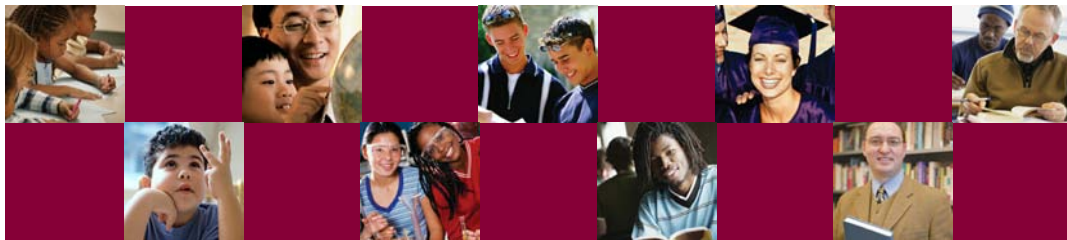


the condition of education 2007



INDICATOR 18

Trends in Adult Literacy

The indicator and corresponding tables are taken directly from *The Condition of Education 2007*. Therefore, the page numbers may not be sequential.

Additional information about the survey data and supplementary notes can be found in the full report. For a copy of *The Condition of Education 2007*, visit the NCES website (<http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2007064>) or contact ED PUBs at 1-877-4ED-PUBS.

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U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2007). *The Condition of Education 2007* (NCES 2007-064). Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.



Adult Literacy

Trends in Adult Literacy

While the quantitative literacy of adults improved from 1992 to 2003, the prose and document literacy of adults was not measurably different between these two years.

Adults age 16 or older were assessed in three types of literacy (prose, document, and quantitative) in 1992 and 2003. *Literacy* is defined as “using printed and written information to function in society, to achieve one’s goals, and to develop one’s knowledge and potential.” The average prose and document literacy scores of U.S. adults were not measurably different in 2003 from 1992, but the average quantitative literacy score increased 8 points between these years (see supplemental table 18-1).

One measure of literacy is the percentage of adults who perform at four achievement levels: *Below Basic*, *Basic*, *Intermediate*, and *Proficient*. In each type of literacy, 13 percent of adults were at or above *Proficient* (indicating they possess the skills necessary to perform complex and challenging literacy activities) in 2003 (see supplemental table 18-2). Twenty-two percent of adults were *Below Basic* (indicating they possess no more than the most simple and concrete literacy skills) in quantitative literacy, compared with 14 percent in prose literacy and 12 percent in document literacy.

Differences in average literacy scores were apparent by sex and race/ethnicity. Women scored

higher than men on prose and document literacy in 2003, unlike in 1992. Men outperformed women on quantitative literacy in both years. Male scores declined in prose and document literacy from 1992 to 2003, while female scores increased in document and quantitative literacy. In 1992 and 2003, White and Asian/Pacific Islander adults had higher average scores than their Black and Hispanic peers in the three types of literacy assessed. Black performance increased in each type of literacy from 1992 to 2003, while Hispanic average scores declined in prose and document literacy.

Additional differences in average literacy were apparent by education and age. Educational attainment is positively related to all three types of literacy; those with any education after high school outperformed their peers with less education in 1992 and 2003. Between these years, average prose literacy decreased for most levels of educational attainment, and average document literacy decreased for those with some college, associate’s degrees, and college graduates. From 1992 to 2003, the average prose, document, and quantitative literacy scores of adults ages 50–64 and 65 or older increased.

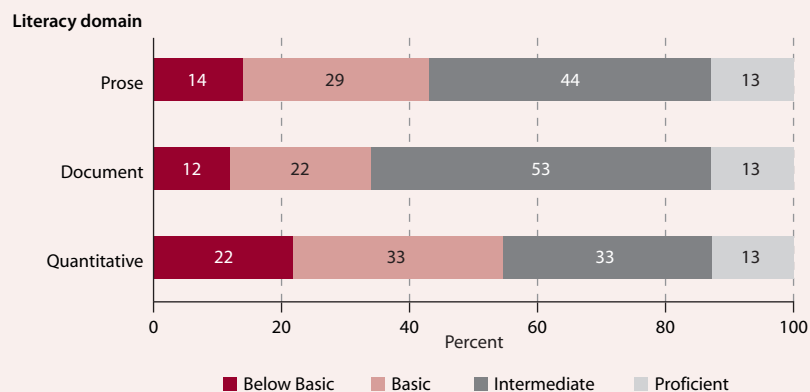
NOTE: Adults are defined as people age 16 or older living in households or prisons. *Prose literacy* is the knowledge and skills needed to perform prose tasks (i.e., to search, comprehend, and use information from continuous texts, such as paragraphs from stories); *document literacy* is the knowledge and skills needed to perform document tasks (i.e., to search, comprehend, and use information from noncontinuous texts in various formats, such as bills or prescription labels); and *quantitative literacy* is 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). Race categories exclude persons of Hispanic ethnicity. In 1992, respondents were allowed to identify only one race; in 2003, respondents were allowed to identify multiple races. Included in the total but not shown separately are American Indians/Alaska Natives and respondents with more than one race. Results are reported in terms of average scores on a 0–500 scale. To compare results between 1992 and 2003, the 1992 results were rescaled using the criteria and methods established for the 2003 assessment. Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding.

SOURCE: Kutner, M., Greenberg, E., and Baer, J. (2005). *A First Look at the Literacy of America’s Adults in the 21st Century* (NCES 2006-470), figure 2, data from U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NAAL).



FOR MORE INFORMATION:
Supplemental Notes 1, 3
Supplemental Tables 18-1,
18-2
NCES 2006-471

ADULT LITERACY PERFORMANCE: Percentage of adults scoring at each achievement level in prose, document, and quantitative literacy: 2003



Trends in Adult Literacy

Table 18-1. Average prose, document, and quantitative literacy scores of adults age 16 or older, by selected characteristics: 1992 and 2003

Characteristic	Prose		Document		Quantitative	
	1992	2003	1992	2003	1992	2003
Total	276	275	271	271	275	283
Sex						
Male	276	272	274	269	283	286
Female	277	277	268	272	269	279
Race/ethnicity ¹						
White	287	288	281	282	288	297
Black	237	243	230	238	222	238
Hispanic	234	216	238	224	233	233
Asian/Pacific Islander	255	271	259	272	268	285
Age						
16–18	270	267	270	268	264	267
19–24	280	276	282	277	277	279
25–39	288	283	286	282	286	292
40–49	293	282	284	277	292	289
50–64	269	278	258	270	272	289
65 or older	235	248	221	235	235	257
Language spoken before starting school ²						
English only	282	283	275	276	280	289
English and Spanish	255	262	253	259	247	261
English and other language	273	278	260	268	271	289
Spanish	205	188	216	199	212	211
Other language	239	249	241	257	246	270
Education						
Still in high school	268	262	270	265	263	261
Less than/some high school	216	207	211	208	209	211
GED/high school equivalency	265	260	259	257	265	265
High school graduate	268	262	261	258	267	269
Vocational/trade/business school	278	268	273	267	280	279
Some college	292	287	288	280	295	294
Associate's/2-year degree	306	298	301	291	305	305
College graduate	325	314	317	303	324	323
Graduate studies/degree	340	327	328	311	336	332
Employment status						
Employed full time	290	285	286	281	292	296
Employed part time	285	281	279	277	281	287
Unemployed	263	269	261	265	261	270
Not in labor force	252	255	244	250	247	261

¹ Race categories exclude persons of Hispanic ethnicity. In 1992, respondents were allowed to identify only one race; in 2003, respondents were allowed to identify multiple races. Included in the total but not shown separately are American Indians/Alaska Natives and respondents with more than one race.

² The "English and Spanish" category includes adults who spoke only English and Spanish as well as adults who spoke English, Spanish, and another language(s). The "Spanish" category includes adults who spoke only Spanish as well as adults who spoke Spanish and another non-English language(s). The "Other language" category includes only adults who spoke neither English nor Spanish.

NOTE: Adults are defined as people age 16 or older living in households or prisons. *Prose literacy* is the knowledge and skills needed to perform prose tasks (i.e., to search, comprehend, and use information from continuous texts, such as paragraphs from stories); *document literacy* is the knowledge and skills needed to perform document tasks (i.e., to search, comprehend, and use information from noncontinuous texts in various formats, such as bills or prescription labels); and *quantitative literacy* is 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). Results are reported in terms of average scores on a 0–500 scale. To compare results between 1992 and 2003, the 1992 results were rescaled using the criteria and methods established for the 2003 assessment.

SOURCE: Kutner, M., Greenberg, E., and Baer, J. (2005). *A First Look at the Literacy of America's Adults in the 21st Century* (NCES 2006-470), figures 1, 4, 11, 14, 18, and table 7, data from U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NAAL) and 1992 National Adult Literacy Survey (NALS).

Trends in Adult Literacy

Table 18-2. Percentage of adults age 16 or older in each prose, document, and quantitative literacy achievement level, by selected characteristics: 2003

Characteristic	Prose				Document				Quantitative			
	Below Basic	Basic	Inter-mediate	Proficient	Below Basic	Basic	Inter-mediate	Proficient	Below Basic	Basic	Inter-mediate	Proficient
Total	14	29	44	13	12	22	53	13	22	33	33	13
Sex												
Male	15	29	43	13	14	23	51	13	21	31	33	16
Female	12	29	46	14	11	22	54	13	22	35	32	11
Race/ethnicity ¹												
White	7	25	51	17	8	19	58	15	13	32	39	17
Black	24	43	31	2	24	35	40	2	47	36	15	2
Hispanic	44	30	23	4	36	26	33	5	50	29	17	4
Asian/Pacific Islander	14	32	42	12	11	22	54	13	19	34	35	12
Age												
16–18	11	37	48	5	11	24	56	9	28	38	28	6
19–24	11	29	48	12	9	20	58	13	21	36	33	10
25–39	12	25	45	18	8	19	56	17	17	31	35	17
40–49	11	27	47	15	10	20	54	15	19	32	34	16
50–64	13	27	44	15	12	23	54	12	19	30	34	17
65 or older	23	38	34	4	27	33	38	3	34	37	24	5
Language spoken before starting school ²												
English only	9	27	49	15	9	21	56	13	18	33	35	15
English and Spanish	14	38	42	6	12	29	54	5	31	39	26	4
English and other language	7	33	51	9	10	25	57	8	15	38	34	14
Spanish	61	25	13	1	49	25	23	3	62	25	11	2
Other language	26	33	34	7	20	24	46	10	28	33	29	10
Education												
Still in high school	14	37	45	4	13	24	54	9	31	38	25	5
Less than/some high school	50	33	16	1	45	29	25	2	64	25	10	1
GED/high school equivalency	10	45	43	3	13	30	53	4	26	43	28	3
High school graduate	13	39	44	4	13	29	52	5	24	42	29	5
Vocational/trade/business school	10	36	49	5	9	26	59	7	18	41	35	6
Some college	5	25	59	11	5	19	65	10	10	36	43	11
Associate's/2-year degree	4	20	56	19	3	15	66	16	7	30	45	18
College graduate	3	14	53	31	2	11	62	25	4	22	43	31
Graduate studies/degree	1	10	48	41	1	9	59	31	3	18	43	36

¹ Race categories exclude persons of Hispanic ethnicity. In 1992, respondents were allowed to identify only one race; in 2003, respondents were allowed to identify multiple races. Included in the total but not shown separately are American Indians/Alaska Natives and respondents with more than one race.

² The "English and Spanish" category includes adults who spoke only English and Spanish as well as adults who spoke English, Spanish, and another language(s). The "Spanish" category includes adults who spoke only Spanish as well as adults who spoke Spanish and another non-English language(s). The "Other language" category includes only adults who spoke neither English nor Spanish.

NOTE: Adults are defined as people age 16 or older living in households or prisons. *Prose literacy* is the knowledge and skills needed to perform prose tasks (i.e., to search, comprehend, and use information from continuous texts, such as paragraphs from stories); *document literacy* is the knowledge and skills needed to perform document tasks (i.e., to search, comprehend, and use information from noncontinuous texts in various formats, such as bills or prescription labels); and *quantitative literacy* is 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).

SOURCE: Kutner, M., Greenberg, E., and Baer, J. (2005). *A First Look at the Literacy of America's Adults in the 21st Century* (NCES 2006-470), figures 2, 5–10, 12, 13, 15, 16, and table 8, data from U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NAAL).

Trends in Adult Literacy

Table S18-1. Standard errors for the average prose, document, and quantitative literacy scores of adults age 16 or older, by selected characteristics: 1992 and 2003

Characteristic	Prose		Document		Quantitative	
	1992	2003	1992	2003	1992	2003
Total	1.1	1.3	1.1	1.2	1.1	1.2
Sex						
Male	1.2	1.5	1.2	1.5	1.4	1.3
Female	1.3	1.4	1.2	1.2	1.2	1.3
Race/ethnicity						
White	1.2	1.5	1.2	1.5	1.1	1.3
Black	1.4	1.8	1.4	2.1	1.6	2.1
Hispanic	2.3	3.5	1.8	3.6	2.3	3.2
Asian/Pacific Islander	6.1	4.0	6.1	5.0	7.8	5.1
Age						
16–18	2.3	2.8	2.2	2.9	2.5	3.1
19–24	2.0	2.4	2.2	2.5	2.0	2.3
25–39	1.3	1.7	1.2	1.8	1.3	1.8
40–49	2.0	2.3	1.9	1.8	1.8	1.9
50–64	1.4	1.9	1.4	2.1	1.8	1.9
65 or older	1.7	2.0	2.2	2.0	2.7	2.2
Language spoken before starting school						
English only	1.2	1.4	1.2	1.3	1.2	1.2
English and Spanish	2.9	3.1	3.6	3.4	4.6	3.8
English and other language	4.0	3.1	4.5	3.2	5.6	4.1
Spanish	2.9	3.8	2.8	4.6	3.3	4.6
Other language	3.4	4.6	3.7	4.2	4.3	4.3
Education						
Still in high school	2.5	3.7	2.4	4.3	3.2	4.2
Less than/some high school	1.4	2.4	1.5	2.6	2.1	2.2
GED/high school equivalency	2.2	2.1	2.3	2.5	2.3	3.1
High school graduate	1.0	1.3	1.4	1.5	1.2	1.6
Vocational/trade/business school	2.1	2.7	2.0	2.5	2.2	2.2
Some college	1.4	1.6	1.6	1.7	1.7	1.7
Associate's/2-year degree	1.9	2.4	1.9	2.0	2.0	2.1
College graduate	1.9	2.1	1.9	2.2	1.8	1.8
Graduate studies/degree	2.0	2.8	1.9	2.2	2.1	2.1
Employment status						
Employed full time	1.3	1.5	1.2	1.2	1.3	1.1
Employed part time	1.7	2.2	1.8	2.2	1.7	2.2
Unemployed	2.3	2.8	2.2	3.3	3.2	3.6
Not in labor force	1.4	1.7	1.5	1.9	1.9	1.8

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NAAL) and 1992 National Adult Literacy Survey (NALS).

Trends in Adult Literacy

Table S18-2. Standard errors for the percentage of adults age 16 or older in each prose, document, and quantitative literacy achievement level, by selected characteristics: 2003

Characteristic	Prose				Document				Quantitative			
	Below Basic	Basic	Inter-mediate	Proficient	Below Basic	Basic	Inter-mediate	Proficient	Below Basic	Basic	Inter-mediate	Proficient
Total	0.6	0.6	0.7	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.7	0.6	0.6	0.5	0.5	0.5
Sex												
Male	0.6	0.7	0.7	0.6	0.6	0.5	0.8	0.6	0.6	0.5	0.5	0.6
Female	0.6	0.6	0.8	0.6	0.6	0.6	0.8	0.6	0.8	0.7	0.7	0.6
Race/ethnicity												
White	0.5	0.8	0.9	0.9	0.5	0.7	1.0	1.0	0.7	0.7	0.8	0.8
Black	1.4	1.2	1.4	0.4	1.7	1.4	1.9	0.5	1.8	1.3	1.1	0.4
Hispanic	1.8	1.0	1.1	0.4	1.6	0.8	1.2	0.5	1.7	0.9	0.9	0.5
Asian/Pacific Islander	2.0	2.2	2.5	1.8	2.2	2.1	3.0	2.3	3.0	2.9	2.8	2.5
Age												
16–18	1.7	2.5	2.7	1.4	1.4	1.8	2.4	1.7	2.3	2.1	2.1	1.3
19–24	1.1	1.3	1.5	1.1	1.1	1.2	1.7	1.5	1.4	1.3	1.4	1.1
25–39	0.6	0.7	0.7	0.8	0.7	0.7	1.1	1.1	0.8	0.8	0.8	0.9
40–49	0.9	1.1	1.2	1.1	0.7	0.8	1.1	0.9	0.9	0.8	0.8	0.9
50–64	0.8	0.9	1.1	0.8	0.9	0.9	1.2	1.1	1.0	0.8	0.9	0.8
65 or older	1.3	1.2	1.4	0.6	1.5	1.0	1.4	0.4	1.6	1.2	1.2	0.6
Language spoken before starting school												
English only	0.5	0.7	0.8	0.7	0.5	0.6	0.8	0.7	0.6	0.6	0.6	0.5
English and Spanish	2.1	2.2	2.4	1.3	2.5	3.0	3.8	1.8	3.3	2.6	2.8	1.3
English and other language	1.5	2.8	3.1	2.1	2.0	2.3	2.9	2.0	2.7	2.7	3.0	2.6
Spanish	1.8	1.1	0.9	0.3	2.0	1.0	1.3	0.4	2.2	1.2	1.1	0.5
Other language	2.2	2.0	2.3	1.3	1.9	1.3	2.0	1.2	2.3	1.7	1.9	1.5
Education												
Still in high school	2.5	2.8	3.1	1.5	2.3	2.2	3.0	1.9	2.9	2.5	2.3	1.4
Less than/some high school	1.4	1.0	0.9	0.2	1.4	0.7	1.0	0.3	1.3	0.8	0.7	0.2
GED/high school equivalency	1.8	2.9	3.0	1.1	1.9	2.3	2.8	1.2	3.1	3.1	2.9	1.2
High school graduate	1.0	1.2	1.3	0.6	1.0	1.1	1.4	0.7	1.4	1.3	1.3	0.7
Vocational/trade/business school	1.8	2.6	2.7	1.5	1.5	2.3	2.7	1.7	2.1	2.3	2.3	1.4
Some college	0.7	1.4	1.7	1.4	0.8	1.3	1.8	1.5	1.2	1.8	1.8	1.5
Associate's/2-year degree	0.7	1.5	2.0	2.0	0.7	1.5	2.3	2.2	1.1	1.9	2.1	2.1
College graduate	0.5	1.0	1.7	1.8	0.6	1.2	2.5	2.7	0.6	1.2	1.5	1.9
Graduate studies/degree	0.4	1.2	2.3	2.6	0.4	1.1	2.6	2.8	0.6	1.5	2.1	2.6

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NAAL) and 1992 National Adult Literacy Survey (NALS).