

Literacy and Numeracy Skills of U.S. Men and Women

This Data Point examines the literacy and numeracy skills of U.S. men and women ages 16–65. The data are from the Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC), which measures adults' skill levels in literacy and numeracy, as well as their ability to solve problems using computers.¹ PIAAC literacy and numeracy scores range from 0 to 500, but they cannot be compared directly because each domain has a distinct framework, construct, set of items, and scale. This analysis uses PIAAC data from the U.S. Main Study of 2012 and the U.S. National Supplement of 2014, which together provide a nationally representative sample of about 8,000 adults ages 16–65.²

Literacy scores for men and women were not measurably different, but men had higher numeracy scores than women.

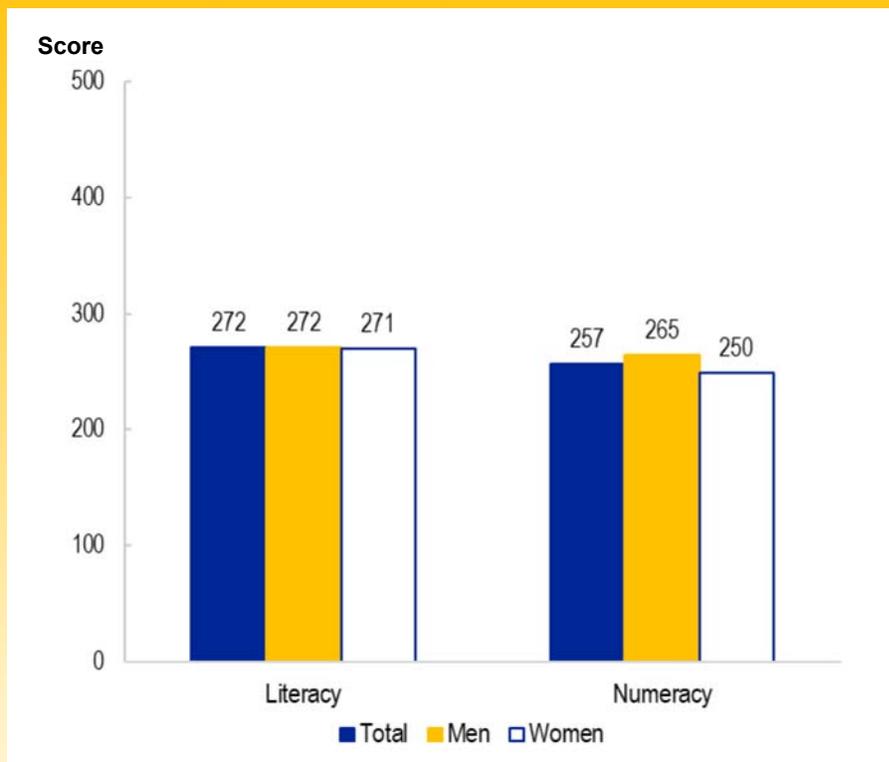
The average literacy score among U.S. adults was 272 (**figure 1**). Men's average score was 272, which was not measurably different from women's average score of 271.

The average numeracy score among U.S. adults was 257. Men scored higher than women in numeracy. Their average score was 265, some 15 points higher than women's average score of 250.

Men's numeracy scores were higher than women's in each age group and educational attainment level.

Looking at adults in roughly ten-year age intervals, men had higher average numeracy scores than women in each age category, scoring between 9 and 18 points higher in each category (**figure 2**). For example, among those ages 16–24, men scored

FIGURE 1. Average literacy and numeracy scores of U.S. adults ages 16 to 65, by sex: 2012/2014



NOTE: Literacy and numeracy scores are scaled between 0 and 500. Standard error tables are available at <https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/ctes/tables/index.asp?LEVEL=ADULT>.
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC), U.S. PIAAC 2012/2014.

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258 and women scored 249. Among those ages 55–65, men scored 261 and women scored 243.

Men also had higher average numeracy scores than women with the same levels of educational attainment. Among those with less than a high school education, men scored 218, some 15 points higher than women's score of 203. Among adults with a high school diploma or some postsecondary education but no degree, men scored 255, some 16 points higher than women's score of 239. Finally, among those with a postsecondary degree, men scored 299, some 19 points higher than women's score of 280.

Endnotes

¹In the PIAAC framework, literacy refers to the ability to read, understand, and use written text in a variety of life situations. Numeracy refers to the ability to understand and use mathematical information in a variety of life situations.

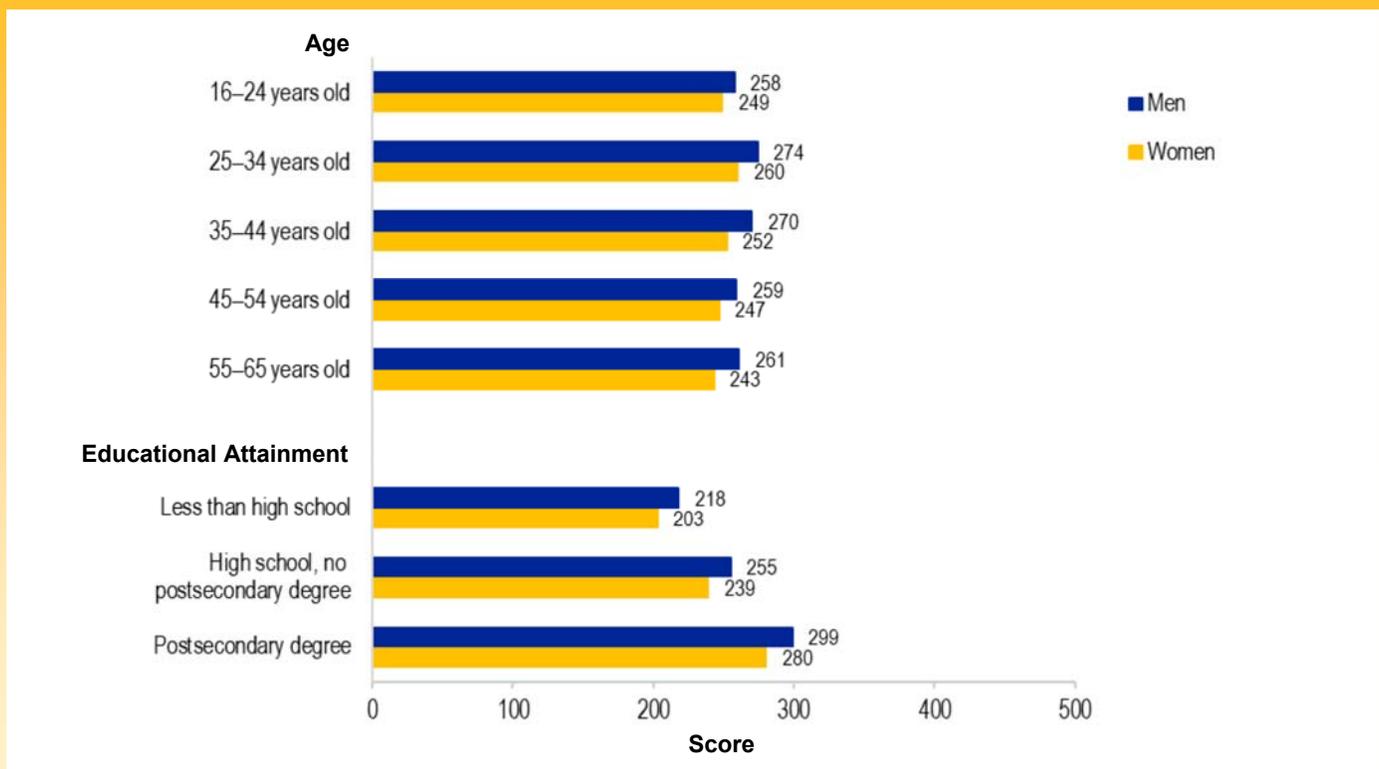
Examples of literacy items include circling the word that correctly identifies a pictured object or reading a passage of text and answering a question about its meaning. Examples of numeracy items include reading the temperature in a picture of a thermometer or interpreting a graph with numeric data.

PIAAC scores are typically reported using scale scores such as those used here, and proficiency levels; for information on men's and women's proficiency levels, see *Literacy, Numeracy, and Problem Solving in Technology-*

Rich Environments Among U.S. Adults: Results From the Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies 2012, at <https://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2014008>.

²The U.S. Main Study of 2012 was part of the first round of the PIAAC international assessment. The National Supplement of 2014 was a U.S.-only addition conducted to enhance the U.S. sample. The National Supplement increased the sample size of unemployed adults (ages 16–65) and young adults (ages 16–34) and added samples of older adults (ages 66–74) and incarcerated adults (ages 16–74). The samples of older and incarcerated adults are not included in this Data Point.

FIGURE 2. Average numeracy scores of U.S. men and women ages 16 to 65, by age and educational attainment: 2012/2014



NOTE: Numeracy scores are scaled between 0 and 500. Standard error tables are available at <https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/ctes/tables/index.asp?LEVEL=ADULT>.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC), U.S. PIAAC 2012/2014.

This NCES Data Point presents information on education topics of current interest. It was authored by Serena Hinz of RTI International. Estimates based on samples are subject to sampling variability, and apparent differences may not be statistically significant. All noted differences are statistically significant at the .05 level. In the design,

conduct, and data processing of National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) surveys, efforts are made to minimize the effects of nonsampling errors, such as item nonresponse, measurement error, data processing error, or other systematic error.