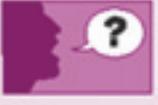


Assessment Content at Grade 8

The content of the writing assessment varied to reflect the skills appropriate for each grade level, with differing proportions of writing tasks measuring each of the three purposes for writing: narrative, informative, and persuasive. At grade 8, a slightly higher proportion of the tasks measured narrative and informative writing than persuasive writing. The 2007 eighth-grade writing assessment included 20 different writing tasks (7 narrative, 7 informative, and 6 persuasive). A copy of the grade 8 planning brochure is presented below.

Grade 8 Student Brochure on Planning and Reviewing Writing

Ideas for Planning Your Writing	Ideas for Reviewing Your Writing
<p>To plan your writing, you could do one or more of the following:</p> <p> Brainstorm List lots of ideas; choose which ones to use.</p> <p> Imagine Imagine talking about your topic with someone.</p> <p> Draw Draw a picture or a diagram of your topic.</p> <p> Web Draw lines between ideas to connect them.</p> <p> Outline Organize ideas into main points and subpoints.</p>	<p>After writing, think about the following:</p> <p> Purpose Have I said what I want to say?</p> <p> Development Do I need to add more details? Do I need to take out some details?</p> <p> Organization Are the parts in the right order? Do the parts fit together?</p> <p> Clarity Will my audience understand? Is my writing easy to read?</p> <p> Correctness Grammar? Punctuation? Spelling? Capitalization?</p>

Writing Achievement Levels at Grade 8

The following achievement-level descriptions for grade 8 writing are applied to first drafts that students are expected to generate within the limited time constraints in a large-scale assessment environment, and not to final or polished student writing. The cut score depicting the lowest score representative of that level is noted in parentheses.

Basic (114): Eighth-grade students performing at the *Basic* level should be able to produce an effective response within the time allowed that shows a general understanding of the writing task they have been assigned. Their writing should show that these students are aware of the audience they are expected to address, and it should include supporting details in an organized way. The grammar, spelling, punctuation, and capitalization in the work should be accurate enough to communicate to a reader, although there may be mistakes that get in the way of meaning.

Proficient (173): Eighth-grade students performing at the *Proficient* level should be able to produce an effective response within the time allowed that shows an understanding of both the writing task they have been assigned and the audience they are expected to address. Their writing should be organized, making use of techniques such as sequencing or a clearly marked beginning and ending, and it should make use of details and some elaboration to support and develop the main idea of the piece. Their writing should include precise language and some variety in sentence structure, and it may show analytical, evaluative, or creative thinking. The grammar, spelling, punctuation, and capitalization in the work should be accurate

enough to communicate to a reader; there may be some errors, but these should not get in the way of meaning.

Advanced (224): Eighth-grade students performing at the *Advanced* level should be able to produce an effective and fully developed response within the time allowed that shows a clear understanding of both the writing task they have been assigned and the audience they are expected to address. Their writing should show some analytical, evaluative, or creative thinking, and should demonstrate precise word choice and varied sentence structure. Their work should include details and elaboration that support and develop the main idea of the piece, and it may make use of strategies such as analogies, illustrations, examples, anecdotes, or figurative language to clarify a point. At the same time, the writing should show that these students can keep their work clearly and consistently organized. Writing by eighth-grade students performing at the *Advanced* level should contain few errors in grammar, spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and sentence structure. These writers should demonstrate good control of these elements and may use them for stylistic effect in their work.

FOR MORE INFORMATION...

The results presented in this section are for all eighth-graders in the nation. State and urban district results for released writing tasks are also available at <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/itmrls>.



Informative Writing at Grade 8

An important aspect of informative writing is being able to convey ideas and information to an audience about something the writer knows well. The writing task presented here asks students to write about something eighth-graders are familiar with, namely, backpacks. To engage students in the task, create context, and give them a starting point for their writing, they received a letter in an envelope from a fellow student coming from far away. This student is looking for information about backpacks and how they are used. The letter also helps to give students a

starting point for their writing in the limited time period available to them. Sixty-seven percent of eighth-graders received a rating of “Sufficient” or higher on their responses to this writing task.

Percentage of eighth-grade students at each rating level in 2007

Excellent	Skillful	Sufficient	Uneven	Insufficient	Unsatisfactory
2	14	51	24	6	3

NOTE: Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding.
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2007 Writing Assessment.

Sample Eighth-Grade Informative Writing Task

Open the envelope labeled **E** that you have been given. Take out the letter from Rina and read it. Rina, who wrote the letter, is coming to a school in America for the first time and needs to know what a backpack is.

Write a letter back to Rina. In your letter, include a clear description of a backpack and explain in detail what she should keep in it. Remember, the more information Rina has, the better prepared she'll be to start eighth grade.

Dear Eighth-Grade Student,

Hello! My name is Rina and I am moving to the United States with my family in July. In September I will start eighth grade in America. I will miss my friends at home, but I'm excited about the move and about starting eighth grade.

I have a friend who said that most junior-high school students in America keep their school work in something called a "backpack". I don't know what that is. Will you write back to me and explain what a "backpack" is and what I should keep in it? Getting a good start in my new school is important to me and your information will really help. Maybe someday I can return the favor to someone else by giving them information they need!

Sincerely,
Rina

Range of Eighth-Grade Informative Writing Skills

The item map below illustrates the range of writing ability demonstrated by eighth-graders. For example, students performing near the middle of the *Basic* range were likely to provide a “Sufficient” response for the *Backpack* writing task. Students performing near the top of the *Proficient* range were more likely to provide a

“Skillful” response, and responses rated as “Excellent” were likely to be provided by students performing in the *Advanced* range. Examples of responses rated as “Uneven” and “Excellent” are presented on the following pages.

GRADE 8 NAEP WRITING ITEM MAP

	Scale score	Rating of responses to <i>Backpack</i> task	Rating criteria
Advanced	300 ~		
	260	254 “Excellent” essay about a backpack	Students writing at the EXCELLENT level developed well-organized essays with well-chosen details, using transitions to lead the reader from one part of the essay to another. These students also consistently varied their sentence structure and made good word choices, doing so with minimal errors.
	250		
	240		
	230		
224			
Proficient	220	213 “Skillful” essay about a backpack	Students writing at the SKILLFUL level developed clearly organized essays using details in parts of their essays, but occasionally missing transitions. These students sometimes varied their sentence structure and exhibited good word choices, and errors they made did not interfere with reader understanding.
	210		
	200		
	190		
	180		
	173		
Basic	170		Students writing at the SUFFICIENT level developed essays using some details, with generally related ideas often lacking transitions. While these students demonstrated control over sentence boundaries, their sentence structure and word choices were often simple and unvaried. Errors they made did not interfere with reader understanding.
	160		
	150	147 “Sufficient” essay about a backpack	
	140		
	130		
	114		
	110	106 “Uneven” essay about a backpack	Students writing at the UNEVEN level wrote essays that conveyed some clear information. However, the essays were also characterized by one or more flaws, including a lack of development, repetition of ideas or information, breakdowns in organization, uneven control over sentence boundaries and word use, and errors that at times interfered with reader understanding.
100			
	90		Students writing at the INSUFFICIENT level wrote essays characterized by one or more flaws, including very fragmented, disorganized, or repetitive development; minimal control over sentence boundaries and word use; and errors that often interfered with reader understanding.
80	77 “Insufficient” essay about a backpack		
70			
60			
	~		
	0		

NOTE: The sample grade 8 writing task in the 2007 writing assessment was mapped onto the NAEP 0–300 writing scale. The map shows, for each level on the scoring guide from “Insufficient” through “Excellent,” the scale score attained by students who had a 65 percent probability of attaining that level or higher for the selected task. Scale score ranges for writing achievement levels are referenced on the map.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2007 Writing Assessment.

Example of an “Uneven” Response

The response shown on the following page was rated as “Uneven” because, while it does convey some clear information, it also demonstrates a lack of development and breakdowns in organization, moving quickly from thought to thought with little, if any, elaboration: “Every one at my school has a packback. I’m going to tell you what a backpack is.” Control over sentence boundaries and structure is uneven—at times present, at other times absent: “You will put paper, folders, pens, pencils, books, and more.” There are also numerous errors in punctuation, spelling, and usage, some of which may require a reader to hesitate and puzzle over meaning, such as the consistently incorrect use of apostrophes (“for big kid’s”).

Although 20 percent of the eighth-graders whose responses to the *Backpack* task were rated as “Uneven” engaged in some prewriting activity, there was no prewriting activity on the planning page for the sample student response presented here. Since scorers did not see students’ planning pages, the absence of prewriting activity did not factor into the rating of the response.

The table below shows the percentage of eighth-graders within each achievement level whose responses were rated as “Uneven” or higher. For example, 95 percent of students performing at the *Basic* level at least were able to write essays that presented some clear information, even if that information was presented in an unevenly organized way, was inconsistently developed, or sometimes exhibited sentence, word choice, or other errors that could interfere with reader understanding.

Percentage rated as “Uneven” or higher for eighth-graders at each achievement level in 2007

Overall	Below <i>Basic</i>	<i>At Basic</i>	<i>At Proficient</i>	<i>At Advanced</i>
92	49	95	100	100

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2007 Writing Assessment.



FOR MORE INFORMATION...

Explore other sample writing tasks and student responses from the 2007 writing assessment at <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/itmrls>.

Dear: Rina

2/26/07

How are doing? I'm great! Every one at my school has a backpack. I'm going to tell you what a backpack is. A backpack is like a purse except you put it in your back. There's some for like kids and some for big kids. You need one for the big kids. In if you would put your school stuff. Some have lots of pockets, and some have very little. You will put paper, folders, pens, pencils, books, and more. Like you the stuff you used to take to your school, you will have all that but in a backpack. Hope you get a nice backpack. Nice to meet you.

Sincerely:

Example of an “Excellent” Response

The response shown on the following page was rated as “Excellent” because it is well organized, using descriptive details and transitions to lead the reader from one piece of information to another: “A backpack is a bag with a rounded top + a flat bottom. It unzips around the top to reveal a spacious pouch. In this pouch you might keep...”. The response also sustains variety in sentence structure throughout and exhibits good word choices (reveal, vertically, flexible).

The content of the student’s planning page shown below illustrates how the student engaged in prewriting activities by creating a list and drawing a picture. The list produced on this planning page contributed to the way information was organized in the student’s response. The list of details focusing on the physical description of a backpack was drafted into sentence form during composition.

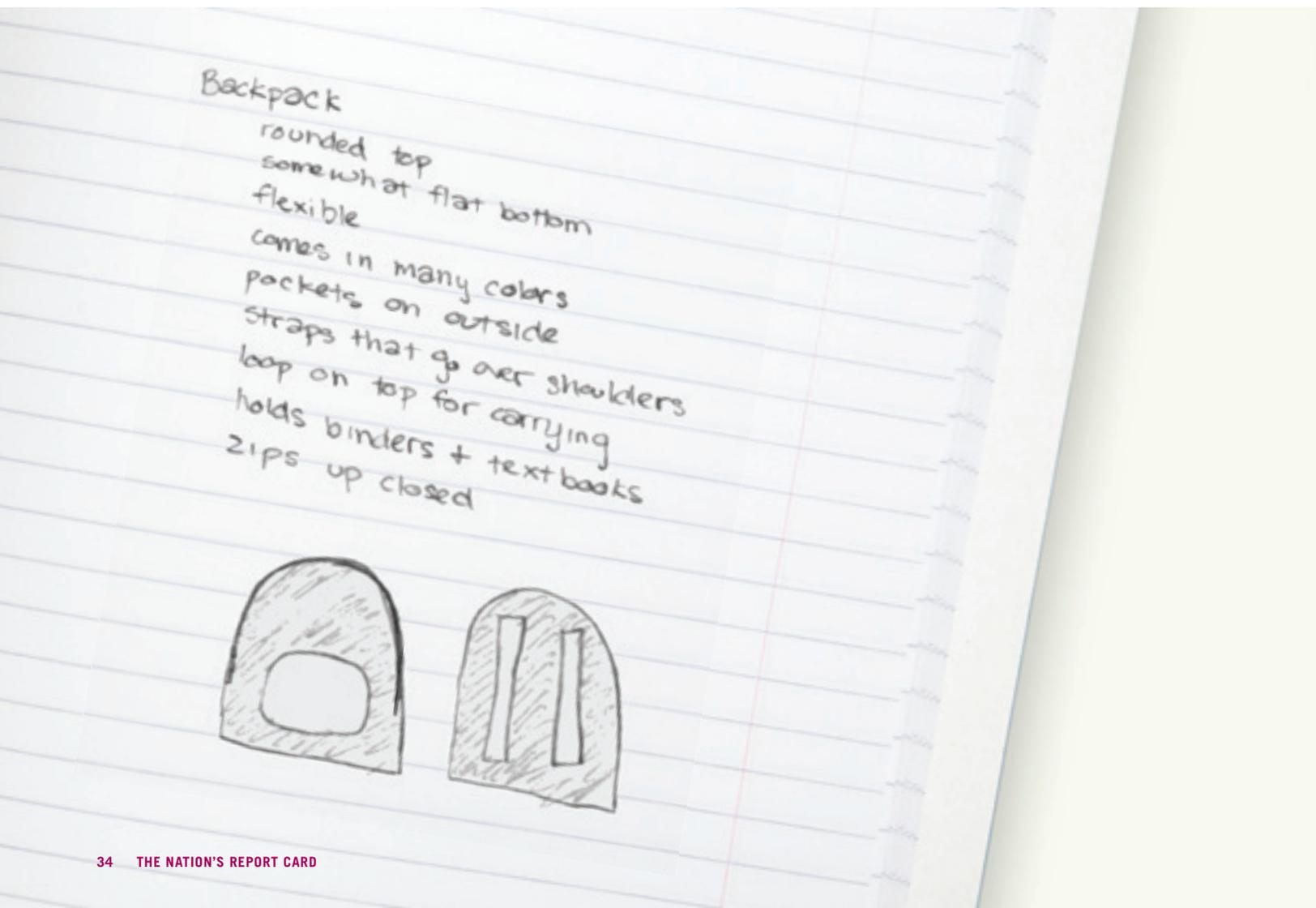
The table below shows the percentage of eighth-graders within each achievement level whose responses were rated as “Excellent.” For example, 4 percent of students performing at the *Proficient* level were able to write developed and well-organized essays with well-chosen details, using transitions to lead the reader from one part of the essay to another. These students also consistently varied their sentence structure and made good word choices, doing so with minimal errors. Less than 1 percent of the students at the *Basic* level were able to do so.

Percentage rated as “Excellent” for eighth-graders at each achievement level in 2007

Overall	Below <i>Basic</i>	At <i>Basic</i>	At <i>Proficient</i>	At <i>Advanced</i>
2	#	#	4	38

Rounds to zero.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2007 Writing Assessment.



Dear Rina,

Hi! My name is Kate and I am currently attending the school you will when you reach the United States. I'm glad you're excited about starting eighth grade! I don't know what eighth grade is like where you come from, but here it's really fantastic!

My middle school friends and I do keep our school work in backpacks. A backpack is a bag with a rounded top + a flat bottom. It unzips around the top to reveal a spacious pouch. In this pouch you might keep a binder with school papers in it or a textbook. Other than the pouch, on the front of the backpack there may be other small pockets to keep things such as pencils, pens, or other small items in. Two straps are attached vertically on the back of the backpack. These are used for putting your arms through so the backpack hangs on your back. Most backpacks are made of a canvas-like material that is flexible but not stretchy. They come in a variety of colors.

I hope my explanation of a backpack helped give you an idea of what they look like. I am excited to meet you when you come to America! I'm sure you'll enjoy eighth grade as much as I have! Maybe you could return the favor by telling me what it's like where you come from. Write back soon!

Your new American friend,