The 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NAAL)

The 2003 NAAL is a nationally representative assessment of literacy skills of adults age 16 and older. It is based on an earlier assessment of adult literacy, the 1992 National Adult Literacy Survey (NALS), and includes two new components that allow assessment of basic reading processes for the first time. These new components provide valuable information on the reading skills of the nation’s adults, including those who have difficulty using written text.

The first new assessment component, the Fluency Addition to NAAL (FAN), uses speech-recognition software to assess the ability of adults to decode and recognize words, and to read with fluency. The second new instrument, the Adult Literacy Supplemental Assessment (ALSA), assesses the ability of the least-literate adults to read words and comprehend simple prose documents. A unique feature of ALSA is its use of tangible and highly familiar stimulus materials.

As shown, when NAAL is administered, every participant receives the same Background Questionnaire, core screening items, and FAN tasks. Very low performance on the core screening items identifies ALSA participants. Adults performing above the ALSA cut-off score on the core screening items take the main NAAL. The entire interview takes an average of 90 minutes.
## The 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy

### Main NAAL Assessment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What is the main purpose of the assessment?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Describe the status of literacy among the nation’s adults 16 and over, as measured by their ability to use printed material</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Describe the status of literacy among adults in each of six participating states</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Measure changes in the levels and distribution of adult literacy over time</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Enhance understanding of the factors associated with literacy</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What is being measured?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Comprehension and use of printed materials and performance on arithmetic operations using information embedded in text</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What are the key features of the instruments being used?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Background questionnaire administered in English or Spanish, depending on the respondent’s choice</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Total pool of 148 questions; each respondent answers 40</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Written directions for core screening items administered in English or Spanish, depending on respondent’s choice</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Health literacy score derived from health-related items embedded throughout NAAL</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How will the data be collected?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Household survey of 19,500 adults starting in Spring 2003 (including ALSA respondents and 6,500 from state samples); oversampled Blacks and Hispanics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Respondents’ written answers collected for analysis and scoring</td>
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<tr>
<th>What types of reports may be released?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Main report (describing findings for the entire sample of adults)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Literacy highlights report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Technical report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Reanalysis of the 1992 data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Individual state reports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Health literacy report</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Issue briefs</td>
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<th>Who is likely to use the data?</th>
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<td>• Policymakers may use information about the levels of literacy demonstrated by all adults and subgroups of adults to justify or support creation or improvement of programs</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Policymakers can use results to inform workplace literacy programs</td>
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<tr>
<td>• States can compare the performance of adults in their state with that of adults in other states and the nation</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Health organizations can use health literacy data to identify the best ways of reaching target audiences</td>
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### New NAAL Components

#### Fluency Addition to NAAL (FAN)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What is being measured?</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Decoding, word recognition, and reading with fluency</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Measures of words-per-minute and reading accuracy</td>
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<td>• Oral directions and questions provided in English or Spanish, depending on respondent’s choice</td>
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<td>• Household survey of 19,500 adults starting in Spring 2003 (including ALSA respondents and 6,500 from state samples); oversampled Blacks and Hispanics</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Speech-recognition software used to record and analyze respondent readings of passages and lists of words and numbers</td>
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<td>• Short fluency report</td>
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<td>• Chapters in the main NAAL and technical reports</td>
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<td>• Issue brief</td>
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### Adult Literacy Supplemental Assessment (ALSA)

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<th>What is the main purpose of the assessment?</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Describe the basic reading skills of adults age 16 and over</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Provide a baseline for measuring future changes in the levels and distribution of adults’ basic reading skills over time</td>
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<td>• Enhance understanding of the factors associated with basic reading skills</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Respondents are given tangible stimulus materials, such as food boxes, which are highly familiar</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Oral directions and questions provided in English or Spanish, depending on respondent’s choice</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Answers to assessment questions may be provided in Spanish</td>
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<td>• Household survey of the lowest 10 percent identified by their performance on the NAAL core screening items</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Respondents’ oral answers scored by interviewers on the spot</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Directly assesses respondents’ background knowledge related to stimulus materials</td>
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<td>• Policymakers may use information about the levels of literacy demonstrated by all adults and subgroups of adults to justify or support creation or improvement of programs</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Adult education providers can use information about basic reading skills to develop more appropriate instruction and courseware for literacy and professional training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Researchers can use the data to study the possible causes of low literacy and develop appropriate remedies</td>
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For more information about the NAAL and its components, visit the NAAL web site at http://nces.ed.gov/NAAL or contact Sheida White, NAAL Project Director at the National Center for Education Statistics, by e-mail at Sheida.White@ed.gov.

The 2003 NAAL Background Questionnaire

The 2003 NAAL Background Questionnaire collects data on a variety of background variables, many of which obtain valuable information not collected in the 1992 Survey. There are 10 categories of background questions (see below). The number of questions for each category is shown in parentheses. The questionnaire is administered orally using a Computer-Assisted Personal Interview (CAPI) system, allowing interviewers to target questions to appropriate respondents. Because the questions are targeted, no respondent will answer all of the questions.

The questionnaire serves three purposes: (1) it provides descriptive data on the participants; (2) it enhances understanding of the factors that are associated with literacy skills used at home, at work, or in the community; and (3) it allows for the reporting of changes over time.

Background Variables
- General & language background (19)
- Education background & experience (19)
- Political & social participation (12)
- Labor force participation (15)
- Literacy practice (7)
- Job training & skills (10)
- Demographic information (8)
- Family literacy (5)
- Household income & welfare participation (12)
- Health (10)

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