificate. Prison inmates with a high school diploma or a GED/high school equivalency certificate had higher average prose, document, and quantitative literacy than prison inmates with lower levels of educational attainment.

Many prisons offer vocational training as well as academic classes, and 29 percent of prison inmates had participated in some sort of vocational training. However, more inmates reported being on waiting lists for these programs than were enrolled. Prison

inmates who had participated in vocational training in the past had higher average prose, document, and quantitative literacy than prison inmates who had not participated in any sort of vocational training program.

Certification programs are sometimes offered as part of the vocational training provided in prisons. Prison inmates who had received either information technology certification or some other type of certification recognized by a licensing board or an industry or professional association had higher average prose, document, and quantitative literacy than prison inmates who did not have the same type of certification. However, prison inmates who had received either type of certification had lower average levels of prose, document, and quantitative literacy than adults in the household population with similar certifications.

Work and Literacy Experiences in Prison

Chapter 4 discussed the relationship between literacy and education and job training experiences in prison. This chapter discusses the relationship between literacy and other experiences in prison, including work assignments, library access and use, computer use, and reading. The relationship between literacy and these other prison experiences is complex. Although inmates who enter prison with higher literacy may be more likely to use the library and computers, read, and even get certain work assignments, participating in any of these activities may help inmates improve their literacy.

Prison Work Assignments

In 2003, some 68 percent of prison inmates had a work assignment. Prison inmates who had a work assignment had higher average prose and quantitative literacy than those who had no work assignment (figure 5-1). Seventy-two percent of incarcerated adults with *Intermediate* prose literacy had a work assignment, compared with 66 percent of prison inmates with *Below Basic* prose literacy (figure 5-2).

A variety of jobs are available in prisons. Some jobs involve little or no reading and writing, such as working in the prison laundry or on the groundskeeping crew. Other jobs involve large amounts of reading and writing, such as working in a prison office. As part of their work assignments,

Prison Work Assignments

Library Use

Computer Use

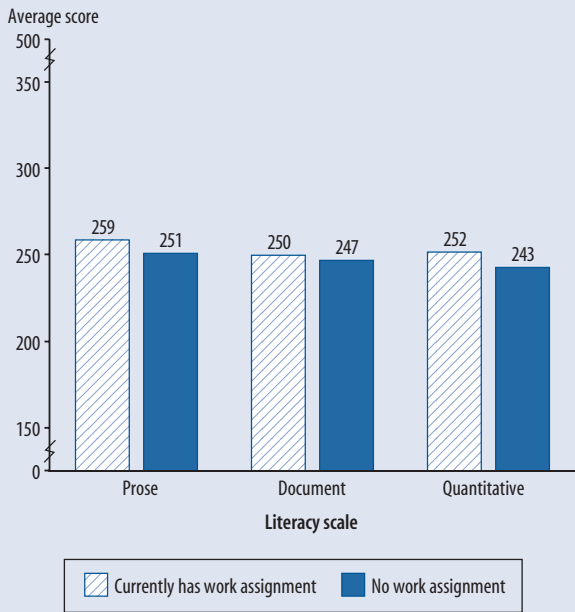
Reading Frequency

Summary

inmates may encounter both prose texts and documents. Prison inmates who read every day as part of their work assignment had higher average document literacy than those prison inmates who never read as

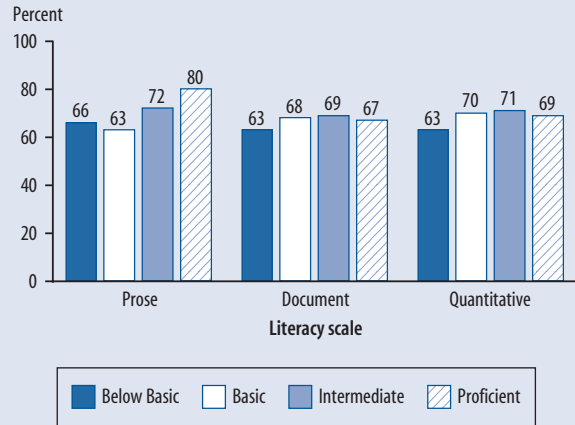
part of their work assignment, but the differences in prose literacy were not statistically significant (figure 5-3). Prison inmates who wrote every day as part of their work assignment had higher average prose,

Figure 5-1. Average prose, document, and quantitative literacy scores of the adult prison population, by current prison work assignment: 2003



NOTE: Adults are defined as people 16 years of age and older living in prisons. Adults who could not be interviewed due to language spoken or cognitive or mental disabilities (1 percent in 2003) are excluded from this figure.
 SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy.

Figure 5-2. Percentage of the adult prison population who had a current prison work assignment, by prose, document, and quantitative literacy level: 2003

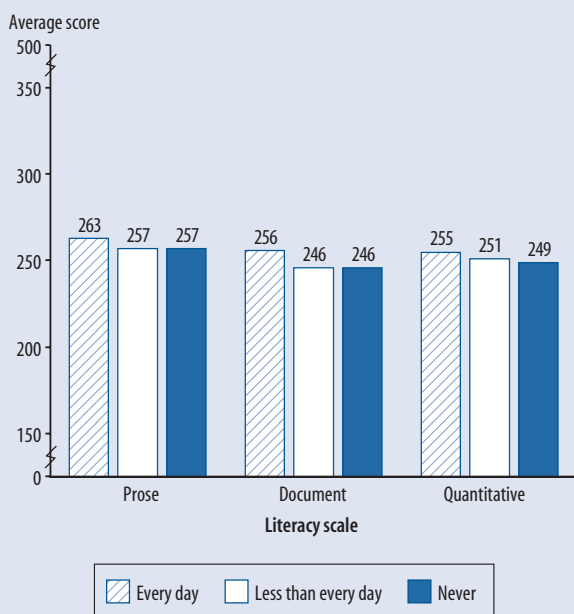


NOTE: Adults are defined as people 16 years of age and older living in prisons. Adults who could not be interviewed due to language spoken or cognitive or mental disabilities (1 percent in 2003) are excluded from this figure.
 SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy.

document, and quantitative literacy than those who never wrote or those who wrote less than every day as part of their work assignment (figure 5-4). Moreover, prison inmates who wrote less than every

day as part of their work assignment had lower average prose, document, and quantitative literacy than those inmates who never wrote as part of their work assignment.

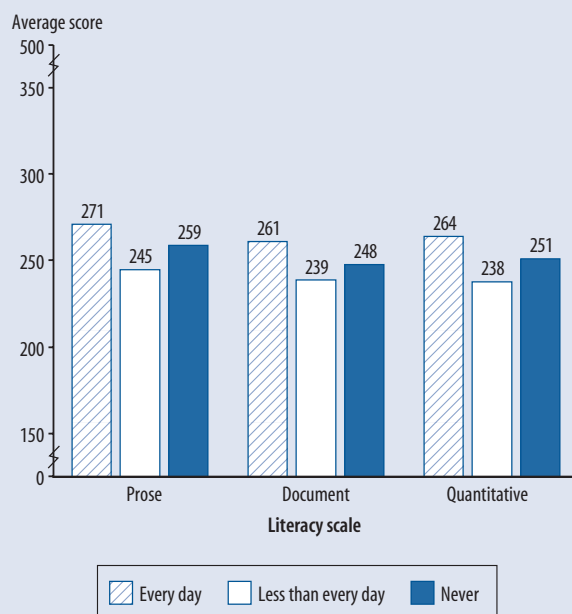
Figure 5-3. Average prose, document, and quantitative literacy scores of the adult prison population, by frequency of reading as part of current prison work assignment: 2003



NOTE: Adults are defined as people 16 years of age and older living in prisons. Adults who could not be interviewed due to language spoken or cognitive or mental disabilities (1 percent in 2003) are excluded from this figure.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy.

Figure 5-4. Average prose, document, and quantitative literacy scores of the adult prison population, by frequency of writing as part of current prison work assignment: 2003



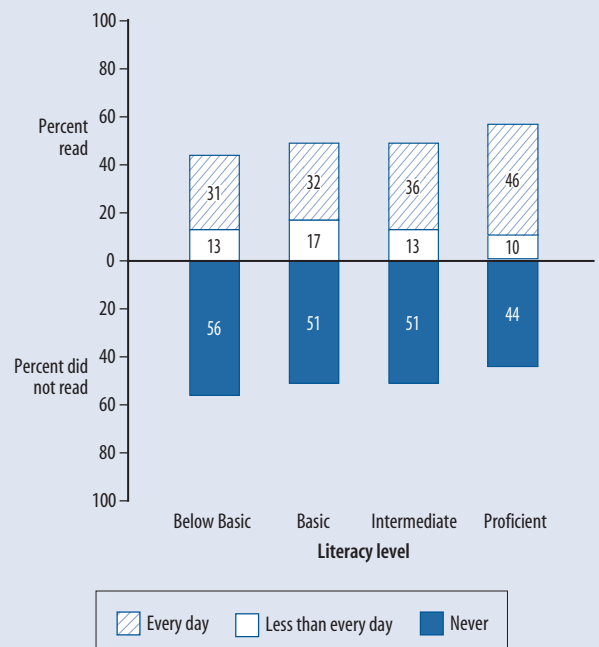
NOTE: Adults are defined as people 16 years of age and older living in prisons. Adults who could not be interviewed due to language spoken or cognitive or mental disabilities (1 percent in 2003) are excluded from this figure.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy.

Although reading and writing on a regular basis as part of a work assignment may lead to improvement in an inmate’s literacy, it is also possible that inmates who already have more-advanced reading and writing skills are more likely to be given work assignments that require more-frequent reading and writing. Figure 5-5 shows the percentage of incarcerated adults at each prose literacy level who had a work assignment that either did or did not require reading. None of the differences across the literacy levels was statistically significant.

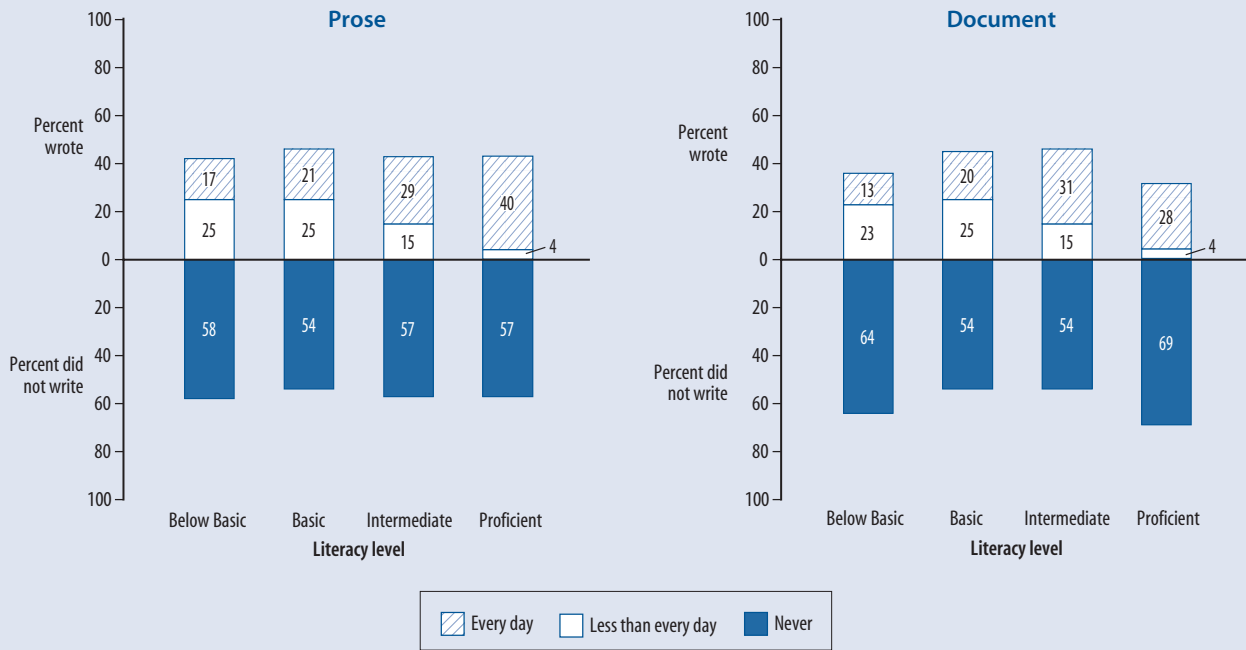
However, there were significant differences in the percentages of inmates in each literacy level who had jobs that required writing regularly (figure 5-6). Forty percent of inmates with *Proficient* prose literacy and 29 percent of inmates with *Intermediate* prose literacy wrote every day, compared with 17 percent of inmates with *Below Basic* prose literacy. Thirty-one percent of inmates with *Intermediate* document literacy wrote every day, compared with 13 percent of inmates with *Below Basic* document literacy.

Figure 5-5. Percentage of the adult prison population who read as part of current prison work assignment, by prose literacy level: 2003



NOTE: Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding. Adults are defined as people 16 years of age and older living in prisons. Adults who could not be interviewed due to language spoken or cognitive or mental disabilities (1 percent in 2003) are excluded from this figure.
 SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy.

Figure 5-6. Percentage of the adult prison population who wrote as part of current prison work assignment, by prose and document literacy level: 2003



NOTE: Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding. Adults are defined as people 16 years of age and older living in prisons. Adults who could not be interviewed due to language spoken or cognitive or mental disabilities (1 percent in 2003) are excluded from this figure.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy.

Library Use

Many prisons have a library that is available to inmates, although the hours that the library is open, the procedures that inmates must go through to request a visit to the library or delivery of books from the library, and the extent and variety of reading material available vary.¹² Prisoner inmates do not always have easy access to a library, but 75 percent of inmates reported that they used the prison library at least once or twice a year. Although 59 percent of prisoners were usually able to access the library within 2 days of wanting to do so, 22 percent had to wait

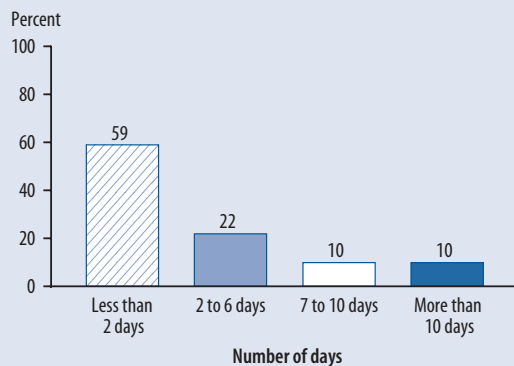
2 to 6 days, 10 percent had to wait 7 to 10 days, and an additional 10 percent had to wait 10 days or more (figure 5-7).

Library use can be related to literacy in two ways: adults who have higher literacy levels may be more likely to want to access the library and find things to read, and adults who use the library and read more frequently may improve their literacy levels.

As shown in figure 5-8, prison inmates who used the library weekly or monthly had higher average prose

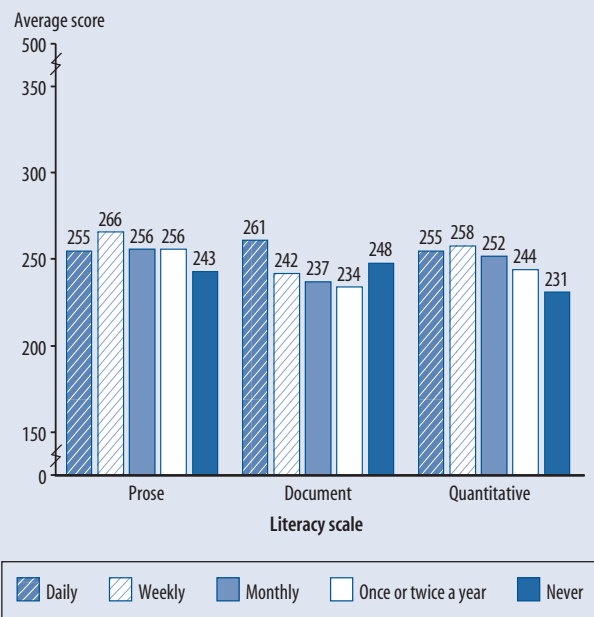
¹² The *Directory of State Prison Librarians 2002* lists 826 state prisons that have a librarian (Maryland Correctional Education Libraries 2002). In 2000, the most recent year for which data are available, there were 1,320 state correctional facilities in the United States (Stephan and Karlberg 2003).

Figure 5-7. Percentage of the adult prison population who attempted to use the prison library, by number of days it took to obtain access: 2003



NOTE: Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding. Adults are defined as people 16 years of age and older living in prisons. Adults who could not be interviewed due to language spoken or cognitive or mental disabilities (1 percent in 2003) are excluded from this figure.
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy.

Figure 5-8. Average prose, document, and quantitative literacy scores of the adult prison population, by frequency of library use: 2003

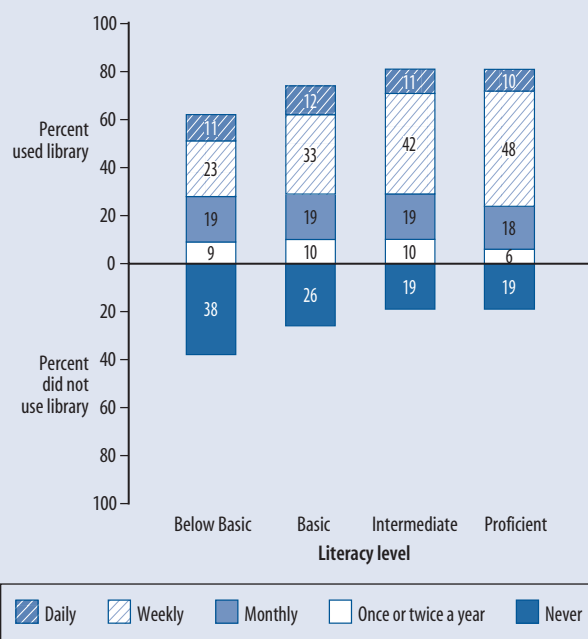


NOTE: Adults are defined as people 16 years of age and older living in prisons. Adults who could not be interviewed due to language spoken or cognitive or mental disabilities (1 percent in 2003) are excluded from this figure.
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy.

literacy than prison inmates who never used the library. Prison inmates who used the library daily had higher average document literacy than prison inmates who used the library less frequently (weekly, monthly, once or twice a year, or never). Prison inmates who used the library daily, weekly, or monthly had higher average quantitative literacy than prison inmates who never used the library, and prison inmates who used the library weekly had higher average quantitative literacy than prison inmates who used the library once or twice a year.

Thirty-eight percent of prison inmates with *Below Basic* prose literacy never used the library, compared with 26 percent of prison inmates with *Basic* prose literacy, 19 percent with *Intermediate* prose literacy, and 19 percent with *Proficient* prose literacy (figure 5-9).

Figure 5-9. Percentage of the adult prison population who used the library, by prose literacy level: 2003



NOTE: Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding. Adults are defined as people 16 years of age and older living in prisons. Adults who could not be interviewed due to language spoken or cognitive or mental disabilities (1 percent in 2003) are excluded from this figure.
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy.

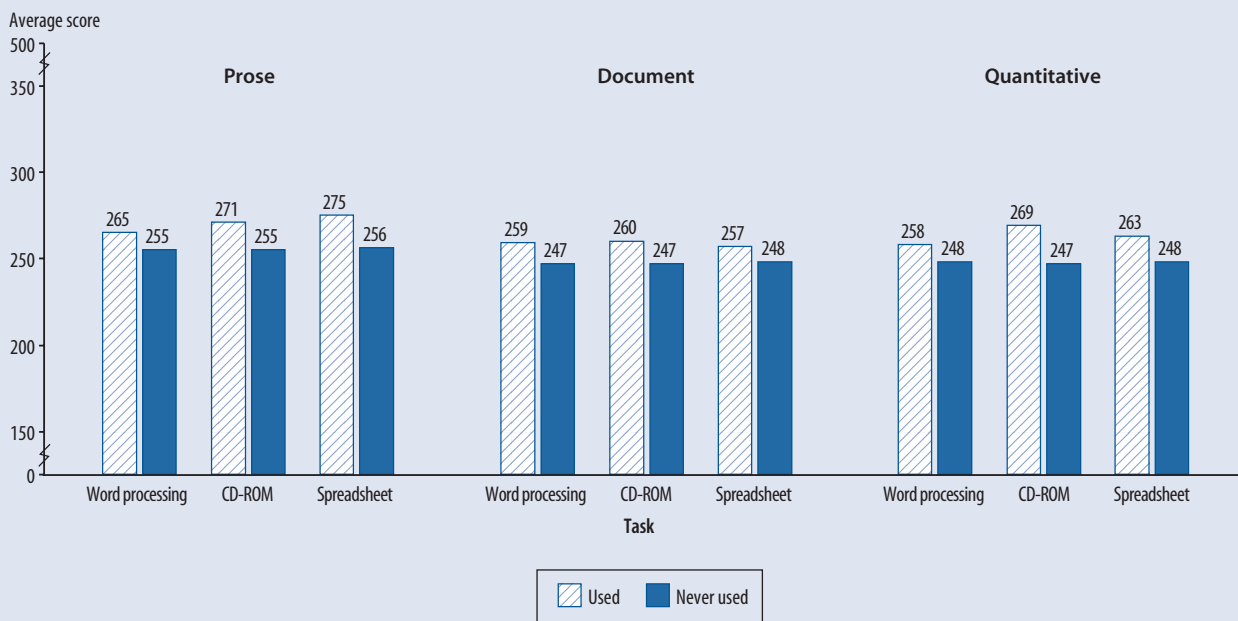
Computer Use

Although access to the Internet is typically prohibited within prisons, incarcerated adults may have opportunities to use other computer programs and features through academic classes, job training, work assignments, or the prison library. As with library use, the relationship between literacy and computer use is probably a two-way process: inmates with higher levels of literacy may be more likely to use a

computer, and inmates who use a computer regularly, particularly for tasks that involve reading and writing, may improve their literacy.

Incarcerated adults who used a computer for word processing or for using a CD-ROM had higher average document and quantitative literacy than those who never used a computer for these tasks (figure 5-10). Inmates who used a spreadsheet had higher average prose literacy than inmates who did not.

Figure 5-10. Average prose, document, and quantitative literacy scores of the adult prison population, by computer use for various tasks: 2003

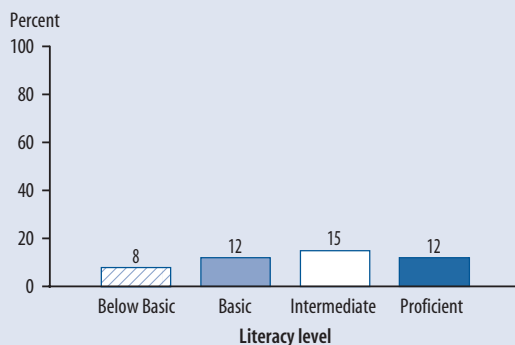


NOTE: Adults are defined as people 16 years of age and older living in prisons. Adults who could not be interviewed due to language spoken or cognitive or mental disabilities (1 percent in 2003) are excluded from this figure.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy.

There were no statistically significant differences in the percentage of inmates with *Below Basic*, *Basic*, *Intermediate*, or *Proficient* prose literacy who wrote using a word processing program (figure 5-11). There were also no statistically significant differences in the percentage of inmates with *Below Basic*, *Basic*, *Intermediate*, or *Proficient* document literacy who looked up information on a computer CD-ROM (figure 5-12). A higher percentage of inmates with *Proficient* than with *Below Basic* or *Basic* quantitative literacy used a spreadsheet program (figure 5-13).

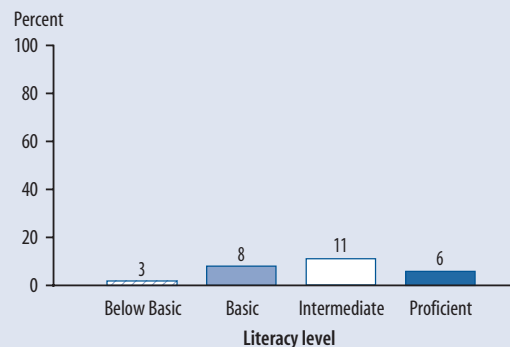
Figure 5-11. Percentage of the adult prison population who wrote using a word processing program, by prose literacy level: 2003



NOTE: Adults are defined as people 16 years of age and older living in prisons. Adults who could not be interviewed due to language spoken or cognitive or mental disabilities (1 percent in 2003) are excluded from this figure.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy.

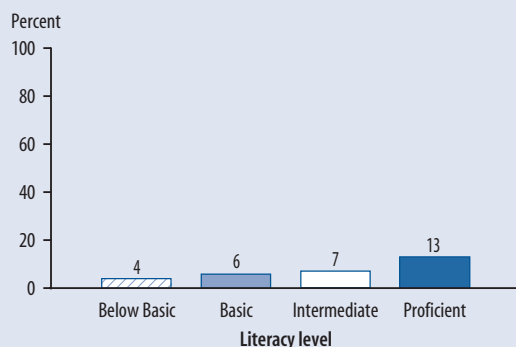
Figure 5-12. Percentage of the adult prison population who looked up information on a computer CD-ROM, by document literacy level: 2003



NOTE: Adults are defined as people 16 years of age and older living in prisons. Adults who could not be interviewed due to language spoken or cognitive or mental disabilities (1 percent in 2003) are excluded from this figure.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy.

Figure 5-13. Percentage of the adult prison population who used a computer spreadsheet program, by quantitative literacy level: 2003



NOTE: Adults are defined as people 16 years of age and older living in prisons. Adults who could not be interviewed due to language spoken or cognitive or mental disabilities (1 percent in 2003) are excluded from this figure.

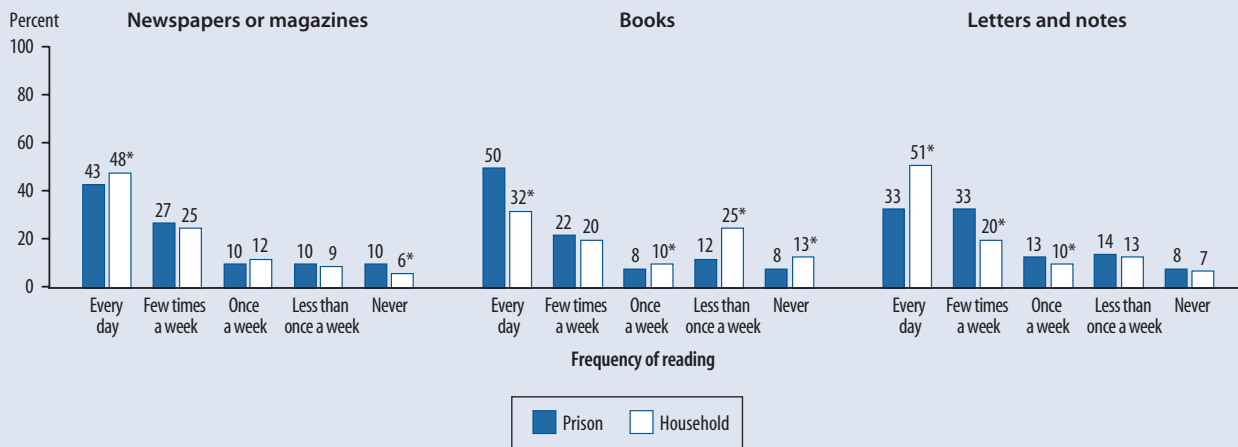
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy.

Reading Frequency

Incarcerated adults often have time they need to fill up, and reading is one activity that fills time. Forty-three percent of prison inmates reported reading newspapers and magazines every day, 50 percent read books every day, and 33 percent read letters and notes every day (figure 5-14). Only 10 percent of prison inmates never read newspapers and magazines, and 8 percent never read books or letters and

notes. A higher percentage of prison inmates than adults living in households read books every day (50 percent versus 32 percent), but adults living in households were more likely than incarcerated adults to read newspapers and magazines or letters and notes every day. Among adults in prisons and households, 97 percent and 96 percent, respectively, reported reading one of these three types of reading material at least occasionally.

Figure 5-14. Percentage of the adult prison and household populations who read each of the following printed materials in English: newspapers or magazines, books, letters and notes, by frequency of reading: 2003



*Significantly different from prison population.

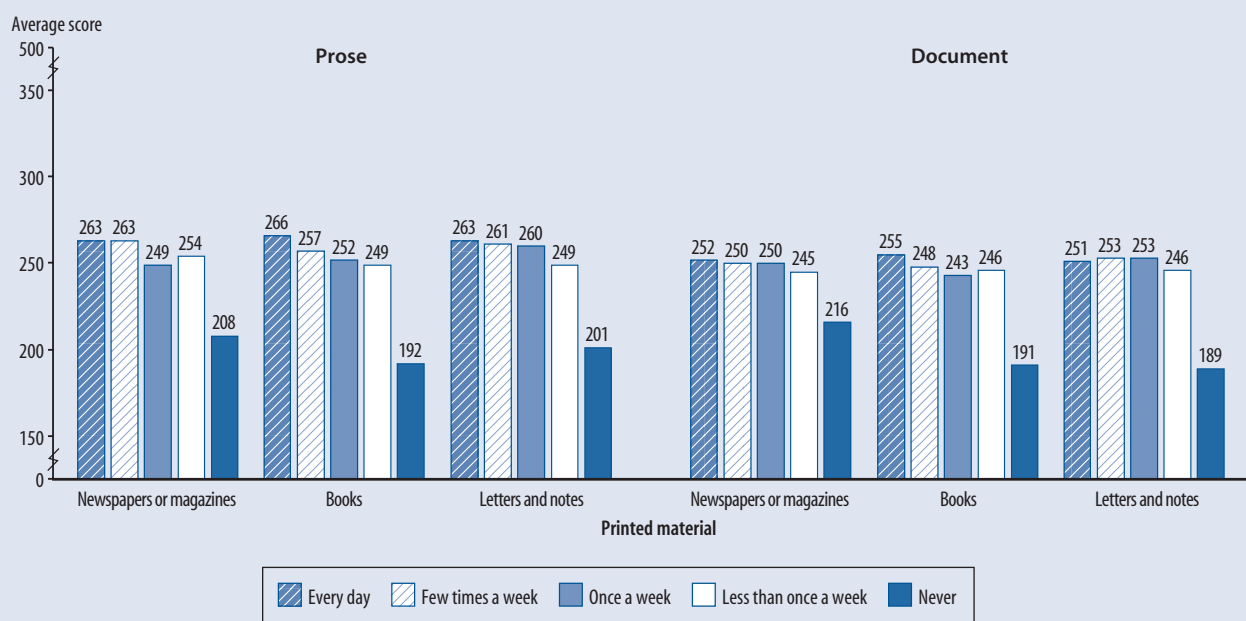
NOTE: Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding. Adults are defined as people 16 years of age and older living in prisons or households. Adults who could not be interviewed due to language spoken or cognitive or mental disabilities (1 percent of the prison sample and 3 percent of the household sample in 2003) are excluded from this figure.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy.

Prison inmates who read newspapers and magazines, books, or letters and notes had higher average prose and document literacy than prison inmates who never read at all, regardless of the frequency with which they read (figure 5-15). Looked at another way, a higher percentage of inmates with *Below Basic*

prose literacy never read newspapers and magazines, books, or letters and notes than inmates with higher levels of prose literacy (figure 5-16). Compared with inmates who had *Below Basic* prose literacy, a higher percentage of inmates with *Basic* or *Intermediate* prose literacy read these materials every day.

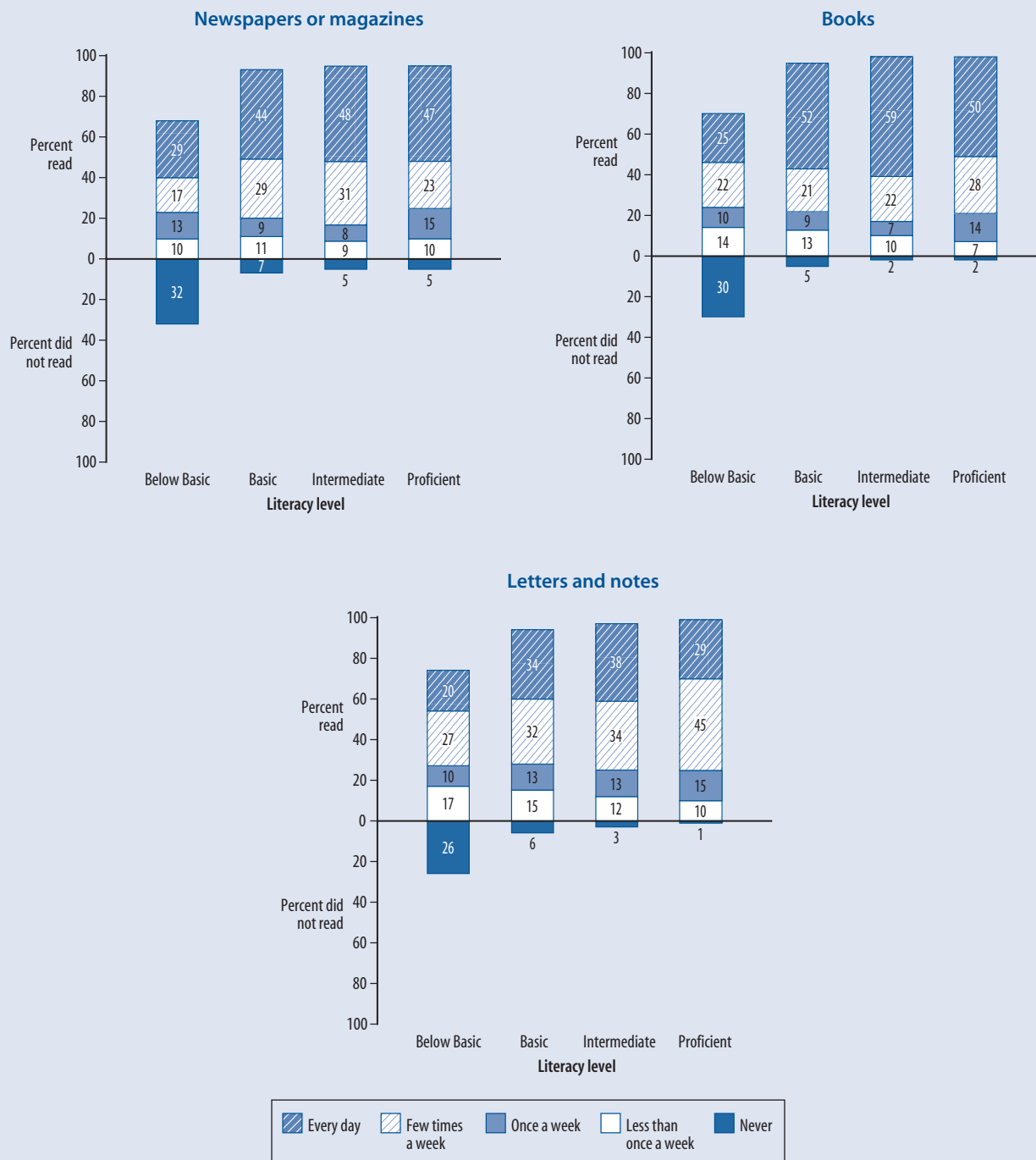
Figure 5-15. Average prose and document literacy scores of the adult prison population, by frequency of reading each of the following printed materials in English: newspapers or magazines, books, letters and notes: 2003



NOTE: Adults are defined as people 16 years of age and older living in prisons. Adults who could not be interviewed due to language spoken or cognitive or mental disabilities (1 percent in 2003) are excluded from this figure.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy.

Figure 5-16. Percentage of the adult prison population who read each of the following printed materials in English: newspapers or magazines, books, letters and notes, by prose literacy level: 2003



NOTE: Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding. Adults are defined as people 16 years of age and older living in prisons. Adults who could not be interviewed due to language spoken or cognitive or mental disabilities (1 percent in 2003) are excluded from this figure.
 SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy.

Summary

In general, inmates who participated in activities that required some reading or writing had average literacy either the same as or higher than the average literacy of inmates who did not participate in these activities.

Prison inmates who had work assignments had higher average prose and quantitative literacy than inmates who did not have work assignments. Prison inmates who used the prison library weekly or monthly had higher average prose literacy than prison inmates who never used the library. Prison inmates who used a computer for word processing or for using a CD-ROM had higher average document and quantitative literacy than inmates who never used a computer for these things. Finally, prison inmates who read newspapers and magazines, books, or letters and notes had higher average prose and document literacy than prison inmates who never read, regardless of the frequency with which they read.

A higher percentage of inmates with *Proficient* and *Intermediate* prose literacy than with *Below Basic* prose literacy had prison work assignments that required writing every day. A higher percentage of inmates with *Basic*, *Intermediate*, and *Proficient* prose literacy than with *Below Basic* prose literacy used the library. A higher percentage of prison inmates with *Proficient* than with *Below Basic* or *Basic* quantitative literacy used a spreadsheet program. Moreover, a higher percentage of inmates with *Basic* or *Intermediate* than with *Below Basic* prose literacy read newspapers and magazines, books, and letters and notes every day.

Although engaging in any of the activities discussed above may improve an inmate's literacy, it is also possible that inmates who already have higher levels of literacy are more likely to participate in these activities. Readers are cautioned not to draw causal inferences based solely on the results presented here. As discussed in chapter 1, many of the variables discussed here are related to one another, and complex interactions and relationships have not been explored here.

Criminal History and Current Offense

As discussed in chapter 2, the adult prison population was over 50 percent larger in 2003 than 10 years previously. The 2003 prison population was also somewhat older and better educated than in 1992 (table 2-1). As discussed in this chapter, there were also some changes in the reasons adults were incarcerated, their length of incarceration, and their previous criminal history. Information presented in this chapter related to type of offense, length of incarceration, expected date of release, and criminal record are based on prison inmates' self-reports, not prison records.

In both 1992 and 2003, the commission of a violent crime was the most common reason adults were incarcerated (table 6-1).¹³ In 1992, some 44 percent of prison inmates were incarcerated because they had committed a violent crime; in 2003, some 47 percent of prison inmates had committed a violent crime. There was a slight decline between 1992 and 2003 in the percentage of inmates who were imprisoned because of property crimes. The percentage of inmates who had previously been sentenced to both probation and incarceration rose from 48 percent in 1992 to 64 percent in 2003.

On average, prison sentences were longer in 2003 than in 1992 (table 6-1). The percentage of inmates who expected to be incarcerated for a total of over 10 years (121 months or more) increased from 16 percent in 1992 to 28 percent in 2003, and the

Type of Offense

Expected Length of Incarceration

Expected Date of Release

Previous Criminal History

Summary

¹³ See appendix B for a discussion of how different crimes were classified.

Table 6-1. Percentage of the adult prison population in selected groups: 1992 and 2003

Characteristic	1992	2003
Type of offense		
Violent	44	47
Property	18	15*
Drug	25	23
Public order	13	15
Expected length of incarceration		
0–60 months	64	52*
61–120 months	20	21
121+ months	16	28*
Expected date of release		
2 years or less	66	62
More than 2 years	34	38
Previous criminal history		
None	21	16*
Probation only	14	11
Incarceration only	16	10*
Probation and incarceration	48	64*

*Significantly different from 1992.

NOTE: Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding. Adults are defined as people 16 years of age and older living in prisons. Adults who could not be interviewed due to language spoken or cognitive or mental disabilities (3 percent in 1992 and 1 percent in 2003) are excluded from this table. Results are based on inmates self report, not prison records.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, 1992 National Adult Literacy Survey and 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy.

percentage who expected to be incarcerated for 5 years or less declined from 64 percent to 52 percent. Despite these changes in expected total length of incarceration, there were no statistically significant changes between 1992 and 2003 in the percentage of prison inmates who expected to be released within the next 2 years—a population of particular interest because they will need to find employment after their release from prison. In 2003, some 62 percent of prison inmates expected to be released within 2 years.

Type of Offense

Prison inmates are often sentenced for more than one crime. For example, a drug dealer may shoot another drug dealer and receive a sentence for both drug dealing and murder. In this discussion of type of offense, inmates are categorized by the offense for which they received the longest sentence. In the example just given, in which a drug dealer shoots another drug dealer, if the crime for which the inmate received the longest sentence was the murder, that inmate’s offense would be categorized as violent. If the drug dealing resulted in a longer sentence, the inmate’s offense would be categorized as a drug crime. More information on how offenses were classified is included in appendix B.

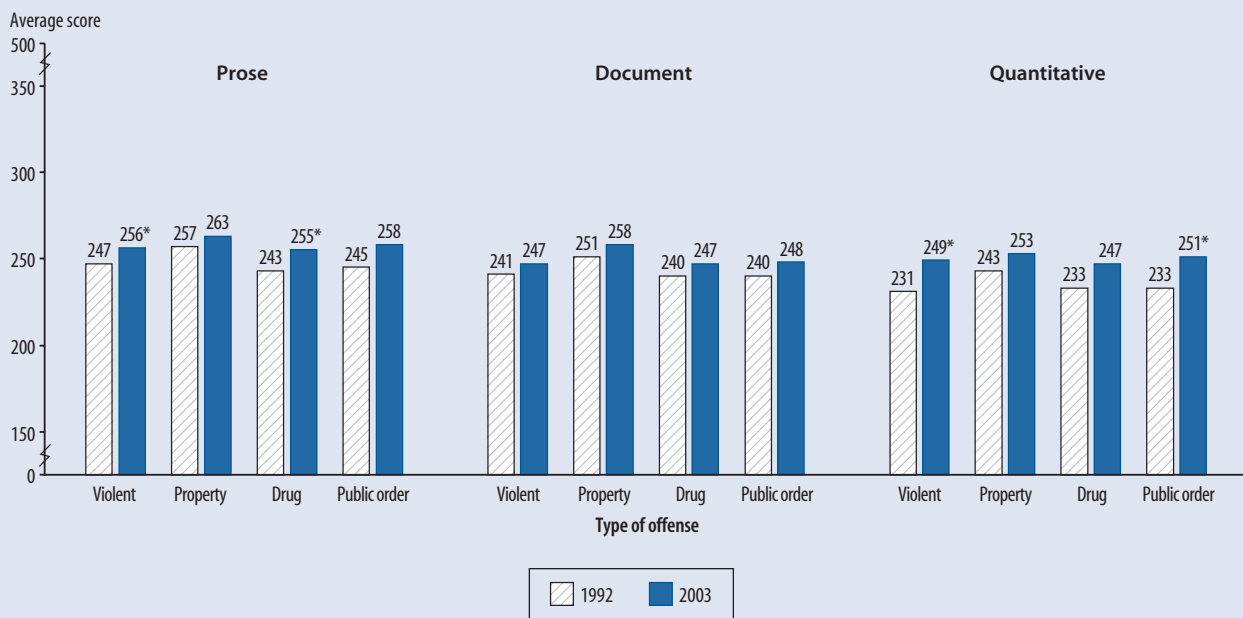
In 2003, inmates who were incarcerated because of a property crime had higher average document literacy than inmates who were incarcerated for other types of offenses (figure 6-1). There were no statistically significant differences in prose or quantitative scores based on the type of offense that led to incarceration.

As discussed in chapter 2, among the total adult prison population, average prose and quantitative literacy increased between 1992 and 2003, but there were no statistically significant changes in document literacy (figure 2-1). Average prose scores and quantitative literacy also increased among inmates imprisoned for a violent crime (figure 6-1). Average prose

literacy increased among inmates who had committed a drug offense, and average quantitative literacy increased among inmates imprisoned for a public order offense. Reflecting the lack of significant change in document literacy between 1992 and 2003 for the prison population as a whole, there were no statistically significant changes in average document literacy for any of the four types of offenses examined in figure 6-1.

Among inmates who had committed a violent crime, the percentage with *Below Basic* literacy declined from 23 percent to 17 percent on the prose scale, 24 percent to 14 percent on the document scale, and 52 percent to 39 percent on the quantitative scale

Figure 6-1. Average prose, document, and quantitative literacy scores of the adult prison population, by type of offense: 1992 and 2003



*Significantly different from 1992.

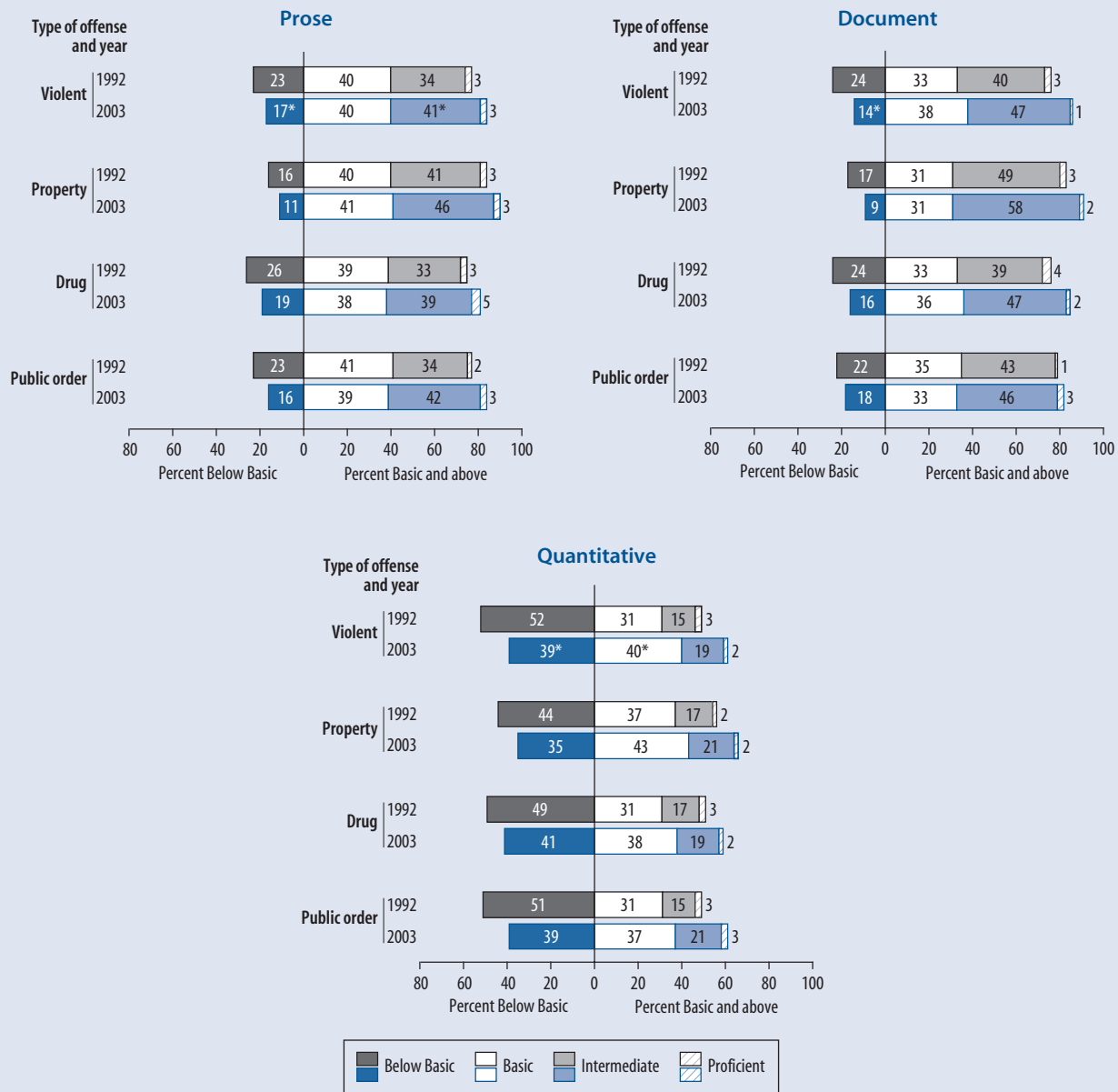
NOTE: Adults are defined as people 16 years of age and older living in prisons. Adults who could not be interviewed due to language spoken or cognitive or mental disabilities (3 percent in 1992 and 1 percent in 2003) are excluded from this figure.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, 1992 National Adult Literacy Survey and 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy.

(figure 6-2). The percentage of inmates who had committed violent crimes and had *Intermediate* prose literacy rose from 34 percent to 41 percent, and the percentage of inmates who had committed violent crimes and had *Basic* quantitative literacy rose from 31

percent to 40 percent. Among inmates who had committed property, drug, or public order crimes, there were no statistically significant changes in the percentage in each prose, document, and quantitative literacy level.

Figure 6-2. Percentage of the adult prison population in each prose, document, and quantitative literacy level, by type of offense: 1992 and 2003



*Significantly different from 1992.

NOTE: Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding. Adults are defined as people 16 years of age and older living in prisons. Adults who could not be interviewed due to language spoken or cognitive or mental disabilities (3 percent in 1992 and 1 percent in 2003) are excluded from this figure.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, 1992 National Adult Literacy Survey and 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy.

Expected Length of Incarceration

Expected length of incarceration was calculated from the time inmates entered prison to the time they expected to be released. The number represents their total expected length of incarceration, not the number of months they had remaining on their sentence. In 2003, there were no statistically significant differences in average prose, document, or quantitative literacy among inmates based on their expected length of incarceration (figure 6-3).

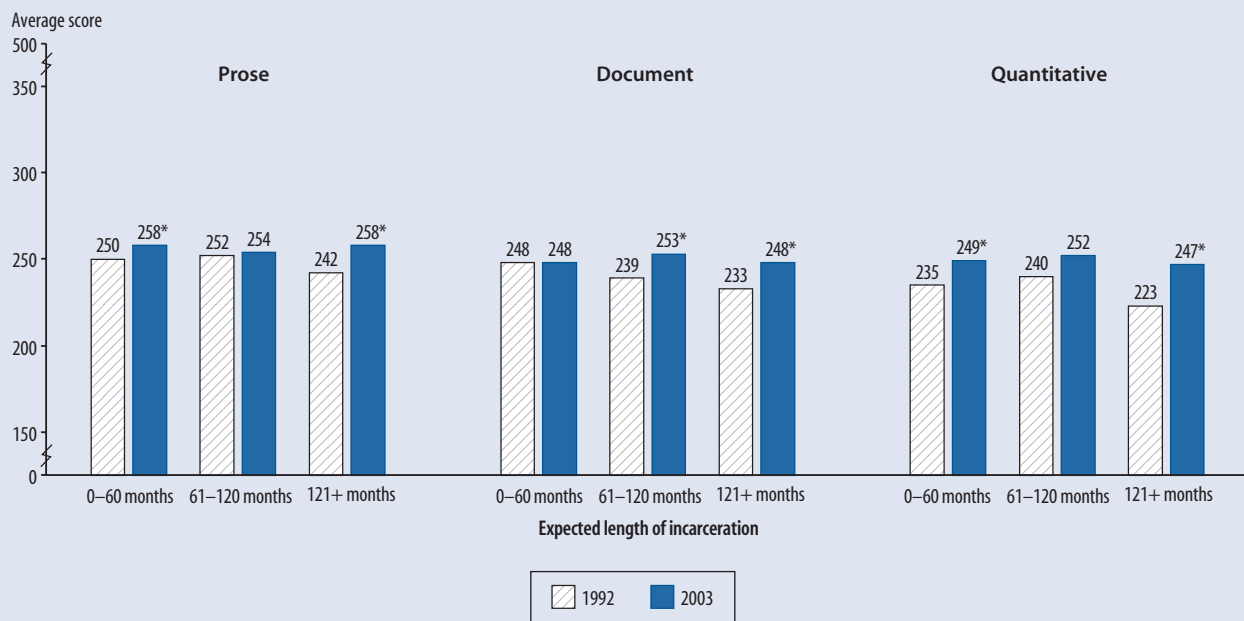
Average prose, document, and quantitative literacy increased between 1992 and 2003 for inmates who expected to be incarcerated for over 10 years (121 or more months), starting from when they were first incarcerated (figure 6-3). Average prose and quantitative literacy also increased for inmates who expected to be incarcerated for a total of 5 years or less (0 to

60 months). Average document literacy increased for inmates who expected to be incarcerated for over 5 years but not more than 10 years (61 to 120 months).

Among prison inmates who expected to be imprisoned for 5 years or less (0 to 60 months), between 1992 and 2003 the percentage with *Below Basic* prose literacy declined from 21 percent to 15 percent and the percentage with *Below Basic* quantitative literacy declined from 49 percent to 40 percent (figure 6-4). The percentage with *Intermediate* quantitative literacy increased from 16 percent to 21 percent.

Among prison inmates who expected to be imprisoned for over 5 years but not more than 10 years (61 to 120 months), between 1992 and 2003 the percentage with *Below Basic* document literacy decreased from 27 percent to 14 percent and the percentage with *Intermediate* document literacy increased from

Figure 6-3. Average prose, document, and quantitative literacy scores of the adult prison population, by expected length of incarceration: 1992 and 2003



*Significantly different from 1992.

NOTE: Adults are defined as people 16 years of age and older living in prisons. Adults who could not be interviewed due to language spoken or cognitive or mental disabilities (3 percent in 1992 and 1 percent in 2003) are excluded from this figure.

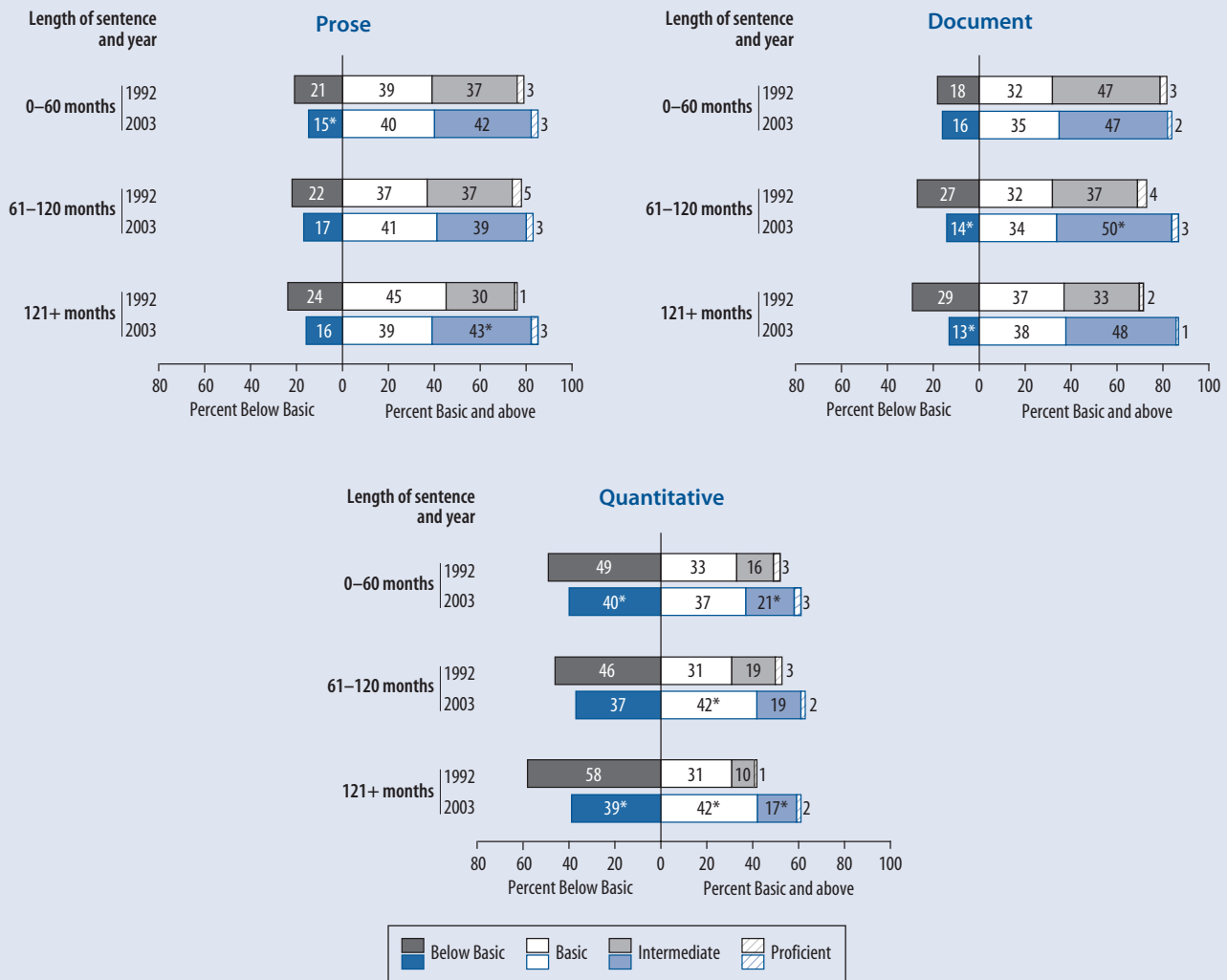
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, 1992 National Adult Literacy Survey and 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy.

37 percent to 50 percent. The percentage with *Basic* quantitative literacy increased from 31 percent to 42 percent.

Among prison inmates who expected to be imprisoned for over 10 years (121 months or more), the percentage with *Below Basic* quantitative literacy decreased from 58 percent to 39 percent, the per-

centage with *Basic* quantitative literacy increased from 31 percent to 42 percent, and the percentage with *Intermediate* quantitative literacy increased from 10 percent to 17 percent. The percentage with *Below Basic* document literacy decreased from 29 percent to 13 percent and the percentage with *Intermediate* prose literacy increased from 30 percent to 43 percent.

Figure 6-4. Percentage of the adult prison population in each prose, document, and quantitative literacy level, by expected length of incarceration: 1992 and 2003



*Significantly different from 1992.

NOTE: Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding. Adults are defined as people 16 years of age and older living in prisons. Adults who could not be interviewed due to language spoken or cognitive or mental disabilities (3 percent in 1992 and 1 percent in 2003) are excluded from this figure.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, 1992 National Adult Literacy Survey and 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy.

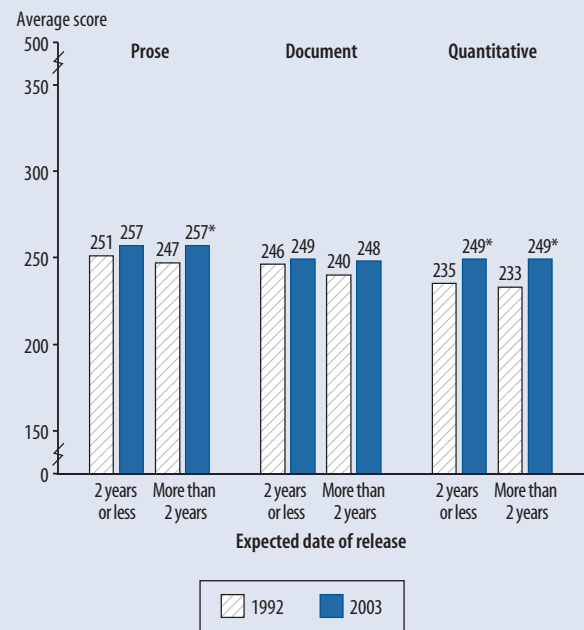
Expected Date of Release

The literacy of inmates who are near their expected date of release may be of particular concern because they will soon need to do such things as rejoin their families and find a job. As shown in table 6-1, 74 percent of inmates had been incarcerated previously (64 percent had been sentenced to both incarceration and probation and an additional 10 percent had been sentenced to incarceration alone). Without adequate literacy skills, adjusting to life outside of prison could be even more difficult for released inmates.

As was discussed in chapter 3, prison inmates had lower average prose, document, and quantitative literacy than adults living in households (figure 3-1). This would be of somewhat less concern if prison inmates who expected to be released within 2 years had higher literacy than inmates with more time left to serve on their sentences, but that was not the case. In 2003, there was no difference in average prose, document, and quantitative literacy between prison inmates with 2 years or less remaining on their sentence and inmates who did not expect to be released within 2 years (figure 6-5).

Among inmates with 2 years or less remaining on their sentences, average quantitative literacy increased between 1992 and 2003, but the changes in average prose and document literacy were not statistically significant (figure 6-5). Among inmates who did not expect to be released within 2 years, both average prose and average quantitative scores increased.

Figure 6-5. Average prose, document, and quantitative literacy scores of the adult prison population, by expected date of release: 1992 and 2003



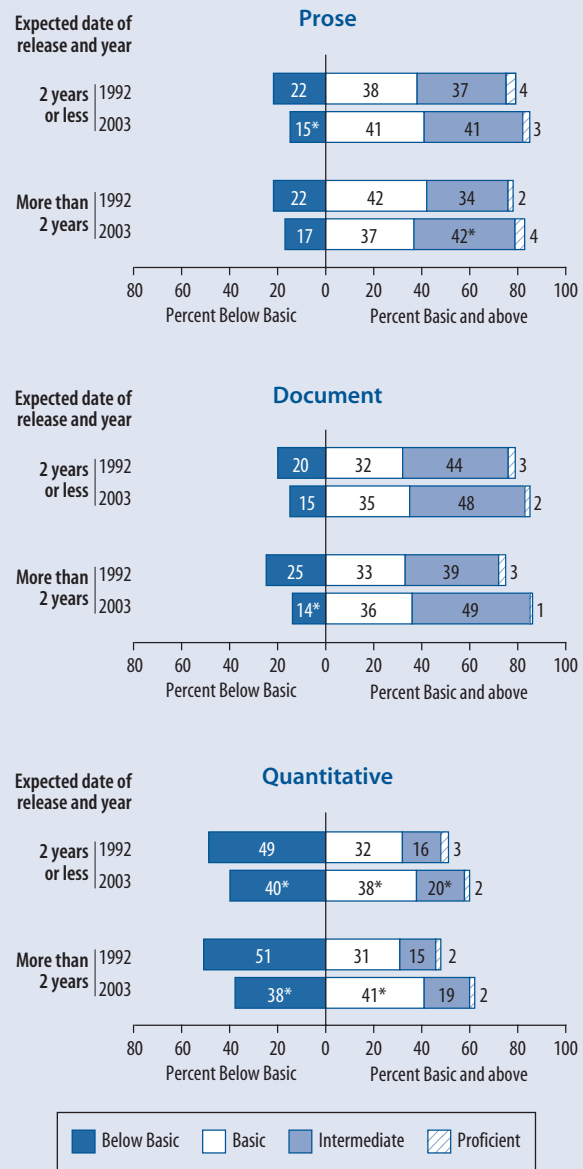
*Significantly different from 1992.

NOTE: Adults are defined as people 16 years of age and older living in prisons. Adults who could not be interviewed due to language spoken or cognitive or mental disabilities (3 percent in 1992 and 1 percent in 2003) are excluded from this figure.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, 1992 National Adult Literacy Survey and 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy.

Among prison inmates who expected to be released in 2 years or less, the percentage with the lowest literacy, *Below Basic*, did decrease from 22 percent to 15 percent on the prose scale and from 49 percent to 40 percent on the quantitative scale (figure 6-6). However, although the percentages of inmates who had *Below Basic* prose literacy and expected to be released within 2 years decreased, because of the increase in the size of the prison population, the number of inmates in this category was approximately 130,000 in both years. The percentage with *Basic* and *Intermediate* quantitative literacy increased. Among inmates who expected to serve additional time of more than 2 years, the percentage with *Below Basic* document and quantitative literacy decreased, the percentage with *Intermediate* prose literacy increased, and the percentage with *Basic* quantitative literacy increased.

Figure 6-6. Percentage of the adult prison population in each prose, document, and quantitative literacy level, by expected date of release: 1992 and 2003



*Significantly different from 1992.

NOTE: Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding. Adults are defined as people 16 years of age and older living in prisons. Adults who could not be interviewed due to language spoken or cognitive or mental disabilities (3 percent in 1992 and 1 percent in 2003) are excluded from this figure.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, 1992 National Adult Literacy Survey and 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy.

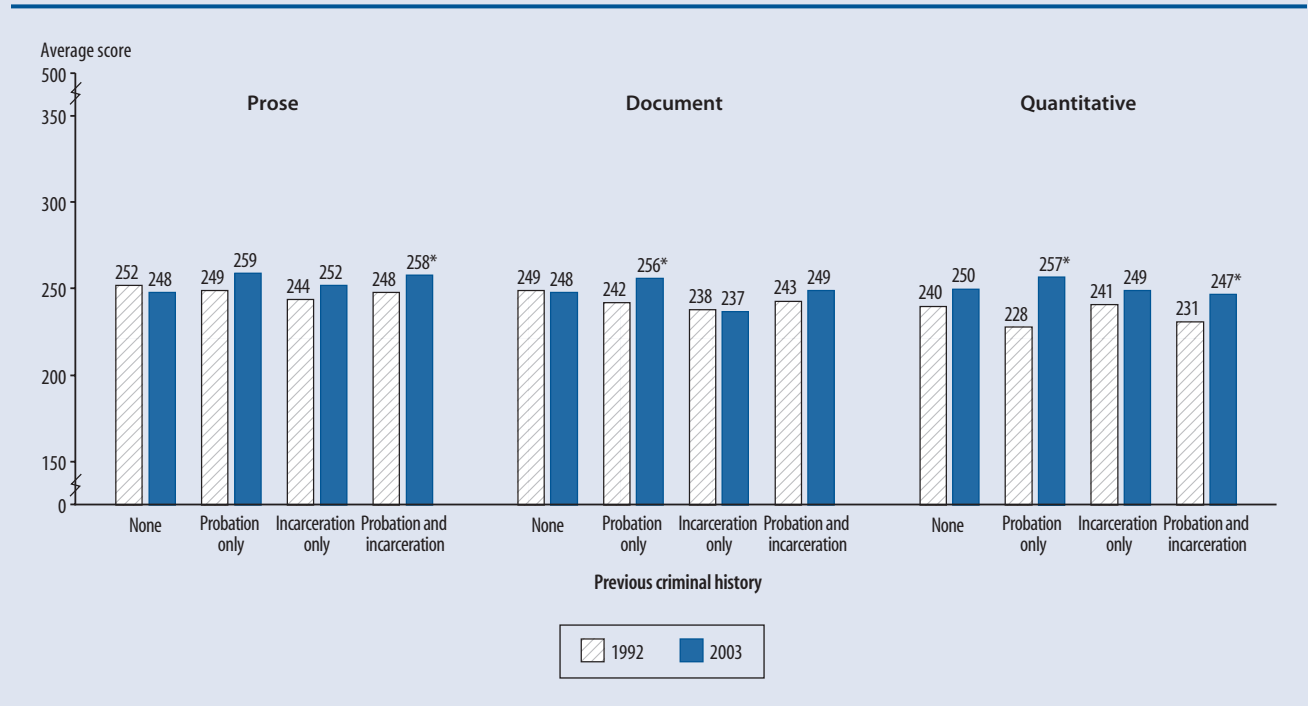
Previous Criminal History

In 2003, 16 percent of prison inmates had never previously been incarcerated or on probation, 11 percent had been on probation only, 10 percent had been incarcerated only, and 64 percent had been both incarcerated and on probation (table 6-1). In 2003, inmates who had previously been incarcerated only had lower average document literacy than inmates who had previously been on probation only or been both on probation and incarcerated (figure

6-7). There were no other statistically significant differences based on criminal history.

Between 1992 and 2003, average prose and quantitative literacy increased among inmates who had previously been sentenced to both probation and incarceration, and average document literacy increased among inmates who had previously been sentenced to probation only (figure 6-7). The only changes in the distribution of inmates across the literacy levels were that a lower percentage of inmates

Figure 6-7. Average prose, document, and quantitative literacy scores of the adult prison population, by previous criminal history: 1992 and 2003



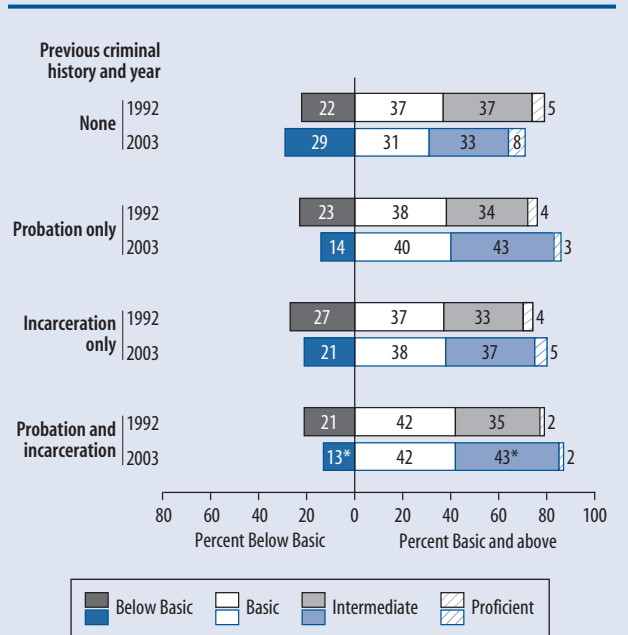
*Significantly different from 1992.

NOTE: Adults are defined as people 16 years of age and older living in prisons. Adults who could not be interviewed due to language spoken or cognitive or mental disabilities (3 percent in 1992 and 1 percent in 2003) are excluded from this figure.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, 1992 National Adult Literacy Survey and 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy.

who had previously been sentenced to both incarceration and probation had *Below Basic* prose literacy in 2003 than in 1992 (13 percent versus 21 percent) and a higher percentage had *Intermediate* prose literacy in 2003 than in 1992 (43 percent versus 35 percent) (figure 6-8).

Figure 6-8. Percentage of the adult prison population in each prose literacy level, by previous criminal history: 1992 and 2003



*Significantly different from 1992.
 NOTE: Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding. Adults are defined as people 16 years of age and older living in prisons. Adults who could not be interviewed due to language spoken or cognitive or mental disabilities (3 percent in 1992 and 1 percent in 2003) are excluded from this figure.
 SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, 1992 National Adult Literacy Survey and 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy.

Summary ¹⁴

When compared with the prison population in 1992, the prison population in 2003 included a higher percentage of inmates who expected to be incarcerated for more than 10 years (16 percent versus 28 percent). Among these inmates who expected to be incarcerated for more than 10 years, average prose, document, and quantitative literacy was higher in 2003 than in 1992.

The 2003 prison population also included a higher percentage of inmates who had previously been sentenced to both incarceration and probation (48 percent versus 64 percent). Between 1992 and 2003, average prose and quantitative literacy increased among inmates who had previously been sentenced to both probation and incarceration and average document literacy increased among inmates who had been sentenced to probation only.

The most common reason for incarceration in both 1992 and 2003 was the commission of a violent crime. Between 1992 and 2003, average prose and quantitative literacy increased among inmates who were imprisoned because of a violent crime. On all three scales, the percentage of inmates who had been convicted of a violent crime and had *Below Basic* literacy declined.

Inmates who expect to be released within the next 2 years are of particular interest because they will need to find jobs and rejoin their families and communities. There were no statistically significant changes between 1992 and 2003 in the percentage of inmates with 2 years or less left to serve on their sentences. Among inmates with 2 years or less remaining on their sentences, average quantitative literacy increased, but the changes in average prose and document literacy were not significant.

¹⁴ Information presented in this chapter related to type of offense, length of incarceration, expected date of release, and criminal record are based on prison inmates' self-reports, not prison records.

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